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PROCEEDINGS OF
THE 4TH INTERNATIONAL JOINT CONFERENCE
ON HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM

Transformative Trends Shaping
the Future of Sustainable Tourism

IJCHT – 24

| 04–06 SEPTEMBER | 2024 |

NHA TRANG – VIETNAM

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THANK YOU FROM CONFERENCE CHAIR

The 4th International Joint Conference on Hospitality and Tourism (IJCHT) 2024, hosted by Thai Binh Duong University in Nha Trang, Vietnam, from September 4th to 6th, 2024, was a significant gathering of global experts. This event brought together researchers, educators, industry professionals, and policymakers to explore the latest trends and challenges in the tourism and hospitality sectors.

With about 125 extended abstracts submitted, the conference offered a rich platform for sharing innovative ideas and fostering international collaboration. The two full-day conference was a treasure trove of knowledge and ideas. Distinguished keynote speakers, such as Prof. Cihan Cobanoglu, enlightened us with insightful presentations on the fascinating intersection of AI and sustainability, offering valuable future research recommendations. Prof. John Bowen shared his expertise on emerging trends shaping sustainable tourism. Meanwhile, Dr. Nguyen Anh Tuan focused on the local context, providing valuable insights into Vietnam's tourism industry's current state and future direction. In addition to insightful keynote speeches, we had the opportunity to participate in various interactive workshops and panel discussions. These sessions explored both theoretical and practical aspects of the tourism and hospitality industry, providing valuable insights for industry experts, academia, and students. Moreover, 36 offline and 48 online presentations allowed participants to explore exciting topics and network with fellow professionals.

The conference was a great success, thanks to the support and collaboration of many individuals and organizations. Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to our keynote speakers, workshop and panel speakers, and co-hosts, including the University of Technology Mara, the Graduates School of Tourism and Management (GSTM NIDA), Thammasat University, Bali Tourism Polytechnic, RMIT Vietnam, CINTURS, VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam Tourism Research, the University of South Florida, ANAHEI, PATA (Thailand Chapter), and TedQual. I also extend my heartfelt thanks to the Scientific Committee, the Organizing Committee, the Session Chairs, and all presenters and participants for their invaluable contributions. Thirdly, I would like to thank Thai Binh Duong University for hosting the 4th IJCHT, TUI BLUE Nha Trang for sponsoring this event; and the hard work of our students. Finally, my special thanks go to my Co-Chairs – Assoc. Prof. Ann Suwaree Ashton and Dr. Anderson Ngelambong, thank you for your great support in making this event a success.

I hope we all had a great experience full of new knowledge, ideas, memories, and friendships after this conference. I look forward to seeing you all again in the 5th IJCHT.

Thank you

Dr. Thuc Thi Mai Doan Do (CAROL DO)

Conference Chair

PREFACE

It is a great pleasure and an honor for us to present the Proceedings of the 4th International Joint Conference on Hospitality and Tourism, IJCHT 2024, held at Thai Binh Duong University in the beautiful coastal city of Nha Trang, Khanh Hoa, Vietnam from September 4-6, 2024. The conference was an invaluable opportunity for experts, scholars, educators, and other stakeholders in hospitality and tourism to meet with a view to brainstorming transformative trends that would shape the future of sustainable tourism.

The hospitality and tourism industries have undergone unprecedented changes driven by technological innovations, evolving consumer behavior, and the still-present impact of the pandemic. Furthermore, it calls for the involvement of sustainable practices, which require a collaborative solution to meet the path of inclusive growth and environmental care for the well-being of all stakeholders. The IJCHT 2024, with its theme "Transformative Trends Shaping the Future of Sustainable Tourism," had the aim to address these challenges and shed light on discussions of innovative practices and research supporting sustainable tourism development.

The 2024 conference welcomed participants globally, represented by 25 countries in attendance. The IJCHT 2024 attracted 125 extended abstracts and, consequently, have 83 full papers that will help further knowledge and practice in our fields. The presentations are in a hybrid format: 36 Offline, 48 Online. Presentations ensure wide accessibility for participants all over the world. IJCHT 2024 proudly hosted 70 physical attendees and 50 online participants, connecting academic and industry people across boundaries.

Contributions in this volume truly range from addressing emerging consumer trends, the discussion of technology-driven solutions, to sustainable practice. These proceedings feature a wide contribution to review innovative research and insights provided by the participants. It is our belief that the discussion will motivate further discussion, collaboration, and impactful research.

We would also like to extend our profound thanks to all the presenters, participants, reviewers, and members of the Organizing Committee for their dedication and valuable contribution. A special thanks go to Dr. Carol Do, Chair of The IJCHT 2024. Your efforts made this conference a successful event; we look forward to seeing how these discussions will keep on shaping the future of sustainable tourism.

On behalf of the organizing committee, we welcome you to IJCHT 2024. We hope that these proceedings will be informative to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers alike and serve as one means toward realizing a more sustainable and prosperous future for tourism and hospitality.

If you already visited Nha Trang, one of the most beautiful beaches in Vietnam, please come back. If not, please consider adding Nha Trang to your list of places to visit. Thank you very much for your interest in, and participation in, this life-changing event.

Sincerely,

Dr. Cihan Cobanoglu, CHTP

McKibbon Endowed Chair Professor

Dean, School of Hospitality and Tourism Management

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SERVICE DESIGN THINKING FOR RESTAURANT KITCHENS WITH A DUAL REPRESENTATION OF KITCHEN ACTIVITIES AND FUNCTIONS

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Extended abstract

To enhance experiences of diners and service providers and to reduce food waste in restaurants an effort can be made by offering smart services to support decision making activities of restaurant stakeholders based on structured representations of activities and experiences of diners and service providers in conjunction with data obtained from restaurant stakeholders and various artifacts. This is an example of service design thinking efforts which address design thinking (Kim, 2021) in the perspectives of experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1998) and service-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

All sorts of kitchens can be regarded as a product-service system (Goedkoop et al., 1999), that is a combined system of products and services as well as infrastructures, interrelations and data with which ecosystem stakeholders including customers and product/service providers are co-creating values. The product aspect of a kitchen is represented with functions where flows of materials, energy and information are described in a top-down manner. The service aspect should be modeled with activities and experiences of kitchen stakeholders. Interactions of functions and activities are analyzed to identify affordances (Galvao and Sato, 2005; Kim, 2015) so that messages from product and service elements to stakeholders are systematically identified with associated value and context information.

The research question is how to develop a framework for service design thinking of restaurant kitchens. In this paper, an exemplary framework of dual modeling of kitchen function and kitchen stakeholder activities will be proposed using the context-based activity modeling (Kim et al., 2020) with rich and structured representation of contexts including goal context, relevant structure context, physical context and psychological context. While psychological context includes diverse subjective evaluations of stakeholder experiences including emotional experiences, relevant structure context captures critical relations of various kitchen artifacts as well as food and ingredient associations. This framework will also enable defining various data to be obtained from restaurant stakeholders and various artifacts.

Using the proposed framework, smart kitchen services can be designed so that context-specific designing of kitchen staff activities is enabled. In this kinds of efforts, industry partners including various kitchen product and technology companies and kitchen software companies will collaborate toward development of a smart kitchen product-service system together with testbed restaurants. In this way, designing of smart kitchen services can be enabled so that both kitchen staff experiences and dining experiences can be enhanced and problems in kitchen processes and kitchen culture can be overcome including those involved with food waste in restaurant kitchens.

Keywords – Service Design Thinking, Smart Kitchen Service Design, Activity Modeling, Function Decomposition, Sustainability,

Purpose/Problem Statement - The aim of this research paper is to propose a framework for smart kitchen service design where kitchen stakeholder activities and experiences can be designed tightly integrated with function aspects of product-elements.

Originality/value – This research develops a framework for service design for restaurant kitchens.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative approach used thorough investigation of cooking activities and functions of an example food menu used in a restaurant.

Findings/Discussion – The results found that critical information for designing restaurant kitchen services has been obtained from the interactions identified from dual representation of functions and activities of cooking. This information could be used in understanding stakeholder experience related issues such as emotional experience issues and motivation and cognitive experience issues when stakeholder subjective experience evaluation capability is

combined with activity information and in identifying areas for physical artefact design improvement through affordances and associated activity issues.

Theoretical implications – This study proposed a theoretical framework for service design of restaurant kitchens by dual representation of activities and functions so that both human activity aspects and artefact functional aspects must be represented in a tightly integrated manner to design product-service systems in hospitality and tourism field like restaurant kitchens.

Practical implications – Hospitality and tourism stakeholders and service and experience designers are able to apply the findings of the study to establish effective service and experience design foundations by considering people aspects of activities and experiences and artefact aspects of product and environment elements in tightly integrated manners to realize diverse experience values including functional, social, emotional and information issues.

Social implications (Policy contribution) – Decision makers of restaurant kitchen services like those in schools for example should be based on service design thinking where both human aspects and artefact aspects are equally addressed, not only those in operational issues.

Research limitations – This paper reports on-going research where the proposed framework is still being improved with testbeds starting with cooking of a few exemplary menu items. More comprehensive implementation-oriented research efforts are to be followed.

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TRANSFORMING HOTEL MARKETING: LEVERAGING HOTEL VIRTUAL TOURS TO ENHANCE BOOKING INTENTION

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Extended abstract

The hotel sector is currently encountering difficulties as potential visitors are hesitant to book rooms, mostly due to price differences across various booking platforms (Lee et al., 2016). The presence of uncertainty can have a direct effect on a hotel's rates of room occupancy and income. In the industry, there is a competitive landscape where customer preferences and experiences play a crucial role (Falah, 2020). In order to attract customers and prevent a decline in market share, hotels need to distinguish themselves from their competitors (Zhang et al., 2020). Customer behavior in online booking can be influenced by factors such as incidental affect and mood-changing prices (Chen & Wang, 2017). Hotels are using technology more and more to improve the booking process and reach a wider range of customers, in order to deal with issues related to room bookings and competitiveness (Xu & Xu, 2014). The implementation of 360-degree video virtual tours in the hotel business presents a viable remedy for issues such as low room booking intentions and intense rivalry. Studies have demonstrated that 360-degree virtual movies have a substantial impact on increasing people's knowledge and understanding of other places, which in turn encourages them to visit those areas in real life (Wu & Lai, 2021). Hotels can enhance their ability to attract potential visitors and shape their perceptions by offering immersive virtual tours. This can ultimately lead to an increase in the guests' inclinations to visit the hotel (Santos et al., 2020). Research has shown that virtual reality marketing, which includes 360-degree tours, is more impactful than standard imagery in improving consumer attitudes and intentions to visit tourist places (Talawar, 2024). The study attempts to examine the impact of 360-degree hotel virtual tours on customers booking intention. The study focuses on the 360-degree hotel virtual tours' utilitarian value, hedonic value and affective experience.

Keywords – 360-degree video; Booking Intention; Utilitarian and Hedonic Value; Hotel Virtual Tour

Purpose/Problem Statement - The hotel industry is facing challenges due to a high competitive environment where customer preferences and experiences are significant (Falah, 2020). Customers are often influenced by price disparities across booking channels (Lee et al., 2016), contributing to uncertainty that can impact a hotel's room occupancy rates and revenue. Thus, it is crucial that hotels must differentiate themselves to attract guests and avoid losing market share (Zhang et al., 2020).

Originality/value – The combination of the utilitarian-hedonic value framework with the cognitive-affective-conative framework offers a rich foundation for understanding customer decision-making processes and can inform strategies for enhancing consumer virtual tour experiences and behavioral outcomes.

Design/methodology/approach – The study used a quantitative methodology with purposive sampling design and online survey data collection approach. The study employs Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling, a statistical technique used to assess complex relationships between latent variables in a structural model, for data analysis. The statistical program is particularly suitable for research with lower sample sizes, non-normal data distributions, and complex theoretical models.

Findings/Discussion – This study proposes that utilitarian value (derived from the practical benefits and functionalities) and hedonic value (enjoyment and visually appeal) offered by a 360-degree hotel virtual tour positively influences, affective experience and consequently hotel room booking intention. Customers who perceive the utilitarian value of being able to virtually explore hotel facilities, room layouts, and amenities are more likely to have positive experience, and intention to book a room. Affective experience, encompassing the feelings evoked during the virtual tour, is proposed to mediate the relationship between utilitarian and hedonic values and hotel room booking intention. Positive affective experiences such as excitement and satisfaction may enhance the likelihood of customers forming an intention to book a room. Previous research on virtual reality applications and immersive experiences has demonstrated their impact on consumer behaviors and intentions, emphasizing the importance of emotional and experiential factors (He, 2023; Pillai, 2022; Yoon et al., 2021).

Theoretical implications – The study can contribute to the integration of utilitarian and hedonic value theories in the context of virtual tours and hotel bookings. By exploring how these two dimensions influence booking intentions, the research can provide insights into the dual nature of consumer motivations and preferences in the hotel industry. Also, the study highlights the role of virtual tours as a competitive marketing tool in enhancing customer experiences and influencing booking intentions.

Practical implications – The study can provide valuable insights to hotel decision-makers about the implementation of 360-degree virtual tour technology for marketing and sales objectives. Hotels may improve customer experiences and increase room bookings by acknowledging the impact of utilitarian and hedonic values and investing in advanced technologies. Furthermore, hotels can optimize their marketing strategies to entice and captivate prospective customers by highlighting the tangible advantages and psychological allure of virtual tours.

Research limitations – The study only focuses on a 360-degree virtual tour which might limit the applicability of the findings to different types of reality-based virtual tour. Further investigation could examine comparative analyses across various forms of virtual tours, including augmented reality, virtual reality, and livestreaming tours, to ascertain the most efficacious format in influencing intents to book rooms. This could provide valuable information into the most effective digital marketing methods for captivating consumers.

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TECHNOLOGY MEETS TRADITION: THE ROLE OF MOBILE AUGMENTED REALITY IN ENHANCING YOUNG ADULTS' MUSEUM EXPERIENCES

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Extended abstract

Studies have demonstrated that museums have a vital function in offering educational prospects for young adults (Andre et al., 2016). In order to appeal to young people, museums must beyond conventional methods and take into account elements such as visitor behavior and exhibition layout that are attractive to this specific age group (Piscitelli & Anderson, 2001). It is crucial to comprehend the reasons behind public cultural involvement in museums, as this can provide insights into the elements that influence the enthusiasm of young adults in visiting these institutions (Wang et al., 2020). Researchers Barron and Leask (2017) have investigated the adoption of customized engagement tactics for several generational cohorts, including Generation Y, in order to improve visitor experiences and guarantee the museums' long-term viability. In addition, the adoption of cutting-edge technology, such as mobile augmented reality, has been acknowledged for its ability to improve visitor engagement, learning experiences, and enjoyment in museum environments (Baker et al., 2022). Museums can offer customized and interactive experiences to modern audiences, especially young adults who are familiar with digital interactions, by using mobile augmented reality (Dieck et al., 2018). The objective of this study is to analyze the characteristics of mobile augmented reality that impact the intention of young adults to visit museums. Researchers have the ability to reveal the systems that determine media consumption patterns and preferences.

Keywords – Augmented Reality; Visit Intention**;** Intrinsic and Extrinsic Value**;** Museum; Young Adult

Purpose/Problem Statement - The issue of poor interest among young adults in visiting museums is a multifaceted challenge that requires a comprehensive understanding of various factors influencing their engagement. Research has shown that museums play a crucial role in providing learning opportunities for children (Andre et al., 2016). However, to attract young adults, museums need to go beyond traditional approaches and consider factors such as visitor patterns and exhibition design that appeal to this demographic (Piscitelli & Anderson, 2001).

Originality/value – This study combines cognitive appraisal theory and uses and gratification theory which offers a comprehensive framework for studying the topic under investigation. By integrating both theories, the researchers may explore the cognitive processes that underlie individuals' motivations for actively seeking out particular media content or experiences in order to fulfill their psychological requirements. This integration can offer a deeper understanding of how individuals evaluate and interpret media stimuli based on their perceived importance and meaning, resulting in distinct emotional and behavioral reactions (Pahng & Kang, 2023). This study is one of the few that investigates how young adults perceive and evaluate mobile augmented reality content in museums, and how this relates to their desired benefits or satisfactions.

Design/methodology/approach – The study used a quantitative methodology, including face-to-face self-administered questionnaires to collect data. The study utilizes Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), a statistical method applied to evaluate intricate interactions between latent variables in a structural model, for data analysis. The statistical program is well-suited for investigations that have smaller sample numbers, non-normal data distributions, and sophisticated theoretical models. Researchers can use it to evaluate both the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model) at the same time, gaining understanding of the connections between the variables.

Findings/Discussion – This study investigates the correlation between the intrinsic and extrinsic value of mobile augmented reality, emotional contentment, and the inclination to visit a museum. Citing existing literature, it is proposed that the intrinsic worth of the perceived usefulness, ease of use, and level of interaction of mobile augmented reality applications in a museum environment have a beneficial influence on visitors' emotional contentment. The improvement in user experience can result in heightened emotional gratification, indicating that

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improved levels of perceived usefulness, simplicity of use, and interaction of mobile augmented reality in museums can lead to increased emotional pleasure among visitors. The anticipated impact of participating in mobile augmented reality activities in a museum environment on emotional satisfaction among young adult visitors is projected to be positively influenced by the extrinsic value of enjoyment, autonomy, and competence. The emotional gratification experienced by visitors is expected to operate as a mediator in the interaction between the external value of mobile augmented reality and their intention to revisit the museum or suggest it to others.

Theoretical implications – The study connects theories from psychology, communication studies, and museum studies, promoting interdisciplinary research and applications. By combining cognitive appraisal theory and uses and gratification theory, the study provides a better understanding of how young adults perceive and engage with mobile augmented reality in museums.

Practical implications – Practical guidelines can be developed for implementing mobile augmented reality in museums, focusing on factors that enhance emotional satisfaction and visit intention. Museum professionals can use the study's findings to design mobile augmented reality experiences that maximize perceived utility, usability, interactivity, enjoyment, autonomy, and competence, attracting more young adult visitors.

Research limitations – The study focuses on a specific demographic (young adults) and a particular setting (museums using mobile augmented reality), which might limit the applicability of the findings to other age groups or different types of museums.

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ECO-CONSCIOUS TREKKERS - EXPLORING THE TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF SUSTAINABLE TREKKING

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Extended abstract

Sustainable trekking has gained recent research attention and its benefits are much appreciated in the context of sustainable tourism (Rojo-Ramos et al., 2020). Indiahikes, a leading trekking organization in India, has been pioneering sustainable trekking initiatives in India through its Green Trails project (Trinetra, 2017). The project has been remarkable in bringing out positive impacts in the sensitive mountain environment for years. Trekkers being an important aspect of the initiative, have the potential to transform trekking as well as lifestyle to be more environmentally responsible (Anjusha & Thomas, 2024). Through analyzing the case of Indiahikes and the Green Trails project, this research further explores the transformative impact of sustainable trekking among fellow trekkers. Through an interpretive approach, this study employs semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis to investigate the subjective perceptions of trekkers. Grounded in the transformative learning theory (Pung et.al, 2020; Mezirow, 1978), which explains the learning process of adults through which they alter their worldview, this study explores how such sustainable initiative during trekking translates to eco-consciousness and changes in their attitude of trekking participants. Although several studies have been conducted examining the transformative impact of educational travel in the context of tourism (Stone & Duffy, 2015), this research further explores the theory in the context of trekking. It also sheds light on transformative impacts which can be implemented by various trekking organizations to inculcate responsible travellers who are also looking for meaningful experiences post treks. Also, on a policy level, this study helps highlight the benefits of sustainable trekking on an individual and social level so that effective guidelines can be implemented.

Keywords - Sustainable trekking, Transformative learning theory, mountain tourism, Indiahikes, Sustainable tourism, Eco-conscious

Purpose/Problem Statement - Sustainable initiatives in the context of trekking have gained recent attention in tourism, and the relevance of such initiatives is appreciated. Although some studies have been done on the possible influence of sustainable initiatives while travelling, research exploring the participants' reflections upon engaging in eco-friendly practices and how they are translated into their lives is still unexplored. This research aims to explore the transformative role of sustainable trekking initiatives in the life of trekkers who engage in sustainable trekking activities, with the support of Transformative learning theory.

Originality/value – This research addresses the literature gap on sustainable trekking, especially in sensitive environments, and how such initiatives correspond to the transformative journey of trekkers through the perception of fellow trekkers.

Design/methodology/approach - The study employs an interpretive paradigm that believes in multiple realities in the context of transformation. In soliciting participants for the study, Indiahikes, a leading sustainable trekking organization will be approached. The 'Green trails initiatives' of Indiahikes have gained popularity due to their successful implementation of sustainable initiatives in trekking and defective management of trekking in sensitive environments. To explore the subjective experiences of the participants who have engaged in sustainable trekking, in-depth interviews will be conducted which can provide insights into the transformative experiences. Thematic analysis will be employed to understand participants' different perceptions and experiences in sustainable trekking and how such initiatives have transformed them.

Findings/Discussion – This paper will shed light on the transformative impact of sustainable initiatives during the trekking. Some practices learned through trekking could also induce behavioral changes in the participants making them vocal about eco-conscious trekking and practices. Such transformative tourist experiences provide opportunities for self-reflection, increased awareness, and adoption of sustainable initiatives in their everyday lives.

Theoretical implications –The study adds to the understanding of transformative learning theory in the context of trekking. This theory can be studied by examining the participants' cognitive, affective, and behavioural attitudes to reflect on the psychological, conventional, and behavioural transformation in the trekkers after trekking. The framework provides an understanding through which the participants transform and influence their environmental consciousness. Also, additional insights can be gained on how the experience inculcates reflective behaviour in participants' existing attitudes towards nature and lifestyle. The understanding of transformation can also be extended to what are the factors that foster transformative learning.

Practical implications – Practical implications shall be executed by informing sustainable tourism practices in the context of trekking. It can provide insights to tourism facilitators, especially trekking companies to reflect on their initiatives toward sustainable tourism. Also, the organizations can indulge in experiential trekking initiatives which foster transformative learning, among participants and inculcate such practices in their lives. Furthermore, the importance of such initiatives in the transformation of trekkers can be tapped to better community engagement in sustainable tourism.

Social implications (Policy contribution) – On a social level, the study can highlight transformative learning through sustainable trekking contribute to engaging environmental awareness, and inspire individuals and organizations to adopt sustainable lifestyles and be vocal for such transformation. Transformative experience during trekking also fosters interpersonal connections and social bonds among participants. The study can also add value to policy development focused on sustainable tourism initiatives, especially in sensitive trekking destinations like mountains and forests. Policymakers can implement guidelines to promote sustainable trekking and support the wellbeing of the host environment, and communities.

Research limitations – Transformation often unfolds over extended periods, which can be difficult to explore during interaction with participants. However, future research can conduct longitudinal studies or follow-ups to seize the long-term transformative impacts through sustainable initiatives during trekking. The current study is based on the subjective experiences of participants in India, recruited from Indiahikes which may fail to represent the broader trekking community. This can be overcome by further studies that can explore the phenomenon of transformation among trekkers from different cultural backgrounds.

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THE ROLE OF MOBILE 360-DEGREE VIDEO IN AUGMENTING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM EDUCATION

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Extended Abstract

The efficacy of conventional sustainable tourism education at higher education institutions is impeded by obstacles that inhibit its ability to adequately equip students for the requirements of the business and the worldwide sustainability objectives. Although there has been a growing focus on higher education for sustainable development in the last twenty years (Hallinger & Chatpinyakoop, 2019), there are notable deficiencies in incorporating cutting-edge technology into sustainable tourism education. An essential problem is the lack of innovation in teaching and learning methods that cater to the needs of the present generation. The traditional pedagogical approach to tourism education typically emphasizes the content rather than the effectiveness of delivery. Integrating 360-degree video technology into sustainable tourism education in higher learning institutions presents a possible possibility for addressing challenges in conventional teaching methods. By harnessing the immersive and interactive qualities of 360-degree movies, educators may enrich the learning experience and more effectively equip students for the intricacies of sustainable tourism practices. Wu and Lai (2021) state that 360-degree virtual tours are an excellent means of promoting tourism activities like mountain trekking. These tours generate greater attention and engagement by providing a more participatory and visually captivating experience The immersive experience offered by this program can captivate students' focus and enhance their comprehension of sustainable tourism principles by presenting a lifelike and captivating virtual setting. The present study seeks to investigate the advantages, concerns, and difficulties associated with the incorporation of 360-degree video technology into the pedagogy of sustainable tourism.

Keywords – 360-Degree Video, Educational Innovation; Sustainable Tourism

Purpose/Problem Statement - Despite the increasing interest in higher education for sustainable development over the past two decades (Hallinger & Chatpinyakoop, 2019), there are significant gaps in integrating innovative technology into sustainable tourism education. One of the key issues is the failure to innovate teaching and learning approach that align with the current generation needs. the current study aims to explore the benefits, issues and challenges related to integrating 360-degree video technology into the sustainable tourism pedagogy.

Originality/value – The study takes a dual perspective of both educators and students in examining the topic under investigation. The triangulation of findings from both stakeholders will provide a more comprehensive picture of the benefits, issues and challenges of 360-degree video technology integration in the sustainable tourism education.

Design/methodology/approach – The study employs a convergent parallel qualitative method approach that involves expert interviews with educators and focus groups with students. The data is collected and analyses concurrently but separately, two sets of results then will be merged for a comprehensive understanding of the research question.

Findings/Discussion – 360-degree videos provide an immersive and interactive quality that can assist instructors in improving the learning experience and effectively equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills for sustainable tourism practices. The immersive experience is designed to captivate students' attention and enhance their comprehension of sustainable tourism principles through a lifelike and captivating virtual environment. In addition, educators have the ability to provide students with chances to participate in reflective practices and experience learning, which can result in a more comprehensive comprehension of sustainable tourism principles. 360-degree videos can enhance students' practical skills and critical thinking abilities, which are crucial for tackling sustainability concerns in the tourism business. Additionally, the utilization of 360-degree video technology can have

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a pivotal impact on the cultivation of emotional coping abilities and the mitigation of anxiety in pupils, especially in circumstances characterized by high levels of stress or risk. 360-degree videos can enhance students' resilience and confidence in managing difficult situations by offering a secure and regulated virtual setting for practicing coping methods and decision-making abilities. This revolutionary educational strategy can greatly enhance students' ability to negotiate real-world situations with increased ease and calmness. Multiple concerns and obstacles must be taken into account. Producing captivating and interactive content necessitates specific tools and knowledge, which might provide cost difficulties for educational establishments. In addition, addressing the technological challenge of assuring the accessibility and interoperability of 360-degree media across various devices and platforms is crucial.

Theoretical implications – The study enrich the literature on educational innovation and sustainable tourism pedagogy. The findings of the study can stimulate innovative thinking, and deepen our understanding of the complex dynamics between immersive technologies and sustainability education.

Practical implications – Through investigating the possible advantages, difficulties, and suggestions provided by educators and students, the researchers can obtain significant knowledge that can be used to guide the implementation and improvement of educational projects. The study offers valuable information for educators, policymakers, and industry stakeholders who wish to utilize immersive 360-degree video technologies for sustainable tourism teaching.

Research limitations – The study may have a limited sample size, which can affect the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. The sample may not be representative of all educators and students, leading to potential biases. Future studies should embark on a quantitative cross-comparison study that will be more representative of the target population.

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THE GUIDELINE OF GSTC FOR COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF CBT IN PHUKET, THAILAND

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Extended abstract

Sustainable tourism is becoming an important trend as tourists become more popular. The business sector is also trying to develop environmentally friendly products and services. Governments and various international agencies have developed policies that support sustainable tourism as well (Miller & Torres, 2023). The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) is an attempt to create understanding together about sustainable tourist attractions and global guidelines for sustainability in travel and tourism are provided by the GSTC Criteria. This is considered a basic guideline for the agencies responsible for resource management (Anis et al., 2023). This article aims to analyze GSTC for community-based tourism management in Phuket, Thailand. After that, the data from the study can create the guidelines for GSTC for community-based tourism managed in an integrated manner and look at the overview that covers all four dimensions: 1) sustainable management 2) increase benefits and reduce negative impacts on social-economic benefits to local communities 3) increase benefits and reduce negative impacts on culture for communities and tourists; and 4) increase benefits and reduce negative environmental impacts.

***Keywords** – Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC); Community-Based Tourism (CBT); Tourism Management*

Purpose/Problem Statement - The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) is an attempt to create understanding together about sustainable tourist attractions. This is considered a basic guideline for the agencies responsible for resource management (Ivars et al., 2023). While community-based tourism has been supported by Thai governments for many decades, this article also aims to study and analyze GSTC for community-based tourism management in Phuket, Thailand. Recent studies about community-based tourism in Thailand have mostly focused on sustainability. However, studies on specific GSTC for community-based tourism were limited, which became the research gap in this study. In terms of sustainable tourism, each community should be able to specify their resources. GSTC for community-based tourism was studied with the purpose of developing sustainable community-based tourism in Phuket, Thailand, through sustainable management, socioeconomic impacts, cultural impacts, and environmental impacts. Promote the management of tourist attractions according to the guidelines of the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) (Sangsrisang et al., 2022).

Originality/value – This research develops a theoretical framework a guideline for CBT destination that wish to become more sustainable according to GSTC standards. The four main components of the GSTC guideline for community-based tourism management. maintaining sustainable tourism resources, the understanding of community participation and its relationship with CBT, cultural preservation, and environmental protection in the community. Tourism agencies can develop tourist attraction management according to the guidelines of the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC).

Design/methodology/approach – This article is based on a literature review utilizing journal articles and other relevant and useful resources on the internet. In the following, the basic steps and important choices involved in conducting a literature review will be suggested and discussed using four phases: (1) designing the review, (2) conducting the review, (3) analysis, and (4) writing up the review. This process was developed from practical experience and is a synthesis of and influenced by various standards and guidelines suggested for literature reviews (Snyder, 2019).

Findings/Discussion –The results show the applicability of the GSTC for sustainable CBT management in Phuket, Thailand. The result is consistent with The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (2019) First, sustainable management: Carrying out certain types of community tourism activities should take into account their suitability

and impact on tourist attractions. In addition, many tourist attractions should determine the number of tourists and the carrying capacity of the area in order to achieve maximum utilization and sustainable tourist attractions. Second, socioeconomic impacts: creating community relationships for participation and awareness of systematic development in the value of resources and the tourism development process by being aware of the satisfaction and needs of the community as well. Third, cultural impacts: Tourist attractions have policies and systems in place to value, restore, and preserve cultural assets, including heritage buildings and cultural landscapes. Lastly, environmental impacts: Strengthening and increasing knowledge and understanding Consciousness of tourists and local owners in jealous love and responsible for tourism resources Including interdependence in needs and responding with knowledge of the value of use, recovery, and preserving tourism resources for sustainability.

Theoretical implications – This study proposes The Guideline of GSTC for Community-Based Tourism Management: A Case Study of CBT in Phuket, Thailand. They are the result of a study to develop a common understanding of sustainability in community-based tourism. They are arranged in four pillars: sustainable management: Demonstrate sustainable destination management, socioeconomic impacts: Maximize economic benefits to the host community and minimize negative impacts, cultural impacts: Maximize benefits to communities, visitors, and culture; minimize negative impacts, and environmental impacts: Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts.

Practical implications – The communities-based tourism in Phuket need support from several sectors, such as the government, private sectors, and local participation, to offered a starting point for more sustainable CBT destination and attraction, which refer to applications of the GSTC criteria.

Social implications (Policy contribution) – This study resulted in a policy to promote the management of tourist attractions according to the guidelines of the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC). There is a policy to promote the creation of a tourist destination management agency (Destination Management Organization, DMO) that is effective in the area.

Research limitations – This study should include additional quantitative and qualitative research in order to use the results to develop policy recommendations in the area. Moreover, the efficacy of CBT has some problems, which suggests that further improvements in CBT strategies are still needed.

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TRAVEL INTENTION: A CASE STUDY
OF THAI EV CONSUMER

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Extended abstract

Recent travel behavior trends reflect a shift towards more sustainable, personalized, and technology-driven experiences. The growing emphasis on environmental impact, health and wellness, local travel, and convenience plays a significant role in shaping tourists' decisions. At the same time, as the world strives towards a more sustainable future, the role of electric vehicles (EVs) in the tourism industry has gained increasing attention. Electric vehicles have become a viable option for personal transportation, offering a more environmentally friendly alternative to traditional fossil-fuel-powered vehicles. This research seeks to a greater understanding of travel intention among EV drivers, Thai EV consumers are used as a context of the study. A qualitative research approach is adopted in this study. A focus group interview is organized with ten key informants who own an EV. The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) is used as a research foundation. Unique travel patterns are evident. Attitude, subjective norm, and perceived ease and difficulty of travelling with EVs are evident in this research findings. Both positive and negative attitude are mentioned. Family members, children in particular, are the key social influence. Availability of charging station and roadside assistance are perceived as ease and difficulty of using EVs for travel. Theoretical and practical implications are provided.

Keywords – EV tourists; EV tourism; Tourist behaviour; Theory of Planned Behaviour

Purpose/Problem Statement - as EV technology continues to evolve and environmental consciousness grows, understanding the behavioral intention of potential EV tourists in Thailand is both timely and pertinent. This research seeks to bridge the gap in existing literature, offering a comprehensive analysis that supports sustainable tourism practices and enhances the overall experience for EV tourists in Thailand. Theory of planned behaviour (TPB) is utilized in this study.

Originality/value – Most existing studies using TPB focus on general consumer behavior or specific sectors like public transportation or car ownership. This research uniquely integrates sustainable tourism and green transportation, contributing to a relatively underexplored intersection in academic literature. Moreover, Thailand, with its unique blend of cultural attractions, environmental challenges, and developing EV infrastructure, provides a distinct context for studying EV tourism behavior.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative research approach with a one-hour focus group interview is adopted. Ten key informants are approached. Content analysis is employed.

Findings/Discussion – The focus group interview is conducted with four females and six males in their 30s years old. All of them work in a business sector. It was evident that most of the car owners buy an EV because of government incentives and policies. The Thai government has implemented various incentives to promote EV adoption, including tax reductions, subsidies, and import duty exemptions for EVs and EV components. In addition, it was found that the EV cars are usually used when travelling within the city, with two key informants drive the cars when travelling long distance outside the town. Limited charging infrastructure is highly mentioned. While Thailand has made efforts to install charging stations, the overall charging infrastructure is still limited, especially in rural and remote areas, which can hinder possibility of EV tourism. The limited driving range of EVs and the availability of charging stations can contribute to range anxiety among tourists, potentially deterring them from using EVs for long-distance travel or extended trips. It was also found that the presence of fast-charging stations can enhances the convenience of EV travel, allowing tourists to recharge quickly and continue their journey with minimal disruption. However, the key informants reveal that the more common situation at the present is slow or standard charging stations, require longer wait times, which can be inconvenient for travelers on tight schedules. Based on TPB Framework, positive attitude is evident, for example, clean energy, zero-carbon, and budget have been highly spoken.

The decision to adopt EV travel among the key informants is significantly influenced by societal and peer factors. In particular, those travelling with children concern more on EV infrastructure, for example, reliability of EVs and charging stations. Availability of robust roadside assistance and support services for EVs is also mentioned. There is a need to feel confident that help is available in case of breakdowns or technical issues.

Theoretical implications – Exploring EV tourists' behavioral intention through the TPB framework allows for a comprehensive understanding of the psychological and social factors driving their choices. This approach can reveal how attitudes towards EVs, societal influences, and perceived control over travel logistics influence travel decisions, offering a nuanced understanding of this growing demographic.

Practical implications – Tourism stakeholders, destination policy makers and related tourism business are able to apply the findings of this study to enhance the appeal of Thailand as an EV-friendly destination. For policymakers, it provides a foundation for developing supportive regulations and infrastructure projects that facilitate the growth of EV tourism. For the tourism industry, including hotels, attractions, and transport providers, it highlights opportunities to innovate and improve services tailored to EV tourists.

Social implications (Policy contribution) – This study contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable tourism development, reinforcing Thailand's position as a leader in environmentally responsible travel.

Research limitations – The focus group interview is conducted with those in their young of age. The future research should access other cohort who may provide different view of EV tourism pattern. Futhermore, the current research is a qualitative study in nature. Therefore, future research could employ a quantitative research design to generalize research findings.

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USING DIGITAL STORYTELLING AS A MARKETING APPROACH TO PROMOTE PLACE BRANDING AND DEVELOP SUSTAINABLE MARKETING IN EMERGING MARKETS: THE CASE OF SAUDI

Hanan AlDammas

Extended abstract

Digital storytelling as a brand marketing technique is widely used to encourage knowledge creation among stakeholders significantly shaping customer behaviors and strengthen place branding. However, less is known of bottom-up digital storytelling contributions of community including tourists and residents for destination marketing. The aim of this research is to develop a bottom-up framework of digital storytelling as a place branding for enhancing community contributions. Data will be collected from expatriate and residents living in, working, and visiting Saudi Arabia to address the factors that impact the quality of storytelling to advance place branding. Data will be collected through a mixed methods research methodology including 2 different phases of secondary and primary data collection as follows: a) Conducting a Systematic Literature Review SLR as secondary data collection. In order to review previous research, a number of peer-reviewed research were selected based on identified searching strategies and determination of inclusion and exclusion criteria. b) Conducting a self-administered questionnaire for investigating drivers, challenges, and motivations that may impact place branding in day-to-day practices in Saudi Arabia. Such factors as storytelling approaches, knowledge, attitude of individuals, and using technology to promote place branding can be investigated. The relationship among factors can be confirmed statistically to present and propose a conceptual framework of community bottom-up storytelling to serve place branding in Saudi Arabia. Data will be randomly collected from locals and expatriates living in Saudi Arabia. The questionnaire is structured based on the proposed conceptual framework extracted from literature review. The developed questionnaires will be posted online for random participation. Data will be analyzed through a descriptive but also through an inferential data analysis technique. IBM-SPSS will be used to conduct descriptive data analysis and reporting demographic data, while Smart PLS will be used to conduct Structural Equation Modeling SEM as well-established equation modeling techniques used in marketing research. As a result, measured and structured model will be provided to identify the significancy among study's constructs relationship. C) Conducting semi-structured interviews with the community, namely residents and expatriates to elicit their experiences with the place and identifying the way they describe the place to others and why they do so. Participants will be selected through a purposeful and a snowballing recruiting technique. Approximately 20-25 meeting will be conducted. Thematic data analysis will be used for conducting data analysis. D) conducting multi-sided ethnography will be used together with interview to investigate lived experiences among targeted practitioners. Multisided ethnography is a study to investigate the relation between people and place through direct observation. It is also an approach to collect the data not only from people structured observation, but also from stories, biographies, websites, and conflicts. It can also include photos, videos, and field work. Investigating tourists in Saudi Arabia following their blogs and activities are also included to the frame of data collection. Study can be significantly contributing to provide a new understanding of community contribution for place branding using co-creation digital storytelling.

Keywords – Place branding, digital marketing, digital storytelling, tourism, sustainable marketing, Saudi Arabia

Purpose/Problem Statement - The aim of this research paper is to investigate the impact of digital storytelling to enhance community knowledge co-creation and place branding in Saudi Arabia. More is known of top-down knowledge-creation practices using storytelling. However, little is known about bottom-up knowledge co-creation practices to promote place branding. Participatory destination branding is another type of involving tourism stakeholders to work together to advance place branding. Residents are essential stakeholders in place branding industry. Therefore, residents' engagement in place branding is required to provide a holistic approach to marketing including tourists and residents with marketers and brand practices

Originality/value – This research develops a theoretical framework for using co-creation digital storytelling for enhancing place branding. Providing new understanding for practitioners to the role of participatory model of digital storytelling to change our understanding to destination branding would be a significant contribution in this

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study. Tourism stakeholders including, community, decision makers and corporation can obtain benefits from this research understanding the significant roles of residents, expatriates and tourists in advancing Saudi image internationally.

Originality/value – This research develops a theoretical framework for using co-creation digital storytelling for enhancing place branding. Providing new understanding for practitioners to the role of participatory model of digital storytelling to change our understanding to destination branding would be a significant contribution in this study. Tourism stakeholders including, community, decision makers and corporation can obtain benefits from this research understanding the significant roles of residents, expatriates, and tourists in advancing Saudi image internationally

Design/methodology/approach – A mixed methods methodological approach will be followed to conduct data collection and analysis. Conducting a self-administered questionnaire to identify factors impacting digital storytelling practices to shape Saudi Arabia place branding. Data analysis will be conducted using Smart PLS to apply Structured Equation Modeling SEM. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted as a qualitative approach eliciting community experiences in digital storytelling practices to spot the place and listing their experiences. Thematic data analysis will be used therefore as a data analysis technique. conducting multi-sided ethnography will be used together with interview to investigate lived experiences among targeted practitioners.

Findings/Discussion – As a doctoral candidate, the author gets started to currently conduct a systematic literature review SLR. A large number of research papers were selected using pre-identified inclusion and exclusion criteria. Keywords and academic databases were listed to facilitate thesearch strategy. The expected outcomes of this study are a conceptual framework for digital storytelling identifying the main drivers impacting digital storytelling practices and helping to predict effective destination branding.

Theoretical implications – This study proposed a conceptual framework for better understanding the current practices of digital storytelling within Saudi context. The way digital story conducted through the processes of connecting, echoing, developing, questioning and constructing will be presented. In addition, how these patterns could predict more intentions to visit the place and recommending it for potentials visitors.

Practical implications – Tourism involved stakeholders including decision-making, researchers, travel agencies and thecommunity will be applying the contribution of this study to improve thetourism industry and promote tourism digital marketing through developing a holistic approach combining top-down to bottom-up place branding approach.

Social implications (Policy contribution) – decision maker should develop policies to enhance tourism industry by involving all stakeholders together. Strengthen the relationship between tourists and residents and pay more attention to community contribution to the place and its characteristics. Improve the roles of community in place branding and sharing touristic activities with formal authority.

Research limitations – More and multifaceted qualitative approach could be conducted in the future to address intensive community experiences and perception for experiencing place and the way they used to not only reported their experiences but also to deliver it in a meaningful matter.

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A SUSTAINABLE TALENT PIPELINE OF VIETNAMESE LUXURY HOSPITALITY MANAGERS. INDIGENIZING FROM CLASSROOM TO LEADERSHIP

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Extended abstract

Introduction:

Predictions state Gen Z individuals born between 1995 and 2012, will make up 27% of the global workforce by 2025 (Stevanovski et al, 2024) and currently they are the largest proportion of hospitality and tourism workers (Goh & Jie, 2019, Goh & Kong, 2018, Goh & Lee, 2018; Self et al, 2019, Goh & Okumus, 2020). Limited studies have examined the current Vietnamese undergraduate hospitality management student cohort and their luxury hospitality industry perceptions, leadership, management career aspirations and progression that they see as existing within the Vietnamese and wider Asian luxury hospitality industry.

Background

The Hospitality Industry is a major and key driver of development and growth for the rapidly expanding economy of Vietnam. Hospitality is widely considered to be a labour intensive industry (Korpi & Mertents 2002) which aligns to the key human resource strategy of the Asian Pacific regions strategy for development of talent with regards to the travel and tourism sector. This strategy offers several countries the possibilities of improving their position economically and socially via a high quality educational system (Crotti and Misrahi, 2015). The hospitality industry globally is generally serviced by tertiary level educational institutions providing an educated and trained workforce for the industries needs. These institutions preparing students for the industry often fall into one of two categories: vocational (VET) and higher educational (HE) institutions. Each having its own emphasis related to their programs and course. VET providers often in the form of colleges, schools or institutions seek to place an emphasis within their curriculum on operational and sometime specific operational skills often related to the more immediate needs of the industry in areas such as catering, restaurant skills or general hotel workers, However, Universities seek to proved a great focus and emphasis on producing management talent with a curriculum emphasis on strategic management, finance and marketing and the adoption and use of technology alongside soft skills such as critical thinking and dealing with and managing change (Zagonari, 2009). While fundamentally the talent produced by both institution are educationally different highlight by the fact VET offer certificate, diploma level education and Universities offer the same alongside degrees and masters programs it has been noted that upon graduation VET and HE graduates often compete for the same roles and positions often at the operational level, due in large part state's Le et al 2018 to the limited managerial positions available in the employment marketplace.

While it is observed that this situation is seen in other developing nations where the growth of over-education talent and unskilled jobs is aligned to the weak demand for locally educated skilled / management labour which in turn is related to the slow expansion in HE education intensive occupations (Mehta et al 2013). The situation and demand needs are changing whereby hospitality companies are now seeking to source skilled and future management talent from the locally educated workforce (Stephenson et al, 2010, Accor, 2024). Being achieved by initiating their own organisations to attract, develop, and retain locally HE educated talent adn in turn thus developing a sustainable talent pipeline (Jooss et al., 2021). In addition what anidotal evidence suggest is that along with locally HE educate talent gaining local certified aqualifications there also exist a talent pool of graduates who form a group who have been educated in international accredited education often from within their home county, and these students graduate from programs that have been provide by and in some case delivered by overseas educational providers and institutions, this can be done on campuses, often refreded to as overseas campus, or inistutions and these provide program from overseas educational providers in classroom mode or in online in what has been called TNE.

In this paper while it is recognised that there exist different pathways towards hospitality careers that can be taken by students within developing nationals such as Vietnam, it is assumed that there are very similar career

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opportunities offered to students in certain labour markets and its is this viewpoint that is seeking to be challenged as the labour market in particular in South East Asian which is geographically is close to the Middle East and Africa three of the world's regions experience some of the world's fastest growth in tourism and hospitality the labour market and demand for local operational which has traditionally been localised however the need and demand for skilled management labour is becoming more Indigenizing with a less reliance on expat labour normally from the west and a growing realisation by such major hospitality organisations for local management talent to not only meet their demands for such talent, ESG….

Given such changes in the demand and greater emphasis on local educated management talent and the growth in HE sector teaching HM programs to doctorale level it is interesting to understand how students of hospitality perceived the hospitality workplace and how they can see their futures as potential leaders and manager in the context of the local hospitality industry aligned it the growth in the local industry by both MNE and local operators. Developing and understanding of these perceptions can have the potential to further develop the understanding of needs to further Indigenizing the educational curriculum From The Classroom towards the needs of industry as we as educators seek to develop the learning strategies and industry engagement to produce the hospitality leader of the future. Little research has been conducted to understand hospitality student perceptions aligned to their HE level and experiences and the rapidly changing view of industry towards more localised management talent figures indicate that the Industry is worth $bn and is predicted to be valued at 4 by 2030. With significant growth in the Luxury sector of the hospitality industry with Hotel opening in Hanoi, Da nang and HMC in 2024/5.

In addition to a growing, post pandemic, number of tourists visiting Vietnam totally in 13mn in 2023 is also a significant domestic tourism market which has led to a hotel industry that is highly segmented with SME in dominance. However, globally and regionally branded hotel operators are seeking a presence within the Vietnamese hotel industry where brand presence by Accor, marriott, IHG VN can now be seens as part of the hotel product and service offerings. One of the industry's major challenges in terms of its continued upward trajectory of growth is aligned talent and the engagement, recruitment and retention of local talent as employees within the hospitality sector. In an effort to make the career move into the hospitality more inspiring for local companies have embarked on partnerships with VET and HCI with the aim of encouraging local talent into the Human resource talent pipeline for the long terms sustainable development and growth of the industry in a program of engagement know as indignation, which mirrors efforts that have taken place in such countries as Singapore, UAE and KSA in seeking to create employment opportunities for Gen Z talent. As indications suggest that the career opportunities for Gen Z aligned to the need for them to be qualified and equipped with soft skills and in some instance the hard skills of the industry to embark upon a successful career with the vietnam hotel industry.

The Gen Z workforce in hospitality has been the subject of studies ( ) as a generation they have been found to display characteristics and traits unique to their generation and this also translates to their view on work and the working environment they seek within an organisation.

Studies on Gen Z

Studies based on hospitality students in Australia have posited that Gen Z employees regard the hospitality profession as a fun, interesting, exciting, fulfilling, place to work and they prioritise and encompass travel opportunities over salary bands (Goh & Lee, 2018). They expects to visualise customised career pathways with a demonstrated long-term career plan trajectory that must show progression throughout the various hierarchy levels within an organisation that offers progress relatively quickly up the career ladder towards career success providing them with an expectation of healthy working conditions (Ly & Adler, 2009, McGuire et al, 2017).

The Gen Z social group also have certain socio-cultural work related values associated with their generation that co exist alongside their hospitality career aspirations which have been focused into four value areas: (1)Training and leadership programs, (2) Human connection, (3) An authentic company culture (4) They want to invest in a job that invests in them seeking flexibility, purpose, and balance in the workplace (weforum.org,2022).

The hotel industry

In the context of careers within the Vietnamese luxury hospitality industry[1] these factors if they exist also

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[1] *The country's major cities, particularly Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, are on course to see an influx of new hotels. 75 of the 130 hotel projects featured are four-star, with the remaining 55 guaranteeing five-star service. The most prominent locations for hotel development are Ho Chi Minh City, with 15 new properties totaling 7,323 rooms, and Hanoi, with 13 new buildings totaling 4,242 rooms. Da Nang anticipates 11 properties with a total of 2,933 rooms. Source:*

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coexist alongside Geo-political, cultural, social, economic and environmental challenges that the Vietnamese Hospitality industry faces. Research evidence suggests these include; (1) Negative socio-cultural perceptions. (2) Political and economic focus or the lack of. (3) The lack of industry-education linkage and cooperation. (4) Graduates' perceived lack of skills and their poor preparation for the workplace. (5) The lack of women's hospitality career advancements and progression. (6) The hospitality industry preferences for students sourced from vocational education, and (7) An increasingly growing number of options related to hospitality degrees programs that adhere to different national and international standards within the Vietnamese higher education sector (Thi & Poh, 2024, Vo, et al. 2022, Anh et al, 2018, Bui et al, 2022).

Education

Keywords: Hospitality, Education, Management, Vietnam Luxury Hospitality, Asian luxury Hospitality, Luxury Hospitality Industry, Sustainable Talent Pipeline.

Purpose / Problem Statement:

The aim of this research is to examine the perceptions, leadership and management career understanding and aspirations of Generation Z hospitality management degree students within the context of the Vietnamese and Asian luxury hospitality industry. The study will be seeking to understand their future aspirations and expectations with regards to their future career opportunities and progression within the Vietnamese and Asian luxury hotel industry. The goal is to develop an indigenize conceptual framework that develop an understanding that can assist Vietnamese based educators and industry to provide a clear and positive indigenizing based teaching and industry career progression model (Stephenson et al, 2010) that will lead towards a sustainable talent pipeline for career and industry advancement of educated Vietnamese hospitality students studying to be future leaders and managers in the luxury hospitality industry.

Originality / Value:

Solnet, Baum, Robinson, and Lockstone-Binney (2016) strongly emphasised the need for ongoing hospitality workforce research to address the evolving workforce issues. Despite Generation Z being the largest proportion of hospitality and tourism workers, there exist limited studies that have examined this particular student cohort studying hospitality management degree programs in Vietnam's higher educational institutions.

This research seeks to develop an understanding of the key concepts to examine the role that higher education degrees play in the role of indigenizing of industry context, engagement, recruitment and retention of Gen Z future leaders and managers in the Vietnamese and Asian Luxury Hotel industry.

Design / Methodology . A quantitative approach will use online questionnaires for the collection of data. The study's data will be analysed using a statistical package with the issue of standard measures of frequency and correlation and multiple regression being applied to the data to analyse collected data to determine any significant findings and relevant correlations that may exist within the findings

Theoretical Implications: The study will propose an indigenize conceptual framework for a greater understanding of the factors related to the education of Gen Z hospitality talent. Seeking to produce a sustainable talent pipeline for career and industry advancement for the development and growth of Vietnamese and Asian luxury hospitality.

Practical Implications: The study's findings can assist in the development of policies and planning of hospitality management education and luxury hospitality industry management training programs and career paths for graduates of Vietnamese hospitality management degree programs.

Social Implications: The study's findings can assist in the development of policies and planning that seek to indigenize hospitality management education and human resource policy in the Vietnamese hospitality industry.

Research Implications: Further in depth studies should be undertaken with a wider sample group drawn from a more geographically dispersed student population. This will result in a more thorough understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced within the hospitality management education in Vietnam.

Limitation of the study will be related to the geographical dispersion of the student population and the varying standards of hospitality management degree programs they are studying.

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https://www.mordorintelligence.com/industry-reports/hospitality-industry-in-vietnam

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SCREEN TO GREEN: THE POWER OF K-DRAMA AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN SHAPING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM BEHAVIORS

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Extended abstract

This study explores the impact of Korean Dramas (K-Dramas) on shaping tourists' sustainable behaviour. Recently, the film industry's influence on sustainable tourism behaviour has garnered increasing scholarly attention (Hua et al., 2021; Lopez et al., 2018). According to a 2024 report by the Statista Research Department, approximately 68 percent of respondents acknowledged the widespread popularity of K-dramas even beyond the fan community. K-dramas have significantly promoted Korea as a top tourist destination by showcasing attractive locations. These films not only attract global tourists but also facilitate the promotion of Korean culture through their broad appeal. The power of social media has led to the emergence of "viral places," amplifying interest and spurring discussions about travel and tourism activities in general and sustainable tourism in particular. Social media platforms also increase community engagement and encourage responsible travel behaviours, ultimately contributing to sustainable economic growth and global cultural understanding.

This research uses a quantitative method by collecting data through an online survey questionnaire. Behavioural patterns will be researched by contacting Vietnamese tourists interested in K-Drama. The survey will be distributed via social media platforms where K-Drama fans interact. It is expected that 150 responses will be received from Vietnam. Statistical data analysis will be conducted using JASP. This project is currently in its early stages, and it is expected that initial findings will be presented at the conference.

Keywords — Sustainable Tourism, Korean Drama, K-Drama Impact, Responsible Tourism, Tourism Marketing, Social Media Tourism, Sustainable Tourism Behaviours

Purpose/Problem Statement — This study aims to rigorously examine the role of social media in promoting sustainable tourism practices through Korean Dramas (K-Dramas) from the perspective of Vietnamese tourists. It aims to evaluate the role of social media in promoting tourism destinations featured in K-Dramas and analyze how K-Drama content consumption influences sustainable tourism behaviours. Additionally, the study will assess the reception and implementation of sustainability messages by the K-Drama fan community. This research will provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of social media as a tool to advance sustainable tourism practices, contributing to more holistic tourism strategies.

Originality/value — This research explores how popular cultural phenomena such as K-Dramas influence sustainable tourism awareness and behaviour. The study offers a comprehensive look at how media content can promote sustainable tourism by assessing economic, social and environmental impacts. These findings provide practical insights into marketing policy and strategy, providing valuable data for optimizing popular culture and social media use in shaping effective initiatives. This approach enhances tourism promotion and ensures sustainability messages reach global audiences more deeply and effectively.

Design/methodology/approach — A quantitative approach will be employed, utilizing online questionnaires to collect data. The study's data will be analyzed using JASP. Initial findings will be presented at the conference.

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MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS' PARTICIPATION IN ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT FOR FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY AT ROYAL BELUM

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Extended abstract

It is known that tourism is one of the world's largest industries, acting as a vehicle for sustainable development and providing significant economic, sociocultural, and environmental value to the resident people (Sharpley, 2002). The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2008) estimated that tourism contributes up to 10 percent (%; $5.89 trillion) of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and has increased two-fold in 2018 (Aref, 2011). Therefore, tourism is a great socio-economic driver in many nations and can enhance the socio-economy of the local people.

Importantly, tourism is one of the main sources that contribute positively to developing countries' economies, especially within Southeast (SE) Asia. In Malaysia, tourists are attracted to unique local cultures and traditions, thus it is important to continuously improve facilities and services particularly in areas that attract international tourists. Tourism is currently the third major GDP contributor to the country, due to Malaysia's serious involvement in promotional activities during the 1970s and establishment of the first tourism department under the Ministry of Trade and Industry (Jaafar et al., 2011). Currently, the tourism sector is an important contributor to the economy and is identified as one of the major sources of foreign exchange earnings and catalyst to the country's economic growth. According to the online report issued by the Sundaily (19 October 2015), Malaysia's tourism sector was the 6th largest contributor to the national economy, contributing to a total of MYR 161 billion (bill.; 14.9%) of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2014 (Mosbah & Khuja, 2014).

Malaysia is known as one of the earth's 12 "mega-diverse" countries, thus the government agreed to enhance the efficient management, conservation, and sustainable development of forest biodiversity. Furthermore, biodiversity contributes to economic, food security, environmental stability, national heritage, science, education, recreation, and ecotourism (Abdullah et al., 2015). Over the last few decades, ecotourism has been a contested topic among academics and industry practitioners as a tourism segment that contributes to sustainable development (Wondirad, 2019). It has been acknowledged by academics as an alternative tourism to mass tourism. Due to adverse impacts imposed by the latter on world's environment, environmentalists, governments in developed and developing nations adopted ecotourism as a developmental mechanism to enhance the local economy and social development (Masud et al., 2017). Due to the recognition of ecotourism as one of the national agendas in many developing countries, the sustainable development paradigm has emphasized the inclusion of tourism by the government of developing countries. As a result, sustainable development goals (SDGs) were embedded by researchers in their tourism-related studies to embrace the importance of such goals to the natural ecosystem and local community livelihoods (Kunjuraman, 2020).

Keywords – Ecotourism development; stakeholders' collaboration; Royal Belum; Malaysia; mixed method; Southeast Asia

Purpose/Problem Statement - Overall, this research sets out to ascertain the ecotourism value via mixed method approach, while improving the economic situation of activities at Royal Belum (RBSP). Specifically, we seek to understand the development of continuous sustainable ecotourism within the Royal Belum vicinity, focusing on: (1) Stakeholder participation, through Tourists' perception on Willingness To Pay (WTP), Total biodiversity and ecotourism value estimation via Biodiversity credits (Biocredits) at RBSP; (2) Development of Royal Belum as an Ecotourism destination, through qualitative in-depth interviews with local residences, and (3) Ecotourism resiliency through quantitative survey in RBSP.

Even though the State Park provides many functions to the country and people, scarce data was found on Stakeholder participation and to estimate the ecotourism value. The biodiversity at RBSP is still vulnerable to harm

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due to climate change, thus reducing the full ecotourism benefits there. Royal Belum is a pristine forest of Malaysia, a vital habitat for charismatic and keystone animals which function as their ecosystem homes. Moreover, biodiversity from RBSP is impacted by too much rainfall that weakens the resilience of its dipterocarp plants, unpredictable weather causing altered flower / fruit timings, homogenous animal makeup and potential harm to people and farmed species caused by the spread of zoonotic. Stakeholder participation is an invaluable part of sustainable ecotourism, because it organizes and evens out rulings according to the requirements of each group. A top-down ecotourism system expedites the growth but does not necessarily provide favorable results for the local people who inhabit the site.

Originality/value – This research presents novel approach about the stakeholders' collaboration efforts in developing and managing the country's niche ecotourism destination for future sustainability. Several important collaboration efforts will be established among the stakeholders, especially involving local communities. This study will provide insights about the collaboration efforts initiated by Malaysian tourism stakeholders towards sustainable ecotourism development and offers references to similar ecotourism destinations in other countries.

Design/methodology/approach –The study area will involve Tourist hotspot and Orang Asli settlements in RBSP: Pulau Banting Jetty, Kampung Sungai Tiang (5410 3500N,101260 4000E), Kg. Sungai Kejar (5480 0600N 101240 300E) and Aman Damai (54000400N 101210 5100E).

The prospective respondents will be asked to agree to participate in the survey by answering a questionnaire-guided interview. The study will employ a mixed method research by integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. The qualitative approach is done by conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with informants from Stakeholders: tourists, local community (Temiar & Jahai tribes), government officials, non-government organizations (NGOs), and the private sector. Other potential collaborators include scientists and park management. The quantitative approach will be done via desktop research and structured questionnaire for survey (WTP). Tourist components in the survey instrument will be adapted, and the sample involved will be up to 500 respondents at Royal Belum. Higher economics of ecosystem supported at Royal Belum will be a measure of services. The total biodiversity and ecotourism value of Royal Belum will be sampled three times per year. Biodiversity credits (Biocredits) are used as an indication of value, for the Biodiversity Offsets Scheme and to pay for biodiversity-enhancing activities. Biocredits will be calculated using the System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA). Willingness to pay will be determined through i) Contingent Valuation method (CVM) which determines the respondents' attitude towards enhancing biodiversity, and ii) Stated Preference (SP) which indicates willingness to pay for biodiversity services. Thereafter, the Individual Travel Cost Method (TCM; survey questionnaire) is used to obtain the main data. This information will be assessed with truncated negative binomial regression, to understand which factors are important for the local tourists in Royal Belum. Consumer surplus will be determined from regression, giving an estimate of benefits obtained by the visitors from ecotourism.

Interviews will be studied according to themes and textual software, while an analysis of survey is undertaken using Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS 20.0; Windows). Data will also be analyzed using PLS and Microsoft Excel.

Findings/Discussion – N / A.

Theoretical implications – The theoretical framework includes Stakeholder Theory and Tourism Sociology at RBSP, consisting of perspectives in ecotourism issues of Malaysia and will be discussed in relation to SDGs of SE Asia.

Practical implications – Broadly, this tourism sociology study is part of a larger project which is aimed at mitigating climate change's impacts on an important protected area. Particular added value elements in The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the UN, essentially has activities that address 6 out of 17 SDGs (SDGs 3, 6, 13, 14, 15 and 17). Among the expected outputs of this action include the economic valuation of ecosystem services in terms of annual revenue from ecotourism, water resource, pollination, seed dispersal, and community health and the experimental results of the studies conducted to ascertain the impact of environmental parameters on the survivability of selected organisms. Component 3 addresses SDGs 6, 13, 14, 15 and 17 as impact and mitigation plan from the outcomes of workshops and focus group discussions directly addresses the impact of climate change on biological diversity, water security, ecotourism activities. To ensure gender equality and youth participation in expert consultations, invitation for expertise from both gender and youth participation will be balanced, with special seat allocations reserved for women and youth participants.

Social implications (Policy contribution) – There will be stakeholder engagements via focus group discussions that serve as consultation meetings which would develop as a think tank committee. The latter shall consist of scientists, park management personnel and other stakeholders of RBSP. Specific memberships include the Temiar / Jahai tribe representative, 40% women panel and 30% youth panel. The successful implementation of this project will produce evident-based interventions to mitigate impact on RBSP. These interventions will be reflected in guidelines, management decisions and policies.

Research limitations – N / A.

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GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATION AGRITOURISM OF FISH FARMING LEARNING CENTER: A CASE STUDY OF CHIANG RAI, THAILAND

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Extended abstract

The aim of this research is to study the communication guidelines for agritourism of fish farming learning center: A case study of Chiang Rai, Thailand. Agritourism has continuously gained interest from tourists, including farmers, young smart farmers, nature conservationists, or those seeking to escape from stressful lifestyles (Chase, 2019; Leco, Perez, Hernandez & Campon, 2013), especially in period of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, it has become increasingly important to continuously care for and maintain physical health worldwide (Marçal & Ciolac, 2021) such as ecotourism, farm stays, or increased consumption of clean food, etc. Through literature review, research works related to this topic has been found such as the development and management of agricultural tourism (Park, Doh & Kim, 2014), tourists' satisfaction with agricultural tourism (Andayani et al., 2021) or numerous studies focusing on the importance of agritourism significant role in driving the country's economy (Bhatta & Ohe, 2020; Campbell & Kubickova, 2020). However, there is still a lack to explore of promotion in agricultural tourism, especially in agricultural tourism studying from learning centers that serve as information hubs, scientific knowledge, local expertise, and natural recreational models. This remains a less explored research topic, requiring a comprehensive exploration of guidelines for agritourism communication for fish farming learning centers.

This study aims to raise awareness and assess the needs of tourists (Ngamvichaikit & Rian, 2014), thus it's essential to examine communication guidelines for agritourism that are unique within the community context and can attract target groups (Basu & Dutta, 2008; Liu & Chen, 2010), especially from the perspective of stakeholders who possess in-depth information and play a role in determining appropriate and effective communication strategies for agricultural tourism (Georges & Caleman, 2021). This leads to the promotion of sustainable agricultural conservation and development, the expansion of tourism routes, the creation of jobs, increased income, enhancement of local quality of life, and overall improvement of the country's tourism economy.

This study used a qualitative approach, data collecting used in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, and participatory observations involving stakeholders form various sectors including government agencies responsible for tourism, agriculture, and community management, as well as agricultural groups, local residents, private tourism operators, digital marketing experts, and agricultural academics. The findings suggest that communication guidelines for agricultural tourism at fish farming learning centers should involve community communicators, who can creatively generate diverse content through various activities, showcasing the unique experiences of the community in organic tilapia farming while preserving the wisdom of local farmers. These experiences can be presented through a variety of channels, including on-site, online, and on-ground channels.

Keywords – Tourism Communication; Agritourism; Learning Center

Purpose/Problem Statement - The aim of this research paper is to study the communication guidelines for agritourism of the fish farming learning center: A case study of Chiang Rai. Even though in the area of Phan District, Chiang Rai, this flat valley is a complete Nile tilapia farming center, capable of farming tilapia the most in the upper northern region. It is a tourist destination that can provide agricultural learning experiences of community ways of life with abundant natural resources. However, in the past, there has been a lack of studies on the marketing communication dimension to promote agricultural tourism of the fish farming learning center.

Originality/value – The original value of this paper is to present communication guidelines for agritourism of the Nile tilapia farming learning center in Chiang Rai, aiming to raise awareness and assess the demand for clear and intriguing tourist information. Chiang Rai, located in the northernmost part of Thailand, boasts abundant resources and significant river sources, supporting the livelihoods of fishermen, particularly in tilapia farming, hence earning

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the nickname "The Land of Nile Tilapia" This tilapia farming center utilizes clean energy technology that is environmentally friendly. It transforms fish pond landscapes into recreational areas, incorporates community herbal resources into cuisine, sells tilapia products, and manufactures processed tilapia products such as tilapia chili paste and tilapia noodles.

Design/methodology/approach – This study employed a qualitative approach and collect data by using in-depth interview and focus group discussion technique, along with participatory observation. Participants were selected based on specific criteria aligned with the study objectives, including 1) farmers' groups, such as fish farming group leaders and local residents 2) government staff, such as the Provincial Department of Agriculture, Tourism Authority of Thailand (Chiang Rai), and government officials responsible for community management, such as community developers 3) tourism agencies from the public sector and 4) digital marketing communication professionals, and agricultural experts.

Findings/Discussion – The results of study follow on the research question asked; regarding the communication guidelines for agritourism of the Nile tilapia farming learning center, it was found that entrepreneurs or farmers should be community communicators capable of creating unique content through experiential activities that reflect the community's identity in organic Nile tilapia farming. This promotes both physical and mental health through presentations in various formats such as on-site, online and on-ground channels.

Theoretical implications – The research proposes the theoretical framework of agritourism and digital marketing communication with the ultimate goal of development, becoming a significant theory in improving agricultural tourism communication for entrepreneurs and communities.

Practical implications – Stakeholders in agritourism for example farmers, restaurant owners, homestay businesses, and government agencies can utilize research findings to create clear and effective content that stimulates interest and the needs of tourists. Additionally, they can promote the image of agricultural tourism for the future of the aforementioned tilapia farming learning centre.

Social implications (Policy contribution) – Developers or stakeholders should establish policies and enhance communication plans for agritourism in a manner that serves as a framework for development such as government agencies should take the lead in driving continuous health tourism and creating networks between regions to support and expand the market for agritourism extensively.

Research limitations – The study from the in-depth perspective of the target group aims to disseminate information about agricultural tourism from the tilapia learning centre to collect data on market communication assessment and satisfaction levels across various dimensions. This data will be utilized to develop content that is both intriguing and clear, for responding to the genuine needs of tourists.

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EXAMING THE FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE CHOICES OF WELLNESS TOURISM DESTINATIONS AMONGS VIETNAMESE TOURISTS

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Extended abstract

Tourism is one of Vietnam's key economic sectors by significantly contributing to GDP growth and creating a large number of jobs for local people. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has seriously impacted the development, operation and contribution of the tourism industry. It can be said that after COVID-19, the tourism industry is undergoing a recovery process and adapting to a new business model. In this context, the wellness tourism industry has become an important sector, creating conditions for tourists to improve their health and experience safe travel. The wellness tourism industry not only helps visitors enjoy unique travel experiences, but also has significant importance in improving their health and well-being.

Vietnam has diverse natural and cultural resources, which are the foundation for the development of the health tourism industry. The wellness tourism industry in Vietnam offers many high-quality wellness services such as wellness resorts, spas, and wellness centers. Visitors can enjoy therapeutic treatments, yoga, massage, and regenerative methods to improve health and reduce stress. Therefore, the health tourism industry in Vietnam provides a unique combination of tourism and healthcare, bringing simultaneous benefits in terms of both health and tourism experience for tourists (Nature *and Environment, 2023)*.

The wellness tourism industry is becoming an important and interesting field in Vietnam. Researchers conducted research to understand and evaluate the impact of health tourism on travelers and local communities. One of the recent studies is the article tittled *The COVID-19 Pandemic and Factors Influencing the Destination Choice of International Visitors to Vietnam (Wu et al., 2023)*. This research paper has shown the impacts on the choice of destinations in the tourism industry in general for international tourists to Vietnam. The first book written about this type of tourism was "Tourism and Health" by Professor Phan Van Duyet (*Hanoi Medical Publishing House in 1999*). The author has pointed out the basic potentials in the development of medical tourism in Vietnam. However, the author has not mentioned the current situation as well as measures to promote this type of exploitation in Vietnam. After Professor Phan Van Duyet, there has not been a monograph book written on this topic. In newspapers and magazines, there are also a number of articles such as "Health tourism" by Dr. Le Anh Tuan (Vietnam *Tourism magazine, No. 5/2008*). The author has summarized some basic information such as the formation of health tourism in the world, the products and subjects of health tourism and the current situation, and the trend of medical tourism development in Vietnam. However, all this information is only in the brief forms, without going into details.

Therefore, the objectives of this research are to examine the factors that affect the choice of health tourism destinations of Vietnamese tourists. To achieve these research objectives, we use the quantitative research approach with an online survey for Vietnamese tourists. The results of this study can help tourism businesses and destination tourism management organizations better understand the factors that Vietnamese tourists are interested in when choosing a wellness tourism destination. This can contribute to the development of suitable wellness tourism products and services and enhance the travel experience combined with the wellness of Vietnamese tourists.

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ENHANCING OUR SPIRITUAL HEALING THROUGH THE DEVEVOPMENT OF FOREST BATHING

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Extended abstract

Spiritual retreat is one of the activities that fall under wellness concept (Ashton, 2018, 2021).

Spirituality can reflects positive emotions, love attachment, trust, faith, compassion, gratitude, forgiveness, joy and hope (Barros & Schultz, 2023). Some people travel to join spiritual activity because they want to seek the purpose in life and explore what goes beyond life (Sobihah Abdul Halim, Tatoglu, & Banu Mohamad Hanefar, 2021).

Forest bathing, known as "Shinrin-yoku" in Japanese, has garnered significant attention in Japan in recent year for its ability to induce relaxation, alleviate stress, and facilitate a deep connection with nature. It involves full sensory immersion in the beauty and wonder of nature surroundings, aiming to rejuvenate the body, mind, and sprit (Choukas-Bradley & van der Vorst, 2018).

This paper aim is to develop spiritual retreat tourism activity centered around forest bathing". The research employed a quantitative approach, utilizing survey questionnaire for data collection. A total of 160 samples were gathered and analyzed using multiple regression technique. The findings reveal that various factors influence tourist satisfaction, and their intention to revisit the destination. Key push factors, such as self-transcendent and physical well-being, significantly impact participation in forest bathing activities. Internally driven motivation for tourist includes the desire for destination surrounded by nature setting, characterized by greenery, tranquility, and proximity to local culture and authentic community environments.

Keywords – Forest Bathing, Spiritual Tourism Development, Wellness Tourism, Spiritual Retreat Motivation, Wellness tourism sustainability

Purpose/Problem Statement –

Nature therapy, as a method to promote well-being, serves as a health model with implications for enhancing mental health and spiritual retreat. In response to the reported stress levels in modern society, human is exploring numerous avenues to address physical and mental health challenges. Forest bathing experience have been emerged as a form of mindful tourism practice and that not only promotes a sustainable use of natural resources but also fosters overall well-being (Li, 2010). Numerous studies have been investigated the effect of forest bathing on human health and well-being (Imamura et al., 2022; Li, 2010; Mathias, Daigle, Dancause, & Gadais, 2020). However, a gap remains regarding the specific factors that determine tourists' participation in forest bathing therapy and the attractions of destinations that encourage tourist to travel and engage in forest bathing activities.

Fulfilling this gap is crucial as its outcomes can be beneficial across several aspects, especially in enhancing forest sustainability through the development of forest healing activities by forest communities and relevant stakeholders (Aisyianita, Afif, & Anwari, 2022). In addition, for those who lack connection with nature and the soul, forest bathing provides a way to reconnect, immerse oneself in nature, and find solace within it.

Originality/value –

This study offers unique insights into the development of spiritual retreat through forest bathing activities. Significant gaps remain in understanding the cause-effect relationship between forest bathing features and psychological benefits. Therefore, this research contributes valuable insights into the fundamental well-being needs of human and suggests ways to manage forests to ensure these benefits, thereby enhancing the appeal of spiritual tourism destinations.

Design/methodology/approach –

A quantitative approach was utilized, employing a survey technique to gather data from 160 samples who engaged in forest bathing within the national park in Thailand.

Findings/Discussion –

The study revealed that both psychological and physical factors play crucial roles in influencing tourist satisfaction, and their intention to revisit a destination. Psychological factors, such self-transcendent and physical

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well-being significantly motivate tourist to participate in forest bathing activities. Moreover, the appeal of a destination, characterized by its nature purity, green landscapes, peaceful atmosphere, tranquility, and proximity to local culture and authentic community environments, influences tourists' decisions to travel there.

Theoretical implications –

The theoretical contribution of this study propose a model for developing spiritual tourism through forest bathing activities. This model serves as a guide for scholars and educators to grasp the fundamentals of mental health and spiritual well-being improvement. It underscores the foundational aspects physical and psychological benefits, particularly highlighting how forest bathing fosters self-transcendence and physical well-being in individuals.

Practical implications –

The stakeholders in wellness and related businesses can comprehend the preferences of forest bathing tourist and utilize the study results as a blueprint to develop such activities for visitors. Moreover, they can learn effective destination management and preparation techniques aligned with tourist preferences. This understanding is crucial amidst current global challenges such as stress related to achieving work-life balance. Forest bathing activities serve as valuable guidelines in addressing cultural diversity, enhancing economic well-being, and integrating advancements in technology.

Social implications (Policy contribution)

The study contributes to achieving the sustainable development goal by advocating for the development of spiritual tourism through forest bathing. This approach emphasizes the creation of serene nature destinations abundant with greenery and a tranquil atmosphere conducive to spiritual retreats.

Research limitations

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the researchers faced limitation in sampling participants who typically engaged in forest bathing activities. Nevertheless, they successfully navigated this challenge by leveraging the strong rapport between forest bathing facilitators and tourism who were member of the forest bating community.

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HALAL- FRIENDLY WELLNESS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: THAILAND CASE STUDY

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Extended abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the development of Halal-friendly wellness tourism in destination where the Muslim population is not predominant. Halal tourism is one of the high demand market emerged from the growth of Halal industry (Hasan, Sunariyah, & Endriyati, 2022; Rahman, Moghavvemi, Thirumoorthi, & Rahman, 2020). It was predicted that the world's total Muslim population is expected to increase approximately 35 percent, it rising from 1.6 billion to 2.2 billion by 2030 (Fustos, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2011). Moreover, wellness activity enhance tourist health well-being, ultimately create happiness, peach, transcendent, and reach self-actualization, during and post trip, and the activity will cover all aspects of health well-being including physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual (Büssing, 2024; Buzinde, 2020; Garg, Gupta, Mittal, & Kaur, 2024; Kongtaveesawas, Prasarnphanich, Sinthupinyo, & Ashton, 2022; Rathore, Singh, & Katiyar, 2024). Hence, wellness activity tourism will help to enhance marketing strategy development for such a nice market.

This study used a qualitative approach with face-to-face interview technique for data collecting process. The data analysis was performed by a content analysis technique. A total of 40 participants were interviewed. The permission was asked for tape recording, and participants were informed that the information given will be strictly confidential and only researcher can access data.

The findings indicate that the development of Halal-friendly wellness tourism should involve four key elements: spa/ therapy, sport/ leisure/adventure, slow food concept, and nurturing spiritual well-being. In addition, there's a need to prioritize Halal-friendly practices, encompassing provisions for halal food, designated prayer spaces, staff trained in Islamic regulations, and services adhering to gender segregation. Each activity should be tailored to accommodate Muslim visitors, ensuring they can engage fully in tourism experiences without compromising their adherence to Islamic principles.

Keywords – Halal-friendly Wellness Tourism, Non-Muslim Destination Tourism Development, Wellness Activity, Muslim Tourism in Thailand.

Purpose/Problem Statement – This study explored strategies for fostering Halal-friendly wellness tourism within a destination that may not have a predominantly Muslim population.

Originality/value – This research constructs a theoretical framework for the development of Halal-friendly wellness tourism model for a Non-Muslim country. The model propose distinct wellness activities development formulated from insights gathered from the actual experiences and opinion of Muslim participants. Notably, these halal wellness activities have not been proposed in previous research endeavors.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative approach was employed, involving in-depth interviews with a total of forty participants. Data analysis was performed using the contents analysis technique.

Findings/Discussion – The result revealed that the Halal-friendly wellness tourism can be developed through four key activities; including spa/therapy, sport/leisure/adventure, embracing the slow food concept, and spiritual retreats.

Specifically, in the spa/therapy category, it is essential to endure gender segregation, with treatment rooms and therapist services provided by the same gender. In addition, spa products used, such as massage oil, should refrain from incorporating perfumes or alcohol. The design and ambience of spa venues must align with Muslim principles, including separate prayer rooms for males and females and avoiding religion symbols in decorations. Moreover, spa linens, such as towels, bedsheets, pillow should not be reused. Staff across all spa roles, including, receptionists, cleaners, and therapists should be trained to understand Muslim regulations and sensitivities.

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In the second activity offering sport/leisure/adventure activities for Muslim tourist; the findings converge on four primary considerations: Firstly, ensuring access to Halal food options; secondly, facilitating the availability of prayer spaces; thirdly, refraining from alcohol consumption; and fourthly, engaging tour guides who are well-versed in Islamic practices.

In proposing the slow food concept, the findings emphasize three key points. First, adhering to Halal certification standards; secondly, offering vegetarian or vegan choices; and thirdly, providing ethnic foods that reflecting local culture or traditional cuisine, incorporating nutritious ingredients. Regarding the spiritual well-being activity, the results highlight three crucial points: Firstly, the programs should avoid associations with idolatry; secondly, incorporating Quran sound healing programs, or Tibetan bowl sound healing, while eliminating any chanting related to other religions; and thirdly offering visits to historically significant Mosques, evoke spiritual emotions and sacred historical connections. Additionally, there's an emphasis on including activities in natural environments for spiritual retreats.

Theoretical implications – This study proposed a theoretical framework to develop Halal-friendly wellness tourism, especially in non- Muslim country. It consists of two important structures: firstly, the core resources for halal-friendly product and services; secondly, Halal-friendly wellness tourism four activities were developed; including spa/ therapy, sport/ leisure/ adventure, slow food, and spiritual well-being.

Practical implications – This research makes valuable contributions to practical managerial implications. Initially, it introduced innovative Halal-friendly wellness activity development model. It presents noteworthy activities that can effectively relevant stakeholders to develop wellness tourism product, services and activities for both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists.

Research limitations – The limitation of this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic; hence, the contact makes through online, such as using zoom and Microsoft team for data collecting using in-depth interview. Therefore, face-to-face interactions can afford researchers a better opportunity to observe participants' behavior and gesture, thereby enhancing their understanding of the information provided. However, the limitation overcome by participants allow researcher to have personal contact if unclear in some issues.

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TREKKING/HIKING TOURISM IN VIETNAM: SHIFTS IN NEEDS AND INTENTIONS TO BUY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

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Abstract:

This study focuses on changes in demand and intention to purchase products and services related to trekking/hiking tourism in Vietnam, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the theoretical basis of adventure tourism and research on destination image and travel motivation, the study applied a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods.

In qualitative method, the study conducted in-depth interviews with tour guides and adventure tourists. At the same time, a quantitative method was implemented through a survey for 400 participants. Analysis of collected data shows that factors such as destination image and travel motivation have a significant influence on tourists' intention to purchase trekking/hiking tourism products.

The results of the study highlight the importance of developing targeted marketing strategies, aimed at improving destination image and responding to specific travel motivations, thereby encouraging tourists to choose products, trekking/hiking service. Finally, the study proposes policies to support sustainable development for the trekking/hiking tourism industry in Vietnam, including applying advanced technology and improving service quality, thereby enhancing the experience. Tourists and promote socio-economic development in localities.

Key word: *Trekking/hiking tourism, Qualitative and quantitative research methods, Destination image, Travel motivation, Intention to purchase tourism products.*

1. Introduction

Trekking and hiking tourism in Vietnam has experienced rapid development, reflecting a strong growth trend in the tourism industry in general and in the adventure tourism segment in particular. Resolution No. 08-NQ/TW of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, issued on January 16, 2017, clearly defined the role of tourism as a key economic sector, contributing to the growth and sustainable development of the country (Party Central Committee Secretariat, 2017).

Recent studies show that combining adventure elements with agritourism creates higher economic value for rural areas, while contributing to preserving cultural heritage and promoting economic growth. Local economy (Aisyianita et al., 2023). Tour guides, especially in the field of trekking, play an important role in educating tourists about environmental conservation and providing information about local ecology and culture (Poudel & Nyaupane, 2024).

Demand for trekking and hiking tourism in Vietnam is increasing, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic when people increasingly favor outdoor activities. This requires the development of new tourism products that meet the diverse needs of tourists, especially those who are young and adventure-loving. Studies such as Dang, Nguyen & Nguyen (2022) have explored factors that influence tourists' decisions to choose a destination, helping policymakers and businesses develop appropriate tourism products.

The development of trekking tourism must also ensure sustainability, not only economically but also environmentally and socially. Studies such as those by Wirawan (2016) and Leister (2019) have shown how local communities can benefit from tourism development, as well as the importance of resource management and conservation in the context of tourism. Adventure travel scene.

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The development of digital marketing and communication strategies is another important factor in attracting and retaining customers. Studies such as that of Utami (2023) have explored how digital media can be used to market trekking packages to enhance competitiveness. Promote sustainable development of businesses. This research shows that understanding and effectively applying digital communication tools can expand influence and attract customers more effectively, especially in the context of modern consumption that is increasingly shifting translate to digital.

Along with the increase in demand for outdoor tourism, the development of trekking types from mountains and deserts to tropical and glaciers is also increasingly diversifying, reflecting the creativity and adaptation of the tourism industry. advent calendar (Różycki & Dryglas, 2014). A deeper understanding of the factors that attract tourists to participate in trekking helps policymakers and tourism businesses develop appropriate and sustainable tourism products, thereby promoting the development of the industry.

Another important aspect is the participation and commitment of tourists in guided trekking activities. Tour guides not only provide information about the region's geography and ecology but also educate visitors about conservation and sustainability. This enhances the visitor experience and also contributes to environmental conservation and local economic development (Leister, 2019).

Exploring the factors that influence tourists' return intention is also a necessary factor for the long-term development of the tourism industry. Studies such as that of Effendi et al. (2022) show that service quality, marketing communication, and tourist motivation have a direct influence on customers' decisions to re-visit a destination. Understanding these factors helps tourism businesses optimize marketing strategies and improve services to best serve customers.

Thus , trekking/hiking tourism in Vietnam is not only a recreational activity but also an opportunity for discovery, education and conservation. Studies such as that of Dang, Nguyen & Nguyen (2022) and efforts to develop tourism products suitable to local conditions have contributed to socio-economic development and environmental protection. Thereby, this research not only promotes the development of sustainable tourism but also ensures satisfaction and rich experiences for tourists.

2. Theoretical basis and research methods

2.1 Theoretical basis

2.1.1 Concept of adventure tourism

Adventure tourism is defined as entertainment activities organized in wild and new locations, where visitors can participate in outdoor activities with high levels of physical activity and varying degrees of challenge (Millington, 2001). This definition emphasizes the combination of excitement from adventure and novel experiences, while also contributing to increased environmental awareness and positive interaction with nature.

Studies show that adventure tourism is not only a rapidly growing segment in the tourism industry but also a form of tourism that deeply interacts with the natural environment (Giddy, 2016). However, the relationship between adventure tourism and the environment has not been fully explored, especially the environmental perspective of adventure tourism operators and their behavior in minimizing environmental impacts. (Giddy, 2016).

Despite this, existing studies often focus on outdoor recreation activities and have not fully evaluated aspects related to safety, environmental, social or economic impacts of adventure tourism (Buckley, 2014). This suggests a need for further research into the structure of adventure tourism products, customer characteristics and related management policies.

Besides, authors Swarbrooke et al. (2003) also emphasized the variety of names and activities of adventure tourism, from exciting adventures to natural adventure recreation activities, showing the richness and diversity of this type of tourism. This calendar meets the diverse needs of tourists.

This information is important in the sustainable development of the adventure tourism industry, especially in Vietnam, where trekking and hiking tourism is increasingly popular. Further research on these factors will help policymakers and tourism businesses develop appropriate, safe and sustainable products, contributing to socio-economic development and conservation. environment.

2.1.2 Concept of trekking/hiking tourism

- Trekking concept

Trekking is an adventure tourism activity that helps explore natural landscapes and local culture through long

walks. This activity is characterized by journeys through wilderness areas, mountains and forests, often lasting from a few days to many weeks. Trekking participants often have to carry their own necessary items and prepare carefully physically and mentally to face challenges along the way (Skurka, 2012).

Historically, trekking activities originated from the need to explore and exercise for high-income people, but today has become widely popular with many people. The trips not only provide opportunities to exercise but also help participants increase awareness of the environment and local culture. Trekking tourism in Vietnam, especially in areas such as Lao Cai and Da Lat, has developed strongly since the 1990s and increasingly attracts the attention of both domestic and foreign tourists (Hall, 2018).

Authors such as Damian Hall and Andrew Skurka have emphasized the combination of natural exploration and cultural experiences while trekking, showing that it is not only a physical activity but also a spiritual journey. and emotions, providing a deep understanding of indigenous habitats and communities. This is also clearly reflected in the fact that trekking tourism is not only entertainment but also a means for sustainable development, through enhancing environmental conservation and promoting local economies (Giddy, 2016).

- Concept of hiking (Hiking)

Hiking is an outdoor walking activity for entertainment, exercise and maintenance of physical fitness. This is often the main activity on vacations, and is also the main reason for the trip for many people. Hiking is considered a special type of tourism, often involving the exploration of nature and exposure to different local cultures and histories through walking along roads or trails in local areas. rural areas, mountains or nature. These activities also include visiting cultural sites and monuments, which contribute to sustainable tourism due to the respect that most hikers have for the natural and cultural environment (Moira, Mylonopoulos, & Terzoglou, 2021). Hiking is long-term walking in rural areas, usually carried out on established trails and providing the opportunity to enjoy nature and local culture. In hiking activities, participants interact with nature, exploring mountain terrain and forests through trips that can last several days (Reuter & Pechlaner, 2012). Hiking is not only a method of physical exercise but also a recreational activity, helping to improve mental and physical health, while strengthening the connection with the surrounding environment. Hiking requires participants to prepare necessary equipment to ensure safety and comfort throughout the journey. Hiking is a long-term walking activity performed in natural environments such as mountains, forests, grasslands or other natural areas. This is a popular activity that involves exploring local nature, culture and history via trails or set routes. Hikers, often called hikers, often follow established trails or explore on their own, passing through diverse and beautiful landscapes. Hiking brings many health benefits such as improving fitness, reducing stress and increasing connection with nature (Moira, Mylonopoulos, & Terzoglou, 2021).

2.1.3 Concept of destination image

In the study of Beerli & Martín (2004), the authors analyzed and proposed a theoretical framework on the factors that form tourist destination image. Research shows that destination image is made up of many components, including natural features such as landscape and environment, cultural and historical heritage, infrastructure and tourism services, security and friendliness of local people. Destination image is not only physical elements but also includes subjective feelings and assessments of visitors based on personal experiences and collected information. The authors emphasize the importance of building and maintaining a positive destination image, because it directly affects tourists' choice and return intentions. This study provides a solid theoretical basis for effective destination marketing and management. Muntinda and Mayaka (2012) considered destination image to be an important factor in attracting tourists. They stated that destination image includes many aspects such as cuisine, social environment, accessibility, safety, weather, natural resources, cultural values and recreational activities, all of which has an impact on tourists' decisions when choosing a destination. The authors also emphasize the role of destination information sources in forming awareness and promoting travel motivation, thereby influencing the image of the tourist area in the eyes of tourists.

Thus, the factors identified include beautiful natural scenery, unique historical and cultural relics, and attractive attractions. Besides, the attraction also comes from beautiful and clean beaches, fresh, quiet air, and convenient transportation system. Good quality of accommodation and food services also play an important part. In addition, the convenience of camping activities, the richness of local cuisine, security and safety, the friendliness of the people and the professionalism of local guides are also factors. create an attractive destination image for tourists.

2.1.4 Concept of tourism motivation

In the study of Prideaux and Shiga (2007), the authors explored the motivations that motivate tourists to choose

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tourist destinations. Research focuses on analyzing factors such as culture, nature, and personal experiences. Prideaux and Shiga determined that travelers are often attracted by the desire to explore new cultures, engage in unique leisure activities, and escape stressful daily life. Besides, research also shows that economic factors and amenities also play an important role in tourists' decisions. Results from this study provide insight into how tourism managers can develop more effective marketing strategies that target the specific needs and desires of tourists, thereby enhancing the experience. their experience and satisfaction. In the study of Paris and Teye (2010), the authors focused on discovering the motivations that drive travel behavior. They analyzed the factors that influence tourists' travel decisions, including the need for cultural experiences, the search for adventure, and the desire for rest and relaxation. Paris and Teye emphasized the importance of psychological factors, such as the need for self-actualization, the search for pleasure, and innovation. Research also shows that social factors, such as the influence of family and friends, play an important role in travel decisions. In addition, the authors also explore differences in travel motivations between different age groups, genders and cultural backgrounds. The results of Paris and Teye's research provide important information to help tourism managers and marketers develop appropriate strategies to meet the diverse needs of tourists. In the study of Mutinda and Mayaka (2012), the authors focused on analyzing travel motivation from the perspective of factors affecting tourists' destination choices. They explore how factors such as infrastructure, service quality, and recreational activities influence travel decisions. Mutinda and Mayaka also considered social and cultural factors, including safety, local hospitality and the uniqueness of the destination. Additionally, the study emphasizes the role of promotion and marketing strategies in attracting tourists. The authors also mention that modern economic and technological trends, such as the rise of social networks and online booking sites, have changed the way tourists approach and select destinations. arrive. Research results provide important information for tourism managers in developing attractive and effective strategies. In Hindle et al.'s (2015) study, the authors examined travel motivations from a psychological and social perspective. The study focused on analyzing factors such as the need to escape the pressures of daily work, the search for adventure and exploration, and the desire to connect with nature and local culture. Hindle et al have identified that travel motivations often include the desire for relaxation, the search for pleasure and personal satisfaction, as well as the need for innovation and novel experiences. Research also shows that social factors, such as the desire to bond with family and friends, and the influence of social networks, play an important role in travel decisions. Results from this study provide insight into how tourism managers can create tailored tourism products and services that better meet the diverse needs of tourists. In Li et al.'s (2015) study, the authors explored the motivations that drive tourists' travel behavior through analyzing many different factors. They focus on understanding the needs and desires of travelers in choosing a destination. Motives identified include the need for cultural experiences, adventure and exploration, as well as the desire to escape everyday life and seek relaxation

2.1.5 Concept of destination information source

According to the authors Gursoy and McCleary (2004) - Project: "An Integrative Model of Tourists' Information Search Behavior" - This study develops an integrated model of tourists' information search behavior, emphasizing highlight important sources of information and their influence on destination choice decisions. Beerli and Martin (2004) - Project: "Factors Influencing Destination Image" - This document studies factors affecting destination image, including the role of destination information sources in forming that image. Jacobsen and Munar (2012) - Project: "Tourist Information Search and Destination Choice in a Digital Age" - This work explores how technology and digital media change the way tourists search for information and make decisions choose destination. Xiang and Gretzel (2010) - Project: "Role of Social Media in Online Travel Information Search" - This document analyzes the role of social networks as an important source of information for travel information searches online.

Thus, factors influencing the decision to choose adventure tourism products include personal travel experience, information from tourism management organizations, media, and word of mouth. Information sources via the internet, social networks, tourist communities and local people also play an important role. Diverse information from these channels helps travelers make smart and trustworthy decisions, thereby enhancing their travel experience and satisfaction when participating in local adventure activities.

2.1.6 Product Choice Intention and Behavior

Behavioral intention is the set of actions, attitudes, and reactions of an individual or organization in a specific situation. In the context of tourism, consumers' behavioral intentions involve searching, evaluating, purchasing, and using products/services that satisfy their needs and desires (American Marketing Association - AMA). Tourism

consumer behavior includes stages from need recognition, information search, option selection, and purchase decision to post-purchase behavior (Le Thi Hoai et al., 2023). This means that studying tourism consumption behavior requires a clear understanding of the factors that influence purchasing decisions, such as personal characteristics, emotions, environmental influences and social interactions. association (Solomon, 1992).

According to David L. Loudon and Albert J. Della Bitta (1993), tourism consumer behavior is not only external actions but also includes thinking processes, considerations before purchasing and reactions after purchasing. . Factors such as personal ethical standards, attitudes, and awareness of the harmful effects of tourism can promote responsible travel behavior intentions of generation Z domestic tourists in Vietnam (Nguyen Thi Thu Huong, 2017). This indicates that, in the context of trekking/hiking tourism, marketing strategies need to aim at understanding these factors to develop products and services that suit the needs and behaviors of tourists (David L. Mothersbaugh & Delbert I. Hawkins, 2015).

2.1.7 Research hypothesis

2.1.7.1 Research model on product choice intention by (Beerli and Martín, 2004)

In the authors' research (Beerli, Martín, 2004) at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, the authors explored factors affecting destination image. Their research model focuses on analyzing how different factors contribute to the image that tourists have of a particular destination.

The model includes two main types of elements:

- Subjective factors: These factors are related to visitors' personal knowledge and experience. These include factors such as personal perspective, previous experiences and level of knowledge about the destination.

Objective factors: These factors include physical and perceived attributes of the destination such as landscape, facilities, culture, history, price, and weather.

The model also addresses the impact of media and advertising in shaping destination image. Media can create a positive or negative image and often influence tourists' decisions about choosing a destination.

In addition, the model also emphasizes the role of social and personal factors such as age, gender, and education level in shaping tourists' opinions and expectations about the destination. These factors can influence how they perceive and evaluate a destination.

Finally, research by Beerli and Martín (2004) provides insight into how different elements blend to create the overall image of a destination in the minds of tourists, thereby influencing to their choice.
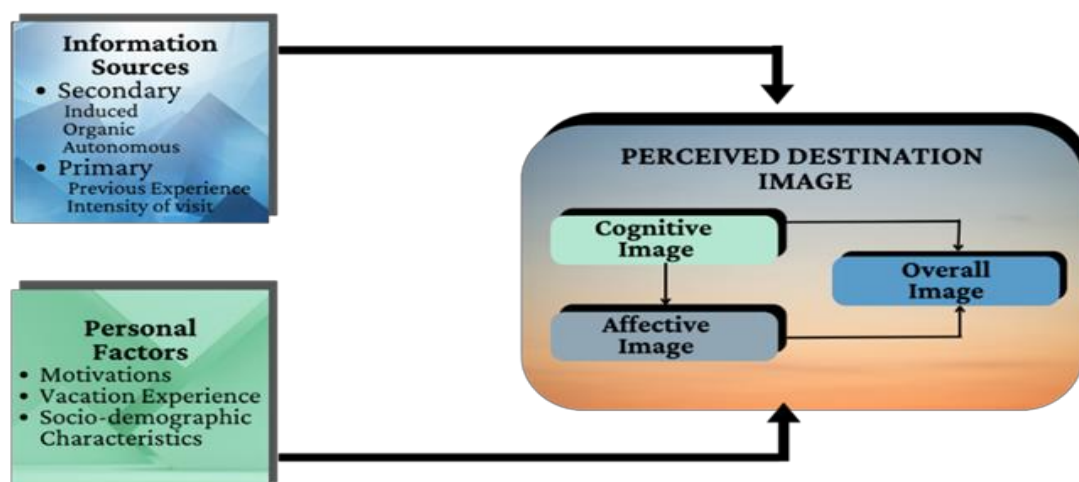
Figure 1. Destination image model

2.1.7.1 Research model on product choice intention by (Cham et al., 2020)

Authors Cham and colleagues (2020) produced a study published in the "Journal of China Tourism Research", studying Malaysia's image as a medical tourism destination and its relationship with return intention. of Chinese tourists coming to Malaysia for medical examination and treatment.

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This study investigated factors influencing Malaysia's image as a medical tourism destination through a self-administered questionnaire distributed to 600 participants. Collected data were analyzed using structural equation modeling. The results show that country-specific factors (such as knowledge of the country, safety, accessibility, and affordability) along with social factors (such as word-of-mouth and word-of-mouth social media) were all significant predictors of Malaysia's image as a medical tourism destination. This, in turn, affects visitors' perceived value and intention to return.

The study provides insights into the importance of building a positive image for a medical tourism destination and how it can assist in attracting and retaining medical tourists. The researchers suggest that understanding both national and societal factors can help policymakers and practitioners shape their strategies to enhance Malaysia's competitiveness in this industry.
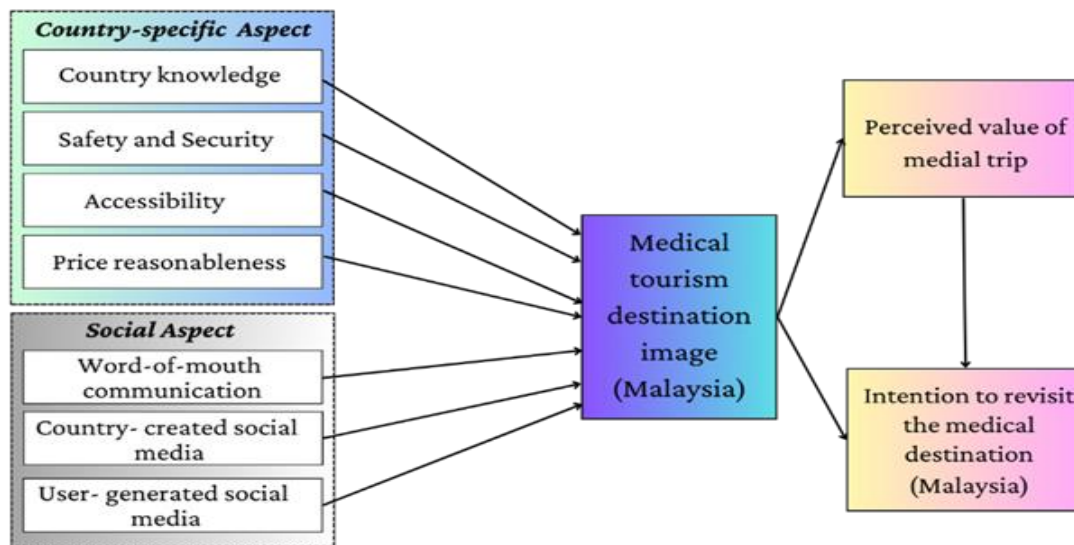
Medical Tourism Destination Image

Image name:

Proposed research model.

Based on the authors' research model: .... We propose a theoretical research model as follows:
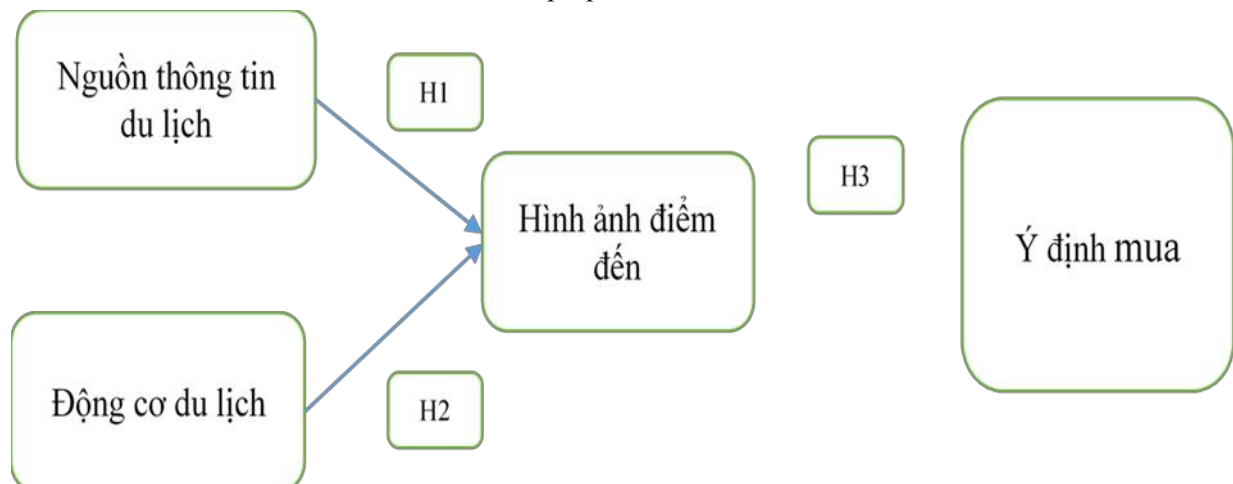
Figure 2. Proposed research model

Based on the proposed research model, the research hypotheses are proposed as follows:

Hypothesis H1: Tourism information sources have a positive impact on destination image.

Hypothesis H2: Travel motivation has a positive impact on destination image.

Hypothesis H3: Destination image has a positive impact on the intention to purchase treking and hiking tours.

2.2. Research Methods

This study applies both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the behavior and intentions of tourists in the trekking/hiking tourism sector. Qualitative methods include in-depth interviews with 5 adventure tour guides and consultation with 10 tourists to adjust and develop a scale for quantitative research. Thereby, providing a solid foundation for exploring and gaining a deeper understanding of the factors that influence tourists' decisions and behavior (Hair et al., 2010).

Regarding quantitative methods, this study uses a large-scale sample with an expected sample size of 400 to achieve high reliability in statistical estimates, based on the recommendations of Anderson and Gerbing (1988) and Hair et al. . (2014) on the minimum sample rule for PLS-SEM analysis. The sample was collected through non-probability sampling method, mainly convenience sampling, from Khanh Hoa and Lam Dong provinces, using electronic means such as Google Forms and social networks to distribute questionnaires.

Collected data were processed and analyzed using SPSS 22 and SmartPLS 3.0 software. The analysis steps include descriptive statistics of the data, evaluation of the measurement model and appraisal of scales based on indicators such as Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The proposed standards help ensure the reliability and validity of the scale used in research (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Hair et al., 2017).

These methods allow for a comprehensive assessment of tourists' behavior and intentions towards trekking/hiking tourism, as well as identifying factors that influence the decision to purchase products and services in this field. Vietnam.

3. Research results and discussion

3.1. Characteristics of the study sample

Sex

• Female: 139 people, accounting for 35.1%

• Male: 257 people, accounting for 64.9%

• Total: 396 people, 100%

Age

• Under 18 years old : 38 people, accounting for 9.6%

• From 18 to 30 years old : 340 people, accounting for 85.9%

• From 31 to 45 years old : 9 people, accounting for 2.3%

• From 46 to 60 years old : 3 people, accounting for 0.8%

• Over 60 years old : 6 people, accounting for 1.5%

• Total : 396 people, 100%

This shows that the majority of the research sample is male and the age group is mainly between 18 and 30 years old. This information can help further analyze the behavior and preferences of this group of people towards the researched tourism product.

3.2 Measurement Model Evaluation (SmartPLS)

3.2.1. Quality of outcome scale variables

Table 1. Outer Loading factor (Outer Loading)

	DC	HA	NT	YD
DC1	**0.904**			
DC2	**0.927**			
DC3	**0.928**			
DC4	**0.941**			
DC5	**0.950**			
DC6	**0.937**			
DC7	**0.947**			

DC8	0.951		
HA1		0.941	
HA10		0.949	
HA11		0.958	
HA12		0.954	
HA13		0.963	
HA14		0.954	
HA2		0.955	
HA3		0.961	
HA4		0.955	
HA5		0.954	
HA6		0.921	
HA7		0.969	
HA8		0.962	
HA9		0.948	
NT1			0.952
NT2			0.961
NT3			0.956
NT4			0.970
NT5			0.968
NT6			0.967
NT7			0.965
NT8			0.960
NT9			0.956
YD1			0.964
YD2			0.982
YD3			0.978

Source: Results of data analysis by the authors (2024)

To evaluate the variable quality of the resulting scale in research on factors affecting the intention to choose adventure tourism products, consider the Outer Loading coefficients of each variable. These coefficients measure the extent to which each observed variable contributes to the concept of the latent variable they represent. As a rule, external loadings are considered significant if they are greater than or equal to 0.7.

Motor (DC)

• All variables from DC1 to DC8 have very high external loadings, ranging from 0.904 to 0.951. This shows that these variables are very suitable to measure the concept of "Motivation" in research.

Image (HA)

• Variables from HA1 to HA14 also show very high external loadings, ranging from 0.921 to 0.969. This indicates that the variable "Image" was accurately and reliably measured in the study.

Non - printing source (NT)

Variables from NT1 to NT9 have external loading factors from 0.952 to 0.970, showing high suitability and reliability in measuring the concept of "Information Source."

Intention (YD)

The variables YD1 to YD3 have factor loadings from 0.964 to 0.982, which is also very high, showing good

agreement in measuring tourists' "Intention".

From these data, it can be concluded that the resulting scale in the study is of high quality, with observed variables having high loadings, accurately and reliably reflecting the theoretical concepts they represent. This increases the accuracy and reliability of research results, helping to provide valuable insight for the development of marketing strategies and product development in the adventure tourism sector.

3.2.2 . Reliability and convergence of the scale (Reliability & Validity)

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
DC	0.980	0.980	0.983	0.876
HA	0.992	0.992	0.993	0.908
NT	0.990	0.990	0.991	0.925
YD	0.974	0.974	0.983	0.950

Source: Results of data analysis by the authors (2024)

Evaluate the reliability and convergence of the scale for the topic based on the cronbach's alpha, rho_a, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (ave) indices provided as follows:

Motor (DC)

• cronbach's alpha: 0.980

• rho_a: 0.980

• composite reliability: 0.983

• average variance extracted (ave): 0.876

Image (HA)

• cronbach's alpha: 0.992

• rho_a: 0.992

• composite reliability: 0.993

• average variance extracted (ave): 0.908

N sources of information (NT)

• cronbach's alpha: 0.990

• rho_a: 0.990

• composite reliability: 0.991

• average variance extracted (ave): 0.925

Intent (YD)

• cronbach's alpha: 0.974

• rho_a: 0.974

• composite reliability: 0.983

• average variance extracted (ave): 0.950

Evaluate:

* Reliability:

C ronbach's alpha , rho_a , and composite reliability are all very high for all variables (DC, HA, NT, YD), exceeding the commonly recommended threshold of 0.7, indicating very good consistency and reliability of variables in the research model. These indices ensure that the items within each latent variable consistently measure the attributes or concepts they are intended to measure.

* Convergent validity:

A verage variance extracted (ave) for each latent variable is higher than 0.5, with values from 0.876 to 0.950. This shows that a large amount of information is derived from the variables in the model and that they converge well on the latent concepts they represent. This is especially important in confirming that the observed variables generate

a sufficient amount of information about the latent variables and are relevant to the research objectives.

The above indicators show that the scale used in this study has high reliability and convergence, ensuring that the analysis and conclusions drawn from the data are accurate and reliable. This is extremely important for developing research-based strategies and policies to attract and serve tourists more effectively in the trekking/hiking adventure tourism sector.

3.2.3 Evaluate the structural model

Evaluate the direct impact relationship and the impact of moderating variables

Table 2. Path coefficient effects and testing hypotheses

Directional	NC hypothesis	Beta coefficient	Standard deviation	T Statistics	P Values	Conclude
DC -> HA	H2	0.513	0.054	9,425	**0.000**	**Accept**
HA -> YD	H3	0.901	0.014	66,028	**0.000**	**Accept**
NT -> HA	H1	0.471	0.053	8,932	**0.000**	**Accept**

Source: Results of data analysis by the authors (2024)

To evaluate the structural model in the study, consider the path coefficients (beta coefficients), standard deviations, T Statistics and P Values from the data table:

Analyze relationships in the model:

- Relationship between Motor (DC) and Image (HA) - Hypothesis H2:

Beta coefficient: 0.513

Standard deviation: 0.054

T Statistics: 9,425

P Value: 0.000

Conclusion: Hypothesis H2 is accepted, showing that Motivation has a positive and statistically significant influence on destination Image. This shows that the more motivated tourists are, the more positive their image of the destination is.

- Relationship between Image (HA) and Intention (YD) - Hypothesis H3:

Beta coefficient: 0.901

Standard deviation: 0.014

T Statistics: 66,028

P Value: 0.000

Conclusion: Hypothesis H3 is accepted, showing that Image has a very strong and statistically significant influence on tourist intention. This proves that a good image will lead to high participation intentions of tourists towards a trekking/hiking adventure destination.

- Relationship between Information Source (NT) and Image (HA) - Hypothesis H :

Beta coefficient: 0.471

Standard deviation: 0.053

T Statistics: 8,932

P Value: 0.000

Conclusion: Hypothesis H1 is accepted, showing that Information Source also has a positive and statistically significant influence on destination Image. Credible and attractive information can improve a destination's image in the eyes of tourists.

3.2.4 Structural model

Based on the image of the structural model, we can evaluate the relationship between the variables Information Source (NT), Image (HA), Motive (DC), and Intention (YD) in research on factors affecting purchase intention.

Structural Model Analysis:

Source of Information (NT) to Image (HA):

The model shows that factors from NT1 to NT9 all have very high path coefficients, showing the strong influence of destination information on the image that tourists perceive. The average values on the path coefficients from NT to HA show that accurate and positive information about the destination can significantly improve the image of the destination in the eyes of tourists.

Motor (DC) to Image (HA):

Factors DC1 to DC8 also show influence on destination image. This demonstrates that personal motivations for participating in adventure tourism activities (e.g. desire for new experiences, challenging one) have a positive influence on their perception of the trekking destination/hiking.

Image (HA) to Intent (YD):

The relationship between BP and YD is represented by a very high beta coefficient of 0.901 with p-value 0.000, showing a very strong relationship. This demonstrates that a positive image of a destination can strongly boost tourists' intention to return or recommend that destination to others.

The presented structural model shows that factors such as Information Source and Motivation have a significant influence on destination Image, which in turn has a strong direct influence on tourist Intention. These relationships not only strengthen the accuracy of the research model but also provide clear evidence of the need for effective information and incentive management to enhance destination image, thereby promote visitors' participation intentions. This is very important in developing marketing and product development strategies for the adventure tourism industry in Vietnam.
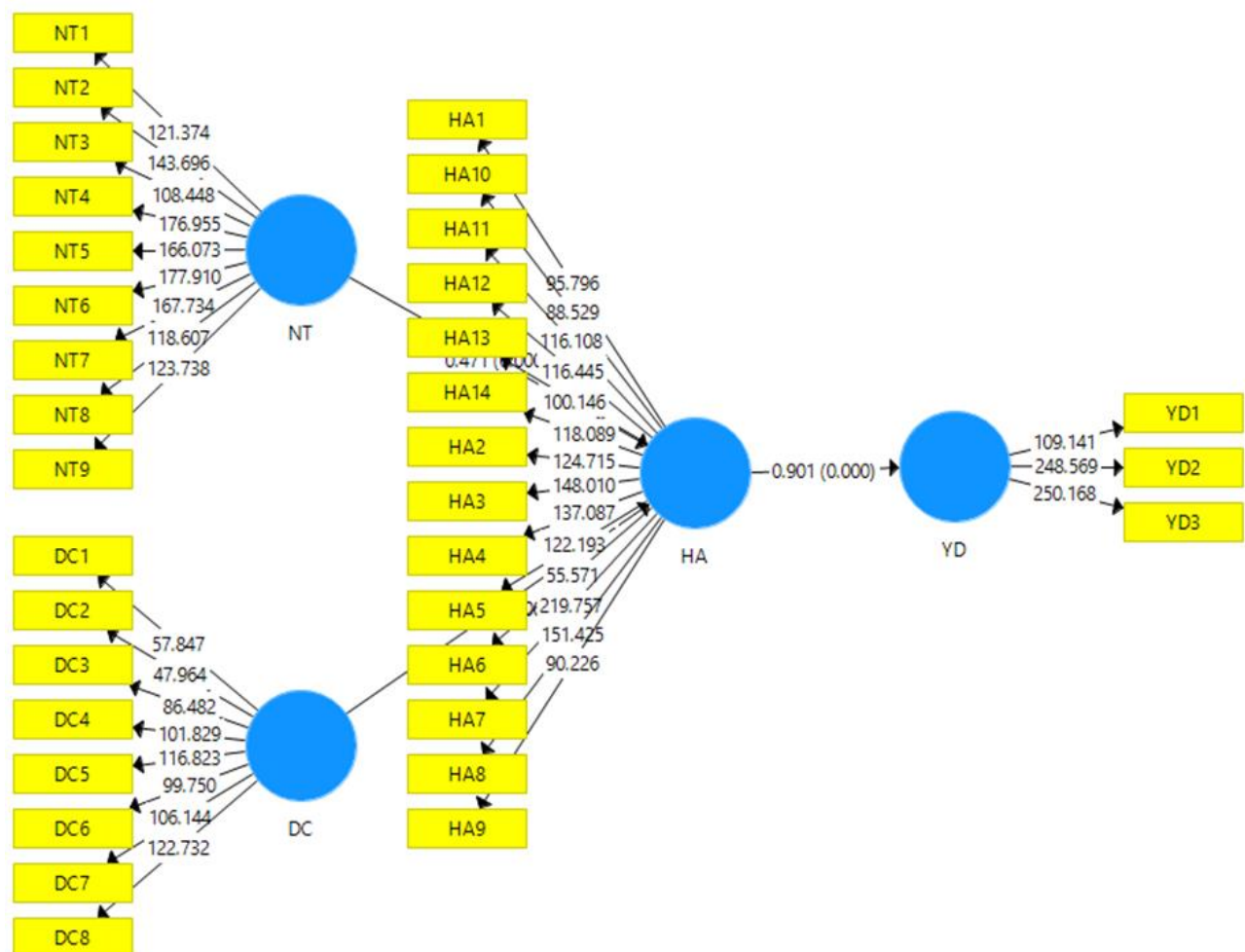
Source: Structural model of the authors (2024)

4. Conclusion and implications to contribute to improving the service quality of trekking/hiking tourism programs to meet the needs of tourists in the transition trend

Conclude

- Image (HA): The image of a trekking/hiking tourist destination has a strong impact on tourist intention; this shows the importance of maintaining and developing a positive image for the destination.

- Information sources (NT): Information sources about trekking/hiking, including media, advice, and online reviews, all have an important impact on tourists' decisions. The accuracy and diversity of available information will influence the attractiveness of the tourism product.

- Motivation (DC): Tourists' motivation to participate, such as the desire to explore, experience new things, or challenge themselves, is also an important factor affecting their decision to participate.

Implications

- Image development and management: tourism managers need to focus on building and promoting a positive image of trekking/hiking destinations through effective and efficient marketing campaigns. How to maintain high quality of services and infrastructure.

- Improving and diversifying information sources: should diversify information provision channels, including travel websites, social networks, and online review platforms. Providing complete and accurate information about routes, safety services, rest spots, and accompanying amenities will help visitors make more accurate decisions.

- Create motivation and special experiences: develop unique travel packages, combining trekking activities with local culture, visiting nature reserves, or community exchange activities to increase engagement attractive and provide added value to tourists.

- Research and feedback: regularly collect feedback from tourists to better understand the factors that satisfy or dissatisfy customers, thereby adjusting and improving.

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF DESTINATION REPUTATION, DESTINATION TRUST, AND REVISIT INTENTION. A CASE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS IN HO CHI MINH CITY

Dang Minh Tri[1]
Pham Thai Son[2]

Extended abstract

In the competitive tourism sector, destinations need to improve the reputations to reinforce visitors' trust and encourage them to return. This study examines how destination reputation, destination trust, and revisit intentions are related in Ho Chi Minh City's tourism scene. Although the city is attractive, it struggles with fewer repeat visitors and low international brand awareness. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study integrated qualitative insights from literature reviews, content analysis, and expert interviews into a conceptual framework, followed by quantitative analysis of 400 valid responses through linear regression and Pearson's multivariate correlation techniques. The findings show that a destination's reputation greatly impacts destination trust and the likelihood of revisit intention, with trust acting as a mediator. Familiarity with the destination also influences these effects, affecting tourists' perceptions and behaviors. These findings offer valuable guidance for marketing strategies in the Ho Chi Minh City tourism industry.

Keywords: *Destination Management; Destination Reputation; Destination Trust; Revisit Intentions; Familiarity*

Introduction

Tobias & Wahl (2013) compared creating a tourism brand for a city or country to corporate branding. Building a brand and identity is key to establishing a reputation (Darwish & Burns, 2019). Tourism depends heavily on reputation and trust due to the simultaneous nature of production and consumption (Marchiori, 2012). Unlike destination image, destination reputation is more lasting and subjective, focusing on the emotional recognition by external stakeholders. Reputation is based on long-term behavior, actions, and engagement (Johnson et al., 2000). (Morgan et al., 2011) stated that a good destination reputation boosts competitiveness, attracting more tourists, investment, and skilled workers. Thus, a strong tourism reputation greatly impacts visitors' intentions to return (Ledesma et al., 2005). It creates rich, positive associations in tourists' minds, enhancing brand value (Keller, 1993; Phau & Lau, 2000; Johnson et al., 2000). Reputation influences tourist behavior, helping achieve a competitive edge and differentiation (Dedeoğlu et al., 2019). Therefore, assessing the impact of destination reputation on trust and revisit intentions is essential for destination management and marketing researchers.

However, research in this area faces several challenges: (1) Studies on the relationships between destination reputation, destination trust, and revisit intentions yield mixed results. Researches from Dowling (2000) and Barnett et al. (2006) argued that image pertains to beliefs and feelings about the destination experience, while reputation refers to the alignment between destination image and stakeholder values. Ledesma et al. (2005) found that revisit intentions are not strongly influenced by destination reputation. In contrast, Coelho et al. (2016) found a direct impact of reputation on post-visit behavioral intentions. Chatzigeorgiou & Christou (2016) confirmed a positive relationship between tourist trust in destination reputation and their willingness to return. (2) In Vietnam, research on destination reputation is limited, with few studies examining its effects on Vietnamese tourist destinations. Vu, (2020) suggested future research on destination brand, destination reputation, and visitor behavior, including revisit intentions, in Ho Chi Minh City. Caldwell, (2014) noted that the impact varies across different destinations, emphasizing the need for

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further investigation.

Moreover, some studies highlight destinations as trusted places for tourists. Consumer trust is crucial in tourism and hospitality as it leads to satisfaction and future visits (Orth & Green, 2009; Kim et al., 2011). Reputation significantly influences trust from both ethical and managerial standpoints (Wagner et al., 2011; Stanaland et al., 2011). A good reputation builds long-term trust and repeat visit intentions (Barnett et al., 2006). Research shows that destination trust is affected by factors such as reputation (Artigas et al., 2015; Su et al., 2020; Sodawan & Hsu, 2022), positive word-of-mouth (Yi et al., 2021; Abubakar et al., 2017), positive destination image, improved travel experiences, loyalty (Han & Hyun, 2013), and revisit intentions (Hassan & Soliman, 2021; Su et al., 2020).

Additionally, research has shown that familiarity influences reputation across various fields. Familiarity with an organization comes from both direct and indirect experiences (Bromley, 2000). Consumers are more likely to choose familiar brands, reinforced through brand experiences (Pae et al., 2002). Research of (Yang, 2007) identified a positive relationship between familiarity and organizational reputation in South Korea. In tourism, familiarity is crucial for destination reputation, impacting trust both positively and negatively (Artigas et al., 2015; Brooks & Highhouse, 2006). Familiarity with a destination positively affects vacation choices (Andsager & Drzewiecka, 2002), fostering long-term relationships, trust, and revisit intentions (Tsai & Lu, 2012). Familiar of one destinations is more appealing than unfamiliar ones (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997). Therefore, familiarity is vital in awareness campaigns and media promotion. (Artigas et al., 2015) examined the relationship between emotional evaluations and destination reputation, while Li et al. (2018) suggested studying familiarity as a moderating factor, highlighting its role in shaping destination attributes and future tourist behavior.

Ho Chi Minh City faces several challenges: (1) Its tourism competitiveness is limited. In 2021, Ho Chi Minh City ranked 8th among 15 provinces in the Vietnam Tourism Competitiveness Index (VTCI). (2) Vu, (2020) found that 89% of 400 interviewed international tourists were unaware of the "Vibrant Ho Chi Minh City" brand. (3) The city's development strategy ties its image and reputation to urban tourism, focusing on cultural, lifestyle, architectural, historical, and technological aspects. This makes it difficult to differentiate Ho Chi Minh City's tourism identity for both international and domestic tourists (Vu, 2020). (4) Tourist destinations in Vietnam, including Ho Chi Minh City, had a second-visit rate of less than 10% in 2019. Hence, practical and theoretical gaps exist in applying previous research on destination reputation, destination trust, and tourist behavior to Ho Chi Minh City. Despite its growing international tourism reputation, Ho Chi Minh City has yet to significantly increase international repeat visitor rates or solidify its impact on the Vietnamese tourism map.

Objectives

To address the practical issues of Ho Chi Minh City as a tourist destination and the theoretical gaps, this research on "The Relationship of Destination Reputation, Destination Trust, and Revisit Intention. A Case Study of International Tourists in Ho Chi Minh City" was undertaken. The study examines the impact of destination reputation on destination trust and revisit intentions, with familiarity as a moderating factor, providing novel insights into destination marketing and promotion. Along with theoretical contributions, the study offers practical recommendations to enhance Ho Chi Minh City's tourism reputation, attract more international repeat visitors, and support Vietnam's broader tourism sector. These findings offer valuable guidance for marketing strategies in the Ho Chi Minh City tourism industry.

Hypothesis

1. The relationship between destination reputation and revisit intentions

Reputation is a crucial variable for service industry enterprises aiming to stand out from competitors (Yamashita & Takata, 2020). In the service market, reputation plays a strategic role because assessing service quality before purchase is often unclear and incomplete (Wagner et al., 2011). This concept applies to the tourism industry, where a strong destination reputation leads to an improved destination image (Yoon et al., 1993), increased satisfaction (Loureiro & Kastenholz, 2011), and greater destination loyalty (Christou, 2007). These factors collectively foster positive evaluations of the destination (Chen & Xiao, 2013), encourage revisit intentions, and increase spending (McGinnis, 1968). Destination reputation directly influences tourists' behavioral intentions after their trips (Coelho et al., 2016). Additionally, Chatzigeorgiou & Christou (2016) confirmed the positive relationship between tourists' trust in a destination's reputation and their willingness to return. A reputable destination maintains its credibility, enhancing tourists' desire to return in the near future (Nam et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023). Based on this foundation, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypotheses 1: Destination reputation positively impacts tourists' revisit intention.

2. The relationship between destination reputation and destination trust

Nguyen & Leblanc, (2001) assert that building and maintaining a strong reputation enhances credibility and customer trust in the business environment, thereby influencing customers' future behavioral intentions (Ou et al., 2006). Ensuring customer trust through a solid reputation increases loyalty. Various perspectives have discussed the impact of reputation on destination trust. In tourism, it is suggested that a destination's reputation significantly influences tourists' trust (Barnett et al., 2006). Recent studies have emphasized the relationship between destination reputation and destination trust. Research has demonstrated that destination reputation impacts destination trust (Mgiba & Chiliya, 2020; Ruan et al., 2024; Hassan & Soliman, 2021). Based on this foundation, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypotheses 2: Destination reputation positively impacts tourists' destination trust.

3. The relationship between destination trust and revisit intentions

Trust creates an emotional bond between consumers and a product (Esch et al., 2006). Wagner et al. (2011) suggest that a provider with a good reputation maintains customer trust better over time, leading to repeat purchases. Chiu et al., (2012) also found that customer trust levels influence their intention to buy again. In tourism, building trust in a destination is crucial (Yang, 2007; Brooks & Highhouse, 2006). Trust reduces perceived risks, enhances the destination's image, and improves travel experiences and loyalty (Han & Hyun, 2013). A destination with a good reputation that builds tourist trust fosters long-term relationships and encourages return visits (Tsai & Lu, 2012). Research has shown that destination trust explains tourists' revisit intentions in various countries, including South Korea (Han & Hyun, 2013), Thailand (Sodawan & Hsu, 2022), China (Su et al., 2020), and Egypt (Hassan & Soliman, 2021). Based on this foundation, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypotheses 3: Destination trust positively impacts tourists' revisit intention

4. The moderating role of familiarity in these relationships

Tourists tend to favor destinations they feel connected to, which influences their vacation choices positively (Andsager & Drzewiecka, 2002). This sense of familiarity can lead to a lasting affinity with a specific destination, fostering intentions to revisit that country (Tsai & Lu, 2012). Studies have demonstrated that familiarity significantly affects how appealing certain tourist spots are (Szubert et al., 2021), as well as perceptions of destination image and intentions to visit (Kim et al., 2019). Additionally, it correlates with destination image, likelihood to recommend, and revisit intentions (Casali et al., 2021), along with destination reputation (Yamashita & Takata, 2020; Artigas et al., 2015), which can build loyalty and encourage future travel plans (Yamashita & Takata, 2020). Familiarity is also linked to intentions to recommend and revisit (Toyama & Yamada, 2016). Moreover, the study from Li et al., (2018) proposed that familiarity acts as a moderator, influencing the relationship between destination characteristics and future tourist behavior. They suggested future research could focus on substituting destination attributes with promotional elements. Based on this, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

Hypotheses 4: Familiarity moderates the relationship between destination reputation and tourists' revisit intention.

Hypotheses 5: Familiarity moderates the relationship between destination reputation and tourists' destination trust.

Hypotheses 6: Familiarity moderates the relationship between destination trust and tourists' revisit intention.
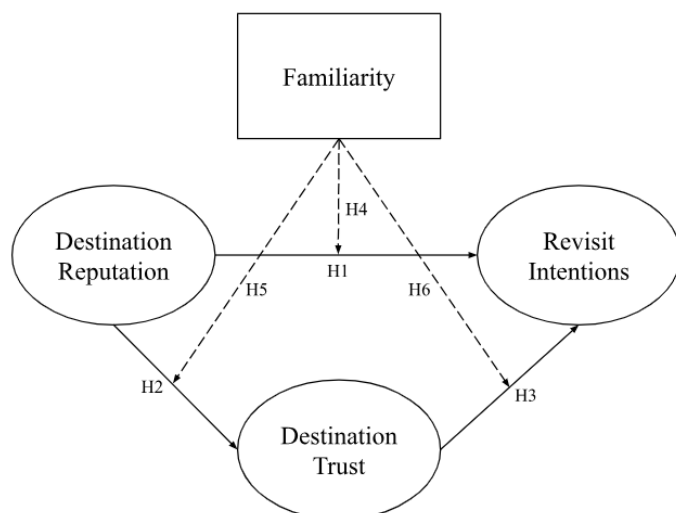
Figure 1 - Research model

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

The research focuses on elucidating the relationships between destination reputation, destination trust, and revisit intention among international tourists to Ho Chi Minh City, while also examining the moderating effect of the sense of familiarity on these relationships. Employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, the study progresses through exploratory and experimental research stages. In the exploratory phase, qualitative methods are used to explore, identify, describe, and validate the research model and measurement scales, literature reviews and content analysis to identify research gaps, models, and hypotheses. This phase also includes 5 expert interviews (Pilot Test) to refine the measurement variables to suit the context and target population. In the experimental phase, quantitative methods involve direct surveys of tourists in Ho Chi Minh City to empirically test six research hypotheses. The scale for the research variables was measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 Strongly disagree to 5 Strongly agree). In the Pre-test phase, 100 tourist interviews were conducted to collect samples for assessing the reliability of scale variables based on expert opinions in the qualitative step, tailored to the unique characteristics of the tourism market in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Cronbach's Alpha was employed to assess the consistency of these variables. For the subsequent phase, Cochran's formula (Cochran, 1977) recommends a minimum sample size of 385 to achieve a 95% confidence level. This larger sample size will be used in the main survey phase to ensure robustness and reliability in the study's findings.

2. Research Tools

Following data collection, the data underwent processing and analysis using SmartPLS 4. The proposed metrics yielded significant findings in the quantitative study. First, reliability assessment included Cronbach's Alpha, where values above 0.7 indicate good measurement reliability and unidimensionality (Hair et al., 2010). Next, composite reliability exceeding 0.7 was used to gauge overall construct correlation (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Second, convergent validity, as per Cooper & Schindler (2014), emphasized examining correlations between observed and latent variables, with ideal outer loadings above 0.7 (Cooper & Schindler, 2014; Henseler et al., 2015). Third, discriminant validity, Cooper & Schindler, (2014), assessed the ability to distinguish between observed variables of one latent variable from another. Garson, (2016) proposed assessing the HTMT ratio, calculated as the average correlation between constructs of the same and different types, to be less than 1. Supporting these viewpoints, Henseler et al., (2015) recommended an HTMT threshold under 0.9 for discriminant validity. Fourth, hypothesis testing involved assessing multicollinearity using VIF (Variance Inflation Factor), with values under 3 indicating no multicollinearity concerns Hair et al., (2019). Subsequent hypothesis testing utilized T-statistics (> 1.96) and significance levels (P-value < 0.05) (Hair et al., 2011). Additionally, demographic data underwent descriptive statistical analysis to summarize respondent information in the survey.

3. Data Collection

Follow Cochran, (1977) formula, which targets a 95% confidence level, indicated that a minimum of 385 samples were necessary. This was achieved through convenience sampling and direct interviews using Google Forms

from April to May 2024, ensuring efficient data collection. Initially, 420 responses were gathered, out of which 400 surveys were deemed valid. However, as recommended by Andrade, (2020), a larger sample size would more accurately represent the population and strengthen the reliability and robustness of the study beyond minimum requirements.

4. Data Analysis

The study conducted a comprehensive survey among 400 international tourists visiting Ho Chi Minh City. Surveys were administered via direct interviews, utilizing a convenience sampling method to select participants. Findings revealed that a majority of respondents were first-time visitors (43%). Gender distribution among surveyed international tourists showed no significant difference, with males comprising 45.5% and females 54.5%. Respondents predominantly fell within the age range of 20-40 years (56.6%). Educationally, a significant portion held at least a university degree (59.5%). The interviewed tourists predominantly originated from Asia (28.5%), followed by the Americas (24.0%), Australia/New Zealand (17.5%), Africa (16.8%), and Europe (13.3%), in descending order.

Table 1 - Scale items

Items	Reference Sources
Destination Reputation (DR)	
DR1. Ho Chi Minh city has a very good reputation	Artigas et al. (2015), Yamashita & Takata (2020), Khalid et al. (2023), Ruan et al. (2024)
DR2. People speak very well of Ho Chi Minh city	
DR3. Ho Chi Minh city's good reputation is backed up by its history	
DR4. Ho Chi Minh city has a better reputation than other similar places	
DR5. People respect Ho Chi Minh city highly	
Destination trust (DT)	
DT1. Ho Chi Minh city is reliable	Abubakar et al. (2017), Khalid et al. (2023), Ruan et al. (2024)
DT2. Ho Chi Minh city provides high quality of products and services	
DT3. Ho Chi Minh city benefit tourists	
DT4. Ho Chi Minh city takes responsibility for tourism management	
DT5. Ho Chi Minh city provides a sense of security	
DT6. I can rely on Ho Chi Minh city to solve problems during my trip	
Revisit Intention (RI)	
RI1. In the near future, I may visit Ho Chi Minh city again for tourism	Su et al. (2022), Hassan & Soliman (2021), Yi et al. (2021)
RI2. In the near future, I plan to visit Ho Chi Minh City again for tourism	
RI3. I wish to visit Ho Chi Minh city again for tourism	
Familiarity (FAM)	
FAM1. Ho Chi Minh city is very familiar to me	Toyama & Yamada (2016), Szubert et al. (2021), Nam et al. (2023)
FAM2. I know Ho Chi Minh city very well	
FAM3. I am always very well informed about Ho Chi Minh city	
FAM4. I am always aware of Ho Chi Minh city	
FAM5. My friends and family tell me that I know Ho Chi Minh city very well	

Source: Compiled by the authors.

The next step involved reliability testing, including Cronbach's Alpha, where values above 0.7 indicate good reliability and unidimensionality (Hair et al., 2010). Subsequently, composite reliability exceeding 0.7 was used to measure overall construct correlation (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 1 presents the results of the measurement scale reliability assessment.

Table 2 - Results of assessing the reliability of the research scale

	Cronbach's alpha	Rho_A	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Destination Reputation	0,907	0,911	0,931	0,729
Destination Trust	0,930	0,930	0,945	0,740
Familiarity	0,856	0,865	0,896	0,634
Revisit Intention	0,841	0,842	0,904	0,759

Source: Compiled by the authors

The results of evaluating the outer loadings of the observed variables with respect to the measured concepts show that the outer loadings of the observed variables range from 0.757 to 0.901, all greater than 0.7, which is considered ideal (Henseler et al., 2015). According to Cooper & Schindler (2014), observed variables exceeding 0.7 are likely to correlate well with the latent concept variables.

Table 3 - The results of evaluating the loadings of the observed variables

	DR	DT	FAM	RI
DR1	0,825			
DR2	0,823			
DR3	0,901			
DR4	0,823			
DR5	0,894			
DT1		0,836		
DT2		0,877		
DT3		0,871		
DT4		0,821		
DT5		0,883		
DT6		0,872		
FAM1			0,771	
FAM2			0,843	
FAM3			0,757	
FAM4			0,763	
FAM5			0,842	
RI1				0,864
RI2				0,882
RI3				0,867

Source: Compiled by the authors

Garson (2016) proposed evaluating discriminant validity using the HTMT ratio, suggesting values. In agreement with this perspective, Henseler et al. (2015) recommended considering an HTMT ratio below the threshold of 0.9 to assess discriminant validity.

Table 4 - Discriminant validity according to Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	DR	DT	FAM	RI	FAM x DR	FAM x DT
DR						
DT	0,282					
FAM	0,250	0,186				
RI	0,414	0,623	0,496			
FAM x DR	0,030	0,173	0,318	0,054		
FAM x DT	0,182	0,038	0,344	0,089	0,316	

Source: Compiled by the authors

Hair et al. (2019) proposed evaluating multicollinearity based on the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), suggesting that multicollinearity occurs when independent variables in a research model are interdependent. They proposed that a VIF threshold below 3 indicates no multicollinearity.

Table 5 - Multicollinearity according to the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

	DR	DT	FAM	RI	FAM x DR	FAM x DT
DR		1,059		1,152		
DT				1,124		
FAM		1,158		1,226		
RI						
FAM x DR		1,100		1,209		
FAM x DT				1,216		

Source: Compiled by the authors

When completing the analysis through indicators such as T-statistics and the significance level (p-value) (Hair et al., 2011), consideration is given to testing the validity of the research hypothesis. According to Hair et al. (2011), if the T-statistics value exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is less than 0.05, it is considered to have a significant impact.
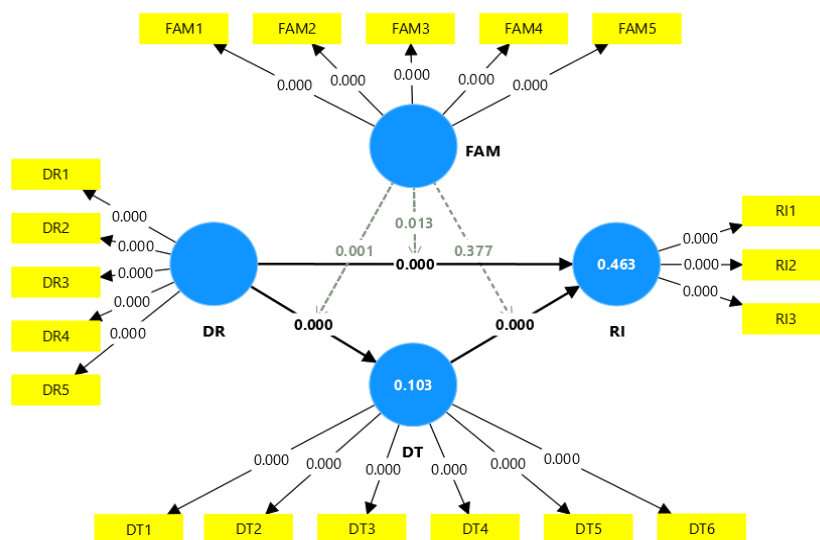
Figure 2 - The results of testing the research hypothesis

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Table 6 - Testing the research hypothesis

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values	Conlusion
DR -> RI (H1)	0.17	0.17	0.043	3.947	0	Accept
DR -> DT (H2)	0.246	0.248	0.049	5.041	0	Accept
DT -> RI (H3)	0.464	0.464	0.041	11.318	0	Accept
DR -> DT -> RI	0.114	0.115	0.025	4.529	0	Accept
FAM x DR -> RI (H4)	0.122	0.122	0.049	2.481	0.013	Accept
FAM x DR -> DT (H5)	-0.148	-0.148	0.046	3.182	0.001	Accept
FAM x DT -> RI (H6)	0.043	0.042	0.048	0.884	0.377	Deny

The study found significant relationships and moderations among destination reputation, trust, familiarity, and intention to revisit among international tourists in Ho Chi Minh City. Firstly, the impact of destination reputation on revisit intention (H1) and on trust in the destination (H2) both showed strong statistical significance (p-values = 0.000, T-statistics > 1.96), indicating a positive influence of destination reputation on both destination trust and revisit intentions. Similarly, the relationship between destination trust and revisit intention (H3) was highly significant (p-value = 0.000, T-statistics = 11.318), confirming that trust positively affects tourists' revisit intention.

Furthermore, the study revealed that trust in the destination mediates the relationship between destination reputation and revisit intention (mediation hypothesis). This suggests that a positive reputation enhances trust, which in turn increases the likelihood of tourists revisiting Ho Chi Minh City (p-value = 0.000, T-statistics = 4.529).

Regarding the moderating role of familiarity, the study found support for its influence on the relationship between destination reputation and revisit intention (H4), with a significant p-value (0.013) and T-statistics (2.481). Besides, familiarity moderated the relationship between destination reputation and destination trust (H5), with a significant p-value (0.001) and T-statistics (3.182).

Conclusion and Discussion

From the research findings on the relationship between destination reputation, destination trust in Ho Chi Minh City, and their roles in attracting repeat tourists, several managerial implications are proposed:

Firstly, Ho Chi Minh City's tourism has consistently received high evaluations from reputable international assessors through annual awards, demonstrating its influential reputation on the global stage. Therefore, it is crucial to continue leveraging these existing strengths. For international tourists, diverse preferences exist in travel experiences. Strengthening and developing the destination reputation among international tourists requires a deep understanding of their specific needs and preferences (Nejat & Fallah Lajimi, 2022). For example, tourists from different markets like China prioritize cuisine, crafts exploration, heritage sites, and casino entertainment; Korean tourists blend business leisure with cultural historical sites and gourmet shopping; European markets such as France and Germany focus on historical and cultural tourism, resorts, shopping, urban exploration, and craft villages. Tailoring communication strategies, tourism programs, and products based on market-oriented approaches are crucial. Emphasis should be placed on enhancing the quality of tourism services including hotels, restaurants, transportation, guides, and entertainment. High-quality service not only ensures customer satisfaction but also builds trust, loyalty, and encourages revisit intention (H1). Concurrently, quality control and service evaluation at tourism facilities are essential.

Secondly, building a unified, creative, and memorable tourism brand image for Ho Chi Minh City remains challenging (Vu, 2020). To attract international tourists' attention, establishing a distinctive and easily recognizable tourism brand is essential. Developing an effective information and communication system is crucial for managing destination reputation through public image and media portrayal of Ho Chi Minh City. Maintaining a reliable information and communication system helps reflect a positive and authentic city image, generating trust and interest from tourists. Utilizing various social media platforms is an effective approach in destination promotion, surpassing traditional advertising methods to effectively change international tourists' perceptions. This strategy enhances visibility and interaction, tapping into potential tourist markets. International travel software development in various countries supports brand recognition for Ho Chi Minh City, such as Go2Joy, Lonely Planet, Traveloka with high

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visitor traffic from Asian tourist markets (Yi et al., 2021); Expedia, Agoda, Ctrip with extensive global market access. Previous studies argue the positive impact of social media on brand awareness (Su et al., 2020). Tourism managers in Ho Chi Minh City can integrate guidelines, maps, promotional programs, and multilingual communication through diverse social media platforms to increase brand recognition. Brand building forms the foundation for enhancing perceived value, loyalty (Christou, 2007), and trust in the destination (H2), thereby influencing tourists' intention to revisit in the future.

Thirdly, improving hospitality and service quality is crucial to reinforce Ho Chi Minh City's tourism image and enhance international tourists' confidence amidst safety concerns during travel between destinations, food safety, and personal property safety. Enhancing the quality of local transportation infrastructure and tourism services including transportation, accommodation, dining, entertainment, sightseeing, and event organization is necessary. This demands infrastructure improvement and technical facilities at tourist sites, as well as creating seamless connections between routes and tourist spots. Additionally, constructing high-quality accommodation systems and diversifying supplementary services to meet diverse tourist needs are vital. Establishing trust and ensuring tourist safety contributes to destination loyalty (Han & Hyun, 2013), encouraging revisit (H3). Moreover, strengthening environmental and cultural preservation is crucial. Sustaining local environmental and cultural values is essential for tourists to feel confident and satisfied upon returning. Implementing measures for environmental protection, sustainable tourism management, and respecting local cultural preservation are vital.

Through moderated effects of familiarity, tourism marketing managers should consistently provide updated information, as potential tourists access information through the internet, becoming familiar with specific destinations. Furthermore, creating a friendly and welcoming environment is essential for positively promoting destination reputation. Training competent, culturally knowledgeable staff enhances tourist familiarity and comfort (Coelho et al., 2016). Maintaining local cultural identity annually through fairs, exhibitions, and tourism festivals, combining cultural preservation and promotion, creates a unique tourism environment that enhances familiarity and connection for international tourists visiting Ho Chi Minh City. Tourists are more interested and engaged with the city when they have opportunities to experience local culture through cuisine, arts, festivals, and cultural activities (Piramanayagam et al., 2020)

Research limitations

Alongside new discoveries in the topic, the study still has several limitations that open up avenues for future research revolving around various aspects of the topic: The study employs convenience sampling in interviewing international tourists, lacking differentiation across various market segments in the impact relationship. (Nejat & Fallah Lajimi, 2022) suggest the need to examine specific market segments to clarify impact relationships. In the future, researchers can inherit and develop studies tailored to different tourist market segments contributing to marketing fields. The study focuses solely on the relationship between destination reputation, destination trust, revisit intention, and familiarity without exploring explanatory factors for destination reputation, destiantion trust, or familiarity. Future studies can clarify explanatory factors and revalidate relationships by applying explanatory variables. Regarding familiarity, the study theoretically applies familiarity derived from information and accumulated experience and a sense of closeness during tourists' travel experiences. Future studies could apply other aspects to explain these issues of interest. Finally, the study applies the relationship between destination reputation, destiantion trust, revisit intention, and familiarity in the research on international tourists visiting Ho Chi Minh City. Caldwell, (2014) asserts different study locations yield different results. Therefore, future studies can apply research to new study locations to re-examine the accuracy of related relationship studies.

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CULTURAL HERITAGE FACTOR IN THE COMPETITIVENESS OF CRUISE TOURISM DESTINATION IN HO CHI MINH CITY

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Abstract:

Cultural heritage tourism is a type of tourism that focuses on exploring and experiencing cultures. It can include various activities, such as visiting historical and cultural sites, participating in festivals and events, enjoying local cuisine, and learning about local customs and traditions. Due to these characteristics, cultural tourism is considered a niche market with great potential for development. Tourism service providers can take advantage of this niche market by developing products and services that meet the specific needs of each tourist group. Cruise tourism schedules can create unique and attractive travel experiences for tourists while contributing to preserving and promoting local cultural values and the country's economic and social development destinations in a sustainable way. This article proposes a case study in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), Vietnam, which explores the opinions of experts and stakeholders using semi-structured interviews. Research showed that HCMC's cultural heritage has outstanding competitive potential compared to other cruise destinations such as Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) or Bangkok (Thailand). Particularly prominent are "historical and cultural relic sites". It also offers implications and recommendations for strengthening the cruise tourism industry's resilience and competitiveness.

Keywords: *destination competitiveness; cultural heritage; cultural heritage factors; cruise tourism; Ho Chi Minh City*

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is considered a key economic sector by many countries around the world because of its great contributions to the economy (Pemayun, Suryanata, & Sciences, 2019). According to statistics from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), In 2022, total revenue from global tourism has reached 842.1 billion USD, an increase of 4.4% compared to 2021 (Syaifudin, Hendarmawan, & Novianti, 2022). In addition, tourism is an economic sector capable of creating many jobs for people in many different fields, such as accommodation, transportation, dining, entertainment, shopping, agriculture, forestry, and fishery. As UNWTO stated, in 2022, tourism has created 330 million direct jobs and 1.2 billion indirect jobs worldwide. Besides, tourism not only creates foreign exchange revenue and jobs but also contributes to promoting the socio-economic development of countries, including infrastructure development and improving the quality of life, preserving and promoting cultural values, etc. Therefore, competition between countries and destinations to attract tourists is becoming increasingly fierce.

In the context of diverse tourism development, the cultural tourism niche market has emerged as an inevitable trend. According to (Ridderstaat & Nijkamp, 2016), niche markets exploit the competitive advantages of specific tourism market segments, providing unique experiences and meeting the unique needs of tourists. Niche tourism like cultural tourism is popular, reflecting modern trends. Tourists today crave deep cultural experiences, including art, heritage, cuisine, and lifestyle. Their destination choice hinges on the quality of artistic, architectural, and historical offerings. Cultural tourism is expanding to more diverse experiences, including "immersing in the atmosphere" of a place (Richards, 1996), and "enjoying local cuisine". (Constantin, Mitrut, & Management, 2008);(Ilbery, Kneafsey, & A, 1999) Excursionists enjoy cultural activities. Cultural heritage tourism focuses on experiencing both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Collaboration is key to combining cultural heritage and tourism effectively. Develop tourism products that suit cruise tourists' tastes. Create immersive experiences to help visitors experience local culture authentically. Based on these overall considerations, the article proposes a case study of HCMC, which possesses a

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rich cultural heritage system spanning a long history. From heroic historical relics such as the Independence Palace, Cu Chi Tunnels, and National Museum of History to intangible cultural heritages such as the art of opera, Southern amateur music,... Every heritage site has unique values, contributing to the city's colorful cultural picture. Faced with competition in Southeast Asia's cruise market, Ho Chi Minh City leans on its rich cultural heritage. Bustling festivals, historical sites like Ben Thanh Market, and a modern seaport attract visitors. Can this unique heritage be HCMC's secret weapon? This research explores cultural heritage's role in boosting HCMC's cruise tourism competitiveness.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Cultural heritage

The UNESCO Convention on World Heritage (1972) defines cultural heritage as encompassing places, traditions, and living expressions inherited from our ancestors. According to (Pietrobruno, 2009) cultural heritage is an inheritance from the past that contains events, places, and people. In a similar vein, (Yu, Lertcharnrit, & Smith) has provided another version of the definition of cultural heritage, and it is explainable in a way that these products range from antiquities, artwork, monuments, sites, heritage buildings, and historical urban areas with the characteristic of intrinsic values. As stated by (Liu, 2013) and (Kang, Kim, Ryan, & Park, 2014) cultural heritage plays an important role in tourism destinations because millions of people have already traveled across the globe just to experience different types of heritage(Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). Cultural heritage is spiritual and material products with historical, cultural, and scientific value, passed down from generation to generation. Cultural heritage is divided into two main types: tangible cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage (Vecco, 2010)

2.2. Special Events

Building on past research ((Özdemir Bayrak, 2011);(Fan, Lu, & Wu, 2014);(Maneenetr & Tran, 2014);(Lee, Lee, & Wicks, 2004)), highlights the potential of special events to boost a destination's tourism appeal. Special events, with their short-term, engaging activities, can attract tourists and immerse them in the city's unique culture and heritage. This aligns with the broader understanding of events as a way to showcase local culture and motivate destination choices.

2.3. Competition

Despite fierce competition, defining "tourism competitiveness" remains elusive due to diverse models and factors. Evaluating it is crucial for future success. While Porter (1995) defines competition as offering value at lower prices, this applies even without a physical product in tourism. Poon (1990) led the way in identifying key factors like quality, innovation, and environmental focus for a competitive edge. This highlights the need for a comprehensive evaluation framework to understand and improve tourism competitiveness. After 1993, some authors such as (Chon, 1995; G. I. Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Dwyer & Kim, 2003), (Enright & Newton, 2004), (Hassan, 2000),(Heath, 2002) (Pearce, 1997) and (G. I. J. J. o. t. r. Crouch, 2011) analyzed tourism competitiveness mainly by creating definitions and developing models. Although there are many different definitions in the tourism literature, Crouch and Ritchie's (1999, p. 137) definition has been adapted to a basic definition that describes tourism competitiveness as " *increasing the ability to tourism spending, increasingly attracting visitors while providing them with satisfying, memorable experiences and doing so in a profitable way, while enhancing the well-being of destination residents and preserving natural capital. nature of the destination for future generations* "(Cronjé, du Plessis, & Management, 2020)

2.4. Destination Competitiveness

According to the authors (G. I. J. A. s. Crouch & attributes, 2007) destination competition research focuses on 3 main themes: a) aims to diagnose the competitive position of specific destinations including the United States (Ahmed & Krohn, 1990), Sun/Lost City, South Africa (Kim, Crompton, & Botha, 2000), cultural tourism in Toronto (Carmichael, 2002), Las Vegas (Chon, 1995)casino (d'Hauteserre, 2000), Australia ((Dwyer, Livaic, Mellor, & Management, 2003), Hong Kong (Enright & Newton, 2004)…b) focus on specific aspects of destination competitiveness, including destination competitiveness including destination services (Chacko, 1998), destination management systems (Baker, Hayzelden, Sussmann, & Research, 1996), destination marketing (Buhalis, 2000), price competitiveness (Forsyth, Dwyer, & report, 2009), quality management (Go & Govers, 2000), environment (Cucculelli & Goffi, 2016), nature-based tourism (Huybers, Bennett, & Economics, 2003), strategic management (Ruhanen, 2007; Soteriou & Roberts, 1998)and package tours (Taylor, 1995). C) develop a destination model that aims to identify and explain the factors that drive destination competitiveness. Various researchers(Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Heath, 2002; Kim et al., 2000; Poon, 1993; Porter, 1980) proposed tourism models that include these factors.

This factor can be unique products and services as well as its benefits to persuade tourists to choose this destination over others (G. I. J. J. o. t. r. Crouch, 2011) making the destination competitive. These factors may vary depending on the destination and the approach used to obtain the competitive factor (Cronjé et al., 2020). The above studies have models, tested in different contexts, space and time are not the same, so some researchers argue that there is no method or model suitable for all destinations. To measure competitiveness there is no set of indicators that can be applied to all destinations at all times (Dwyer, Cvelbar, Edwards, & Mihalic, 2012). Clear differences between geographical space, socio-political situation, historical circumstances at a destination, and characteristics of research objects such as tourists. Therefore, the competitiveness model applied in one destination may not apply to another destination and may not give consistent results (M. J. J. o. T. Kozak & Marketing, 2002; M. J. T. m. Kozak, 2002). This has been verified through research on different models by the author(Gomezelj & Mihalič, 2008) at the destination of Slovenia. But in general, all competitive destinations are influenced by competitive factors at many different levels as **Figure 1** (G. I. J. A. s. Crouch & attributes, 2007)
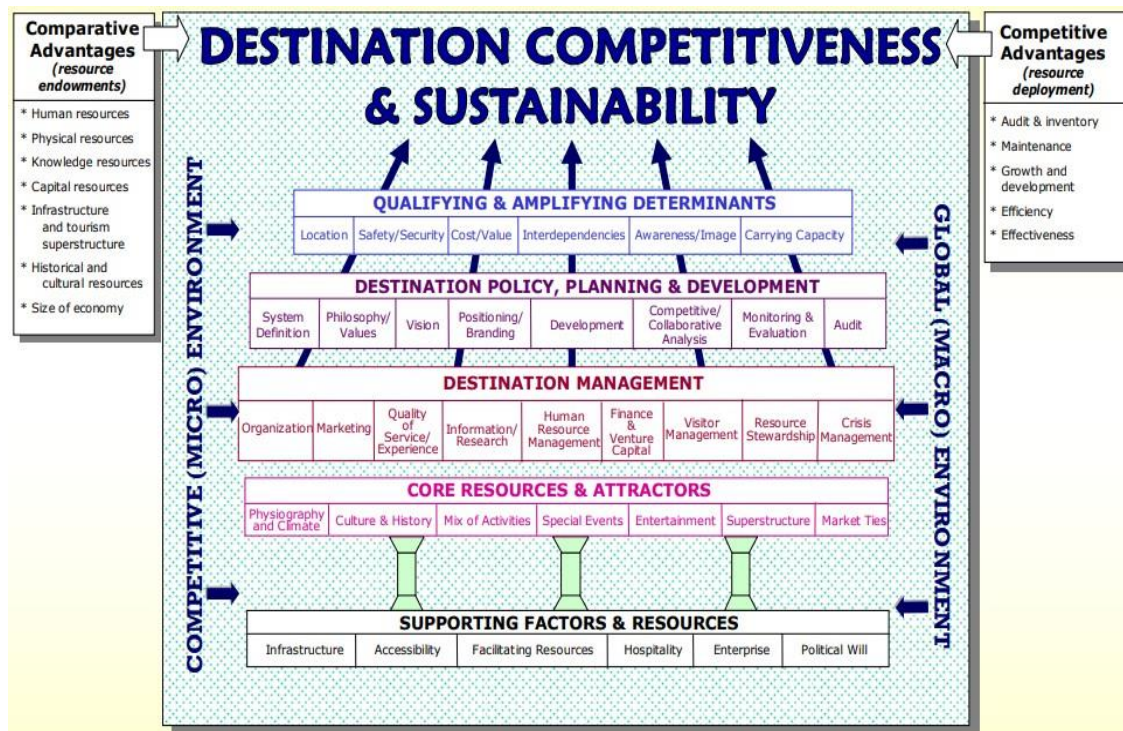
Figure 1*: Tourism Destination competitiveness (G. I. Crouch & Ritchie, 1999)*

2.5. Cruise Tourism

Cruise ships are one of the world's passenger transport industries. A cruise is defined as "making a trip by sea in a straight line for pleasure, usually calling at several ports'(Collins English Dictionary, 2018). A cruise ship is a passenger ship serving entertainment trips. Cruise travel is described as "any paid journey for entertainment on board." Cruise ships are accommodations for guests, not regular means of transporting goods. Cruise ships have schedules to visit many different destinations instead of operating on a predetermined route (Wild, Dearing, & Management, 2000), (Rodrigue & Notteboom, 2013) point out that the current trend in the cruise industry is that "the ship itself represents the destination, essentially operating as a floating resort (or theme park) with all the including related amenities (bars, restaurants, theaters, casinos, swimming pools, etc.)" Perspective of ship business organization; The goal of any company organizing cruises is to provide an engaging experience and comfortable cruise for passengers that will also be cost-competitive. In addition, trip schedules and destinations depend on the following factors: (1) Spatial considerations (2) Time (3) Services (4) Preferences (5) Costs (6) Calculation completeness (7) Profitability (8) Strategy and competition (Corres & Papapchristou, 2013). The cruise tourist market therefore focuses on the relationship between cruise operators and actual or potential passengers. The profitability of the tourism industry depends heavily on the effectiveness of capacity-related risk management. Growth comes hand in hand with increasing lower rates available berths, making their effective management a matter of organizational survival in the long run.

III.Methodology/Data Collection/Data Analysis

3.1 Methodology

Tourism is a resource-oriented economic sector, closely linked to all other economic sectors. Therefore, to understand the nature of the phenomenon in tourism, it is necessary to have a sociological research methodology. Did social research develop as a way of building knowledge that promotes agreed practices within the research community that help us avoid limitations and pitfalls? (Creswell, 2012). With the right methodology, we also develop knowledge from our personal and sensory experiences. We learn about our world based on what we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. Word beliefs shape the philosophical structure of research, informing decisions from topic selection to presentation of results and dissemination of research findings (Creswell, 2012). This is true to the author's thoughts before choosing the topic based on his beliefs, personal knowledge, and practical experience. This is understood as ontology and epistemology and what is considered knowledge serving the research topic. However, in the field of sociological research, people do not use the postpositivism philosophical beliefs inherent in the natural sciences but use constructionism. This philosophical belief system was developed within a disciplinary context in scientific society and emphasizes subjective human experience, grounded in a socio-historical context (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). Applied to the main research article is in the context of cruise tourism research at the destination of HCMC. Due to the complex nature of the research problem, including many stakeholders, inductive and deductive analytical thinking and expert interviews are needed, and the author applies a qualitative method (Veal et al., 2018)

From April 15th to June 15th, 2024. This study explores HCMC's cultural heritage's impact on attracting cruise tourists compared to regional destinations. Using qualitative methods like interviews and observations, it aims to gain a nuanced understanding

3.2.Data collection

Researchers interviewed 28 travel industry leaders (28-65 years old) across Vietnam to gain deep insights (details in Table 1). Relaxed settings (cafes, offices, online platforms) encouraged open discussions. Pre-defined open-ended questions ensured thoroughness while allowing the exploration of complex topics(Creswell, 2012). Prioritizing ethics, researchers obtained verbal consent, guaranteed anonymity, and offered participants the option to withdraw at any time. These measures ensured participant protection and data reliability.

Target Group	Main Themes
Managers/CEOs/Owners of travel agencies	The potential value of competing cultural heritage
	The company's experience in developing competitive cruise tourism products associated with cultural heritage
	Effective exploitation of cultural heritage in attracting cruise tourists
	Challenges and solutions for developing competitive cruise tourism associated with cultural heritage
	Competitive advantage between Ho Chi Minh City and BKK, Malaysia
Tourism experts/government officers	The role of state management agencies in preserving and promoting cultural heritage values
	Manage and monitor cruise tourism activities associated with cultural heritage
	Support cruise tourism businesses to develop products associated with cultural heritage
	International cooperation in developing cruise tourism associated with cultural heritage:
	Competitive advantage between Ho Chi Minh City and BKK, Malaysia

Table 1. Main themes identified for the research.

3.3. Data analysis

Grounded Theory guides our journey of discovery. First, initial coding involves meticulously analyzing interview transcripts, and identifying recurring themes like pieces of a puzzle. Focused coding refines these themes, carving deeper into the data. Finally, these pieces are systematically assembled into main topics capturing the research

core. Similar to a jigsaw, the overall picture gradually forms, revealing insights into the problem (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kvale, 2007). For clarity, a coded system was adopted (e.g., 'Expert00', 'Business00') (Table 2)

Participant categories	*Code*	*Age*	*N*	*%*	*Field*
Tourism business	Business 00	28-35	2	7	Tour operators/tour managers
		36-43	8	29	Tour operators/tour managers
		43-50	15	54	Tour operators/tour managers
		51-65	3	11	Tour operators/tour managers
Total			**28**	**100**	
Experts	Expert 00	35-45	2	33	Government officers
		46-65	4	37	Cruise tourism/culture
Total			**6**	**100**	

Table 2. Interview profiles and codes (adapted from Tuyen et al (2024)

3.4. Research context

Ho Chi Minh City boasts a rich tapestry woven over 300 years, layered upon ancient foundations. This cultural melting pot blends traditional Vietnamese with modern Western influences. Its unique Southern heritage reflects the lives of the Kinh, Chinese, Cham, and Khmer ethnicities. Home to 188 ranked relics, including national treasures, HCMC particularly draws visitors with its urban heritage and revolutionary sites, preserving memories of the city's fascinating past. According to the report on the performance of HCMC, the inbound visitors to HCMC in 2023 are estimated to reach 5 million, an increase of 44.3% over the same period in 2022, reaching 100% with the plan for 2023. In particular, total revenue in 2023 is estimated to reach 160 trillion VND, up 22% over the same period in 2022, reaching 100% compared to the 2023 plan. Cruise tourists only reach 150,000 pax/year but are high spenders on sightseeing and shopping activities. Four major seaports are Saigon Port, Hiep Phuoc port, Saigon Hiep Phuoc port, Phu Huu port, Cat Lai Port, often welcoming luxury cruise ships with a capacity of 500-1000 pax: Silver Muse, Silver Shadow, Silver Moon, Silver Noca, Seabourn, Seabourn Encore, Nautica, Viking Orion, Seven Seas Explorer, Regatta, the world…. In addition, large ships with a capacity of 1000-3500 such as Celebrity Solstice, ms Noordame, Carnaval Panorama, Diamond Princess, Coral Princess, Quantum of the Seas, and Mein Schiff... docking at Phu My port in Ba Ria Vung Tau also consider HCMC as the main destination in the tour program. To develop a sustainable tourist market, increase the rate of return visitors, booing tours, and spending more on shopping, experts recommend that the city needs to raise awareness of relevant parties about preserving and exploiting cultural heritage elements as a competitive advantage for the region.

IV. RESULTS

Potential value of cultural heritage

A priceless treasure, cultural heritage fuels a nation's soul and drives socio-economic growth. Ho Chi Minh City embodies this. Witnessing Vietnam's evolution from feudal times to the present, it boasts relics like the Independence Palace and Cu Chi Tunnels, testaments to its historic moments. At a cultural crossroads, HCMC offers diverse experiences. From communal houses and pagodas to bustling craft villages, it paints a vibrant picture of Vietnamese life "Vietnam in general and HCMC has a very special history, cultural heritage, especially revolutionary cultural heritage, is very unique and cannot be found anywhere else, and needs to be preserved and protected. preserve and introduce to tourists "Expert 005"

In addition, Cruise tourists have limited time (0.5-3 days), so cultural experiences need to go beyond historical sites. Integrate visits to craft villages, local activities, and religious sites through themed tours.

Expert 009 said: "I see that all travel companies specializing in organizing cruise tourists such as Saigon Tourist, Tan Hong, and Destination Inter cruise all sell tours to customers with the same program such as Reunification Palace, War Remnants Museum. Paintings ex, Jade Emperor Pagoda, Ba Thien Hau Temple, Cu Chi Tunnels, lacquer handicrafts workshop, they need to diversify tourism products with thematic tours such as "urban heritage, religious heritage, pagoda heritage, coffee heritage, colonial heritage...)".

The company's experience in developing cruise tourism products associated with cultural heritage

According to Ritchie and Crouch (1999), and Dwyer and Kim (2003), cultural heritage is a core resource in

destination competition, but not all cultural heritage is valuable in tourism development. That heritage must live and be located in an area with developed tourism infrastructure; Cambodia's Angkor Wat is another architectural masterpiece of humanity, but due to its location far from Sinoville seaport, not many cruise tourists book because of the cost of time and money. This happens similarly to the destination Cu Chi tunnels when cruise ships dock at Phu My and Hiep Phuoc ports. Business 0012 said: "Because HCMC tourism infrastructure is not yet developed, we have tried to design an itinerary that harmoniously combines cultural heritage sightseeing and other tourism activities such as relaxation, entertainment, shopping, and reasonable allocation of time to visit cultural heritage, ensuring visitors have enough time to learn and experience."

Tourists not only experience local cultural heritage but also have the task of awakening the heritage, raising awareness of relevant parties, and contributing to its conservation and maintenance by paying for tour tickets at the monument. "Water puppetry in tours, music at dinner, coffee experiences...tourists love it!". Business 0010 says "Positive feedback fuels innovation, driving unique offerings that bring repeat customers". Business004 emphasized that "cultural and heritage tours are considered for a niche market, cruise tourists are the same, they are willing to pay high prices and demand high quality, so we care about quality at the heritage destination such as security, hygiene and safety, tour guides, means of transportation."

Experts agree cultural heritage is crucial for attracting cruise tourists and boosting the local economy. However, simply leveraging heritage isn't enough (Expert 008). Stronger connections with local communities are needed for tourists to experience authentic culture. This fosters a positive international image and distributes tourist flow. Effective exploitation requires a development plan ensuring harmony between tourism and heritage preservation. It also means improving service quality, protecting the environment, and raising local awareness of heritage and tourism development

Competitive advantage between Ho Chi Minh City and BKK, Malaysia

Many factors influence a destination's appeal for cruise tourists, including the balance between natural and cultural resources. Some regions lack one or the other. To be competitive, destinations should leverage both. Investments in infrastructure, service quality, and destination branding are also crucial. Additionally, resource distribution matters. Cruise tourists seek variety, and HCMC, due to its location, may struggle with limited natural resources and a seasonal climate. Similar patterns are observed in cities like Bangkok, Singapore, and Kuala Lumpur. Each city's cultural heritage is distinct due to unique ethnographic characteristics. HCMC struggles to match the science, technology, and tourism infrastructure levels of these regional cities. Discussing port locations, Business0012 noted, "Port Klang, Malaysia's largest port near Kuala Lumpur, hosts international cruise lines like Star Cruises, Princess Cruises, and Royal Caribbean. Tourists can visit landmarks such as the Petronas Twin Towers, Independence Square, and Batu Caves."

In Singapore, there are two main cruise ports. The Marina Bay Singapore Cruise Center (MBCC), the largest, is centrally located and accommodates five large yachts simultaneously with modern amenities. The older Singapore Cruise Port (SCC) on Sentosa Island remains popular due to its proximity to attractions like Universal Studios Singapore and SEA Aquarium.

Bangkok's closest seaport is Laem Chabang Port, about 30 km south of the city center. This is Thailand's largest container port and a hub for many international shipping lines. Business003 remarked, "Laem Chabang Port hosts cruise lines like Princess Cruises, Royal Caribbean, and Star Cruises. It features a modern passenger terminal with amenities such as restaurants, bars, shops, and rest areas. Shuttle services connect travelers to Bangkok's famous attractions and surrounding areas."

Saigon Port and Hiep Phuoc Port of Vietnam are the two main ports welcoming international tourists. This is a cargo port with a geographical location not far from the center of HCMC, but it is not a deep-water port that can accommodate large cruise ships with a capacity of 1,500 passengers or more like Laem Chabang of Bangkok and Port Klang of Malaysia. Shipping lines **Princess Cruises**, Royal Caribbean, and Star Cruises... must allow their cruise ships to dock at Phu My port (Ba Ria Vung Tau province). Business008 said, "Time costs and transportation costs are large when customers have to travel long distances, Long Thanh Expressway often has traffic jams, greatly affecting the tour and experience schedule in HCMC and shipping lines in the journey to visit in the East Asian region, including China, Hong Kong, and Macau". Unfavorable time factors greatly affect the schedule to experience cultural heritage at the destination, such as the tour program being cut short or the company not including them in the program. Business 005 added: " HCMC is suitable for tourists who want to experience cultural heritage,

revolutionary historical sites, experience cuisine, craft villages, river customs, and reasonable travel costs. Bangkok: Suitable for travelers who like to explore temples, and palaces, shop, and experience Thai cuisine. Malaysia: Suitable for tourists who want to enjoy a luxury vacation, participate in diverse entertainment activities, and explore diverse cultures."

HCMC possesses many unique and outstanding cultural heritages, contributing to strong competitiveness compared to other tourist destinations. With the advantages of cultural heritage, the Independence Palace, Cu Chi Tunnels, Nha Rong Wharf, War Remnants Museum, etc. So we can confirm this city has great potential to develop cultural heritage tourism but there are also many challenges and reasonable solutions are needed.

Challenges and solutions for developing cruise tourism associated with cultural heritage

Accessibility is key for heritage tourism. Unreachable sites hold cultural value, but not tourism value. Cruise tourism, combining culture with accessibility, offers potential, but faces challenges that need solutions

Business 006 was upset: "Cruising companies want to bring passengers to Vietnam, but their service capacity is still limited, and the transport infrastructure, tourism infrastructure, and services are not satisfactory. It is not possible to welcome many large cruise ships at the same time, there is a lack of high-quality accommodation services, restaurants, and entertainment areas for cruise tourists. The connection between destinations is still limited. Lack of cruise routes connect cultural heritage destinations reasonably and conveniently for tourists, traffic jams often occur."

Business 008 added, "The travel time from Hiep Phuoc port (Nha Be) to Ben Dinh (Cu Chi tunnels) in both directions is 6 hours or even 7 hours for a 65km distance. This is a difficult problem for travel agencies and cruise lines. Cruise companies arrange schedules for tourists so invest in developing transport infrastructure and services. Building and upgrading seaports, developing tourist areas, entertainment areas, restaurants, and hotels high quality in cultural heritage destinations". Coordinate with cruise companies to build tourist routes that connect cultural heritage destinations reasonably and conveniently for tourists.

Expert 09 said: "In recent times, I have read in the press that companies specializing in organizing cruise tourism in HCMC have done very well, but tourism products associated with cultural heritage have not been diversified, lacking creativity and experience for tourists so develop tourism products must be associated with cultural heritage such as eco-tourism, spiritual tourism, community tourism. In addition, human resource management in destination competition is not less important, from people working in management, organizational operations, and marketing to direct jobs such as tour guides and on-site guides.

As Expert 0012 shared, "We have a surplus and shortage of international tour guides, a shortage of tour guides and staff with expertise in cultural heritage and cruise tourism, and professional service skills". Professional and proficient foreign language skills. Therefore, it is necessary to train tour guides and staff with expertise in cultural heritage and cruise tourism operations. Expert 009 added, "In addition to the above solutions, there needs to be close coordination between state management agencies, tourism businesses, local communities, and international organizations to develop cruise tourism associated with cultural heritage effectively and sustainably".

IV. MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

To maximize the heritage tourism potential of HCMC, close coordination is needed between relevant parties, including local authorities, tourism businesses, local communities, and tourists. Based on the analysis of HCMC's cultural heritage competitiveness, this study proposes the following overall management implications:

+ *State management agency*

Offer tax exemptions and loan interest rate support to businesses investing in cultural heritage tourism. Aid in constructing tourism infrastructure and developing diverse, high-quality cultural heritage tourism products. Identify and document cultural heritage sites needing protection and classification. Implement regulations on heritage conservation, including restoration, embellishment, and use. Provide financial support and encourage the application of science and technology in conservation efforts. Promote Ho Chi Minh City's tourism and cultural heritage internationally through various media channels. Improve tourism service quality, ensuring security, order, and environmental hygiene. Fund conservation activities and scientific research on heritage. Offer professional and technical support for conservation, organize seminars and training on heritage preservation, and enhance knowledge about cultural heritage, laws, and international conventions.

+ *Travel organization serving cruise tourists*

Develop cruise tourism linked to HCMC's cultural heritage by designing themed itineraries and offering

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diverse services. Enhance service quality through staff training, improved facilities, and technology. Collaborate with travel companies, airlines, and other localities. Market cruise tourism and cultural heritage through media and promotion programs, and partner with international agencies to attract tourists to HCMC.

+ *On the part of the local community:*

Participating in cultural heritage tourism activities, including developing handicrafts tourism products, cultural experience tourism, and protecting cultural heritage and the tourism environment.

Raising the awareness of communities about protecting cultural heritage and the tourism environment.

+ *On the tourist side:*

Respect the cultural heritage and tourism environment of HCMC by participating in cultural heritage tourism activities in a civilized and polite manner. By implementing these management implications, HCMC can develop cultural heritage tourism sustainably and effectively, contributing to attracting cruise tourists to visit and experience, while also preserving and promoting the city's cultural heritage value.

V. CONCLUSION

Ho Chi Minh City possesses rich and diverse cultural heritage competitiveness, promising great potential for developing cultural heritage tourism and attracting cruise visitors in the context of increasingly fierce destination competition. However, to effectively exploit this potential, the HCMC needs to overcome some limitations such as poor connection among cultural heritages, low quality of cultural heritage tourism services, and low awareness of protection. The cultural heritage of some segments of the population is still limited. Therefore, there needs to be close coordination between relevant parties, including local authorities, tourism businesses, local communities, and tourists, to develop heritage tourism sustainably and effectively. Solutions include developing diverse, high-quality cultural heritage tourism products; Combining cultural heritage tours with entertainment, shopping, and culinary activities, and meeting the diverse needs of tourists. Training professional staff and guides, upgrading facilities, and applying technology to heritage tourism activities. Strengthen the promotion of cultural heritage tourism through international tourism fairs, cooperating with international media agencies, and developing online cultural heritage tourism promotion programs. Strengthening propaganda and education for local communities and tourists about the meaning and value of cultural heritage. With the joint efforts of relevant parties, we believe that HCMC's cultural heritage factor will become a strong development factor in the future, contributing to affirming the city's position as a tourist destination and attracting the regional and international cultural heritage tourism map.

Ethics Statement: This manuscript uses ChatGPT to enhance text clarity and readability while maintaining research integrity. This disclosure aims to promote transparency and accountability in the use of AI for scientific writing.

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THE IMPACT OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT THROUGH WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

Tourism plays an important role in achieving the United Nations 2030 Agenda for sustainable development (UN-SDGs), especially the 5th Sustainable Development Goal (UN-SDG5) - Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. There is a growing interest and responsibility for countries and their respective tourism activities to highlight ways to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Women's empowerment has become an important part of sustainable tourism development. Based on a systematic literature review, this study analyzes the effects of women's empowerment on women's participation in tourism activities and tourism development. Four areas of empowerment have been identified in the literature including economic, social, psychological and political empowerment. This study has proposed a theoretical research framework and related research hypotheses for the relationships between women's empowerment, their participation in tourism activities and the development of tourism destinations, as well as the mediating role of women's participation in the relationship between empowerment and tourism development.

Keywords: *tourism, sustainable tourism, female workers, women's empowerment, women's participation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs) aim to address global challenges facing the world, including poverty, gender inequality, climate change, environmental destruction, peace and justice. Achieving gender equality and empowering women is the fifth goal of the UN-SDG. This goal is not only an essential human right but also an important foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.

The United Nations has set several goals to achieve women's empowerment. One of these is to ensure the effective participation of women in society and to give them equal prospects for leadership roles at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and social public life. The second goal is to help women have equal access to economic resources as well as property rights. The ultimate goal is to implement sound policies and enforceable laws to promote gender equality and empower women at all levels. Tourism can strongly contribute to empowering women and improving their economic position. Therefore, if women, especially in developing countries, are given more opportunities to work in the tourism sector and advance to higher levels of management, this will certainly help accomplish the fifth goal of UN-SDG by bringing about gender equality in economic aspects.

Tourism has a key role to play in achieving the central commitments of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including commitments to gender equality, empowering women and leaving no one behind. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2020), "Tourism has the potential to be a vehicle for empowering women in developing regions". Compared to other sectors of the economy, tourism offers better opportunities for women's workforce participation, entrepreneurship and leadership. Women in the tourism industry remain relatively underpaid, underutilized, poorly educated and less represented than men; But tourism offers potential avenues for addressing these inequalities. There is a growing interest and responsibility for countries and their respective tourism activities to highlight ways to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

Therefore, tourism development that includes women's participation has become an important means for sustainable management (Sebele, 2010). Tourism contributes to overcoming gender inequality and ensuring the empowerment of women and their effective participation in the development process, especially in countries with

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traditional values (Arroyo et al., 2019). Without women's participation in development activities, comprehensive community development will not be achieved, because women continue to face many challenges in participating and contributing to community development activities (Gyan, 2021; Alarcon and Cole, 2019) argue that tourism cannot be sustainable without gender equality. Similarly, Pickel Chevalier et al (2019) argue that gender equality is an essential aspect in analyzing the tourism industry's ability to function as an intermediary for sustainable development.

The growing presence of women in the tourism industry has been recognized globally, they make up approximately 57% of the tourism workforce (UNWTO, 2019). Compared to other sectors, women dominate the tourism workforce with an employment rate approximately twice that of men (UNWTO, 2011). This further emphasizes the value of tourism as a factor promoting the role of women, positively impacting women's employment through the economic activities it creates.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

The author uses academic databases on Google Schoolar and ScienceDirect to search for articles related to the research topic with keywords such as "gender and tourism", "women and tourism", "development", "sustainable tourism development", "empowerment". The analysis of the articles mainly focuses on the dimensions such as women's empowerment through tourism, women's participation in tourism, women's role in tourism development, gender in development tourism. Based on a review of domestic and foreign journals, the author analyzed to propose research hypotheses and a research framework on the impact of women's empowerment on tourism development through the women's participation.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

3.1. Literature review and theoretical background

The term empowerment refers to measures designed to increase the degree of autonomy and self-determination of people and communities to enable them to represent their interests responsibly and to decide and act under their own authority. It is a process that helps people become stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their lives and demanding their rights. Empowerment as an action refers to both the process of self-empowerment and professional support for people, helping them overcome feelings of powerlessness and lack of influence and recognize and use their resources.

In tourism, empowerment is a multifaceted and deeply contextual concept with economic, social, psychological, educational, political and environmental aspects. Researchers use many different approaches to study empowerment in tourism. Empowering communities at tourism destinations has long been considered a prerequisite for sustainable tourism development. Tourism-based empowerment of individuals and communities has been documented in different geographical and cultural contexts and from many different perspectives, not limited to economic, social, culture, environment and politics (Boley et al., 2017; Scheyvens, 2000). Empowerment is a process, not just a state or outcome. Empowerment is really necessary for disadvantaged groups including women (Scheyvens, 2000).

According to Scheyvens (1999), multidimensional approach to empowerment goes beyond providing economic and income opportunities, instead it also entails psychological, social and political empowerment of individuals. Scheyvens (1999) proposed a women's empowerment framework, which includes four dimenssions as follows:

Economic empowerment. Economic empowerment refers to the economic benefits and access to productive resources (land, capital, jobs, business opportunities, economic capacity within and outside the family) arising from opportunities created employment opportunities and equitable distribution of economic benefits.

Psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment refers to the attitudes of community members that strengthen a sense of independence, autonomy, and self-esteem. Women feel proud of local traditions and culture, more confident in themselves, and capable of overcoming all challenges. While if an individual loses psychological power he/she becomes indifferent and submissive.

Social empowerment. Social empowerment refers to a sense of community cohesion such as women's participation in tourism activities. Tourism activities help strengthen the social relationship between individual residents and their communities, while also increasing their sense of community attachment, including their participation in community activities and social capital development (Boley et al., 2014). Tourism activities improve the social status of women in the community, create favorable conditions for the establishment of social development

projects or groups, and help strengthen community solidarity.

Political empowerment. Political empowerment refers to women's participation in decision-making for themselves, their families and their communities. It gives the direction and leads the process of tourism development. Political empowerment motivates residents to use and control social resources and participate in decisions related to achieving sustainable tourism. Participating in the decision-making process helps residents control the direction of tourism development (Boley & McGehee, 2014).

Table 1. Studies on women's empowerment in tourism development

No	Author, year of publication	Article/Country	Research findings	Methods of data collection and analysis
1	Ibrahim Elshaera et al (2021)	The impact of women's empowerment on sustainable tourism development: The mediating role of tourism participation/Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	Empowering women about: - Mentality - Politics - Society	Quantitative research using questionnaire, sample: 1100 women, 5-point Likert scale. SEM linear structure analysis with AMOS, SPSS 21.0 analysis
2	Amin Palikhe (2018)	Empowering women in tourism: Special TLTK on Pokhara city/Nepal	The study aimed to determine women's participation in the tourism industry, their circumstances, problems and obstacles and future prospects in the tourism industry. - Socio-economic factors - Attitude and personality - Government policies - Development program	- Questionnaire - Sample: 52 women (purposive sample) - 5-point Likert scale - Analyze using SPSS software
3	Apisalomé Movono & Heidi Dahles (2017)	Women's empowerment and tourism: focusing on businesses in a Fijian village	Assert authority on: - Economy - Society - Mentality - Politics	Ethnographic research
4	Nguyen Thanh Nam (2020)	Gender in community tourism development (The case of Quynh Son community tourism village, Bac Son, Lang Son)/Vietnam	Research identifies that in ethnic minority areas of Vietnam, typically Quynh Son (Lang Son), women have many opportunities to participate in tourism activities but also encounter barriers in customs and language., educational level or gender perception. Therefore, empowering women through tourism is extremely necessary.	Document analysis combined with in-depth interviews
5	Chanel Emily MC Call, Kevin Frank Mearns (2021)	Empowering women through community tourism in the Western Cape/ South Africa	The study aims to reveal the economic and social empowerment (or disempowerment) of women in the MOC (Mothers of Creation Route).	Qualitative research (in-depth interviews)
6	Monkgogi Lenao, Biki Basupi (2016)	Developing ecotourism and empowering women in Botswana/ South Africa	It is asserted that ecotourism development has the dual impact of empowering and disempowering rural women in Botswana	Qualitative research (in-depth interviews)
7	Mohamed A. Abou-Shouk, Maryam Taha	Women's empowerment and tourism development:	Research shows that perceptions of women's work and business ventures significantly influence women's	Using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-

No	Author, year of publication	Article/Country	Research findings	Methods of data collection and analysis
	Mannaa, Ahmed Mohamed Elbaz (2020)	A cross-national study/Egypt, UAE, Oman	empowerment in the tourism industry.	SEM) to analyze the perceptions of 784 respondents in 3 countries: Egypt, United Arab Emirates, and Oman
8	Su et al (2020)	Empowering women through cultural tourism: perspectives of Hui embroiderers in Ningxia, China	Research shows that rural Muslim women's participation in tourism not only helps them advance economically but also provides viable avenues for social, psychological, educational empowerment and politics to varying degrees.	The study used a case study with qualitative data
9	Claudia Gil Arroyo et al (2019)	Increasing women's empowerment through agritourism: Evidence from Andean communities	Research shows that agritourism contributes to empowering women in four areas: psychological, social, political and economic.	In-depth interview. A total of 12 interviews were conducted with 24 participants; 06 interviews with community tourism leaders and 06 group interviews with members of the community providing agritourism activities
10	Eylla Laire M. Gutierrez, Kazem Vafadari (2022)	Exploring the relationship between women's participation, empowerment and community development: A literature review /Philippines	The psychological, social and political empowerment of women positively contributes to community development, in which women's psychological health, social and political participation positively affects the development of women. community development	Literature review according to several academic databases: Google Scholar, Taylor and Francis, ScienceDirect and Emerald Publishing.

3.2. Women's empowerment, women's participation and tourism development

Women's participation in tourism development is of interest to many scholars around the world. Empowering women as analyzed above helps not only achieve the central commitments of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development but is also the basis to help women be confident and ready to do tourism. The role of women's empowerment in promoting women's participation in tourism activities is shown in the following dimenssions:

Economic empowerment, women's participation and tourism development:

Tourism is labour-intensive and can help women gain formal employment opportunities, additional income and respect, contributing to improved family life, enhanced community development, reduced poverty and eliminate traditional views against them (Andereck et al, 2005). Aronsson (2000) also found that tourism creates opportunities for women to participate in self-income generating activities, they establish motels, homestays, restaurants, and more and more women have become business owners, but mainly at the micro and small enterprises (Zhang & Zhang, 2020).

Referring to economic benefits, a study by Kunjuraman et al, (2019) shows that women's participation in community projects in Malaysia is greatly influenced by economic factors such as having additional income and the opportunity to participate in a variety of business activities.

In addition, successful tourism business activities will diversify income sources for community livelihoods (Kunjuraman et al., 2019; Tran & Walter, 2014). Tourism provides opportunities for women to participate as a workforce in the industry and hold leadership positions in the economy... Arguably, tourism development by providing equal opportunities to sustain themselves and their livelihoods for women.

The reality is that travel provides a working environment for women that is separate from everyday work life and the social recognition it brings. It can be seen that tourism is an industry that provides employment opportunities for a large number of people without certain qualifications, the tasks performed such as cooking, welcoming guests, making beds, and cleaning are all performed by women. Thus, women's economic empowerment helps increase their participation in tourism activities and thereby promote the development of the tourism industry. From the above arguments, we make the following research hypotheses:

H1. Women's economic empowerment positively affects women's participation in tourism.

H2. Economic empowerment of women positively affects tourism development

Social empowerment, women's participation and tourism development:

Awareness of the impact of tourism on community cohesion has been noted to shed light on the social empowerment of women. Arroyo et al (2019) argue that women's participation in formal tourism associations and compliance with established rules allows women equal opportunities to benefit from tourism activities, agriculture and rural areas, ensuring the same access and benefits that men receive. In other words, tourism associations give women equal status with men in creating and delivering agricultural and rural tourism products.

This also enhances the status of women in the community because their traditional activities benefit agricultural and rural tourism products directly (e.g. supporting preparatory work for tourists) or indirectly (e.g. selling crafts to tourists). In general, these efforts strengthen the sense of cohesion and cooperation among community members, revive seemingly forgotten cultures, and preserve the community's cultural identity, traditional crafts and ceremonies, enhancing intercultural communication and understanding (Tran and Walter, 2014; Movono, A. & Dahles, H., 2017; Elshaer et al. 2021), facilitating tourism development. Based on these arguments, we propose the following research hypotheses:

H3. Social empowerment of women positively influences women's participation in tourism.

H4. Social empowerment of women positively affects tourism development.

Psychological empowerment, women's participation and tourism development:

The development of tourism has facilitated increased self-esteem and a sense of independence among women, because of their daily activities, such as weaving and producing handicrafts made from locally grown materials, that are very attractive to tourists, helping women feel proud of their culture and family traditions (Arroyo et al. 2019). Psychological empowerment shows that women's pride and self-esteem are enhanced when tourists know the cultural and natural values of the communities where women live (Boley, McGehee, 2014; Schevens, 1999).

Psychological empowerment has a positive impact on local communities in general and women in particular in enhancing and maintaining their self-esteem. Psychologically empowered women tend to have autonomy in shaping their roles and careers in tourism, thereby enabling them to perform better at their jobs, improving their career opportunities. This is clearly shown in the research of Arroyo et al (2019) and Gutierrez, Vafadari (2022). These studies show that women play the role of "custodians" of the community's traditions and cultural knowledge. Psychological disempowerment arises when development makes women feel inferior, or they have no control over the direction of their development and this makes them feel uncomfortable and separate from their community. Thus, psychological empowerment of women stimulates women's confidence and self-esteem, encourages them to participate in socio-economic activities in general and tourism activities in particular, thereby promoting socio-economic activities, as well as local tourism activities.

H5. Women's psychological empowerment positively influences women's participation in tourism.

H6. Psychological empowerment of women positively affects tourism development.

Political empowerment, women's participation and tourism development:

Political empowerment addresses power relationships in tourism development and represents women's perspectives (Nunkoo, Ramkissoon, 2009). Scheyvens (2000) mentioned that political empowerment of tourism occurs when all people are equal and can share ideas about tourism development and planning. Boley et al. (2017) emphasize the participation of local people, including women, at all stages of tourism development and the transition from non-participation and passive participation to active participation levels. This shows that tourism creates opportunities for women to be politically empowered with new roles, taking on many functions and tasks that they would not normally perform in their communities. Women's political empowerment is seen as the process of

promoting women's potential by providing access to new opportunities, having a voice, and helping them carry out tourism activities such as running tourism products businesses, invite guests to use and experience tourism products, present and introduce tourism products and connect relationships in tourism activities, helping them have a voice in related decision making to tourism activities, thereby promoting the development of tourism in general. Based on these arguments, we propose the following research hypotheses:

H7. Political empowerment of women positively affects women's participation in tourism.

H8. Political empowerment of women positively affects tourism development.

3.3. Women's participation and tourism development

Tourism is a vibrant part of the economies of both developed and developing countries (Palikhe, 2018). Tourism development that includes women's participation has become an important means for sustainable management. Tourism contributes to overcoming gender inequality and ensuring the empowerment of women and their effective participation in the development process, especially in countries with traditional values. Without women's participation in development activities, comprehensive community development will not be achieved because women continue to face many challenges in participating and contributing to community development activities (Gyan, 2021). Alarcon and Cole (2019) argue that tourism cannot be sustainable without gender equality. Similarly, Pickel Chevalier et al (2019) argue that gender equality is an essential aspect in analyzing the tourism industry's ability to function as an intermediary of sustainable development.

The growing presence of women in the tourism industry has been recognized globally at around 57% of the industry's workforce (UNWTO, 2019). Compared to other sectors, women dominate the tourism workforce with an employment rate twice that of men (UNWTO, 2011). With this in mind, studies have emphasized the value of tourism as a factor promoting the role of women (Ateljevic, 2008). Tourism positively impacts women's employment through the economic activities it generates (Sinclair, 1998).

Studies show that women's participation in the tourism business plays an important role in the sustainable development of tourism as maintainers of culture (Candra et al., 2023), custodians of traditions in the community and contribute to the economic development of the community. Women's participation in tourism will increase community value and enhance the positive impact of tourism on sustainable tourism development (Scheyvens, 2000). Women's significant contributions to community development in the tourism industry have been reported in several regions including Malaysia (Kunjuraman et al., 2019), China (Dai & Sarkar, 2019), Iran (Fathizadeh et al., 2022), Vietnam (Dang Thi Phuong Anh and Phan Quang Anh, 2023).

There are three basic characteristics of women working in the tourism industry. First, women participate in positions that extend their family roles (Kozak Akoglan & As̜an, 2012) and they mainly have informal roles in tourism with low-income and low skills jobs, such as making souvenirs, opening grocery stores, selling street vendors, cooking, cleaning and working in the accommodation sector etc... (Scheyvens, 2002; Pastore, 2020). On the other hand, some of the roles that women have to bear socially make them need to earn money and at the same time fulfill family responsibilities (being a bride,being a wife, being a mother...). Finally, when viewed from a woman's perspective, tourism offers more favorable opportunities, especially when compared to traditional and strenuous agriculture-based work such as farming, livestock etc... (Scheyvens, 2002).

In developing countries, especially in Vietnam, women have few conditions to participate in paid work, have less access to land, credit and other economic resources (Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs, UN Women, 2015). Women are vulnerable, subject to many different barriers in social life, especially women in rural, midland and mountainous areas. Differences in culture, customs, education level, and language are easily recognized difficulties in research on women in tourism. Therefore, participation goes hand in hand with cultural construction, taking place in both directions: the differentiation of cultural identity that is attractive to tourists and the development of tourism activities stimulates differentiation of cultural identity in local communities. In addition to building a culture of tourism development for ethnic women, the accumulation of social capital also arises, helping to empower ethnic women (Dang Thi Phuong Anh and Phan Quang Anh, 2023). Based on this argument we propose the following hypothesis:

H9. Women's participation in tourism has a positive influence on tourism development.

3.4. Empowering women in tourism development through women's participation

Tourism contributes to overcoming gender inequality and ensuring the empowerment of women and their

effective participation in the development process, especially in countries with traditional values (Gil Arroyo et al., 2019; UNWTO, 2020a). Without women's participation in development activities, comprehensive community development will not be achieved because women continue to face many challenges in participating and contributing to activities. community development (Gyan, 2021). Women's participation in tourism will increase community value and promote sustainable tourism development (Scheyvens, 2000). When women feel travel creates those opportunities for them, they are more likely to participate. This will impact on sustainable tourism development (Boley et al., 2017). Thus, it is the participation of women in tourism activities that promotes the political, psychological, social and economic empowerment of women, thereby promoting sustainable tourism development. Based on these arguments, we propose the following research hypotheses:

Figure 1. Proposed Research Framework

H10. Women's tourism participation mediates between political empowerment and tourism development

H11. Women's tourism participation mediates between psychological empowerment and tourism development

H12. Women's tourism participation mediates between social empowerment and tourism development

H13. Women's tourism participation mediates between economic empowerment and tourism development

To generalize the relationships between forms of empowerment and women's participation in tourism development, we propose the following theoretical research framework in Figure 1.

IV. CONCLUSION

Empowering women has a positive influence on their participation in tourism activities, contributing positively to the development of the tourism economy. Researched documents show that women's participation positively affects economic, psychological, social and political empowerment. As suggested by several authors (Arroyo et al., 2019; Elshaer et al., 2021; Laire M. Gutierrez & Vafadari, 2022; Su et al., 2023), women's participation in tourism helps improve their psychological health as they are seen to gain autonomy, self-esteem, self-determination, autonomy, sense of pride, confidence and optimism through their participation in branch.

Likewise, studies show that women are economically empowered through tourism, especially by providing women with financial income and assets. On the other hand, studies (Abou-Shouk et al., 2021; Lenao & Basupi, 2016; Palikhe, 2018) show that women are more likely to be employed in lower-skilled and lower-paying jobs with fewer supervisory responsibilities.

Furthermore, other studies (Lenao & Basupi, 2016; Nam, 2020; Palikhe, 2018) show that despite the economic income generated by tourism, women are still constrained by the expectations, traditions and culture in their communities and society. A similar situation is observed where women are found to have very little participation in decision-making and political processes in their communities (Elshaer et al., 2021; Laire M. Gutierrez & Vafadari, 2022; Movono & Dahles, 2017).

Based on the literature review, this study analyzes and develops research hypotheses on the impact of women's empowerment on tourism development through women's participation in tourism. Empowering women in tourism not only aims to promote women in particular and local communities in general, but also aims to achieve the United Nations' sustainable development goals.

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THE ROLE OF CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS IN CREATING CULTURAL TOURISM EXPERIENCES IN CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

Hien Nguyen Phuoc[1]

Abstract

The article focuses on analyzing the impact of customer expectations on cultural tourism experiences in the Central Highlands, while also proposing measures to improve the quality of tourism services and products. Using a mixed-method research approach, this study conducted semi-structured interviews with 166 individuals, including domestic and international tourists, local residents, government tourism officials, tourism businesses, and cultural tourism experts, along with direct observation to collect data on customer perceptions and expectations in tourism activities in the Central Highlands. The data was then processed using SPSS software. The research results show that customer expectations significantly influence the decision-making of businesses regarding the improvement and development of tourism products. The study contributes to the academic field by clarifying the relationship between customer expectations and the success of tourism experiences, thereby proposing new directions for future research. The findings from this study not only add to the theoretical foundation but also support practical applications in developing appropriate strategies to enhance tourism experiences in the Central Highlands, better meeting the needs and expectations of customers.

Keywords: Central Highlands culture, creating tourism experiences, customer expectations.

Introduction

The Central Highlands, the central region of Vietnam's mountains, is an attractive destination with the diverse cultural heritage of its indigenous ethnic groups. This area is not only rich in natural resources but also preserves abundant cultural values through festivals, rituals, customs, and traditional music (Nguyen, 2020). The development of cultural tourism in the Central Highlands has contributed to local economic growth, job creation, and cultural heritage preservation (Le & Hoang, 2019). However, to maintain and develop sustainably, the tourism industry needs to understand and meet customer expectations, which is particularly important in the current context where tourists are becoming more discerning and demanding in terms of the quality of their experience (Tran, 2021).

In recent years, with the rise of global tourism, customer expectations have become a key factor influencing the success of tourism destinations (Pham, 2018). For the Central Highlands, tourists not only seek a place to relax but also wish to experience and deeply understand the unique culture of each ethnic group (Vu & Tran, 2020). Therefore, exploring the impact of customer expectations on creating and improving cultural tourism experiences becomes necessary (Nguyen & Pham, 2019). Additionally, this research supports tourism businesses in designing and providing appropriate tourism products, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty (Hoang, 2019).

Customer expectations play a crucial role in shaping and developing cultural tourism experiences in the Central Highlands. Today's tourists not only want to visit and explore but also demand deep and authentic interaction with local culture (Nguyen et al., 2021). To meet these expectations, tourism businesses need to focus on improving service quality, providing complete and accurate information, ensuring safety and security, and creating rich and unique cultural activities (Le & Pham, 2018). These factors not only help increase customer satisfaction but also foster loyalty, making the Central Highlands an attractive and sustainable cultural tourism destination (Tran, 2019).

Customer expectations can affect many aspects of cultural tourism experiences. Research has shown that expectations play an important role in creating customer satisfaction. When customers have high expectations and these are met or exceeded, they feel more satisfied and are likely to return or recommend the destination to others (Nguyen & Tran, 2024). This is particularly true for cultural tourism, where satisfaction comes not only from physical services but also from spiritual and cultural experiences (Nguyen et al., 2020).

An important factor in meeting customer expectations is service quality. Tourism businesses need to ensure that all services, from accommodation and dining to sightseeing programs, are of high quality (Tran, 2021).

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Professionalism and friendliness of staff are also crucial in creating a good impression and meeting customer expectations (Le, 2019).

Tourists need complete and accurate information about the destination and the cultural activities they will participate in. This information not only helps customers prepare better but also allows them to form more realistic expectations about the trip (Vu, 2020). If the information is inaccurate or lacking, customers may feel disappointed and dissatisfied with their experience (Nguyen, 2019).

In addition, safety and security are also important factors affecting customer expectations. Tourists always want to be assured of safety throughout their trip (Pham & Le, 2018). This includes both physical and mental safety. Tourism businesses need to ensure that safety measures are fully implemented and clearly communicated to customers (Nguyen & Tran, 2018).

One of the most important factors affecting customer expectations is the richness and uniqueness of cultural activities. Tourists want to participate in activities with high cultural value and uniqueness, helping them better understand the local culture (Tran et al., 2019). To meet these expectations, tourism businesses need to continuously innovate and develop new and attractive cultural activities (Nguyen & Pham, 2019).

Meeting and exceeding customer expectations not only helps increase satisfaction but also fosters their loyalty. When customers feel satisfied with their experience, they tend to return and recommend the destination to friends and family (Nguyen & Tran, 2024). This not only helps increase revenue but also creates a positive image for the destination (Pham, 2019).

According to Nguyen and Tran (2024), customer loyalty comes not only from satisfaction with the service but also from emotional connection with the local culture. When customers feel they have a memorable and meaningful experience, they tend to return and maintain a long-term relationship with the destination (Nguyen et al., 2021).

In the context of cultural tourism in the Central Highlands, understanding and meeting customer expectations play a key role in maintaining and developing the sustainable tourism industry. Tourism businesses need to focus on improving service quality, providing accurate information, ensuring safety and security, and creating rich and unique cultural activities to meet and exceed customer expectations (Nguyen, 2019). By doing so, the Central Highlands will continue to be an attractive and sustainable cultural tourism destination, contributing to local economic development and preserving precious cultural heritage (Nguyen & Tran, 2024).

Objectives

The research focuses on the following objectives:

1. Identify how customer expectations influence the development of cultural tourism products in the Central Highlands: Understand and analyze the impact of customer expectations on the strategies and decisions for developing cultural tourism products in this region.

2. Explore how tourism businesses respond to these expectations to enhance service and product quality: Investigate the measures and strategies that tourism businesses employ to meet and exceed customer expectations, thereby improving the quality of tourism services and products.

3. Analyze the factors influencing tourists' expectations when participating in cultural activities in the Central Highlands: Identify and assess the factors impacting tourists' expectations, including promotional information, service quality, and safety at the destination.

4. Evaluate the extent to which these expectations affect customer satisfaction and loyalty after the trip: Research the correlation between customer expectations and satisfaction and loyalty after the trip, thereby identifying key factors that need improvement.

5. Provide recommendations based on the research findings to help managers and local authorities improve the quality and uniqueness of tourism products, especially cultural experiences: Propose specific solutions and recommendations to enhance the quality and uniqueness of cultural tourism products in the Central Highlands, supporting managers and local authorities in the sustainable development of cultural tourism.

These objectives will be pursued through a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews and behavioral observations of tourists at destinations, thereby collecting accurate and reliable data.

Hypothesis

This research proposes five main hypotheses. First, Hypothesis 1 suggests that customer expectations positively influence their satisfaction when experiencing cultural tourism in the Central Highlands. This means that customers with high expectations for the quality of tourism services and products will feel more satisfied when these expectations are met.

Second, Hypothesis 2 proposes that high-quality tourism services and products will better meet customer expectations, thereby enhancing satisfaction. When tourism businesses provide services and products that meet high standards, customers will feel fulfilled with their initial expectations.

Third, Hypothesis 3 indicates that customer satisfaction is closely related to their loyalty to the Central Highlands tourism destination. When customers feel satisfied with their tourism experience, they tend to return and recommend it to others, creating loyalty to the destination.

Fourth, Hypothesis 4 asserts that expectations of safety and security significantly influence customers' decisions in choosing a tourism destination. Customers will choose destinations where they feel safe and secure, which directly affects their expectations and choices.

Finally, Hypothesis 5 suggests that the rich and unique cultural activities in the Central Highlands will enhance the tourism experience and meet customer expectations. When customers participate in diverse and distinctive cultural activities, they will have a better experience and feel that their expectations are fully met.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and sample

This study focuses on groups including domestic and international tourists, local residents, government tourism management agencies, tourism businesses, and cultural tourism experts in the Central Highlands. A total of 166 participants were divided into the groups mentioned above. The sample was selected using non-probability sampling methods, combining convenience sampling and quota sampling to ensure representativeness and collect data from appropriate subjects.

2. Research tools

Quantitative research: Questionnaires with both closed and open-ended questions were used to collect data on customer perceptions and expectations. The questions were designed based on a 5-point Likert scale to assess customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Qualitative research: Semi-structured interview forms were used to conduct in-depth interviews with tourists and local residents. Observation forms and note-taking sheets were used to collect data from direct observations at tourist sites. Additionally, focus group discussions were held with experts and tourism businesses to gather detailed and multi-dimensional information.

3. Data collection

Quantitative research: Data was collected through questionnaires distributed directly and via email to the research subjects. These questionnaires helped gather information on customer expectations and experiences.

Qualitative research: Data was collected through in-depth interviews with tourists and local residents, direct observations at tourist sites, and focus group discussions with experts and tourism businesses.

4. Data analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis: Data was analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to summarize the data. Inferential statistical methods such as T-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were applied to test the research hypotheses.

Qualitative Data Analysis: Data from observation forms, interview forms, note-taking sheets, and focus group discussions were coded and analyzed using content analysis methods. Themes and trends were identified and compared to interpret the research results in a deep and comprehensive manner.

Conclusion and discussion

1. Conclusion

1.1. Expectations and impact on cultural tourism in the central highlands

Tourists visiting the Central Highlands have high expectations for the quality of services:
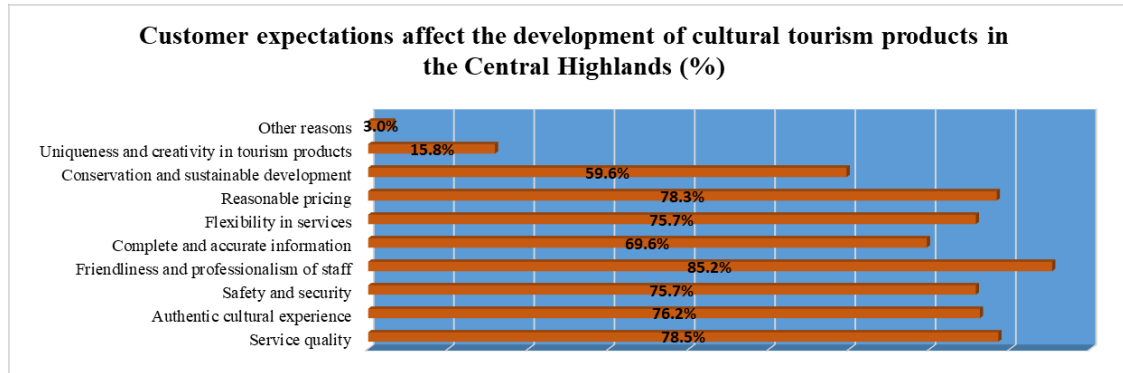
Chart 1: Customer expectations affect the development of cultural tourism products in the Central Highlands

Source: Survey results

Specifically, 95% expect high-quality accommodation, dining, and support services such as tour guides and sightseeing programs, requiring tourism businesses to enhance service quality. Additionally, 88% of customers wish to participate in traditional and distinctive cultural activities such as gong festivals, ethnic musical instruments, and daily life activities of local people, challenging businesses to create diverse and authentic activities.

Safety and security are also essential factors, with 92% of customers considering them basic expectations. Management agencies and businesses need to ensure optimal security measures to provide peace of mind for customers throughout their trip. Friendly and professional staff attitudes are also very important, with 90% of customers expecting this, necessitating staff training to improve service skills and attitudes.

Customers also expect to be provided with complete and accurate information about the destination, activities, and services, with 85% stating that clear information helps them prepare better and form realistic expectations. Flexibility in services is also a crucial expectation, with 80% of customers wanting to customize their itinerary and services according to personal needs. Reasonable and transparent pricing is a decisive factor for 87% of customers, requiring businesses to be clear and reasonable in their pricing.

Furthermore, 78% of customers are concerned about environmental protection and cultural preservation, wanting tourism to ensure sustainable development. Finally, the uniqueness and creativity of tourism products are also significant, with 82% of customers seeking novel and creative experiences. These factors not only help attract and retain customers but also create a competitive advantage for tourism businesses.

Customer expectations play a crucial role in shaping and developing cultural tourism products in the Central Highlands. Businesses and management agencies need to focus on meeting and exceeding these expectations to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty, thereby promoting the sustainable development of the cultural tourism sector in the Central Highlands.

1.2. Analyzing factors affecting tourist expectations when participating in cultural activities in the Central Highlands

Many factors influence tourists' expectations when participating in cultural activities in the Central Highlands:
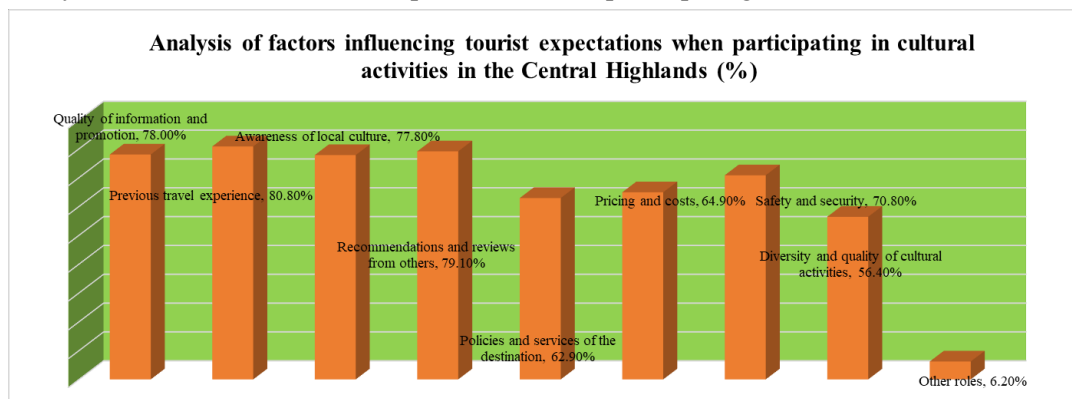
Chart 2: Analysis of factors influencing tourist expectations when participating in cultural activities in the Central Highlands

Source: Survey results

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The quality of information and promotion is an important factor, with 90% of customers indicating that detailed and attractive information greatly affects their trip expectations. Previous travel experiences also have a significant impact, with 85% of customers stating that past experiences influence their expectations of new destinations. Awareness of local culture is another factor, with 88% of customers with extensive knowledge of Central Highlands culture having higher expectations for the authenticity and uniqueness of cultural activities.

Recommendations and reviews from others also have a strong influence, with 83% of customers being influenced by advice and reviews from friends, family, or travel websites. Policies and services of the destination are also very important, with 89% of customers stating that support policies and service quality affect their expectations.

Price and cost are important factors, with 82% of customers expecting reasonable prices to be accompanied by corresponding service quality. Safety and security are also key factors, with 91% of customers stating that safety and security at the destination are important factors affecting their expectations.

Finally, the diversity and quality of cultural activities are indispensable factors, with 87% of customers wishing to participate in diverse, unique, and high-cultural-value activities. These factors not only affect tourists' expectations but also provide a basis for tourism businesses and management agencies in the Central Highlands to adjust and improve service quality. Meeting and exceeding customer expectations will help enhance cultural tourism experiences in this region, thereby promoting the sustainable development of the cultural tourism industry in the Central Highlands.

1.3. Evaluating the impact of expectations on customer satisfaction and loyalty after the trip

Customer expectations play an important role in shaping satisfaction and loyalty after a trip to the Central Highlands:
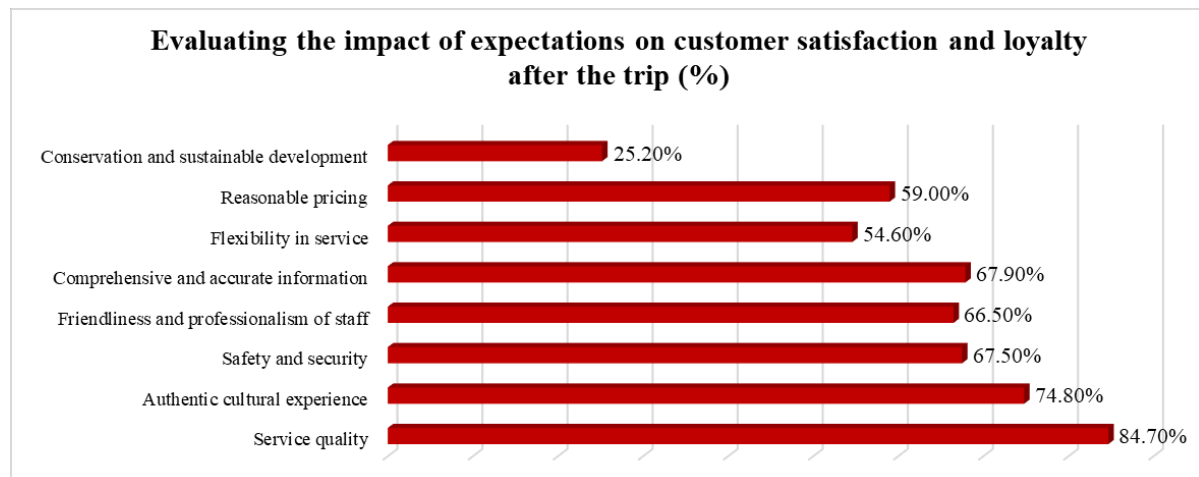
Chart 3: Evaluating the impact of expectations on customer satisfaction and loyalty after the trip

Source: Survey results

Service quality, including accommodation, dining, and support services such as tour guides and sightseeing programs, significantly affects 94% of customers. When these services meet or exceed expectations, customers often feel satisfied and tend to return. Conversely, high dissatisfaction can negatively impact loyalty.

Authentic cultural experiences are also key factors, with 92% of customers stating this is the main reason they visit the Central Highlands. Satisfaction in this area will increase the likelihood of recommending the destination to others. However, dissatisfaction can lead to a significant decline in loyalty.

Safety and security are considered top priorities, with 90% of customers rating them highly. Meeting this expectation not only creates satisfaction but also reinforces loyalty. The friendliness and professionalism of staff, according to 86% of customers, are also very important and directly affect the overall experience.

Complete and accurate information is crucial, with 84% of customers expecting to be provided with accurate information about the destination and activities. Flexibility in services is highly valued by 88% of customers, enhancing satisfaction and the likelihood of return visits. Reasonable prices, according to 85% of customers, must correspond to service quality to build trust and satisfaction.

Sustainable development and cultural preservation are also concerns for 80% of customers. Meeting these

expectations will enhance satisfaction and loyalty. Meeting these expectations not only improves tourism experiences but also contributes to the sustainable development of the cultural tourism industry in the Central Highlands. Businesses and management agencies need to focus on these factors to enhance service quality and promote the long-term development of the industry.

2. Discussion

2.1. Research results according to objectives

This study has achieved its objectives by analyzing the factors affecting customer expectations and evaluating the extent of their impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty after a trip to the Central Highlands. The key factors include service quality, authentic cultural experiences, safety and security, friendliness and professionalism of staff, complete and accurate information, service flexibility, reasonable prices, and sustainable development.

The results show that service quality and authentic cultural experiences are the two factors with the highest impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. This aligns with previous studies on customer satisfaction in the tourism industry, such as the study by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), which emphasizes that service quality is a crucial factor affecting customer satisfaction.

2.2. Related research theories

One prominent theory applied in this research is Oliver's (1980) Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT). According to this theory, customer satisfaction is formed based on a comparison between pre-service expectations and post-service perceptions. If the service outcome exceeds expectations, customers will feel satisfied and tend to be loyal. Our research results align with this theory as high-quality service and well-met authentic cultural experiences lead to higher satisfaction and loyalty.

Additionally, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry's (1988) SERVQUAL theory on service quality was also used to analyze the factors affecting customer satisfaction. SERVQUAL identifies five aspects of service quality: reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy, and tangibles. Our study shows that these aspects play important roles in shaping customer expectations and satisfaction when participating in cultural tourism in the Central Highlands.

2.3. Proposed measures to improve service quality and cultural tourism products in the Central Highlands

Based on the research results, the following measures are proposed to improve the quality of services and cultural tourism products in the Central Highlands:

- Enhance Service Quality: Tourism businesses should focus on training staff to improve professionalism and the ability to meet customer needs. Service quality should be ensured from basic services such as accommodation and dining to support services such as tour guides and sightseeing programs.

- Enhance Authentic Cultural Experiences: Tourism businesses and management agencies should organize more distinctive and traditional cultural activities of the Central Highlands, such as gong festivals, ethnic musical instruments, and daily life activities of local people. This not only helps tourists have authentic experiences but also contributes to the preservation and development of local culture.

- Ensure Safety and Security: Safety and security measures should be enhanced to ensure tourists feel secure throughout their journey. Management agencies and tourism businesses should cooperate to implement crime and accident prevention measures and have emergency response plans.

- Provide Complete and Accurate Information: Tourism businesses should ensure that detailed, clear, and accurate information about destinations, activities, and services is provided. Using modern communication and promotion tools will help customers have a clearer view and form more realistic expectations about the trip.

- Flexibility in Services: Tourism businesses should have flexibility in designing and providing tourism service packages. Customizing services according to customers' personal needs and preferences will create high satisfaction and enhance loyalty.

- Reasonable and Transparent Pricing: Ensuring that service prices correspond to quality and transparency in pricing will help customers feel trusted and satisfied. Businesses should avoid hidden fees and ensure that customers understand the value they receive.

- Sustainable Development: Tourism activities should be developed sustainably, protecting the environment and preserving local culture. Tourism businesses should participate in environmental protection programs and

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encourage customers to engage in responsible tourism activities.

• Encourage Uniqueness and Creativity in Tourism Products: Businesses should continuously innovate and develop new, unique, and creative tourism products. This will help attract customers and create new experiences, thereby enhancing satisfaction and loyalty.

These research results and proposals provide useful information for tourism managers and businesses in the Central Highlands and contribute to the theoretical basis for customer satisfaction and loyalty in the cultural tourism sector. The proposed improvement measures will help enhance the quality of cultural tourism services and products in the Central Highlands, thereby promoting the sustainable development of the tourism industry in this region.

Research recommendations

To continue developing and refining research on the impact of customer expectations on the quality of cultural tourism services and products in the Central Highlands, future research needs to consider the following aspects:

1. First, expand the scope of research in terms of geography and research subjects. Research should be extended to other areas beyond the Central Highlands to compare and contrast, thereby better understanding the differences and similarities in customer expectations at various cultural tourism destinations in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. Simultaneously, research should include service providers, local communities, and other stakeholders to gain a more comprehensive view.

2. Second, delve deeper into the influencing factors. Qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations should be used to gather detailed data on customer experiences and expectations. Additionally, apply advanced quantitative analysis techniques such as regression analysis, factor analysis, and structural equation modeling (SEM) to determine the relationships between influencing factors and customer satisfaction and loyalty.

3. Third, assess the long-term impact of cultural tourism services and products on customer loyalty. Conduct longitudinal studies to track changes in customer expectations and satisfaction over time, as well as evaluate the impact of sustainable development and cultural preservation measures.

4. Fourth, apply technology in research. Use modern technologies such as big data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI), and social media to collect and analyze data on customer expectations and experiences. Additionally, study the impact of digital marketing campaigns on customer expectations to better understand how information dissemination and reception influence customer decisions and expectations.

5. Fifth, develop new, innovative, and unique cultural tourism service models. Encourage collaboration between researchers, tourism businesses, and government agencies to develop and implement sustainable cultural tourism products that meet customer needs and preserve local cultural values.

These studies will help enhance the understanding of customer expectations, thereby improving the quality of cultural tourism services and products in the Central Highlands and other regions.

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SMART TOURISM IN THE CONTEXT OF INDUSTRY 4.0 OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR TOURISM IN TAY NINH PROVINCE

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Abstract

The Fourth Industrial Revolution and its impacts on the tourism industry are significant. This research focuses on providing an overview of tourism development, highlighting the opportunities and challenges that Tay Ninh Province faces in the process of developing smart tourism. The research results indicate that the development of smart tourism will offer numerous opportunities for the local tourism industry, such as promoting tourism images, marketing tourism products, and enabling tourists to easily access destinations. However, the province also faces several challenges, including the need for a smart tourism workforce, infrastructure, and technical facilities.

Nowadays, smart tourism has garnered significant attention for development in many countries around the world, including Vietnam. Tay Ninh Province is located in the Southeast Tourism Region and adjacent to Ho Chi Minh City - the country's tourism hub - has also been planning to gradually implement smart tourism into its development strategies. However, these efforts have not yet yielded effective results and still face many obstacles. This article employs various research methods: data collection and processing, field survey methods, and comprehensive document analysis. The study establishes a theoretical basis for smart tourism, examines the current situation, and explores the potential for tourism development in Tay Ninh Province. Consequently, it proposes solutions for the development of smart tourism, offers recommendations to relevant authorities, and positions the local tourism brand within the current 4.0 industrial trend.

Keywords: Tay Ninh, Smart Tourism, Industry 4.0

1. Introduction

The Fourth Industrial Revolution has prompted various industries to adopt measures for adaptation and modification, with the tourism industry being no exception. Prior to the onset of Industry 4.0, tourism was already recognized as a sector that brought significant benefits and value to many countries, including Vietnam. With the advent of Industry 4.0, new forms of tourism such as "smart tourism," "online tourism," and virtual reality tourism have emerged. These changes have predominantly impacted sectors related to promotion and marketing, followed closely by the tourism service industry. Alongside the challenges posed by Industry 4.0, there are also opportunities for Tay Ninh Province to diversify its tourism offerings to attract more tourists. Recently, Tay Ninh has made progress in developing its tourism industry, particularly in spiritual tourism. However, the implementation of smart tourism in this locality still faces many limitations. Appropriate solutions tailored to the current conditions of the province are necessary to effectively harness smart tourism and achieve high economic benefits.

2. Theoretical basis and research methods

2.1. Theoretical basis of smart tourism

Smart tourism is becoming increasingly popular in countries around the world, including Vietnam. However, to date, this concept lacks a unified definition, as it varies according to different perspectives of researchers.

The Smart Tourism Organization in the UK (2011) defines smart tourism as the use and application of technology in tourism activities, considering it an aspect of smart tourism.

Ning Wang (2014) suggests that the concept of smart tourism originates from the term "Smarter Planet," which serves as the foundation for smart tourism management. This approach leverages a nation's tourism resources with the assistance of cloud computing and network technology to manage tourism in a unified, intelligent, and in-depth manner. It aims to improve decision-making in tourism resource management, expand the service sectors related to

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tourism, and guide tourism activities such as travel, accommodation, dining, shopping, and entertainment. This involves using network technology and placing various sensor devices on different tourism resources to monitor their identification, assets, status, and location.

Gretzel et al. (2015) define smart tourism as tourism supported by integrated efforts at a destination to collect and aggregate data from infrastructure, technical facilities, social connections, government, businesses, other organizations, and individuals. This data is transformed using advanced analytical tools into meaningful experiences and business value propositions that clearly focus on efficiency, sustainability, and enhanced experiences.

Despite the various discussions and definitions of smart tourism, it can be succinctly understood as the application of information technology and technological advancements. This helps tourism managers interact with customers during service usage and enhances customer experience value.

2.2. Research Methodology

Secondary Data Collection and Analysis Method: This method involves gathering and analyzing reference materials from books, newspapers, online articles, as well as documents and statistics from the Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of Tay Ninh Province.

Field Survey Method: This method entails conducting actual surveys at various tourist sites, restaurants, hotels, and shopping areas that cater to the needs of tourists within Tay Ninh Province.

3. Results

3.1. The fourth industrial revolution and Its impact on the tourism industry

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0) has had a direct and profound impact on the socio-economic life, necessitating changes in human activities to adapt to new trends. Despite its limitations, the role of Industry 4.0 in the development of humanity cannot be denied. Tourism is a sensitive sector when it comes to change; however, the advancements of Industry 4.0 have brought about conveniences, business efficiency, and growth in tourism.

Today, the use of smartphones and mobile devices is widespread, and the trend of younger users has facilitated the shift from direct to online transactions. Selling tour packages has become more convenient and less time-consuming compared to traditional methods. Customers no longer need to visit travel companies, agencies, or hotels and restaurants in person to make pre-trip transactions; instead, they can use smart devices for these interactions. Tourism service businesses can also approach customer care, product sales, and complaint resolution more quickly.

Currently, it is easier for tourists to travel as most tasks, such as searching for accommodations, restaurants, flight tickets, and navigation, are no longer as challenging as before the advent of Industry 4.0. For businesses, this is an advantage to disseminate and promote information about tourism products on information platforms and media, enabling tourists, including international ones, to access their offerings. However, alongside these advantages, there are also limitations. Tourists increasingly avoid using services and products through travel companies and instead plan their trips independently to arrange their schedules as they see fit. Additionally, the increased exposure of tourism products forces businesses to continuously improve their offerings and compete on price, as product quality and prices are discussed openly.

Overall, the Fourth Industrial Revolution has introduced various forms of tourism, including smart tourism, and improved the delivery of tourism products to customers. This serves as a foundation for the development of smart tourism in Vietnam in general and Tay Ninh Province in particular.

3.2. Overview of Tourism Development in Tay Ninh Province

Tay Ninh is a province located in the Southeast Tourism Region, bordered by Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) to the east and Long An Province to the south. To the north and west, it shares borders with two Cambodian provinces, Svay Rieng and Kampong Cham, with a nearly 240 km-long border and two international border gates, Moc Bai and Xa Mat, along with several minor border crossings. These geographical advantages provide Tay Ninh with many opportunities for economic and tourism development.

According to the Tay Ninh Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, as of 2020, Tay Ninh Province had 90 recognized heritage sites, including three special national historical sites (Junction City Victory Memorial in Tan Chau town, Tan Chau district; Trang Lon Anti-American War Belt Memorial in Chau Thanh town, Chau Thanh district; and the site of the first Communist Party establishment in Tay Ninh at Giong Nan, Long Vinh commune, Chau Thanh district), 22 national relics, and 57 provincial relics distributed across nine districts and cities. Tay Ninh's famous tourist attraction is Ba Den Mountain, renowned for its majestic scenery and beautiful temples and caves.

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A highlight that draws tourists, particularly followers of the Cao Dai religion, is the Tay Ninh Holy See and several other religious sites. Besides cultural tourism resources, Tay Ninh also boasts diverse natural tourism assets, such as Ba Den Mountain, Dau Tieng Lake, Lo Go-Xa Mat National Park, and Ma Thien Lanh Valley (part of Ba Den Mountain). Additionally, the province hosts several festivals and well-known traditional craft villages, such as the rice paper and Trang Bang noodles.

Statistics from the Tay Ninh Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism show that tourist arrivals in Tay Ninh have remained relatively stable over the years. In 2019, the province welcomed approximately 2.9 million domestic tourists and 8,790 international tourists, generating over 1,000 billion VND in tourism revenue. In 2020, tourist arrivals reached 4,627,114, a 22.8% decrease from 2019, and tourism revenue was 733 billion VND, a 33.3% decrease from 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant decline in 2021, with tourist arrivals dropping to approximately 2,610,000, a 43.6% decrease from 2020, and tourism revenue falling to 600 billion VND, an 18.2% decrease from 2020. However, in 2022, tourism in Tay Ninh rebounded with 4 million visitors and nearly 1,800 billion VND in revenue. In the first nine months of 2023, the province recorded 4.22 million visitors, with estimated tourism revenue of 1,765 billion VND, a 49.7% increase compared to the same period the previous year.

In recent years, Tay Ninh's authorities have made efforts to develop tourism products that align with local conditions. The province has identified cultural tourism linked to the Ba Den Mountain historical and scenic area as a focal point. The aim is to develop this area into a tourism hub with unique products that play a central role in driving the province's tourism development. One challenge Tay Ninh faces is that most visitors do not stay overnight but return to HCMC or neighboring areas, as the province lacks attractive tourism products to keep visitors longer.

Tourism infrastructure in Tay Ninh is not yet fully developed, making access to some tourist sites difficult. The number and quality of accommodation and dining facilities are limited, affecting tourist satisfaction. Currently, Tay Ninh lacks 4- and 5-star hotels and high-capacity, high-quality restaurants. Some tourist sites operate inefficiently, and the budget allocated for tourism activities is low, leading to a general lack of interest in tourism activities.

Additionally, the province's tourism workforce has seen changes over recent years. Between 2017 and 2021, the labor turnover rate was 11%, with direct labor growth at 12.3% and indirect labor growth at 10.4%. Workers with intermediate or higher qualifications make up about 35.5%, while untrained workers constitute 64.5%. Although the management and staff in the tourism sector have received training, there are still limitations in their knowledge of tourism operations and a lack of deep understanding of the tourism service industry. Promotional activities for local tourism products face many challenges due to limited focus and budget constraints. These are obstacles to developing smart tourism in the province, requiring Tay Ninh to devise appropriate plans for budget allocation and development direction.

3.3. Opportunities and challenges in developing smart tourism of Tay Ninh in the Context of industry 4.0

Developing smart tourism in Tay Ninh presents numerous opportunities alongside several challenges that require strategic solutions to transform these challenges into favorable conditions for the province's tourism sector.

Opportunities

* Enhanced access through technology:

Tay Ninh can leverage advancements in information technology to improve tourist access to destinations. Effective utilization of digital media and network-connected devices can allow tourists to conveniently explore and choose suitable destinations and services without extensive time investment.

* Efficient promotion and marketing:

Smart tourism, within the framework of Industry 4.0, offers Tay Ninh the opportunity to promote its unique tourism products and attractions on various information platforms. This digital approach ensures quicker and more effective dissemination compared to traditional methods, attracting a broader audience both domestically and internationally.

* Improved service processes:

The integration of smart systems allows for faster and more efficient negotiation and communication processes. Service procedures can be controlled and updated on information management systems, enabling the tourism sector to adapt quickly to customer changes and needs.

Challenges

* Infrastructure Limitations:

Like many regions in Vietnam, Tay Ninh faces significant infrastructure challenges that hinder the development of smart tourism. Compared to countries with better conditions, Tay Ninh's infrastructure and technical

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facilities are not yet sufficient to meet the demands of smart tourism. Addressing these infrastructure gaps requires long-term investment and substantial funding.

* Economic impact and investment constraints:

While Tay Ninh has seen significant growth in spiritual tourism, most visitors are day-trippers, leading to lower economic returns from the tourism sector. The current economic benefits are insufficient to support the necessary investments in upgrading infrastructure and services.

* Human resource challenges:

Although Tay Ninh's workforce can meet the quantitative demands of tourists, there is a significant shortage of skilled personnel equipped to handle smart tourism. The rapid advancement of Industry 4.0 necessitates a workforce adept in new technologies and smart tourism practices, a gap that Tay Ninh currently struggles to fill.

Strategic Considerations

* Long-term investment plans:

Developing smart tourism requires Tay Ninh to formulate long-term investment strategies. This includes allocating resources efficiently, securing necessary funding, and creating a phased plan to upgrade infrastructure and technological capabilities gradually.

* Leveraging opportunities:

Tay Ninh must identify and capitalize on opportunities to accelerate smart tourism development. This involves enhancing digital marketing efforts, creating partnerships with technology providers, and improving tourist information systems to offer seamless experiences.

* Addressing challenges head-on:

The province must also confront existing challenges directly. This includes improving infrastructure, investing in human resource development, and fostering an environment that encourages technological adoption in the tourism sector. Clear, effective planning and execution are essential to keep pace with the evolving demands of Industry 4.0.

In summary, while Tay Ninh faces both opportunities and challenges in developing smart tourism, strategic planning and effective resource management can help the province navigate these complexities. Embracing technology and improving infrastructure and human resources will be key to successfully implementing smart tourism initiatives and enhancing Tay Ninh's appeal as a modern tourist destination.

4. Conclusion

The development of smart tourism in Tay Ninh Province is a long-term process that requires comprehensive factors including: tourism infrastructure and technical facilities, a skilled workforce for smart tourism, and sufficient financial resources to implement this form of tourism within the province. Moreover, as smart tourism develops in the industry 4.0 era, it brings numerous opportunities for Tay Ninh, yet also presents significant challenges that demand adaptation and strategic planning. The adoption of smart tourism can differentiate Tay Ninh and create competitive advantages. The trend towards smart tourism development in Tay Ninh represents a strategic step, offering many opportunities for the province but also requiring significant investment, technological upgrades, enhanced communication, smart destinations, smart ecosystems, and smart experiences to meet the increasingly high demands of tourists in the current Industry 4.0 trend.

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IMPACT OF AUSTRALIAN WORKING HOLIDAY EXPERIENCES ON PLACE ATTACHMENT, REVISIT INTENTIONS, AND ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

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Extended abstract

This study aimed to explore the effects of Australian working holiday experiences on place attachment, repeat visitation behavior, and consumption. Based on social exchange theory, place attachment theory, and destination image theory, five research hypotheses were proposed. A total of 462 valid questionnaires were collected and analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. The empirical results indicated that Australian working holiday experiences have a significant positive impact on place dependence and place identity. In addition, place dependence and place identity have a significant positive impact on repeat visitation behavior, and repeat visitation behavior has a positive impact on consumption. The findings of this study provide valuable insights for the Australian government and tourism industry to enhance the place attachment and identity of working holidaymakers, thus increasing their intention to revisit and consumption. Therefore, the Taiwan youth working holiday program in Australia has a substantial contribution to the development of Australian tourism economy.

Keywords: Australian Working Holiday Experiences, Place Attachment, Revisiting Behavior, Spending Power

Introduction

In recent years, working holidays have become increasingly popular among young people, especially in destinations like Australia. Working holidaymakers can earn a living while experiencing the local culture, which attracts more and more young people. However, it is an important issue for tourism practitioners and policymakers to enhance working holidaymakers' attachment to the destination, revisiting behavior, and spending power.

Since Taiwan signed the Australian Working Holiday Scheme in 2004, it has attracted many young people who have spent challenging and unforgettable times in Australia. However, past research has not reached a consensus on how this experience affects the local attachment, revisiting behavior, and spending power of working holidaymakers. Therefore, this study will use social exchange theory, place attachment theory, and destination image theory as theoretical foundations to analyze this issue empirically.

First, social exchange theory is a theoretical framework for studying interpersonal interactions, which assumes that people usually consider costs and benefits in social interactions to maximize their gains. In the context of working holidays, interactions between working holidaymakers and local communities can be seen as social exchanges. Past research has revealed the application value of social exchange theory in explaining the relationship between working holidaymakers and local communities (e.g., Ap & Crompton, 1998; Wang & Hsu, 2010).

Second, place attachment theory emphasizes the importance of emotional connections between individuals and specific places. Based on this theory, past research has explored how working holidaymakers establish local dependency and identity in the destination, and how these emotional connections affect their future revisiting intentions and spending power (Lewicka, 2011; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). Previous studies have pointed out that

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place attachment has a significant positive impact on tourists' revisiting intentions and spending power (Chen & Chen, 2010; Huang & Hsu, 2009).

Destination image theory suggests that tourists' cognitive and emotional evaluations of a destination (i.e., destination image) affect their travel decisions, including whether to revisit the destination. A positive, appealing destination image helps attract working holidaymakers and makes them willing to choose the destination again. Therefore, destination image plays a crucial role in revisiting behavior (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Gallarza et al., 2002).

Under the trend of globalization, international travel has become one of the essential ways for many young people to pursue diverse cultural experiences and broaden their horizons. In recent years, the phenomenon of Taiwanese youth going on working holidays in Australia has become more common, not only promoting cultural exchange between the two countries but also driving Australia's tourism economy. Through this study's exploration, it will help us gain a deeper understanding of the impact of place attachment generated during Taiwanese youth's working holiday experience in Australia on their behavior and consumption patterns. At the same time, the research results will provide valuable references for the formulation of market strategies in the Australian tourism industry and cultural exchanges between Taiwan and Australia. In the context of globalization, this study will also serve as a reference for young people from other countries who are considering a working holiday experience abroad, prompting governments and the tourism industry to think deeply about how to enhance tourists' place attachment, expand the potential of the tourism market, and promote international cultural exchange and cooperation.

In conclusion, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence place attachment, revisiting behavior, and spending power of working holidaymakers, particularly those from Taiwan who choose Australia as their destination. By employing social exchange theory, place attachment theory, and destination image theory as the theoretical foundation, this study will empirically analyze the complex relationships among these factors and contribute to the existing body of knowledge in this area.

The findings of this research will not only offer valuable insights for tourism operators and policymakers in both Australia and Taiwan but also serve as a useful reference for other countries with similar working holiday programs. In a globalized world, understanding the experiences of young people who participate in international working holidays is vital for fostering cultural exchanges and cooperation, as well as enhancing the overall appeal of destinations and the growth of the tourism industry.

Literature Review

1. Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory is a theory based on interpersonal relationships, which holds that interactions between individuals are based on mutual giving and expecting returns. The core idea of this theory is that individuals strive for a balance of giving and receiving in their interactions in order to gain maximum benefits. Additionally, social exchange theory suggests that individuals decide whether to continue an interaction based on their evaluations of costs and benefits.

Social exchange theory was first proposed by American sociologist Homans in 1958, and later developed and expanded upon by other scholars such as Blau (1964) and Emerson (1972). These scholars believed that social exchange theory could be applied to a variety of different fields, such as organizational behavior, family studies, and social psychology.

2. Place Attachment Theory

Place attachment theory refers to the emotional attachment people have towards the places they live in. The theory suggests that place attachment is formed by an emotional connection between individuals and the place. This connection may be caused by various factors such as geography, culture, and historical tradition. Place attachment theory holds that place attachment is an emotional bond between humans and their surrounding environment, which can enhance social cohesion and community development. Later, the theory was further developed and applied to fields such as local policy, social psychology, and urban planning. For example, American geographer Relph proposed the "existential sense of place" theory in 1976. He believed that place attachment is an emotional connection between individuals and their place, which can lead to identity, self-worth, and stability.

In the tourism field, place attachment theory is commonly used to study tourists' emotional connections and loyalty to travel destinations. Research indicates that place attachment has a positive influence on tourists' intentions

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to revisit and their consumption behaviors. For example, a tourist with a strong attachment to a place may be more inclined to revisit and spend money in that place.

3. Destination Image Theory

Destination image theory refers to tourists' perceptions and impressions of a destination, including its attractions, culture, history, atmosphere, and other aspects of perception. The theory suggests that tourists' destination choices and satisfaction are influenced by their perception and evaluation of the destination image.

Destination image theory was first proposed by Echtner and Ritchie in 1993 and has since been expanded and developed. Its basic assumption is that tourists' perceptions of a destination image are composed of multiple factors, such as media promotion, recommendations from friends and family, personal experiences, and other factors that influence their impressions and perceptions of the destination. Furthermore, tourists' perceptions and evaluations of the destination image can influence their choices and satisfaction, and even affect the destination's future development.

Destination image theory has been widely applied in tourism research, particularly in destination promotion, brand building, and market research. Researchers have also begun to focus on how tourists form destination images, how they evaluate them, and how they influence the formation and changes of destination images.

4. Derivation of Hypotheses

Based on past research, there is a close relationship between the experiences of tourists in a specific area and their attachment to the place (Lewicka, 2011; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). For Taiwanese youth participating in working holidays in Australia, their experiences in the country may lead them to develop a stronger dependence on the region and form a strong emotional connection. In particular, during their working holiday, they can not only fully understand the local culture, customs, and environment but also establish deep friendships with local residents. Therefore, this study establishes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1a. Australian working holiday experiences have a positive and significant impact on place dependence.

Past research has shown that an individual's sense of identity with a region is largely influenced by their experiences and interactions in that area (Ramkissoon et al., 2012). For Taiwanese youth participating in working holidays in Australia, the experiences they gain there may prompt them to develop a stronger sense of identification with Australian culture, history, and values. During the working holiday, Taiwanese youth have the opportunity to deeply understand Australian society and establish good relationships with locals, which can enhance their sense of place identity (Wang et al., 2019). Therefore, this study establishes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1b. Australian working holiday experiences have a positive and significant impact on place identity.

Past research has indicated that place dependence has a significant positive effect on tourists' revisit behavior (Chen & Chen, 2010; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Knez, 2014). When tourists have a higher degree of dependence on a place, they are more likely to be satisfied with the economic, social, and environmental factors of the region, thereby increasing their willingness to visit again. For Taiwanese youth on working holidays in Australia, the place dependence they establish may make them more willing to revisit Australia to continue enjoying the convenience and satisfaction it offers. Therefore, this study establishes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2a. Place dependence has a positive and significant effect on revisit behavior.

Past research has shown that place identity has a significant positive effect on tourists' revisit behavior (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Ramkissoon et al., 2013; Yuksel et al., 2010). When tourists have a stronger sense of identity with a destination, they are more likely to form emotional connections to the place, thereby increasing their willingness to visit again (Chen & Phou, 2013). For Taiwanese youth participating in Australian working holidays, the place identity they establish may make them more willing to revisit Australia to continue exploring and experiencing its culture and customs. Therefore, this study establishes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2b. Place identity has a positive and significant effect on revisit behavior.

Past research has shown that there is a significant positive relationship between revisit behavior and spending power (Oppermann, 2000; Petrick, 2004; Chen & Gursoy, 2001). When tourists revisit a destination, they often have a deeper understanding of the local environment, facilities, and services, making them more confident and willing to

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try new things in terms of local consumption (Kim et al., 2006; Huang & Hsu, 2009). Moreover, repeat tourists may have higher expectations for the destination's travel products and services, leading them to be more generous in their spending. Therefore, this study establishes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3. Revisit behavior has a positive and significant impact on spending power.

In summary, this research proposes several hypotheses to explore the relationships between working holiday experiences in Australia, place dependence, place identity, revisit behavior, and spending power for Taiwanese youth. These hypotheses aim to provide insights into the factors that contribute to the formation of place attachment and how these attachments may influence tourists' willingness to revisit and their spending behavior. The findings from this research could help tourism industry stakeholders better understand the motivations and behaviors of working holiday participants, allowing them to develop more effective strategies to attract and retain this valuable market segment.

Methods

1. Conceptual Framework

This study is primarily based on social exchange theory, place attachment theory, and destination image theory, incorporating working holiday experiences in Australia, place dependence, place identity, revisit behavior, and spending power as the main dimensions, and establishing an integrated framework. Firstly, the research investigates the impact of working holiday experiences in Australia on place dependence and place identity. It then further analyzes the influence of place dependence and place identity on revisit behavior. Lastly, the research focuses on the impact of revisit behavior on spending power. Through this conceptual framework, the study aims to reveal how working holiday participants' experiences in Australia affect their emotional connections to the local area, and how these emotional connections influence their future willingness to revisit and spending power. The conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1.
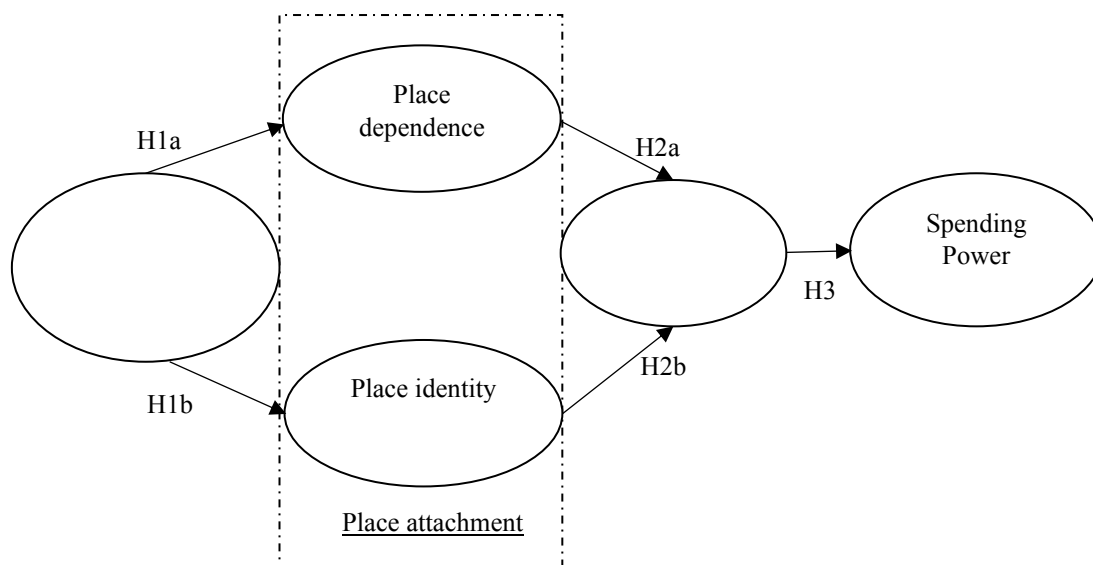
Figure 1. Conceptual framework

2. Measures

The demographic variables of this study include: gender, education level, marital status, family situation, age, and past travel experiences in Australia. Responses to the questions were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 point for "strongly disagree" to 5 points for "strongly agree". The following are the operational definitions of the five dimensions and the corresponding measurement items, along with the relevant literature support:

Working Holiday Experience in Australia

Operational definition: The work, life, and travel experiences of Taiwanese youth participating in the Australian working holiday program.

Measurement items:

a. My work experiences during my working holiday in Australia were diverse and colorful. (Wang & Hsu, 2010)

b. My life experiences during my working holiday in Australia helped me grow. (Wang & Hsu, 2010)

c. I visited many tourist attractions during my working holiday in Australia. (Uriely & Reichel, 2000)

d. I met people from different cultural backgrounds during my working holiday in Australia. (Carr, 2002)

Place Dependence

Operational definition: The degree of a tourist's dependence on the destination, including economic, social, and environmental factors.

Measurement items:

a. Australia provides the job opportunities and resources I need. (Stokols & Shumaker, 1981)

b. I am satisfied with the social networks and community in Australia. (Lewicka, 2011)

c. In Australia, I can find suitable leisure activities and entertainment venues. (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001)

d. I like Australia's natural environment and scenery. (Kyle et al., 2004)

Place Identity

Operational definition: The emotional identification of tourists with the destination and the psychological connections established with the destination.

Measurement items:

a. I am proud of Australia's culture and history. (Proshansky et al., 1983)

b. Australia holds special meaning and value for me. (Hernández et al., 2010)

c. I feel a deep emotional connection with Australia. (Hernández et al., 2010)

d. I am willing to introduce and recommend Australia to others. (Ramkissoon et al., 2012)

Revisit Behavior

Operational definition: The willingness and behavior of tourists to visit Australia again within a certain period.

Measurement items:

a. I am likely to visit Australia again within the next few years. (Oppermann, 2000)

b. I plan to make Australia my top destination for future vacations. (Petrick, 2004)

c. I am willing to return to Australia regularly to explore new tourist attractions. (Chen & Gursoy, 2001)

d. Compared to other countries, I prefer to vacation in Australia. (Kozak, 2001)

Spending Power

Operational definition: The spending power of tourists during their trip to Australia, including the consumption of travel-related products and services.

Measurement items:

a. During my trip to Australia, I would invest more in accommodation. (Brida et al., 2014)

b. While traveling in Australia, I am willing to try high-quality local dining. (Brida et al., 2014)

c. I will purchase souvenirs and gifts during my trip to Australia. (Mok & Iverson, 2000)

d. I am willing to participate in local tourism activities and cultural experiences. (Mok & Iverson, 2000)

3. Sample and Procedure

In the pilot stage, this study plans to select 50 young travelers who have previously participated in working holidays in Australia for pretesting. In the formal questionnaire survey stage, this study adopts convenience sampling to select the sample. The sampling procedure for the formal survey is as follows: This study distributes questionnaires through Australian working holiday agencies and travel agencies handling Australian travel. These agencies and travel agencies are located in Taipei City, New Taipei City, Taichung City, and Kaohsiung City to avoid issues with insufficient representation in the sample. This questionnaire survey is divided into two collection methods. One is an online questionnaire; if travelers cannot complete it on the spot, they are asked to provide their email address, and the online questionnaire is sent to them for completion. The other method is an on-site questionnaire provided for

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on-site travelers to complete. The questionnaire interviewers have received professional training and conduct the survey without causing inconvenience to travelers.

The questionnaire distribution period is from November 2022 to March 2023, with a total of 600 questionnaires administered. A total of 513 samples were collected, with 462 valid questionnaires. The valid response rate is 77%. The uncollected questionnaires are mostly online questionnaires. Among the valid questionnaires, 253 are on-site questionnaires and 209 are online questionnaires.

In the distribution of the sample structure, there are 283 males and 179 females in terms of gender. In terms of education level, there are 321 university graduates and 141 graduate school (and above) graduates. In terms of marital status, 308 are single and 154 are married. In terms of family status, 108 have children and 354 do not have children. In terms of age, there are 150 people aged 25 (and below), 138 people aged 26 to 30, 94 people aged 31 to 35, 50 people aged 36 to 40, and 30 people aged 41 and above. Since Taiwan and Australia signed the Working Holiday Program for young people in 2004, the age limit is set between 18 and 30 years old. The oldest individuals who went on working holidays in Australia at that time are not yet 50 years old. Therefore, the highest age range in this study is set at 41 years old and above. There are 352 people who have traveled to Australia once after their working holiday, 62 with two Australian travel experiences, and 48 with three (and above) Australian travel experiences.

To confirm the representativeness of the research sample, this study uses the wave analysis method to evaluate the effects of non-response. Therefore, by comparing the first batch of filled-in data (respondents who responded earlier) with the second batch of filled-in data (respondents who responded later), the non-response bias is assessed (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). According to Armstrong and Overton (1977), using a t-test to compare the key characteristics of the early response data and the late response data, such as the age of the travelers, there is no significant difference in age between the early and late respondents at the 5% significance level. Therefore, the non-response bias in this study is not significant.

Empirical Results

1. Analytical Results of Common Method Variance

When a respondent answers all variables or measurements, it is easy to generate a single source bias, which may lead to the problem of common method variance (CMV) in the study (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To prevent this, the present study used methods such as anonymous information collection and reverse item design.

In addition, Harman's single factor analysis was used to conduct a post-test examination of the common method variance (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). After performing an exploratory factor analysis on all measurement items, the study identified five factors that accounted for 65.649% of the total variance, with factor 1 accounting for only 33.74% of the variance, which did not exceed the judgment standard of 50%. Therefore, the problem of common method variance in this study is not too serious (Mossholder et al., 1998).

2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

The results of descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis for each study variable are shown in Table 1. All variables showed significant positive correlations with each other.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Working holiday experience	1				
2. Place dependence	.416**	1			
3. Place identity	.417**	.311**	1		
4. Revisit behavior	.399**	.351**	.438**	1	
5. Spending Power	.369**	.324**	.317**	.562**	1
Mean	4.2965	3.9816	3.6791	3.6667	4.0731
S.D.	.41592	.55298	.73768	.72590	.54459

** p<0.01, n=462

3. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis is used to test the measurement model. As shown in Table 2, all t-values of the loadings of the measurement items on their respective latent variables are higher than the significant level of 1.96.

The factor loadings (λ) of all observed variables on their respective latent variables range from 0.32 to 0.88, with most values meeting the threshold of 0.45 or higher proposed by Bentler and Wu (1993) for convergent validity. The individual item reliabilities of the observed variables range from 0.10 to 0.77, with most values meeting the threshold of 0.20 or higher proposed by Bentler and Wu (1993) for single-item reliability, indicating that all observed variables are reliable. The composite reliabilities (CRs) of the five constructs range from 0.74 to 0.87, with all values exceeding the threshold of 0.6 recommended by previous scholars for the CR of latent variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), indicating that the constructs are reliable. The average variances extracted (AVEs) of the five constructs range from 0.45 to 0.63, with all values exceeding the threshold of 0.36 as the minimum acceptable level (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), indicating that the constructs have convergent validity. Only two items in the local dependence construct did not meet the criterion of factor loading greater than 0.45 (0.32 and 0.43) and individual item reliability greater than 0.2 (0.10 and 0.18), but the CR and AVE of the local dependence construct met the threshold, indicating reliability and convergent validity. Therefore, this does not affect the subsequent analysis.

Table 2. Individual item reliability, composite reliability, and average variance extracted

Construct	No. of items	Factor loading (λ)	Individual item reliability (λ^2)	t-value	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
1. Working holiday experience	4	0.64~0.77	0.41~0.59	13.90~17.43	0.78	0.48
2. Place dependence	4	0.32~0.88	0.10~0.77	6.59~20.49	0.74	0.45
3. Place identity	4	0.66~0.80	0.44~0.64	14.82~19.12	0.83	0.56
4. Revisit behavior	4	0.71~0.79	0.50~0.62	16.51~19.23	0.84	0.56
5. Spending Power	4	0.72~0.82	0.52~0.67	17.21~20.53	0.87	0.63

χ^2=509.90; df=160; RMSEA=0.069

4. SEM Analysis and Goodness-of-Fit Test

Table 3 shows the analysis results of the goodness of fit of the structural equation model. In testing the overall model fit, this study used three types of indicators: absolute fit measures, incremental fit measures, and parsimonious fit measures. If the fit of the statistical model is closer to the ideal value, the usability of the model will be higher, and the estimated parameters will have more strategic implications (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

In terms of absolute fit measures, Doll et al. (1994) suggested that the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) can be relaxed to above 0.8, and MacCallum and Hong (1997) suggested that the Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) can be relaxed to above 0.8. The Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) should be less than 0.05, and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) should be less than 0.08. In this study, the GFI was 0.894, AGFI was 0.865, RMR was 0.0455, and RMSEA was 0.0709, indicating that the model fit is still within a reasonable and acceptable range.

In terms of incremental fit measures, a Normed Fit Index (NFI), Relative Fit Index (RFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), or Comparative Fit Index (CFI) greater than 0.9 indicates a good fit of the model (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). In this study, the NFI was 0.939, RFI was 0.930, IFI was 0.956, and CFI was 0.956, indicating that the model fit is still within a reasonable and acceptable range.

In terms of parsimonious fit measures, this study's proposed theoretical model (χ^2/df = 3.315) showed that the model fit was acceptable. It is generally required that χ^2/df be less than 3 (Kline, 2005), and Schumacker and Lomax (2004) considered a more lenient criterion, where χ^2/df less than 5 is acceptable. A Parsimony Goodness of Fit Index (PGFI) and a Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI) greater than 0.5 indicate that the model is not overly complex (Mulaik et al., 1989). In this study, the PGFI was 0.702 and the PNFI was 0.815, indicating that the model was not overly complex. Therefore, the goodness of fit of this study's theoretical model is still within a reasonable and acceptable range.

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Table 3. Results of the goodness of fit indexes

Fit measures	Index	Standard value	Result
Absolute fit measures	χ^2	−	546.93
	Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	＞0.80	0.894
	Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	＞0.80	0.865
	Root Mean Square Residual (RMR)	＜0.05	0.0455
	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	＜0.08	0.0709
Incremental fit measures	Normed Fit Index (NFI)	＞0.90	0.939
	Relative Fit Index (RFI)	>0.90	0.930
	Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	＞0.90	0.956
	Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	＞0.90	0.956
Parsimonious fit measures	χ^2/ d.f.	＞0.90	0.939
	Parsimony Goodness of Fit Index (PGFI)	>0.90	0.930
	Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI)	＞0.90	0.956

5. Causal Path Analysis of the Theoretical Model

This study verified the causal pathway relationships in the theoretical model, and the analysis results are shown in Table 4. The parameter estimation results of the theoretical model are as follows: Working Holiday Experience in Australia (ξ_1) has a significant positive effect on Place Dependence (η_1) (γ_{11} = 0.43, t-value = 7.53). Working Holiday Experience in Australia (ξ_1) has a significant effect on Place Identity (η_2) (γ_{21} = 0.52, t-value = 8.58). Place Dependence (η_1) has a significant positive effect on Revisiting Behavior (η_3) (β_{31} = 0.24, t-value = 4.70). Place Identity (η_2) has a significant positive effect on Revisiting Behavior (η_3) (β_{32} = 0.47, t-value = 8.32). Revisiting Behavior (η_3) has a significant positive effect on Consumption Power (η_4) (β_{43} = 0.66, t-value = 11.85).

Table 4. Parameter estimates for structural equations model

Hypothesized model (Paths)	Parameter estimates	T-value	Results
H1a：Working holiday experience $\xi_1 \rightarrow$ Place dependence η_1 (γ_{11})	0.43	7.53	Supported
H1b：Working holiday experience $\xi_1 \rightarrow$ Place identity η_2 (γ_{21})	0.52	8.58	Supported
H2a：Place dependence $\eta_1 \rightarrow$ Revisit behavior η_3 (β_{31})	0.24	4.70	Supported
H2b：Place identity s $\eta_2 \rightarrow$ Revisit behavior η_3 (β_{32})	0.47	8.32	Supported
H3：Revisit behavior $\eta_3 \rightarrow$ Spending Power η_4 (β_{43})	0.66	11.85	Supported

** p<0.01

6. Direct and Indirect Effect Analysis

In the influence of Australian working holiday experience on repeat visitation behavior, there are two paths: one is through place dependence to affect repeat visitation behavior, and the other is through place identity to affect repeat visitation behavior. The analysis results are shown in Table 5. The result shows that the impact through place identity is greater (total effect = 0.2444).

In the influence of place attachment on consumer behavior, there are also two paths: one is place dependence affecting consumer behavior through repeat visitation behavior, and the other is place identity affecting consumer behavior through repeat visitation behavior. The analysis results are shown in Table 6. The result shows that the impact through place identity via repeat visitation behavior is greater (total effect = 0.3102).

Table 5. Results of direct and indirect effect analysis of revisit behavior

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Factors	Direct effects	Indirect effects via		Total effects
		Place dependence η_1	Place identity η_2	
Working holiday experience ξ_1	—	$\gamma_{11} \times \beta_{31}=0.43\times0.24$	—	0.1032
Working holiday experience ξ_1	—	—	$\gamma_{21} \times \beta_{32}=0.52\times0.47$	0.2444

Table 6. Results of direct and indirect effect analysis of spending power

Factors	Direct effects	Indirect effects via	Total effects
		Revisit behavior η_3	
Place dependence η_1	—	$\beta_{31} \times \beta_{43}=0.24\times0.66$	0.1584
Place identity η_2	—	$\beta_{32} \times \beta_{43}=0.47\times0.66$	0.3102

Conclusion

This study investigates the relationships between Australian working holiday experiences and their impacts on place attachment, revisit intention, and tourism expenditure, confirming five research hypotheses. The results demonstrate that Australian working holiday experiences positively and significantly influence both place dependence and place identity, aligning with previous studies (e.g., Wang & Hsu, 2010; Hernández et al., 2010). Furthermore, both place dependence and place identity significantly enhance revisit intention, supporting the findings of Lewicka (2011) and Jorgensen and Stedman (2001). Finally, revisit intention positively impacts tourism expenditure, corroborating Petrick's (2004) results.

In essence, this study underscores the crucial role of Australian working holiday experiences in fostering place attachment, revisit intention, and increased tourism expenditure. These findings not only reinforce existing literature but also provide new insights and a theoretical framework for future research. The study highlights the significance of these experiences in enhancing place attachment and revisit intentions, which in turn boost tourism expenditure, elucidating the interaction and influence mechanisms among these factors.

In conclusion, the empirical validation of five research hypotheses in this study elucidates the relationships between Australian working holiday experiences and place attachment, revisit intention, and tourism expenditure. These insights offer valuable references and guidance for policymakers and tourism operators, establishing a foundation for future research in related fields.

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EXPLORING THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN ECOLOGICAL CONSERVATION, TOURISM, AND SUSTAINABILITY IN LANYU: THE CASE OF OTUS ELEGANS BOTELENSIS

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Extended abstract

This study, from the perspective of the indigenous tribes of Lanyu, delves into the relationship between the ecological conservation of "Otus elegans botelensis," its societal implications, tourism impacts, and sustainable development. An integrated framework, grounded in social exchange and place attachment theories, was designed for this research. A questionnaire was developed and used to collect 364 valid samples. The primary analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling to assess how the ecological conservation of "Otus elegans botelensis" influences societal implications and how it indirectly affects the local identity and sustainable development of Lanyu through its impacts on tourism, both positive and negative. An intriguing finding of the research is that, despite potential adverse tourism impacts caused by ecological conservation, the indigenous Tao people residing in Lanyu continue to strengthen their sense of local identity.

Keywords: *Otus elegans botelensis, Ecological Conservation, Social Implications, Tourism Impact, Sustainable Development, Place Identity*

Introduction

In recent years, the global tourism industry's growth has provided economic benefits but also dual impacts on various regions (Unurlu, 2021). Lanyu, a picturesque island southeast of Taiwan, is no exception. While tourism has boosted the local economy, it has also affected local culture, ecology, and social dimensions. A notable example is the "Lanyu Scops Owl (Otus elegans botelensis)," an endemic nocturnal species. Traditionally, the Tao people saw this owl as an ill omen, but it has since become a tourist attraction (Lee & Severinghaus, 2004).

Balancing economic development with cultural and ecological conservation is critical for local managers and stakeholders. The Social Exchange Theory suggests people evaluate costs and benefits in social interactions to maximize gains (Blau, 1964). Thus, while conserving "Otus elegans botelensis" benefits tourism, it also has negative impacts. The Place Attachment Theory emphasizes emotional connections to places (Song, Chen, & Zeng, 2022). This research explores respecting local culture and ecology while considering stakeholder interests and promoting sustainable tourism.

Previous studies, such as Berry, Nickerson, & Metcalf (2016) in Montana, showed that gray wolf conservation had mixed economic and tourism effects. However, the impact of ecological conservation on local tourism, both positive and negative, is less explored. This research aims to address this gap, focusing on the relationship between the conservation of "Otus elegans botelensis," tourism impacts, and sustainable development. The goal is to provide strategic guidance for Lanyu's tourism development, emphasizing long-term sustainability by protecting natural and cultural resources.

This study examines the relationship between ecological conservation, societal implications, tourism impacts,

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and sustainable development, focusing on "Otus elegans botelensis." The research questions include:

(1) How does the role of "Otus elegans botelensis" in ecological conservation influence its societal significance?

(2) Does the conservation of "Otus elegans botelensis" cause significant positive or negative impacts on Lanyu's tourism?

(3) How do conservation activities and tourism impacts affect local residents' sense of place identity?

(4) How do societal meanings and perceptions of "Otus elegans botelensis" influence local identity?

(5) How does local residents' place identity drive or constrain sustainable development strategies in Lanyu?

These questions aim to reveal the interactions among cultural, ecological, and developmental factors in Lanyu and provide strategic recommendations for sustainable development.

Literature Review and Development of Research Hypotheses

The Otus elegans botelensis is a species endemic to Lanyu (Lee & Severinghaus, 2004) and its existence holds significant importance for ecological diversity as well as profound symbolic meaning in cultural and social aspects. In many indigenous cultures, specific flora and fauna are often closely associated with myths, legends, and traditional customs. Therefore, if the Otus elegans botelensis occupies a special place in local culture, conservation efforts for this species might enhance its symbolic significance within the culture, thereby deepening societal identification and connection.

Furthermore, through conservation education and promotional activities about the Otus elegans botelensis, the public can gain a deeper understanding of its ecological value and cultural significance. This not only helps to raise their awareness of environmental protection but also may lead them to cherish and identify more with the unique ecology and culture of Lanyu. The local tourism industry could also benefit from this, as the ecological conservation achievements of the Otus elegans botelensis and the stories behind it could become significant attractions for tourists.

Additionally, when ecological conservation becomes a common goal of the community, it may lead to greater unity and collaboration among local residents, thereby strengthening their connections and social cohesion (Keling, Ho, Yap, & Entebang, 2021). Working together for the conservation of the Otus elegans botelensis could also enhance local residents' sense of identity with their culture and social identity. Therefore, based on the aforementioned reasoning, this study establishes Hypothesis 1a.

Hypothesis 1a. The ecological conservation of the Otus elegans botelensis has a positive significant impact on societal implications.

The Otus elegans botelensis, as an endemic species of Lanyu, bestows the island with a degree of uniqueness and differentiation. In the era of globalization and mass tourism, tourists often seek one-of-a-kind experiences, which are usually derived from local natural and cultural features (Kim, 2010).

When the Otus elegans botelensis is effectively conserved and its image is disseminated through various media and promotional activities, it is likely to be established as a significant 'brand' or symbol of Lanyu. Tourists, especially those interested in nature and ecotourism, might be drawn to this unique ecological experience. Moreover, the activities and outcomes of ecological conservation themselves could become a focal point for tourists' visits and learning. For example, tourists could visit the habitat of the Otus elegans botelensis or participate in related educational and promotional activities, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of this bird species and Lanyu's ecological environment.

Furthermore, effective conservation of the Otus elegans botelensis, supported jointly by tourists and local residents, could create a 'positive cycle'. This implies that the economic benefits brought by tourists' visits and spending could be reinvested in the conservation of the Otus elegans botelensis and other environmental efforts, thus attracting more tourists in turn. Therefore, based on the aforementioned reasoning, this study establishes Hypothesis 1b.

Hypothesis 1b. The ecological conservation of the Otus elegans botelensis leads to positive tourism impacts on Lanyu.

When discussing the ecological conservation of the Otus elegans botelensis, while the potential economic and branding value cannot be overlooked, there may also be some adverse tourism impacts associated with it.

Initially, to ensure the ecological conservation of the Otus elegans botelensis, it might be necessary to restrict tourism activities in certain areas. For instance, crucial breeding or habitat areas could be designated as protected zones, limiting access for tourists. Although such measures are beneficial for the survival and reproduction of the

species, they could result in some economic losses from a short-term tourism economic perspective. Furthermore, increased promotional efforts to attract visitors for 'birdwatching' could lead to crowds that exert pressure on Lanyu's ecological environment, including noise pollution, waste management issues, and damage to other ecosystems. Excessive tourism activities could gradually degrade the island's natural beauty and ecological balance.

Moreover, for the local inhabitants, there might be shifts in culture or lifestyle. The influx of a large number of tourists might introduce external cultures, potentially leading to cultural conflicts or clashes in values, particularly for conservative or traditional communities. Additionally, to cater to tourists, localities might develop commercial activities that do not align with local culture or values.

In summary, while conservation measures are beneficial for the Otus elegans botelensis and Lanyu's ecological environment in the long run, they could result in a series of adverse tourism impacts in the short term. Therefore, this study establishes Hypothesis 1c.

Hypothesis 1c. The ecological conservation of the Otus elegans botelensis leads to negative tourism impacts on Lanyu.

In many sociocultural contexts, specific flora and fauna are often linked with societal implications, traditions, or cultural values (Balding & Williams, 2016). For the Otus elegans botelensis, this unique ecological symbol might hold a special place within the local community. Effective ecological conservation efforts for this species, emphasizing its conservation value, are not only a protection of the species but also a respect and preservation of the sociocultural implications it represents.

Looking further, when local people engage with ecological conservation activities for the Otus elegans botelensis, they may gain a deeper understanding and recognition of the societal meanings behind it. Such understanding and recognition could lead them to value their culture and traditions more, strengthening their sense of identification with Lanyu. In other words, locals might perceive their efforts not just as for the Otus elegans botelensis but also as a commitment to preserving their culture and traditions. Moreover, when tourists or other non-locals express high interest and respect for the ecological conservation of the Otus elegans botelensis, it could further enhance the pride of locals in their land and culture, thereby promoting their local identity.

In summary, since the ecological conservation activities of the Otus elegans botelensis may reinforce locals' recognition of the value of their culture and traditions, thereby enhancing their sense of local identity, this study establishes Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 2. The societal implications of the ecological conservation of the Otus elegans botelensis have a significant positive impact on local identity.

When a location experiences positive tourism impacts, such as increased tourism revenue, more job opportunities, and enhanced cultural exchange opportunities, these can strengthen the economic and social vitality of the local community (Slabbert, du Plessis, & Digun-Aweto, 2021). Such prosperity and sense of achievement often deepen the local residents' identification and pride in their community.

Firstly, the growth of the tourism economy can make local residents feel that their homeland is appreciated and valued, reinforcing their emotional attachment to it (Prasad, Bindu, & Dixit, 2023). For example, when tourists praise the natural beauty, culture, and traditions of Lanyu, local residents may feel prouder and more fulfilled. Secondly, as the tourism industry develops, local infrastructure and services may improve, making the living environment more habitable. This not only provides a better quality of life for locals but may also make them feel that their place of residence has a unique appeal. Lastly, cultural exchange is another significant benefit brought about by tourism. When tourists and locals interact and communicate, they not only share their stories and experiences but may also affirm and rediscover their own cultures and values. This reaffirmation and recognition of culture may further solidify the locals' identification with their culture and homeland.

Based on the above inferences, the positive impacts of tourism may enhance the local residents' sense of identification with their homeland. Hence, this study establishes Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 3. Positive tourism impacts have a significant positive effect on local identity.

Negative tourism impacts, such as environmental pollution, destruction of cultural heritage, and a decline in the quality of life in local communities, can affect residents' local identity (Tang, Yuan, Ramos, & Sriboonchitta, 2019). These impacts may lead local residents to feel that their home, culture, and values are threatened or disrespected.

Firstly, environmental pollution and overdevelopment can degrade the local natural beauty and ecosystems, leading to negative feelings about their homeland. For instance, if Lanyu faces severe garbage issues or ecological damage due to tourism activities, locals might feel that their home is losing its original beauty and character. Secondly, excessive tourism activities might lead to the damage of local cultural heritage (Moisescu, Gica, Coros, & Yallop, 2019). Local traditions and customs might be commercialized or misrepresented, causing residents to feel that their culture is being demeaned or overlooked. Furthermore, the rapid development of the tourism industry leading to price hikes or a decline in community life quality might cause distress and pressure on local residents (Mihalic & Kuscer, 2022). This pressure might lead to a sense of alienation from their place of residence, thus weakening their local identity.

Based on the above inferences, negative tourism impacts might lead to a diminished or alienated sense of local identity among residents, hence the establishment of Hypothesis 4 in this study.

Hypothesis 4. Negative tourism impacts have a significant negative effect on local identity.

Place identity involves residents' profound emotional connection and identification with the place they inhabit. When residents possess a strong sense of place identity towards their community or region, they are likely more inclined to invest in its future and preserve its uniqueness (Yang, Wang, Cai, & Zhou, 2022).

Firstly, when local residents have a strong emotional attachment to their homeland, they may place greater emphasis on its long-term well-being. This can manifest in their participation and decision-making, such as supporting or engaging in environmental conservation activities (Li, Wu, & Deng, 2022), promoting green community development projects, or protecting local cultural heritage (Siddiqui, Sujood, Bano, & Hamid, 2023). Furthermore, the sense of place identity among local residents could also enhance their sense of responsibility towards local resources. For example, they might focus more on the use of local renewable resources, support sustainable business practices, or participate in community planning to ensure balanced economic, social, and environmental development. In addition, place identity might encourage collaboration and community cohesion among residents (Uzzell, Pol, & Badenas, 2022). When residents collectively identify with a place and its values, they are more likely to form groups to jointly promote sustainable development strategies and projects.

In conclusion, when local residents have a strong sense of place identity, they may be more willing and motivated to invest in sustainable development measures and strategies, ensuring the long-term prosperity and well-being of the place they cherish. Therefore, this study establishes Hypothesis 5.

Hypothesis 5. Place identity has a significant positive impact on sustainable development.

Methods

1. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

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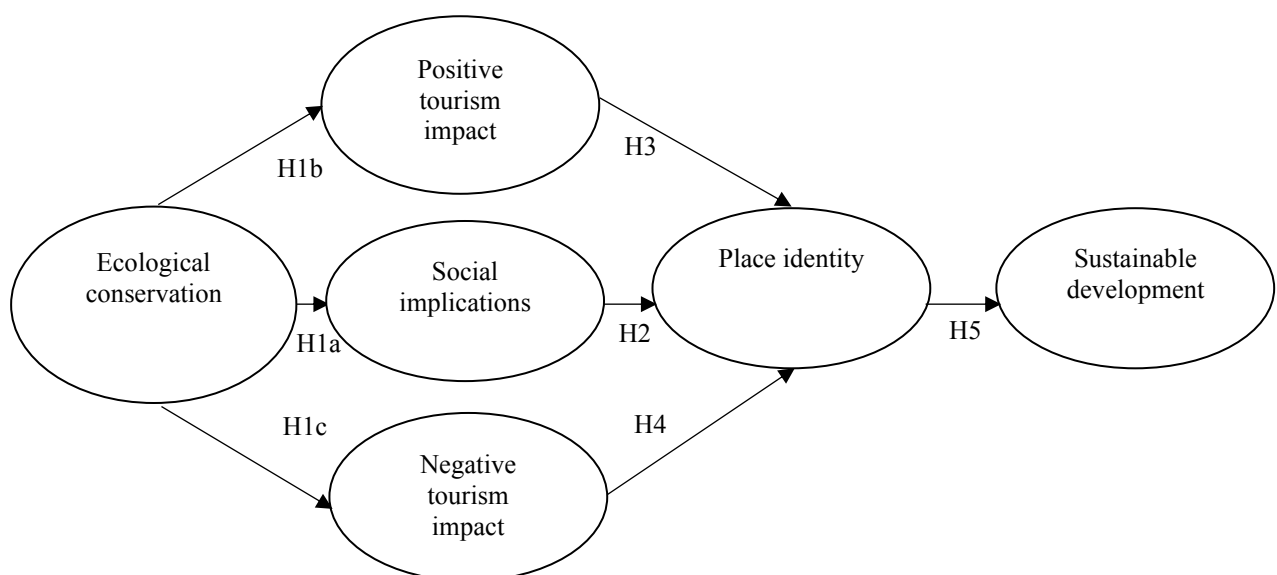
2. Operational Definition and Measurement of Variables

Ecological conservation of the Otus elegans botelensis

The ecological conservation of the Otus elegans botelensis is defined operationally in this study as a series of strategic, sustainable, and scientific actions and plans aimed at maintaining and enhancing the habitat, population, and biodiversity of the Otus elegans botelensis. These efforts ensure the species is protected from excessive human interference or destruction.

Drawing on the research of James, Gaston, & Balmford (1999), and Berkes (2004), this study measures the ecological conservation of the Otus elegans botelensis using four items. These items, based on the aforementioned operational definition and relevant literature, are designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the respondents' perceptions and knowledge of the ecological conservation of the Otus elegans botelensis.

(1) I believe that the local government and organizations of Lanyu have established effective conservation plans for the Otus elegans botelensis.

(2) I believe that the current ecological environment of the Otus elegans botelensis is severely affected by human interference or destruction.

(3) I think that the local community of Lanyu is actively involved in the conservation activities of the Otus elegans botelensis.

(4) I believe that the current conservation resources (such as funding, manpower, facilities, etc.) are sufficient to support the ecological conservation efforts of the Otus elegans botelensis.

Social implications

Social implications refer to the meanings, values, and impacts that a certain object, phenomenon, or activity holds within a social or cultural context. These implications are closely related to the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of a social community and can influence the interactions and sense of identity among community members.

Based on the study of Douglas (2002), this research measures social implications using four items. These items aim to understand the respondents' perceptions of the significance and impact of the Otus elegans botelensis within Lanyu's society and explore its role and status in culture, history, and social interactions.

(1) I believe that the Otus elegans botelensis represents some cultural or historical significance in Lanyu's society.

(2) Stories or legends related to the Otus elegans botelensis influence my understanding and perception of Lanyu's society.

(3) I think that the significance of the Otus elegans botelensis is widely recognized by members of the Lanyu community.

(4) I believe that the Otus elegans botelensis has an impact on local community activities or rituals in Lanyu.

Positive tourism impact

Positive tourism impact refers to the favorable effects resulting from tourism activities, including economic growth, increased job opportunities, promotion and preservation of local culture, and constructive contributions to the local environment and community.

Drawing from Sinclair's (1998) research, this study measures positive tourism impact using four items. These items aim to assess the respondents' perception and evaluation of the positive impacts generated by tourism activities in Lanyu.

(1) I believe that tourism activities have brought significant economic growth to Lanyu.

(2) I think that tourism activities have created more job opportunities in Lanyu.

(3) I feel that due to tourism activities, the culture and traditions of Lanyu have been better promoted.

(4) I believe that tourism activities have led to an increased focus and investment in environmental protection in Lanyu.

Negative tourism impact

Negative tourism impact refers to the adverse effects caused by tourism activities, including environmental degradation, distortion or commercialization of community culture, excessive economic dependence, and

overconsumption of local resources.

Based on the research by Gössling (2002), this study measures negative tourism impact using four items. These items are designed to explore the respondents' awareness and evaluation of the negative impacts generated by tourism activities in Lanyu.

(1) I believe that tourism activities in Lanyu have led to the degradation or destruction of the local natural environment.

(2) I feel that due to tourism, the traditional culture and values of Lanyu have been distorted or overly commercialized in some aspects.

(3) I think Lanyu's economy is overly dependent on tourism to the extent that other potential economic development directions are neglected.

(4) I believe that tourism activities in Lanyu have led to the overconsumption of local resources, such as water or food supply.

Place identity

Place identity refers to an individual or community's emotional connection, sense of identification, and belonging to a geographical area. This sense of identity stems from shared experiences, culture, history, and values associated with the place, as well as emotional projections onto its natural and built environment.

Based on the research by Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff (1983), this study measures place identity using four items. These items aim to assess respondents' sense of place identity with Lanyu and explore their connection to and perception of the uniqueness of Lanyu.

(1) I feel a close connection to the natural environment and cultural characteristics of Lanyu.

(2) I feel a sense of belonging when I am in Lanyu.

(3) I believe the history and traditions of Lanyu have a profound impact on my personal values and perceptions.

(4) I think Lanyu is distinct and unique compared to other places.

Sustainable development

Sustainable development is defined as meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It encompasses three main development areas: economic, social, and environmental, focusing on long-term balance and holistic development.

Based on the research by Pearce & Atkinson (1993), this study measures sustainable development using four items. These items are designed to assess respondents' perceptions and evaluations of sustainable development in Lanyu, as well as their considerations related to the local environment, society, and economy.

(1) I believe the development activities in Lanyu take into account the carrying capacity of the local environment.

(2) In Lanyu's development strategies, I think there is a balanced emphasis on economic growth and community welfare.

(3) I feel that the development decisions in Lanyu adequately involve and reflect the opinions and needs of local residents.

(4) I think Lanyu strives to maintain and strengthen local culture and traditional values in its development.

3. Sample Collection

In the preliminary phase, this study plans to select 30 residents of Lanyu Island for a pilot test. For the formal survey, we will employ convenience sampling to select participants. This sampling method is chosen for its ease of operation and cost considerations, selecting the most readily accessible individuals as samples. While time-saving, this method may introduce biases in the sample, hence findings may not be generalizable to a larger target population. The survey collection method involves on-site distribution to residents, with several researchers dispatched to Lanyu to hand out surveys directly. Professionally trained interviewers will be sent to ensure minimal disturbance to the residents during survey distribution and collection. Tourists who can respond on the spot will fill out the survey immediately. For those unable to do so immediately, our researchers requested that they mail the completed surveys back. The survey was conducted from October to December 2023, with a total of 400 surveys distributed and the same number retrieved. After excluding invalid and incomplete responses, there were 364 valid surveys, making the

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response rate 91%.

In terms of sample distribution, there were 186 males and 178 females. Age-wise, 115 were 30 years old or younger, 93 were between 31 and 40, 80 were between 41 and 50, 63 were between 51 and 60, and 13 were over 61 years old. Regarding educational level, 278 had high school education or below, 76 had a university degree, and 10 had postgraduate education. For marital status, 150 were single, and 214 were married. Concerning family status, 255 had children, and 109 did not. Regarding average monthly income, 218 earned NT$30,000 or below, 80 earned between NT$30,000 and NT$50,000, 34 earned between NT$50,000 and NT$80,000, and 32 earned over NT$80,000. In terms of identity, 328 were indigenous, and 36 were non-indigenous. Regarding experience working outside the area, 102 had such experience, while 262 did not.

To assess the representativeness of the research sample, this study used wave analysis to evaluate the effects of non-response. By comparing the first batch of returned data (from earlier respondents) with the second batch (from later respondents), we assessed non-response bias. According to Armstrong and Overton (1977), using a t-test to compare key characteristics, such as the scale of the respondents' hotels (number of rooms), there was no significant difference in age between early and late respondents at a 5% significance level. Therefore, non-response bias in this study is not significant.

Empirical Results

1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

The results of the descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficient analysis for each research variable are presented in Table 1. All variables showed significant positive correlations with each other.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
1. Ecological conservation	1					
2. Social implications	.679**	1				
3. Positive tourism impact	.551**	.644**	1			
4. Negative tourism impact	.603**	.569**	.403**	1		
5. Place identity	.497**	.506**	.530**	.441**	1	
6. Sustainable development	.592**	.547**	.574**	.492**	.481**	1
Mean	4.0179	3.7988	3.6902	4.0185	3.8832	3.9162
S.D.	0.63611	0.74263	0.71029	0.63107	0.57833	0.65701
Cronbach's α	0.831	0.893	0.891	0.880	0.714	0.872

*"**" p<0.01, n=364*

2. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

This study used confirmatory factor analysis to test the measurement model. As seen in Table 2, the t-values of the factor loadings for each dimension's measurement items were all above the significant level of 1.96, with factor loadings (λ) of all observed variables on their respective latent variables ranging between 0.49 and 0.91. These values meet the threshold value of above 0.45 proposed by Bentler and Wu (1993), indicating a considerable degree of convergent validity for this study's scale. The individual item reliability ($λ^2$) of the observed variables ranged between 0.24 and 0.85, all surpassing the threshold value of 0.20 suggested by Bentler and Wu (1993), demonstrating that all observed variables are reliable.

Regarding the composite reliability (CR) of the dimensions, past scholars have generally recommended that the CR of latent variables should be higher than 0.6 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The CR of the six dimensions in this study ranged from 0.71 to 0.89, all above 0.70, indicating that the dimensions of this study are reliable. In terms of the average variance extracted (AVE), past scholars suggest that AVE values should be higher than 0.5, with values above 0.36 considered marginally acceptable (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The AVEs of the six dimensions in this study were all greater than 0.39. According to Bentler and Wu (1993) and Fornell and Larcker (1981), the higher the AVE of a dimension, the higher its convergent validity. The analysis shows that this study's scale has a considerable degree of convergent validity.

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Table 2. Individual item reliability, composite reliability and average variance extracted

Construct	No. of items	Factor loading (λ)	Individual item reliability (λ^2)	t-value	CR	AVE
1.Ecological conservation	4	0.71~0.82	0.50~0.67	14.88~18.01	0.84	0.56
2. Social implications	4	0.70~0.87	0.49~0.76	14.96~20.42	0.89	0.68
3. Positive tourism impact	4	0.81~0.83	0.66~0.69	17.98~18.75	0.89	0.68
4. Negative tourism impact	4	0.69~0.91	0.48~0.83	14.51~21.84	0.89	0.67
5. Place identity	4	0.49~0.70	0.24~0.49	8.97~13.45	0.71	0.39
6. Sustainable development	4	0.61~0.92	0.37~0.85	12.40~22.34	0.89	0.67

χ^2=640.40; df=237; RMSEA=0.068

3. SEM Analysis and Goodness-of-Fit Test

This study used three types of indicators for testing overall model fit: absolute fit measures, incremental fit measures, and parsimonious fit measures. The closer the fit of the statistical model to the ideal values, the higher the usability of the model and the more strategic the parameter estimation (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

In terms of absolute fit measures, Doll, Xia, and Torkzadeh (1994) suggest that the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) can be relaxed to above 0.8. MacCallum and Hong (1997) suggest that the Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) can be relaxed to above 0.8. The Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) should be less than 0.05, and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) should be less than 0.08. In this study, GFI=0.855, AGFI=0.822, RMR=0.0465, and RMSEA=0.0747, indicating that the model's fit is within a reasonable and acceptable range.

For incremental fit measures, values greater than 0.9 for the Normed Fit Index (NFI), Relative Fit Index (RFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) indicate good model fit (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). In this study, NFI=0.956, NNFI=0.965, RFI=0.950, IFI=0.969, and CFI=0.969, indicating that the model's fit is within a reasonable and acceptable range.

Regarding parsimonious fit measures, the proposed theoretical model of this study (λ^2/df = 3.024) shows an acceptable level of fit. Generally, λ^2/df less than 3 is required (Kline, 2005), though Schumacker and Lomax (2004) consider a more lenient threshold, accepting λ^2/df less than 5. Parsimony Goodness of Fit Index (PGFI) and Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI) greater than 0.5 indicate that the model is not overly complex (Mulaik, James, Altine, Bennett, Lind, & Stilwell, 1989). In this study, PGFI=0.698 and PNFI=0.848, indicating that the model is not overly complex. Therefore, the model's fit in this study is within a reasonable and acceptable range.

4. Causal Path Analysis of the Theoretical Model

This study validated the causal relationships in its theoretical model, with the results presented in Table 3. The parameter estimation results of the theoretical model are as follows. Hypothesis 1a: Ecological conservation (ξ_1) has a significant positive effect on social implications (η_1) (γ_{11} = 0.82, t-value = 12.63). Hypothesis 1b: Ecological conservation (ξ_1) significantly impacts positive tourism impacts (η_2) (γ_{21} = 0.70, t-value = 10.78). Hypothesis 1c: Ecological conservation (ξ_1) has a significant positive effect on negative tourism impacts (η_3) (γ_{31} = 0.67, t-value = 9.55). Hypothesis 2: Social implications ($\eta1$) have a significant positive effect on place identity (η_4) (β_{41} = 0.22, t-value = 3.34). Hypothesis 3: Positive tourism impacts (η_2) have a significant positive effect on place identity (η_4) (β_{42} = 0.44, t-value = 6.43). Hypothesis 4: Negative tourism impacts (η_3) have a significant positive effect on place identity (η_4) (β_{43} = 0.34, t-value = 5.21). Contrary to the inference of this study, it was hypothesized that negative tourism impacts would have a significant negative effect on place identity. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is not supported. Hypothesis 5: Place identity (η_4) has a significant positive effect on sustainable development (η_5) (β_{54} = 0.74, t-value = 9.93). Except for Hypothesis 4, all other hypotheses received statistical support.

Table 3. Paths of Parameter estimates for structural equation model

Hypothesized model (Paths)	Parameter estimates	t-value	Result
H1a：Ecological conservation $\xi_1 \rightarrow$ Social implications η_1 (γ_{11})	0.82**	12.63	Supported
H1b：Ecological conservation $\xi_1 \rightarrow$ Positive tourism impact η_2 (γ_{21})	0.70**	10.78	Supported
H1c：Ecological conservation $\xi_1 \rightarrow$ Negative tourism impact η_3 (γ_{31})	0.67**	9.55	Supported
H2：Social implications $\eta_1 \rightarrow$ Place identity η_4 (β_{41})	0.22**	3.34	Supported
H3：Positive tourism impact $\eta_2 \rightarrow$ Place identity η_4 (β_{42})	0.44**	6.43	Supported
H4：Negative tourism impact $\eta_3 \rightarrow$ Place identity η_4 (β_{43})	0.34**	5.21	Not supported
H5：Place identity $\eta_4 \rightarrow$ Sustainable development η_5 (β_{54})	0.74**	9.93	Supported

Note:"" p<0.05; "**" p<0.01*

5. Direct and Indirect Effect Analysis of the Theoretical Model

The effects of ecological conservation on sustainable development through other factors are shown in Table 4. The total effect of ecological conservation on sustainable development through social implications and place identity is 0.9204. The total effect of ecological conservation on sustainable development through positive tourism impacts and place identity is 1.048. The total effect of ecological conservation on sustainable development through negative tourism impacts and place identity is 0.9678. Among the various impact pathways, the total effect of ecological conservation on sustainable development is greatest when mediated by positive tourism impacts and place identity.

Table 4. Results of direct and indirect effect analysis of sustainable development

Factor	Direct effect	Indirect effect via		
		Social implications η_1 & Place identity η_4	Positive tourism impact η_2 & Place identity η_4	Negative tourism impact η_3 & Place identity η_4
Ecological conservation ξ_1	—	$\gamma_{11} \times \beta_{41} + \beta_{54}$= 0.82×0.22+0.74	$\gamma_{21} \times \beta_{42} + \beta_{54}$= 0.70×0.44+0.74	$\gamma_{31} \times \beta_{43} + \beta_{54}$= 0.67×0.34+0.74
Total effect		0.9204	1.048	0.9678

6. Conclusion and Theoretical Contributions

6.1. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the intricate relationship between the ecological conservation of "Otus elegans botelensis," the tourism impacts in Lanyu, and sustainable development. By employing the Social Exchange Theory and Place Attachment Theory, we developed and tested hypotheses to understand how conservation activities influence societal implications, tourism impacts, place identity, and sustainable development.

The findings support most of the hypotheses. Specifically, the ecological conservation of the "Otus elegans botelensis" significantly impacts the societal implications and both positive and negative tourism impacts. It underscores the dual nature of tourism, where conservation efforts can attract tourists while simultaneously imposing ecological and social pressures.

Contrary to our hypothesis, negative tourism impacts positively affected place identity. This could indicate that even adverse effects might foster a sense of unity and responsibility among residents towards their environment, reflecting a complex interplay between tourism dynamics and local identity.

Furthermore, place identity was found to have a significant positive effect on sustainable development, emphasizing that emotional and cultural connections to a place drive efforts toward long-term, balanced growth.

These results align with studies such as Berry, Nickerson, and Metcalf (2016), which highlighted that ecological conservation can attract tourism while posing challenges. However, our findings extend this by showing that conservation activities can also enhance local identity, despite potential negative impacts.

The study also resonates with research on the role of place identity in sustainable development (Yang et al., 2022), reinforcing the idea that a strong sense of place encourages residents to engage in sustainable practices. Our research contributes to this body of knowledge by demonstrating how specific conservation efforts can enhance this identity and drive sustainable development strategies.

6.2. Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the theoretical discourse on sustainable tourism by integrating ecological conservation with social and cultural dimensions. It provides empirical evidence that conservation efforts not only have economic and environmental implications but also deeply influence social structures and local identities.

Moreover, the unexpected finding regarding negative tourism impacts and place identity suggests a need to revisit traditional assumptions in the Social Exchange Theory. It indicates that negative experiences can also strengthen community bonds and promote collective action towards sustainability.

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DETERMINING FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE DEVELOPMENT OF SMART TOURISM DESTINATIONS: CASE STUDY IN KHANH HOA - VIETNAM

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Abstract

The 4.0 industrial revolution has had a significant impact on transforming different aspects of economic and social life as well as creating innovative business models for many industries, including tourism. Smart tourism is being considered as a ground-breaking solution to develop and promote tourism toward sustainability in each locality and each country. In Vietnam, tourism is determined as a prioritized industry in Vietnam's socioeconomic development strategy for the period of 2021-2030. In recent years, Vietnam's tourism market has shifted with the rapid growth of online tourism, with an emphasis on the development of smart tourism destinations. The development of Smart Tourism destinations facilitates tourists' interaction with their surroundings, promoting the quality of their experiences in destinations, while also contributing to improving the quality of life of locals as well as ensuring the sustainable development of the tourism territory. The development of Smart Tourism destinations requires taking into account the impacts of many other factors in addition to concentrating on cutting-edge technology infrastructure. This study intends to investigate the factors influencing the development of smart tourism destinations in Khanh Hoa, Vietnam. By studying documents, interviewing experts, studying and proposing 10 factors that influence the development of tourism destinations, including: (1) Smart governance; (2) Human resources for smart tourism; (3) Smart residents; (4) Smart tourists; (5) Smart infrastructure system; (6) Tourism resources; (7) Smart economy; (8) Smart mobility; (9) Smart environment; (10) Smart living. The study findings will contribute to studies on smart tourism and serve as a basis for further research.

Keywords: smart tourism, smart city, smart tourism destination, technology in tourism

1. Introduction

In recent years, the tourism industry has undergone a profound transformation thanks to the rapid advancement of information and communication technologies (ICT) (Rodrigues et al., 2022). This digital revolution has changed the tourism industry, thereby introducing the concept of "smart tourism" (Rodrigues et al., 2022). Smart tourism destinations (STD) utilize digital technologies to enhance tourists' experiences, optimize destination management, and promote sustainability (Rodrigues et al., 2022).

Smart tourism is now becoming a topic of interest in studies around the world and the term "Smart Tourism Destination" is drawing more and more attention and being discussed in many academic forums. According to Nguyen Thi Minh Nghia et al. (2019), STD means "an innovative tourism area that is accessible to everyone and built on modern technological infrastructure, ensuring the sustainable development of the territory, facilitating the interaction of tourists and their integration with the surrounding environment as well as improving the quality of their experiences at destinations and the quality of life of residents". Research on components of STDs, six core components are identified including: (1) Smart amenities; (2) Smart attractions; (3) Smart ancillary services; (4) Smart accessibility; (5) Smart activities; (6) Smart available packages (Buhalis, 2000; Tran Ha My et al., 2017; Huertas et al., 2019). These factors evaluated by scholars can be used to analyze the development of a smart tourism destination, and also serve as a guide for tourism destinations desiring to become a STD. Many studies also highlight how information and communication technology (ICT) influences the development of STDs and plays an essential role for fostering competitiveness (Boes et al., 2016; Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015; Cavalheiro et al., 2019). However, ICT is only the essential infrastructure required to develop STDs (Boes et al., 2015, 2016; Cavalheiro et al., 2019). ICT is a key component in the development of STDs, but it is necessary and required to have the coordination of other soft factors such as human capital, leadership, innovation and social capital (Boes et al., 2015, 2016; Cavalheiro et al., 2019) as well as strategies, public policies and governance efficiency of the government (Lima et al., 2020).

In addition, STDs are thought to be based on the foundation of a smart city. Factors for smart city development are also the factors for STD development as a factor of smart tourism (Savić & Pavlović, 2018) and smart cities function as a stepping stone for the development of STDs (Jasrotia & Gangotia, 2018). Factors of a smart city will also be considered as factors influencing the development of smart tourism destinations.

Currently, smart tourism development is the policy of Vietnam's tourism in order to increase its competitive advantages and promote sustainable development. The formation of new tourism trends in general and smart tourism in particular in the world has placed urgent requirements on state governance authorities and Vietnamese tourism enterprises, including Khanh Hoa. In order to become a smart tourism destination, it is first and foremost necessary for Khanh Hoa to identify the factors that influence the development of smart tourism destinations, thereby having appropriate development orientations and solutions. Therefore, the study will approach the theory, synthesis, analysis of relevant studies and expert interviews to evaluate, select, identify and analyze the factors that influence STD development in the context of Khanh Hoa tourism.

2. Objectives

This study aims to investigate the factors influencing the development of smart tourism destinations in Khanh Hoa. The study findings will contribute to studies on smart tourism in Vietnam as well as serve as a basis for further quantitative research on this important topic.

3. Theoretical background

3.1. Smart tourism destination

Tourism destinations are considered "smart" when destination administrators employ digital technologies to enhance tourists' experiences, improve destination governance and promote sustainability (Boes & et al., 2016). This transformation is driven by the increasingly strong digitization of the tourism industry, leading to the emergence of new behaviors and expectations of tourists.

Smart tourism destinations (STDs) have been defined and clarified by various authors. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism, 2018), a smart tourism destination is one that utilizes technology to boost access to information, enhance the quality of tourists' experiences, and ensure the destination's sustainable development. Sharing the same view upon emphasizing the role of information technology, Boes et al. (2016) define STD as a destination that employs advanced information and communication technologies (ICTs) to enhance tourists' experiences, improve resource governance efficiency and promote sustainable tourism development. Accordingly, the STD concept of Boes et al. (2016) emphasizes the role of smart technologies in creating interconnected and intelligent systems that enable real-time data exchange and collaboration among stakeholders, ultimately improving decision-making and service delivery in tourism. Meanwhile, Gretzel et al. (2015) define STD as a destination that deploys and integrates information and communication technologies to collect and analyze data from a variety of sources, enabling the provision of personalized and contextual services to tourists. The concept focuses on the ability of smart destinations to provide customized and flexible experiences to tourists through the use of large-scale data and analytics and ensure services that fit their individual demands and preferences. STD is also defined as a destination that uses smart technology to create dynamic value for all stakeholders, ensuring that tourists have a smooth and profound travel experience (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2014). This definition emphasizes the co-creation of value between tourists, enterprises and local communities supported by the intelligent use of technology to provide personalized and real-time services.

Based on the above definitions, STD can be defined within the scope of the article: STD is a destination developed based on the integration of advanced technologies and collaborative efforts among stakeholders to enhance the overall travel experience of tourists and promote sustainable development of destinations. This comprehensive approach not only addresses the changing needs of modern tourists but also assures that tourism destinations remain viable and appealing in the long run.

3.2. Research trends on factors influencing the development of smart tourism destinations

Boes et al. (2016) inherited Buhalis' (Sa) 6 framework (2000) in which main components of a smart tourism destination are studied, considering the smart tourism destination as a comprehensive and intelligent ecosystem, with four main factors influencing the intelligence of a destination including (1) Leadership; (2) Innovation; (3) People (including human capital, social capital, known as soft intelligence factors) and (4) ICT. These four factors have also been identified by Savić and Pavlović (2018) and Karya et al. (2019) in their study.

Also within the framework of the study on factors influencing STD development, the smart tourism destination model of Ivars-Baidal et al. (2019) has inherited the application of indicators classified according to six aspects related to smart cities: smart economy, mobility, environment, people, living and governance of Giffinge et al. (2007) to propose a structural model of smart destinations with 3 levels: Strategic relationship, Tool and Application with 6 different aspects including: Governance, Sustainability, Innovation, Connectivity , Information System and Smart solutions.   In particular, the authors acknowledge the supporting role of ICT in shaping smart tourism destinations based on strategic conditions and relationships. However, the study also suggests that the factor of governance is a challenge for STD development.

Based on INVAT.TUR (2015) model, Lima et al. (2020) also identified six indicators to analyze smart tourism destinations: Governance, Sustainability, Accessibility, Connectivity and Sensorization, Information Systems, and Innovation. According to the authors, these indicators play a crucial role in detecting and addressing the factors that contribute to the development and maintenance of STDs, as well as improving travel experiences of tourists. Popova and Malcheva (2020) identified the Smart Tourism Destination Assessment Model, under which the four pillars of a smart destination have been identified, including: Accessibility, Sustainability, Digitalization and Attractivenes, along with stakeholders acting as supporting factors for these pillars. Popova and Malcheva's research (2020) also shows that factors of the external environment such as Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal also influence the development of STDs with different levels, directions and frequencies of influence. With the smart tourism destination development (STDDM) model, Cavalheiro et al. (2020) identify four key factors that play an important role in turning a destination into a STD, including: (1) Sustainability; (2) ICT integration; (3) Community and government support; and (4) Innovation.

In some other studies, similar factors have also been identified by the authors. According to Jasrotia and Gangotia (2018), guaranteeing human capital and innovation at all levels is critical for the success of tourism destinations. In addition, according to Rodrigues et al. (2022), the core factors of smart tourism destinations include technology, creativity, sustainability, accessibility, and governance. Furthermore, digital technology is considered to play a crucial role in allowing destinations to collect and analyze large amounts of data, provide personalized services, and support real-time coordination between stakeholders (Calero et al., 2022). However, success in developing smart tourism destinations requires more than just the integration of technology but also requires a comprehensive approach that aligns with the principles of good governance, community inclusion and sustainable resource governance (Rodrigues et al., 2022). Smart governance is also identified as a key factor, includes effective coordination between public and private entities to develop and implement innovative tourism strategies in the study by Rodrigues et al. (2022). Strengthening human resources through training and capacity building is also crucial since smart tourism destinations require highly specialized skills in areas such as data analysis, digital marketing, and experience design (Rodrigues et al., 2022). Engaging local communities is another crucial factor in ensuring that the benefits of smart tourism are distributed equitably and that cultural assets and traditional knowledge are preserved (Rodrigues et al., 2022).

Furthermore, STD development is also considered to be based on the sustainable governance of natural and cultural tourism resources. Leveraging digital technologies to monitor environmental impact, control resource consumption, and encourage environmentally-friendly practices can help tourism destinations achieve a balance between economic growth and environmental protection (Khan et al., 2017; Cavalheiro et al. 2021; Boes et al. 2016).

Research trends related to factors influencing STD development are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Research trends related to factors influencing the STD development

No.	Author	Scope of research	Method	Finding
1	Boes et al. (2016)	Cities in Europe	Case study approach	- STD components include ICT, leadership, innovation, social capital and human capital. - STD components serve as the foundation for STD development to enhance travel experiences and increase the

No.	Author	Scope of research	Method	Finding
				competitiveness of tourism destinations.
2	Savić and Pavlović (2018)	Serbia	Qualitative research method, including case studies and interviews with tourism industry stakeholders	- STD components include technology, innovation, human capital. - STD components serve as the foundation for STD development to enhance travel experiences and increase the competitiveness of tourism destinations.
3	Jasrotia and Gangotia (2018)	Dharamshala, India	Literature review approach	The success of STDs depends on: information technology, Innovation, human resourses when a smart city uses these factors to enhance the six A's of tourism.
4	Ivaris-Baidal et al. (2019)	Benidorm, Spain	Mixed methods, including qualitative method such as interviews with key stakeholders incorporating quantitative analysis of data from a variety of sources	Components of STD: Technology infrastructure, Stakeholder cooperation between local governments, enterprises and communities, Sustainability.
5	Lima et al. (2020)	Brazil	Qualitative research through content analysis	Components that play an important role in identifying and evaluating a smart tourism destination include: Governance, Sustainability, Accessibility, Connectivity and Sensorization, Information Systems, and Innovation
6	Popova and Malcheva (2020)	Bulgaria	Mixed methods: qualitative and quantitative research methods.	Factors influencing the development of Varna city as a smart tourism destination: external factors, cccessibility, sustainability, digitalization and sttractiveene and stakeholders

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No.	Author	Scope of research	Method	Finding
7	Karya et al. (2019)	Bali, Indonesia	Research analysis, Case studies, Surveys and Interviews	Factors influencing the performance of smart tourism destinations in Karangasem Regency, Bali: Human capital, Social capital, Entrepreneurship, and ICT.
8	Liberato et al. (2017)	Portugal	Study of existing documents; Consultation with experts; Analysis of the structure of complex relationships between key factors influencing smart tourism.	**Factors influencing** STD development: Technology infrastructure, Cooperation between stakeholders, innovation, technology, accessibility, and sustainability
9	Rodrigues et al. (2022)	---	Qualitative research through data synthesis and analysis	**Factors influencing STD development: Digitization in tourism**
10	Calero et al. (2022)	---	Analysis and synthesis from previous studies and statistical method	Factors influencing STD development: digital technology
11	Cavalheiro et al. (2021)	Búzios, Brazil	Qualitative Research and Experimental Research Methods	ICT, local population, local government authorities, collaborative arrangements involving public sector organizations and private companies

Source: Compiled by the authors (2024)

4. Research Methodology

The study has synthesized studies related to STDs in previous studies. Results of theoretical anthology show that ICT, governance, tourism resources, people, stakeholders, economic and environmental factors, infrastructure systems, transportation, innovation... have an impact on STD development. However, indicators or measurement criteria are believed to vary by destination and no smart tourism destination model is scientifically best suited (Lima et al., 2020).

To investigate the factors influencing STD development suitable for the case of Khanh Hoa, Vietnam, the study has implemented a convenient sampling method for semi-structured interviews with 20 participants (05 interviewees from state authorities, 05 lecturers with tourism expertise and 10 managers from travel and accommodation enterprises in Khanh Hoa province). These in-depth interviews provide a comprehensive understanding of smart tourism, smart tourism destinations, and factors that are considered to have an impact on the development of smart tourism destinations. A questionnaire was also prepared and the authors conducted the interview process in the order of asking questions and clarifying the research problem. Interviewees were asked to identify the factors influencing the development of smart tourism destinations. Each interview lasted an average of 30 minutes.

5. Findings

Khanh Hoa is a province with great potential for developing unique and appealing tourism, drawing both domestic and foreign tourists, and is one of the country's ten major tourism and service centers. Currently, the development of the tourism industry according to the smart trend of Khanh Hoa is quite late and slower than some localities that are tourism centers of the country. However, Khanh Hoa has been gradually transforming itself in the digital transformation of tourism, applying advanced communication technology to governance, business activities as well as promotional communication from the state governance level in order to proactively adapt to changes of the trend towards the goal of developing smart tourism on the basis of smart and modern cities (Nguyen Thi Hong Cam, 2022).

In this context, the study conducted interviews with experts on the factors influencing STD development in Khanh Hoa. The interview results show that there are 12 factors including factors that are part of the destination and external factors that are considered to have an impact on STD development. However, two factors include: Cooperation between stakeholders and Innovation are proposed at a low rate (10% and 5% respectively). In addition, the study found that the majority of opinions judged that the cooperation between stakeholders, namely between local governments, enterprises and communities, depends on the governance and cohesion capacity of local governments. It is included in the governance factor; Innovation is included in the governance factor and factors related to people such as tourism human resources, tourists, residents or innovation spirit in the smart economy. Therefore, the study eliminated these 2 factors. The findings show that there are 10 factors that influence STD development. Interview results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of qualitative research results identifying the factors influencing the development of smart tourism destinations

No.	Factor	Frequency	Reason
1	**Smart governance**	20	- STD development needs to review public policy strategies and government governance effectiveness. - Tourism governance must be based on a methodical planning process with social participation to achieve a high consensus among stakeholders. - Smart governance plays a crucial role in the development of STDs through improvements of governance, customer experience, marketing and promotion, sustainability and security governance. This helps to optimize tourism activities and brings clear benefits to both tourists and local communities. - Digitization can lay the foundation for STD development by improving governance, customer experience, marketing and promotion, as well as enhancing infrastructure governance and rapid response.
2	**Smart tourism human resources**	20	- Smart human resources are vital not only for the implementation of technology and effective governance, but also support the creativity, sustainable development and effective marketing of smart tourism destinations.- The training and development of smart tourism human resources is a key factor to ensure the success of smart tourism destinations.
3	**Smart tourists**	20	- Smart tourists are consumers of smart tourism services and are important partners in creating added value and sustainable development for STDs through improving travel experiences, supporting environmental conservation, and contributing to the promotion and marketing process through quality feedback and assessments.
4	**Smart infrastructure system**	20	- Help optimize the governance and operation of key services and facilities, including transportation, accommodation, public utilities, and attractions.

No.	Factor	Frequency	Reason
			- Help improve tourists' experiences by providing smart utility services that facilitate tourists' mobility and interaction.
			- Help enhance security and safety through more effective security monitoring and governance, control, and rapid response to dangerous situations, protection for the safety of tourists and local communities.
			- Smart infrastructure enables more efficient governance of resources such as energy, water, and waste. The use of energy-saving technologies and environmental governance helps to minimize negative impacts on the environment and protect natural resources, thereby supporting sustainable development.
5	**Tourism resources**	18	- Tourism resources are not only the main source for tourism activities but also play a crucial role in the development and sustainability of STDs. Smart exploitation and governance of these resources will bring great benefits to both the locality and the tourism industry as a whole.
6	**Smart environment**	18	- Smart environment not only helps to protect the environment and improve the quality of life, but also is an important factor in the development and enhancement of the value of STDs. The integration of smart technology into environmental governance and tourism activities will bring long-term benefits to both the locality and the tourism industry, help to manage resources effectively, thereby helping to improve tourists' experiences and promote economic development.
7	**Smart resident**	17	- Smart residents are not only consumers but also individuals who actively participate in their communities and use technology, data and digital platforms to participate in civic activities, improve the urban environment and the overall quality of life in cities, help preserve culture, and contribute to the sustainable development of STDs.
8	**Smart mobility**	17	- Smart mobility is crucial to improve the tourists' experiences, help optimize governance and efficient use, save time and transportation costs, enhance traffic safety at STDs, bring various benefits to both tourists and localities, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of STDs.
9	**Smart economy**	16	- Promote local economic development; Create new job opportunities; Provide innovative solutions and services to improve customer experience; Support for sustainable development; Strengthen local and international cooperation and linkages.
10	**Smart living**	15	Living refers to the integration of advanced technologies and smart systems into various aspects of daily life to enhance convenience, efficiency, and sustainability. Therefore, smart living not only enhances tourists' experiences, but also plays an important role in improving the efficiency of resource governance and utilization, improving security and safety, and promoting creativity and innovation in STDs, thereby helping STDs to develop sustainably and improve competitiveness.

(Source: Compiled by the authors, 2024)

Based on research models on the development of smart tourism destinations (Boes et al., 2016; Ivars-Baidal

et al., 2019; Popova & Malcheva; 2020; Lima et al., 2020; Cavalheiro et al., 2021), the findings of previous studies and on the basis of analyzing the results of experts' opinions on the development of smart tourism destinations in Khanh Hoa, studies on the factors influencing STD development in Khanh Hoa, the following factors are selected:

Smart governance: Provide good governance that is capable of adapting to new changes (Jasrotia & Gangotia, 2018). The governance factor includes transparent government services for both the public and private sectors (Khan, 2017). Smart governance also includes strategy, destination governance organization and collaboration of stakeholders (Ivars-Baidal et al., 2019). *Smart governance* is measured by 5 indicators including: Destination with e-government implementation; Destination with open, digitized and transparent data systems; Implementation of public services, online administrative procedures implemented at destinations; Obtainment of strategic and policy perspectives and orientations for smart tourism development at destinations; Assurance of effective cooperation among stakeholders at destinations in smart tourism development (Jucevicius et al., 2014; Purnomo et al., 2016; Lazaroiu & Roscia, 2012; Otwicz et al., 2021).

Smart tourism human resources: Demonstrate the ability of employees to use information and communication technology to improve tourists' experiences and the efficiency of tourism activities (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2014). *Smart tourism human resources* are measured by 3 indicators including: Tourism human resources at the destination with full professional skills; Tourism human resources at the destination with an entrepreneurial spirit and a vision of innovation and creativity; Tourism human resources at the destination including the quality of human resources for state governance of tourism and human resources of tourism enterprises (Otwicz et al., 2021; Boes et al., 2015; Cong De Nguyen et al., 2020).

Smart tourists: Tourists openly share their data and use smart technologies, interact flexibly with other stakeholders, co-create to enhance and personalize smart experiences (Nguyen Thi Minh Nghia et al., 2019). Smart tourists are measured by 3 indicators, including: Local residents are knowledgeable and willing to use technology; Local residents are willing to participate in smart tourism development activities at the destination; Local residents are willing to support tourists (Femenia-Serra et al., 2019; Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2014).

Smart infrastructure system: A network of interconnected digital technologies, devices and services deployed within a specific tourism destination to improve efficiency, sustainability, and overall tourists' experiences. Smart infrastructure systems are represented by the use of smart sensors and network technologies for the purpose of accessing infrastructure such as energy resources, water networks, streets, buildings, etc.(Jasrotia & Gangotia, 2018.) The measurement scale of the *Smart infrastructure system* is adjusted from Cong De Nguyen et al. (2020) including: Information technology infrastructure is widespread, meets the needs of tourism development; System of tours, routes, and tourism destinations integrating smart technology; Systems of hotels, restaurants, resorts, entertainment and shopping centers integrating smart technology; Public restroom system integrating smart technology; Convenient transportation infrastructure, smart airport, pier, and train station systems that meet the demands of tourists.

Tourism resources: According to Xiel (2021), tourism resources are the basic conditions for tourism growth and development of a region, and serve as the basis of tourism activities. Tourism resources include natural and cultural resources. The measurement scale of *Tourism resources* adjusted from Cong De Nguyen et al. (2020) includes: beautiful, diverse and unique natural landscape in the destination; many impressive and unique cultural heritages at the destination (architectural art, historical relics, museums, pagodas, churches, etc.); many intriguing and unique cultural events, sports, traditional festivals at the destination; many unique traditional arts and folklore at the destination; many traditional craft villages, unique handicrafts and local products at the destination.

Smart environment: An "ecosystem that leverages smart technologies, data analytics, and sustainable methods to create livable, resource-efficient, and environmentally-friendly spaces" emphasizes the use of technology and data to optimize resource governance, reduce environmental impact, and improve the quality of life for residents (Cohen & Muñoz, 2015). A smart environment is measured by 5 indicators including: smart waste, wastewater and emission treatment systems at the destination; use of renewable energy sources, and effective use of electricity and water at the destination; green and sustainable urban development plan based on smart technology at the destination; pollution monitoring system at the destination; smart electricity, water and lighting systems at the destination (Jasrotia & Gangotia, 2018; Khan et al., 2017; Purnomo et al., 2016; Jucevicius et al., 2014).

Smart resident: Smart residents are residents who actively participate and respond to daily tasks in the city by using their IT skills to communicate their desires (Hatuka & Zur, 2019). *Smart residents* are measured by 3 indicators including: Local residents are knowledgeable and willing to use technology; Local residents are willing to participate

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in smart tourism development activities at the destination; Local residents are willing to support tourists (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2014; Cong De Nguyen et al., 2020).

Smart mobility: Smart mobility refers to the accessibility of the destination, the ability to reach the destination and the existence of the modern transport system (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2013; Corte et al., 2017). Smart mobility is "the use of smart transport systems, digital technology, and data analytics to improve traffic efficiency, reduce traffic congestion, promote sustainable modes of transport, and improve the overall mobility experience" (Cohen and Muñoz, 2015). *Smart mobility* is measured by 3 indicators including: smart and safe transport systems at the destination; effective traffic control systems at the destination; smart roads, bridges and transport systems at the destination (Jasrotia& Gangotia, 2018; Khan et al., 2017; Jucevicius et al., 2014; Purrnomo et al., 2016; Lazaroiu & Roscia, 2012).

Smart economy: is "an economic system that leverages digital technology, data analytics, and innovation to promote sustainable economic growth, increase productivity, and enhance the well-being of individuals and communities" (Cohen and Muñoz, 2015); a place to provide smart and innovative economic conditions and tools to promote entrepreneurship and competitiveness, including digital technology-based business strategies (Cohen, 2014). *Smart economy* is measured by 5 indicators including: knowledge-based economy at the destination; connectivity/integration into the national/inter-national market at the destination; spirit of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship at the destination; economic competitiveness at the destination; flexibility of the labor market at the destination (Khan et al., 2017; Lazaroiu & Roscia, 2012; Jucevicius et al., 2014; Popova & Malcheva, 2021).

Smart living: Smart life is "the use of digital technologies to reproduce and reinvent basic systems and services to create a comfortable, convenient, safe and sustainable lifestyle (Townsend, 2013); it provides a quality of life for residents and tourists, including all aspects of life and tourism destinations (Jasrotia & Gangotia, 2018) and is particularly relevant to education, healthcare, cultural lifestyles (Khan, 2017). *Smart living* is measured by 4 indicators including: The destination has a system of culture, education and training in the digital era; The destination has a smart medical and health care system; The destination ensures public security and personal safety; The destination has social cohesion (Khan et al., 2017; Jucevicius et al., 2014; Lazaroiu & Roscia, 2012; Popova & Malcheva, 2021; Gangotia, 2018; Purnomo et al., 2016).

6. Conclusion

The emergence of new tourism trends around the world has necessitated urgent requirements for tourism managers and enterprises to update information and evaluate the situation, thereby presenting appropriate development orientations and solutions. The development of smart tourism provides numerous benefits to both destinations and tourists, and it has become increasingly urgent in the present development trend, including Khanh Hoa.

Managers can also benefit from investigating the factors that influence the development of smart tourism destinations. The determining of 10 factors influencing the development of smart tourism destinations in Khanh Hoa is built on the analysis and evaluation from relevant studies and in-depth qualitative interviews.

The study findings should be verified in the next study through quantitative methods. Thereby, it is possible to confirm the accuracy as well as the influence of these factors on the development of smart tourism destinations; the level of influence and importance of each factor influencing the development of smart tourism destinations will also be proven.

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CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND FOOD WASTE MANAGEMENT IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

Nguyen Thi Ngan Anh[1]

Extended abstract

Introduction – Our current economic model, linear economy, exploits virgin natural resources for production, then discards them. Meanwhile, circular economy (CE) attempts to stop producing waste at the first time. The tourism and hospitality industry plays a significant role in the deterioration of the environment. Food waste (FW) is an emerging concerns nowadays, contributing significantly to global greenhouse emission. These raises a need to incorporate CE principles in FW management in tourism and hospitality sector.

Purpose/Problem Statement - This paper aims to (1) study current practices of CE in FW management in the tourism and hospitality industry in developed countries, (2) examine challenges and enablers of CE adoption in FW management in the tourism and hospitality sector and (3) propose recommendation for key stakeholders and future researchers.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper applies the method of quantitative systematic literature review to analyse and synthesize secondary data. Firstly, the researcher identify specific keywords regarding the research topic and the research aims. These keywords include 'circular economy', 'sustainable practice', 'food waste', 'developed countries' and 'tourism and hospitality'. The selected papers must relate to all keyword issues and be published in well-recognized Scopus journals or organizations.

Findings/Discussion – The results found that local community engagement was considered the most effective strategy. Utilizing seasonal food and predicting the number of visitors to ensure an appropriate amount of food are increasingly widely applied. The top enabler for CE adoption is technology development. Financial pressures are discussed as the most challenging issue in CE implementation, followed by incentive, knowledge and governmental support inadequacies.

Theoretical implications – This study may improve theoretical knowledge of CE as they apply to business in the tourism and hospitality industry, and lead to further theoretical framework development in this context.

Practical implications – Stakeholders will have a comprehensive overview of how tourism and hospitality businesses apply CE principles in FW management, the challenges and opportunities in this process. From this, they can identify appropriate solutions for further development.

Social implications (Policy contribution) – As regulation and incentive inadequacy are among the top constraints, the developer should formulate policies and improve plans in which CE adoption is facilitated.

Research limitations – The limitation of this study is that it was primarily based on secondary data. Future studies should collect empirical data in specific study sites to have more accurate, practical and comprehensive insights of the situation.

Keywords: circular economy, sustainable practice, food waste, developed countries, tourism and hospitality.

Introduction

Despite significant benefits from tourism industry, studies point out tourism development causes adverse effects (Liu et al., 2022) to the natural environment which is the mainstay for the industry development. Global climate change consequences are happening more frequently than ever before. Over the past few years, we have witnessed many natural disasters such as flooding in Jakarta in 2020, the Australian bushfire and the Moroccan earthquake in 2023. According to the United Nations (2021), if we still maintain current linear models, in 30 years, three planets will be required to support our way of life. The linear economy, which is our current system, produces products from the Earth's resources, then discards them. Conversely, the circular economy (CE), a new sustainability

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paradigm, can minimize the environmental consequences and business' costs, create jobs, and support the local economy.

The tourism and hospitality industry has been considered among the top contributors to environmental degradation (Dogru et al., 2020). Food waste (FW) in this industry is turning into a major concern (Dhir et al., 2020) as it constitutes a significant percentage of the total waste. About 40% of food from farms ends up their lives as waste (WWF, 2021), contributing 10% (Forbes, 2021) to greenhouse gas emissions globally. The United Nations have set the sustainable development goal number 12.3 of "halve per capita global food waste". However, the research on this issue is still limited (Bowen et al., 2023).

Vietnamese tourism and hospitality stakeholders agree that a shift to CE would be a strategic approach to overcome our current linear economic model's limitations (Chowdhury et al., 2022). The country's government has established various initiatives and reforms such as carbon tax or incentive for carbon practices of the entrepreneurs. Despite this, Vietnam has still contributed significantly to the greenhouse gas emission.

Therefore, this paper would like to study how businesses in tourism and hospitality in developed countries apply CE in FW management. From this, it is expected to propose recommendations for Vietnamese stakeholders in this industry, including owners, managers, employees, local people, or policy-makers to develop a framework in which CE principles are employed effectively.

Objectives

For the purpose sustainable tourism development, the adoption of CE, especially in FW management, is an integral part. Therefore, this study aims to (1) study current practices of CE in FW management in the tourism and hospitality industry in developed countries, (2) examine challenges and enablers of CE adoption in FW management in the tourism and hospitality sector and (3) propose recommendation for key stakeholders and future researchers.

Research Methodology

This paper applies a systematic quantitative literature review method to identify, synthesize and analyze previous research. Firstly, based on the research objectives, the researcher identified keywords, including "circular economy", "food waste", "developed countries" and "tourism" or "hospitality" and searched on the Google Scholar database. Secondly, criteria selection and revision steps were established. To keep up with the latest trends and ensure the reliability of research in CE, the results should be published within the past 6 years, since 2018. Only journals of Q1 and Q2 Scopus and written in English are chosen. Because the research in CE and FW in tourism and hospitality is limited, the researchers can identify only 23 articles that are qualified for this study. The last phase involved importing the data into the research database and constructing summarized tables for analysis.

Findings

1. Circular economy initiatives

Researchers, based on experiences from developed nations, suggests initiatives of waste reduction and recycling practices, including utilizing a sharing economy platform, donating food surplus, recycling food waste (animal feeding or energy production), creating a sustainable menu, using local products, or developing an FW monitoring system (Bowen et al., 2024; Camilleri, 2021; de Visser-Amundson, 2022; Lagioia et al., 2024; Westgeest, 2022). In fact, Copenhagen hotels have employed an FW tracking tool and launched a competition to encourage employees to minimize waste. To take advantage of a sharing economy, many hospitality businesses in Finland, Germany, Sweden, or Poland have employed ResQ, a mobile application in which food can be shared and exchanged among participants. Donating food is also recognized as a good initiative by international hotel chains like Hyatt, Marriott International, and Fairmont Hotels and Resort.

Hospitality businesses has developed campaigns to commit to CE and FW management (Florido et al., 2019; Jones & Wynn, 2023). There are programs that provide hotels with techniques to reduce waste. Specifically, Hilton Hotels in the US and Europe establish strategies guiding staff on how to prevent waste at each stage, from menu planning to food recycling. Researchers also highlight the importance of local community engagement. Hospitality entrepreneurs should utilize local products fully to advance CE transition, support the local economy and reduce logistic costs. Farmers are suggested to be key stakeholders and suppliers in CE mainstream (Florido et al., 2019).

Utilizing seasonal food and predicting the number of visitors to ensure an appropriate amount of food are increasingly widely applied. An exact forecast of visitors' quantity and their nationalities will facilitate waste reduction (Amicarelli et al., 2022; Camilleri-Fenech et al., 2020). Based on these, hospitality employees can develop

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a standard portion that is appropriate to each guest's behavior and preference.

To promote the mentioned initiatives, it is required a relevant governance and regulatory framework. An appropriate CE legislation will favor circular tourism and hospitality transition (Falcone, 2019; Khan et al., 2021; Zarbà et al., 2021). For instance, the European Union has developed strategies for CE implementation, such as the EU Circular Economy Package's Directives in 2018 which aims to employ CE principles in resource and waste management. The interpretation of legislation elements should be simple and understandable. The government should provide incentives for effective CE applications such as tax reduction or recognized certifications. Storing food properly is seen as an effective way to reduce and recycle them. Business has considered fermentating, freezing, or drying food to last their first life longer.

Table 1. Circular economy initiatives

Initiatives	Researchers
Utilizing sharing economy platform.	Amicarelli et al. (2022); Bowen et al. (2024); Camilleri-Fenech et al. (2020); de Visser-Amundson (2022); Falcone (2019); Florido et al. (2019); Jones and Wynn (2023); Khan et al. (2021); Lagioia et al. (2024); Westgeest (2022); Zarbà et al. (2021)
Designing sustainable menu.	
Donating food surplus.	
Local community engagement.	
Predicting guests' attendance.	
Utilizing seasonal products.	
An appropriate governance and regulatory framework	

2. Opportunities and challenges.

Technology is discussed as the top enabler for CE transition. It is helpful to measure the amount of food should be produced and the quantity of FW can be reduced or recycled. Hospitality business can use mobile application to track and monitor inventory whereas customers have the opportunity to discover discounts on excess food products from nearby businesses, thereby diminishing the total amount of FW. Furthermore, the employment of AI, robotics, or IoT provides smart CE and FW management methods (Amicarelli et al., 2022; Del Vecchio et al., 2022; Yang & Lin, 2021). Intercontinental Hotel group is a good example. Some hotels of this group applied Winnow, a smart system that allows staffs to manage FW. As a result, these hotels have reduced 20% of FW. Another opportunity that is emphasized by the majority of researchers is sharing economy. CE and sharing economy are discussed as related concept that can be integrated to offer great opportunities for CE transition.

The most recognized challenging issue in CE and FW management is the financial issue (Bux & Amicarelli, 2023; Camilleri, 2021; Khan et al., 2021; Tamasiga et al., 2022; Vatansever et al., 2021). The transformation to CE requires high cost for investment but low returns. Developing new technologies, building infrastructure and changing business models for production, recycling and waste management in the CE poses a financial burden for entrepreneurs whereas the economic efficiency is still unclear. The economic benefits of the CE are often long-term, while businesses need immediate profits. Besides, incentive policies are still limited.

Knowledge inadequacy is acknowledged as a big challenge for CE transition (Fabrice & Sivarajah, 2021; Khan et al., 2021; Lagioia et al., 2024; Martínez-Cabrera & López-del-Pino, 2021). The awareness of this issue among key stakeholders in tourism and hospitality industry is still at an initial step. To ensure effective changes, customers and service providers need to perceived CE concept properly. Once the tourists and service providers understand the importance of this, it is possible to apply all aspects of CE in their operations.

Tourism and hospitality business also encounter challenges of the regulatory frameworks, insufficient infrastructure and inadequate governmental support (Fabrice & Sivarajah, 2021; Martínez-Cabrera & López-del-Pino, 2021; Vatansever et al., 2021). These highlight the need for improve CE related policies.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

The implementation of CE in FW management within the hospitality industry offers a viable road to sustainability. This paper emphasized the key initiatives that hospitality businesses in developed countries have applied. Enablers and barriers during this process are also mentioned.

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To integrate CE principles, prestigious hospitality groups highlight the vital role of sharing economy platforms, food donation and local economy engagement. This aims to create a community where mutual benefit can be met by helping each other. A sustainable menu in which local and seasonal products are utilized will help to reduce FW in the initial steps. These initiatives highlight the sector's increased commitment to minimizing environmental impact and increasing resource efficiency. CE ambition cannot be met with a proper legislation framework. Therefore, a demand of an appropriate regulatory framework is required.

However, CE transition in FW management encounters some challenges. Significant barriers include high initial investment costs but low returns, knowledge inadequacies and regulatory framework inconsistencies. Tackling these difficulties must involve a collaborative effort from stakeholders, including businesses, researchers, local people, employees, technology developers, customers, and authorities. Despite these barriers, technological advancement and increased demands for sustainability will create an ideal environment for CE practice expansion.

In conclusion, although the path to CE implementation in FW management in the tourism and hospitality industry is still complicated and demanding, the benefits outweigh the challenges. Once the barriers can be addressed by collaborative efforts between stakeholders, favorable legislation, and ongoing developments, this industry can gain not only environmental advantages but also economic and social values.

2. Discussion

The objectives of this research are to identify the application of CE ideas to FW management in the tourism and hospitality sector. The findings provide significant insights for stakeholders aiming to reduce FW and promote sustainability. Besides, the analysis of existing CE practices in prestigious hospitality groups supports the CE framework (Ellen Macarthur Foundation, 2021), which emphasizes resource loops and waste minimization. Designing a sustainable menu with local and seasonal products, engaging the local community, donating food, or utilizing sharing economy are consistent with CE principles and stakeholder theories (Baah et al., 2022), thereby diminishing the dependence on virgin resources.

This study also highlights significant enablers and barriers mentioned by most scholars. While the most recognized enabler is technology development, financial constraints and knowledge inadequacy are challenges for businesses. This can be explained by the resource-based view theory which helps to see how organizations can leverage available resources to overcome the situations (Bowen et al., 2023). Legislation components are another top barrier. This aligns with institutional theory, emphasizing how regulatory environments influence organizational behaviors (Castro-Lopez et al., 2023). Based on findings, the researcher proposes recommendations for stakeholders in tourism and hospitality to facilitate CE practices in their FW management, offering valuable insights for business, policy-makers and future researchers.

Research recommendations

As economic constraints, legislation system and governmental support are found to be among the top barriers, it is suggested that governmental organizations should establish funds assisting entrepreneurs and offer tax reductions in CE practices. Financial policies are required to support businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, in installing new technological equipment and setting up business models because their initial costs are often quite high. Once entrepreneurs perceive the economic, social and environmental values that sustainable practices could bring, they will be motivated to follow this way.

Besides, knowledge and perception are backgrounds for fruitful strategies. However, scholars point out that the awareness of CE among stakeholders is still unclear. This raises a high demand for educational campaigns. In addition to training programs at educational institutions, we should actively organize seminars and forums to exchange knowledge and encourage scientists to research this issue further. Businesses need to improve their employees' relevant knowledge. Local authorities need to communicate CE principles and their roles with residents.

Technology is realized as an efficient enabler in the process of circular transition. It is necessary to build a friendly and effective cooperative environment between tourism businesses and technology development companies. Organizing competitions, awards, or certificates on research and application of new technology are encouraging methods. Businesses that employ circular technology in their operating models should be promoted and honored to build their image. It is vital to develop a real testing environment It is necessary to create a real testing environment, such as the 4-star hotel Green Solution House of Denmark, in which the business model operates as a living laboratory, both adopts and co-develops circular technologies.

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Regarding future research direction, it is discussed that scholars should empirical data in specific study sites to have more accurate, practical, and comprehensive insights of the situation. Small and medium-sized business is the core of the hospitality and tourism industry, creating most employment and income for the locals. However, research on CE practices in FW management in this sector in developing countries, especially Vietnam, is scarce. Researchers should consider conducting research on this issue.

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AN OVERVIEW OF AGRITOURISM AND THE INSIGHTS GAINED FOR VIETNAM

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2nd Anh Le Trinh[2]

Abstract

Agritourism is considered a promising growth industry because of its beneficial effects on rural areas' economy, culture, environment, and society. Publicly accessible documents somewhat support this claim. To achieve the goal of thoroughly analyzing, assessing, and incorporating intellectual achievements in agritourism research. The article utilizes the Web of Sciences as the primary data source. The study encompasses 708 academic papers on agritourism for bibliometric analysis in period 1973 – 07/2024. The results offer a thorough synopsis of research patterns, encompassing keywords, authors, countries, and the publication count over time. The study identifies some noteworthy aspects in the field of agritourism. This constraint also necessitates the requirement for future studies to supplement data from supplementary sources in order to strengthen observations regarding agritourism. From there, there will be a lesson for Vietnam in developing additional research on agritourism that is more suitable in its national context. Inheriting and applying appropriate research into practical activities, such as developing appropriate support policies to help stakeholders participate in agricultural tourism and building appropriate agricultural tourism products. With each local context, community training activities contribute to achieving economic, cultural, social, and environmental effects.

Keywords: agritourism, agricultural tourism, bibliometric analysis, VOSviewer.

Introduction

The phrase agricultural tourism emerged in industrialized nations throughout the 1980s (Barbieri, 2020), (Rauniyar et al., 2021), (Rauniyar et al., 2021), (Rauniyar et al., 2021), (Wicks & Merrett, 2003) and refers to activities closely associated with agriculture. On agricultural farms, educational and entertaining activities occur immediately (Gil Arroyo et al., 2013). The study centers on the following subjects: The concept, scope, and theory of agritourism are considered contentious owing to academics' varying perceptions of agricultural tourism. These perceptions are based on the unique qualities of this sort of tourism, resulting in varied opinions (Flanigan et al., 2015), (Phillip et al., 2010). (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008); Agritourism may provide economic efficiency to stakeholders, including farmers, local communities, and enterprises, by providing them with a way to boost and diversify their revenue streams (Tew & Barbieri, 2012), (Barbieri & Mahoney, 2009), (Nickerson et al., 2001), (Gomes et al., 2019); The amalgamation of agritourism and sustainability pertains to cultural, social, and rural environmental factors(Ammirato et al., 2020), (Lupi et al., 2017); Feminist perspectives have shown the significant influence, incentives, and obstacles of gender roles in agritourism (McGehee, N.G.; Kim, K.; Jennings, 2007). The proliferation of study themes and the exponential growth in the number of publications about agritourism in the last forty years have shown this kind of tourism's significance, function, and value. The emergence of this kind of tourism, in the context of increasing population growth, dwindling agricultural resources, and climate change, poses significant challenges and severe danger to global food security (Godoy et al., 2014).

The popularity of bibliometrics has increased steadily as the benefits of this approach have been more readily available. It employs statistical methods to quantify and assess the content, pertinent details, and overall amount and quality of published papers to monitor trends or patterns in a particular area of research (Ahmi & Mohd Nasir, 2019). Bibliometric analysis is a valuable tool for doing a literature review on agritourism. It allows for examining published papers within a particular area, industry, country, or time, providing a descriptive sample and revealing additional information. Additional, comprehensive data about publications, including authorship, frequency of keywords, and citations (Ho, 2007). Given the present ease of access and abundance of data from scientific publications, a growing number of tools are being created to examine this bibliometric data. VOSviewer is a bibliographic mapping tool called Visualization of Similarities, created by Van Eck and colleagues (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

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Additionally, it functions as a software application that generates maps using network data, visually presents metrics, and analyzes various elements such as journals, authors, and keywords. It may also be constructed based on citations, bibliographic coupling, co-citation, or co-authorship relationships (Van Eck & Waltman, 2017). The use of VOS in this research is appropriate since it specifically examines agritourism data at a collective level.

Research Methodology

A bibliometric study was conducted using Web of Science databases to examine the literature on agritourism. This database is one of the most significant sources in the world, including the bulk of scientific research papers from various sectors. These articles are published in reputable publications (Abrizah et al., 2013).

Utilizing bibliometric approaches is essential and beneficial for conducting a comprehensive visual analysis of data structures. Bibliometrics, or bibliometric statistical analysis, quantifies the quality and quantity of books, journals, and publications. The variables utilized for document measurement encompass Authorship; Origin (institution, nation, region, language); Source (periodical, publisher, category); Research content (textual material, subject matter); Document citation, internal citation, co-citation (quantity of references in the article, quantity of citations to the document, etc.). The quantitative analysis of publications and bibliometric applications will be used as a research assessment tool to assess the effect of agritourism studies (Trà, 2021). Conducting such analysis will enable us to provide more impartial remarks and evaluations compared to conventional document review techniques.

This study will focus on gathering data linked explicitly to agritourism from scientific papers that have been widely accepted by specialists, starting from the inception of the phrase "agritourism" in the available data until July 2024. In addition, it is worth noting that academic publications on agricultural tourism are predominantly published in English. Therefore, the terms "agritourism," "agro-tourism," "agricultural tourism," and "agriculture tourism" will be the designated word and keyword phrases employed to search for documents on the subject matter of agricultural tourism. The search focused on academic papers from 1973 to July 2024 across all languages to uncover agritourism data based on keywords in article titles. Since the title is often the first feature that readers notice (Annesley, 2010).

Results

Total number of published articles about agritourism

A total of 708 published publications about agritourism have been discovered by extracting data from the Scopus database from 1973 to July 2024. Table 1 summarizes the documents on Web of Science data with the most significant number of publications. It reveals that research papers on agritourism have the maximum number of publications, totaling 468 propotion 69.14% of the total, are research papers. Conference articles comprise 21.25% of the total, while book chapters account for 4.96% and review article for 2.27%. In addition, several additional publications, including books, early access,correction, etc., each contribute less than 1% to the whole study.

Table 01: Summarizes the documents on Web of Science data about agritourism

Document Types	Quantities	Percentages (%)
Article	468	66.29
Proceeding Paper	150	21.25
Book Chapters	35	4.96
Review Article	16	2.27
Meeting Abstract	9	1.27
Book Review	8	1.13
Early Access	7	0.99
Editorial Material	7	0.99
Correction	2	0.28
Letter	2	0.28
News Item	1	0.14
Note	1	0.14
Total [1]	706	100%

Source: The authors gathered information from Web of Science, July 2024

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[1] *Retracted Publication: 2*

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English is the predominant language found in the recovered documents, with 646 documents accounting for 91.24% of the total. Other languages, such as Chinese, French, German, and Polish, are also present.

Trends in the number of research publications during a time
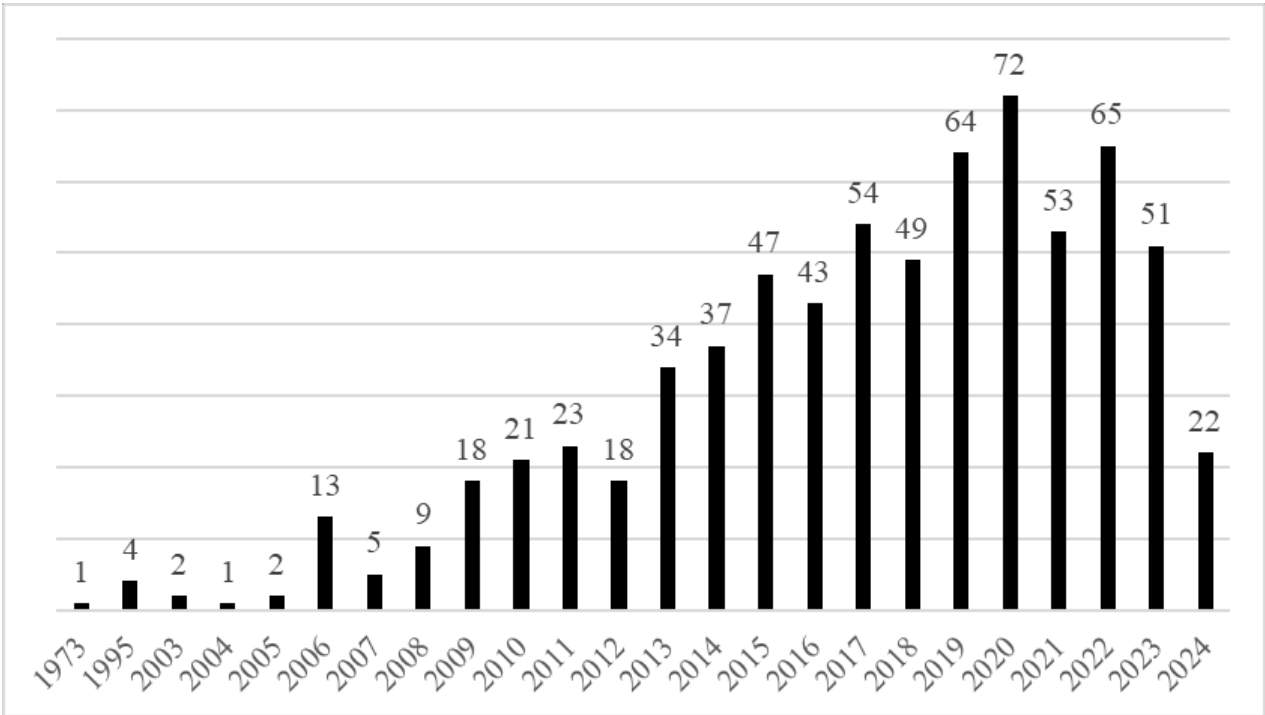
Figure 1: Statistics on the number of research articles about agritourism from 1973 to 2024

Source: Web of Science, 2024

Agritourism is an emerging study subject, with formal research papers focusing on this field starting to emerge in the 1980s. An analysis of the literature according to the year of publication allows for observing the progress and popularity of study subjects over time (Zakaria et al., 2021). Statistical examination of literature publishing patterns reveals that agritourism is now experiencing rapid growth and expansion. Figure 1 demonstrates that 2020 exhibits the most significant level of publishing output, with a total of 72 documents. Conversely, the first years of the research have the lowest productivity, averaging around 1 document each year. The quantity of papers in the domain of agricultural tourism is growing annually and broadening the range of study, including not only industrialized nations. Agritourism is a complex subject that garners interest from researchers in several disciplines, including agriculture, policy, marketing, sustainable development, environment, ecology, rural and urban studies, and more.

Co-occurrence author keywords
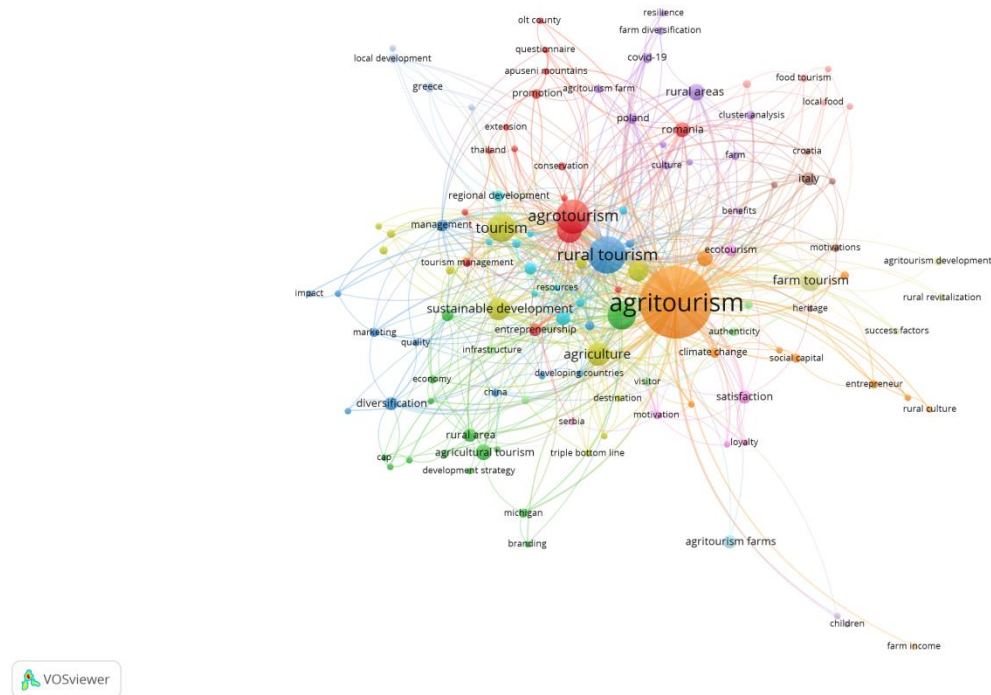
Figure 2. Co-occurrence author keywords (Source: VOSviewer 1.6.20)

The utilization of VOSviewer software version 1.6.20 for author keyword mapping, with a minimum occurrence threshold of 3, reveals that the following terms are significant: agritourism, agrotourism, rural tourism, tourism, agriculture, sustainable development, rural development, farm tourism, sustainability, agricultural tourism (agro-tourism), rural areas, ecotourism, sustainable tourism, and climate change are exhibits the most co-occurrence, which is visually apparent from the size of the circles shown in Figure 2. The circles inside the identical color cluster indicate a shared topic among studies, with each circle representing a specific subject of agritourism study. Figure 2 displays orange clusters, which consists of 16 items. The keywords associated with this cluster include agritourism, biodiversity, circular economy, conservation, ecotourism, and rural development, which are the study's focus—research on the advantages of agricultural tourism growth. The green cluster encompasses themes such as heritage, landscape, environment, and natural resources and is dedicated to comprehending the resource-related elements that contribute to agricultural tourism.

Additionally, there are additional groups of colors that are centered around the primary field of study, such as "resources," "entrepreneurship," and "adaptation" in the field of agritourism. These clusters are associated with phrases such as gender, stakeholders, social capital, and business. This demonstrates the wide range and abundance of study subjects related to agritourism within the academic realm.

The role of an author and their impact on the subject of agritouism

Figure 3: Authors with the most amount of citations (Source: VOSviewer 1.6.20)

The utilization of VOSviewer software for bibliometric analysis aids in comprehending the influential writers in agricultural tourism. Figure 3 reveals that Barbieri Carla has the most significant contribution to 20 research articles connected to agritourism, with 1242 citations. The authors' literature study reveals that the bulk of agritourism research has primarily included collaboration between two or more writers, with an average of 2.92 authors per paper. Collaborative research enhances the variety, range, and quality of papers related to agritourism issues.

Countries involved in agritourism research

The geographic distribution of studies in agritourism research is clearly shown using VOSviewer analysis using the Web of Science database as a source. Figure 4 reveals that the United States, China, Poland, and Italy are the nations that have made the most significant contribution in terms of the quantity of papers about agritourism. This observation aligns with the findings of the literature analysis, which indicate that industrialized nations quickly recognized the potential of this particular kind and subsequently implemented regulations to facilitate its integration with other businesses. This factor significantly contributes to the prevailing influence of these nations in the realm of agritourism research. The conspicuousness of the bubble indicates the mutual assistance and joint effort across nations in agritourism research, and this phenomenon is progressively becoming a prevalent pattern.

The network overlay visualization map in Figure 4 identifies the chronological order in which research from the mentioned nations emerged. Furthermore, there has been a notable surge in the number of publications on agritourism in Asian countries with a predominant agricultural sector, including Indonesia, Thailand, Iran, Malaysia, India, and Vietnam. This demonstrates that nations with robust agricultural capabilities have also started prioritizing agricultural tourism, which yields several economic, cultural, environmental, and social advantages—promoting sustainable development in rural regions.
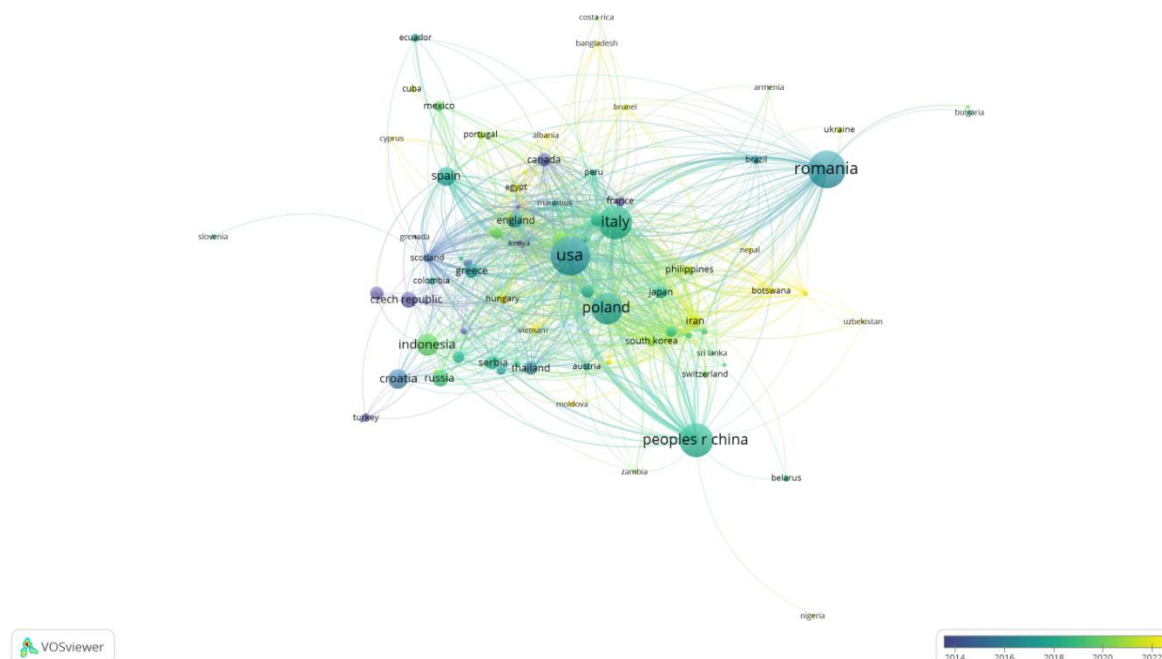
Figure 4: Countries contributed to agritourism research (Source: VOSviewer 1.6.20)

Recommendations for further study on agritourism in Vietnam

The literature review analysis revealed that the majority of agritourism documents could be categorized into several main research topics, such as policy, strategic change, price, motivation and determining factors for participating in agritourism activities, diversification strategies, challenges, and opportunities, use of information technology in tourism activities, sustainable development, and gender factors in tourism development. The following research subjects are now highly regarded, and Vietnam should consider exploring and researching them.

Several research concentrate on understanding ***policy*** within agritourism, such as the escalating influx of young laborers in rural regions or strategies to bolster agritourism. Limited support for capital investment, resource organization, and marketing of tourist activities remains a challenge in poor nations (Lybbert & Sumner, 2012). There is a need to implement targeted policies tailored to each rural region's specific requirements, particularly policies aimed at providing support for the capital and pricing of products and services for farmers involved in the tourist sector (Yang et al., 2010), (Veeck et al., 2006), (Viglia & Abrate, 2017).

Another area of study that is considered essential is the ***identification of characteristics*** that contribute to visitors' impressions of agritourism sites (Pesonen et al., 2011). The cognitive process of visitors may be influenced by several factors, such as the cultural traditions of the local population, the typical food culture, and the surrounding landscape (Brandano et al., 2018). Furthermore, studies assess agritourism development ***initiatives' beneficial and detrimental effects*** on the individuals involved. The potential consequences include: assisting the local population in expanding their sources of revenue; generating more employment opportunities and enhancing tourists' comprehension of tourism by incorporating agricultural farming operations (Lipton, 1980).

Recent research on agritourism indicates a need for more study on ***the use of science, technology, and innovation in agritourism operations***. Simultaneously, researchers have shown that farmers need more complete awareness of the possibility of conserving local history for tourist development (LaPan & Barbieri, 2014). Other research concentrates on examining and comprehending clusters of tourist marketplaces desiring to engage in agritourism (Che et al., 2005). Conduct a study on the ***involvement of local communities*** and agricultural workers in tourism, specifically focusing on their preferences and requirements (Srikatanyoo & Campiranon, 2010), (McGehee, 2007). A comparative examination of studies conducted in developing nations and established markets reveals that agricultural workers in these two marketplaces have some commonalities in their priorities (Varmazyari et al., 2018). Both tourism markets prioritize the desire to relax in a rural area and engage in activities related to nature and the environment. Engaging in leisurely activities and spending quality time with relatives, family, and friends (Sotomayor et al., 2014).

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The potential for the development of agricultural tourist activities is substantial. However, in the current societal framework, there has been a significant amount of knowledge, constant improvement, and innovation in agriculture and tourism, resulting in their convergence. Further investigation is required to study the gaps. Researchers have highlighted deficiencies in ***investment policy***, deficiencies in altering the incentive to engage in agritourism from both the supply and demand perspectives and deficiencies in the knowledge and conduct of all parties involved. About tourist assets (Hjalager et al., 2018). The challenge is finding the ideal size for agritourism operations, which involves allocating agricultural and non-agricultural resources to maximize efficiency while ensuring food provision for local and regional regions. Research endeavors focused on the attributes and driving forces behind the advancement of agricultural tourism have been carried out and produced outcomes: Evidently, young farmers possess or acquire portions of agricultural tourism. Individuals who own agricultural property, with a strong foundation of knowledge, awareness, and a willingness to take risks, are more likely to engage in agricultural tourist activities to expand their family's income (Meraner et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the spatial separation between rural and urban regions also benefits farmers. Agricultural tourism development incentivizes farmers to focus on certain types of farming and progressively transition to cultivating high-value crops (Santeramo & Morelli, 2016), (Khanal & Mishra, 2014). In addition to external influences, further research has shown that the success of agritourism is heavily influenced by the caliber and number of human resources inside the community engaged in tourism, as well as the magnitude of tourism activity farm tissues (Hung et al., 2016). Furthermore, the investigation of the benefits, obstacles, prospects, and complexities associated with agricultural tourism is a subject of considerable interest among several experts (Colton & Bissix, 2005), (Kordel, 2016), (Naidoo & Sharpley, 2016)

Moreover, gender concerns get considerable attention in the field of agritourism. The research findings indicate that women use agritourism activities to bolster and empower themselves to get employment, generate revenue, and enhance their skills via their routine endeavors. Agricultural tourism has emerged as a valuable strategy to empower and gain recognition for women in rural regions, where patriarchal ideology continues to prevail in the agricultural sector (Tacoli & Mabala, 2010), (Pattnaik et al., 2018).

Conclusion

An analysis of agritourism literature using bibliometrics and VOSviewer software has shown consistent and continuous growth in both the number of research publications and the number of authors over the last forty years. It is an ongoing and evolving process that will continue to progress in the foreseeable future. Concurrently with the rise in the quantity of publications, study areas of agricultural tourism are also broadening and becoming more varied. The use of keyword analysis, bibliometric analysis, and visual representation generated by VOS software has enhanced the objectivity of the document review process. It assists in identifying frequently repeated terms, identifying the impact of prominent researchers in the area, collaborating via co-citation, etc., indicating that the primary study on agritourism is now being conducted. Various research organizations are studying agritourism from several perspectives, including conservation, evaluating possible advantages, promoting sustainable development, involving stakeholders, and raising awareness. Research in agritourism is mainly performed by countries that have made substantial contributions to this field, particularly emphasizing established nations like the United States, England, and Italy. In contrast, developing countries with emerging agricultural economies have recently started to engage in agritourism research.

Nevertheless, observing the extent of dissemination, degree of impact, and study prospects of agritourism research in these developing nations is feasible. Nevertheless, this study is constrained by its reliance only on the Web of Science database. Despite being a substantial database, it can only include part of the research on agricultural tourism, providing a partial summary. Exploring works derived from various database sources may provide new and enlarged study avenues for agricultural tourism in the future.

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REGENERATING HERITAGE URBAN AREAS THROUGH HERITAGE TOURISM – CASE STUDY OF FRENCH ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IN HUE

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Extended abstract

Tourism in historical urban areas, most cities see urban heritage-based tourism as a means of diversifying the economy, increasing revenue, improving residents' living standards and innovating urban space. The article uses the PIC model in heritage tourism research, evaluating theories and research models related to community tourism and tourism planning to provide a basis for developing a heritage tourism planning model. This study examines heritage tourism as a tool for urban regeneration of French architectural heritage in Hue by considering factors such as the value of this heritage, the potential of heritage tourists as a niche market, cultural management policies, and branding for heritage destinations.

Keyworld: Heritage, heritage tourism, regenerative, French architecture.

Introduction

Urban architectural and cultural heritage refer to material and spiritual products created in the past with historical, cultural, and scientific significance. Reality has proven that the cultural differences and diversity of cultural heritage are important factors for attracting tourists and promoting a city's image, contributing to significant economic potential, even for smaller economies. This paper explores the multi-dimensional approach of balancing conservation and development while utilizing urban architectural heritage.

With about 70 years of presence in Hue (1875-1945), the French significantly transformed Hue's urban planning and architecture. For the first time, the city was introduced to Western-style street planning, infrastructure construction, and grand architectural works in the Classical and Modern styles. The French also built a unique, small urban area on the southern bank of the Perfume River, known as the Western Quarter. This area, built in European architectural style, has coexisted with the traditional urban area for a long time and is now considered a heritage area itself. Hue is considered a heritage city, and research on leveraging French architectural heritage within its existing historical space contributes to renewing Hue as a tourist destination.

Heritage tourism and heritage urban regeneration

Heritage tourism is a complex notion to define and classify. It is a term that can be understood as "cultural tourism", "art tourism", "ethnic tourism" or "indigenous tourism" and they are often used interchangeably (Michael Hitchcock et al., 2010) .

Some define heritage tourism simply as visiting heritage sites or viewing historical resources. Others suggest that heritage tourism is the process of personal connection with objects or places that are seen as what defines heritage tourism. Even more specifically, some observers argue that heritage tourism is based on the inquiry process of people wanting to learn something new or enhancing their lives in certain manners. All of these perspectives are essential components of heritage tourism (Timothy , 2011). Also according to Timothy, " Heritage tourism includes all the elements handed down by humans from the past through which tourists have experiences and desire to find meaning, education or spiritual beliefs." (Timothy , 2011, p. 42). The exciting thing that creates heritage is the process of "consuming" and absorbing the past according to each specific context, in which personal experience is considered one of the essential elements of heritage tourism.

Heritage tourism is a suitable and lively type of tourism (UNESCO, 2021) "*focusing on monuments historical, natural and price treat literature* " (Bonn et al. , 2007, p . 135). A research group rescue tried to understand and determine the uniqueness of heritage tourism experiences (Chung et al. , 2018; Yi et al. , 2022). If done successfully, legacy Tourism takes advantage of the location's history to add depth to the experience (Chhabra et al. , 2003; Ram

et al. , 2016). Tourism practitioners often pursue this strategy at various levels, e.g recreate events or situations that happened in the past (Chhabra et al ., 2003), or use absolute symbolic links with the past (Yi et al. , 2022). By its nature, heritage tourism focuses on the past (Anastasiadou & Vettese, 2021) and as such, it requires a temporary distance between the historical events it focuses on and the tourist's present (Leighton, 2007). In other words, heritage tourism strategies create temporal distance between tourists and locations.

Tourism in historical urban areas, most cities see urban heritage-based tourism as a means of diversifying the economy, increasing revenue, improving residents' living standards and innovating urban space.

Several global trends in heritage tourism and urban innovation have emerged in recent years. The emerging trend is the government's growing interest in heritage tourism, evident in managers' efforts to restructure the economy. It shows a shift from traditional manufacturing or manufacturing sectors to more service-based economies, directly affecting the relationship between urban heritage and tourism (Timothy, 2019). Swarbooke (2000) and Daher (2005) explain how tourism is often used as a tool to recreate and give visitors new perspectives on heritage (Dher, 2005). Heritage tourism has the potential to play a role in urban regeneration in various ways, especially in the planning of cultural policies, focusing on heritage tourists as an appropriate urban market. Integration, local community participation and place branding (Bianchini, 1993; Brebbia & Galiano-Garrigos, 2017; Timothy, 2014).

Objective

The theoretical framework applied for this study is **Timothy and Tosun's** participatory, incremental, and collaborative planning (PIC) model (2003). This framework mentions that to develop heritage tourism in heritage destinations, it is necessary to attract participation and consider stakehoder's opinions in building heritage tourism in urban areas (Timothy, 2011).

The PIC model includes three steps: participatory, host community engagement, incremental, collaboration/coordination between central government, destination businesses and local public structures. Collaborative or coordinated planning highlights the role of stakeholder coalitions and coordination in building an economically sustainable environment for heritage tourism development (Timothy, 2011).
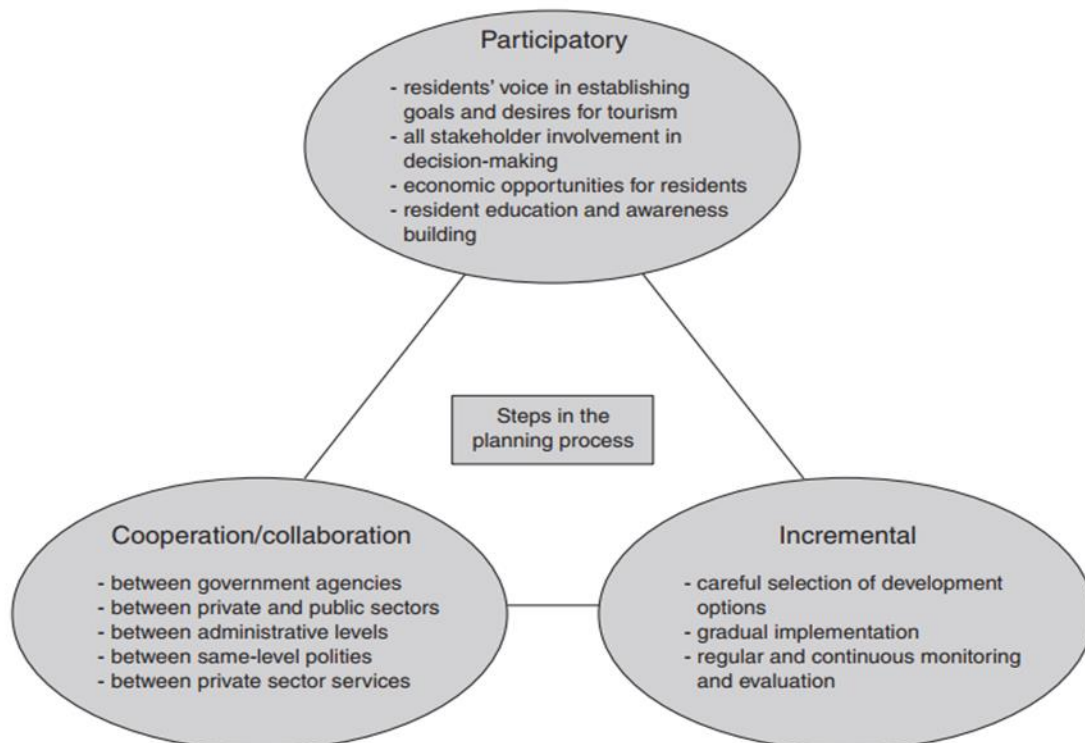
Hình 1: PIC planning principles (Timothy, 2011)

Research Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this study, the main research question is: What are the important roles of stakeholders in regenerating heritage cities through heritage tourism? We applied a qualitative research design proven in different contexts to build theory. (Winn, 2001).

Qualitative research was preferred due to the exploratory nature of this study, which provided the opportunity to explore in depth the perceptions and experiences (Hennink et al., 2020) of those knowledgeable about the French architectural heritage in Hue. These people were then selected to express their perceptions and answer the research questions. Consistent with qualitative research, purposive sampling allowed us to select participants based on their relevance in achieving the purpose of this study by answering the research questions based on their direct involvement/understanding in the activities of exploiting the French architectural heritage in Hue as a form of heritage tourism, thereby recreating the image of the architectural heritage city in Hue for tourists. Due to the specific characteristics and attributes of the participants necessary to answer the research questions and achieve the research purpose, we applied the snowball sampling technique (Hennik et al, 2020) to recruit participants for this study. Using this method, the first participant from the author's professional network was asked to refer potential participants who met the eligibility criteria and might be interested in providing helpful information about their stakeholder management experience. During data collection, a consent form introducing the research topic, the purpose of the study, ethics including anonymity, and the participant's right to withdraw at any stage of the research process was signed by each participant.

The study included two phases of data collection. Using secondary data sources, Phase 1 of this study investigated policies related to local heritage, specifically the Hue Tourism Development Strategy and Plan 2020 - 2025, along with a list of typical French architectural heritage works in Hue. In addition, the author also studied the documents of two conferences held related to French architectural heritage in Hue. The first conference "The gains and losses of the restoration of historic quarters", held in Hanoi in 1994, discussed the value of French architecture in the three Indochinese countries. The second conference "Evaluation of Hue urban architectural fund", held in Hue in 2003. All four documents are publicly available online. These documents were examined to highlight inter-organizational relationships, funding mechanisms, key areas of work, a list of typical French architectural heritage buildings in Hue that are expected to be exploited for tourism development, and to identify French architecture on the banks of the Perfume River as one of the valuable architectural treasures of Hue that need to be preserved. The results from this examination informed the second phase (interviews) and provided a context for the analysis of empirical data in Phase 2.

Phase 2 involved semi-structured interviews with managers, community residents, tourism companies and tourists (Flick, 2009). These interviews aimed to capture the level of engagement and collaborative tendencies. The critical stakeholders examined here reflect Gelder's (2011) description of critical stakeholders. They represent individuals and organizations that can significantly contribute to shaping the future of urban areas through policies, actions, behaviors and communications. A sample of seven senior managers and experts representing each of the seven critical organisations involved in urban heritage tourism in Hue were interviewed. The interviews took place in Hue, Vietnam, during the first two weeks of February 2023.

Due to the nature of the research, and as described by Gibbs (2007), it was found that when the study looked at policies, institutions and evaluations, the factual content of what respondents said emerged enough to analyze the qualitative data collected.

Thematic analysis, a form of qualitative coding analysis, was applied. It supports the development of deeper-level themes than surface-level codes (Bryman, 2012). It allows the researcher to spend more time with the data, exploring themes that emerged, rather than reflecting the researcher's own beliefs (Fielding & Warnes. 2009; Matthew & Sutton, 2011). The NVivo14 software tool for qualitative data analysis was used to support

Fiding

1. Issues faced by stakeholders in the development of French architectural heritage tourism in Hue

a. Different perceptions of heritage value

In general, with French architectural heritage, as a stakeholder group, the local community only sees minimal heritage value in the area. Four out of ten interviewees were skeptical about French architectural heritage and one resident did not know whether it could be considered heritage.

"Is French architecture also considered heritage? I did not know that"

(Resident, 27 years old)

Two people believe that only a part of French architecture is considered heritage and should be classified as heritage. One resident commented

"Hue has many French architectures, but they are currently being used for the wrong purposes. I think that only architectures classified by the state as relics should be considered heritage, for example, Quoc Hoc School"

(Resident, 45 years old)

On the contrary, tourists and most stakeholders from managers to tourists recognize the value of French architecture, despite other inconsistent views. They see each French architectural work as they always carry historical stories, and at the same time containing many cultural and architectural artistic values. They consider the historical context to be valuable, including the style and characteristics of the area.

One manager commented: "French architects have studied and selected appropriate planning and construction methods by designing roads, flower gardens, lawns, campuses and works to create harmony in the southern area. Therefore, it does not affect the landscape of the Huong River and does not conflict with the works in the north of this river; today, those values have contributed to creating the appearance of the city with cultural identity. These values are the architectural language that represents a historical period of Hue city, it shows the richness of types and the superiority of landscape design. It is these masterpieces that contribute to the value of the heritage city, a land with 7 heritages recognized by UNESCO"

(Manager, 55 years old)

As discussed above, the different understandings of heritage values suggest the need to collectively assess and construct heritage values in urban heritage planning because heritage values perceived by stakeholders do not always align with dominant concepts of value (Avrami, Macdonald, Mason, & Myers, 2019; De la Torre, 2013). The diverse perspectives stakeholders hold can also be used to resolve conflicting perceptions of heritage values (Hautam¨aki & Laine, 2020; Yu, 2017).

Different goals, priorities and concerns when developing heritage

Regarding the French architectural heritage in Hue, all interviewees agreed with the need to preserve the French architectural heritage. Among the works being privatized (French villas exploited to become cafes, restaurants, etc.), three aspects of development were pointed out: seeking business opportunities, promoting heritage, and promoting the vitality of heritage. Five out of seven interviewees were concerned about whether using heritage for business purposes would change the heritage.

"Currently, some French villas are used by tourism companies or individuals as restaurants and cafes. I am afraid that this will change the architectural structure of the works."

(Resident, 36 years old)

All stakeholders from the public sector are interested in restoring architectural heritage for tourism exploitation. However, they are also concerned about exploitation of heritage without losing its value.

For tourists, French architecture offers an opportunity to understand urban and cultural characteristics. Four out of five tourists emphasized their concern for the authenticity of heritage and hope that French architectural heritage will be restored to its original appearance through development. All interviewed tourists agreed that French architectural heritage has the potential to become an attractive tourist destination due to its important role in the city's history.

The results clearly show that stakeholders are positioned at different hierarchical levels in the heritage planning. These different needs must be considered in collaborative heritage planning as some of these needs directly compete with heritage conservation and conflicts may arise. The results also demonstrate the internal heterogeneity of stakeholder groups, suggesting the need for internal group coordination in a collaborative planning approach. However, despite their differences, stakeholders have some commonalities that provide a basis for engagement in heritage planning.

2. Coordination between public administrative agencies

The second dimension of the PIC model of institutional partnerships points to the linkages between different levels of governance – national, regional and local. The inherent structure of these inter-organizational relationships (including how to allocate budgets and areas of responsibility) creates additional complexities that are often not easy to navigate. Local authorities and their associated organizations may retain some control over the management of heritage sites. However, funding to support heritage buildings is provided by other stakeholders – through central government structures such as the Ministry of Culture. Central government therefore has significant influence over

tourism development and the conservation of French architectural heritage. In such cases, the local-national linkages between the local authorities in Hue and national agencies are essential in terms of funding projects in the French architectural heritage area. It is felt that the local government and the government tourism unit need to strengthen the work of securing these funds, by emphasizing the local national partnership.

On the other hand, **many management agencies currently manage French architectural heritage** in the process of searching for architectural records of colonial works in Hue. This issue is of great concern to managers. **Recognizing** and considering recognizing French architectural heritage is reasonable. It helps to unify the general management agency.

"In 2000, the whole city had about 240 French colonial architectural works. However, in 2018, the city decided to recognize 27 typical French colonial architectural works (Decision 1152/QD-UBND). It is necessary to continue to compile records to review and recognize these works"

(Manager, 43 years old)

According to the authorities, the announcement of 27 typical French architectural works in Hue city aims to create a basis for orientation in conservation, promotion and general management in terms of policy.

3. Opportunities for stakeholders to participate in the process of heritage tourism development

In addition to highlighting challenges related to stakeholder engagement in heritage planning and management, interviewees mentioned several opportunities. First, there was a consensus that heritage could be beneficial. Although their understandings and interests varied, stakeholders agreed that French architectural heritage could be used to exploit niche markets and could gain value through tourism development. These potential benefits could provide a common ground and motivation for stakeholder engagement in collaborative urban heritage planning.

The final opportunity is the emergence of innovative platforms that can facilitate collaborative planning if managed well.

Discussion

First, integrating urban heritage planning and management with collaborative processes requires the collaborative identification of heritage. This process must provide opportunities for stakeholders to identify and understand heritage values. These opportunities not only help to reduce conflicts between stakeholders but also enable discussion between laypeople and experts. By jointly assessing and identifying heritage values, stakeholders from different sectors can clarify their views

The following important consideration is to consider the hierarchy of stakeholders' interests to ensure that these interests are met. **Stakeholders can express aesthetic and intellectual interests only** when their basic interests are met- By understanding common or conflicting interests, decision makers will be able to identify which groups can form alliances and which groups can conflict.

This awareness will support more effective coordination of stakeholder relationships in the collaborative planning process for urban heritage

In the management of French architectural heritage, there have been some overlapping and unclear functions of public management agencies. The lack of ongoing active communication and dialogue can be an obstacle when key stakeholders want to contribute. Although the number of private stakeholders is increasing and providing an additional dimension to the establishment of collaborative activities, their **influence** currently **needs to be improved.**

Stakeholders in the network support the growing role and positive impact of public-private partnerships on French architectural heritage, however, the current tourism partnership structure offers limited opportunities for such collaboration. This is a prominent area for further development for the site.

The challenges outlined above in this case **study are common** to the French architectural heritage of Hue. This is particularly true in tourism, where a large number of actors are involved in the decision-making process (Hall, 2005). As a result, the state's task of coordinating the activities of destinations tends to be more difficult. Conflicts can arise between different government roles and forms of governance and between stakeholders advocating diverse perspectives (McKercher & du Cros, 2002; Cooper & Hall, 2008). It is important to sow the seeds for constructive dialogue between high-impact stakeholders involved in heritage tourism alliances (Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Timothy & Boyd, 2003). The role of public stakeholders is crucial to the future development of heritage tourism (Hall, 2008; Scheyvens, 2011). Coordination is needed both within and between different levels of government, for effective

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tourism strategies to be developed (Hall, 2005). The findings of this study demonstrate the need for precise coordination between activities, levels of management and stakeholders, including establishing constructive dialogue and working towards nurturing heritage tourism alliances.

A unified approach to management and planning involving the participation of all key stakeholders in heritage tourism representing the public sector in a destination is a stepping stone towards introducing coordination mechanisms and collaborative practices into heritage towns (Evans, 2000).

However, more than participation is required. Active urban tourism planning and management strategies are often required (Green, 2001; Timothy, 2011). Different methods for the French architectural heritage in Hue must also be adapted. Based on the above discussion, it is clear that broadening and deepening the participation of all stakeholders in the network is imperative.

Conclusion

Considered at the early stages of urban heritage development, the case of French architectural heritage reflects the potential for heritage tourism development, demonstrating how a collaborative planning process can be applied at the early stages of this development. Through this case, this study explored the challenges and opportunities stakeholder face in planning and managing of urban heritage.

The results show that conflicts in urban heritage arise due to different perceptions, interests and expectations of stakeholders. The collaborative planning process provides a perspective to understand how stakeholders perceive urban heritage and how stakeholders can contribute. Notably, issues of power differentials, lack of communication and participation mechanisms may require the development of a more supportive framework to engage stakeholders in the heritage development process.

Despite the challenges, some opportunities have emerged and strategies have been developed to facilitate stakeholder engagement in the restoration of French architectural heritage through heritage tourism. These strategies have some limitations, as the application of any strategy must be guided by the social, cultural and political context of the development process.

Understanding stakeholders helps to understand their network of relationships within groups, allowing for the anticipation of strategies and the promotion of evolving roles in the heritage development process. This will enable stakeholders to be perceived from a dynamic perspective, leading to a better assessment of their influence in urban heritage planning. Two aspects that require further research are how to leverage the different agency roles of stakeholders and how to develop partnerships between stakeholders in different contexts.

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STAKEHOLDERS' ANALYSIS: THE PERCEIVED BENEFITS AND FUNDING PROCESS OF TIAHOU RELIGIOUS FESTIVAL IN BINH DUONG PROVINCE, VIETNAM

Nguyễn Phương Hồng Phúc[1]

Abstract

Tianhou religious festival (TRF) has been widely promoted across Asia, and its long-established rituals and religious values benefit the tourism sector economically. This exquisite and meaningful festival bounded to the religious beliefs of local people in Binh Duong Province (BDP), Vietnam, has been an ultimate way to increase the socio-economic development of the surrounding area. However, studies on the Tianhou religious festival under the tourism lens have not been addressed adequately, especially the benefits of stakeholders and the funding process of the Tianhou religious festival as a non-profit-oriented event. Undoubtedly, understanding stakeholders' collaboration will enhance the quality of the festival. The study adopted qualitative methods using semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, with the data transcribed and analyzed by thematic analysis. The findings reveal that the effects of organizing TRF may enhance interpersonal skills, economic benefits, social incentives, and community cohesiveness. The festival received the funds through voluntary donations from firms, government financial support, and lanterns auctions. This research contributes to visualizing the impacts of TRF on stakeholders and the funding process under the scope of a non-profit-oriented event. The findings can guide the key stakeholders in improving the same concept of event management in the future.

Keywords: *stakeholder analysis, Tianhou religious festival, perceived benefits, funding process.*

Introduction

Religion is among the primary motivations for traveling; tourists often travel to events and festivals directly or indirectly related to religions (UNWTO, 2014). Therefore, studies on festivals and events have been developed worldwide for their crucial role in social development and cultural preservation that have been promoted and created as tourist attractions (Andersson and Getz, 2008). However, a limited number of studies specifically address stakeholder analysis in religious festival contexts (Zhang *et al.*, 2019).

The objective of this paper is (i) to identify the perceived benefits TRF stakeholders receive that motivate them to organise this festival and (ii) to analyse the funding process of TRF in Binh Duong province under the scope of a non-profit religious festival. The outcome of this paper will identify the benefits stakeholders can receive and the funding process of TRF that contributes to the overall event management body of knowledge.

Objectives

This study focuses on two main objectives which are:

1. To determine the benefits that key stakeholders could be gained from organising the Tianhou festival.

2. To analyse the funding process for the non-profit festival and the use of the festival's funds.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

This study conducts qualitative research by using face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the topic guides drafted along to aid both the respondents and the researcher during the interview session to explore the study objectives using Freeman's stakeholder theory as a guide to conduct the questions (Freeman, 1984). Respondents are assigned by the previous interviewee within the cycle of Tianhou organisers to participate in the study. The topic guide was also provided beforehand so the participants could be well prepared and guide both parties in focusing on the scope of the discussion (Marshall and Rossman, 2014). For the data analysis, thematic analysis has been used because of its nature in helping researchers have more flexibility while retaining rich and valuable data. The collected data was manually computed by the researcher into codes and themes that align with the study objectives followed

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(Braun and Clarke, 2006) six steps in conducting thematic analysis.

2. Research Tools

In this study, the primary data collection includes face-to-face interviews with the targeted respondents. An in-depth semi-structured interview using the snowball technique is conducted with stakeholders associated with the TRF's operation. The designed instrument for semi-structured interviews is composed of a topic guide. The topic guide can provide a guideline for narrating the whole conversation within the scope of the study. The interview session was conducted in English or Vietnamese, based on the respondent's preference. All interviews received consent from the individual and department, and the interview was conducted at their workplace. The interview was audio-recorded, and notes were also taken.

However, the questions addressed during the actual interview session might not follow the exact topic guide for naturally flowing and continuous narration. As the researcher used semi-structured interviews for the study, the researcher was able to ask more questions to gain deeper insights from respondents as long as it strongly related to the scope of the study. In addition, as the festival is not organised by a single stakeholder, different stakeholders will give different ideas on the same questions. However, one stakeholder might not know certain areas (financial, history, marketing). Therefore, 5 topic guides (same guided questions) with additional questions related to specific stakeholders have been conducted. The researcher wants to keep the 2-ways engagement between the interviewer and the respondent so the whole conversation for more in-depth data

3. Data Collection

The topic guide was also provided beforehand so the participants could be well prepared and guide both parties in focusing on the scope of the discussion. It is, however, different from empirical studies that only have one set of topic guides for all respondents. There are different topic guides for interviewing respondents based on their role in the TianHou Festival and whether they are from the private or public sector or NGOs. As the researcher indicated, the respondents are chosen by occupation, festival background, and public or private sector. The presumed listed interests (duties, competencies, and capabilities) are shown in previous empirical studies. Nevertheless, this study's findings might not show an absolute similarity to previous studies due to the different nature of the festival was governed. As the researcher adopts qualitative research, the approach is more inductive and does not test the variables as performed in quantitative research. Thus, the development of 5 topic guides arises from the fact that there are sections that one respondent will know about while others will not (especially on the financial aspect). Hence, 5 sets of topic guides were prepared for different stakeholders. However, the foundation of these 5 is the same. The only difference is based on the participation they involved in the festival. As the researcher is conducting a semi-structured interview, not a structured interview, the researcher has leeway and flexibility to use probing techniques during the interview sessions. This is to ensure that the researcher's plans initially are not strictly bounded as the situation might be different while maintaining the saturation data principle.

4. Data Analysis

For this study, data from semi-structured interviews will be used for the content analysis coding. Academic data analysis involves identifying key themes, concepts, and patterns of belief that connect people and settings (Marshall and Rossman, 2014). Thus, using the right way to analyse the data will advance the research for more accurate outcomes. Data collected was then analysed manually by using thematic analysis.

Tianhou Temple is a long-established cultural and religious relic; the Tianhou festival has become an important festival for the cultural and religious preservation of the Mazu-Tianhou Cult. The festival attracted thousands of pilgrims and tourists throughout its three days of celebration (from the 12th of January to the 15 of January according to the Chinese Lunar Calendar). Tianhou Temple is managed by the Organisational Board including the representatives of 4 Chinese Communities (Quang Dong (广东); Phuc Kien (福建省); Sung Chinh (宋钦); Trieu Chau (潮州)). Each group of the communities will be the head of the Organisational Board of Tianhou Temple for one year, and the chief of the group will be the head of the Festival Organisers. They will be responsible for planning the festival's rituals, parade, and external relationships with Government bodies (Vo, 2003). The Organisational Board of Tianhou Temple for the Tianhou Festival is also divided into different departments, including General Affairs, Communication Department, Welfare Department, and Board of Supervisors. Together with other stakeholders from the Government sectors, the Tianhou Festival creates a festival space including sacred space, community, and social space.

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Figure 1 shows the extracted data from key stakeholders' interview sessions indicating that key stakeholders can acquire benefits from the organising process of the Tianhou festival both physical and mental aspects. The most frequent benefits extracted from the interview sessions involve interpersonal skills, economic benefits, social incentives, and community cohesiveness. These findings have similar patterns with the perceived impacts of festivals from festival organisers perspective (Gursoy, Kim and Uysal, 2004).
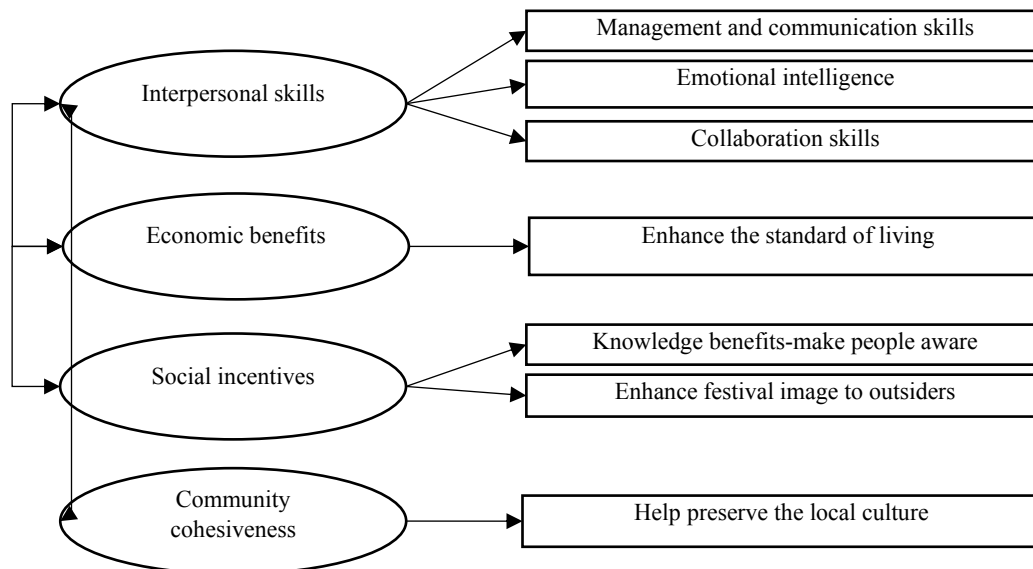
Figure 1: The perceived impacts of festivals by organisers at TRF, BDP, Vietnam

Source: Author

Key stakeholders stated that their interpersonal skills have been improved especially management skills (including time management, plan management, and communication skills); emotional intelligence (how they can tackle urgent situations before or during the festival); and collaboration skills (including how stakeholders can collaborate in harmony). These skills are crucial in organising the Tianhou festival and practical in their daily life context because of their work's requirements:

R2 "Being a member of the volunteers' team helps me develop my social skills and emotional intelligence… attitude is the key to the festival's success. … For volunteers in particular, … have the hotline contact connected with higher-level stakeholders….I can develop …negotiation skills during this process… Even when conflicts and issues occur, organisers and stakeholders must be calm first and promptly contact each other for solutions."

R3 "Firstly, the attitude when other stakeholders and I communicate with each other is undeniably essential. Second, respect is the critical work on an excellent harmonious relationship between stakeholders…I also can improve my management skills, helping to enhance the position of the People's Committee in the organising process for festivals and other events."

R5 "Being one of the main stakeholders who organise this festival also helps promote religious tourism in BDP and Tianhou Temple, particularly by drawing more people to come to the festival each year… the festival is not only linked to the local people minds but also an alternative way to promote religious tourism."

From the excellent promotion, more people and pilgrims will come to Tianhou festival each year, and the image of the festival, especially the unique name that tourists named for Tianhou festival – the "free" festival with its unique features can be spread out to outsiders.

R8 "The most significant skill is management skills in planning and monitoring the tasks during the festival. We also learn about budget management for an unexpected situation."

Research objective 2 of this study aims to analyse the funding process for a non-profit festival and the use of the festival's funds. According to Andersson & Getz, public and non-profit festivals are not heavily dependent on sponsorship, unlike profit festivals (Andersson and D Getz, 2009). Instead, non-profit, and public festivals have government support in revenues, budget, and legislation matters. This principle also applies to the Tianhou religious

festival case, interview sessions with key stakeholders who organise the Tianhou festival reveal the similarity between Getz's findings and the Tianhou festival case. Stakeholders' responses reveal that the Organisational Board of Tianhou Temple manages the fund for the Tianhou Festival. Therefore, they will open a lanterns auction to raise funds for the festival operation.

R5 "The fund is raised and managed by the Organisational Board of Tianhou Temple. However, unlike other festivals that ask for fundraising and sponsors, we do not call for sponsors…However, on the 15th of January (Chinese Lunar Calendar), we will auction the lanterns with nine lanterns for nine kinds of fortunes…Typically, those who join the auction are firms in BDP or even HCMC that cannot directly support the festival. In 2018, the total amount of money from the auction was over 2 billion Vietnamese dongs."

R7 "We are not involved in the financial aspect of the festival. Everything related to financial support will become eventually related to the Organisational Board of Tianhou Temple."

However, stakeholder from the Culture and Information Division reveals that a non-profit festival can also ask for financial support from the Government. For example, the money to open and build festival booths for businesspeople and the Steering Committee is from the Government.

R3 "Basically, we are not usually the ones that handle the financial aspect. The organisational board of Tianhou Temple is the one who raises funds for the festival through the lanterns auction. However, we do support the facilities for the festival specifically in selling booths for businesspeople, NGOs, volunteer groups, and the booth for the Steering Committee."

R5 "Everything mainly comes from their voluntary hearts. We are still accepting their efforts and resources. Hence, after the festival is operated, we often open a ceremony to celebrate and treasure all the donors and volunteers who are giving their efforts to support the festival in collaboration with the local authority."

The money from the lanterns' auction is used for multiple purposes, and one of them is the infrastructure improvement for the Temples. For example, a stakeholder from the Organisational Board of Tianhou Temple stated that Tianhou Temple is expanding to a bigger and safer building in Binh Duong, New City. Hence, the money will be split for both Temples' up-gradation. Other parts of the money will then be used for social enhancements that focus on supporting the development of the local community:

R5 "From the auction, and other supports, the money will be then divided into sub-fields that are used for different purposes such as fixing and decorating the infrastructure of the Tianhou festival (one at Phu Cuong Ward, and one newly built in Phu My Ward) …. sending part of the money to schools in BDP and poor students, another part of the money will help homeless people. In 2020, the pandemic strongly affected this process of money gathering, so our budget was reduced by 80%. We did the lantern auction online and used the money to help poor people in the area to help them overcome a hard time during the pandemic."

The Tianhou Festival does not include business sectors in the organising process, its funding is also different. The Organisational Board of Tianhou Temple will do a lantern auction to raise funds and receive financial support from the government and businesspeople. All the financial support is voluntary. The fund is used to organise the Tianhou festival and improve the social life of the area. The perceived benefits of TRF, and BDP include interpersonal skills, economic growth for the local community, social incentives, and community cohesiveness (Figure 2).
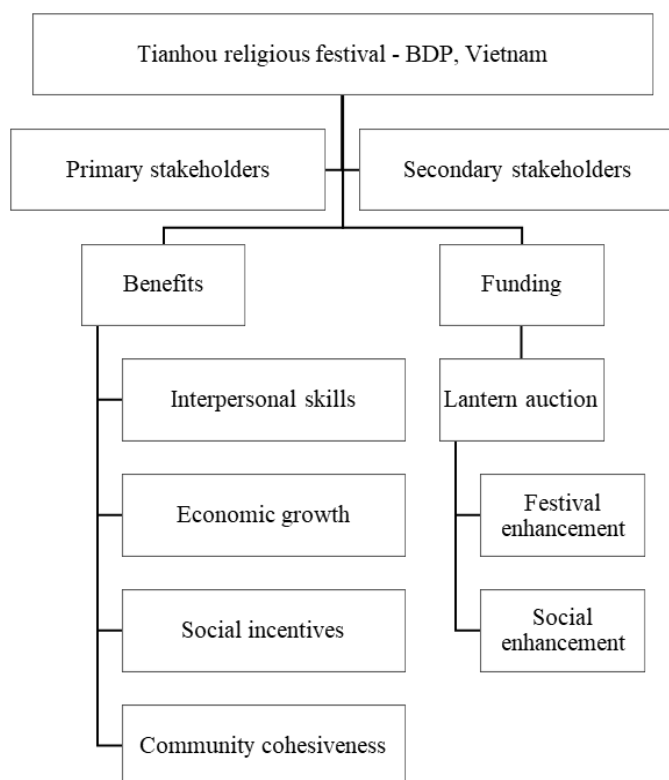
Figure 2: The perceived benefits and funding process of TRF, BDP

Source: Author

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

The stakeholder theory by Freeman (1984) proved to be valuable even for the tourism sector. By having benefits for all stakeholders, a well-arranged collaboration between key stakeholders can be formed and ensure the sustainability of the festival. Each festival has its characteristics that not only one stakeholders' model from the empirical studies can be used to identify, but the findings also show that depending on the scenario and groups of stakeholders, different stakeholders' benefits can be perceived and most of the non-profit festivals keen on getting fund for organising the festival from Government sector and sponsor from economic firms.

2. Discussion

The findings show that key stakeholders can receive benefits not for only the stakeholders but indirectly from the growth of the local community. Public and non-profit festivals have successfully lobbied the government for money or other benefits. Therefore, on-profit festivals seem to be less concerned about sponsors (Andersson and D Getz, 2009). The study indicates the benefits that motivate stakeholders to join the organising process of TRF, BDP, Vietnam, and the funding process of how the festival can operate while being a non-profit-oriented event. Future studies can consider doing a comparison between different countries doing the same festival so findings can be more diverse

Research recommendations

There are a few opportunities that can be included for future studies. Future studies on a similar topic as this research can consider having FGD (Focus group discussion) to have a diverse source of data at the same time and increase the chance for respondents to discuss the topic. Future research can also bring to mind the idea of applying a method between quantitative and qualitative to gather more respondents while still keeping the data valid. Also, instead of focusing on one case study, future studies can be done on the concept of comparing the same festival that happens in different places to explore the similarities and dissimilarities between them that can add to the body of knowledge. Moreover, future research can look at a broader scope of how integration and collaboration between inter-organizations and intra-organizations at different levels can benefit each other and enhance the festival's quality, especially from the perspective of a multi-stakeholder structure in DMO (Destination Marketing Organisation).

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CORPORATION SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND BRAND VALUE FROM THE EMPLOYEE'S VIEW: CASE STUDY OF SMES IN HOSPITALITY IN HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

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Vuong Quoc Hung[2]
Nguyen Thanh Ngoc Thach[*]

Abstract

Strengthening corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities is crucial for enhancing a business's Brand Value (BR). The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the BV of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the hospitality of Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), Vietnam from the employee's view. A quantitative research method was used by the authors in this study. Based on an overview of previous studies, secondary data was synthesized, and a survey questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire was distributed to leaders of SMEs in hospitality and the primary data was formed. A total of 217 respondents. After using a linear regression analysis tool, the results of primary data analysis show that five cognitive aspects of CSR affect Brand Value including Community, Customers, Employees, Legal and ethical, and Shareholders. The study aims to provide insights and recommendations on CSR activities and brand equity.

Keywords: *CSR, Brand equity, SMEs, Hospitality; Ho Chi Minh City.*

Introduction

At the end of 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, spread rapidly, and negatively impacted businesses across all sectors and sizes (Iva Gregurec et al., 2021). The severe consequences of the pandemic were evident in all aspects of life, particularly in the economy, politics, society, and psychology (Bretas & Alon, 2020; Ratten, 2020). According to World Bank data (2024), global economic growth fluctuated significantly from 2019 to 2023, even experiencing negative growth in 2020. Vietnam's economy also saw significant fluctuations during this period. However, Vietnam remained a bright spot in the global economy during the crisis (Ngoc, 2024), with impressive growth and a GDP of $430 billion in 2023 (World Bank, 2024). According to the Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam (2024), small and medium enterprises (SMEs) account for 98% of businesses in Vietnam, highlighting their crucial role in the economy.

Ho Chi Minh City (hereinafter abbreviated as HCMC) is always considered the economic capital of Vietnam. As of the end of 2023, the GRDP is estimated to have increased by 5.82% compared to the same period last year, reaching $65.5 billion and accounting for 15.5% of Vietnam's GDP (excerpt from Ngoc, 2023). With 564,650 businesses at the beginning of 2024 (Quang, 2024), and 98% of them being SMEs, the role of SMEs in HCMC's economy is extremely significant. According to HCMC Statistics Department (2024), the total revenue of the trade and service sector in 2023 was estimated at 1,190,407.3 billion VND (equivalent to $46,630,483,245), with accommodation and food services accounting for 108,496.1 billion VND (equivalent to $4,251,620,678). This highlights the importance of SMEs in the hospitality sector to HCMC's economy, and their brand image impacts the city's economy through their performance.

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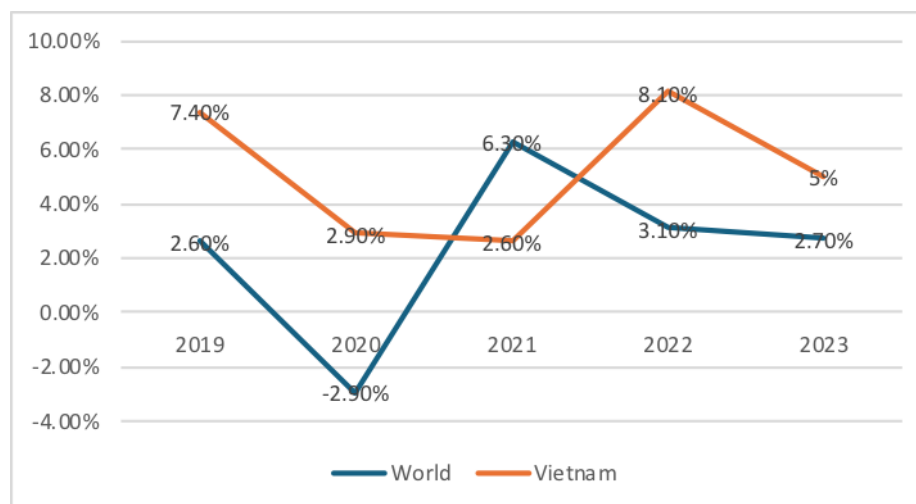
Figure 1. The GDP growth rate of Vietnam and the world in the period 2019 - 2023

Source: World Bank, 2024

As the economy recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses need to focus on various factors to enhance their BV (hereinafter abbreviated as BV) in the eyes of customers. This creates significant pressure on businesses to maintain and develop their operations while fulfilling community responsibilities. Therefore, fulfilling social responsibilities contributes to the success and enhancement of a business's BV . Alrubaiee et al. (2017) and Baumgartner (2014) argue that some businesses have adopted CSR activities as a business strategy, differentiating themselves for long-term growth and competitive advantage. Further research is essential to fully capture the benefits of CSR activities as a corporate strategy for brand recognition, brand image, BV, and brand management. Hence, brand management has become a necessary strategy to enhance competitiveness, with customers and employees closely linked to the brand, known as brand image and brand perception (Abid et al., 2020; Ahmed et al., 2017). Several studies have shown that CSR activities positively impact brand image, and initiatives and consumer perceptions of CSR are linked to brand perception and brand image (Boonpattarakan, 2012; Casado-Diaz et al., 2014; Werther & Chandler, 2005). If CSR initiatives appear reckless, the brand and company's image can be severely damaged (Calabrese & Lancioni, 2008; Dawood, 2019; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). Therefore, it is important to implement appropriate CSR initiatives to improve the company's image, brand perception, and brand image. Effective CSR initiatives must consider that brand image and brand perception are among the most important aspects of corporate strategy (Lho et al., 2019; Ahmed et al., 2017).

Currently, no research evaluates the impact of CSR factors on corporate BV from the employee perspective in HCMC. Therefore, conducting this research is necessary and urgent, especially as the world may face serious pandemics like COVID-19 in the future.

Objectives

This study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. Explore the relationship between CSR and BV of SMEs in hospitality in HCMC.

2. Assess the impact of CSR aspects on the BV of SMEs in hospitality in HCMC.

3. Provide recommendations to help SMEs leaders in hospitality in HCMC have a basis for building their businesses' competitive strategies through CSR activities.

Literature reviews and Hypothesis

Concepts of SMEs in Vietnam

Currently, there are many different definitions of SMEs, depending on the characteristics of each organization and country. Even within each country, there are different classification methods for each different industry. The main classification of enterprise size is often conducted based on labor size and corporate financial measures (Costa Melo et al., 2023) or classified according to criteria such as total assets, labor scale, annual revenue and capital investment (Baenol, 1994)

In Vietnam, SMEs are small-scale enterprises in terms of capital and labor. According to Decree No.

56/2009/ND-CP dated June 30, 2009 of the Government, the criteria for classifying SMEs are as follows:

Table 1. Criteria for classifying SMEs in Vietnam

Scale	Field		
	Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries sector	Industrial and construction sector	Service area
Micro enterprise			
- Labor Scale (employee)	≤ 10	≤ 10	≤ 10
Small enterprise			
- Labor Scale - (employee)	10 - 200	10 - 200	10 - 50
Capital size (billion VND)	≤ 20	≤ 20	≤ 10
Medium enterprise			
- Labor Scale (employee)	200 - 300	200 - 300	50 - 100
- Capital size (billion VND)	20 - 100	20 - 100	10 - 50
Big enterprise			
- Labor Scale - (employee)	> 300	> 300	> 100
Capital size (billion VND)	> 100	> 100	> 50

Source: Vietnam, (2009)

Thus, for research on the hospitality industry, the author makes the point to research businesses operating in the hospitality industry and with a workforce of less than 100 employees and a capital of less than 50 billion VND.

Concepts of CSR

Although CSR has received much attention in recent years, it is still a controversial topic and there is no unified definition (Huong, 2020). According to Wood (2010), CSR is difficult to describe precisely because researchers with different approaches view it in different ways. Carroll (1979) is one of the first scholars to give a description of CSR. He pointed out four areas of responsibility that businesses should implement, they are economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic. Economic responsibility, in particular, relates to the conception that a corporation should take actions to maximize profits for its owners. Legal responsibility refers to the activities of a company meeting all legal standards. Ethical responsibility requires a company to act fitly with ethical values and perform in accordance with societal norms. Finally, philanthropic duty is a company's commitment to contribute to society's well-being (Carroll, 1979; Khan and Fatma, 2019). Besides, Freeman (2010) argues that the concept of CSR can be understood based on the stakeholder theory, which emphasizes that companies must be responsible for their direct and indirect stakeholders. According to Stubbs and Stubbs & Cocklin (2008), companies must understand CSR in a broader context and act responsibly from the perspective of shareholders and stakeholders. Research by Matten and Moon (2008) has come to the conclusion that regardless of the many definitions given by different researchers and groups, CSR is ultimately about a company's policies and practices based on the greater social good. CSR is a strategic marketing technique that has a great influence on customer behavior in the field of marketing and company management (Hwang and Kandampully, 2015; Sen et al., 2006). Furthermore, CSR has been identified in previous studies as an essential PR strategy that directly affects the loyalty of customers and employees to the brand (Werther and Chandler, 2005), especially in the telecommunications industry (Kodua and Mensah, 2017).

Theoretical studies of CSR in Vietnam provide an overview of the debates, current conditions, and challenges surrounding the country's innovative thinking (Cung and Duc, 2008). In addition, through research on sustainable development, the benefits of CSR are said to contribute to this area (Tai, 2010). Duc (2011) points out that studies were conducted in Vietnam to determine its implications for domestic firms. In order to be more relevant when applied in practice in Vietnam, regulations and guidelines on CSR implementation and assessment in countries around the world must be revised and supplemented (Duc, 2011). Besides, other studies look at the employee's perspective, and combine HR policy with CSR to promote and create advantages for the organization and society (Thang, 2010) and are presented in reports. Thuong (2013) and Chau (2014) show more extensive information on labor rights, humanitarian concerns, the role of state management and the approach to each object (laborers activities,

shareholders, customers and other topics). Furthermore, the reports also emphasize the necessity of implementing CSR, highlighting the link between business benefits and social benefits (Bach, 2015). There are many empirical studies on CSR across the country, taking into account the current state of CSR activities in enterprises and the variables influencing the adoption of CSR in practice. According to the research results, economic advantages, macroeconomic policies, ethical obligations and community focus are among the factors that promote the adoption of CSR by small and medium sized companies (Duyen and Canh, 2013) and CSR is also associated with leadership, demonstrating that leadership has a beneficial impact on CSR implementation (Duyen and Tho, 2015). Collier & Esteban (2007) also have the same idea when finding that the achievement of CSR activities will largely depend on the willingness of stakeholders to cooperate and adhere to the CSR strategy. Therefore, it is ultimately the responsibility of the stakeholders to implement CSR strategies on a regular basis.

Concepts of BV (as hereinafter as BV)

According to Chang & Liu (2009), Marketing was the first field to focus on research on BV in the 1960s. BV is the specific value that a brand brings to external audiences such as customers and internal objects such as employees, and at the same time expressed through perceived value, the emotions and feelings of consumers towards the brand (Huong, 2020). BV is an important indicator of a company's financial performance, and it has aroused the interest of academics and practitioners for almost three decades, as shown by a large body of formal research (Tasci, 2021). Furthermore, brand equity is a key term in marketing, management, and branding research (Baalbaki & Guzmán, 2016), since a higher degree of brand equity typically correlates to better cash flows and increased competitiveness (Pepe et al., 2011; Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000). As a result, the management and enhancement of brand equity should be considered as a corporate strategy (Wood, 2000). Branding in the service industry is a topic of great debate in academics as well as among people who directly execute marketing operations; it is an element of the marketing strategy as well as a highly valued company asset (Grace & O'Cass, 2005). A brand is considered a valuable asset of any business, and brand management needs to be approached from many aspects (Wood, 2000).

In the service industry, assessing the influence of brand equity must be done from a variety of perspectives (Srinivasan et al., 2005). More than one technique should be utilized to analyze the brand, according to De Chernatony & Cottam (2006), which helps stakeholders. Furthermore, King & Grace (2010) stress the importance of workers in the management of service brands. More and more companies are encouraging their staff to act as brand ambassadors (De Chernatory et al., 2004). Employee skills and knowledge provide a competitive advantage, thus providing an opportunity for all workers to grasp the value of a brand and its role in developing a productive working environment, which is vitally important (Parker, 2012). Employee-based brand equity is described as the impact of a company's brand on its workers' reactions to the factors of the working environment (King & Grace, 2009). In the service industry, there are many criteria used to determine the BV of an organization, which are employee feedback, knowledge dissemination, brand awareness, commitment, brand behavior, etc. brand, customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction, employee engagement intention, positive communication, management support, socialization, work attitude and employee engagement with the company (King & Grace, 2010). Furthermore, employee satisfaction is correlated to employee engagement intentions (Boselie & van der Wiele, 2002) and generates positive organizational communication (Shinnar et al., 2004).

The relationship between CSR and BV

One of the activities that have a significant influence on the company's image is CSR (Lion, Macchion, Danese & Vinelli, 2016). According to Becker Olsen et al. (2006), via corporate CSR efforts, a good brand image may be formed in the eyes of customers, encouraging customer involvement and loyalty surname for a specific brand (He & Li, 2011). In order to better understand this business trend, Giau et al., (2016) performed a study on CSR in the fashion sector and discovered that it is a valuable tool for growing sales and improving brand image. CSR actions and a brand's image have a favorable and essential link, according to a study by Othman and Hemdi (2013). Nowadays, the topic of CSR is getting more and more attention, guiding to increase the scope of research on CSR activities as well as effectiveness for each enterprise implementing the CSR program (Chomvilailuk & Butcher, 2010). Martínez et al. (2014) concluded that CSR activities have a direct impact on the business performance of hotel service providers in Spain. Furthermore, despite not mentioning the concept of the brand, Kim et al. (2017a) experimentally proved that factors in employees' CSR perceptions in Korean hotels have a strong impact on latent variables like organizational behavior, work performance, commitment to participation, and increased work performance. Esmaeilpour & Barjoei (2016) through a study of 384 food products, concluded that there is a positive

relationship between CSR and brand equity. In addition, CSR has a direct correlation to loyalty, brand image (Martínez et al., 2014), and job performance through better working conditions, commitment to the organization, and behaviors with organization processing (Kim et al. 2017b). Studies on the relationship between CSR and brand equity have been conducted at different levels, but the results show that the association between them is positive (Torres et al., 2012; Tingchi Liu et al., 2014; Hur et al., 2014; Hur et al., 2014). According to Huong (2020) recently, with the development of the world economy, the service industry also has developed, and CSR research has shifted to developing countries and the service sector. With this trend, Studies in Vietnam have also updated CSR in the last two decades and most research systems on the importance of CSR for development, more specifically, CSR implementation will be linked to success in the future (Duyen and Canh, 2013).

Hypothesis

Based on theories of CSR and BV, the authors propose a research model that includes 5 perceived components of CSR as independent variables and the following assumptions are presented:

H_1: Perception of the community aspect of CSR impact on brand eqiuty.

H_2: Perception of the employee aspect of CSR effects on brand eqiuty.

H_3: Perception of the legal and ethical aspect of CSR influence brand eqiuty.

H_4: Perception of the customer aspect of CSR affects brand eqiuty.

H_5: Perception of the shareholder aspect of CSR effects on brand eqiuty.
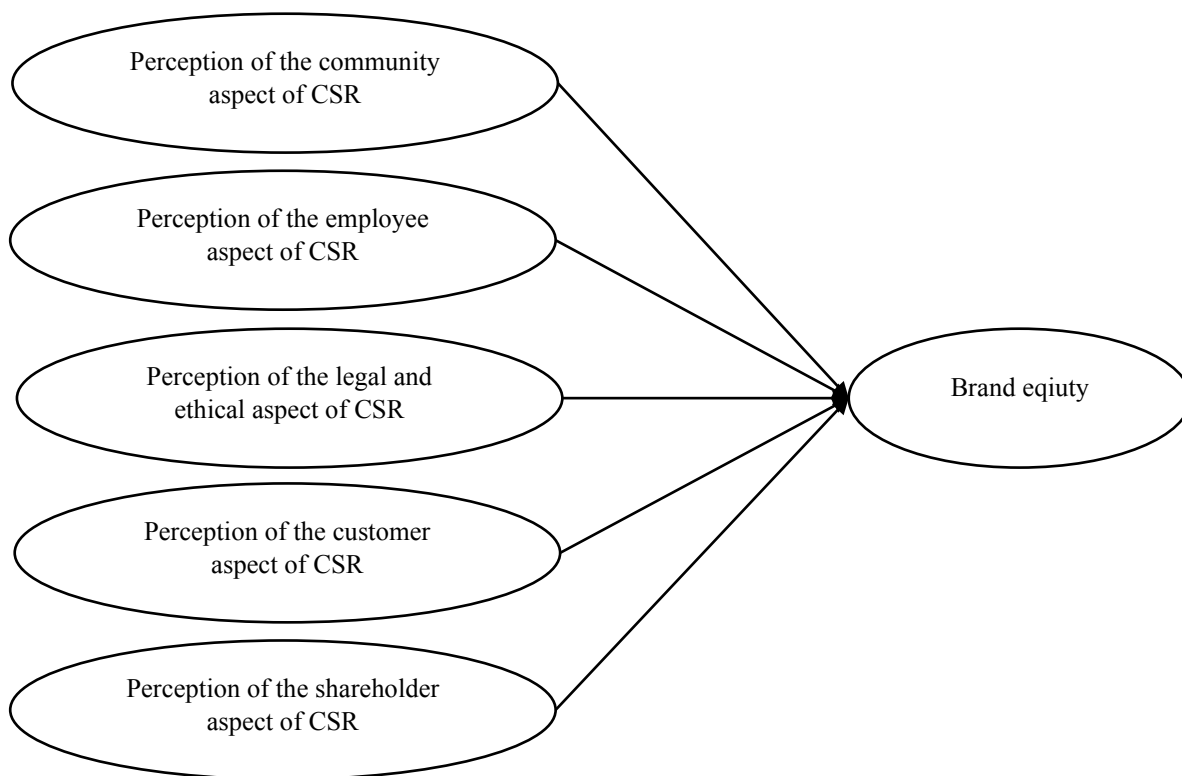
Figure 2. Proposed research model.

Source: own (2023)

Research Methodology

Populations and Sample

The population of this study is all SMEs operating in the hospitality industry in HCMC. However, the population is very large and fluctuates from day to day, so when choosing a sample, the author applies a non-probability sampling method with convenience sampling technique.

For the research sample, the author determined the sample size based on the sampling formula of Hair et al. (2006) and Tabachnick & Fidell (2013). From there, the appropriate sample size for the study is Nmin = Max(5*29;

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8*5+50). In this study, the author collected primary data from 217 businesses operating in the area, thus ensuring the requirements.

Research Tools

The authors employed quantitative research methodologies in this study, as well as two types of secondary and primary data:

First, in terms of secondary data, theories pertaining to CSR initiatives and brand equity, with a focus on the relationship between them, have been searched and evaluated in published journals, books, and other sources such as websites, studies, commercial, and educational organizational reports, etc. As a result, the components of CSR have been identified and validated, at the same time determining that brand equity is affected by CSR activities.

Next, interviews were performed with 9 experts in Ho Chi Minh City, including researchers, CSR professionals, and executives of nine businesses to discover hidden factors or potential factors and scales for detectable elements. Next, 3 focus group discussions and 2 in-depth structured interviews were conducted with 27 random employees to gain a deeper understanding of observed variables as a cross-check method to get better results. After that, the questionnaire was then created as a primary data collection tool. The questionnaire's material was adopted and adapted from prior research' questionnaires (Carroll, 1991; Bayoud et al., 2012; Martinez et al., 2014; Tingchi Liu et al., 2014; Fatma et al., 2014; Zheng et al., 2014; Tingchi Liu et al., 2014; Pérez & del Bosque, 2014; Khan et al., 2015; Pérez et al., 2015; Fatma & Rahman, 2016; Fatma et al., 2016; Khan et al., 2016; Huong, 2020) based on receiving recommendations of experts, employees' viewpoints from the qualitative research results, and also from theoretical meta-analysis results. Before presenting the official survey, 17 employees took a pilot test to assess understanding and provide input on how to improve the clarity of the questionnaire.

Data Collection

With the random sample approach, 295 employees provided answers to the questionnaires for the formal survey, after filtering, 217 questionnaires were eligible to meet the requirements for the analysis.

Data Analysis

With primary data obtained through the survey process with respondents, a total of 217 quality survey questionnaires were entered into SPSS 26.0 software for analysis.

Table 2: Demography analysis

Iterms	Amounts	Ratio
Gender		
Female	126	62.67%
Male	91	37.33%
Type of business		
Private enterprise	51	24.29%
State – owned enterprise	44	20.95%
Parnership	51	24.29%
A limited liability company	71	33.81%
Working seniority		
00 - 05 years	107	49.31%
05 - 10 years	68	33.34%
10 – 15 years	32	14.75%
Over 15 years	9	04.60%

Source: own (2024)

Through table 2, the author sees the diversity in the research sample, so the research sample is representative of the population.

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Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of the scales

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Perception of the shareholder aspect – SH			**Cronbach's Alpha = 0.685**	
SH1	5.88	1.471	.461	.650
SH2	5.59	1.159	.659	.353
SH3	5.03	1.990	.427	.689
Perception of the community aspect – CO			**Cronbach's Alpha = 0.839**	
CO1	18.47	7.370	0.738	0.792
CO2	18.52	7.186	0.684	0.799
CO3	18.53	7.037	0.776	0.781
CO4	18.75	7.262	0.706	0.795
CO5	18.69	7.261	0.665	0.803
CO6	18.68	8.321	**0.257**	0.894
Perception of the employee aspect – EM			**Cronbach's Alpha = 0.896**	
EM1	23.08	19.900	0.755	0.874
EM2	23.06	20.284	0.840	0.864
EM3	22.97	20.703	0.824	0.867
EM4	23.10	20.884	0.763	0.873
EM5	22.98	21.624	0.749	0.876
EM6	23.23	25.928	0.**212**	0.928
EM7	23.23	19.981	0.773	0.872
Perception of the customer aspect – CU			**Cronbach's Alpha = 0.800**	
CU1	15.85	7.139	0.611	0.753
CU2	15.87	7.187	0.653	0.738
CU3	15.92	7.573	0.551	0.772
CU4	15.63	7.493	0.664	0.737
CU5	15.86	8.888	0.445	0.800
Perception of the legal and ethical aspect – LE			**Cronbach's Alpha = 0.827**	
LE1	11.24	3.202	0.693	0.764
LE2	11.33	3.121	0.644	0.787
LE3	11.21	3.205	0.648	0.784
LE4	11.22	3.319	0.628	0.793
Brand Value – BV			**Cronbach's Alpha = 0.836**	
BV1	11.38	3.403	.638	.805
BV2	11.20	2.993	.739	.758
BV3	11.40	3.592	.514	.856
BV4	11.28	2.960	.788	.735

Source: own (2024)

The results show the variable EM6 = 0.212 and CU6 = 0.257, they both < 0.3 and they must be deleted from the model. Thus, there are 27 observed variables accepted and brought into the EFA factor analysis. In terms of EFA analysis, the EFA results of 27 observed variables depict that, five (5) factors have been extracted at Eigenvalue = 1,398 of which the extracted variance is at 68.519% and KMO is at 0.843. The following is the result of EFA:

Table 4. Rotated Component Matrix

Item	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
EM3	0.884				
EM2	0.879				
EM5	0.828				
EM7	0.825				
EM4	0.796				
EM1	0.774				
CO3		0.847			
CO5		0.833			
CO4		0.803			
CO1		0.748			
CO2		0.686			
CU1			0.793		
CU2			0.793		
CU4			0.782		
CU3			0.588		
CU5			0.522		
LE1				0.796	
LE2				0.766	
LE4				0.730	
LE3				0.730	
SH2					0.871
SH1					0.787
SH3					0.627

Source: own (2024)

The EFA factor analysis is evidenced by the EFA results, and it is appropriate, as the dependent variable's EFA analysis results are as follows:

Table 5. Rotated component matrix of the dependent variable

	Component
	1
BE4	0.906
BE2	0.873
BE1	0.799
BE3	0.688

Source: own (2024)

Table 6. Pearson correlation coefficient

		BV	EM	CO	CU	EL	SH
BV	Pearson Correlation	1	0.469[**]	0.578[**]	0.474[**]	0.549[**]	0.320[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	217	217	217	217	217	217

Source: own (2024)

This result expresses that the model does not exist the violate multicollinearity and autocorrelation. Also, regression analysis results are displayed as follows:

Table 7. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.729[a]	.532	.521	.40428	1.874

Source: own (2024)

The results show that the coefficient of determination R^2 = 0.532 and adjusted R^2 = 0.521. From here, the author concludes that the model has a fit level of 52.1% (this means that the independent variables have a 52.1% influence on the dependent variable when running the regression). In addition, the Dubin-Watson coefficient is $1.820 < 1.874 < 2.180$, which proves that the model does not have autocorrelation.

Table 8. Regression results of the model

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	0.155	0.240		0.645	0.520		
	EM	0.127	0.038	0.184	3.366	0.001	0.742	1.348
	CO	0.293	0.059	0.290	4.974	0.000	0.654	1.529
	CU	0.165	0.047	0.191	3.479	0.001	0.738	1.356
	EL	0.254	0.058	0.253	4.406	0.000	0.674	1.484
	SH	0.154	0.049	0.152	3.122	0.002	0.935	1.070

Source: own (2024)

The findings show that factors as Perception of the employee aspect of CSR; Perception of the customer-aspect of CSR; Perception of the community aspect of CSR; Perception of the legal and ethical aspect of CSR, and Perception of the shareholder aspect of CSR are statistically significant in the model and have a favorable influence on company brand equity. As a result, the linear regression equation is expressed as:

$$BV = 0.184*EM + 0.290*CO + 0.191*CU + 0.253*EL + 0.152*SH$$

On the other hand, the VIF is very modest (less than 2) indicating that these independent variables are not tightly linked, and that multicollinearity does not present.

Conclusion and Discussion

Conclusion

As described in the findings, the results demonstrated that there are five elements that impact Brand equity in companies. The β coefficient of the Perception of the community aspect of CSR is the highest (β = 0.290), which proves that the company's employees appreciate the impact of community-related activities on the BV of businesses, and at the same time show the significance of these activities to social life. Besides, UNICEF (2021) has affirmed that businesses are one of the subjects most looking forward to Vietnam's reopening and development, therefore, businesses' willingness to sponsor and support vaccine deployment effectively is both a great message of solidarity and an investment in keeping Vietnam's economy recover and development. In addition, factors such as Perception of the employee aspect of CSR; Perception of the customer aspect of CSR; Perception of the shareholder aspect of CSR; Perception of the legal and ethical aspect of CSR achieve β coefficients range from 0.152 - 0.253 which was higher than 0 and completely positively impacted the BV of the enterprise. As a consequence, all of the hypotheses H_1, H_2, H_3, H_4, H_5 have been accepted.

Discussion

From the results of the analysis of theoretical content related to corporate social responsibility and BV by qualitative and quantitative research methods, this study has identified five aspects of CSR impact on corporate BV, which are (1) Perception of the community aspect of CSR; (2) Perception of the customers aspect of CSR; (3)

Perception of employees aspect of CSR; (4) Perception of the legal and ethical aspect of CSR; and Perception of the shareholders aspect of CSR (5). This study's finding is consistent with the studies of Tao et al. (2018); Fatma et al. (2016); Fatma et al., (2015); Tingchi Liu et al., 2014; Hur et al., 2014; Saeednia & Sohani (2013); Torres et al. (2012). Therefore, some recommendations and implications for business managers are given in order to improve the effectiveness of activities related to corporate social responsibility while increasing their BV. However, there are still some limitations in the study. The first limitation is the sample size when completed with a small sample size and certainly, the results will be more accurate with larger sample size. The second limitation is that the study is only conducted on enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City, the results will be more reliable if carried out on a larger spatial scale. Therefore, these limitations will open the direction of further research with the hope of making a significant contribution to management theory and practice.

Research recommendations

According to the research results, most surveyed employees attach great importance to enterprises' contributions to the community through activities showing their social responsibility, as a premise for increasing the BV of each firm in the social, especially in the period when the Covid-19 pandemic has not shown any sign of ending Therefore, it is necessary for businesses to be serious about making strategies for their CSR activities to create competitive advantages. The recommendations are detailed as follows:

1. In the current situation of limited and scarce economic resources, in order to improve their BV, businesses should focus on building a CSR strategy alongside their other business strategies. First, businesses need to have a long-term CSR action strategy to orient the business for sustainable development. Enterprises need to develop an appropriate roadmap in gradually implementing CSR aspects according to common standards, supported by stakeholders, and actively contributing to the community. To ensure the successful implementation of the CSR strategy in the long term, businesses need to build a specialized unit in this field, and at the same time should finance their own activities. In Vietnam, with the strong development of the Trade Union and the Fatherland Front, businesses should work closely with local authorities to carry out more meaningful CSR activities in order to increase the BV. In addition, it is necessary to develop an appropriate CSR activity plan for each specific audience.

2. Businesses need to comply with the provisions of law and ethical standards in the process of operating. In addition to understanding and following Vietnamese and international laws on business, enterprises need to carefully study the content of trade agreements between Vietnam and other regions in the world (EVFTA, TPA, etc.) to understand the conditions of the legal and transparent investment environment, to find and detect business partners. Building a code of conduct for business to serve as an operating manual is also a way to pay attention.

3. According to Oyewumi et al. (2018), CSR investment costs that are not disclosed do not have a positive impact on financial efficiency, so it is necessary to strengthen disclosure. Therefore, businesses need to have a plan to publicize their implemented CSR activities to raise awareness of managers, employees, and the community about CSR. The brand equity of the business will be enhanced when stakeholders realize its contribution to the community.

4. Finally, firms must conduct initiatives to improve BV through stakeholder communication programs. Business executives, in particular, must understand the strengths of the present brand in order to focus on developing their own image, allowing customers to recognize their brand immediately. At the same time, brand equity will rise as the perceived quality of the brand improves.

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LINKING BETWEEN DESTINATION MANAGEMENT, DESTINATION IMAGE AND DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS: A CASE OF DA LAT, CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

Tạ Tường Vi[1,2]

Abstract

Effective destination management is crucial for enhancing a destination's competitiveness. This study analyzes the impact of various destination management aspects on competitiveness in Da Lat, a tourist destination in Vietnam's Central Highlands. Researcher employed quantitative methods, surveying 216 respondents through convenience sampling. Structural equation modeling with partial least squares *(PLS-SEM)* was used to test the hypotheses. The research results indicate that destination management (DM) and destination image (DI) have a positive impact on destination competitiveness (DC). Additionally, destination image serves as a mediator in the relationship between destination management and destination competitiveness. These findings aim to provide valuable insights for tourism authorities and stakeholders, aiding them in developing effective destination management plans and strategies to boost competitiveness.

Keywords: destination management, destination competitiveness, Dalat, Central Highlands.

INTRODUCTION

Destination management, destination image, and destination competitiveness are crucial factors influencing the success of tourism (Cordova-Buiza & Serruto-Perea, 2024; Sul et al., 2020). Effective destination management plays a vital role in enhancing competitiveness through strategic planning, development, efficient marketing, and crisis management (Batra, 2017; Gul & Gul, 2022; Koo et al., 2016; Wong, 2018). This increases the perceived value for tourists and impacts their intention to visit (Risfandini et al., 2022). Destination image also affects tourists' behavior and intentions, thereby boosting competitiveness (Hu & Shen, 2022; Yuan & Vui, 2024).

The relationship between destination management, destination image, and destination competitiveness is an important yet under-researched topic in tourism. Destination management encompasses not only organizing and operating tourism activities but also building and maintaining the destination's image in tourists' minds. This image plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' perceptions and destination choices. However, previous studies have often analyzed these factors individually without considering their interconnections and mutual impacts (Abreu-Novais et al., 2016; Hanafiah & Zulkifly, 2019; Rubio & Betancur, 2018; Zhu, 2021).

Đà Lạt, nestled in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, is renowned for its cool climate, stunning natural landscapes, and rich cultural heritage. Despite its success in attracting tourists, Đà Lạt faces significant challenges in maintaining and enhancing its competitiveness in an increasingly saturated tourism market (Hien, 2022).

This study aims to explore how effective destination management can shape the destination's image and, consequently, boost its competitiveness. By analyzing the interconnectedness of these factors, this research will provide fresh insights into the tourism field and establish a robust theoretical framework for future studies. The outcomes of this study are expected to enhance tourism management practices in Đà Lạt, offering practical recommendations for the sustainable development of its tourism industry.

Objectives

1.Investigate the interrelationships between destination management, destination image and destination competitiveness in Da Lat.

2.Assess the mediating role of destination image in the relationship between destination management and

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destination competitiveness in Da Lat.

3.Based on the research results, make strategic management recommendations to improve Da Lat's destination competitiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical framework

Destination management

Destination management is a comprehensive concept that includes strategic decisions, organization, and activities aimed at identifying, promoting, and marketing tourism products sustainably and economically (Reinhold & Beritelli, 2022). Destination management organizations (DMOs) play a central role in supporting stakeholders such as tourists, local residents, and businesses at various geographical levels (Fyall & Garrod, 2020; Hall, 2011). The main challenges include product development, branding, strategic alliances, infrastructure development, accessibility, and seasonal employment (Fyall & Garrod, 2020). The diversity of stakeholders and the need to balance economic development with environmental protection and community welfare increase the complexity of destination management (de Andreis & Carioni, 2022).

Recent research emphasizes that adopting an integrated management approach is necessary to maintain competitiveness and sustainability, especially with the growing trend of experiential tourism (Faur & Ban, 2022). Zheng et al., (2022) indicate that effective destination management can enhance competitiveness by developing unique and innovative tourism products, thereby creating added value for tourists (Zheng et al., 2022).

Therefore, destination management is not only an important tool for sustainable economic development but also a key factor in improving the destination's image and enhancing its competitiveness.

Destination image

The destination image is defined as the impressions, opinions, and perceptions that an individual has about a specific place (Kislali et al., 2016). A positive destination brand image not only attracts and retains tourists but also promotes sustainable tourism development and effective management by destination management organizations (DMOs) (Abiola-Oke & Fakokunde, 2022). Improving the destination image along with smart competitive strategies can enhance effective destination management (Dumitru, 2022). Destination stereotypes can influence the destination image and marketing strategies of DMOs (Karri & Dogra, 2023). The destination image not only influences the initial travel intention but also impacts the level of satisfaction and the likelihood of returning to the destination in the future (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Mohamad et al., 2019).

The relationship between destination image and various facets of tourism management and competitiveness is of paramount interest. Research indicates that destination image and transport infrastructure significantly influence tourists' intentions to revisit, which in turn enhances the destination's overall competitiveness (Shariffuddin et al., 2023) . This relationship is further strengthened by the correlation between destination image and tourists' intentions to visit, revisit, and recommend the destination to others, thereby boosting competitiveness through return visits and word-of-mouth promotion (Risfandini et al., 2022). Additionally, a positive destination image is linked to increased satisfaction, loyalty, and competitiveness among tourists (Huang et al., 2021). Implementing customer experience-focused strategies in destination management can distinctly improve the destination image and its competitive edge (Faur & Ban, 2022). Moreover, both destination image and tourist satisfaction are critical in effectively managing and enhancing the destination's image (Moliner-Tena et al., 2024).

Consequently, fostering a positive destination image is crucial for attracting and retaining tourists, promoting sustainable tourism development, and ensuring long-term competitiveness

Destination competitiveness

Destination competitiveness reflects a location's ability to attract and retain tourists by optimizing comparative and competitive advantages. Key components include natural resources, cultural resources, infrastructure, destination management, services, and marketing activities (Dwyer et al., 2020). Effective management of these elements not only enhances the destination's image but also optimizes the tourist experience, creating a sustainable strategy for improving competitiveness.The destination image comprises the impressions, opinions, and perceptions individuals have about a specific place. A positive destination image not only attracts and retains tourists but also promotes sustainable tourism development and effective management by destination management organizations (DMOs) (Mior Shariffuddin et al., 2023). Improving the destination image alongside smart competitive strategies can significantly

enhance effective destination management.

Numerous studies have confirmed the close relationship between destination competitiveness, destination management, and destination image. Many scholars emphasized that effective management of natural resources, cultural resources, infrastructure, and services is essential to enhancing competitiveness and image (Chu et al., 2022; Dwyer et al., 2020). Stavrianea & Kamenidou also highlight that destination image and tourist experiences are crucial in attracting and retaining tourists (Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2021). According to Pike and Page (2020), effective destination management through marketing strategies and product development can improve the destination image and boost competitiveness (Pike & Page, 2014). Novais et al. (2020) demonstrate that the combination of effective destination management and high competitiveness leads to a positive destination image and tourist satisfaction (Abreu-Novais et al., 2016).

In essence, developing a positive destination image is crucial for attracting and retaining tourists, promoting sustainable tourism development, and ensuring long-term competitiveness.

HYPOTHESIS AND PROPOSED RESEARCH MODEL

The proposed research model is built upon foundational theories of destination management, destination image, and destination competitiveness (Dumitru, 2022; Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). The aim of this model is to identify and analyze the relationships among these three factors. Effective destination management not only directly impacts destination competitiveness but also indirectly through the creation of a positive destination image in the minds of tourists. Destination image plays a crucial role in enhancing competitiveness by influencing tourists' behavior and intentions (Yuan & Vui, 2024). This model provides a comprehensive theoretical framework to better understand the factors that contribute to the success of a tourist destination.

Based on the analyzed studies, the author hypothesizes the following:

H1a: Destination management has a direct and positive impact on destination competitiveness.

H1b: Destination management positively impacts on destination image.

H2: Destination image positively impacts on destination competitiveness.
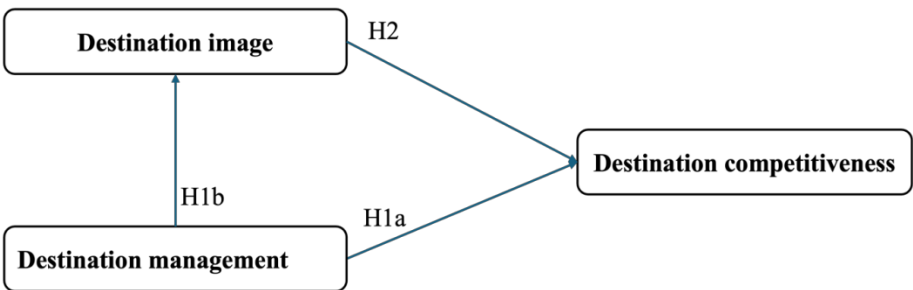
Fig 1. Research model. *Source: The author 2024.*

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) method is an advanced multivariate analysis technique that enables an in-depth examination of relationships between variables using sophisticated statistical methods. According to Hair et al., a minimum sample size of 100 is recommended for SEM analysis involving latent constructs across up to five groups (Hair et al., 2021). To ensure high research quality, this study selected a sample size of 216, exceeding the recommended minimum. Data were collected via a convenience, non-probability sampling method through an online survey administered via Google Forms, widely disseminated in Zalo and Messenger groups comprising researchers, university lecturers, and tourism business managers. After excluding invalid responses, 216 valid surveys were obtained.

Conducted from April to July 2024, the survey gathered primary data through meticulously designed questionnaires. The collected data were analyzed using the SmartPLS 4.0 tool. Descriptive statistical analysis provided an overview of destination management and destination image, identifying key influencing factors and their impact on destination competitiveness. The PLS-SEM method was applied to evaluate the reliability, convergent

validity, and discriminant validity of the research constructs and to test the proposed hypotheses.This study offers a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing tourism destination competitiveness, providing valuable insights to assist managers and researchers in developing effective strategies to enhance destination attractiveness and competitiveness.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

1.Demography of respondents

The detailed information about the survey respondents is presented as follows: Gender distribution includes 52.7% female and 47.3% male. The age groups are categorized as follows: 21.3% are between 25 and 34 years old, 29.6% are between 35 and 44 years old, 36.1% are between 45 and 55 years old, and 12.9% are over 55 years old. Regarding work experience, the groups are classified as follows: less than 3 years (23.4%), 3 to 5 years (28.7%), 5 to 10 years (27.1%), and more than 10 years (20.8%). Participants come from various fields, with 18.9% working in travel agencies, 41.3% being lecturers and researchers at universities, and 39.8% being officials at the Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism. Concerning the number of visits to Đà Lạt, 11.4% of respondents were visiting for the first time, 31.7% were visiting for the second time, and 56.9% had visited more than twice.These data provide a comprehensive view of the demographic characteristics and experience of the survey respondents, thereby enhancing the accuracy and representativeness of the study.

2.Results of SEM model analysis

Testing the reliability of the research scale

Table 1. Outer Loadings - Matrix

	DC	DI	DM
DC1	0,800		
DC2	0,829		
DC3	0,784		
DI1		0,827	
DI2		0,859	
DI3		0,881	
DI4		0,847	
DI5		0,886	
DM1			0,794
DM2			0,783
DM3			0,741
DM4			0,865
DM5			0,836

Source: Survey data of 216 respondents in 2024

The analysis of outer loadings in exploratory factor analysis (EFA) helps evaluate the extent to which observed variables represent latent constructs. In this study, the three latent constructs are Destination Competitiveness (DC), Destination Image (DI), and Destination Management (DM), represented by their respective observed variables.**DC** has loadings ranging from 0.784 to 0.829, indicating that variables DC1, DC2, and DC3 are good representatives of Destination Competitiveness. **DI** has loadings ranging from 0.827 to 0.886, demonstrating that DI1 through DI5 are strong indicators of Destination Image. **DM** has loadings ranging from 0.741 to 0.865, showing that DM1 through DM5 are reliable representatives of Destination Management. All loadings exceed the 0.7 threshold, ensuring good representation for the latent constructs, thus enhancing the model's reliability and validity. According to Hair et al. (2010), a loading threshold of 0.7 is the accepted standard for loadings to be considered reliable and strong indicators of latent constructs (Hair, 2010; Kline, 2023).

Table 2. Results of testing scale reliability

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
DC	0,727	0,729	0,647
DI	0,912	0,918	0,740
DM	0,863	0,869	0,648

Source: Survey data of 216 respondents in 2024

The analysis of indices in reliability and validity assessment helps evaluate the extent to which measurement scales consistently and accurately represent latent constructs. In this study, the three latent constructs are Destination Competitiveness (DC), Destination Image (DI), and Destination Management (DM), represented by their respective reliability and validity indices. For Cronbach's Alpha, DC achieves 0.727, indicating acceptable internal consistency of the items within the scale, DI achieves 0.912, demonstrating very good internal consistency, and DM achieves 0.863, showing good internal consistency. For Composite Reliability (CR), DC achieves 0.729, indicating acceptable reliability, DI achieves 0.918, demonstrating very good reliability, and DM achieves 0.869, showing good reliability. For Average Variance Extracted (AVE), DC achieves 0.647, indicating good validity, DI achieves 0.740, demonstrating very good validity, and DM achieves 0.648, showing good validity. All indices exceed the acceptable thresholds, ensuring good reliability and validity for the latent constructs, thus enhancing the model's robustness. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.7 or higher are considered acceptable, while CR values of 0.7 or higher and AVE values of 0.5 or higher are the accepted standards for ensuring the reliability and validity of measurement scales (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker criterion

	DC	DI	DM
DC	0,805		
DI	0,564	0,860	
DM	0,443	0,392	0,805

Source: Survey data of 216 respondents in 2024

The Fornell-Larcker criterion is a crucial method for assessing discriminant validity in structural models, ensuring that latent constructs are measured independently. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), discriminant validity is established if the square root of the AVE (values on the diagonal) is greater than the correlations between the latent constructs (values below the diagonal) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In this study, the latent constructs include Destination Competitiveness (DC), Destination Image (DI), and Destination Management (DM). Specifically, DC has a square root of AVE of 0.805, which is greater than its correlations with DI (0.564) and DM (0.443). DI has a square root of AVE of 0.860, greater than its correlations with DC (0.564) and DM (0.392). DM has a square root of AVE of 0.805, greater than its correlations with DC (0.443) and DI (0.392). All latent constructs, DC, DI, and DM, achieve discriminant validity, ensuring independent and accurate measurement of the different aspects of the research model.

Analysis the structural model

Table 4. Model Fit

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0,063	0,063
d_ULS	0,360	0,360
d_G	0,171	0,171
Chi-square	219,566	219,566
NFI	0,859	0,859

Source: Survey data of 216 respondents in 2024

In this study, the SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual) measures the average difference between observed and predicted values in the PLS-SEM model. With an SRMR of 0.063 for both the saturated and estimated models, which is below the threshold of 0.08 or 0.1 as suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999) (Hu & Bentler, 1999) ,

the model demonstrates a good fit with the data. This confirms that the model accurately explains the relationships between destination management, destination image, and destination competitiveness, ensuring the reliability and validity of the analysis results. This enhances the understanding of factors influencing tourism in Dalat, Central Highlands.

Table 5. R- square adjusted

	R - square (R^2)	R-square adjusted (R^2)
DC	0,376	0,370
DI	0,154	0,150

Source: Survey data of 216 respondents in 2024

The R^2 and adjusted R-square indices are crucial measures for evaluating the explanatory power of regression models concerning dependent variables, with R^2 values ranging from 0 to 1 indicating greater accuracy as the value increases. However, the acceptable R^2 value depends on the complexity and context of the study (Cohen, 2013). In this study, Destination Competitiveness (DC) has an adjusted R^2 of 0.370, indicating that the model explains 37.0% of the variance in destination competitiveness. This level is considered moderate according to Hair et al. (2011) but significant in tourism research. Destination Image (DI) has an adjusted R^2 of 0.150, explaining 15.0% of the variance in destination image. This value is suitable for the study's objective of examining the positive and significant impact of Destination Management (DM) and Destination Image (DI) on Destination Competitiveness (DC). Thus, the study provides important insights into the relationship between destination management and destination competitiveness while highlighting the importance of R^2 and adjusted R^2 indices in evaluating model fit.

Results of SEM model analysis

Table 6. Hypothesis testing

	Total effect (ß)	P values	Conclusion
DI -> DC	0,461	0,000	Accepted
DM -> DC	0,443	0,000	Accepted
DM -> DI	0,392	0,000	Accepted

Source: Survey data of 216 respondents in 2024

Total Effect (ß) represents the overall impact of an independent variable on a dependent variable within a structural model (Sarstedt et al., 2021). P-value is a probability measure used to determine the statistical significance of a research result. If $0.01 \leq$ P-value < 0.05, the research hypothesis is considered statistically significant (Fisher, 1922; Sarstedt et al., 2021). In this study, the impact coefficient of destination image (DI) on destination competitiveness (DC) is 0.461 with a P value of 0.000, indicating that this relationship is highly statistically significant. This suggests that when the destination image improves, the destination's competitiveness also increases significantly. Similarly, destination management (DM) also has a strong impact on destination competitiveness with an impact coefficient of 0.443 and a P value of 0.000, confirming that when destination management improves, the destination's competitiveness will also be enhanced. Furthermore, destination management significantly affects destination image with an impact coefficient of 0.392 and a P value of 0.000, showing that when destination management improves, the image of the destination in the eyes of visitors also improves. All these results are highly statistically significant, indicating that the hypotheses are strongly accepted.
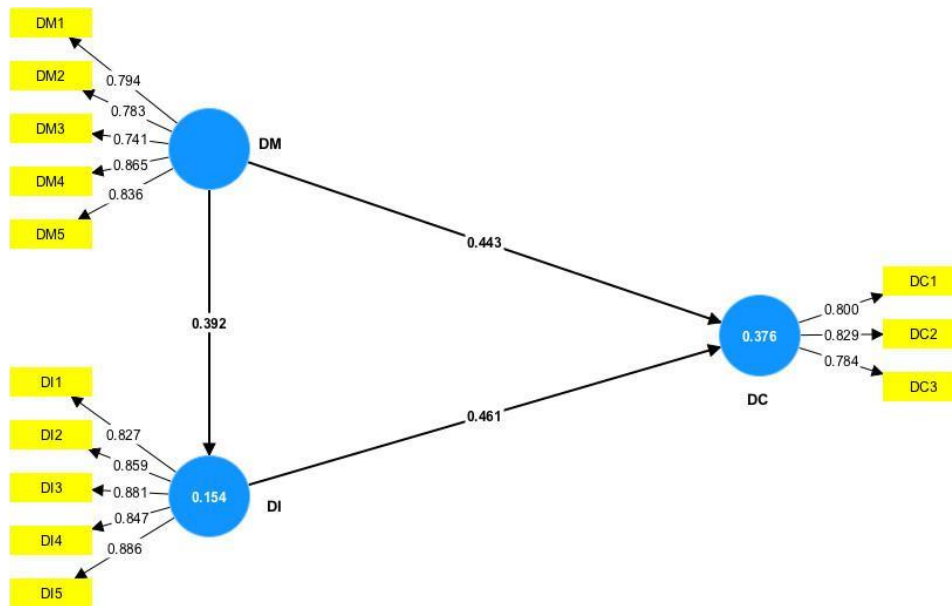
Fig 2. Structural model output. *Source: Survey data of 216 respondents in 2024*

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

Research results indicate that both Destination Management (DM) and Destination Image (DI) have a significant impact on destination competitiveness (DC). Specifically, DM has an impact coefficient of 0.443 and DI has an impact coefficient of 0.461. Additionally, DM also significantly affects DI with an impact coefficient of 0.392. Based on these results, here are specific solutions to enhance the competitiveness and improve the image of Da Lat:

Destination Management (DM)

Research demonstrates that DM has a significant impact on destination competitiveness with an impact coefficient of 0.443 and a P-value of 0.000, indicating high statistical significance. To enhance competitiveness, it is essential to establish clear standards and regulations regarding tourism services, hygiene, food safety, and environmental protection. Regular monitoring and inspections will ensure compliance with these standards. Effective destination marketing across multiple channels such as TV, newspapers, social media, and travel websites will comprehensively promote Da Lat. The development of a tourism information system, including tourist information centers and online services such as mobile applications and websites is necessary. Finally, raising environmental awareness and developing high-quality human resources through professional training and collaboration with universities are crucial.

Destination Image (DI)

Destination image (DI) has a significant impact on destination competitiveness with an impact coefficient of 0.461 and a P-value of 0.000. To improve Da Lat's image, it is necessary to preserve and develop natural landscapes such as parks, flower gardens, forests, and lakes. Developing unique tourism products such as eco-tours, agricultural tourism, and cultural tourism will create unique experiences for visitors. Building a friendly and hospitable local community through training and awareness campaigns also significantly contributes to enhancing the destination's image. Investing in high-end tourism infrastructure such as resorts, hotels, and modern amenities, along with developing unique tourism experiences, will turn Da Lat into a renowned resort destination.

The Impact of DM on DI

The research also indicates that DM significantly affects DI with an impact coefficient of 0.392 and a P-value of 0.000. To improve destination management, Da Lat should establish an online feedback system for tourists and apply information technology in smart tourism management. Strengthening public-private partnerships is essential to leverage resources and initiatives from businesses. Diversifying tourism products, such as eco-tourism, adventure tourism, and cultural tourism, will attract various tourist groups. The local community should actively participate in environmental protection and sustainable tourism development through educational programs and workshops. Da

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Lat should also organize tourism promotion events, invest in infrastructure and support services, and provide training programs for local tourism businesses to enhance service quality and operational efficiency.

Conclusion

Consistent and comprehensive implementation of these solutions will significantly enhance Da Lat's competitiveness and improve its image, thereby attracting and retaining visitors and ensuring the sustainable development of the destination. Effective destination management not only strengthens competitiveness but also enhances the destination's image, creating a positive feedback loop. An improved destination image will attract more visitors, further boosting Da Lat's competitiveness in the global tourism market. The combination of destination management and image enhancement will help Da Lat establish a comprehensive and sustainable tourism development strategy.

Research recommendations

While the study confirms the significant impact of Destination Management (DM) and Destination Image (DI) on destination competitiveness (DC), certain limitations remain. Future research should investigate additional variables and adopt more extensive sampling methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing destination competitiveness.

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APPLICATION OF DIGITALIZATION IN TOURISM SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT IN VIETNAM

Nguyen Thi Khanh Linh[1]

Extended abstract

In recent years, digital transformation (DT) has emerged as an inevitable trend in the field of supply chain management. As an industry which is vulnerable to social fluctuations, the tourism industry need to apply DT to improve competitiveness and develop more sustainably. The study aims to explore the application of DT in Tourism Supply Chain Management (TSCM) in Vietnam through synthesizing the theoretical basis of digitalization in TSCM, thereby clarifying the role of DT in tourism. The article also researches secondary data collected through reliable documents such as scientific journals, conference articles, thesis, dissertations, and official websites to study the actual situation of digitalization in Vietnamese tourism. The scope of the research is in Vietnam, data on relevant components in the tourism supply chain are collected to have a comprehensive view of the research problem. Thus, some conclusions are drawn as a basis for proposing recommendations. Vietnam has deployed a fairly comprehensive digital transformation application, from government agencies to businesses participating in TSC. The application of digital technology has brought many clear effects such as reaching many customers, shortening processing time, ensuring information between links, and improving customer satisfaction. However, the implementation has not been carried out synchronously, there is still poor connection between components, the lacking of modern and appropriate infrastructure, leading to the maximum effectiveness of TSCM not being achieved. A number of solutions have been proposed aimed at government agencies and businesses participating in TSCM when implementating digitalization to improve the efficiency of TSCM.

Keywords: *Digitalization; Digital transformation; Tourism; Tourism supply chain (TSC); Toursim supply chain management (TSCM)*

Introduction

Tourism supply chain is a linked chain of tourist firms that perform and/or support channel functions (Song, 2011). As a net composed by suppliers, operators, tourists and other relevant organizations, tourism supply chain purchases various resources that the tourism industry requires and transfers to core service and support, which will be finally provided to tourists (Wang X., 2012). The existence of tourism supply chain is determined by the comprehension of tourism products; single travel agency cannot supply all products and services, which can only be realized by the coordination of various relevant enterprises. (Ren L., 2015). When compared with traditional manufacture industry supply chain, tourism supply chain is characterized by complexity, high risk and difficulty in quality control (Yang L., 2013). That features lead to the need of managing the TSC.

Tourism supply chain management can be referred to as a set of approaches utilized to efficiently manage the operations of the TSC within a specific tourism destination to meet the needs of tourists from the targeted source market(s) and accomplish the business objectives of different enterprises within the TSC. The TSCM philosophy requires moving away from arms-length relationships toward coordination across organizations throughout a TSC (Xinyan, Z. at al, 2009). The main aim of TSCM is to have a commercial and competitive advantage over rival organizations by making the process more cost-effective and more efficient, and the products more differentiated (Richard & Wisner, 2005). In a 2009 publication, Xinyan Z. at al proposed seven subject areas of TSCM including: (1) demand management, (2) two-party relationships, (3) supply management, (4) inventory management, (5) product development, (6) TSC coordination, (7) and information technology. These components need to be established to operate synchronously, effectively and achieve the goals of TSCM. Tourism is a high-contact industry, the nature of work and workplaces is undergoing rapid transformation. Therefore, digitalization becomes the optimal solution for the tourism industry in general and TSCM in particular.

Digitalization and digital technologies are significant drivers of economic growth and development (Solomon & Van K., 2020). Digitalization offers great benefits for the supply chain, such as increased availability of

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information, optimization of logistics practices, real-time data collection, more efficient inventory management and increased transparency (Barbara B. at al, 2022). The introduction of digital technology has caused a paradigm shift in tourism (Happ & Ivancsó, H., 2018). Modern tourism focuses on responding trends and meeting consumer needs. Digitalization processes are particularly relevant for the service sector. Trade and transport companies, enterprises of the tourism and hospitality industry, catering were able to expand the target audience and reach and improve the quality of service, develop at an accelerated pace, taking into account that in the global digital supply chain management the victory will be won by those in whose arsenal more and the quality of digital platforms (Tatyana B. et al, 2020). Other important factor resulted by the digitalization is the connectedness of customers, not only to businesses but also to other customers. Digital technology has encouraged customers using their advocate roles on the products or services. Businesses has less control to customers than before, and to succeed they should conduct coopetition strategy or 'cooperate and compete' at the same time (Della C. et al, 2016). Sustaining an effective tourism supply chain that shows a relationship with other business partners is challenging due to the complexity of the stakeholders involved (Jermsittiparsert et al. 2019). Digitalising the tourism supply chain could have an impact on many components in the industry, not just accommodation, transport, and excursions, but also bars and restaurants, handicrafts, food production, waste disposal, and the infrastructure that supports tourism in destinations (Tapper et al. 2004). The notion of tourism supply chain management emphasizes the inter-firm strategic interactions in the context of tourism supply chains (Molefe et al, 2018). The success of a product on the tourist market is determined by the cooperation between multiple business partners in a tourism supply chain, and contributes to the optimization of the conducted business activities, if successful.

Objectives

The article aims to research the application of digital transformation in Tourism Supply Chain Management (TSCM) in Vietnam. Specific contents implemented include:

1. Research on the current status of applying digital transformation to components in the TSC.

2. Identify the opportunities and challenges of applying digital transformation to TSCM.

3. Propose some recommendations to overcome the challenges when implementing TSCM digitalization, thereby improving the effectiveness of TSCM in tourism development in Vietnam.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

The article studies the application of digital transformation to TSC components in Vietnam. Zhang et al. (2009) stated that TSC is a network of tourism organizations involved in a series of diverse activities, ranging from providing an entire spectrum of components of tourism products/services, such as flights, accommodation at the tourism reception desk, and ending with the sale of tourism products in the tourism region. This network includes a wide range of subjects, both from the private and the public sector that are involved in the creation, sale, and promotion of tourism products. Components connect with each other in a reciprocal relationship to create great experiences for tourists, which is demonstrated in Fig. 1.

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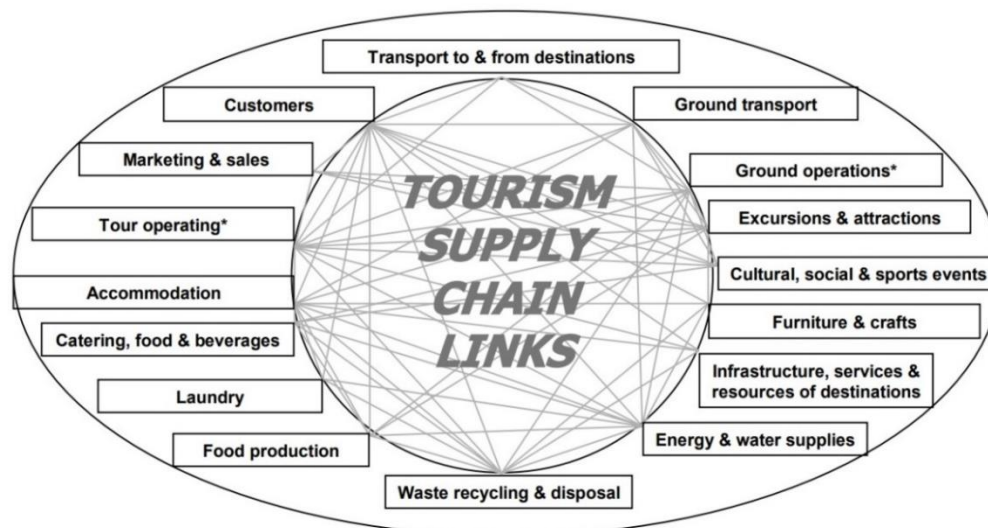
* Tour operating includes advertising, purchasing, package development, marketing and sales, and purchasing

* Ground operations include ground transport and excursions

Fig. 1: Tourism supply chain links. Source: Richard et al., 2004

In this research, the paper focuses on studying 9 basic components of TSC including: (1) Transport to & from destinations, (2) Marketing & sales, (3) Tour operating, (4) Accomodation, (5) Catering, food & beverages, (6) Ground transport, (7) Excursions & Attractions, (8) Cultural, social & sport events, (9) Infrastructure, services & resources of destinations

2. Research Tools

The paper uses theoretical analysis, synthesis methods and data collection method to conduct the research. In addition, the observation method and case study are combined to illustrate the study. The observation form includes open content based on the pre-determined research objectives, such as: current status of each component works, whether digitalization is applied, the role of digitalization in each component, advantages and disadvantages...

3. Data Collection

The paper studies secondary data collected through reliable documents such as scientific journals, conference reports, theses, dissertations and official websites. The first step is to identify relevant keywords such as "tourism supply chain", "tourism supply chain management", "digitalization" to identify relevant theoretical background as the basis for the study. The next step is to search based on keywords related to the components of the tourism supply chain to obtain actual data on these components. The documents used will be carefully screened to ensure that they meet the research objectives with criteria such as being relevant to the research content, having scientific value, being up-to-date, etc. Direct observation methods are also implemented to obtain objective evidence on the research problem. Then, combining the theory and actual data collected, the study analyzes and evaluates the application of digital transformation in tourism supply chain management.

4. Data Analysis

Directive No. 16/CT-TTg dated May 4, 2017 of the Prime Minister on strengthening the capacity to access the 4.0 industrial revolution and reducing the negative impacts of this wave in Vietnam clearly stated that Tourism is one of the economic sectors prioritized for building digital transformation strategies and applying information technology. In Feb 2023, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Vietnam had signed Decision No. 405/QD-BVHTTDL promulgating the 2023 Digital Transformation Plan to continue promoting the Digital Transformation Program with the goal of enhancing change from awareness and action on digital transformation, maintaining digital transformation activities and replicating good models and effective practices in digital transformation activities. This proves that the Vietnamese Government is aware of the important role of digitalization in economic development in general and tourism in particular.

4.1. Transport to & from destinations

In Vietnam, the main means of transporting tourists to destinations are quite diverse. International tourists mainly travel by plane and cruise ship, while domestic tourists travel by air, rail and road. In 2023, passenger transport is estimated to reach 4.679,3 million passengers, up 12,3% over the previous year, and turnover will reach 246,8 billion, up 24,2% due to the number of international visitors to Vietnam increasing again (General Statistics Office, 2023). With the growth of tourism in recent years, the need for digital transformation in passenger transport is inevitable in Vietnam, especially in the context that other tourism-developed countries have also done this very well. The digitalization of passenger transport not only effectively supports tourists, optimizes the travel experience, and encourages tourists to travel more, but also helps businesses closely control operating costs, improve labor productivity, and create competitiveness with the tourism industry of other countries.

Tab 1. Summary of current status of means of transport in Vietnam

No.	Modes of transportation	Current status
1	Air	- 11 international airports - 12 domestic airports
2	Sea	34 seaports, including 02 special ports, 11 type I seaports, 07 type II seaports and 14 type III seaports.

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| 3 | Rail | Total length 3,315 km, 7 main routes, spanning 34 provinces and cities. |
| 4 | Road | - 18.863 companies with over 224.800 contract passenger vehicles
- over 3,500 tourist vehicles of 738 companies |

Source: self-synthesis

In general, businesses in the transportation sector have applied digitalisation in their operations. Most of the applied digital transformation frameworks are at levels 1 and 2, that is, basic and advanced digital transformation. The application is reflected in management software such as: ticket management, goods management, office management, employee management, vehicle management, customer management, agent management; or e-tickets/e-contracts, customer care call center, websites, mobile apps, online payment solutions. As a business with a relatively solid technology foundation, Vietnam Airlines aims to comprehensively develop online sales channels and optimize digital technologies by 2025 to bring the highest business efficiency (National digital transformation electronic information portal, 2023). In addition, aiming at the goal of digital transformation at a specialized level (level 3), transport corporations have cooperated with telecommunications corporations or companies providing high-tech solutions (for example: MobiFone Telecommunications Corporation and Vietnam Railway Corporation, 2023). Digital transformation is a difficult and challenging process, requiring a long-term roadmap, large financial investment and constant determination of businesses.

4.2. Marketing & sales

Marketing and sales in tourism include promoting and selling various tourism services, attractions and holiday packages. An effective marketing strategy can attract tourists and build a good brand identity, thereby highlighting the awareness of the destination, exchanging unique culture and sharing experiences, and raising tourists' awareness of environmental conservation. Moreover, doing well in marketing and sales will create a competitive advantage, boost sales and revenue, and create more jobs for the society. In 2023, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism issued the Vietnam Tourism Marketing Strategy to 2030, aiming to promote and position Vietnam as a leading attractive tourist destination in Southeast Asia, affirming the brand and competitiveness of Vietnam tourism, contributing to the implementation of the goals of the Strategy. In particular, the application of digital technology in tourism marketing activities is one of the emphasized contents.

Digital transformation in Marketing and Sales focuses on promoting the Vietnamese tourism brand with the title and logo "Vietnam - Timeless Charm" expressed in 5 main tourism product groups including: Sea and island tourism; Cultural tourism; Ecotourism; Urban tourism and other types of tourism on social networking platforms such as Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok... At the same time, the official websites of the Vietnam National Authority of Tourism are professionally and methodically built with a lot of useful information and attractive content, attracting many visitors. By March 2024, the website https://vietnam.travel has risen to the top of the region in terms of number of visits, ranking 132.676 in the world (Tourism Information April 2024).

4.3. Tour operating

Digital transformation is an inevitable need for tourism businesses. This policy was issued even before the Covid 19 pandemic broke out. Under the strong influence of the pandemic, this need is even more urgent. By the end of 2023, Vietnam has had 4.069 international travel businesses (Tourism Information Center, 2024). With the increasing number of tour opertors, the competition for development is increasingly fierce. Companies have been quick to grasp the needs, quickly deploying technological solutions such as: mobile applications, artificial intelligence (AI) and Chatbots, customer ratings (Rating and Review), virtual reality (Virtual Reality) ... into their tour operations. In fact, some businesses have applied digitalization very successfully, typically Vietravel or Saigontourist.

Vietravel's digitalization work began in 2003 with the Tour Sales Management System (Etour). To date, Vietravel has more than 40 software products serving business operations and operations. Vietravel's digital transformation is based on the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) model, software systems are automatically connected to help departments handle tasks conveniently. Vietravel is also a pioneer in e-commerce with the online tour sales website travel.com.vn and the first online payment in Vietnam. In parallel, there is the Vietravel application on both Apple and Android platforms. Promoting e-commerce after the pandemic, combined with improving customer experience on the website and Vietravel App, has helped Vietravel's online revenue increase (Anh Tuấn,

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Saigontourist has completely transformed and standardized data entry procedures, data tracking and workflows in all departments through the operation of new business tools and software. The entire Saigontourist Travel system has built a highly accurate customer data source, complete data information and meets the requirements of market analysis and marketing strategies; Orienting customers to use consulting and tour purchasing channels with centralized connections, identifying and taking care of customers on a single digital platform; Adjusting the entire workflow and working tools with business applications, widely applied to all domestic, foreign and international tourism markets and specialized business departments such as airline ticket services, car rental, study abroad, customer care department and accounting department (Chi Mai, 2024).

4.4. Accomodation

Accommodation is one of the indispensable services in tourism. By the end of 2023, in Vietnam, there are 38.000 tourist accommodation establishments with more than 780.000 rooms, of which, there are 247 5-star tourist accommodation establishments with 80.896 rooms and 368 4-star tourist accommodation establishments with 50.716 rooms (Tourism Information Center, 2024). Accommodation establishments in Vietnam are also strongly participating in the digital transformation trend. Digital transformation in the hotel industry not only promotes serviceization, increases guest satisfaction but also significantly supports operations management and improves business performance. Digital transformation in the hospitality industry not only promotes serviceization, increases guest satisfaction but also significantly supports operations management and improves business performance with leading technologies such as AI (chatbots), IoT (smart rooms, tablets & beacons), AR (Augmented Reality) and VR (Virtual Reality)...

Using IoT technology with automatic sensors, guests can unlock the room or control the hotel's air conditioning system, room lights and room information through a separate application integrated on their own phone. Even the room parameters (sound, light, temperature...) can be stored for the next stay. This technology has been successfully applied by hotels such as Ariyana Smart Condotel Nha Trang or Sojo Hotels.

The Self check-in/check-out feature allows users to be proactive in checking in and out, without having to meet the receptionist. Facial recognition technology used during the check-in/check-out process is also a special service experience. With the OCR optical character recognition feature, customers only need to scan their ID to provide information when booking a room. Customers can easily look up information, ask questions or request services at any time through chatbot/AI software. These technologies are used quite commonly in high-end accommodation facilities, such as Wink Hotel Saigon Centre, Vinpearl Nha Trang...

In addition to customer-oriented technologies, digital transformation in the accommodation sector also includes comprehensive management technologies, optimizing operations, helping to quickly capture information, minimizing manual operations risks, and improving data storage efficiency. In addition, revenue management technologies through links with OTA channels also help the business process to be smooth and fast. Asset management technologies also support tracking throughout the asset life cycle, optimizing asset longevity and performance, and reducing operational risks.

4.5. Catering, food & beverages

According to the Vietnam Food and Beverage Market Report 2023, the number of restaurants/cafes in Vietnam reached 317.299 stores, generating revenue of VND 590,9 trillion. Of which, 68% of revenue comes from full-service restaurants, 17% from beverage stores, and the remaining 15% is contributed by limited-service restaurants and street food stores (iPOS.vn, 2023). Instead of manual sales and management as before, F&B business models have been participating in the digital transformation flow by applying sales and management software, automatic table reservations, food ordering, and using new payment methods such as card payments, e-wallets, or QR Code scanning. Digitalisation will help the industry develop sustainably and increase revenue significantly.

To digitize, each business model group has a different way of doing it. For street food shops, digital transformation can start with online payment through QR code scanning or can be equipped with additional handheld devices, integrated with purchase receipt printers and payment software to help control orders and revenue accurately and quickly. For medium-sized restaurants and cafes, it is similar, but adjusted to suit each scale and need. In addition, this group can equip themselves with professional operational management solutions such as: inventory management software to help control the volume of specialized raw materials in the F&B industry, customer management software to help manage customer loyalty data, create promotional programs and customer care, or solutions to create online

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sales websites... For large business models, businesses need to implement comprehensive solutions, focusing on four main operational areas: offline sales area, online sales area, operations and management department, and solutions to connect with third parties (iPOS, 2023).

In the Vietnam Food and Beverage Market Report (2023), iPOS said that in a survey of 2.832 F&B businesses nationwide, up to 91,8% of these businesses have participated in digital transformation. The digital transformation applications that have been applied include: sales software, electronic menus, sales websites, customer care applications, inventory management software, accounting software and human resource management software. The effectiveness of the above applications is assessed by these businesses to be between 46% and 69% (the lowest level is customer care applications, and the application that is assessed as the most effective is sales software).

4.6. Ground transport

The basic means of ground transportation in Vietnam are public transport, taxi/motorbike taxi. Digital transformation has also been deployed for these services to increase the comfortable experience for tourists. The popular public transport in localities is the bus. Some places have added newer types such as urban railways in Hanoi or public bicycles in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. With the application of technology, tourists can easily buy electronic tickets, pay online to participate in these forms of transportation. In addition, when applying management software, service providers can also easily control costs, collect information to increase business efficiency. Recently, with the application of technology, taxi/motorbike taxi has become a popular means of transportation for tourists. By simply using a smartphone with a ride-hailing app installed, tourists can easily find a driver to take them to their desired destinations with a predetermined route and cost. Instead of worrying about being scammed like before, with this form of technology car, tourists, especially independent tourists, can rest assured and enjoy their trip. According to a report by Mordor Intelligence, the technology car-hailing market in Vietnam in 2023 was worth 727,73 million USD, estimated to reach 0,88 billion USD in 2024 and expected to reach 2,16 billion USD in 2029, with an average compound growth rate (CAGR) of 19,5%/year in the next 5 years (Le Vu, 2024).

4.7. Excursions & Attractions

According to the Tourism Map, Vietnam has 63 provinces/cities with 4 pole points, 17 islands, 17 border gates, 18 beaches and 56 other destinations. In each locality, there are many other attractive and interesting tourist destinations. To support tourists to conveniently access these destinations, management units have implemented digital transformation steps in many different ways. Information about tourist attractions is edited and widely posted on online platforms and social networks. Ticket purchases are also done online on official websites. In addition, linking with online travel platforms such as Booking.com or Klook ... with attractive promotions is also a new point. At tourist attractions, visitors can experience digital transformation technology with QR codes, 3D technology and Virtual Reality. All written, audio and visual information of the destination is uploaded to the application, which is both modern, intuitive and vivid... easy to remember and brings impressive emotions to visitors. Through the application, businesses can also easily collect customer Reviews and Ratings, thereby creating a basis for increasingly perfecting their services.

4.8. Cultural, social & sport events

Vietnam currently has 8.868 festivals, including 8.103 traditional festivals, 687 cultural festivals, 74 professional festivals and 4 festivals of foreign origin (Ha Phuong, 2023). With such a large number of festivals, the need to digitize related data is essential to meet management and organization needs. The Project on Digitizing Festival Data in Vietnam for the 2021-2025 period was signed and issued by the Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism on July 16, 2021, accordingly, 100% of traditional festival data will be digitized. To date, data on traditional festivals has been completed and basically digitized. The Vietnam Festival Portal software has updated thousands of pages of documents, articles, images, and videos about festivals in general and traditional festivals in particular (Quynh Vu, 2023). In addition, in festivals or events, digital transformation activities such as e-tickets, e-menus, online payments, etc. have also been applied. On the one hand, it will simplify the procedures for visitors to participate in the festival, on the other hand, it will help the organizing unit to monitor, control, and evaluate the effectiveness of operations as well as make it easier to manage finances.

4.9. Infrastructure, services & resources of destinations

In the 2023 Global Innovation Index Report, WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization) said that Vietnam's Infrastructure Index ranked 70/132 countries (Phan Anh, 2023). In the period 2017 - 2023, Vietnam was continuously in the Fair group, with an increasing trend. Infrastructure and tourism resources are prerequisites for

tourism development, therefore, investment in infrastructure development is an urgent issue. In addition, along with the ongoing need for digital transformation, the tourism industry needs to focus on developing digital infrastructure and digital applications such as the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), cloud computing, big data analysis (SMAC); developing digital human resources, supporting businesses to adapt to new trends.

The Vietnam National Administration of Tourism has built a system of technology application products and digital transformation in the tourism industry. This is the foundation for forming a digital transformation ecosystem for tourism, helping entities easily access and implement digital transformation faster. In particular, the Smart Tourism Card, Vietnam Travel application, Tourism Management and Business Platform application, website Golden Vietnam Tourism, Vietnam Tourism database system... are considered core products that provide practical support for tourists, tourism service supply chains, tour guides, and state tourism management agencies. In particular, the app "Vietnam Safe Travel" - an important multi-utility integrated platform such as a digital map of safe tourism, connecting medical data on the epidemic situation in localities, providing information on safe tourism service facilities... Along with that, many smart and convenient products help to optimally meet the needs of users, typically the room management system at accommodation establishments, electronic ticket system, automatic access control system, smart parking lot, automatic water vending machine... (H.N., 2022).

For digital transformation to be truly effective, the Vietnamese government has invested in developing the internet network. Acording to Open Development Vietnam (2022), Vietnam's Internet usage rate is at 73,2% of the total population in 2022. The average download speed via mobile connection is 38,23 Mbps, ranking 47/140 countries, while the fixed broadband internet connection speed is 76,16 Mbps, ranking 45/182 countries. Vietnam is one of the countries with the cheapest internet rates for both fixed and mobile internet. The average monthly package cost for broadband internet in Vietnam is 10,81 USD, ranking 13/220 countries. The average price of 1GB of mobile data in Vietnam is 0,61 USD, ranking 37/223 countries. These are favorable conditions for developing digitalization of components in the tourism supply chain in Vietnam.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

The data in part 4 has shown a panoramic picture of digital transformation in the basic components of TSC in Vietnam. Thereby, the article links with 7 key issues of TSCM to analyze the impact of digitalization on TSCM.

1.1. Demand management

Demand management is an important part of SCM as well as in the successful implementation of TSCM. In particular, accurate demand forecasting plays a huge role in every TSC planning activity. To estimate the expected future demand, econometric and time series approaches are often used. However, business managers who are always busy with business often pay little attention to these academic methods. Therefore, digitalization has become a useful tool when relevant data is easily collected through applications/websites/technology platforms and then using demand forecasting software to get the desired results. When all components in TSC apply digital transformation, demand forecasting can be done accurately. In Vietnam, with the Google search engine, managers can easily find a lot of information about units providing demand forecasting software. Since then, demand management has become faster and more efficient than before.

1.2. Two-party relationships

TSC is a complex network consisting of many industries and related entities. The relationship between these objects can be divided into many different types, styles, and groups depending on each approach. However, it is undeniable that the relationship between the parties in TSC is an extremely important component for tourism development. Data digitization has brought many benefits to the management of the two-party relationships. It can be seen that the periodic reporting of businesses to government agencies can be done conveniently and cost-effectively thanks to the form of online reporting with digitized data. In addition, the connection between service suppliers and tour organizers also takes place quickly and accurately through software and applications. And the indispensable relationship is the connection between customers and businesses. Digitizing customer data helps businesses to meet the maximum needs of customers.

1.3. Supply management

Supplier selection and maintaining relationships between suppliers (hotels, resorts, attractions, airlines ...) and tour operators/travel agents play a profound role in TSCM. Supply chain management software can provide maximum support for selecting the most suitable and effective suppliers while allowing information management, purchasing planning, cost control, risk prevention and reporting.

1.4. Inventory management

Inventory plays a key role in a TSC and developing effective inventory management strategies is crucial for achieving efficient TSCM. Digitized historical sales data will be the basis for demand forecasting. In addition, relationships with tour operators/travel agents will also help suppliers determine the appropriate supply and optimal inventory levels. Digital transformation has provided tools to maintain and develop relationships within the TSC.

1.5. Product development

TSCM aims to meet the needs of tourists. Through the reviews and ratings of tourists collected through applications/travel platforms/websites, suppliers can identify the constantly changing trends and tastes of tourists. In addition, based on the recorded data, suppliers can identify weaknesses and thereby improve products and services. Product development needs to be done regularly and continuously. Digital transformation tools will support businesses in processing large amounts of data to achieve their goals.

1.6. TSC coordination

TSC consists of many components that perform different tasks to create a complete tourism product. Coordination between components in TSC is extremely important in TSCM because it helps reduce redundant and duplicated work, improve operational efficiency and achieve higher profits for the entire TSC and its participants. Blockchain platform and related applications are powerful tools to support TSC coordination.

1.7. Information technology

Information technology is an indispensable part of TSCM. The application of digitalization to information technology is a strong development step, improving the efficiency of using information technology. With digitized data and related applications, digitalization will support TSCM to achieve faster, more comprehensive, more creative and more effective results.

2. Discussion

With the programs and action plans issued by the government on digital transformation, the application of digitalization to TSCM has been implemented in all components of TSC. Thereby, a number of opportunities and challenges have been identified. Next, some solutions will be proposed to contribute to improving the effectiveness of digitalization application in TSCM in Vietnam.

2.1. Oppotunities

- At the national scale, the application of digital transformation in TSCM will create a comprehensive, rich digital data warehouse that is easy to exploit and share for use in researching new products and services, creating new markets, and enhancing competitiveness with other countries. In addition, digitalization in TSCM will create conditions for all components in TSC to participate in the digitalization process, contributing to raising awareness and skills of related entities, creating uniformity in action, thereby promoting solidarity in developing the national tourism industry.

- At the enterprise scale, digital transformation in TSCM will bring products and services to more tourists, maximize customer experience, satisfy their needs, thereby generating more revenue. When applying management software to TSCM, businesses will have the opportunity to build an automated working environment, save costs, and optimize operational efficiency. In addition, digitalizing TSCM also creates a network of close relationships between TSC components while still ensuring the safety and security of information, promoting the effectiveness of the cooperation process, and increasing product/service quality. In addition, digitalizing TSCM also increases flexibility and adaptability to different situations, thereby minimizing risks and hazards.

2.2. Challenges

- The digital transformation of tourism data requires the synchronous, close and long-term coordination of many components based on a strong and unified technology platform. This is a challenge in managing and using that digital data warehouse most effectively.

- Vietnamese tourism businesses still lack experience, have limited financial resources and are weaker in technology platforms compared to other countries. Besides, the level of understanding of each business about digitalization is also not high and uneven.

- Digitalization will lead to restructuring of businesses and business processes, taking place in the long term and requiring large financial investments.

- Digital transformation in TSCM requires the determination and synchronization of the entire tourism industry, from management units to businesses to enhance technological capacity in line with new development trends.

- The application of digital TSCM among enterprises and localities is not homogeneous, concentrated in large cities and enterprises with strong financial potential, not really popular in small localities and SMEs.

- Many localities and sectors have outdated infrastructure and technology, not suitable for digital transformation application.

- The legal corridor on digital transformation is not complete and clear, so the implementation of digitalization still has many shortcomings.

2.3. Proposed solutions

- Actively study and exchange with experts from developed countries on technology and have experience in the field of digital transformation in tourism, especially digitalization in TSCM.

- Strengthen the dissemination of digital transformation content to components in TSC, open training courses on digitalization in TSCM for leaders of tourism businesses.

- Strengthen technical support and necessary capital for tourism businesses in the TSCM digitalization roadmap.

- Make synchronous and comprehensive investments in infrastructure and technology to improve the quality of digital data in TSCM.

- Complete policies and legal frameworks related to digital transformation in tourism.

Research recommendations

Customers are a component of TSC. However, due to limitations, the study has not yet conducted an in-depth survey of tourists' opinions on the effectiveness of TSCM digitalization. Future studies should focus on analyzing this content to properly assess the role of digitalization in TSCM.

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RESEARCH FRAMEWORK ON FACTORS AFFECTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF LUXURY RESORTS IN VIETNAM

Dung Nguyễn Ngọc[1]
Vinh Mã Xuân[2]

Extended abstract

Responsible tourism has received much attention from domestic and foreign researchers recently. The application of CSR tools can mitigate negative impacts and increase the positive effects of tourism in creating fair transparency for visitors, local people, tourism resources, business partners, and other stakeholders. Good implementation of corporate social responsibility will promote the sustainable development of tourism activities and improve the quality of life of local people (Merwe, 2007). This research focuses on building a research framework based on identifying factors affecting the implementation of CSR at luxury resorts in Vietnam. Through researching and synthesizing documents, interviewing experts, and surveying relevant audiences, the authors proposed a research framework that demonstrates external factors (government policies, customers, business partners, local communities, and environment) and internal factors (management, employer, brand, CSR awareness) that influence CSR implementation at luxury resorts in Vietnam. The study used the PLS method to analyze 211 survey samples collected to verify the reliability and suitability of the framework. The research results enrich the theoretical framework of factors influencing CSR implementation for specific tourist accommodation establishments in future research papers.

Keywords: Social responsibility; framework; luxury resort; CSR.

Introduction

Corporate social responsibility is still one of the current topics of concern in Vietnam. Especially in the field of tourism, the influence of corporate social responsibility on tourist accommodation is being deep concern. The origins of CSR can be traced back to developed countries and reflect the concerns of shareholders in high-income countries (Low, 2016), while the World Business Council for Sustainable Development considers corporate social responsibility to be "The business's continued commitment to communicating with the indigenous culture and contributing to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as the local community and society" (Soundarya, 2013). In addition, it is believed that corporate social responsibility has led to new ways of engaging with society and government (Hope & Kwarteng, 2014).

In recent years, researchers and businesses have been increasingly interested in the concept of CSR in many different ways and fields (Mai Thị Kiều Lan, 2023). The main goal of CSR practice is to create value for key stakeholders and fulfill responsibilities towards them (R. Edward Freeman & S. Ramakrishna Velamuri, 2008). However, one of the representative definitions of CSR has pointed out that "CSR is how companies manage business processes to create a society that has an overall positive impact." (Mallen Baker, 2004). CSR implementation is also defined as "specific actions and policies in the context of the organization that take into account the expectations of stakeholders and the three key points of economic, social and environmental performance" (Aguinis, 2011). The application of tools to implement social responsibility can minimize negative impacts and increase the positive impacts of tourism in creating fair transparency for tourists, indigenous peoples, tourism resources, business partners, and other stakeholders in a voluntary spirit (Mai Thu Hiền và Giang Thị Phương Anh, 2022). Implementing corporate social responsibility well will promote the sustainable development of tourism activities and improve the quality of life of local people (Merwe, 2007).

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The system of accommodation facilities brings significant economic benefits, contributing to the diversification of economic sectors for the locality and regional development (Nguyễn Trọng Nhân, 2017). From the perspective of the tourism industry, the revenue from the hotel–restaurant business accounts for a very high proportion, sometimes up to 70% of the total revenue of the industry, especially in popular tourist destinations (Hiệp hội khách sạn Việt Nam, 2017). Social responsibility in accommodation facilities is an important aspect that accompanies the sustainable development of the tourism industry. The implementation of social responsibility is not only an ethical task but also brings many positive influences on both businesses and communities. There are also opinions that CSR is a tool to enhance the economic interests and legitimacy of the company. The growing importance of CSR has prompted many countries to develop statutory models to regulate their economic activities (Wen, 2017).

Current international research papers on CSR on the Scopus system, Web of Science, and Google Scholar also have many topics and fields. The author studied the statistical results in Scopus of studies related to social responsibility with 842 articles. Specifically, in the period from 2015 to 2023, out of 30 research papers in 2015, there will be 137 papers by 2023. Research papers through national and international conferences or specialized research journals almost have many research papers that discretely analyze factors related to CSR. Domestic CSR studies in the service sector mainly focus on analyzing the current state of social responsibility, thereby proposing several solutions to improve the implementation of social responsibility in the service sector such as hotels (Trần Thị Minh Hòa và Nguyễn Thị Hồng Ngọc, 2014) ...
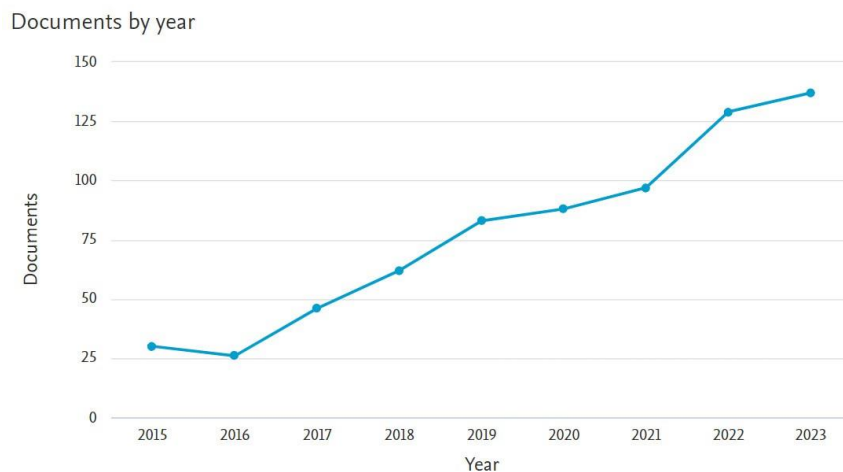
Figure 1: Number of CSR-related research papers published (2015-2023)
Source: Scopus (2024)

Through many research directions on social responsibility, as presented above, research on factors affecting the implementation of social responsibility in luxury hotels in Vietnam is still having a gap. Therefore, the goal of this study is to build on previous theories and research models, a new model will be proposed on factors affecting the implementation of social responsibility in luxury resorts in Vietnam.

Objectives

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors affecting the implementation of social responsibility in luxury resorts in Vietnam.

To achieve the objectives, the tasks of the topic research are determined as follows:

1. To overview the research situation related to the topic.

2. To sum up, systematizing the theoretical basis relates to the factors that affect the implementation of social responsibility in accommodation establishments and related issues.

3. To propose a research framework on factors affecting the implementation of social responsibility in luxury resorts in Vietnam.

Proposing research framework:

1. Theories related to corporate social responsibility

Through the synthesis of studies on social responsibility and documents related to the topic, the author finds that there are many theories that researchers have mentioned about the implementation of social responsibility such as Institutional Theory, Stakeholders Theory, Resource Dependence Theory, Contingency Theory, Sustainable Development Theory, ... However, in the context of the research, the author will apply the following two theories to serve the research objectives.

- Institutional Theory

According to Nguyễn Minh Thành (2023), the first person to introduce the concept of institutions was Hamilton in 1932. Based on institutional theory, organizational decisions are not only governed by efficiency goals, but are also influenced by political, economic, social, and cultural normative constraints. Currently, social responsibility and the implementation of social responsibility according to sets of standards are codified and becoming more and more popular (Michel Capron, Francoise Quairel-Lanoizelée et al., 2009). Institutional theory is used in research to explain the influence of factors on the implementation of social responsibility such as legal provisions, ethical standards on the implementation of social responsibility, such as the requirements of relevant components affecting the implementation of social responsibility.

- Stakeholders Theory

The Stakeholders Theory puts the enterprise at the center of the overall relevant components, including shareholders and all others involved in the operation and decisions of the business such as customers, NGOs, and local communities... It requires businesses to identify goals and manage associated interests and moral obligations by the requirements of relevant parties. Therefore, to create values and success for businesses must also create social prosperity, fairness, and equality in relevant sectors (Freeman, 1984).

According to Boatright (2003), businesses should be operated for the benefit of stakeholders such as shareholders who invest money in the company, employees who invest time and intellect, and customers who invest in trust, business, and community that provide infrastructure and education for the future generation of workers. For this theory, an enterprise is considered a subject in a large collective with many different participants. More specifically, Freeman (1984) proposed that this theoretical model be divided into two groups: (1) a group of components outside the enterprise and (2) a group of components inside the enterprise (as shown in Figure 2). Wearing (2005) presented that stakeholder theory emphasizes the importance of all stakeholders whether indirectly or directly through the activities of a company. Therefore, information transparency is also a necessary social responsibility that the business meets the requirements of the parties.
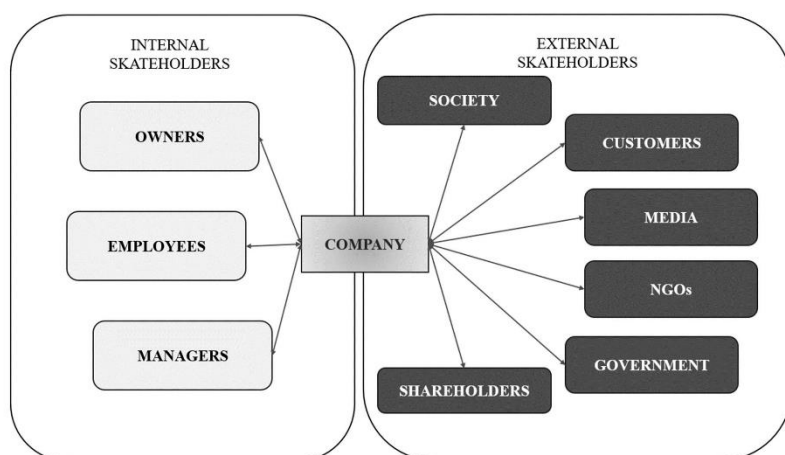
Figure 2: Stakeholders according to Freeman (1984)

2. Framework of factors affecting the implementation of social responsibility in luxury resorts in Vietnam

Based on the actual conditions in Vietnam at present and based on institutional theories, and theories of relevant components, the author proposes a research framework of factors affecting the implementation of social responsibility in luxury resorts in Vietnam as shown in Figure 3.

Social Responsibility (CSR) is all the economic, legal, moral, and philanthropic issues that society expects in

any given moment (Carroll, 1991); research by Tô Quang Long (2020) has proposed six factors affecting social responsibility in the hotel business; The model of Xavier Font and Jennifer Lynes (2018) proposed internal and external factors that affect the CSR implementation of the tourism service industry and the hospitality business; The model by Nursyazwani Mohd Fuzi et al. (2022) is a multivariate regression model with dependent variables in CSR implementation in Malaysia; framework of Nguyễn Quyết and Lê Trung Đạo (2018). In addition, Capron et al. (2007) argue that stakeholder theory is the main frame of reference for CSR arguments, but it is difficult to consider all stakeholders of the enterprise, so it is necessary to consider the relevant stakeholders according to each specific study.

Government (PL) is an organization that promulgates legal corridors to support businesses in resort operations to achieve the best results with useful values for stakeholders (Lê Thị Nga and Nguyễn Hoàng Linh Chi, 2021); The research framework of Vũ Công Giao and Nguyễn Quang Đức (2021) shows the benefits of transparency in business for businesses that implement social responsibility. The H1 hypothesis was developed as follows:

H1: Government and the implementation of social responsibility have a covariate relationship.

The environment (MT) referred to here is the natural environment which is understood as all the natural elements of matter created by humans, surrounding humans, and affecting the existence and development of surrounding organisms. Based on research by Phạm Thị Cẩm Anh and Tăng Văn Nghĩa (2020) on corporate social responsibility in protecting the environment and its behavior affecting consumers; research by Babiak, K., & Trendafilova, S. (2011) on CSR and environmental responsibility; Kraus, S., Rehman, S. U., & García, F. J. S. (2020) addressed corporate social responsibility and environmental performance. The H2 hypothesis was developed as follows:

H2: Environment and implementation of social responsibility have a covariate relationship.

A community (CD) is a group of people who share similar cultural, historical, and living habits within a certain administrative geographic area where accommodation facilities operate. Turker, D. (2009); and Singh et al. (2018) show that there is an alignment of intrinsic elements of CSR that create sustainable values for the development of local communities; Ahmad Masum et al. (2020) shows that there is an influence on the development of local communities. The H3 hypothesis was developed as follows:

H3: Local communities and the implementation of social responsibility have a covariant relationship.

Business partners (DT) are groups of people who have interests or requirements for businesses. Specifically, they include suppliers, customers, employees, shareholders, local communities, and managers who act as representatives of these groups (Freeman, 1984); Longo et al. (2005) ; Nobuyuki Tokoro (2007) shows that the relationship between business partners has fair and friendly cooperation with commitments to ensure quality; Joel Gonsalves (2023) accepts differences and adopts a way of respecting all points of view of the parties that will lead to successful collaboration. The H4 hypothesis is developed as follows:

H4: Business partners and social responsibility partners with covariate relationships.

Customers (KH) are tourists who experience luxury resorts in tourist destinations. Based on research by Châu Thị Lệ Duyên et al (2014), Hồ Trần Quốc Hải and Vũ Trực Phức (2021), the implementation of social responsibility must be based on the trust and support of customers; research by Mobin et al. (2020) shows that information about CSR on social media sites attracts consumers and increases eWOM intent; Nguyễn Thị Kim Chi (2017) shows that consumers can boycott goods if businesses violate social responsibility activities. The H5 hypothesis is developed as follows:

H5: Customers and the implementation of social responsibility have a covariate relationship.

Management (DH) is the process of organizing, planning, operating, and controlling the activities of a business to achieve its goals and business results. Based on research by Châu Thị Lệ Duyên et al. (2014), business leaders need to voluntarily perform social responsibility with their hearts rather than just because of temporary responsibility or advertising; Nguyễn Trọng Nhân et al. (2020) have shown that there is a relationship between the operation of accommodation facilities by managers and the implementation of corporate social responsibility. The H6 hypothesis is developed as follows:

H6: Managing and implementing social responsibilities with covariate relationships.

Employees (NL) are employees working in tourist accommodation establishments who are entitled to social welfare and other benefits according to the law. According to Turker's research, D. (2009) also acknowledges that there is a relationship between corporate social responsibility and its human resources; employee motivation tends to

be related to work and organizational activities (Skudiene & Auruskeviciene, 2012). The H7 hypothesis is developed as follows:

H7: Employees and social responsibility performers have a covariate relationship.

A Brand (TH) is a collection of intangible assets related to trademarks, names, and symbols. Brand value management means managing the investment activities to create and grow this asset (An Thị Thanh Nhàn và Lục Thị Thu Hường, 2010); research by Chen, T.B. & Chai, L.T. (2010) shows that consumers' perception of brand trust influences their consumer behavior; Malik, M. (2015) also asserts that quality social responsibility programs will help build brands and improve reputation. The H8 hypothesis is developed as follows:

H8: Brand and social responsibility implementation have a covariate relationship.

CSR Awareness (NT) is the level of awareness of employees about their organization when participating in CSR policies and activities associated with social and business goals. According to the research of Hoàng La, Phương Hiền, Trần Ngọc Trung (2015), it has been shown that there is a relationship between the perception of employees and customers towards the implementation of corporate social responsibility and cooperative behavior through intermediaries and trust; Mã Xuân Vinh et al. (2023) believe that there is a cohesion of employees of tourist accommodation establishments with a sense of social responsibility; Rupp et al. (2006) also pointed out that participating in social responsibility activities allows for the development of employees' positive perception of the organization. The H9 hypothesis was developed as follows:

H9: Awareness of CSR and implementation of social responsibility with covariate relationship

Research Methodology

1 Populations and Sample

Preliminary research using a test scale with 32 survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews with 8 tourism experts eliminated 2 scales out of 42 recommended variables. The study was formally surveyed with 211 samples including 40 observed variables in June 2024.

2 Research Tools

The study uses SmartPLS 3.0 software with the least squared technique (PLS) as the main statistical tool to analyze the reliability of the scale, the value and evaluate the suitability of the proposed framework, and evaluate the structural framework with the meaningful level of regression coefficients.

3 Data Collection

The subjects of the sample collection are tourists who are experiencing, employees who are currently working at resorts in Phú Quốc, Phan Thiết, and Nha Trang according to the assessment of 4 to 5 stars, as of the date of receiving the survey. Samples are collected in a convenient method in the form of a direct survey combined with online. After eliminating the invalid response samples, the remaining 211 valid votes are included in the analysis and processing of the following steps.

4 Data Analysis

4.1 Reliability Analysis (Cronbach Alpha)

Cronbach's Alpha Test: The results of the analysis of Table 1 show that all factors are reliable with Cronbach's Alpha coefficient greater than 0.7, specifically ranging from 0.727 to 0.887 and most of the values of the load coefficient of each index are greater than 0.4 (the smallest value is 0.704). Therefore, the reliability of the index has been ensured. Thus, the scale reliability of all variables fits.

Composite Reliability (CR): The analysis results show that the composite reliability of CD, CS, DH, DT, KH, MT, NL, NT, PL, TH, and it is found that the aggregate reliability score for each structure is greater than 0.8. Therefore, it has been proven that the scale has good internal consistency reliability.

Table 1. Summary of coefficients in PLS-SEM model

Factors	Index	Load factor of the indicators	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	VIF
CD	CD1	0,716				1,394
	CD2	0,725	0,727	0,807	0,651	1,641
	CD3	0,879				1,567
	CD4	0,897				1,230
CS	CS1	0,795				1,914
	CS2	0,839				2,304
	CS3	0,786	0,851	0,893	0,627	1,849
	CS4	0,789				1,715
	CS5	0,747				1,691
DH	DH1	0,777				1,718
	DH2	0,891				1,755
	DH3	0,749	0,813	0,862	0,556	1,695
	DH4	0,818				1,791
	DH5	0,783				1,477
DT	DT1	0,854				2,841
	DT2	0,902	0,874	0,912	0,723	2,912
	DT3	0,811				1,953
	DT4	0,830				1,893
KH	KH1	0,896				1,705
	KH2	0,772	0,833	0,812	0,531	1,754
	KH3	0,711				1,899
	KH4	0,769				1,812
MT	MT1	0,736				1,705
	MT2	0,808				1,851
	MT3	0,832	0,808	0,863	0,563	1,970
	MT4 MT5	0,807				1,531
NL	NL1	0,814				1,230
	NL2	0,884				2,378
	NL3	0,841	0,887	0,916	0,686	2,795
	NL4 NL5	0,809				2,150
NT	NT1	0,704				2,075
	NT2	0,741				1,879
	NT3	0,784	0,781	0,850	0,533	1,550
	NT4	0,762				1,520
	NT5	0,852				1,746
PL	PL1	0,771	0,789	0,860	0,606	1,483

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	PL2	0,791			1,300
	PL3	0,849			1,423
	PL4	0,797			1,732
TH	TH1	0,753			1,849
	TH2	0,723	0,736	0,833	0,556	1,578
	TH3	0,754			1,525
	TH4	0,752			1,247

Source: Compiled by the authors

Evaluate the convergence value of the scale: The results show that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of all factors is greater than 0.5 to meet the test requirements, ranging from 0.531 to 0.723. According to Hair et al. (2017), for a scale to reach a convergence value, the AVE value must be greater than 0.5 and that means that the factors will explain at least half of the variance of the respective indicators. An AVE of less than 0.5 means that the variance of error exceeds the interpreted variance. Thus, each structure exhibits a good convergence value.

4.2 Testing the Differential Value of the Scale

Evaluate the differential value: for the scale to reach the differential value, for any potential variable, the square root of the AVE must be higher than the variance of any other potential variable. In SmartPLS, in the Fornell-Larcker standard table, the square root of the AVE appears in diagonal cells and the correlations between variables appear below it. As a result of Table 2, this analysis shows that the differential value for the structures achieved by the quadratic root of the AVEs is higher than for the non-diagonal correlations.

In addition, the study was estimated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait index method (referred to as HTMT), and the results showed that the HTMT indices for all pairs of study variables of the first-order factor were less than 0.9, satisfying the standard condition (Hair et al., 2016), (see Table 3).

Table 2. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	CD	CS	DH	DT	KH	MT	NL	NT	PL	TH
CD	0.806									
CS	0,188	0,792								
DH	0,074	0,241	0,745							
DT	0,038	0,111	0,487	0,850						
KH	0,058	0,046	0,367	0,549	0,729					
MT	0,014	0,219	0,562	0,601	0,456	0,750				
NL	0,087	0,179	0,617	0,497	0,310	0,526	0,828			
NT	0,006	0,556	0,288	0,030	0,083	0,141	0,238	0,730		
PL	0,005	0,117	0,353	0,498	0,514	0,410	0,361	0,006	0,779	
TH	0,103	0,508	0,253	0,079	0,004	0,260	0,255	0,466	0,116	0,745

Source: Analysis results of the authors

Table 3. Heterotrait - Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	CD	CS	DH	DT	KH	MT	NL	NT	PL	TH
CD										
CS	0,176									
DH	0,197	0,253								
DT	0,120	0,123	0,558							
KH	0,165	0,094	0,576	0,745						
MT	0,095	0,236	0,700	0,712	0,663					
NL	0,138	0,191	0,730	0,576	0,517	0,630				

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NT	0,158	0,663	0,378	0,093	0,114	0,172	0,284		
PL	0,093	0,132	0,442	0,637	0,687	0,564	0,457	0,093	
TH	0,188	0,622	0,325	0,113	0,165	0,351	0,323	0,589	0,235

Source: Analysis results of the authors

From the results of the analysis, the authors were able to conclude that the scales used in the study model achieved very good reliability and value.

4.3 Structural framework testing:

4.3.1 Multilinear coefficient

According to Hair et al. (2017), multilinearity can occur if the tolerance is less than 0.2 or if the magnified coefficient of variance (VIF) exceeds 5. VIF is the inverse of tolerance and contains the same information about multilinearity. The tolerance is calculated as $1 -$ (minus) R^2 of the factor. This means that when the R^2 of a factor is less than 0.8, the multilinearity is not a problem because it has ensured that the criteria or tolerances are less than 0.2 or the VIF is greater than 5. The results of the analysis of Table 1 show that the results of VIF are all below the threshold of 5; The maximum value of VIF is 2.912 and the minimum value of 1.230 indicates that the latent variables do not occur multi-collinear.

4.3.2 Model Conformity Verification

The conformity of the model is tested by the value of R^2. The analysis results show that the corrected R^2 value of the social responsibility implementation model (CS) is 0.401, which meets the statistical standard of model suitability and the corrected R^2s of the model are explained to a moderate extent (Hair et al., 2017), shown in Table 4.

Table 4. R and R^2 Testing

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
CS	0,427	0,401

Source: Analysis results of the authors

In addition, the authors used the Communality index to evaluate the model in accordance with the structural model, according to Hair & et al. (2016) the Communality index is equivalent to AVE in the PLS model and should have a value greater than 0.5 for the model to be suitable. According to the results of Table 1, the structural model that has shown AVE is greater than 0.5 for all structures. According to Hu & Bentler (1998), if the SRMR index is less than 0.1, the model is accepted, and the SRMR less than 0.08 is the standard. Therefore, based on the analysis results of Table 5, the SRMR = 0.08 index has confirmed that the author's proposed model meets the accreditation standards.

Table 5. Fit Summary

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0,080	0,080
d_ULS	6,641	6,641
d_G	1,782	1,782
Chi-Square	1978,627	1978,627
NFI	0,634	0,634

Source: Analysis results of the authors

From all the above results, this study has proven that the PLS Smart 3.0 has confirmed that the proposed research model is consistent with the experimental data.

Conclusion and Discussion

5 Discussion

From the statistical results of the regression coefficient analysis in Table 6, the CSR awareness factor (NT) has the largest regression coefficient, so it has the most positive impact on the implementation of social responsibility, other factors have a decreasing impact in order of brand factor (TH), environmental factor (MT), government factor

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(PL), customer factors (KH), management factor (DH), business partner factor (DT), community factor (CD); the employee factor (NL) has the smallest regression coefficient, so it has the least influence.

Table 6. Impact Coefficient Results

Factors	Path Coefficients (β)
CD	0,017
DH	0,026
DT	0,023
KH	0,039
MT	0,059
NL	0,016
NT	0,427
PL	0,047
TH	0,281

Source: Analysis results of the authors

Conclusion

Qualitative methods such as synthesizing documents based on Institutional Theory and Stakeholders Theory, as well as in-depth interviews with experts in the field of tourism to draw valuable experiences in setting up questionnaires. The research paper also used PLS Smart 3.0 software to measure the reliability of the scales and test the structural model to confirm the suitability of the research model. The study results have shown that the scales of factors affecting the implementation of social responsibility in luxury resorts in Vietnam all ensure reliability and value. The multivariate regression analysis shows that eight factors, namely Community, Management, Business partners, Customers, Environment, Employees, CSR awareness, Government, and Brands, are all statistically significant for the implementation of social responsibility in luxury resorts in Vietnam in the context of this study. The proposed research framework has achieved the goals set initially.

Research recommendations

The next studies will be carried out more broadly in terms of the number of samples, objects, and scope of research... The author will recalibrate the scales to suit the situation and development conditions of various types of accommodation establishments in Vietnam. In addition, the limitation of the study is that the relationship of impact through diverse mediators has not yet been considered, and further studies can be done to be more complete.

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RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT BASED ON INDIGENOUS AND CULTURAL VALUES IN BAC AI DISTRICT, NINH THUAN PROVINCE

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Extended abstract

Bac Ai district is inhabited by many ethnic minority communities, possessing abundant natural and human resources, ecological natural landscapes with orchards such as green pomelo, durian, melon, tangerine, banana ...this is a good condition for the formation of rural tourism products in Ninh Thuan province.

On the basis of compiling secondary documents, the article synthesizes the theoretical basis for promoting indigenous cultural values in tourism development. The research results will propose a number of solutions to develop rural tourism based on indigenous cultural values. The solutions focus on building rural tourism products with local values, designing management models and effective cooperation between stakeholders in local tourism development. Since then, helping to preserve the indigenous culture of the ethnic community living in Bac Ai district, Ninh Thuan province.

Keywords: rural tourism, indigenous cultural values, Ninh Thuan

Introduction

Ninh Thuan province has 32 ethnic groups living with a population of over 144,200 people, accounting for 24.4% of the province's total population[3]. Ninh Thuan province is in the South-Central region, with diverse terrain with a combination of mountains, rivers, lakes, streams, sea and desert. Rural settlements in Ninh Thuan Province have different characteristics in terms of population density and distribution compared to other regions in the country. Mountainous and desert areas are more sparsely populated than coastal and plain areas. The rural population is primarily engaged in agriculture, livestock raising, and fishing. Consequently, the cultural and historical values, festivals, and traditional customs of the province are often linked to agriculture and folklore, bearing unique characteristics of the indigenous communities.

Rural settlements in Ninh Thuan Province have formed numerous agricultural villages, harbouring a wealth of cultural and historical values, representing the cultural diversity of the ethnic groups. Among the various cultures, the values of traditional craft culture and other cultural heritages, such as religions and architectural works, landscapes, culinary culture, performing arts, and festivals, stand out. These very values hold immense potential for rural economic development.

Bac Ai District is a mountainous district located in the northwest of Ninh Thuan Province, a locality where over 90% of the population is the Raglay ethnic group, with a natural area of 102,730 hectares, including 12,347 hectares of agriculture land, the rest is mostly forest land and Rocky Mountains[4]. Recent research on Raglay culture shows that the Raglay people have a rich and diverse cultural heritage, especially intangible culture. The Raglay

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people have their own language, a rich treasure trove of epics, a unique system of traditional musical instruments, especially the unique Ma La system, a treasure trove of unique songs, folk songs, folk dances, with rich ritual systems. In particular, the artisans still preserve various types of ethnic musical instruments such as: Saranai trumpet, Kanhi instrument; Forms of festivals, rituals and cultural and religious activities are reserved such as: Traditional wedding ceremony; Grave leaving ceremony; Worshiping ceremony to celebrate new rice; Field worship ceremony; or to store musical instruments: Ma La, gourd musical instrument, Bamboo Flute, Chapi instrument, etc.; Regarding folk songs and dances, there is a system of ancient stories, epics, riddles, picking and answering questions, dances: rice pounding dance (corn pounding dance), rice field dance, grain picking dance... ceremonies, customs, musical instrument are closely associated with the spiritual life of ethnic minorities in the district, is cared for, kept, preserved and increasingly promoted[1].

In addition, Bac Ai is an ancient war zone, with illustrious historical relics such as: Pi Nang Tac stone trap in Phuoc Binh, Ta Lu fortress in Phuoc Dai, and Ta Nang Mountain relic complex, which are good conditions for formation into origin-oriented tourism and becomes an activity in the product chain of developing tourism programs. In addition, the district also has a number of traditional handicrafts with unique characteristics and great potential to exploit tourism development such as: Ecotourism; agricultural tourism; community tourism ... Tourists will participate in activities to experience agricultural tourism and agricultural farming at: Bo Lang ethnic eco-tourism village (belonging to Phuoc Binh National Park); Raglai ethnic ecological village of Hanh Lac Hamlet (belonging to Phuoc Binh National Park) ...

However, the exploitation and development of agricultural tourism based on the strengths of local indigenous cultural values is still very limited due to reasons such as: (1) The preservation and protection of cultural heritage has not yet been given attention, lacking support projects to limit negative impacts on cultural heritage; (2) The infrastructure conditions limit the ability to develop tourism based on indigenous cultural values; (3) The quality of tourist experience from cultural tourism programs, tourism products and activities has not been promoted; (4) The goal of maximizing economic benefits may give rise to issues of sustainable tourism development in the locality; (5) The large of indigenous cultural sites have not been invested to introduce all cultural values ... to tourists.

In summary, developing and exploiting indigenous cultural values in rural tourism development in Bac Ai District, Ninh Thuan Province requires planning, investment and close cooperation between related parties. In addition, it is necessary to focus on building rural tourism products with unique local values, designing an effective management model to ensure a balance between economic and social benefits, and help preserve indigenous culture to the ethnic community living in Bac Ai District, Ninh Thuan Province.

Research Methodology

1. Methods of collecting, processing, analysing and synthesizing documents and data

Research data is collected from many sources such as tourism research projects in Vietnam and around the world; statistical data sources; reports compiled from localities; and maps, diagrams, and images related to research topics. The authors chose qualitative data analysis as the main research method to determine the potential for rural tourism development in Ninh Thuan province. From there, propose several solutions to develop rural tourism based on indigenous cultural values.

2. Methods using diagrams and charts

The authors used the tourism map in Ninh Thuan Province and the administrative map of Bac Ai District to locate rural tourism resources and identify tourist destinations suitable for local development.

3. Field survey methods

In addition, the authors also conducted many field surveys in areas of Bac Ai District such as: Phuoc Binh National Park, Pi Nang Tac Stone Trap, Phuoc Binh Crossbred Gaur Farm, Da Nhong Stream, Raglay ethnic ecological village in Hanh Rac 1,2 village, Tan My Dam ... The methods to collect information through the field such as observing landscapes and agricultural tourism experience activities, filming and taking photos to save practical documents. There are 3 survey periods from June 2023 to June 2024 all had local officials leading the way, supporting consultation and providing information for research in Bac Ai. From there, it helps the authors have objective assessments on agricultural tourism development, indigenous cultural values ... to serve the assessment of the

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[1] https://baovanhoa.vn/dan-toc-ton-giao/huyen-bac-ai-ninh-thuan-day-manh-cong-tac-bao-ton-phat-huy-gia-tri-van-hoa-dong-bao-raglai-99506.html

potential and development of rural tourism.

Literature review

1. Overview of rural tourism

Rural tourism can be defined as the "country experience" which encompasses a wide range of attractions and activities that take place in agricultural or non-urban areas. Its essential characteristics include wide-open spaces, low levels of tourism development, and opportunities for visitors to directly experience agricultural and/or natural environments. Consequently, rural tourism in its purest form should be: Located in rural areas; Functionally rural – build upon the rural world's special features of small-scale enterprise, open space, contact with nature and the natural world, heritage, "traditional" societies and "traditional" practices; Rural in scale – both in terms of buildings and settlements – and, therefore, usually small scale; Traditional in character, growing slowly and organically, and connected with local families. It will often be very largely controlled locally and developed for the long term good of the area (Humaira Irshad, 2010).

Rural tourism is a concept that refers to tourism activities taking place in rural areas, associated with agricultural activities, rural landscapes, community life along with traditional cultural heritages local system (Dao Ngoc Canh, Ngo Thi Ai Thi, 2018). According to the author group Le Thi Thanh Yen (2020), rural tourism is a type of tourism that has all rural elements (life, traditional crafts, landscape, etc.) is a tourist resource that attracts tourists, is a new livelihood direction for rural areas. Rural tourism helps create new jobs for women and other young people and can develop by harmoniously combining rural area resources (agriculture and traditional crafts, cultural heritage, etc.) with tourism. Rural tourism is a tourism activity that takes place in rural areas, using available rural resources for tourism purposes and is closely related to ensuring sustainable development of that rural area (Pham Xuan Hau, 2017).

Thus, rural tourism is a complex and multi-faceted activity: it is not just farm-based tourism. It includes farm-based holidays but also comprises special interest nature holidays and ecotourism, walking, climbing, and riding holidays, adventure, sport and health tourism, hunting and angling, educational travel, arts and heritage tourism, and, in some areas, ethnic tourism (OECD, 1994). Since many rural tourism activities take place within communities, it is necessary to thoroughly study environmental and visitor management to maintain established community goals such as protecting landscapes, nature, and heritage during the process of restructuring the rural economy (Humaira Irshad, 2010).

2. Development of rural tourism based on local cultural values

Natural resources and local culture are significant potential factors in attracting both domestic and international tourists. Since local culture represents a core component of tourism and is a crucial element in drawing visitors to both urban and rural destinations. It plays a vital role in enticing tourists to rural areas for experiential and exploratory purposes (Liu et al., 2023). Through the development of branding, rural cultural tourism spaces can bridge the cultural perception gap among visitors from different regions, enhance the experience value of rural tourism, and contribute to the sustainability of local culture ((Liu et al., 2023). Even in urban areas, local culture can be integrated into tourism development processes. Tourists are inherently curious about local cultures and seek such experiences. In this context, local culture not only attracts tourists to a specific destination but also creates distinctive features and uniqueness, thereby promoting the development of a strong destination brand (Ghofur & Ismanto, 2022). However, it is essential to maintain a balanced relationship between local culture and the culture introduced by tourists to ensure mutual benefits for both parties.

Local cultural values and traditions must be acknowledged by both the local community and tourists. In the realm of culture, it is neither appropriate nor feasible to evaluate or compare one culture against another. It is crucial that the relationship between "local cultural environments and external influences is entirely managed and determined by the local people themselves, free from external interference" (Guo et al., 2022). In this regard, local culture in tourism can serve as a means to support the local population, revitalizing and enhancing its value when positively recognized and appreciated. Economic benefits are significant factors driving ethnic tourism, empowering local communities, and aiding in the preservation of local cultural heritage (Guo et al., 2022).

At tourism destinations where local culture, such as urban culture, plays a crucial role in adapting quickly to technology, "cultural preservation is necessary to ensure that traditions and local culture continue to exist for future generations" (Ermawati, 2023). In sustainable development at the local level, it is essential to balance "economic benefits, cultural preservation, and environmental protection" (Yang et al., 2022). In this context and from a cultural perspective, a sustainable approach encourages the preservation and transmission of traditional knowledge and skills,

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investing new value into both tangible and intangible elements, for both local residents and tourists. Thus, one of the primary goals of revitalizing local values is to preserve and convey local culture and traditional skills. Neglecting to maintain traditional culture or applying it inappropriately often provokes strong reactions from local communities" (Yang et al., 2022).

Therefore, local culture and tourism are considered to be interconnected through two main factors: attractiveness and revitalization potential. The local culture can serve as a product or attraction that draws tourists, while tourism can act as a means of revitalizing local culture. In this interrelated and inseparable dynamic, local culture is often seen as the foundational element for developing tourism attractions. Local culture provides the foundation for tourism development. Collaboration among stakeholders in tourism is also a crucial factor contributing to its growth. To meet developmental needs, agricultural tourism managers must work with travel companies and destinations, analyse contexts, and explore ways to integrate agricultural tourism products with rural culture. Local authorities need to participate in this process to establish mechanisms for evaluating the integration of tourism and local culture, and to promote the sustainable development of agricultural tourism. Preserving local cultural values should be aligned with maintaining economic benefits, so that local residents recognize the value and importance of their culture from multiple perspectives, particularly in terms of improving socio-economic conditions.

Addressing solutions to mitigate the negative impacts associated with ethnic tourism is of paramount importance. "Destination managers should focus on upgrading infrastructure, protecting attractive resources, developing tourism products, and creating job opportunities for the community," while also emphasizing the authenticity of tourism products to "enhance local residents' awareness of their ethnic culture, increase their pride, and motivate them to willingly preserve and inherit their traditional culture" (Guo et al., 2022).

The cultural identity of ethnic minorities is considered a crucial factor in sustainable tourism development, serving as a guiding principle that allows for the enhanced exploitation of cultural resources while promoting the economic development of ethnic minority regions. Cultural tourism activities in areas with ethnic minorities are on the rise. As tourism grows, the demand for exploring, experiencing, and appreciating art increases, making the appeal of traditional cultural elements of ethnic minorities—integral to the unique identity of Vietnamese tourism products—more influential in tourists' decisions (Giao, H. N. K., & Anh, H. D. T., 2021). It can be said that sustainable tourism development linked to the cultural identity of ethnic minorities has "transformed heritage into assets," thereby creating more authentic and attractive tourism products. In this context, traditional housing architecture is preserved rather than being replaced by concrete constructions that overshadow the culture of the Kinh people, ethnic costumes, though not abundant, are still maintained and produced by the community in many places; customs, traditions, rituals, festivals, music, folk songs and dances, and visual arts continue to be preserved and promoted.

In Vietnam, numerous studies have been conducted on the development of rural tourism leveraging cultural values. However, these efforts have predominantly focused on general directions and perspectives rather than establishing specific models and solutions tailored to the unique cultural contexts and local communities.

3. Overview of rural tourism in Bac Ai District, Ninh Thuan Province

In recent years, rural tourism in Ninh Thuan Province has seen initial positive development and garnered increasing attention from visitors, thereby stimulating local economic growth. The province has enacted various resolutions, plans, and policies to foster rural tourism while advancing new rural development such as Decision No. 458/QD-UBND, which outlines the Economic and Social Development Plan for Ninh Thuan Province for 2021-2025; the Proposal for Tourism Development in Ninh Thuan for 2021-2025, with a vision extending to 2030; and programs related to the planning and development of local craft villages, as well as the preservation and enhancement of cultural values in the province. Additional relevant plans include Plan No. 4654/KH-UBND dated 03 September 2021, by the People's Committee of Province, which implements the Sustainable Preservation and Promotion Program of Vietnamese Cultural Heritage for the period 2021-2025 in Ninh Thuan Province., and the Plan for Developing the "Raglai Ethnic Cultural Space" in Bac Ai District for the period 2023-2026. These policies collectively provide a framework for advancing rural tourism by leveraging local cultural values, contributing to the broader objective of rural revitalization and development.

According to the "Tourism Development Project for Bac Ai District for the Period 2023-2025, with a Vision to 2030," Bac Ai District benefits from policies under Government Resolution 30a aimed at rapid and sustainable poverty reduction. The Bac Ai District Party Committee for the 14th term has issued Resolution No. 08-NQ/HU

concerning tourism development in the district for the period 2022-2025. The focus is on enhancing tourism development in Bac Ai District, contributing positively to the economic restructuring and sustainable poverty reduction efforts, creating job opportunities, and improving the living standards of local residents. The district frequently organizes vocational training courses tailored to the needs of each commune and the local population to promote self-employment among the youth. Bac Ai has developed traditional craft villages such as: the weaving model in Phuoc Tien Commune, producing items like baskets, gourd containers, bows, and Chapi musical instruments; a dried bamboo shoot production group; and a group growing new high-yield crops. For agricultural tourism development, the main products include fruit garden tours (such as pomelo, banana, durian, and cantaloupe); development of medicinal herb areas, which are characteristic of the Bac Ai mountainous region, both preserving and promoting medicinal herbs while supporting tourism linked with traditional handicrafts in weaving villages.

The district is continuously working on developing procedures and planning for raw material areas for craft villages, creating product display points, designing product samples, building brand identities for craft villages, and supporting the search for partners and business connections to integrate production with product consumption.

Exploiting the cultural values of traditional crafts, along with the production landscape, will help create employment opportunities for rural labour in Bac Ai, stabilize the local residents' livelihoods, contribute to poverty reduction in the district, and preserve the traditional cultural beauty of the local ethnic communities. The local authorities and residents are aware of the importance of tourism and have invested in developing tourism towards higher quality, which has initially created a new look for tourism activities in the district. Despite having considerable potential in local culture, rural tourism has not yet developed in line with its potential due to simplistic notions of tourism products and a lack of scientific establishment. The average number of visitors to Bac Ai District is only 7,000 – 10,000 visitors per year, with social income from tourism activities growing at an average rate of 10% per year[7]. This situation arises from several factors:

Firstly, rural tourism products often overlap and fail to create distinct characteristics between villages, which diminishes their unique appeal. Tourism exploitation has only focused on well-established factors without researching and discovering new tourism products based on connected values and unique features of each locality. Currently, individual tourism products are small-scale and lack integration and coordination due to the absence of a comprehensive tourism planning strategy. Tourism products rely solely on existing resources, with similar processes, organization, and layout across villages, leading to duplicated products, a lack of distinctiveness, and insufficient overall connection and promotion. The products do not enhance the experience, lack interaction between visitors and residents, and are missing traditional cultural events that help visitors understand the local cultural values more deeply. The development of a "Tourism Product Portfolio" has not been prioritized in craft villages.

Secondly, many works at residential sites such as: landscape systems (including all environmental, cultural and social factors such as: architectural and construction works, open spaces and public areas, natural environment, cultural activities and events, transportation systems and walkways, etc social and economic activities, tourist experience areas... together form the overall picture of the cultural village area), residential spaces that blend the residential environment and nature, the rural ecosystem, including the field area outside the village... bearing the cultural imprint of building a unique community living environment of the locality that has not been fully identified. In addition, there is also an intangible cultural system such as customs, community lifestyles, festivals, and culinary culture that have not been exploited methodically to integrate with the preserved tangible heritage.

Thirdly, the system of facilities and technical facilities such as tourist accommodation areas, homestay systems, integrated or independent entertainment areas in the village are still less interested in investment.

Fourthly, the management policy mechanism, the division of investment and exploitation responsibilities are not clear in legal documents and synchronously deployed to the residential community. The connection with the new rural planning is not tight, the infrastructure and environment are still poor, and have not created conditions for tourism development such as: small and narrow roads, restricting vehicles with large tonnage and size entering the village, power lines, trees have not been properly adjusted or planned, etc.

Fifthly, the mobilization of the population community to participate in tourism activities is still limited because local people who are used to traditional agricultural lifestyles and practices find it difficult to adapt to a new environment, especially the environment for providing tourism services when there are tourists who come from outside. In addition, the access to service vocational learning also creates difficulties for farmers who are used to farming and producing agricultural products. The training and guidance on how to do tourism for the community are still ineffective.

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Sixthly, souvenir products are still a gap in many craft villages, the production is not professional. Visitors to the craft village pay and consume for souvenirs are still low. The promotion of craft village products is still weak, lacks branding, and has not been actively promoted internationally. This is a limitation while the context of cyber information technology has opened up many new directions of promotion.

All the above factors reduce the attractiveness and attractiveness of the tourism program and have not promoted local indigenous cultural values. The discussion to propose solutions becomes necessary in the case of Bac Ai District, Ninh Thuan Province.

Conclusion and Discussion

Past studies have proven that there is an increasing trend showing more tourists are travelling to rural areas for vacation because of its richness of the local natural, cultural, and heritage resources. Despite the potential importance of rural touris; however, there has been an ongoing debate on ways to better develop rural tourism destinations that will ensure sustainable of profitability. Service quality has been proposed as one of the crucial determinants to enhance tourist's satisfaction and subsequently lead to revisit intention (Chee Hua Chin et al., 2018). Rural tourism development planning is the exploration of the potential of the community as a tourism destination that contains spiritual, social and environmental dynamics rather than simply an economic engine for growth (Wanda et al., 2009). Locals in rural tourism communities need to observe the benefits of tourism-related development in their communities (Wanda et al., 2009).

Rural policy should be closely related to rural life in general and take into account the complex and diverse nature of rural communities, cultural and ecological structures, environmental protection issues, social development and infrastructure requirements (Wanda et al., 2009).

To achieve sustainable development, it is necessary to pay attention to investment and strictly manage and conserve environmental resources. In addition, to effectively develop rural tourism activities, the government and people of Bac Ai District, Ninh Thuan Province need to:

(1) Develop a rural tourism recovery plan, focusing on improving infrastructure, training human resources and boosting the tourism industry and marketing through lively communication channels, social networks, and websites;

(2) Develop unique, rich and highly experiential rural tourism products through the exploitation of indigenous cultural values, participation in agricultural activities such as planting durian, grapefruit, cashew and jackfruit, so that tourists can participate in farmers' lives, support cultivation and animal husbandry activities;

(3) It is necessary to invest in building and improving infrastructure, transport systems, electricity, water, communication networks in the whole district in general; Encourage homestay investment in rural tourist destinations; Determine the role of the government, localities, businesses and communities. In particular, it is necessary to emphasize the role of the community because this is the residential area of the community, and the traditional cultural heritage is also basically preserved by the community. Campaigns so that people do not feel that they are exploited and do not receive commensurate benefits.

(4) Design traditional craft products to show the labour characteristics of the Raglay people such as: household goods carvings, mosaic carvings, fishing tools such as rice paddies, medicinal products such as banana wine, etc. This is a condition to help people have sustainable business opportunities, preserve and promote local culture, and support community economic development.

(5) Develop a rural tourism program that provides a sightseeing experience in villages, help visitors come into direct contact with artisans and traditional production processes. Visitors can experience the creation of a product or a stage of a product or enjoy local specialties;

(6) Organize courses, seminars, events, and festivals in cultural villages to help maintain and promote customs and cultural uniqueness of each village. Designing spaces to display handicraft products of the craft village, creating opportunities for visitors to easily access when shopping, and at the same time helping people expand the business market at Raglai Ethnic Ecotourism Village in Hanh Rac 1 Hamlet, Hanh Rac 2 Hamlet Community Tourism Village to help tourists learn about gong culture, the Chapi, unique folk performing arts, learning about the cultural value of local cuisine. Propose the principles of operation, association, investment, and operation management in the model.

Research recommendations

The changing trends of travelling by tourist have created a new market segment for the tourism industry (Chee Hua Chin et al., 2018). Rural tourism development based on indigenous cultural values is very necessary, in order to

further promote the potential and strengths of the locality, especially indigenous culture. Thereby helping to develop rural tourism in the direction of building specific products, creating attraction and highlight for local tourism in the construction of a new countryside, towards the goals of sustainable development of socio-economic life. The application of theoretical issues in the practice of rural tourism development, especially from the perspective of promoting indigenous cultural values, has shown success in a number of countries and localities. In the future, the authors will use more sociological survey methods with many groups of subjects and stakeholders to evaluate indicators to specifically measure the impact of indigenous cultural values on rural tourism development in the locality.

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THE EFFECT OF GREEN INCENTIVES AND TRAINING ON STAFF HAPPINESS AND JOB OUTPUT AT A FEW FOUR- AND FIVE-STAR HOTELS AND CRUISE SHIPS IN HA LONG

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Extended abstract

The discipline of green human resource management (GRHM) is a recent development with notable gaps in knowledge. Thus, there is still room to explore the relationship between GHRM practices and job satisfaction as well as green performance. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to develop and evaluate a research model that takes into account the regulatory influence of resource commitment as well as the intermediary function of work satisfaction elements in relation to the effects of green training, rewards, and incentives on the green performance of hotels and luxury yachts. A questionnaire survey was utilized to collect data from a sample of 250 respondents. The partial least squares method (PLS SEM) is used to establish causal effects in a structured model as well as assess construct validity and reliability. The results indicate that job satisfaction and green performance are highly predicted by rewards, green incentives, and green training. Green performance is also impacted by job happiness at the same time. Furthermore, studies demonstrate the important moderating effect of resource commitment. According to this study, lodging facilities should prioritize recognizing and promoting employees' environmentally friendly behavior in order to improve employee happiness, green performance, and environmental protection.

Keywords: Green training; Green rewards and encouragement; Job satisfaction; Green performance; Resource commitment.

Introduction

Humanity is dealing with a number of global environmental issues, including climate change (United Nations, 2022), the nitrogen cycle, and biodiversity loss. Environmental challenges have spurred sustainability activities (Zaidi & Azmi, 2022), resulting in the demand for green human resource management (GHRM), or "greening" workplaces and organizations (Khalid et al., 2022). Thus, academic research on green methods in human resource management, also known as green human resource management (GHRM), has expanded rapidly over the last decade (Anushree Tandon et al., 2023).

According to Ren, S. et al. (2018), "recognize the relationship between HRM actions that affect the environment" is made possible through the use of green HRM. The three main components of this activity are: creating opportunities for employees to apply (employee engagement and empowerment, supportive climate/culture, role of unions in EM, organizational learning), encouraging employees to comply with green standards (management management/performance appraisal; pay and reward systems), and developing employees' green capabilities (recruitment and selection, training and development, job descriptions) (Renwick, D. W. S., Redman, T., 2013; Moraes, S.D.S., et al., 2018; Tang, G. et al., 2018; Nhat Tan Pham et al., 2020). Green HRM also encompasses other activities including rewards, remuneration, and performance management (Aboramadan & Karatepe, 2021; Shah & Soomro, 2023). Thus, while being a new field of study, scholarly interest in GRHM has grown quickly recently (Nhat Tan Pham et al., 2020). But there are still a lot of unanswered questions in this subject, which must be taken into account in order to spur further research and development.

For accommodation establishments, including hotels, which are core businesses in the tourism sector, participating in green activities has become a point of attention and is monitored on a global scale. bridge (Nhat Tan Pham et al., 2020; Chaudhary, 2021). However, the success of hotel businesses in greening this activity largely depends on the participation and support of employees (Anushree Tandon et al., 2023). Exploring the individual-

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level determinants of GHRM and its profound influence on employee behavior is especially necessary in the context of tourism and hospitality (Yang et al., 2021; Alreahi et al ., 2023). However, GHRM research at the individual level still faces many challenges in implementation because current scholars lack awareness, orientation and understanding of these activities (Mahlagha Darvishmotevali; & Altinay, 2022; Tanveer; et al., 2023). Meanwhile, as these initiatives might enhance hotels' environmental performance, it is crucial to look into how GHRM affects staff members (Hameed et al., 2020). In spite of this, there aren't many studies examining how GHRM can enhance turnover, job performance, employee satisfaction, and green employee performance (Nhat Tan Pham et al., 2020; Alreahi et al., 2023). However, neither the relationship between employee satisfaction and green performance nor the moderating role of resource commitment have received much attention (Aisha AlKetbi, 2024). On the other hand, GHRM practices have a positive impact on employee satisfaction and the organization's green performance (Michael Asiedu Gyensare, Samuel Adomako, 2023). Two primary practical strategies in GHRM (Pinzone et al., 2019) to build greening-related competences and desire to adopt greening are green training (GT) and green rewards and incentives (GR). Prior empirical research on green training has mostly examined how it affects environmental performance, rarely taking into account other effects on workers' job happiness (Lu et al., 2005) or other aspects of their lives (Ren, S. et al., 2018). In the meantime, studies on green incentives and rewards primarily demonstrate their significance in raising worker satisfaction (Rayner, J., & Morgan, 2018).

As a result, this essay will specifically look at how employee work satisfaction and the environmentally friendly performance of around 4-5 star hotels and cruise ships in Ha Long are affected by training, incentives, and awards. These are significant lodging facilities that establish brand and quality for the Ha Long lodging industry. Since all of these lodging facilities are in the food and beverage sector, they use a lot of resources (such as water and energy) and produce a lot of waste. Ha Long Bay, on the other hand, is where lodging establishments dump their rubbish; in Quang Ninh province, protecting the region's cultural heritage is always of utmost importance (Cao Quynh, 2024).

Objectives

). In light of the aforementioned background, the papers in this study on the subject of green human resource management that have been published in international journals under the Scopus and Web of Science categories are referred to. This paper will concentrate on developing a research model to elucidate the connection between employee job satisfaction, green performance in the control of commitment, and green personnel training, rewards, and incentives. The following resources can be used to address the research question:

1. How do green training, green rewards and incentives affect job satisfaction and green performance?

2. How does job satisfaction affect green performance?

3. What moderating role does an enterprise's resource commitment play in the relationship between green training and rewards and job satisfaction and green performance?

Hypothesis

According to some writers, applying the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) theory provides a solid foundation for improving our comprehension of organizational problems pertaining to the execution of activities. Management of human resources (HR) (JA Marin-Garcia & Tomas, 2016). Bailey (1993) first proposed the AMO framework, arguing that in order to ensure employee discretionary effort, three requirements must be met: employees must be motivated appropriately, they must possess the requisite skills, and employers must provide opportunities for their participation (Appelbaum, E., Bailey, T., Berg, P., & Kalleberg, 2000). The AMO theory states that when given the right skills, motivation, and organizational opportunity, workers will perform better. The AMO theory states that when given the right skills, motivation, and organizational opportunity, workers will perform better. AMO theory has been used extensively in the human resources (HR) literature to emphasize the relationship between HR activities and performance because of this association (JA Marin-Garcia & Tomas, 2016).

The connection between green training, worker happiness, and the environmental performance of lodging establishments.

As stated by Daily, B. F., Huang (2001), "green training is a process of on-the-job training and continuing education designed to achieve corporate environmental management goals and objectives." According to Elrehail, Harazneh, I., Abuhjeeleh, M., Alzghoul, A., Alnajdawi, S., and Ibrahim (2019), in this direction, it was stated that: "training and development leads to the integration of human capital and the accumulation of knowledge, which

ultimately affects employee happiness and satisfaction." According to Babbour (2013), this is one of the most widely used green HRM practices in businesses. It is also acknowledged as a crucial procedure for introducing cleaner production (Diana, G. C. et al., 2017).

The ability, motivation, and opportunity theories guide the development of green training as a capacity-building strategy (Renwick, D. W. et al., 2016). This approach encourages employees to engage in more environmentally conscious behaviors and serves as the cornerstone for various initiatives aimed at reducing environmental impact and promoting environmentally conscious performance (Janaka Siyambalapitiya et al., 2018). Consequently, it is evident from these recent research that green training has a significant role in encouraging environmentally conscious employee behavior. Consequently, a number of studies have demonstrated a relationship between positive attitudes among employees and ethical and ecologically conscious actions taken by individuals and businesses (Koh, H.; Boo, 2001; Valentine, S.; Barnett, 2003). On the other hand, prior research has shown demonstrated that training can affect employee satisfaction in both favorable and unfavorable ways (Oppenauer, V., & Van De Voorde, 2018). Because employees view training as a kind of organizational support, green training can, in particular, increase employee satisfaction with work in the social aspect (Pinzone et al., 2019; Hany Hosny Abdelhamied et al., 2023). As a result, we formulate the following theory:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Green training improves employee job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Green training improves the green performance of the accommodation facility.

The relationship between green rewards and incentives, employee job satisfaction, and green performance in lodging places

According to research, rewards and motivation have a significant impact on employee job satisfaction. According to AMO theory, employees perform effectively when motivated by suitable behavioral rewards (Rayner, J., & Morgan, 2018), which contributes to environmental management (Purnama, N. D., & Nawangsari, 2019). Dumont, J. et al. (2017) argue that in order to incentivize employees to participate in green projects, firms must correctly analyze their green behavior and link it to promotion and salary prospects. Rewards can be monetary (bonuses, tax breaks, and profit sharing), non-monetary (recognition and praise), or negative reinforcement (Mandip, 2012; Zibarras, L. D., & Coan, 2015). Furthermore, firms are advised to incorporate a number of reward systems to enhance employee happiness and sustainable behaviors, such as monetary incentives, eco-awards, and recognition programs (Odhiambo, G. M. et al., 2023). In a study of Ghana's service sector, awards were found to increase job satisfaction and thus employee loyalty to the firm (Shagufta & Abugre, 2013). At the same time, Renwick et al. (2013) emphasized the need of linking environmentally friendly actions with employee benefits in order to assist the fulfillment of stated environmental goals. Thus, the hypothesis we build is as follows:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Green training improves employee job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Green training improves the green performance of the accommodation facility.

Employee satisfaction mediates the relationship between training, rewards, green incentives, and green performance of accommodation companies.

According to Wiliandari (2015), job satisfaction is a compilation of employees' perceptions of whether or not their work is exciting. Job satisfaction is a manifestation of good or pleasant emotions that arise from evaluating a job or the enjoyment of analyzing a job or work experience (Ahmad Fajar Prasetyo et al., 2024). According to Ahmad Fajar Prasetyo and colleagues (2024), contentment requires the following factors or situations: engaging, difficult work, opportunities to excel, opportunities to achieve prizes and promotions; meeting these factors will result in satisfaction.

According to McCue, C., and Gianakis (1997), satisfied personnel will swiftly fulfill the organization's goals, tasks, and objectives, which has a good impact on task execution. According to Rodríguez et al. (2016) and Nguyen (2020), job satisfaction correlates with improved performance. Eberegbe, G., and Giovanis (2020) underline the strong and favorable impact of job satisfaction on goal-achieving performance. When employees are satisfied, they are willing to work more and put in more effort to complete tasks more successfully, resulting in improved overall performance (Gaafar, H. et al., 2021). As a result, organizational performance is another topic that has been extensively researched as an important outcome of implementing G-HRM activities (Albloush et al., 2022; Ali & Muhammad Hassan, 2022; El Baroudi et al., 2023; Freire & Pieta, 2022). Several aspects of organizational performance, including environmental, economic, and social performance (Elshaer et al., 2023). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

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Hypothesis 5 (H5): Job satisfaction has a favorable impact on a business's environmental performance.

Resource commitment moderates the association between work happiness and corporate green performance.

Resource commitment can impact the interaction between green human resource management strategies (Gyensare, MA; Adomako, S; Amankwah-Amoah, 2024). An organization's level of resource commitment is determined by the allocation of "tangible and intangible entities available to the firm that enable the firm to efficiently and/or effectively produce a product offering to market value for some market segments" (Hunt, S. D., & Lambe, 2000). It has been shown that personnel constitute the cornerstone of long-term competitive advantage (J Barney, 1991; Wright et al., 1994). This shows that organizations that can combine and dedicate strategic resources to green HRM practices are more likely to promote employee well-being. As a result, we believe that resource allocation is critical for firms to execute green human resource management operations.

Hypothesis 6 (H6): Committed resources play a moderating influence in the link between job satisfaction and company environmental performance.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

Data for the study were gathered from personnel and management at 18 hotels and cruise ships rated 4-5 stars (according to the Vietnam National Tourism Administration's star rating requirements) in Ha Long and Quang Ninh. These lodging units are chosen at random from a list of establishments of the same star class compiled by the Quang Ninh Department of Tourism. The authors made phone calls to 22 facilities and received support and cooperation from 20 units. Then, we used the sampling criteria of units that have paid attention to environmental protection policies and have implemented environmental training content (energy saving, decreasing plastic waste...). As a result, 18 institutions met the sampling criterion. The number of valid samples gathered is 250 qualifying ballots for data analysis. This number of samples meets the minimum sample size for SEM structural model analysis, as Hair et al. (2019) state that if the number of latent variables is less than or equal to 5 and each latent variable includes more than three questions, the minimum sample size is 100.

2. Research Tools

The study conducted a questionnaire-based survey. The questionnaire is divided into five components, each representing one of the five scales in the established study model (Figure 1). Each part contains questions related to each observable characteristic and is scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) absolutely disagree to (5) completely agree. In addition, a variety of demographic control factors relevant to the study were included in the questionnaire, including gender, age, education level, and expertise.

3. Data Collection

The author team collected data face-to-face and online from 18 lodging units in two rounds, with each unit anticipated to complete 15 surveys. The first poll was performed directly by handing out 270 questionnaires. Before respondents completed the survey, the authors revealed the survey's objectives and substance, as well as explained some of the questionnaire's terms. Following that, respondents were given 15 minutes to answer the survey questions. This survey was conducted in equal parts at 18 facilities, with the author group and colleagues participating. The first survey results garnered 230 votes, out of which 215 were legitimate. Research and conduct the second round of surveys online by sending questionnaires created on Google Forms to employees who did not participate in the survey directly, with the assistance of the head of Human Resources and facility managers. With this form, the study collected 57 surveys, only 35 of which were legitimate. Thus, the authors collected a total of 250 surveys that matched the criteria for data analysis. The sample's demographic characteristics are listed below: The male rate is 42.8%, the female rate is 57.2%; the age group 18-25 accounts for 45.7%; the majority of educational and professional qualifications are college degrees (32.4%); university has the second highest rate (28.8%).

4. Data Analysis

The study utilized PLS-SEM as the primary approach for testing the research model, which included both the measurement and structural models. PLS-SEM is less restrictive than other models because it assumes a normal distribution, limits sample size, and takes multicollinearity into account (Anderson & Swaminathan, 2011). Hair, J. F et al. (2017), on the other hand, stressed that PLS is superior in the following situations: (i) when the study's purpose is to predict essential directional variables or components; and (ii) when the sample size is limited. As a result, the

study uses the linear structural model SEM from Smart PLS 3 software to verify the measurement model and examine the direct and intermediate impacts in this study.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

Descriptive statistics

Basically, all respondents agreed with the survey indicators offered in the questionnaire. The average scores are all greater than the median score (3) (table 2). The greatest average score (M) is SS3 (4,628), while the lowest average score is CR1 (3,876). The SD values ranged from 0.565 (SS5) to 1.239 (CR3).

Test the measurement model

The PLS algorithm is the best technique for predicting measures since it tests the measurement model with reliability indicators as well as construct convergent and discriminant validity (Camilleri & Filieri, 2023). Table 1 shows composite dependability values ranging from 0.851 to 0.929. Cronbach's Alpha and Rho_A values both above the suggested level of 0.7. The average variance extracted (AVE) was all greater than 0.5.

Table 1: Shows mean value, standard deviation, reliability, and convergent validity indices for the measuring scale.

Construct	Itemn	Mean	Deviation	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha	Rrho_A	CR	AVE
Resource commitment	CR1	3.876	1.195	0.91	0.730	0.793	0.851	0.663
	CR3	3.924	1.239	0.906				
	CR5	4.432	0.757	0.784				
Job satisfaction	SS1	4.528	0.682	0.877	0.886	0.887	0.929	0.814
	SS2	4.544	0.626	0.912				
	SS5	4.604	0.565	0.917				
Green training	GT1	4.448	0.663	0.876	0.876	0.88	0.910	0.671
	GT2	4.400	0.681	0.794				
	GT3	4.384	0.772	0.853				
	GT4	4.292	0.753	0.81				
	GT5	4.384	0.702	0.757				
Green rewards	GR1	4.22	0.751	0.778	0.810	0.811	0.868	0.568
	GR2	4.172	0.799	0.769				
	GR3	4.088	0.867	0.719				
	GR4	4.252	0.741	0.721				
	GR5	4.176	0.806	0.779				
Green performance	GP1	4.508	0.706	0.823	0.901	0.901	0.924	0.669
	GP2	4.524	0.711	0.835				
	GP3	4.428	0.735	0.826				
	GP4	4.524	0.664	0.79				
	GP5	4.432	0.741	0.809				
	GP6	4.488	0.677	0.826				

Source: Processing questionnaire data with Smart PLS 4, 2024.

Furthermore, discriminant validity is established using the Fornell and Larcker criterion (1981) and the HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio) according to Henseler, J. et al. (2015), which are the primary methods for evaluating reliability. Theo Fornell & Larcker (1981) criterion, in particular, ensures that the square root of the AVE for each latent

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variable is greater than the sum of the latent variables' correlation. The HTMT index (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio) varies from 0.213 to 0.750 and is guaranteed to be less than 0.9, indicating a distinction between two latent variables.

Table 2: Indicators of discriminant validity of the measuring scale

	Construct	HTMT						Fornell and Larcker				
		1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5
1	Green performance							0.818				
2	Green rewards	0.750						0.64	0.75			
3	Green training	0.711	0.397					0.633	0.33	0.819		
4	Job satisfaction	0.776	0.728	0.498				0.694	0.62	0.439	0.902	
5	Resource commitment	0.634	0.671	0.402	0.473			0.443	0.48	0.264	0.338	0.814
6	Resource commitment x Green training	0.235	0.143	0.337	0.148	0.394						
7	Resource commitment x Green rewards	0.266	0.288	0.145	0.22	0.213	0.285					

Source: Processing questionnaire data with Smart PLS 4, 2024.

Check the structural model

The PLS algorithm provides details on direct, indirect, and total impacts in a structured model (Ringle, C. M. et al., 2022). SmartPLS 3 provides useful information about the variance inflation factor (VIF). Findings from the internal model indicate that if VIF values are lower than 5, multicollinearity does not occur (Hair, J. F. et al., 2013). Through testing results, the study found that the VIP value ranges from 1.0 to 2.0, ensuring there is no multicollinearity phenomenon (table 3). At the same time, the R^2 value of Green performance is 0.685, Job satisfaction is 0.542. Therefore, the research model is considered satisfactory because for the multiple regression model, the standard R^2 is $\geq$ 50%. Considering the Q2 index, the out-of-sample explanatory power of the independent variable on the Green performance variable is 0.610 and on the Job satisfaction variable is 0.432, which is the average level of forecast accuracy.

Table 3: Index of discriminant validity of the measurement scale

Items	VIF	Items	VIF	Construct	R-square	R-square adjusted
CR1	2.657	GR4	1.540	Green performance	0.685	0.678
CR3	2.634	GR5	1.778	Job satisfaction	0.542	0.437
CR5	1.128	GT1	2.910			
GP1	2.393	GT2	2.256	**Construct**	**Q²predict**	**RMSE**
GP2	2.496	GT3	2.748	Green performance	0.610	0.631
GP3	2.578	GT4	2.170	Job satisfaction	0.432	0.763
GP4	2.065	GT5	1.901			
GP5	2.165	SS1	2.168			
GP6	2.661	SS2	2.820			
GR1	1.739	SS5	2.918			
GR2	1.744	Resource commitment x Green rewards	1.000			
GR3	1.472	Resource commitment x Green training	1.000			

Source: Processing questionnaire data with Smart PLS 4, 2024.

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Bootrapping technique is performed to test the research hypothesis. This technique replicates 5000 samples with 1458 cases (Henseler, J. et al., 2009). Table 4 presents the results of the standardized beta coefficient, standard deviation figures, T statistical results and statistical significance (P value).

Table 4: Results of testing research hypotheses from Bootrapping results

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values	Decision
Green rewards -> Green performance	0.238	0.237	0.054	4.394	0.000	Supported
Green rewards -> Job satisfaction	0.529	0.527	0.047	11.292	0.000	Supported
Green training -> Green performance	0.351	0.351	0.047	7.415	0.000	Supported
Green training -> Job satisfaction	0.262	0.262	0.058	4.494	0.000	Supported
Job satisfaction -> Green performance	0.334	0.335	0.059	5.659	0.000	Supported
Resource commitment -> Green performance	0.130	0.131	0.048	2.719	0.007	Supported
Resource commitment x Green training -> Green performance	0.054	0.053	0.044	1.940	0.003	Supported
Resource commitment x Green rewards -> Green performance	0.042	0.041	0.038	2.001	0.002	Supported

Source: Processing questionnaire data with Smart PLS 4, 2024.

The test results reveal that green rewards and incentives have the biggest impact on employee job satisfaction (H1: $\beta = 0.529$, t = 11.292, p = 0.000), compared to green training (H2: $\beta = 0.262$, t = 4.494, p = 0.000). Furthermore, empirical research demonstrates that green training, as well as green encouragement and prizes, have a very substantial direct impact on the green performance of accommodation businesses. Green training has a significant impact on green performance (H3: $\beta = 0.351$, t = 7.415, p = 0.000), as do green encouragement and incentives (H4: $\beta = 0.238$, t = 4.394, p = 0.000).
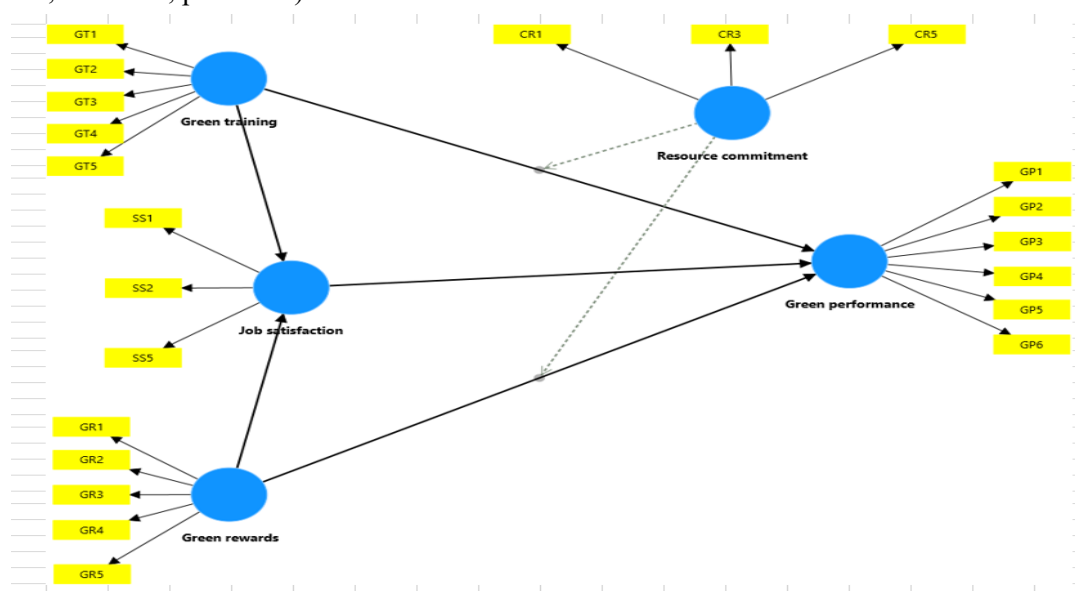
Figure 1: Results of testing the structural model using Bootrapping

Source: Processing questionnaire data with Smart PLS 4, 2024.

Research shows a strong link between employee job satisfaction and a company's environmental performance (H5: $\beta = 0.334$, t = 5.659, p = 0.000). According to study, job satisfaction acts as a mediator between green training, green rewards and incentives, and green performance in lodging companies such as hotels and cruise ships., 5 stars.

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This is the most fundamental principle underlying this study paradigm. It clarifies that this study contains significant indirect causal channels, specifically that when employees are satisfied with their jobs, the enterprise's green performance compatibility improves.

Furthermore, the study examines the function of the moderating variable, which is the company's commitment to green performance; and the relationship between green training, green awards, and incentives and the green performance of lodging facilities. The Bootrapping technique reveals that company commitment moderates the association between standard indicators (H6: β = 0.130, t = 2.719, p = 0.007; H7: β = 0.054, t = 1.940, p = 0.003; H8: β = 0.042, t = 2.001, p = 0.002). This experimental result demonstrated that resource commitment has a moderating effect in the association between green training, green rewards, and incentives for green kumquat performance, though the level of moderation is low.

2. Discussion

The study presents an integrated model of the effects of green training, rewards, and incentives on the green performance of lodging facilities via the mediating link with job satisfaction and the moderating role. In this concept, green rewards and incentives drive employee job satisfaction and green performance. The study found a strong correlation (β = 0.529) between green rewards and incentives and job satisfaction, based on AMO theory. Rayner, J., and Morgan (2018), as well as Purnama, N. D., and Nawangsari (2019), have highlighted the importance of this element. Green rewards and incentives have a significant impact on an accommodation facility's environmental performance (β coefficient = 0.238). This demonstrates that when units provide forms of reward and encouragement for employees who adopt green habits, firms may promote the implementation of environmental goals while enhancing quality and revenues. In this regard, certain research by Renwick et al. (2013) and Odhiambo, G. M. et al., (2023) have underlined that green awards and incentives encourage the adoption of organizational environmental goals and sustainable activities, but they have not taken into account their direct impact on green performance.

Furthermore, several authors, like Renwick, D. W. et al. (2016) and Janaka Siyambalapitiya et al. (2018), believe that green training is very important in fostering positive environmental behavior among employees. However, empirical research on the influence of green training on job satisfaction are scarce (Lu et al., 2005), and they rarely explore additional effects on employees (Ren, S. et al., 2018). The study demonstrated a significant correlation between green training and green performance (β = 0.351). The study demonstrated a significant correlation between green training and green performance (β = 0.351). Our research indicates that green training significantly improves employee job satisfaction (β = 0.262). Thus, green training is still recognized as a motivating factor in promoting employee happiness and improving the green performance of lodging service firms in applying a variety of solutions to reduce environmental impacts (Janaka Siyambalapitiya et al., 2018).

However, employee job satisfaction plays a mediating role in the relationship between green training, green rewards and incentives, and green performance. Many scholars who have studied the relationship between satisfaction and green performance agree that the two factors are proportionate. Employees who are content with their work are more likely to accomplish personal and organizational goals, leading to improved performance (McCue, C.; Gianakis, 1997; Rodríguez, D. 2016; Nguyen, 2020; Gaafar, H. et al., 2021; Ahmad Fajar Prasetyo et al., 2024). Based on the authors' research findings, we evaluated this link and believe that adding green training, awards, and incentives will increase employee job satisfaction. As a result of that satisfaction, the accommodation facility's environmental performance will improve. Testing this association yielded the third greatest effect coefficient in the structural model (β = 0.334).

However, the correlations in this research model are moderated by resource commitment considerations. Many research have found that resource commitment can impact the relationship between green human resource management practices (Gyensare, MA; Adomako, S; Amankwah-Amoah, 2024), as this element is strongly associated to employee citizenship behavior (Bergeron, 2007; Nielsen et al., 2012). Our research confirms that resource commitment has a moderating effect on the relationship between green training, green rewards, and green performance. However, the standardized coefficient (β) is not large (< 0.2). However, we continue to believe that resource allocation is critical for firms seeking to undertake green human resource management activities and improve green performance.

Thus, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no research has been conducted on the relationship between some important elements of green human resource management practices (green training, green rewards, and incentives) and job satisfaction, as well as the green performance of high-end accommodation businesses (4- and 5-star hotels

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and cruise ships). On the other hand, the study takes these aspects into account as moderators of the resource commitment connection. This component is a necessary condition for firms to apply GHRM practices with the purpose of raising employee job satisfaction and improving the unit's green performance. Overall, the study's new conceptual model helps to raise awareness about the necessity of green training, rewarding and inspiring green behavior, and allocating resources so that accommodation businesses can practice. Green, environmental protection, and addressing the growing demand from tourists interested in the green environment. GHRM principles can help accommodation facilities increase their competitiveness and ensure the long-term development of enterprises and tourism destinations.

Research recommendations

The study did, however, use trustworthy measurements to clarify the proposed model. However, additional research is needed to clarify some of the following issues:

1. Investigating the influence of demographic characteristics on green performance to determine disparities in judgments of organizational green performance when using GHRM.

2. The influence of certain demographic parameters (education level, professional level, personal personality, etc.) on the relationship between GHRM practice features, job satisfaction, and environmental performance.

3. Other researchers can sample a greater number of 4- and 5-star hotels to improve sample reliability.

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SOLUTIONS FOR DEVELOPING GREEN TOURISM PRODUCT IN NHA TRANG - KHANH HOA

Phan Thi Minh Thao[1]
Ha Minh Phuoc[2]

Extended abstract

Tourism has truly become a key economic sector that drives the development of various industries and fields, significantly contributing to the formation of a modern economic structure. In the general trend, developing tourism towards green growth is emphasized, based on the rational and efficient exploitation of resources, development associated with environmental protection, and preserving community culture. Khanh Hoa province has immense potential for developing green tourism thanks to its possession of the country's longest coastline (385 km), over 200 nearshore islands and more than 100 offshore islands, four of the world's most beautiful bays, historical and cultural strengths, and unique festivals. This article collects secondary data on the development of green tourism in Khanh Hoa. It proposes several solutions for building and improving green tourism products, contributing to the sustainable tourism development orientation in Nha Trang–Khanh Hoa.

Keywords: solution, development, green tourism, Nha Trang – Khanh Hoa

Introduction

With the development of the tourism industry, serious environmental problems caused by tourism have received great attention from the public (Cheng et al., 2018; Gurung, 2015; Hwang & Lee, 2018). Concerns about sustainability in the tourism industry have led to the emergence of a new form of tourism, known as green tourism; This form promotes the idea of sustainability and conservation of natural resources (Butarbutar & Soemarno, 2013; Hwang & Lee, 2018). Green tourism has become a trend and has been proliferating in many countries around the world, increasingly attracting widespread attention from tourists, tourism businesses in particular, and social communities. Association in general. In Vietnam, developing green tourism today is not only an urgent requirement but also an important strategic direction, a path for the sustainable development of Vietnamese tourism. Green tourism is an important aspect of sustainable tourism, focusing on the conservation of resource areas, land, and wildlife (Gurung, 2015; Weber, 2013).

In Vietnam, developing green tourism today is not only an urgent requirement but also an important strategic direction, a path for the sustainable development of Vietnamese tourism. The National Strategy and National Action Plan on Green Growth for the period 2021-2030, with a vision to 2050, have identified strategic tasks: (1) Reduce the intensity of greenhouse gas emissions and promote the use of green growth. Use clean energy and renewable energy; (2) Greening production; and (3) Greening lifestyle and sustainable consumption... United Nations Tourism Organization (UN Tourism) (renamed from World Tourism Organization - UNWTO) has determined to develop tourism in the direction of increasing Green growth is an important, necessary, and inevitable development path and emphasizes the role of tourism as one of the factors promoting green economic development. To develop tourism towards green growth, countries must focus on 1) Consumption in tourism; 2) Benefits of tourism and tourism-related workers; 3) Environmental benefits; 4) Preserve and promote cultural heritage values; and 5) Modeling tourism development towards green growth.

Khanh Hoa is a coastal province on the South Central Coast, with outstanding advantages in marine tourism resources and a famous system of islands, archipelagos, and coastal bays. In addition, Khanh Hoa also has historical and cultural strengths such as many national relics... special festivals are preserved and organized annually... Physical infrastructure is also invested by the province to Support tourism development such as a convenient transportation system with enough means of transportation from waterway, road, and air. Resorts, hotels, and entertainment complexes with big brands are converging such as Sheraton, Vinpearl, Intercontinental... Nha Trang tourism in particular Khanh Hoa has been experiencing remarkable developments. With positive contributions to the development of Vietnam's tourism industry. However, tourism activities still have many shortcomings such as

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tourism products still lack diversity, just pure sightseeing and resort tours that do not take advantage of the strengths of craft villages, local culture, or residential communities. Population, overloaded infrastructure, traffic jams, environmental pollution, social evils, insecurity, and order, the use of technology has not yet been effective and synchronous in organizational work. And management... According to the Master Plan for Vietnam's tourism development and the Master plan for tourism development in the South Central Coast region to 2020, with a vision to 2030, approved by Prime Minister, identified Khanh Hoa as one of the 07 key areas prioritized for development in the country, Nha Trang city is a tourism urban area, Khanh Hoa needs breakthrough solutions in tourism development, including, promoting the development of tourism products in the direction of green growth is the priority choice.

Objectives

1. Research on the current status of exploiting and developing green tourism products in Nha Trang – Khanh Hoa (advantages, limitations, current situation)

2. Propose solutions to develop green tourism products towards sustainable tourism development

Theoretical Background

1. Green tourism

The concept of green tourism has been mentioned since the 1980s, but recently green tourism has become a trend that attracts the attention of many people. According to the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) and the World Tourism Organization - UNWTO (now United Nations Tourism - UN-Tourism), green tourism is understood as responsible travel to nature, preserving the environment, and maintaining the lives of local people sustainably. Green tourism is often associated with three strategic tourism product lines from national strengths: ecology - culture and agriculture - rural areas. These product groups are similar in exploitation when associated with the natural environment and culture, focusing on Green elements (original from nature) - Clean (ensuring hygiene and safety) - Beautiful (unique landscape and architecture). In addition, green tourism is also understood as waste-free tourism, does not negatively impact the ecosystem and community culture, monuments, heritage... or participates in environmental protection (planting trees to create forests, garbage collection…

According to Graci and Dodds (2008), green tourism, an important component of sustainable tourism, is defined as "travel to destinations where flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are attractions. main attraction." This definition is further expanded to include sustainable tourism where climate impacts are minimized, natural resources are respected and conserved, and programs are adapted to the resource context. Fragile raw.

In Vietnam, Professors are people's teachers. Nguyen Van Dinh has given the definition "Green tourism is a type of tourism based on nature and culture, with environmental education, contributing to conservation efforts and sustainable development, with active participation of the local community". The core of green tourism is green tourism products. Green tourism is not only a guarantee for sustainable tourism development, but also a solution to help increase the number of tourists with high spending levels and are conscious and civilized when participating in tourism.

From the above approaches, conclusions can be drawn.

Green tourism in the narrow sense: is a form of tourism activity that is close to nature, and environmentally friendly, taking into account the protection of resources and the ecological environment. Understood in this sense, green tourism is associated with the activities of businesses and tourism organizations in their efforts to build green tourism products such as forming green tours, green hotels, green resorts, green transportation, and green tourism destinations.

- Green tourism in a broad sense: is sustainable tourism that simultaneously meets all three goals: (1) Fast, stable tourism growth, ensuring quality and efficiency; (2) Protect resources and ecological environment, adapt to climate change; (3) Resolve social issues well, ensuring harmony of interests of entities participating in tourism activities.

2. Principles for building green tourism products

According to Doods & Joppe (2001), green tourism is understood in terms of four contents, including (1) Responsibility for the environment - protecting, conserving, and enhancing the role of nature and the physical environment to ensure long-term sustainability of the ecosystem; (2) Long-term development capacity of the local economy – supporting local economies, businesses and communities to ensure economic development and

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sustainability; (3) Biodiversity – appreciating diverse cultures and expressions to thereby preserve and promote indigenous cultural values; (4) Enrich the tourist experience through active participation in natural tourist attractions, interacting with residents and learning about local culture.
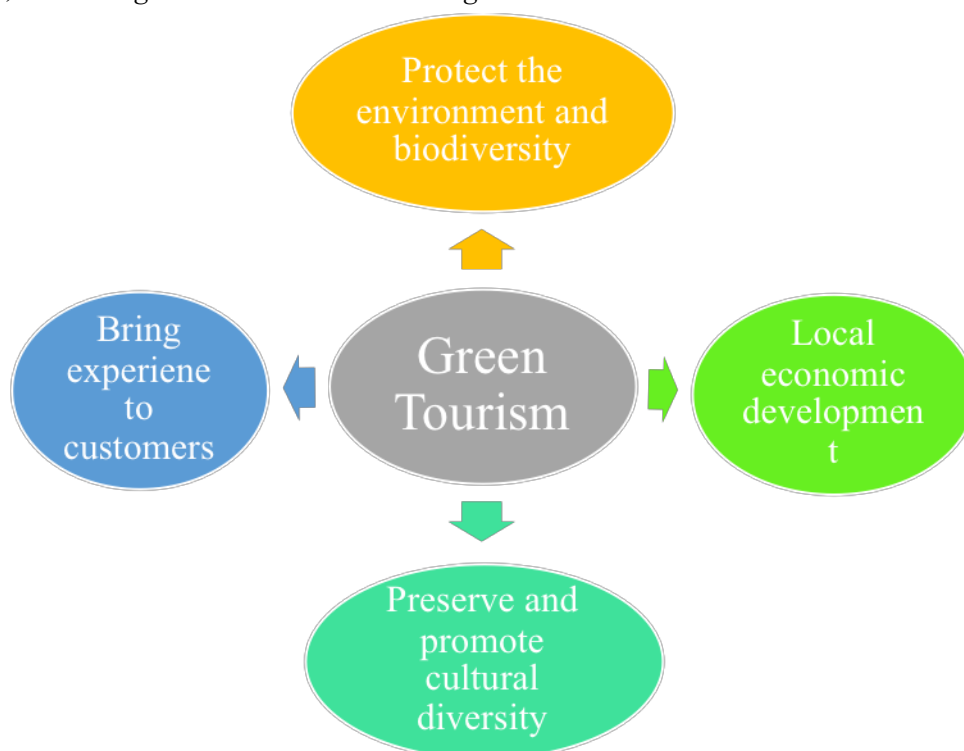
Chart 2.1. Basic principles of green tourism products

(Source: Doods & Joppe, 2001)

For green tourism products to contribute to the development of sustainable tourism, the products need to meet the following criteria:

- The products formed must be environmentally friendly, with low impact on natural resources and marine protected areas in particular. Minimize impacts on the environment (plants and animals, habitats, resources, energy use, and pollution...) and try to be beneficial to the environment.

- The product must be exploited and developed based on social and cultural aspects: not harmful to the social or cultural structures of the community where the product is exploited. Activities must respect local culture and traditions. Engage stakeholders (individuals, communities, tour operators, and government administrators) in all stages of planning, development, and monitoring, educating stakeholders to perform their roles well.

- One of the important factors and tourism products must be to contribute economically to the community, creating fair and stable income for the local community as well as as many other stakeholders as possible.

3. Experience in building green tourism products

3.1. In the world

➕ Japan

Japan's green tourism development is marked by a strong commitment to sustainability and community participation. The Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) plays an important role in promoting green tourism activities by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically:

- Promotion of sustainable tourism: JNTO has developed policies to promote sustainable tourism, including disseminating information about tourism areas and services that incorporate sustainable activities, and encouraging tourism responsibility.

- Community empowerment: Local communities are empowered to effectively implement green tourism policies, which contribute to preserving natural areas, and biodiversity and promoting their values. Local culture.

- Educational initiatives: Focus on educational tourism, where school tours are used as a means to develop

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ecotourism, especially in rural areas with natural environments, however, has been transformed.

- Pilot site for the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS): The Noto Satoyama Satoumi landscape in Ishikawa Prefecture has been selected as the pilot site for GIAHS. Thanks to that, the authorities and people of this area have recognized the strengths and opportunities of green tourism, thereby focusing on preserving agricultural biodiversity and cultural heritage.

⬩ Thailand

As Asia's leading tourist destination with beautiful beaches and famous attractions with their own identities, Thailand is a leading country in the region in green tourism ideas. Thailand's experience in developing green tourism is the journey of applying eco-tourism and specific, sustainable activities.

- Developing tourism towards sustainable resource management with the participation of indigenous communities is considered one of the basic strategies of Thai tourism. Based on the set principles and strategies, the Thai government has set very specific goals for tourism development in the current period: (1) Managing sustainable tourism development, Being responsible to the community to improve the quality of tourism services, while contributing to restoring and upgrading the unique and diverse values of products and tourism resources of Thailand; (2) Put sustainability and prosperity for indigenous communities at the forefront of tourism development. Development activities must revolve around the community's goal of preserving, improving, and protecting the environment; (3) Promote the exploitation of high-quality tourism markets towards markets with high consumption levels and the use of environmentally, economically, and socially responsible products.

- Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) model: Thailand has applied the BCG model to link the tourism industry with ensuring safety and sustainability. This model focuses on taking advantage of the country's rich historical sites, unique culture, and landscape to promote ecotourism.

- Tourism recovery after the pandemic: The Thai Government issued and implemented a plan to restore and innovate the tourism industry according to the BCG model after the COVID-19 pandemic, including addressing challenges such as overcrowding. , vulnerable to natural disasters.

- Community-based tourism: Thailand has empowered local communities to become key decision-makers in their tourism development, ensuring the community fully benefits. This is considered a solution for green tourism because it encourages local communities to balance economic growth with socio-cultural and environmental impacts.

- Green travel app and sustainable travel guide: The Thai Tourism Authority has developed an app called Green Travel, designed to promote a new style of travel with key information accurate and reliable, contributing to the development of green, sustainable tourism in Thailand

⬩ Singapore

This country has set ambitious goals in the Singapore Green Plan 2030, aiming to turn Singapore into a sustainable tourism destination, specifically:

- Sustainable tourism destination: Singapore aims to become a sustainable tourism destination, with initiatives such as making Sentosa a carbon-neutral destination by 2030.

- Singapore Green Plan 2030: This comprehensive plan includes five main pillars, of which the green economy is one of them. The plan sets sustainable development goals, including those related to tourism. In particular, Singapore will deploy the Tourism Sustainability Program (TSP), tourism businesses can exploit these programs to improve skills and train employees on related skills. To sustainability. Singapore's tourism industry also offers eco-friendly tours such as cycling tours, walking tours, and nature tours, contributing to the green economy and supporting the Green Plan. In addition, innovating services through the application of technology (such as virtual food festivals or walking tours) will enhance sustainability and visitor experience.

- In addition, Singapore is actively promoting ecotourism experiences and highlighting its commitment to ecotourism. These efforts demonstrate Singapore's proactive approach to creating green, sustainable, and resilient tourism, in line with global environmental goals.

3.2. In Viet Nam

In Vietnam, green tourism products have also been paid attention to, built, and developed in many localities. Several achievements are considered outstanding and recognized. Green tourism products in these localities have attracted a large number of domestic and international tourists.

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↓ Quang Nam

The locality is rich in tourism resources, possessing two world cultural heritage sites recognized by UNESCO. Quang Nam's consistent policy and orientation is "development for conservation, conservation for development", accordingly, tourism development is always associated with protecting heritage values, preserving biodiversity, protecting resources, and the ecological environment.

- For Hoi An and Quang Nam, the policy is to develop diverse tourism products: the one hand, promote the development of community tourism, agricultural tourism, and craft village tourism, creating conditions for people to participate in work. Tourism thereby creates jobs, improving people's income and living standards; On the other hand, promotes the development of high-class eco-tourism - resort products in Cua Dai and South Hoi An beach areas to meet tourist needs while reducing pressure on heritage areas.

- In My Son, the image of the My Son temple complex is preserved and promoted, making it increasingly attractive and winning the sympathy of tourists.

- For Cu Lao Cham, Quang Nam determines that tourism must be linked with conservation, fishermen's tourism with the sea, farmers' tourism with forests and fields, and tourism for a green, sustainable economy in the future. Measures to protect resources and the environment are strictly implemented on the island, from controlling the number of visitors to the island, controlling tourism services and sightseeing activities and experiences on the island to controlling plastic waste. , promoting the role of the community in protecting resources and the environment promoting propaganda, and raising awareness of people and tourists.

↓ Co To island, Quang Ninh province

Also implementing many environmental protection programs, such as: implementing environmental protection projects, of which the focus is the Co To district project without plastic waste; waste classification project at source; project to limit the use of plastic bags; collect, transport and treat household waste and beach waste; Organizing regular environmental cleaning activities in residential areas, at beaches... From September 2023, Co To has made it mandatory for all tourists not to bring plastic bags and single-use plastic items to the island. ; Every person on the island upholds responsibility, changes habits, says no to single-use plastic products and nylon bags, and replaces them with environmentally friendly products...

↓ Phong Nha - Ke Bang National Park

Currently, many tourist routes and destinations are being exploited with separate products, including types of tourism to visit historical caves; ecotourism to experience and learn about nature and biodiversity; and adventure tourism to conquer and explore caves... In the process of exploiting tourism, to protect the landscape and minimize the impact of tourism activities on the environment, Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park focuses on tourism capacity through the issuance of very strict regulations on limiting the number of visitors. Typically, at Son Doong cave, mass visitors are not welcomed but are only limited to the number of people on each tour; Each tour only serves 6 guests, 6 day 5 nights journey. All tourists participating in the tour undergo training on safety regulations and environmental protection in the exploration area. During the tour, tourists and guides must strictly comply with regulations on safety and environmental protection in the exploration area. Hygiene, environmental protection. In addition, Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park actively propagates and disseminates knowledge about environmental protection, protecting heritage values, and preserving biodiversity for people in the buffer zone, so forest resources are currently that it is well protected, people's pressure on the ecosystem and biodiversity has been significantly reduced.

Research Methodology

The article uses qualitative research methods and secondary document collection methods to research the potential for developing green tourism in Nha Trang-Khanh Hoa and proposes some solutions to improve the effectiveness of this type of tourism. This tour is in Khanh Hoa province today. To serve the research, the author has researched documents, books, newspapers, sources from the internet, theses, dissertations, and documents at the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Khanh Hoa and the People's Committee of Khanh Hoa. Provincial people about developing green tourism.

Observation method: Conduct observations of green tourism products and activities of parties involved in the tourism sector (management leaders at all levels, businesses, and local communities) to support conclusions. Research results on the current status of green tourism construction and conditions and processes for building green tourism products in Khanh Hoa.

Results

1. Potential for developing green tourism products in Nha Trang

⬧ Potential for tourists

According to a report from the Department of Tourism of Khanh Hoa province, the number of tourists coming to Nha Trang - Khanh Hoa increased steadily over the years from 2017 to 2019. However, in the period 2020 - 2021, the COVID-19 epidemic situation has caused a serious decrease in tourist arrivals.
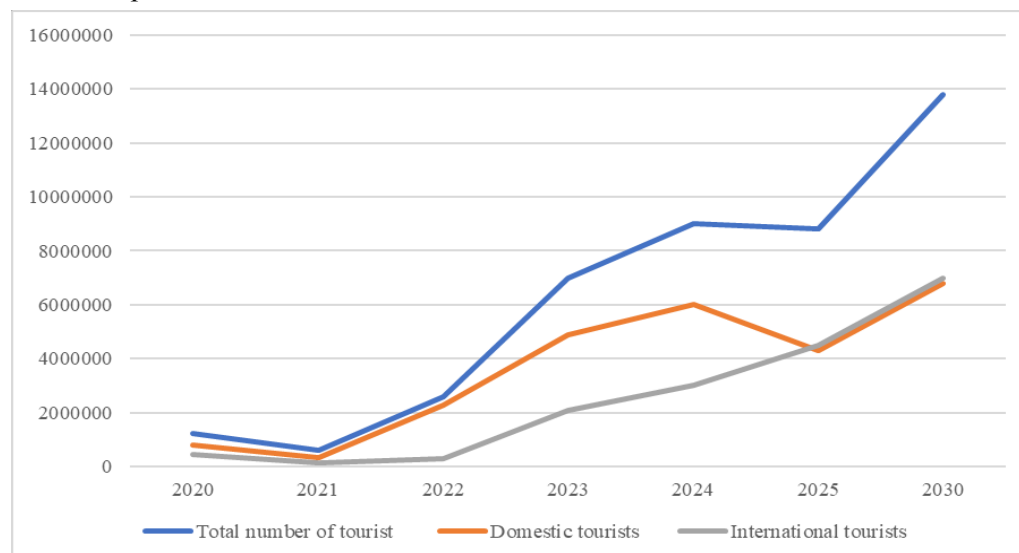
Chart 2.2. Total number of tourists coming to Khanh Hoa in the past 7 months from 2017 - 2019

(Source: Report from the Department of Tourism of Khanh Hoa province)
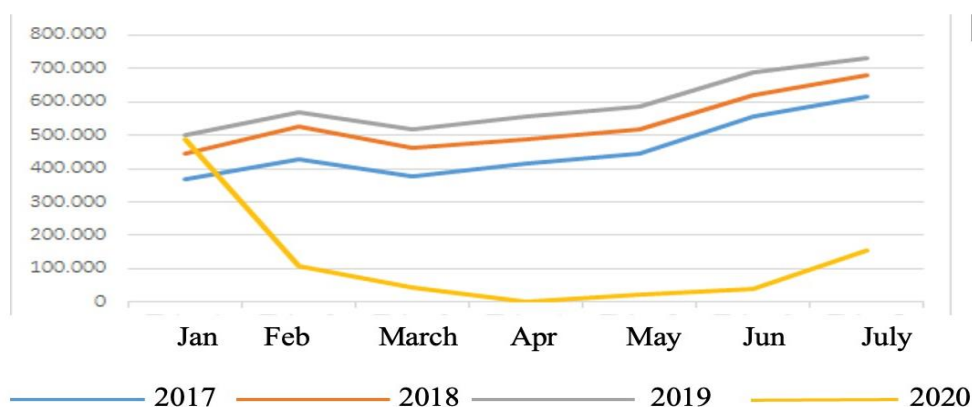
Chart 2.3. Total number of tourists coming to Khanh Hoa from 2020 - 2023 and forecast from 2024 - 2030

(Source: Khanh Hoa Province Tourism Development Steering Committee)

By 2022, when the COVID-19 epidemic situation has officially been controlled, business activities of enterprises in the tourism sector are gradually recovering, and the number of visitors to Khanh Hoa has begun to increase in the race to return to Vietnam. About development trajectory. According to the report of the Tourism Development Steering Committee of Khanh Hoa province in 2023, the entire Khanh Hoa province is estimated to welcome 7 million visitors, an increase of 170.5% compared to 2022, including about 2.1 million visitors. Internationally, increased 7.1 times. Tourism revenue in the entire province is estimated to reach nearly 31,800 billion VND, an increase of 127.5% compared to 2022. In 2024, the province's tourism industry aims to welcome 9 million visitors, including 3 million international visitors, and 6 million domestic tourists, by 2025, the locality will welcome 4.5 million international tourists and 4.3 million domestic tourists. By 2030, the Khanh Hoa tourism industry aims

to welcome 7 million international tourists and 6.8 million domestic tourists.

The above data shows that the number of visitors to Nha Trang-Khanh Hoa always maintains a stable position and grows steadily every year. Nha Trang is still a tourist destination chosen by domestic and international tourists for their vacation.

✦ Potential for natural conditions

Nha Trang in particular and Khanh Hoa are a province on the South Central Coast, a locality with many advantages in terms of natural conditions, geographical location, and natural resources for socio-economic development in general and tourism development in particular. Khanh Hoa has rich and diverse tourism resources, with scenic spots and beautiful beaches stretching along a 385km long coastline, nearly 200 coastal islands, and over 100 islands and reefs in the Truong Sa archipelago. Khanh Hoa is also famous for having 4 beautiful bays: Van Phong, Nha Phu, Nha Trang, and Cam Ranh. Among them, Nha Trang Bay is considered the most beautiful bay in the world. The Truong Sa archipelago has an important strategic position in both defense and economy. Khanh Hoa is located on important traffic axes of the country, has deep-water seaports, Cam Ranh International Airport has the third largest international passenger traffic in the country, and is an important air traffic gateway for both the South Central region and the Central Highlands.

- Khanh Hoa Beach has clear blue water, and no aggressive fish or underground eddies, so it is very safe. One of the unique things about Khanh Hoa is the concentration of many coral reefs with all colors and unique shapes. So it is very suitable for diving and watching coral tourism activities. Nha Trang is located in the heart of a valley, surrounded by mountains and sea. Therefore, it creates an extremely charming landscape. In front of the city is the East Sea with 19 scattered islands. Among them, Hon Tre Island has the largest area, about 36 km2.

- Tourism potential Nha Trang is also known as the home of swiftlets. That's why Nha Trang is known as Tram Bien Yen Porcelain

✦ Cultural and social potential

Not only does it have many famous beautiful landscapes, but Khanh Hoa is also a place that preserves many long-standing cultural traditions. Khanh Hoa owns 1 intangible cultural heritage of the world (the art of playing hut), and 16 level relics. National, 4 scenic island relics, unique architectural works such as the legendary Ponagar Tower with a history of about 1,000 years, Dien Khanh ancient citadel, communal houses, pagodas, temples,... and famous scientific research facilities such as the Institute of Oceanography and the Pasteur Institute of Nha Trang - associated with souvenirs about the life and career of scientist Alexandre Yersin; is a culturally diverse locality with many customs and folk festivals, in which the Cau Ngu Festival, Thap Ba Festival, and Grave Leaving Festival of the Raglay people have been recognized as national intangible heritages. Gia..., along with traditional craft villages such as mat making, pottery making

✦ Potential for facilities

Infrastructure for tourism is strongly developed following the trend of in-depth and large-scale investment. By 2023, the whole province will have 1,181 tourist accommodation establishments with more than 64,689 rooms; in which the number of rooms of 4-5 star hotels accounts for 40%, associated with famous brands in the world such as InterContinental, Best Western, Six Senses, Radisson, Movenpick, Eastin Grand, Accor Hotels & Resorts, and at the same time Khanh Hoa province attracts investment, builds sightseeing entertainment areas, and large-scale, high-quality luxury shopping centers in the province. Attract investment and put into operation two 18-hole golf courses in Vinpearl and Diamond Bay tourist areas; Golf Links Cam Ranh's 21-hole golf course serves tourists, contributing to enhancing the Nha Trang - Khanh Hoa tourism brand. The whole province has 233 travel service businesses, of which 187 are international travel businesses.

Khanh Hoa converges all forms of transportation: road, waterway, railway, and air. This place is also a traffic and trade hub domestically and internationally. Cam Ranh International Airport has been upgraded to modernity, reaching a capacity of 5.1 million passengers/year. It is expected that by 2050, Cam Ranh International Airport will build an additional terminal, increasing the total capacity to 45 million passengers/year. The Cam Lam - Vinh Hao expressway, more than 78 km long, passing through Khanh Hoa, Ninh Thuan, and Binh Thuan, has completed the main route, inaugurated on April 28, 2024, officially connecting the journey from Ho Chi Minh City - Nha Trang by highway, saving travel time.

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⊕ Potential for tourism products

Khanh Hoa strongly develops high-quality sea and island resort tourism combined with entertainment, sightseeing, adventure sports, and ocean exploration developed in the coastal space. From the beginning of 2023, units will focus on investing in developing new tourism products to serve tourists, typically Vega City Joint Stock Company inaugurated the "That" Theater, a cultural and artistic architectural project. And announced the show LIFE PUPPETS - an art program to innovate Vietnamese puppet heritage, enhancing Khanh Hoa tourism products. In addition, in recent years, mountain eco-tourism products have developed in the western part of Khanh Hoa, cruise tourism has developed mainly in the Nha Trang area and surrounding areas (international cruise tourism), watching the sunset on a yacht...), developing tourist accommodation ships, submarine tours on Nha Trang Bay, adventure tourism products (zip rope cruises, paragliding...) are also sold. Enterprises are interested in investing and putting into operation to diversify Khanh Hoa tourism products.

+ Shopping: Large shopping centers mainly meet the high-end shopping needs of people and partly serve domestic and foreign tourists at mainly GO supermarkets, Coop Mart, Lotte Mart, Vincom, Gold Coast Shopping Mall... and many stores on the streets of Nha Trang city.

+ Cuisine: besides the advantages of unique, unique, quality beach tourism products and attractive attractions, cuisine is also a product choice to attract tourists. The land of Khanh Hoa has many local dishes with strong regional flavors that have become familiar to tourists from near and far such as Bird's Nest, Ninh Hoa grilled spring rolls, Ninh Hoa fish leaf vermicelli, Nha Trang apricot fish salad.

⊕ Attention of the government and local authorities

According to the Master Plan for Vietnam tourism development and the Master plan for tourism development in the South Central Coast region to 2020, with a vision to 2030, approved by the Prime Minister, Khanh Hoa is identified. Is one of 07 key areas prioritized for development in the country, Nha Trang City is a tourist urban area, Northern Cam Ranh Peninsula tourist area is a national tourist area, and Truong Sa is a national tourist destination; Regarding Khanh Hoa's socio-economic development strategy, in which tourism is determined to be invested and developed to become a key economic sector according to the orientation of Resolution No. 08-NQ/TW, dated January 16, 2017 of the The political. Thoroughly grasping and implementing that spirit, the Provincial Party Committee and People's Committee promptly issued many programs and plans as a basis for implementing provincial tourism development, typically Action Program No. 14-CTr/TU , dated July 24, 2017 on implementing Resolution No. 08-NQ/TW; Action Program No. 30-CTr/TU, dated February 23, 2022 implementing Resolution No. 09-NQ/TW, dated January 28, 2022 of the Politburo on construction and development of Khanh Hoa province until 2030 , vision to 2045; Plan No. 1957/QD-UBND dated July 13, 2021 implementing Action Program No. 14-CTr/TU dated July 24, 2017 of Khanh Hoa Provincial Party Committee, period 2021-2025; Plan No. 12148/KH-UBND dated November 29, 2021 implementing the strategy to develop Vietnam's tourism until 2030 in Khanh Hoa province; Plan No. 3360/KH-BCD dated April 11, 2023 to develop tourism in Khanh Hoa province according to Resolution No. 09-NQ/TW of the Politburo, Resolution No. 42/NQ-CP dated March 21, 2022 of Government, Resolution No. 55/2022/QH15 dated June 16, 2022 of the National Assembly.

2. Current status of building and operating green tourism products in Nha Trang - Khanh Hoa.

2.1. Advantage

In recent years, according to the direction and orientation of the People's Committee of Khanh Hoa Province, green tourism is one of the solutions contributing to promoting sustainable tourism development. Nha Trang in particular and Khanh Hoa in general have also been building and putting into operation several green tourism products at ecotourism locations such as:

- The Kong Forest Adventure tourist park is surrounded by the forest canopy of Hon Ba (in Suoi Cat commune, Cam Lam district). There are many adventurous experiences here, such as the Zipline Canopy Tour - cable skiing under the canopy of giant forest trees; exploring old forests; Participating in outdoor group activities; Enjoy cuisine amidst pristine nature; Relaxing bathing in the stream... all works on the Kong Forest campus take nature as a fulcrum and are developed in the direction of conservation and sustainability. The entire Zipline system is designed and constructed by foreign experts, choosing only suitable trees to install the slide to ensure safety without any screws attached to the tree trunk.

- Yang Bay Tourist Park, Monkey Island Tourist Area, Ba Ho Tourist Area... The common point is that the

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investor builds and perfects the product to attract tourists, but tries to preserve the pristine nature of nature. Nature and focus on environmental protection. Ba Ho tourist area has tried to preserve the integrity of the wild nature of Ba Ho, bringing the best value to tourists. Visitors to Ba Ho can experience green tourism products such as walking paths along streams, tree-top houses, high-class bungalow accommodation systems with roofs planted entirely with natural grass, yoga retreat model (a combination of travel and outdoor yoga). Thereby, visitors will understand more about Ba Ho land as well as the value that the natural ecosystem brings.

- Long Phu Tourism CP, believes that environmentally friendly tourism is an inevitable and long-term trend. At Monkey Island and Orchid Stream, many messages about green tourism have been brought to visitors. Notably, the approximately 5,000 square meter Waste Park on Monkey Island uses waste materials to create works such as bottle houses; animals made of soda cans and seashells; tables and chairs, and swings made of old tires... Along with that, the company has renovated and protected coral reefs at Monkey Island and developed dozens of rare orchid species at Hoa Lan Waterfall, creating a tourist space. Very close to nature.

- Since 2019, the Department of Tourism has coordinated with the Nha Trang - Khanh Hoa Tourism Association to organize a launching ceremony for the idea contest "Combating plastic waste in tourist accommodation establishments", and at the same time mobilize businesses. Tourist accommodation service business participates in the "Anti-plastic Waste" movement. Responding to the movement, some businesses have used waste materials to make decorative objects as a message calling for environmental protection. Typically, Champa Island Nha Trang tourist area with flower gardens, windmills, and lighthouses made of plastic waste;

The system of hotels and resorts in Nha Trang-Khanh Hoa such as Hon Tam, Champa Island, Fusion, The Anam, and Vinpearl... have also taken action towards the goal of building and connecting to form tourism products. Green has gradually shifted to using environmentally friendly materials, such as cloth bags instead of plastic bags, paper straws instead of plastic tubes, glass water bottles, and processed cosmetics. Extracted from natural essential oils... At the forefront of this trend, Ana Mandara Cam Ranh Resort (formerly Ana Mandara Nha Trang) has used glass bottles to store filtered water, straws made of bamboo, or made of disposable rice... Vinpearl Nha Trang was honored by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment with the 2019 Vietnam Environment Award for 3 "green" principles on Hon Tre Island: traveling entirely by electric vehicles, government green for the island, and replacing single-use plastic with environmentally friendly materials. Hon Tam tourist area also responded to the fight against plastic waste by providing cloth bags instead of plastic bags for tourists to store dirty items. Many resorts have invested in building vegetable gardens and farms for tourists to experience. For many years, Six Senses Ninh Van Bay Resort has invested in a large organic vegetable garden. In 2022, Six Senses Ninh Van Bay launched the Ninh Van Greens complex, considered the first resort with a solar energy ecosystem in Vietnam built to provide sustainable energy for the resort such as electricity, organic vegetables, and hot water. Champa Island tourist area is also a pioneer in responding to green tourism by installing a solar battery system for use. This tourist area also has a vegetable garden and tangerine garden for visitors to visit. In the Bai Dai area, resorts: Alma, and The Anam... have built vegetable gardens, fruit gardens, and poultry farms for guests to visit and experience.

- Tourist areas associated with local ethnic communities have been formed such as Lang Nho - Lang Nho Lake tourist area (Dien Tan commune, Dien Khanh), Ba Ho tourist area (Ninh Ich commune, Ninh Hoa town), Nong Trai Vui (Dien Lam commune, Dien Khanh district), Lach stream tourist area (Khanh Vinh) create conditions for ethnic minority communities to participate in tourism activities.

Tourism activities come with the integration, promotion, and introduction of traditional craft villages such as Truong Son Craft Village, which has 10 Vietnamese records for culture and handicrafts, exploring each stage. Creating handmade works. Started from the project of Cultural Area, Conservation and Traditional Practices, Sculpture Garden Exhibition invested by Khanh Hoa Forestry and Fisheries Processing Joint Stock Company. The craft village campus is more than 1.95 hectares wide and has become a prominent tourist destination in the city. Some tours combining craft villages are chosen by tourists such as Lu Cam Pottery Village, My Trach mat and tile weaving village, Suoi Cat basket weaving village, and Phuc Loc Tay Bronze Casting Village...

Nha Trang-Khanh Hoa has also introduced AI technology into tourism activities such as automatic route explanation, information lookup systems, travel apps, promotion systems, and the introduction of culture - landscapes, and attractions. local scene…

The Nha Trang Bay Management Board has issued a notice that tourists should not bring plastic bags and single-use plastic products through Nha Trang Tourist Wharf when going on sea and island tours.

2.2. Disadvantage

- Problems such as overloaded infrastructure, traffic jams, solicitation, and arbitrarily increasing selling prices still occur in Nha Trang-Khanh Hoa.

- In the process of building green tourism products, there are still major obstacles in balancing socio-economic and environmental factors such as no organization to classify household waste at source, no system synchronized collection, there is no specialized equipment suitable for transporting classified waste, there is no appropriate process to serve the separation and treatment of waste after classification, and green standards have not been applied. For tourism businesses and tourist destinations, there has not been a strong digital transformation in the tourism sector

- Similar green measures are currently only implemented locally, individually, and spontaneously, but have not been systematically organized and managed.

- Tourism development policies still focus on building projects, not focusing on long-term policies such as encouraging private sector investment in tourism fields and industries, especially tourism infrastructure. Infrastructure, tourism facilities, community tourism development, eco-tourism, and cultural tourism.

- The development of tourism business infrastructure is showing signs of imbalance, especially hotels in the center of Nha Trang city. There is no appropriate solution to encourage investment in large-scale entertainment venues, art performance areas, etc. Investment in upgrading urban infrastructure cannot meet the requirements in time, especially the problem of urban transport infrastructure.

- Tourism products are slow to be invested in and innovated to improve quality: Lack of nighttime tourism products and services to serve tourists. There are not many specific tourism products with local brands

- Tourism destination management is not strict and effective. Environmental hygiene and food safety are still inadequate; Price manipulation, illegal tourism business, and false advertising... still occur, causing insecurity and affecting the image of local tourism.

- The tourism industry lacks a team of model tourism business leaders of the era with high competition and integration requirements and lacks a team of professional tour guides with many types of tourism and languages. Belongs to the target market

- Complementary connections have not been established in the development of product and service chains of small and medium-sized tourism enterprises.

- The application of technology to promote online promotion of destination image still has certain limitations. Promotion work to promote and introduce Khanh Hoa's tourist destinations on major media networks in the world has not appeared much, and work to promote the domestic tourism market in major cities of Vietnam has not appeared yet. Continuously... so the promotion and advertising effectiveness is not high.

Research recommendations

Propose ideas to build and develop green tourism products in Nha Trang - Khanh Hoa.

- Should conduct testing, develop and deploy the use of a set of assessment and ranking indicators for these

+ Green tourism business establishments, implementing green labeling for tourism business establishments from studying the ranking criteria of several countries in the world such as criteria on business management and operational planning, cultural respect and sensitivity, engagement with local communities, customer satisfaction, responsible communications, contribution to conservation, environmental stewardship

+ Tourist destinations/areas such as responsible operations around wildlife, flora and fauna, environmental education and information, safety and services, social responsibility society, environmental management, water quality, and waste treatment capacity.

- Develop a policy for each tourist area/destination to have one green tourism product put into operation, to connect the local community and introduce and preserve traditional craft villages.

- Focus on developing existing green tourism products, starting from assessing the potential of green natural resources, conducting market research surveys, and encouraging and enhancing "green" in infrastructure development. Tourism technical facilities and tourism services. Develop tourist routes connecting green tourism areas/destinations in the city with green quality products, exploiting ecosystem characteristics... Develop diverse types of tourism in the direction of green growth such as eco-tourism, community tourism, rural agricultural eco-tourism, discovery tourism - experiencing natural and cultural heritage values, relaxation - health care

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- Implement links and cooperation with tourism businesses in promoting and promoting local green tourism products; Regularly organize tourism activities to protect the environment. In particular, tourists play a key role in contributing to environmental protection activities by doing practical things such as planting trees, picking up trash on the beach, distributing biodegradable plastic bags, sorting trash, and buying and using plastic bags. Friendly products with the environment…

- Tourism business establishments have a synchronous waste classification system at source. Khanh Hoa province can apply propaganda and training measures along with specific management policies on waste classification at source in synchronization with tourism businesses.

- Raise awareness of tourism human resources, local community, and management staff about the meaning and importance of developing green tourism and green tourism products in the island district; There needs to be a policy to train officials on green tourism development and sustainable tourism. Form knowledge and skills about environmental protection in green tourism; Regularly update information on green tourism activities, examples of green tourism development, and experiences in green tourism development. Businesses operating in the direction of green tourism and green tours of Nha Trang - Khanh Hoa.

- Strengthen propaganda to raise awareness of parties involved in tourism activities including tourists - banking - hotel businesses - people - and tourist attractions (through hoardings, posters, banners, slogans, and images) about positive measures aimed at sustainable development such as: using natural, environmentally friendly materials, saving energy, using solar energy; responsible for protecting the environment.

- Develop policies to encourage investment projects to develop green tourism associated with natural and cultural conservation. Create conditions for companies to register to develop green tourism products and invest in thematic tours to combine tourism with environmental protection activities;

- Enhance close coordination with provincial and local departments and businesses to develop policies and create a favorable environment for sustainable green tourism product business activities.

- Attention should be paid to the impact of climate change on the environment, especially the ecosystems and marine nature reserves most at risk or threatened, as well as ecosystem services to propose countermeasures.

Conclusion

Building and operating green tourism is an inevitable trend, a sustainable direction for sustainable tourism. With the advantage of natural resources and a unique cultural identity, Nha Trang-Khanh Hoa has many potentials and advantages to develop green tourism. Green tourism development policies in Khanh Hoa in particular and Vietnam in general have been completed to create conditions for green tourism to develop. If the locality can implement solutions in terms of human resources, building sites, synchronizing management, perfecting facilities, promoting environmental protection activities, and balancing the ecosystem. , creating conditions for the community to participate in tourism activities... then the journey to create a green destination will become a future destination.

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SWOT ANALYSIS OF WELLNESS TOURISM IN THANH HOA AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

A SWOT analysis is a structured planning method used to evaluate internal and external factors impacting the tourism development of a locality or destination. Identifying SWOT is crucial as they guide subsequent planning steps to achieve the objectives. This study employs group discussions with nine experts, researchers from training institutions, state management agencies, and representatives of tourism businesses in Thanh Hoa province to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of wellness tourism in the province. Despite having various and different opinions, the participants reached a consensus on the SWOT analysis of Thanh Hoa's wellness tourism. Based on this analysis, the authors proposed four groups of solutions regarding mechanisms and policies, product development, human resources, and promotion. These solutions received approval from the experts involved in the group discussions. The study results provide a significant scientific basis for stakeholders to identify local issues, facilitating the development of strategies for wellness tourism and enhancing local tourism.

Keywords: SWOT Analysis, Wellness Tourism, Thanh Hoa Tourism

1. Introduction

According to the Global Wellness Institute, wellness tourism is defined as "travel associated with the pursuit of maintaining or enhancing one's personal wellbeing" (Global Wellness Institute, 2023). Recently, wellness tourism has rapidly gained significance, emerging as one of the fastest-growing sectors in the global wellness economy, especially after Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has further heightened human's wareness of health, making wellness tourism a prominent trend. In 2022, as the tourism industry began to recover, there were approximately 819.4 million wellness trips globally, generating a total revenue of $650.7 billion. In the coming years, wellness tourism is expected to grow rapidly with an annual growth rate of 16.6%, reaching $1.4 trillion by 2027 (Global Wellness Institute, 2023).

Wellness tourism services include various tourism activities, such as sightseeing at natural and cultural sites, learning about local customs, and receiving wellness services in hotels or accommodations such as massages and spa treatments (Praprom & Laipaporn, 2023). Wellness tourists seek for these activities to extend their wellness lifestyle and help them proactively maintain and improve their health and well-being. The Global Wellness Institute claimed that wellness travelers are generally wealthier, more educated, and well-traveled. They are willing to pay 41 to 175% more for experiences, services, and amenities that enhance their health and well-being (Global Wellness Institute, 2023). Recognizing the significant opportunities that wellness tourism presents, many regions worldwide, including Vietnam, have proactively conducted surveys and research projects to leverage their natural and cultural resouces to attract wellness tourists. Many localities, such as Ha Long, Hoa Binh, and Tam Dao, Ba Vi have started to establish their image as ideal wellness tourism destinations in Vietnam.

Thanh Hoa is a province situated in the North Central region of Vietnam that holds a crucial position in terms of economy, social culture, and defense. In the Resolution 58-NQ/TW of Vietnam Politburo on the development of Thanh Hoa province up to 2030, with a vision extending to 2045, the Communist Party Central Committee has determined to lead Thanh Hoa become one of the four key growth centers in the northern region, along with Hanoi, Hai Phong, and Quang Ninh. The Resolution also emphasizes the importance of making tourism become a pivotal economic sector of the province (Vietnam Communist Party Central Committee, 2020). With this orientation, many efforts to develop Thanh Hoa tourism have been promoted. Besides traditional tourism products like beach resort tourism, spiritual, and cultural tourism; wellness tourism is also gaining increased attention from provincial departments (Thanh Hoa Provincial Party Committee, 2021). To establish appropriate development strategies, a

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SWOT analysis of wellness tourism in the locality is essential.

A SWOT analysis (analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) is a structured planning method used to evaluate the internal and external factors that can affect the tourism development of a locality or destination. Identification of SWOT is important because they can inform the later steps in planning to achieve the objectives. In fact, SWOT analysis has been widely employed in various studies to assess and analyze potential of wellness tourism (Irma et al., 2021; Khanal & Shimizu, 2019; Praprom & Laipaporn, 2023). Following the previous research, this study will utilize the SWOT model to evaluate the internal factors (the strengths and weaknesses) and to identify external factors (including opportunities and threats) that can be beneficial or detrimental to the development of wellness tourism in Thanh Hoa. Based on this analysis, the authors aim to propose effective solutions to capitalize Thanh Hoa strengths and advantages, overcome weaknesses, seize opportunities and effectively deal with challenges.

2. Methodology

To achieve the objectives, this study employs method of group discussion. This method encourages participants to exchange ideas, engage in discussions, and reach a consensus on the given topic. The participants are experts, researchers from training institutes, representatives from Thanh Hoa Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and representatives from tourism businesses in Thanh Hoa province. A total of nine individuals participated in the group discussion (Table 1). The discussion topics are divided into 2 main subjects. Firstly, the participants discuss about SWOT analysis of wellness tourism in Thanh Hoa province (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats). Despite having various and different opinions, the participants reached a consensus on the SWOT analysis of Thanh Hoa's wellness tourism. Secondly, the group provides recommendations for developing wellness tourism based on the discussion results of SWOT analysis.

Table 1. Participants infromation

Code	Institution	Major/Field of research	Experience
P.1	Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences, Hong Duc University	Ethnographic	26 years
P.2	Head of Tourism Department, Hong Duc University	Cultural studies, Tourism	15 years
P.3	Lecturer, Hong Duc University	Cultural studies, Tourism	15 years
P.4	Lecturer, Hong Duc University	Environment, Tourism geography	12 years
P.5	Lecturer, Hong Duc University	Tourism geography	15 years
P.6	Official, Thanh Hoa Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism	Cultural management	15 years
P.7	Official, Thanh Hoa Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism	Tourism	18 years
P.8	Manager of a travel company	Tourism	10 years
P.9	Manager of a 3-Star hotel	Tourism	5 years

The experts shared their experiences, opinions, and suggestions based on their professional knowledge and working experiences. Their sharings were meticulously recorded. The discussion provided crucial data, enabling researchers to synthesize the SWOT analysis of wellness tourism in Thanh Hoa and propose suitable recommendations for its development.

3. Study Results

SWOT analysis of wellness tourism in Thanh Hoa

Strengths

1. Thanh Hoa has plentiful tourism resources, enabling the development of a wide range of wellness tourism products.

Thanh Hoa has significant potential for developing wellness tourism through its plentiful resources of natural and cultural. The province boasts diverse natural landscapes, including varied topography, rich ecosystems, and abundant water sources, creating an ideal environment for relaxation and health restoration. Some famous

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destinations must be listed are beautiful beaches of Sam Son, Hai Tien, Hai Hoa, and Tien Trang. They offer fine white sand and clear blue sea, making them excellent destinations for relaxation and water sport activities. In addition to beaches, Thanh Hoa has numerous scenic spots, streams, and waterfalls that attract visitors. Notable waterfalls include Hieu waterfall, Mo waterfall, and Muon waterfall in Ba Thuoc district, May waterfall and Voi waterfall in Thach Thanh district, and Ma Hao waterfall in Lang Chanh district, etc. which provide perfect retreats for stress relief and relaxation during hot summer days. Eco-destinations such as Ben En National Park, Pu Luong Nature Reserve, Xuan Lien Nature Reserve, and special-use forests in Lang Chanh district, offer peaceful spaces with fresh air, suitable for resting, walking, climbing, meditation, yoga, and enjoying the natural beauty. These forests and nature reserves also preserve various kind s of medicinal herbs like morinda officianalis, polyscias fruticosa, ganoderma lucidum, aloe vera, turmeric, cinnamon, and lemongrass, which are valuable ingredients in traditional and ethnic remedies for health recovery and beauty care. Moreover, Thanh Hoa has several hot mineral springs with therapeutic properties, including Quang Yen hot spring in Quang Xuong district, Tan Thanh mineral spring in Ngoc Lac district, and Thanh Minh mineral spring in Thach Thanh district. These mineral springs are rich in minerals and effective in treating skin, bone, joint diseases, and improving blood circulation, making them ideal destinations for wellness tourism.

Besides attractive natural resources, Thanh Hoa has rich cultural and social assets that can drive wellness tourism development. The province's historical and cultural heritages, like the world heritage site of Ho Dynasty Citadel, Lam Kinh, or traditional craft villages, serve as both captivating attractions and educational experiences in indigenous culture. Traditional festivals such as the Lam Kinh festival, Poon Poong festival, Muong Xia festival, etc. not only bring joy but also immerse visitors in the local customs, practices, and rituals. Also, Thanh Hoa is home to many renowned and sacred spiritual destinations, ideal for visitors seeking solace. Places like Nua - Am Tien temple, Doc Cuoc temple, Song temple, and Ba Trieu temple attract visitors not only with their ancient beauty but also with their serene and sacred atmosphere. These sites provide a space for reflection and inner peace, helping visitors to find balance and tranquility. The local cuisine of Thanh Hoa is another significant attraction, offering many traditional dishes that are both delicious and healthy. Additionally, Thanh Hoa boasts upscale resorts like Pu Luong Retreat and FLC Sam Son, Van Chai Resort, etc, which are perfect for those seeking fresh air, tranquility, and an escape from the hustle and bustle life. Moreover, tourists can unwind with modern spa treatments, beauty therapies, or traditional massages and herbal treatments in these establishments to rejuvenate their health and spirit.

With mentioned advantages of natural and cultural, Thanh Hoa has the potential to develop a diverse range of wellness tourism services. This includes resorts, spas, culinary experiences, mineral baths, traditional medicine treatments, as well as physical and spiritual activities. Together, these offerings promise visitors a holistic experience that enhances both physical and mental well-being.

2. The strategic location enhances its ability to attract tourists from Ha Noi and northern provinces, a big-size market segment.

Thanh Hoa boasts a prime geographical location, situated close to Hanoi capital, a bustle and hustle urban city, with 2-3 hours of travelling by car. The dynamic city life in Hanoi drives millions of people to seek peaceful destinations. Thanh Hoa's beaches and mountain resorts, particularly the Sam Son beach and Pu Luong Nature Reserve, are popular choices for capital's citizens. The northern provinces, particularly the northwest region, do not have the sea, and even when they do, their beaches are often silt-laden and unsuitable for swimming or vacationing. Thanh Hoa's stunning beaches are the perfect option for these market segments. Additionally, Thanh Hoa serves as a crucial transit point between the North and South provinces and acts as the gateway to the Central region. This strategic position not only facilitates connectivity between key economic regions but also fosters numerous opportunities for economic and trade development, including tourism sector.

3. Some wellness tourism destinations in Thanh Hoa are already well-known on Vietnam's tourism map.

Thanh Hoa boasts a rich history in the development of resort tourism. Sam Son Beach in Thanh Hoa has been exploited by the French as a vacation spot for their soldiers since the early 20th century. With its extensive sandy shores, clear blue waters, and moderate salinity, Sam Son is considered one of the most beautiful beaches in Northern Vietnam. This location offers visitors a perfect setting to relax, breathe in the fresh air, and engage in various outdoor recreational activities. Additionally, Sam Son is renowned for its fresh seafood and comprehensive tourism services, including restaurants, hotels, and entertainment areas. The blend of stunning natural scenery and modern tourism infrastructure has made Sam Son Beach, a highly appealing destination for millions tourists annuallly. In addition,

Pu Luong Nature Reserve, which has only recently appeared on Thanh Hoa tourism map, has already made a strong impression on the mind of both domestic and international tourists. It is often referred to as "a paradise in the middle of the jungle", or "Da Lat of Thanh Hoa".

4. Thanh Hoa has large population that may provide abundant human resource and market to wellness tourism businesses and destinations.

As a province having third largest population in Vietnam, Thanh Hoa boasts a diverse and abundant human resource pool. It can supply a big number of workforce to effectively meet the labor demands of businesses in the tourism industry. Consequently, wellness tourism businesses and destinations in Thanh Hoa may easily recruit staff, ensuring service quality and enhancing the tourist experience. Moreover, a large population also serves as a potential customer base for local wellness tourism destinations in Thanh Hoa.

Weakness

1. Thanh Hoa lacks a specific strategy for wellness tourism development.

Until now, Thanh Hoa has not had an official set of criteria for evaluating wellness tourism service facilities, nor is there a standard for recognizing local traditional medicine remedies. This creates a gap in the management and development of the wellness tourism industry. Wellness service facilities, such as spas, yoga centers, and traditional medicine treatment facilities, are becoming increasingly prevalent. However, the lack of specific evaluation criteria results in uneven service quality, which affects the industry's reputation and sustainable development. Additionally, although Thanh Hoa has many valuable traditional medicine remedies, the absence of official certification standards hinders their promotion and proper development. Consequently, these remedies are not being fully exploited in tourism industry.

Not only that, due to the lack of specific and long-term strategies, Thanh Hoa faces the risk of its tourism resources being eroded. Thanh Hoa, with a long history of culture, is home to seven ethnic groups, creates various indigenous knowledge and cultural treasures. However, this indigenous knowledge is at risk of being lost due to low awareness of conservation among the population, especially the youth. In the era of globalization and modern technological development, many young people seem to have little interest in and limited access to their traditional knowledge. Furthermore, current measures to preserve and transmit indigenous knowledge are not really effective. Many educational programs and conservation projects lack necessary investment in both resources and methods. Teaching activities are often disconnected from practice and lack appeal, making the acquisition and application of indigenous knowledge challenging.

2. The accessibility to destinations, particularly in mountainous areas, remains limited.

The highly fragmented terrain in Thanh Hoa makes it challenging to reach destinations, especially in the mountainous areas. The infrastructure in mountainous districts suffers from various shortcomings, including narrow gauge roads, poor quality, and low density, which complicate access to tourist spots and can negatively impact tourists' health during their journey. Additionally, tourist destinations in Thanh Hoa are scattered and distant from each other, affecting travel time and diminishing the appeal of local tourism. The limited number of flights connecting Thanh Hoa with source markets further restricts destinations' accessibility.

3. Public awareness of wellness tourism is still incomplete.

Many individuals do not fully understand the nature and potential of wellness tourism. There are still prevalent prejudices against certain wellness services, particularly massage. Many people believe that massage is merely a guise for social vices and equate it with menial work. This perception not only hampers the growth of the wellness tourism industry but also prevents the full exploitation of local potential.

4. Despite the abundance of labor, the quality human resource is not high.

Despite an abundant local labor force, the quality remains low due to a lack of necessary skills and experience, particularly in mountainous service establishments. Although there is a development policy, the province has yet to implement a specific training program for wellness tourism. This shortfall prevents human resources from meeting the rising demands of the modern tourism industry, especially in wellness-related services like spas, yoga, therapy, and other relaxation activities. The absence of specialized and comprehensive training programs not only hinders the growth of the wellness tourism industry but also limits high-quality job opportunities for local workers.

5. There are almost no promotional activities for wellness tourism products and destinations.

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The promotion program of wellness tourism products and destinations is currently very limited. Thanh Hoa has almost no activities specifically designed for this type of tourism, resulting in a lack of brand recognition and ineffective market access. Promotional efforts often focus on traditional types of tourism, such as cultural, historical, community-based tourism, while neglecting the development potential of wellness tourism. This absence of a distinct promotional strategy has hindered wellness destinations from competing with neighboring locations.

6. Thanh Hoa lacks prominent brands and professional wellness tourism facilities.

Thanh Hoa, a province with significant tourism potential, currently lacks prominent brands and professional facilities in wellness tourism. Local wellness services establishments are primarily small-scale. As a result, visitors struggle to find high-end, professional wellness experiences. The existing services only meet basic needs and lack the unique and diverse offerings needed to attract and retain customers. This shortage diminishes the appeal of wellness tourism in Thanh Hoa and leads to missed economic development opportunities. Although there is one big corporation (Sun Group) running a project at Quang Yen mineral spring, Sam Son beach and Ben En National park, the progress is very slow, and it has not been operated yet.

Opportunities

1. The demand for wellness tourism, both domestically and internationally, is on the rise due to increased working pressure and concerns of health, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, enable Thanh Hoa to attract more and more wellness tourists.

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened awareness of health, prompting people to focus more on self-care. Furthermore, the increasing pressures of modern life and work have forced people to seek for vacations to alleviate stress and restore mental and physical well-being. Additionally, climate change and intense summer heat have increased the demand for destinations with cool, pleasant climates for relaxation. Localities in Thanh Hoa that offer fresh air, pristine natural environments, and wellness facilities are gaining significant attention from travelers and may be thriving to meet this demand, providing comprehensive relaxation and health recovery experiences for visitors.

2. Thanh Hoa tourism may take advantage of the preferential policies from Vietnam government and Provincial People's Committee to stimulate the wellness tourism economy.

Vietnamese government is placing growing emphasis on the tourism economy, with the goal of making tourism a pivotal economic sector. Numerous priority policies have been introduced to foster development and attract investment. These policies encompass tax reductions for tourism enterprises and investments in infrastructure. Concurrently, efforts are being made to promote the national tourism image on the international stage.

Along with government priority policies, the wellness tourism sector in Thanh Hoa also benefits from favorable policies set by the Provincial People's Committee. The Committee has set a clear goal of making tourism a key economic sector for the province, implementing priority policies and specific measures to develop this industry. Significant investments have been made in tourism infrastructure, including upgrading the transportation system, building high-quality tourist areas, and enhancing tourism support services. The province has 20 tourism infrastructure investment projects in rural areas, with a total approved capital exceeding 6,000 billion VND, of which more than 2,000 billion VND has already been implemented. Thanh Hoa places a strong emphasis on preserving and promoting the unique cultural, historical, and natural values of the locality. Additionally, the province actively promotes Thanh Hoa tourism through fairs, exhibitions, cultural and sports events. Policies to support tourism businesses and encourage domestic and foreign investment have also been robustly implemented.

Threats

1. The competition with surrounding destinations in terms of market and the competition with the other economic sectors in terms of labor force.

The major challenge for wellness tourism in Thanh Hoa today is the competition from other localities across the country, especially neighboring provinces, targeting the same tourist sources from Hanoi and the northern provinces. Many localities that have wellness tourism resources, such as Ha Long, Sapa, Ba Vi, Tam Dao, and Hoa Binh, have been developing wellness tourism strategies to attract visitors. They offer professional products and have begun to establish themselves on the wellness tourism map of the northern region. Ha Long has developed high-end resorts with combined spa and wellness service. Sapa, with its cool climate and majestic mountain landscape, offers a mix of traditional and modern spa treatments, drawing visitors seeking relaxation and health restoration. Ba Vi and

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Tam Dao, leveraging their natural and climatic advantages, have built specialized health care resorts, providing unique travel experiences. Hoa Binh is notable for its hot mineral springs, offering special mineral baths and wellness treatments for relaxation and healing. As a "late-comer," Thanh Hoa will need to make significant efforts to compete with these established destinations.

Thanh Hoa faces not only competition in the customer market but also in human resources from other local industries. The "bleeding" of tourism human resources has been a significant issue, particularly during and after the COVID-19 period (Hien et al., 2022). When the pandemic hit, many tourism establishments had to close, resulting in numerous employees losing their jobs or switching to other professions for livelihood. Even after the pandemic was controlled, many workers did not return to the tourism industry due to concerns about job insecurity and low wages. Additionally, many students majoring in tourism have opted to pursue careers in other fields offering higher incomes and more stable opportunities.

2. The impact of the post-COVID economic recession limits tourist spending.

The post-Covid economic recession has significantly affected the spending behavior of tourists worldwide, including in Vietnam. With rising unemployment, declining incomes, and increased financial pressures, travelers are now more cautious with their money. Many people prioritize saving and carefully consider their decisions before spending on travel activities.

3. Issues related to climate change and environmental pollution affect tourism resources and tourist bahavior.

Climate change is causing numerous extreme weather events, severely impacting mountainous regions which are well-known for their cool summers. Recently, these areas have been experiencing intense sunlight and westerly wind from Laos during the summer, significantly altering the local climate conditions. Moreover, the frequency and intensity of storms and floods are on the rise, resulting in substantial property damage and posing significant threats to human lives. These changes not only disrupt the ecosystem but also have a profound negative impact on the tourism industry, particularly wellness tourism.

4. The increasingly demanding of travelers forces wellness tourism businesses and destinations in Thanh Hoa to continuously enhance their quality and innovate.

As tourists gain more knowledge and experience, their expectations become increasingly demanding. Modern travelers not only look for exceptional quality but also crave unique, differentiated, and highly personalized experiences. To meet these expectations, businesses must invest more in the creation and enhancement of their offerings. This involves crafting authentic experiences-genuine and memorable interactions that highlight the brand's distinctive value. Authenticity extends beyond product quality to encompass the manner of service, customer interaction, and care. Businesses must thoroughly understand their customers' needs and desires to develop products and services that truly satisfy and exceed expectations.

Recommendations to develop wellness tourism in Thanh Hoa

Based on the SWOT analysis and incorporating expert opinions, the following recommendations are raised to develop wellness tourism in Thanh Hoa:

Promoting specific and effective policy mechanisms for wellness tourism.

Firstly, Thanh Hoa needs to conduct a comprehensive survey and investigation of the potential, current situation, and needs of the wellness tourism market to provide a scientific and practical basis to develop strategies for promoting wellness tourism in the locality. Thanh Hoa needs to create a plan for zoning areas and destinations that could develop wellness tourism, particularly in special-use forest areas and regions inhabited by ethnic minorities. Special-use forest areas not only provide valuable natural resources but also are ideal environment for wellness tourism activities such as yoga, meditation, forest bathing, and other nature-based therapies. These areas, with their fresh climate and majestic natural landscapes, help tourists relax, restore health, and rejuvenate energy. In regions inhabited by ethnic minorities, developing wellness tourism products not only improves the economic life of the local community but also helps preserve and promote traditional cultural values. Travel experiences that combine health care with ethnic culture, including traditional health care methods, cuisine, and community activities, will create unique and attractive tourism products. Specific policies and long-term strategies to preserve local indigenous resources and knowledge also need to be taken into account.

Secondly, Thanh Hoa needs to develop a set of criteria for wellness tourism services and businesses to ensure quality and safety for customers. By referencing specific ASEAN international standards on wellness tourism, Thanh

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Hoa province can better meet the needs of international visitors, enhancing its competitive position in the region. These standards encompass requirements for infrastructure and equipment, service procedures, employee training, hygiene, and safety. The Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism should provide detailed guidance to wellness service facilities on applying and complying with these standards. This will ensure that the services offered meet high-quality standards, delivering satisfaction and the best experience to customers.

Concurrently, the management authorities should investigate and assess existing wellness service providers and develop plans to enhance the quality, scale, and management of these facilities. They must ensure that health safety standards and criteria for tourists are met. Additionally, businesses should be encouraged to invest proactively and upgrade their facilities to meet customer standards and requirements. This approach will not only improve their service and product quality but also foster trust and satisfaction among customers.

Thirdly, Thanh Hoa needs to develop policies that prioritize organizations, businesses, and households with investment orientations for establishing wellness tourism facilities. These policies should include preferential lending and creating favorable conditions for investors, especially the professional, reputable wellness facilities. Financial support in the form of preferential loans can help businesses easily access capital to invest in infrastructure and high-quality wellness services. Additionally, to encourage large investors to participate in the development of wellness tourism areas, Thanh Hoa should minimize administrative barriers and provide information and technical support during the project planning process.

Developing and upgrading wellness tourism products

Thanh Hoa province should conduct surveys and evaluate the resources of each locality and region to develop unique wellness tourism products. This approach will create distinctiveness and enhance the province's competitiveness, ensuring a diverse range of wellness tourism offerings. Each locality and destination can showcase its unique products, reflecting its true potential and available resources. This strategy not only attracts tourists but also delivers sustainable economic benefits to each area. Additionally, this effort contributes to the preservation and promotion of the local natural and cultural resources, fostering sustainable local economic development.

Subsequently, Thanh Hoa should progressively upgrade its wellness tourism offerings across localities and service facilities to enhance quality and meet the growing demands of tourists. Initially, a comprehensive survey and research on tourists' needs and desires for wellness service are essential. Based on these insights, localities and service establishments need to invest in infrastructure, modern equipment, and the professional development of their staff, improving service quality. This upgrading and enhancement will not only enrich the tourist experience but also contribute to sustainable socio-economic development in the region.

Enhancing human resource capacity

To have a high-quality human resource for wellness tourism, the province must focus on policies to attract labor, develop their competencies, and retain talented, experienced staff. Firstly, to attract workers, it is essential to raise stakeholders' awareness of wellness tourism. The community and related stakeholders should be comprehensively educated about the nature, the potential, and the benefit of wellness tourism. Moreover, wellness tourism facilities must create a more appealing working environment for labors. This involves offering competitive salaries, ensuring work-life balance, providing opportunities for career development, and fostering a supportive and inclusive culture. These efforts will make positions in wellness tourism more attractive to potential employees. To enhance human resource competencies, the province needs to run professional training courses regarding wellness tourism. For residents, the training courses should focus on content that helps them better understand the value and benefits of wellness tourism. This will create favorable conditions for cooperation and growth, and importantly, encourage them, especially the young generation, to participate in resource preservation. For managers, raising awareness and enhancing professional management skills are essential to ensure that tourism activities are conducted effectively and safely. For staff, proper training will enable them to improve service quality and better meet the demands of visitors. Overall, the initative will provide a solid foundation for the development of wellness tourism, thereby contributing to the province's position and attractiveness in the tourism sector.

In addition, training facilities, especially those within the province, should integrate wellness tourism subject into their training curriculum of specialized tourism. This incorporating may enhances training quality, and improves job prospects for graduates as wellness tourism becomes increasingly popular worldwide. The curriculum could include courses in traditional medicine, nutrition, physical education, and wellness service management. Additionally, training institutions should establish partnerships in training with wellness facilities, spas, and health

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care resorts. This will provide students practical experiences and real-world exposures.

Marketing and connecting solutions

Thanh Hoa province must implement a particular promotion and advertising program for its localities and wellness tourism products. To ensure high effectiveness, the program should be designed with a long-term plan divided into specific phases. In the initial phase, the focus should be on key localities that have the most favorable conditions for developing central destinations. These areas will receive substantial investment in infrastructure, services, and distinctive tourism products to create significant attractions and easily draw tourists. Once these central destinations are stabilized and developed, the province will gradually expand investment to neighboring satellite destinations. These satellite destinations will be developed in sync with the central ones, forming a closely linked tourism network. This network will help evenly distribute tourists and optimize investment resources.

Furthermore, it is crucial to encourage localities to take the initiative in their promotion efforts. This approach will not only help them maximize their tourism potential but also add diversity and richness to the province's overall tourism offerings. Localities can develop their own promotional strategies that align with their unique characteristics and advantages. Additionally, it is essential to promote the use of information technology in tourism promotion. Localities should leverage social media platforms, tourism websites, and mobile applications to reach customers more effectively. Collaborating with travel businesses and international tourism organizations will also enhance the quality and effectiveness of promotional efforts. Proactivity and creativity in promotion will elevate Thanh Hoa's profile on Vietnam's wellness tourism map.

Thanh Hoa needs to research how to link existing tours and tourist routes with wellness tourism destinations and facilities. This combination will create new and diverse experiences for tourists and enhance the quality of tourism services. Tourism businesses should analyze current tours, identify suitable destinations for integrating wellness services, and make recommendations to improve tourist satisfaction. The study results will help travel companies design tour packages that harmoniously combine exploration, relaxation, and healthcare, attracting more customers, especially those interested in health and a healthy lifestyle.

Finally, Thanh Hoa province should add more flights connecting with key markets like Ho Chi Minh City and southern provinces. This is a crucial measure to enhance the province's competitiveness in attracting investors and various tourist segments. In terms of road infrastructure, there is a need to prioritize the upgrade of main roads passing through districts, especially those connecting to wellness tourism destinations. This will not only reduce transportation time and costs but also promote economic development in remote areas.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

Thanh Hoa offers significant advantages, including diverse tourism resources, a strategic location, having some well-established wellness destinations, and a large population. Additionally, there are growth opportunities as the increasing demand from wellness travelers and favorable government policies. However, Thanh Hoa faces notable weaknesses and threats. They are the absence of development strategies, limited accessibility to certain areas, low public awareness, inadequate labor quality, and a lack of promotional activities and prominent wellness tourism brands. The substantial threats are competition, economic recession, environmental issues, and high expectations of wellness tourist.

To leverage the strengths and opportunities while addressing the weaknesses and challenges, strategic solutions should be considered. These include developing comprehensive mechanisms and policies, enhancing product development, improving human resource quality, and increasing promotional efforts. By implementing these strategies, Thanh Hoa can better position itself in the wellness tourism market, attract more visitors, and drive economic growth in the region. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders to devise effective strategies to booster wellness tourism in Thanh Hoa.

This study has certain limitations. The SWOT analysis and recommendations for wellness tourism development in Thanh Hoa was based on qualitative judgments, potentially introducing subjectivity. Additionally, the study did not extensively engage with locals and tourists, who are crucial stakeholders and could provide a more diverse perspective on wellness tourism in Thanh Hoa. Furthermore, these SWOT analyses are used for the overall assessment of wellness tourism in the entire province. Each locality and tourist destination within the province has distinct characteristics and will have unique SWOTs. For future research, more detailed studies should be conducted to determine and evaluate the SWOTs of specific wellness tourist destinations in Thanh Hoa, such as Sam Son Beach, Quang Yen hot spring, and Pu Luong Nature Reserve. The 6As tourist destination competitiveness framework

proposed by Buhalis (2000) may be applied to evaluate the potential for developing specific wellness tourism products for each destination. Additionally, future studies should consider discussions with various stakeholders, including locals and tourists.

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APPLICATION BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY TO MEDICAL TOURISM ACTIVITIES IN VIETNAM

Do Hien Hoa[1]

Extended abstract

There are many significant challenges in current medical tourism activities such as data security issues related to electronic medical records, electronic health records, medical records, treatment methods, etc. These data play a huge role in the decision-making of medical examination and treatment facilities, and are also valuable resources for the management of medical tourism activities. Although blockchain technology has enormous potential to address the industry's inherent challenges and inefficiencies, current understanding of blockchain applications in medical tourism remains limited. Through the synthesis and analysis of data from existing academic documents related to blockchain and medical tourism, this article points out some applications of blockchain technology for medical tourism activities in managing customers' personal health records, managing medical records, ensuring pharmaceutical data security and introducing the Hospitalsbox medical tourism ecosystem in Vietnam.

Keywords: blockchain, tourism, medical tourism

Introduction

According to a report by Grand View Research, the global blockchain technology market size is expected to reach $163.83 billion by 2029. Therefore, it is not surprising that the appearance of the term blockchain in healthcare and medicine is increasing day by day.

Travelling away from one's usual place of residence at home or abroad for medical services is not new. In the past, medical tourism usually referred to those who travelled from less- developed countries to major medical centres in highly developed countries. In recent years, it may equally refer to those from developed countries who travel to developing countries for lowerpriced medical treatments. These services are often purchased during leisure or business trips or when visiting friends or family (Lubowiecki-Vikuk and Dryglas, 2019; Rahman, 2019).

International customers who want to come to Vietnam to participate in medical tourism are often concerned about the security of medical data, diagnosis based on medical history and professional translation of existing medical records. Along with this issue, a large proportion of Vietnamese people who used to regularly go abroad for medical treatment and want to return to use highend domestic services also face many obstacles in synchronously managing medical records in many different languages. (Ministry of Health, 2019)

One limitation of medical tourism today is that tracing the origin of a patient's medical records and a person's medical history can directly affect their current health status. All hospital systems in the world in general and in Vietnam in particular do not have uniformity in medical records, leading to difficulties for customers in storing and managing their own medical data, making it difficult to learn about medical history to come up with appropriate medical treatment regimens when necessary. (Ministry of Health, 2019)

In fact, in Vietnam, patient medical records have been digitized and implemented in many hospitals, but each hospital stores them using its own software and is difficult to integrate with data in other hospitals. Moreover, the "owners" of the data are the hospitals, not the customers. Blockchain technology will help solve all these problems.

The digital age is where online services in the service sector are promoted and replace traditional customer service methods due to the great benefits they bring. Blockchain technology helps record information accurately and transparently, everyone can see and verify. All transactions will be recorded and guaranteed not to be changed or forged. With that superiority and the strong development trend of information technology, Blockchain has great potential to be applied in different fields in the digital economy, including the tourism sector, in medical tourism activities. However, the application of blockchain technology to medical tourism activities has not been systematically considered. (Erol, 2022)

Objectives

The current literature on blockchain in medical tourism is largely limited and fragmented. Practitioners are

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largely unaware of the full potential of blockchain in medical tourism, which may hinder its largescale adoption and implementation. This formed the impetus for this study, which aims to develop a 'Blockchain Framework for Medical Tourism' that enables the capture of various blockchain applications in medical tourism.

Research Methodology

The topic uses a synthesis method of data analysis from academic documents related to blockchain and medical tourism from journals, reports and articles from reputable organizations.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

The concept of blockchain

Blockchain technology consists of tamperproof and tamperproof digital ledgers implemented without a central repository, as a distributed system and often without a central authority, such as a government, bank or company. It allows users in a community to store transactions in a number that is shared within that community. Transactions cannot be changed once they are published in the normal operation of the blockchain network (Yassine Maleh et al, 2020). That is, the inherent properties of blockchain technology are decentralization, security and data consistency. These characteristics facilitate secure data sharing through cryptographic transactions.

This technology is a decentralized database that stores data in blocks of information that are linked together by encryption and expanded over time (Zheng, Z., Xie, S., Dai, H-N., Chen, X,., Wang, H, 2017). Each block created contains information about the time of its creation and is linked to the previous block with a time code and transaction information. Therefore, blockchain is designed to resist data changes. Once data is stored on the blockchain network, it will be difficult to change and if updated, it will be tracked as a log. Currently, this technology is attracting many studies to build blockchain network models for specific processes in education, data sharing systems in public services and medical data.

The concept of medical tourism

Travelling for medical reasons is one of the earliest forms of and motivations for tourism. Medical tourism is closely related to other concepts such as health tourism or wellness tourism. The umbrella term for medical and wellness tourism is health tourism. (Smith and Puczkó, 2013)

The following definition of medical tourism is advocated by the United Nations World Tourism Organization and European Travel Commission (UNWTO/ETC, 2018, n.p.): "medical tourism is a type of tourism activity which involves the use of evidence- based medical healing resources and services (both invasive and non-invasive).

Application blockchain technology to medical tourism activities in Vietnam

- Blockchain technology is applied to personal health record management to protect medical information and ensure confidentiality in sharing patient data.

International customers who want to come to Vietnam to participate in medical examination and treatment tourism are often concerned about the security of medical data, diagnosis according to medical history and professional translation of existing medical records. With this same problem, a large percentage of Vietnamese people who have often goed abroad for medical examination and treatment and want to return to use highend services in the country also face many obstacles in synchronous management of medical records in many different languages. (Ministry of Health, 2019)

A limitation in medical tourism today is that tracing the patient's medical information, a person's medical history can directly affect their current health condition. All hospital systems in the world in general and Vietnam in particular do not have uniformity in medical records, leading to customers having many difficulties in storing and managing their own medical data, making it difficult to understand medical history to come up with appropriate medical treatment regimens in case of need. (Ministry of Health, 2019)

Blockchain has the ability to provide ownership of electronic records to patients - also known as personal medical accounts. Because personal health is a relatively sensitive issue, this data needs to be kept at a high level of security.

In the blockchain network, each person will be given a secret key and a public key like a personal identifier to be able to track their information or medical records. Therefore, whether it is a medical staff or any hospital, if you want to access the patient's health records, you need that person's permission.

- Proactively manage medical records.

Usually, each hospital usually stores different and individual patient medical records and insurance records. This leads to difficulties in accessing and updating the health situation, and it is also difficult for patients to take the initiative to know their current situation.

Blockchain technology helps patients and medical examination and treatment facilities to store all data on a single blockchain platform. The continuous update of health history helps users to see the latest and most accurate information at any time, especially in cases of urgent hospitalization, emergency...

From there, people can visit many different medical facilities in the system without bringing their procedures and medical records.
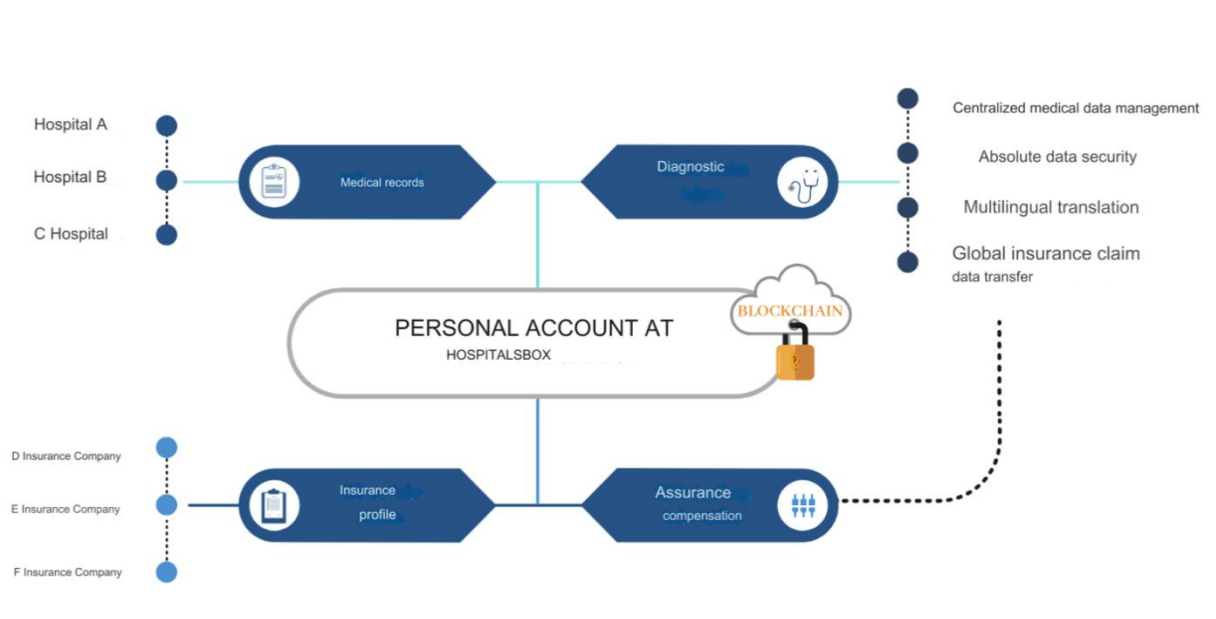
Fig.1. Model of personal medical account with blockchain application in Vietnam - Source: Ministry of Health

- Ensure the safety of pharmaceutical data.

Pharmaceuticals are also considered a field with many important documents such as: Origin of ingredients, dosage formula, excipient content,... The investment of resources in drug research and development activities is also focused by pharmaceutical companies.

However, most pharmaceutical companies do not have a method of managing the origin of drugs, preserving the "secret" formula strictly. When these data are leaked to the market, it will significantly affect the competitiveness and market share of that company.

Therefore, blockchain technology allows businesses operating in the medical - pharmaceutical field to use encryption to store data safely. The confidential information is stored on a single device, also known as the server, and the corresponding key.

Without server authorization, any device or account cannot be accessed, modified or replaced.

In addition, blockchain technology can be applied to trace the origin of pharmaceuticals, drugs or medical devices at the pharmacy system. This ensures the quality of drug input, and at the same time helps the process of management, distribution and consumption of drugs at medical units to take place transparent and accurate.

- Hospitalsbox builds a complete ecosystem for domestic and international customers for medical tourism.

Hospitalsbox – a blockchain technology platform for global medical tourism with the Center of Vietnam, has created a new way to help Vietnamese hospitals build a professional brand that closely combines with many auxiliary services and hightech applications to form a centralized supply chain for medical tourism services in Vietnam and globally. In the Hospitalsbox ecosystem, hospitals become a central connection point for customers looking for medical services and deep into the chain of travel ancillary services to form an impressive journey for visitors. The platform aims to optimize the customer experience, support Vietnamese and global customers to easily manage all

information in their journey with a separate account, all travel auxiliary services with medical examination and treatment program will be personalized for each customer.
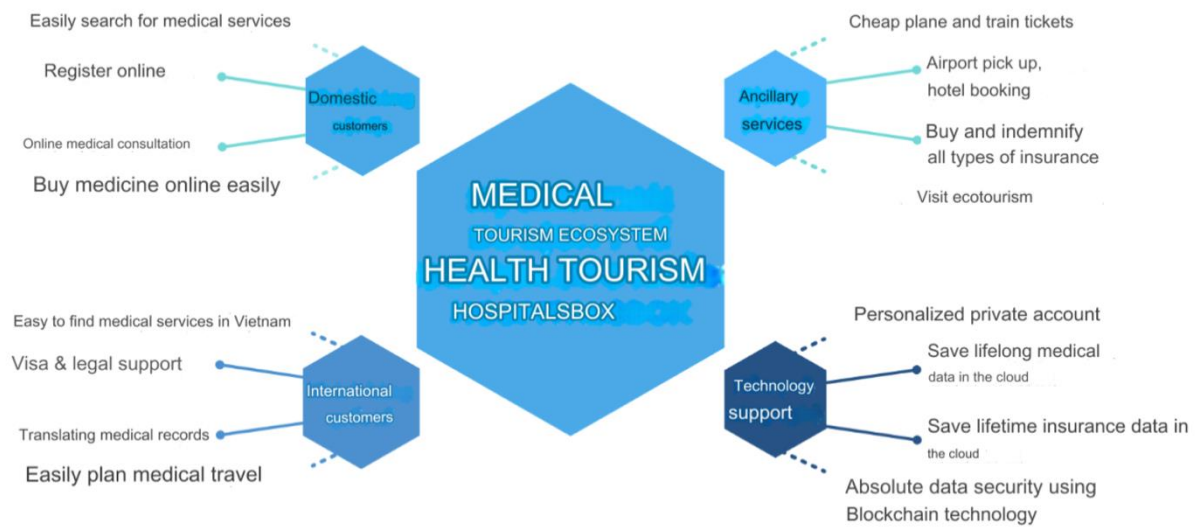
Fig.2. Complete ecosystem for domestic and international customers for medical tourism - Source: Ministry of Health

Hospitalsbox has delved into market research to offer suitable solutions for domestic customers when using a package medical travel service including: remote examination booking, online consultation, home shuttle service, hotel booking, resort travel, buying medicine online... And international customers when choosing medical tourism in Vietnam will be completely free of charge for medical translation of old medical records that they used to have at home.

Fig.3. Medical tourism in its simplest way - Source: Ministry of Health

Coming to Hospitalsbox, the medical travel journey not only becomes simple for Vietnamese people but also really convenient for global customers. In fact, many customers in Western countries, the US, Australia, Canada... want to come to Vietnam to travel and experience services on dentistry, infertility treatment (IVF), oriental medicine, participate in meditation courses, yoga, physical training, mineral bath spa, smoking cessation, weight loss... because the global trend is towards natural techniques rather than Western medicine. But to have an interesting experience

journey for international customers is really not easy, just finding medical services in English in Vietnam is very difficult, not to mention issues of Visa, legal in medical tourism, medical quality assurance is always the top concern of the high-end customer segment globally. They are willing to spend a large budget on a journey of 10 - 15 days in Vietnam for medical services, health care, but to accompany this they need to know who will be responsible and support them in all situations that may occur when coming to Vietnam.

2. Discussion

Certain therapies may or may not be approved by government healthcare regulatory bodies. In such cases, medical tourists seek another country where the same therapy is approved and available – for example, stem cell treatments or IVF therapies. This issue highlights the importance of government regulation and licensing, as well as thirdparty certification of compliance or excellence (Hall, 2013). The healthcare sector is heavily regulated in all countries and this sets the framework for medical tourism too. Regulations may also hinder medical tourism since regulations from one country may not be similar to regulations in others. The transparency of standards and liabilityregulationsisacriticalexpectationin both domestic and international medical tourism. Patients and hospitals share sensitive and personal information, so data security is of paramount importance. Medical tourism has some dark sides, which reinforces the need for regulations and close monitoring. Patients travel for unlicensed treatments or illegal transplants. Organ trafficking – for example, kidneys – has shed light on the darker side of the healthcare industry.

Medical tourism requires specialist knowledge that emerges from the hospitality, travel and healthcare sectors. Socalled medical tourism facilitators or advisors connect patients with healthcare providers and offer personal supporting services (called case management). Specialist platforms focusing on a geographical region or a medical speciality aggregate the medical offers from the providers and operate as distributors. Based on advanced technological solutions, socalled eHealth or mHealth services offer access to remote healthcare professional and resources. This partially limits the opportunities for medical tourism since patients can talk to the consultant remotely instead of travelling (again). eHealth solutions are now available for services such as second opinions when a patient seeks confirmation of the first diagnosis.

Vietnam's medical tourism market in recent years has begun to become more active, the number of customers who are overseas Vietnamese, Koreans, Filipinos, Americans, Australians... coming to Vietnam is increasing. Hospitals in Vietnam are gradually changing and investing in building a quality medical brand to serve global visitors. In Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, there is a wide system of medical facilities, many highly skilled terminal hospitals at the world and regional levels such as: Huu Nghi Hospital, Bach Mai Hospital, E, Central Molar Dentistry, Central Traditional Medicine (HN)..., Cho Ray Hospital, 115, University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Tu Du, An Sinh, Van Hanh (HCMC)...

The Vietnamese medical tourism market is in the first stage and the main operating hospitals still focus on expertise, so it develops quite locally. There are not many accompanying products and services to attract customers, the customer's experience journey is therefore not really impressive. In fact, in Vietnam, there is no unit that provides a complete package of journeys for customers on the online environment, mainly hospitals or resort units providing on-site or traditional travel agents that organize fixed tours without synchronization as well as guarantee of legal responsibility and medical ethics.

Research recommendations

Because health is the most important thing for anyone, product quality management in medical tourism always needs to come first. Medical tourism and health tourism products need to be designed more diversely but still have to ensure quality. Blockchain technology application platforms in the field of medical tourism in Vietnam need to be built on the basis of strict quality control of partners and selecting responsible partners into the linked system. To do this, the platform will closely coordinate with affiliated/under-governmental units of the Ministry of Health (leading, quality and reputable hospitals), specialized agencies of the Government to build and develop the Vietnamese medical tourism brand professionally to promote the national brand to the global market and create trust for all international customers when participating in the journey of medical tourism and health care tourism in Vietnam./.

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IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING AI-DRIVEN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM SOLUTIONS IN VIETNAM

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Abstract

This research explores the potential challenges and opportunities in implementing AI-driven sustainable tourism solutions in Vietnam. The rapid growth of Vietnam's tourism industry has highlighted the need for sustainable practices to mitigate environmental and social impacts. AI technologies offer promising solutions for enhancing sustainability through data analysis, predictive modeling, and automation. This study identifies key challenges, including data quality, integration with existing infrastructure, technical expertise, resistance to change, and high implementation costs. It also examines the roles of government initiatives, technological infrastructure, and public-private partnerships in supporting AI adoption. Case studies from Amsterdam and Kyoto illustrate successful applications and setbacks in integrating AI into tourism. The research underscores the importance of comprehensive AI policies, investment in technological infrastructure, fostering innovation, and enhancing digital literacy. Future efforts should focus on expanding pilot projects, strengthening collaborations, and ensuring inclusive AI adoption strategies. The findings provide strategic recommendations for policymakers, businesses, and stakeholders to effectively harness AI for promoting sustainable tourism in Vietnam.

Keywords: *AI-driven tourism, sustainable tourism, Vietnam, technological integration, public-private partnerships, digital literacy, tourism industry, AI adoption challenges.*

INTRODUCTION

Vietnam's tourism industry is a vital sector contributing significantly to the national economy, drawing millions of international tourists annually. In 2019, Vietnam welcomed approximately 18 million international visitors, generating substantial revenue and creating numerous jobs (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2019). However, the rapid growth of tourism has also led to various environmental and social challenges, including pollution, resource depletion, and cultural erosion (Nguyen & Sluis, 2021). Addressing these challenges requires the implementation of sustainable tourism practices that minimize negative impacts while maximizing positive outcomes.

Sustainable tourism is defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as tourism that "takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (UNWTO, 2017, p. 10). AI technologies, with their capabilities in data analysis, predictive modeling, and automation, offer promising solutions for enhancing sustainability in tourism (Gretzel et al., 2020). For instance, AI can optimize resource management, personalize travel experiences, and monitor environmental impacts (Femenia-Serra et al., 2019). However, the implementation of AI-driven solutions in Vietnam's tourism sector faces unique challenges that need to be systematically explored.

Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are to:

1. Identify the potential challenges in implementing AI-driven sustainable tourism solutions in Vietnam.

2. Analyze the impacts of these challenges on the effectiveness of AI-driven solutions.

3. Propose strategies to mitigate these challenges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

AI in Tourism: Current applications and future potential of AI in the tourism *industry*.

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Artificial intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing various industries, and tourism is no exception. The integration of AI technologies in tourism offers significant opportunities to enhance efficiency, improve customer experiences, and promote sustainability. This section explores the current applications of AI in tourism and its future potential, drawing on recent studies and industry practices.

❖ **Current Applications of AI in Tourism**

AI-powered recommendation systems analyze vast amounts of data from user preferences, search histories, and social media activities to provide personalized travel suggestions, enhancing customer satisfaction by offering tailored recommendations for destinations, accommodations, and activities (Gretzel et al., 2020). Additionally, many tourism companies have adopted AI-driven chatbots and virtual assistants to provide 24/7 customer support, handling inquiries from booking details to travel tips, thus improving customer service and reducing operational costs (Tussyadiah & Miller, 2019). AI is also utilized in predictive analytics, analyzing historical data to predict future trends in tourism, such as forecasting demand, optimizing pricing strategies, and managing inventory, which helps businesses make informed decisions and enhance operational efficiency (Femenia-Serra et al., 2019). Furthermore, AI technologies are being implemented in smart tourism destinations to manage resources more efficiently, including monitoring and controlling energy consumption, waste management, and crowd control, thereby contributing to the sustainability of tourist destinations (Gretzel et al., 2020). Lastly, AI tools are used for automated customer feedback analysis, processing feedback from various sources like online reviews and social media to help businesses understand customer sentiments and identify areas for improvement (Xi & Han, 2021).

❖ **Future Potential of AI in Tourism**

The future of AI in tourism promises enhanced personalization through hyper-personalized travel experiences by integrating real-time data from IoT devices, social media, and travel history (Tussyadiah, 2020). AI also has the potential to significantly contribute to sustainable tourism with applications for monitoring environmental impacts, optimizing resource use, and promoting eco-friendly practices among tourists and businesses (Gretzel et al., 2020). Moreover, AI-powered augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies will transform the tourist experience by providing immersive virtual tours, enhancing on-site experiences with real-time information, and offering personalized travel guides (Neuhofer et al., 2020). Advancements in autonomous vehicles, including self-driving cars, buses, and drones, will revolutionize transportation within the tourism industry, enhancing convenience and safety for tourists (Li et al., 2021). Additionally, as AI systems handle vast amounts of personal data, future developments will focus on advanced data security and privacy, employing AI to detect and prevent cyber threats, ensuring the safety of sensitive information in the tourism sector (Gretzel et al., 2020).

AI is already making significant contributions to the tourism industry through personalized services, efficient resource management, and enhanced customer experiences. The future potential of AI in tourism is vast, with possibilities ranging from hyper-personalized travel experiences to sustainable tourism practices and advanced data security. As AI technologies continue to evolve, their integration into the tourism industry will further transform the way we travel, making it more efficient, enjoyable, and sustainable.

Sustainable Tourism: Principles, practices, and importance of sustainability in tourism.

Sustainable tourism is an approach that seeks to minimize the negative impacts of tourism while maximizing its benefits for the environment, society, and economy. This concept has gained significant attention as the tourism industry continues to grow, posing challenges to natural resources, cultural heritage, and local communities. This section explores the principles, practices, and importance of sustainability in tourism, supported by recent studies and frameworks.

❖ **Principles of Sustainable Tourism**

Sustainable tourism is grounded in principles designed to ensure tourism activities are environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2017), these principles include environmental integrity, which ensures tourism development maintains essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and biological resources. Social equity promotes the fair distribution of tourism benefits among local communities, including marginalized and disadvantaged groups (Dodds & Butler, 2019). Economic viability supports long-term economic benefits for host communities, contributing to poverty reduction and providing stable employment opportunities.

❖ **Practices of Sustainable Tourism**

Implementing sustainable tourism involves various practices aligned with its principles. These include responsible resource management, where tourism businesses and destinations reduce resource consumption, such as water and energy, and manage waste effectively, with eco-friendly accommodations often using renewable energy sources and recycling programs (Dodds & Butler, 2019). Community engagement is crucial, involving local communities in tourism planning and decision-making to ensure development meets their needs and respects their cultural heritage, while supporting local businesses and promoting cultural exchanges (Bramwell & Lane, 2018). Environmental conservation efforts aim to preserve natural habitats and biodiversity, with protected areas like national parks and marine reserves managed to balance tourism activities and conservation goals (Mihalic, 2016). Additionally, sustainable supply chains are increasingly adopted by tourism businesses, sourcing products and services from sustainable suppliers, using locally produced goods, supporting fair trade practices, and reducing the carbon footprint associated with transportation (Gössling, 2017).

❖ **Importance of Sustainability in Tourism**

The importance of sustainability in tourism cannot be overstated, as it offers numerous benefits that contribute to the well-being of destinations, communities, and the global environment. Sustainable tourism practices help protect natural resources and reduce pollution, preserving the ecological balance and ensuring that natural attractions remain viable for future generations (Gössling, 2017). Economically, sustainable tourism promotes local employment and supports local businesses, contributing to economic development and poverty alleviation, which is particularly important in developing countries where tourism can be a major source of income (Bramwell & Lane, 2018). Socially and culturally, sustainable tourism helps preserve cultural heritage and promotes cross-cultural understanding by encouraging respect for local traditions and supporting the protection of historical sites and cultural landscapes (Mihalic, 2016). Additionally, sustainable tourism enhances tourist experiences by providing unique, culturally rich, and environmentally responsible travel experiences, meeting the growing demand for authentic and meaningful experiences (Dodds & Butler, 2019).

Sustainable tourism is essential for balancing the growth of the tourism industry with the need to protect the environment, support local communities, and promote economic stability. By adhering to the principles of environmental integrity, social equity, and economic viability, and by implementing responsible practices, the tourism industry can contribute positively to sustainable development goals. The importance of sustainability in tourism underscores the need for ongoing efforts to integrate sustainable practices into all aspects of tourism planning and operations.

Challenges in AI Adoption: General barriers to AI implementation across industries, with a focus on tourism.

Artificial intelligence (AI) holds transformative potential across various industries, offering improvements in efficiency, decision-making, and customer experiences. However, the adoption of AI technologies is often fraught with challenges. These barriers can be broadly categorized into technological, organizational, ethical, and regulatory issues. This section examines these general challenges and their specific implications for the tourism industry, supported by recent studies and industry reports.

❖ **Technological Barriers**

AI systems in tourism rely heavily on large volumes of high-quality data for training and operation; inconsistent, incomplete, or biased data can significantly hinder AI performance (Chen & Lin, 2019). The data in this industry may come from diverse sources, such as booking systems, social media, and customer reviews, varying in format and quality (Gretzel et al., 2020). Additionally, integrating AI solutions with existing IT infrastructure can be complex and costly, as many tourism businesses have legacy systems that may not be compatible with modern AI technologies, necessitating significant upgrades or replacements (Mikalef et al., 2018). The successful implementation of AI also requires specialized skills in data science, machine learning, and AI system management. A shortage of these skills can impede AI adoption, especially in the tourism sector, where technical expertise may be less prevalent (Tussyadiah, 2020).

❖ **Organizational Barriers**

Resistance to change and organizational culture are significant barriers to AI adoption, as employees may fear job displacement or be reluctant to adapt to new technologies, leading to resistance at various levels of the organization (Brock & von Wangenheim, 2019). This resistance can be particularly pronounced in the tourism

industry, where many jobs are service-oriented. Additionally, the high implementation costs associated with AI, including technology acquisition, integration, and training, can be prohibitively high for many organizations, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector (Gretzel et al., 2020). Effective AI adoption also requires strong leadership and a clear strategic vision; lack of management support or a poorly defined AI strategy can result in failed implementations and wasted resources (Chen & Lin, 2019).

❖ **Ethical and Regulatory Barriers**

AI systems often process large amounts of personal data, raising concerns about privacy and data security; compliance with data protection regulations, such as GDPR, adds complexity to AI implementations (Voigt & Von dem Bussche, 2017). In the tourism industry, where customer data is integral to personalized services, ensuring data privacy is crucial (Tussyadiah, 2020). Additionally, AI algorithms can perpetuate or even exacerbate existing biases if not carefully designed and monitored, making fairness and avoiding discrimination essential but challenging in diverse and global industries like tourism (Brock & von Wangenheim, 2019). Ethical considerations, such as the impact of AI on employment and the potential for surveillance, must also be carefully weighed. Tourism businesses need to balance the benefits of AI with their ethical responsibilities to employees and customers (Gretzel et al., 2020).

❖ **Focus on Tourism**

The tourism industry faces unique challenges in AI adoption, compounded by its reliance on customer service, dynamic market conditions, and the need for personalized experiences. Key challenges include dynamic and unpredictable demand, as tourism demand can be highly volatile and influenced by factors such as seasonality, geopolitical events, and pandemics, complicating the application of AI for demand forecasting and resource management (Tussyadiah, 2020). Providing personalized and high-quality customer experiences is paramount in tourism, and while AI can enhance personalization, its success depends on accurately interpreting customer preferences and behaviors, which can vary widely (Gretzel et al., 2020). Additionally, the global nature of tourism necessitates AI systems that can handle multiple languages and cultural nuances, making it challenging yet essential to develop AI that effectively manages these differences for providing seamless international services (Mikalef et al., 2018).

While AI offers significant potential benefits, its adoption is hindered by various technological, organizational, ethical, and regulatory challenges. These barriers are particularly relevant in the tourism industry, where data quality, integration issues, resistance to change, and the need for personalized customer experiences are critical considerations. Addressing these challenges requires a strategic approach, involving investment in technology and skills, strong leadership, and a commitment to ethical practices.

Case Studies: **Analysis of regions or organizations that have attempted to integrate AI into their sustainable tourism strategies, highlighting successes and setbacks.**

The integration of AI into sustainable tourism strategies has been explored by various regions and organizations worldwide, each encountering unique successes and setbacks. This section provides a detailed analysis of several notable case studies, highlighting the lessons learned from their experiences.

❖ **Case Study 1**: **Amsterdam, Netherlands**

Amsterdam is renowned for its proactive approach to smart tourism and sustainability, implementing various AI-driven initiatives to manage tourist flows and reduce environmental impacts. One success has been in crowd management, where AI analyzes data from sensors and cameras to predict tourist movements, helping to manage overcrowding in popular areas and improving the visitor experience while reducing strain on local infrastructure (Gretzel et al., 2020). Additionally, AI optimizes public transportation routes and schedules, encouraging tourists to use eco-friendly transport options, significantly reducing carbon emissions (Sigala, 2019). However, there have been setbacks, such as data privacy concerns, with the extensive use of surveillance data raising privacy issues among residents and tourists and complicating compliance with GDPR regulations (Voigt & Von dem Bussche, 2017). Furthermore, integrating AI systems with existing city infrastructure required substantial investment and technical expertise, initially slowing down implementation (Gretzel et al., 2020).

❖ **Case Study 2: Kyoto, Japan**

Kyoto, a city known for its rich cultural heritage, has leveraged AI to balance tourism development with the preservation of its cultural and natural assets. One success is in cultural preservation, where AI-driven virtual reality (VR) tours allow tourists to experience historical sites without physically visiting them, reducing wear and tear on these fragile locations (Neuhofer et al., 2020). Additionally, AI algorithms analyze visitor data to provide

personalized itineraries, distributing tourist traffic more evenly across the city and alleviating congestion in popular spots (Tussyadiah, 2020). However, setbacks include the initial resistance of many local businesses, especially smaller ones, to adopt AI technologies due to high costs and a lack of technical know-how (Li et al., 2021). Implementing AI solutions also required careful consideration of cultural norms and practices to ensure that technology did not disrupt traditional experiences (Sigala, 2019).

Assessment of AI Adoption: Evaluation of the Current State of AI Technology Adoption and Its Readiness for Sustainable Tourism Applications

The adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies in various industries is gaining momentum globally, driven by the potential to enhance efficiency, optimize resources, and improve user experiences. The tourism sector, particularly sustainable tourism, stands to benefit significantly from AI technologies. This section evaluates the current state of AI technology adoption in Vietnam and its readiness for sustainable tourism applications.

❖ **Current State of AI Adoption in Vietnam**

▪ **Government Initiatives and Policies**

The Vietnamese government has recognized the importance of AI and has introduced several initiatives to promote its adoption. The national strategy on AI, issued in 2021, aims to make Vietnam a leading center for AI innovation in Southeast Asia by 2030 (Vietnam Ministry of Information and Communications, 2021). These policies provide a supportive environment for AI research, development, and application across various sectors, including tourism.

▪ **Technological Infrastructure**

Vietnam's technological infrastructure is improving, with increasing internet penetration and the rollout of 5G networks in major cities (Nguyen & Tran, 2021). However, there are disparities in infrastructure development between urban and rural areas, which can affect the uniform adoption of AI technologies across the country.

▪ **AI in Tourism**

Several AI-driven initiatives are already being explored in Vietnam's tourism sector. For instance, chatbots and virtual assistants are used by hotels and travel agencies to enhance customer service (Le & Nguyen, 2022). Additionally, AI-powered data analytics tools help in understanding tourist behavior and preferences, aiding in the design of personalized marketing strategies (Pham et al., 2021).

▪ **Research and Development**

Vietnamese universities and research institutions are actively engaged in AI research, contributing to the development of innovative solutions tailored to local needs (Tran & Hoang, 2022). Collaboration between academic institutions and industry players is fostering a conducive environment for AI advancements in tourism.

❖ **Readiness for Sustainable Tourism Applications**

▪ **Awareness and Education**

There is growing awareness of the benefits of AI in promoting sustainable tourism. Educational programs and workshops are being conducted to increase knowledge and skills related to AI technologies among tourism professionals (Vu, 2021). This is crucial for the effective implementation and utilization of AI solutions.

▪ **Pilot Projects and Case Studies**

Pilot projects and case studies play a significant role in demonstrating the feasibility and benefits of AI-driven sustainable tourism solutions. Successful projects, such as smart tourism initiatives in popular destinations like Da Nang, provide valuable insights and best practices for broader adoption (Nguyen & Bui, 2021).

▪ **Environmental Data Integration**

For AI to effectively contribute to sustainable tourism, it needs to integrate comprehensive environmental data. Efforts are being made to collect and analyze data related to environmental impacts, such as carbon footprints and resource consumption, which can be utilized by AI systems to optimize sustainability practices (Pham & Tran, 2022).

▪ **Challenges and Barriers**

Despite the progress, several challenges remain. These include the high costs associated with AI implementation, the need for continuous data quality improvement, and addressing privacy concerns related to data use (Hoang & Pham, 2021). Additionally, the readiness of local businesses to adopt AI solutions varies, with smaller enterprises often facing more significant barriers compared to larger organizations.

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Vietnam is making strides in AI adoption, supported by government initiatives, improving technological infrastructure, and active research and development. While there are promising examples of AI applications in tourism, addressing the existing challenges is essential to realize the full potential of AI-driven sustainable tourism solutions. Continued efforts in education, pilot projects, and data integration are necessary to enhance the readiness and effectiveness of AI technologies in promoting sustainable tourism in Vietnam.

CONCLUSION

The adoption of AI-driven sustainable tourism solutions in Vietnam presents both significant opportunities and challenges. This proposal has outlined the importance of leveraging AI technologies to promote sustainability within the tourism sector, highlighting the potential benefits such as optimized resource use, enhanced visitor experiences, and improved environmental conservation.

Vietnam's technological readiness for AI adoption is advancing, supported by government initiatives and improving infrastructure, yet disparities between urban and rural areas persist, and the availability of high-quality data and technical expertise remains critical (Nguyen & Tran, 2021). Economic considerations highlight the substantial barriers posed by high initial investments and uncertainty around ROI, particularly for SMEs; however, strategic investments and support from both public and private sectors can help mitigate these challenges (Le & Nguyen, 2021). Social dynamics emphasize the importance of overcoming resistance to change and enhancing digital literacy, with local community engagement and public awareness being essential for fostering acceptance and support for AI-driven initiatives (Nguyen et al., 2022). Additionally, developing clear and supportive regulatory frameworks is crucial to ensuring the ethical and effective use of AI, addressing data privacy concerns, and providing robust guidelines for AI applications in tourism (Nguyen & Bui, 2021).

❖ **Strategic Recommendations**

▪ **For Policymakers**

Policymakers should develop comprehensive AI policies and regulations addressing the ethical, legal, and societal implications of AI technologies, focusing on data privacy, cybersecurity, and AI ethics to build trust among stakeholders and encourage AI adoption (Nguyen & Bui, 2021). The government should prioritize investments in technological infrastructure, especially in rural and underdeveloped areas, by expanding high-speed internet access and enhancing computational capacities to support AI applications in tourism (Nguyen & Tran, 2021). Increased funding and support for AI research and development are essential, which can be achieved through grants, tax incentives, and public-private partnerships to encourage innovation in AI-driven sustainable tourism solutions (Pham et al., 2021). Additionally, national programs to improve digital literacy and technical skills among the workforce are crucial, focusing on AI and data analytics, integrating AI-related courses into educational curricula, and providing training programs for current employees in the tourism sector (Vu, 2021).

▪ **For Businesses**

Businesses should adopt a phased approach to AI implementation, starting with pilot projects to test AI technologies on a smaller scale before full-scale deployment. This method allows for identifying and mitigating potential issues and provides valuable insights for successful deployment (Le & Nguyen, 2022). Effective AI solutions also require high-quality data, so businesses should invest in robust data management systems to collect, store, and analyze relevant data, ensuring data accuracy and integrity (Pham et al., 2021). Fostering innovation and collaboration is crucial, and businesses should collaborate with research institutions, technology providers, and other stakeholders to drive innovation. Participation in industry consortia and innovation hubs can facilitate knowledge exchange and best practices, accelerating AI adoption (Tran & Hoang, 2022). Additionally, businesses should promote sustainable practices by integrating AI solutions focused on sustainability, such as energy management systems, waste reduction technologies, and eco-friendly transportation options, to enhance their reputation and attract environmentally conscious tourists (Nguyen & Bui, 2021).

▪ **For Other Stakeholders**

Addressing the challenges of implementing AI-driven sustainable tourism solutions requires coordinated efforts from policymakers, businesses, and other stakeholders. Engaging local communities in the planning and implementation of these solutions is essential, providing training and employment opportunities to ensure tourism benefits are shared with local populations (Hoang & Pham, 2021). Enhancing public awareness about the benefits of AI in promoting sustainable tourism through targeted campaigns and educational programs, while highlighting

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success stories and case studies, can demonstrate the positive impacts of AI technologies (Pham & Tran, 2022). Developing cross-sector partnerships, including tourism, technology, and environmental conservation sectors, can foster a holistic approach to sustainable tourism by leveraging diverse expertise and resources for more effective and innovative solutions (Tran, 2021). Additionally, establishing mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the impact of AI-driven sustainable tourism initiatives ensures that technologies deliver intended benefits without unintended negative consequences (Vu, 2021). By developing supportive policies, investing in infrastructure and education, fostering innovation, and engaging local communities, Vietnam can effectively harness the potential of AI to promote sustainable tourism practices.

❖ **Future Directions**

Future research and practical efforts should focus on expanding pilot projects to gather more data and insights on the effectiveness of AI-driven sustainable tourism solutions, strengthening collaborations between academia, industry, and government to drive innovation and address the skills gap in AI technology, and enhancing the inclusivity of AI adoption strategies to ensure that benefits are equitably distributed across different regions and communities in Vietnam.

In short, the successful integration of AI technologies into Vietnam's tourism sector holds the promise of transforming the industry into a more sustainable and competitive one. By addressing the identified challenges through strategic and coordinated efforts, Vietnam can pave the way for a future where technology and sustainability go hand in hand, ensuring long-term benefits for the economy, the environment, and society at large.

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FACTORS AFFECTING LOCAL CUISINE
ON TOURIST SATISFACTION IN NHA TRANG

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Abstract

The topic "Factors influencing local cuisine on tourist satisfaction in Nha Trang" was conducted with the goal of determining the level of impact on tourist satisfaction with local cuisine. in Nha Trang. Using a random sample of 200 domestic and foreign tourists coming to the coastal city of Nha Trang. Research results show that food hygiene and safety factors have the strongest impact; The factors with decreasing impact are facilities, service staff, culinary quality, perceived price, and the smallest impact is information about the food and restaurant. The results of regression analysis show that all factors have the same impact on tourists' satisfaction with the quality of local culinary services in Nha Trang. Thereby, the thesis has proposed a number of recommendations to help culinary service businesses and Nha Trang city tourism management agencies apply to improve tourist satisfaction coming to Nha Trang. Page.

Keywords: Local cuisine, satisfaction, Tourists, Nha Trang.

1. Introduction

Coming to Nha Trang - a famous coastal tourist city at home and abroad and one of the 29 most beautiful bays in the world, Nha Trang attracts an estimated 7 million visitors by 2023, of which an estimated 4.9 million visitors come. domestic tourists and nearly 2.1 million international visitors, tourism industry revenue reached nearly 31,800 billion VND (Statistics of the Department of Tourism of Khanh Hoa province). Not only does it attract tourists by its poetic natural beauty, but it is also attractive with its rich cuisine, abundant seafood resources and unique cooking methods, imbued with traditional Vietnamese flavors. However, in the current context, a series of restaurants and food service establishments appear everywhere, increasing competition increasingly fiercely. In addition, the introduction of fast food services or the mixing and variations of local dishes prepared in the style of many different countries reduces the culture and quintessence of Vietnamese cuisine. . Therefore, local culinary businesses need to grasp market trends and needs of customer groups, both contributing to improving their satisfaction and preserving culinary cultural identity. reality of the nation. There are a number of related studies on assessing tourist satisfaction with local cuisine here, but the studies focus on international visitors. This research was conducted with 3 objectives (i) Identify the factors that constitute the quality of local culinary services that impact tourist satisfaction in Nha Trang; (ii) Determine the level of impact of the factors that constitute the quality of local culinary services on tourist satisfaction in Nha Trang; (iii) Propose some recommendations and policies to improve the quality of local culinary services to meet the satisfaction of tourists coming to Nha Trang in the near future.

2. Theoretical basis and research model

2.1. Theoretical basis

According to Kotler & Armstrong (1995), marketers always seek to create value and satisfaction for customers, which is a testament to the importance of customer satisfaction. One of the popular theories used to consider customer satisfaction is the "Expectation - Confirmation" theory developed by Richard L Oliver in 1980.

A question raised from the above theories is whether each customer will always be satisfied with the products and services of a business? This is very unlikely to happen, depending on each individual context, customers' feelings will be different. Theoretical basis shows that customer satisfaction has a great impact on the goals and strategies of businesses. Customer satisfaction will contribute to improving service quality, business competitiveness and customer retention.

Research by Quan & Wang (2004) mentioned that when visitors step into a restaurant, their common desire is to enjoy food in a spacious and clean space. In addition, images of interiors, decorative objects, tables and chairs will partly evoke visitors' aesthetic emotions. Restaurant space elements have a direct impact on customers (Lewis & Chambers, 1990). Through color, sound, light, and thematic decoration of each restaurant, it will create a special impression for guests. Therefore, the space and facilities at the restaurant will create comfort when enjoying food, contributing to increasing the level of satisfaction with food (Walker, 2007).

In the service sector, knowledge, style, and working style of employees will affect customer perception and satisfaction (Parasuraman & associates, 1994). Whether or not diners are satisfied depends largely on the capacity and working style of the staff. Employees have an understanding of the restaurant's dishes, have skills in serving, carrying, picking up, pouring... a professional, agile and flexible style will increase customer satisfaction. Research by Quan & Wang (2004)

Culinary quality is an important factor in food selection (Walker, 2007). According to Haven - Tang & Jones (2006), dishes must ensure food hygiene and safety, be beautifully decorated, provide adequate nutrients, and express the typical flavors of the region. Along with that, Lim's (2010) study mentioned that the taste of well-prepared food is appreciated more than good quality. Research suggests that good taste and deliciousness in food will have a positive influence on customer satisfaction and their willingness to pay for it.

According to Haven - Tang & Jones (2006), Dishes must ensure food hygiene and safety, food selection, processing and serving processes must always be strictly controlled to bring quality dishes. quality of customer service. This is also a particularly important factor for visitors to evaluate the quality of food.

According to Oliver (1997), customers often evaluate price and service quality based on the concept of equity and create their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction based on that concept. Food spending accounts for the majority of total tourism spending (Belisle & Francois, 1984). Price level is expected to have a direct effect on customer satisfaction (Zeithml & Bitner, 2000).

Research by Quan & Wang (2004) and Werner (2007) mentioned that the information that tourists receive and are interested in during each trip such as hotel information, restaurants, tourist attractions... is a factor. Indispensable is information about typical local restaurants and cuisine. Quan & Wang (2004) also stated that customers will seek out experiences when they know detailed information about cuisine and places that serve delicious food and contribute to a positive impact on their satisfaction.

2.2. Proposed model and hypotheses

A number of domestic research projects have mentioned factors measuring tourist satisfaction such as research by Nguyen Thi Van (2013) with the topic "Factors affecting tourist satisfaction". on the quality of culinary services in Nha Trang - Khanh Hoa" has given 5 factors that affect tourist satisfaction: (1) physical facilities and tangible means; (2) responsiveness; (3) service capacity; (4) reliability and (5) level of empathy. Another study "Research on the influence of traditional cuisine on the satisfaction of international visitors" by Nguyen Thi Huong (2014) used 5 factors including: sources of information about dishes and restaurants; form and quality of food and drinks; facilities and restaurant space; service staff and perceived price to measure tourist satisfaction. And the research of Le Chi Cong & Dong Xuan Dam (2016) with "Research on the influence of local cuisine on tourist satisfaction: The case of international tourists traveling to Nha Trang beach" has brought concluded that the factors that affect the satisfaction of international guests are: service staff; culinary quality; perceived price; Facilities and space at the restaurant and information about restaurant cuisine.

Based on the theoretical basis of tourist satisfaction with service quality, along with a number of studies by domestic and foreign authors, the factors measuring tourist satisfaction have also been mentioned. , combined with research conditions in the tourism context in Nha Trang, the author has proposed 6 factors of local cuisine that affect tourist satisfaction in Nha Trang. Including: facilities and restaurant space; staff; culinary quality; hygiene and food safety; perceived price; Information about dishes and restaurants.
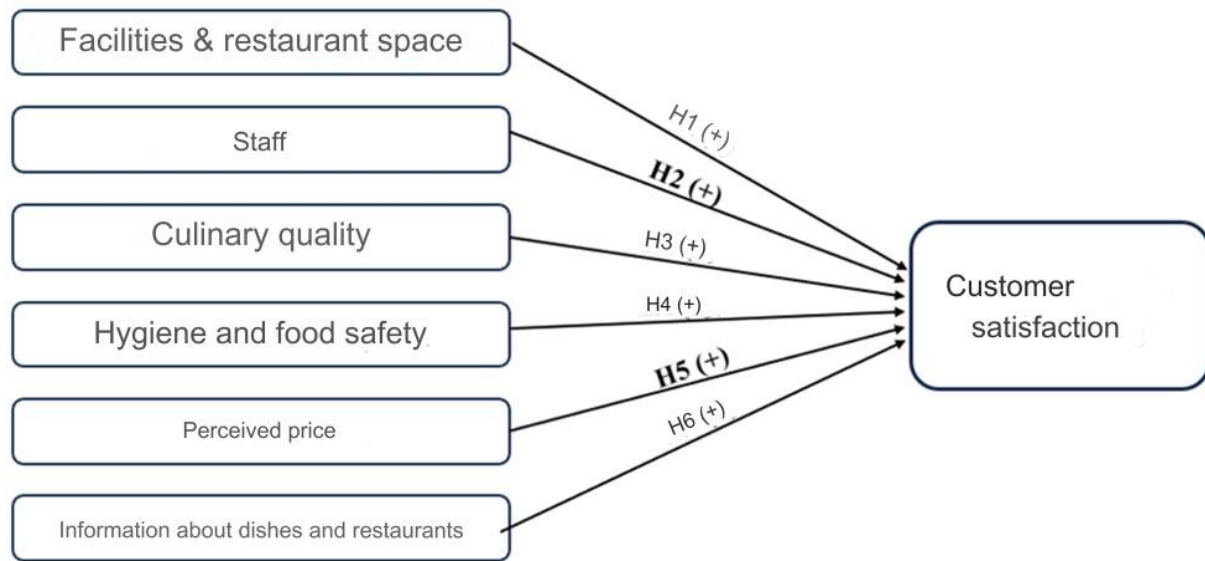
Figure 2.1 Author's proposed research model

Below are the observed variables of each factor:

Table 2.1 Summary of observed variables for each factor in the research model

Symbol	Observed variables about local cuisine in Nha Trang	Source
Facilities and restaurant space		
CS1	New facilities, equipment and amenities	Nguyen Thi Huong (2014); Nguyen Thi Van (2013)
CS2	The restaurant and cafeteria space is spacious, airy, and has beautiful scenery	
CS3	Exquisite interior decoration, creating attraction	
CS4	The location of the restaurant is convenient and easy to find	Le Chi Cong and Dong Xuan Dam (2016); suggested by the author
CS5	The restaurant has a big, famous brand in Nha Trang	
Staff		
NV1	Staff have good communication skills, friendly and open with guests	Nguyen Thi Huong (2014); Author suggested
NV2	Staff have good foreign language skills	Author suggested
NV3	Staff are knowledgeable about the characteristics of dishes and customer needs	Nguyen Thi Huong (2014); Nguyen Thi Van (2013)
NV4	The staff advises on complete and easy-to-understand dishes	Nguyen Thi Huong (2014)
NV5	Employees have a quick and professional working style	
NV6	Employees have neat and clean attire and appearance	Author suggested
NV7	Staff resolve customer complaints quickly and reasonably	Nguyen Thi Huong (2014); Nguyen Thi Van (2013)
NV8	Staff proactively visit and get feedback from customers after dining	Author suggested
Culinary quality		
CL1	Eating utensils are clean, complete, and neat	Le Chi Cong and Dong Xuan Dam (2016)
CL2	Attractive dish appearance, delicious taste	Nguyen Thi Huong (2014)
CL3	The menu is diverse, featuring local specialties	Author suggested
CL4	Dishes that suit your taste	Le Chi Cong and Dong Xuan Dam (2016)
CL5	Nutritious dish	

Symbol	Observed variables about local cuisine in Nha Trang	Source
CL6	The restaurant provides dishes exactly as introduced	Nguyen Thi Van (2013)
Hygiene and food safety		
VS1	Ingredients for food processing are clean and fresh	Author suggested
VS2	The processing place ensures food hygiene and safety	
VS3	Service staff ensure to wear gloves, uniforms, and hair neatly tied	
VS4	Do the containers, packaging, and tools used meet hygiene and safety requirements and do not pollute food or the environment?	
Perceived price		
GC1	The price of the food matches the quality	Nguyen Thi Huong (2014)
GC2	Prices are suitable for customer spending	
GC3	Price chief dish eat Are not High than much so with the point du calendar other	
GC4	Have the chapter submit recommended forever spent give guest (gift donate, extraction stage…)	
Information about dishes and restaurants		
TT1	Introduced by friends and relatives	Le Chi Cong and Dong Xuan Dam (2016)
TT2	Tour guides, hotel staff, and local people introduce	
TT3	Known through fanpages such as Facebook, instagram, tiktok	Author suggested
TT4	Find out through travel websites and travel agencies	Le Chi Cong and Dong Xuan Dam (2016) ; Author suggested
TT5	Introduce yourself through the shop's leaflets	Le Chi Cong and Dong Xuan Dam (2016)
Satisfaction		
HL1	Precious guest comedy heart with matter quantity the dish eat local at Dental Page	Nguyen Thi Huong (2014); Nguyen Thi Van (2013)
HL2	Precious guest satisfied satisfied with matter quantity pandemic service warm real local in Dental Page	
HL3	Precious guest prefer animal with matter quantity pandemic service warm real local in Dental Page	
HL4	Precious guest mandarin heart with matter quantity pandemic service warm real local in Dental Page	
HL5	Precious guest Have one spread experience animal taste with matter quantity pandemic service warm real local at Dental Page	

3. Research methods

The research was conducted in two phases: (1) Preliminary research was conducted using qualitative methods, through studying documents and theoretical models of previous authors to form a research model. Propose and develop research hypotheses and preliminary research scales. Next, the author consults with instructors to discover new criteria or eliminate inappropriate criteria. (2) Formal research was conducted using quantitative methods through direct interviews with domestic and international tourists in Nha Trang. according to the convenience sampling method. With the number of questionnaires distributed being 200/220, the survey was conducted from May 5, 2024 to May 15, 2024 on a number of routes in the city such as: Western Quarter (Biet Thu, Hung Street). Vuong, Tran Quang Khai, Nguyen Thien Thuat...), along Tran Phu Street, around the area near the beach. After being collected, the data were selected, coded and cleaned on excel and spss 26 software through interview questionnaires. The purpose of this study is to test the proposed theoretical model and measure the factors that impact tourist satisfaction with Nha Trang's traditional culinary services. All data after being collected will be processed with the support of Excel software, SPSS 26.0 and carry out data analysis processing steps.

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is 0.6 or higher and the total variable correlation index is ≥ 0.3, then the measurement scale is qualified (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Next, the observed variables and factors continue to be included in the EFA exploratory factor analysis analysis with the Pricipal Components Analysis extraction method along with Varimax rotation with the KMO coefficient criterion of $0.5 \leq KMO \leq 1$ and Percentage of variance extracted ≥ 50% (Mayers, Gamst & Guarino, 2000). Finally, perform regression analysis to evaluate the suitability of the model . Based on the absolute value of the standardized beta coefficient to consider the level of impact between the independent variables on the dependent variable. .

4. Research results

4.1. Research description

Statistical results of demographic characteristics of the study sample are presented in table 4.1. From the results, it was found that in terms of gender, the proportion of female tourists accounts for 60%, concentrated mainly in the age group from 18 to 30, accounting for 46.5%. Up to 62.5% of tourists are married and the highest rate of college or university education is 46%. In the research sample, the highest number of business customers is 28%, with an average monthly income of over 10 million VND accounting for the majority of 47%. About the target tourists.

Survey participants, the majority were domestic visitors with 64.5%.

Table 4.1 Descriptive statistics of demographic characteristics

Special point	Pepper will	Number quantity	Billion rule %
Gender count	Male	80	40.0
	Female	120	60.0
Degree year old	From 18 arrive 30	93	46.5
	From thirty first arrive 50	49	24.5
	Over 50	58	29.0
Love status kiss core	Poison close	75	37.5
	Already conclude kiss	125	62.5
Submit degree learn question	High school	48	24.0
	High level/great learn	92	46.0
	After university	60	30.0
Collect import average /month	< 5 million copper	45	22.5
	From 5 - ten million copper	sixty one	30.5
	> ten million dong	ninety four	47.0
Profession Karma	Student	37	18.5
	Housewife	5	2.5
	Core pellets	36	18.0
	Profession dense enemy [2]	thirty first	15.5
	Terrible joint	56	28.0
	Already retirement	11	5.5
	Other	24	12.0
Opposite to statue guest	Guest inland	129	64.5
	Guest country international	71	35.5
N = 200			

Source: Author's investigation results (2024)

4.2. Research results

The condition to ensure the reliability of those scales is that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is greater than 0.6 and the total variable correlation coefficient is greater than 0.3 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The results of scale reliability analysis (table 4.2) show that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient values of all scales ranging from 0.738 to 0.906 are greater than 0.60 and the total variable correlation coefficient of The observed variables in the scales are all greater than 0.30, so the research model ensures reliability to perform subsequent analysis of EFA exploratory factor analysis.

Table 4.2 results of EFA analysis, Cronbach's Alpha test and descriptive statistics

The scale	Cronbach's Alpha	CITC	Eigenvalue	Variance extract	Medium	Standard deviation
Independent factor scale						
CS: facilities and restaurant space	0.895	0.677	9,136	28.549%	3 .04	0 .939
NV: service staff	0.906	0.605	3,350	10.469%	3 ,37	0 .841
CL: culinary quality	0.885	0.670	2,845	8,890%	3 ,16	0 .946
VS: food hygiene and safety	0.738	0.435	2,328	7.276%	2 .98	0 .897
GC: service price	0.797	0.567	1,579	4.934%	3 ,13	0 .977
TT: information about dishes and restaurants	0.859	0.638	1,213	3,790%	3 ,16	0 .939
Dependent factor scale						
HL: satisfaction	0.880	0.676	3,378	67,553	2 .77	0 .945

Note : CITC – Corrected Item-Total Correlation (smallest total variable correlation coefficient)

Source: Author's investigation results (2024)

After including 32 observed variables of 6 independent factors into EFA analysis. The results show that the KMO index is 0.872 (table 4.3) satisfying the condition ($0.5 \leq KMO \leq 1$) and Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05, so the data is statistically significant and the variables are correlated. There are 6 factors extracted with Eigenvalue = 3.790 and the total variance extracted is 63.908%, so it is meaningful. The Crombach's Alpha coefficient value of the dependent factor is 0.809, so it meets the requirements.

Table 4.3 Regression coefficient results

Tissue image		Generation number Anise regulation Not yet standard chemistry		Generation number Anise regulation Satisfied standard chemistry	Price treat t	Level statistical significance	Thong list Multi add gland	
		B	Wrong standard number	Beta			Degree accept	VIF
first	Hang number	-0.889	0.225		-3,945	0.000		
	NV	0.259	0.048	0.241	5,442	0.000	0.586	0.365
	CL	0.213	0.047	0.214	4,525	0.000	0.606	0.310
	WITH	0.323	0.050	0.293	6,466	0.000	0.612	0.422
	GC	0.156	0.047	0.156	3,331	0.001	0.576	0.233
	CS	0.247	0.045	0.272	5,514	0.000	0.671	0.369
	TT	0.027	0.039	0.026	0.681	0.496	-0.023	0.049

The results of regression analysis show that the beta regression coefficients are all different from 0 and have a positive sign, indicating the positive impact of the factors in the regression model on satisfaction, in which the VS factor (hygiene and safety) is positive. food) with $\beta = 0.293$ has the strongest impact on tourist satisfaction, followed by CS factors (food facilities and space) with $\beta = 0.272$; NV (service staff) with $\beta = 0.241$; CL (culinary quality) with $\beta = 0.214$; GC (perceived price) with $\beta = 0.156$ and TT (information about dishes and restaurants) with $\beta = 0.026$. The variables NV, CL, VS, GC, CS all have Sig coefficients < 0.5, meeting the requirements, so these variables are all statistically significant and have an impact on the dependent variable. However, the variable TT has a significance coefficient Sig $= 0.496 > 0.05$, so this variable has no impact on the dependent variable. This means that when other factors remain unchanged, if a visitor's perception of information about dishes and restaurants increases by 1 unit, the visitor's satisfaction will not change. The VIF coefficients are all small (< 2), proving that multicollinearity between variables is very low.

Thus, based on the results of regression analysis, the author has concluded that the TT hypothesis is not supported because it does not meet the conditions, the remaining hypotheses NV, CL, VS, GC, CS are set out from the model. The proposed research model is supported if the above hypotheses increase customer satisfaction.

4.3. Discuss research results

The research objective of the project is to determine the impact of factors affecting local cuisine on tourist satisfaction in Nha Trang. From the research results of the topic, it can be concluded that the research has achieved its initial goals.

To achieve this goal, the author has relied on theoretical foundations and previous research models to build the proposed research model and put forward corresponding hypotheses combined with data collection through data collection. Actual survey of 200 tourists (satisfactory survey forms) to test this model. At the same time, the study has built a regression model showing the impact of local culinary factors affecting tourist satisfaction in Nha Trang. The results of regression analysis show that the initially proposed model is suitable for the collected data set. Specifically, there are 5/6 factors that affect tourists' satisfaction with the quality of traditional culinary services in Nha Trang. The level of impact of the factors is shown through the standardized regression coefficient, in which the food hygiene and safety factor has the strongest impact with $\beta = 0.293$. This result shows that if businesses focus on processing process, ensuring cleanliness of processing and serving, customer satisfaction will increase. The factor of facilities and restaurant space with $\beta = 0.272$ shows that focusing on investment in facilities, equipment, and airy space design will contribute to increasing customer satisfaction. tourists when enjoying cuisine; The service staff factor with $\beta = 0.241$ shows that focusing on developing a professional staff will greatly increase customer satisfaction; culinary quality with $\beta = 0.214$; perceived price with $\beta = 0.156$. These factors all have a positive impact on tourists' satisfaction when using local culinary services in Nha Trang if these factors are focused on improving and enhancing.

Based on the above analysis results, it is the basis for the author to propose a number of recommendations and solutions to improve the quality of local culinary services and meet the satisfaction of tourists when coming to Nha Trang during their stay. next.

5. Conclusion and proposed solutions

5.1. Propose solutions to improve the quality of local culinary services in Nha Trang

Enjoying local cuisine is an indispensable experience for every tourist when traveling to Vietnam in general and Nha Trang in particular. It can be seen that after the Covid - 19 pandemic, the consumption trend of the vast majority of us is to focus on health. Therefore, food processing must ensure food safety and hygiene criteria. Restaurants must commit to using clean, fresh food processing ingredients. The containers, packaging, and tools used must meet hygiene and safety requirements and do not cause environmental food pollution. In addition, service staff must ensure to wear gloves, uniforms, and neatly tie their hair when serving customers to increase customer satisfaction when using the cuisine.

The results of regression analysis show that the food quality factor greatly affects customer satisfaction, so to improve this factor, businesses must ensure hygiene and safety criteria. food, full of nutrients, eye-catching decoration, attractive flavor, suitable for customers' taste. Besides, the menu should regularly change according to holidays, seasons, etc., creating diversity in dishes and drinks to attract more tourists. Building an image and providing dishes as introduced and right the first time diners enjoy them will require the skills, capacity and smooth coordination of the kitchen staff and related departments. . Along with that, the processing process until the dish is

served needs to be closely monitored to ensure the best possible food quality to serve visitors thoughtfully.

Along with improving culinary quality, culinary businesses also need to focus on monitoring, maintaining and replacing facilities, equipment and machinery to serve the business process; You should focus on airy space design and delicate interior decoration to create the unique style of the restaurant or eatery. The arrangement of potted plants and fresh flowers around the dining area not only increases the aesthetics of the landscape but also creates a feeling of comfort and harmony with nature. The electricity and water system should be checked regularly to avoid risky situations that affect the operating procedures of the facility. All to meet service standards and diverse needs of customers.

Service staff are the ones who have direct contact with customers and bring satisfaction to customers, so businesses need to pay more attention to the quality of human resources and constantly train them. , improving professional qualifications as well as service attitude of each employee. Develop rules, standards and methods to evaluate the level of job completion of each employee's job position. Create a civilized working environment, maximize the capacity of each employee. From there, there are appropriate salary and bonus regimes and timely incentive policies for employees who contribute enthusiastically to their work.

Most tourists will calculate spending on food during their trip, but with increasing needs and income, they are willing to spend on food that satisfies their dietary needs. Therefore, restaurants and eateries should comply with market price laws and list prices publicly and transparently at a level appropriate to the quality of the food, especially during peak seasons of the tourism industry such as holidays. holidays, Tet... In addition, avoid cases of "cutting corners", increasing selling prices higher than normal for international customers. In addition, focusing on customer care and gratitude activities through promotions and discounts on holidays needs to be given more attention.

Businesses need to promote the images of restaurants and eateries on fanpages, on social networking sites or encourage customers who have used and are satisfied with local culinary services to leave positive reviews. on the website of restaurants, eateries, on tourism and culinary websites such as TripAdvisor, Foody, diachiamthuc.vn, etc. Thereby contributing to increasing trust and peace of mind about the quality of food as well as providing relatively accurate source of information about the culinary locations that tourists choose

5.2. Propose solutions to industry management agencies

Improving the quality of local culinary services in Nha Trang is part of the management work of the Department of Tourism of Khanh Hoa province and local authorities. Creating favorable conditions and support for culinary businesses is extremely necessary. This is demonstrated through coordination with functional units to inspect and monitor business operations processes at establishments, ensuring food hygiene and safety, contributing to creating trust and satisfaction for tourists. guest. In addition, focus on investing and upgrading the transportation system, tourism infrastructure... thereby creating a foundation for the development of the tourism industry in general and the food service sector in particular.

Strengthen the work of raising people's awareness in the process of serving guests, building policies to manage reasonable food prices and service fees to serve tourists according to general state regulations. Limit cases of price gouging and selling at higher prices during peak seasons and holidays, and there should be sanctions for these cases.

Provide useful information about tourism services and promote local cuisine to tourists through reputable travel publications and social networking sites. Management agencies need to coordinate with restaurants and hotels to promote advertising programs for typical local dishes in Nha Trang on media such as tourism and culinary websites or posting articles. in magazines... contributing to promoting cuisine so that tourists know more and come to enjoy it. In addition, industry management agencies should coordinate to organize traditional culinary festivals at Sea Festivals or spring holidays... to introduce unique dishes, delicious cooking methods and with traditional eating customs of local people. Thereby, evoking the desire to enjoy delicious food and the passion for discovery of visitors, contributing to leaving an impression and helping visitors better understand Nha Trang's traditional culinary heritage as well as Vietnamese cuisine. Male.

Besides, the work of ensuring environmental hygiene, increasing aesthetic value and maintaining security and order helps tourists feel comfortable and secure when traveling in Nha Trang.

5.3. Limitations of the topic and future research directions

Besides the results achieved, the thesis still has certain limitations. First, the research sampling method is convenience sampling, so the representativeness of the research sample is not high. The research subjects of the

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project include domestic and international visitors, however the survey time is quite short so the number of samples collected is not much (129 domestic visitors and 71 international visitors). In addition, the international visitor survey questionnaire was written in English, so the international visitors here are those who can communicate in English (mostly Korean, Chinese...), so the sample is representative. not high yet. Next, a few guests did not completely understand the question and answered incorrectly with their feelings or left some questions blank, using the same options for the entire questionnaire. Besides, the research results of the topic, proposals and recommendations are only directional and valuable at the present time, because human needs are increasingly increasing according to social trends, so the Tourist satisfaction will also always change. Thus, in order to have more practical policies to help improve tourist satisfaction when using traditional culinary services in Nha Trang, the following studies need to be conducted regularly to overcome limitations. and reach more customers to better grasp customer needs and promptly improve the quality of culinary services to serve tourists.

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VITAL JOURNEYS: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY ON THE SATISFACTION OF INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL TOURISTS IN INDIA

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Abstract

Medical tourism has emerged as a significant industry within India, driven by the promise of high-quality medical care at competitive prices. This paper aims to investigate the satisfaction levels of international medical tourists visiting India and explore the factors that contribute to their overall experience. A cross-sectional survey was conducted, with 413 international patients providing data on various factors including service quality, communication, and cost-effectiveness. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to assess the relationships between these factors and overall satisfaction. The results indicate that while overall satisfaction is high, with an average rating of 4.2 out of 5, significant improvements are needed in pre-travel communication, transparency regarding pricing, and the availability of post-operative care. This study provides insights for healthcare providers and policymakers, offering practical recommendations to enhance India's reputation as a leading medical tourism destination.

Keywords: *Medical Tourism, Healthcare Tourism, Patient Satisfaction, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), Healthcare Communication, Medical Infrastructure, International Patients, Cost-Effectiveness*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In recent years, India has become one of the top destinations for medical tourism, attracting patients from around the globe seeking affordable and high-quality healthcare services. India's medical tourism sector has grown significantly due to its advanced medical facilities, competitive pricing, and the availability of a wide range of treatments, particularly in cardiology, orthopedics, oncology, and cosmetic surgery (Ghosh & Mandal, 2019).

India's unique position as a medical tourism hub is further bolstered by the availability of English-speaking medical professionals, which helps mitigate the language barrier that patients may face in other popular medical tourism destinations. However, despite this growing demand, a comprehensive understanding of the factors driving the satisfaction of international patients remains limited.

1.2 Research Problem

Previous research has explored various aspects of medical tourism, such as the cost-effectiveness of treatments and healthcare infrastructure (Gupta & Das, 2012), but few studies have focused specifically on the satisfaction levels of international medical tourists in India. Understanding what drives satisfaction is critical for healthcare providers, tourism facilitators, and policymakers looking to enhance service quality and attract more international patients.

1.3 Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are:

• To assess the overall satisfaction of international medical tourists in India.

• To identify key factors that contribute to the patient experience, including medical service quality, cost, and communication.

• To provide recommendations for healthcare providers and policymakers to improve the medical tourism experience.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Emergence of Medical Tourism

Medical tourism has grown into a global industry with millions of patients traveling across borders to access healthcare services. The rise of this sector has been driven by factors such as increased globalization, access to

information via the internet, and the high cost of medical care in developed nations (Connell, 2013). Medical tourists generally seek treatments such as elective surgeries, dental procedures, fertility treatments, and cosmetic surgeries, which are often unavailable or expensive in their home countries (Lunt, Horsfall & Hanefeld, 2015). The growing disparity in healthcare costs and long waiting periods in countries like the US and the UK have pushed patients to seek alternatives in developing countries, where medical facilities are of comparable quality at significantly lower prices (Turner, 2011).

2.2 Medical Tourism in India

India's emergence as a global hub for medical tourism is linked to several factors, including the availability of high-quality medical infrastructure, well-trained healthcare professionals, and cost-effectiveness (Ghosh & Mandal, 2019). According to a report by Deloitte (2016), medical tourists in India typically save between 50-80% on treatments compared to Western countries. Additionally, India's medical facilities are known for specializing in certain fields such as cardiology, oncology, and organ transplants (KPMG, 2021). Despite these advantages, several challenges, including communication barriers, lack of transparency in pricing, and the availability of follow-up care, remain as significant hurdles in improving patient satisfaction (Kannan, 2020).

2.3 Determinants of Medical Tourist Satisfaction

2.3.1 Healthcare Quality

Several studies emphasize the importance of healthcare quality as the primary driver of satisfaction among medical tourists (Crooks, Kingsbury, Snyder & Johnston, 2010). Quality care includes the expertise of medical professionals, the technology used, and the outcomes of the treatment provided. Gupta and Das (2012) highlighted that in India, a substantial portion of patients rated the quality of care on par with or better than what they would have received in their home countries. Additionally, the accreditation of hospitals, particularly by international organizations such as the Joint Commission International (JCI), has played a role in improving the reputation of Indian medical facilities (Connell, 2013).

2.3.2 Cost-Effectiveness

Cost is a critical factor influencing the decision of international patients to seek treatment abroad. India's medical tourism sector is highly competitive in terms of cost, offering procedures at a fraction of the price charged in Western nations (Bookman & Bookman, 2007). The ability to provide affordable healthcare without compromising on quality has attracted patients, particularly from Africa, the Middle East, and even developed countries (KPMG, 2021).

2.3.3 Communication and Language Barriers

Effective communication is essential in healthcare, as it directly affects the patient's understanding of their treatment plan and satisfaction with the process. However, one of the major challenges faced by medical tourists in India is the language barrier (Reddy & Qadeer, 2010). While English is widely spoken in India, many patients from non-English speaking countries, such as those from the Middle East or Russia, may struggle to communicate effectively with healthcare providers. Research by Kangas (2010) suggests that healthcare providers offering multilingual support or interpreters can significantly enhance patient satisfaction.

2.3.4 Pre- and Post-Operative Care

The quality and availability of pre- and post-operative care have been shown to influence the satisfaction of medical tourists. Ghosh and Mandal (2019) emphasized that clear communication regarding treatment plans, risks, and expected outcomes before the procedure plays a vital role in shaping patient perceptions. On the other hand, Crooks et al. (2011) pointed out that the lack of adequate post-operative care and follow-up services, especially for patients returning to their home countries, can lead to dissatisfaction, despite the success of the initial treatment.

2.4 Challenges in Medical Tourism

Despite the potential benefits, medical tourism is fraught with challenges that impact the overall patient experience. These challenges include inadequate regulatory frameworks, lack of legal protections, and limited access to detailed information about treatments and pricing before arrival (Bookman & Bookman, 2007). Additionally, some patients report concerns over ethical issues, such as the prioritization of medical tourists over local patients, which can create disparities in healthcare access (Connell, 2013). The lack of legal recourse in cases of medical malpractice or poor outcomes also remains a significant deterrent for many potential medical tourists (Turner, 2011).

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2.5 Theoretical Framework for Medical Tourist Satisfaction

The theoretical foundation of this study is based on the service quality model, particularly Parasuraman et al.'s SERVQUAL model (1988), which assesses five key dimensions of service quality: reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy, and responsiveness. These dimensions are adapted to the medical tourism context by focusing on healthcare quality, cost-effectiveness, communication, and the availability of post-operative care. The study also integrates elements of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (1984) to examine how cultural factors, particularly language and communication styles, influence the satisfaction of medical tourists from different countries.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a cross-sectional research design, with data collected via structured questionnaires. The primary focus of the survey was to measure satisfaction across multiple dimensions, including healthcare quality, communication, cost-effectiveness, and overall experience.

3.2 Sample and Sampling Technique

A total of 413 international medical tourists were selected using a convenience sampling technique. Respondents were approached at several hospitals and healthcare facilities in major medical tourism hubs across India, including Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai. The respondents represented a wide range of medical specialties, with the majority seeking treatment for cardiovascular, orthopedic, and cosmetic surgeries.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected using an online survey distributed to patients post-treatment. The survey included a range of Likert scale questions (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree) to gauge satisfaction across different aspects of their medical experience. The questionnaire was divided into sections based on demographics, medical service quality, communication, cost-effectiveness, and pre- and post-operative care.

3.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS for preliminary statistical analysis, while Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was performed using SMART PLS 4.0 to test the relationships between the key variables. SEM was particularly useful in identifying the strength and direction of the relationships between factors such as healthcare quality, cost-effectiveness, communication, and patient satisfaction.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The majority of the respondents were aged between 30 and 60, with nearly 60% coming from countries in the Middle East and Africa. A significant portion of patients (35%) sought cardiovascular treatment, followed by orthopedic procedures (25%) and cosmetic surgeries (15%).

4.2 Overall Satisfaction

The average satisfaction rating was 4.2 out of 5, indicating a generally high level of satisfaction among international medical tourists in India. The key factors contributing to this satisfaction were:

• Healthcare Quality: The skill and expertise of medical professionals were highly rated, with 85% of respondents expressing satisfaction.

• Cost-Effectiveness: Over 90% of respondents felt that the cost of treatment was significantly lower compared to their home countries, enhancing overall satisfaction.

• Infrastructure: Modern healthcare facilities and access to advanced medical technologies were frequently cited as major factors influencing satisfaction.

4.3 Communication and Language Barriers

Patients who were able to communicate in their native language or in English reported significantly higher satisfaction levels compared to those who faced language barriers. The SEM analysis revealed that communication barriers negatively impacted patient satisfaction ($\beta = -0.35$, $p < 0.01$).

4.4 Pre- and Post-Operative Care

The quality of pre- and post-operative care was another major determinant of satisfaction. Patients who received detailed information about their procedures and potential risks beforehand expressed higher satisfaction. However, some respondents noted that the availability of post-operative care, particularly in the form of follow-up consultations, could be improved.

4.5 SEM Results

The SEM analysis showed that healthcare quality ($\beta = 0.75$, $p < 0.001$), cost-effectiveness ($\beta = 0.60$, $p < 0.001$), and communication ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.05$) were the strongest predictors of overall satisfaction. These results emphasize the importance of these factors in shaping the medical tourism experience in India.

5. Discussion

5.1 Key Findings

This study provides critical insights into the factors influencing the satisfaction of international medical tourists in India. Overall, the high satisfaction levels indicate that India's healthcare infrastructure and cost advantages are major selling points for international patients. However, the findings also highlight areas for improvement, particularly in pre-travel communication and the availability of post-operative care.

5.2 Comparison with Previous Research

The results align with previous studies that have emphasized the importance of healthcare quality and cost-effectiveness in determining patient satisfaction (Gupta & Das, 2012). However, this study expands on the literature by incorporating communication as a significant factor influencing satisfaction, particularly in the context of language barriers (Connell, 2013).

5.3 Implications for Medical Tourism in India

The findings suggest that while India is performing well in terms of healthcare delivery, improvements in communication and follow-up care could further enhance the overall experience for medical tourists. Hospitals and healthcare providers that prioritize these areas are likely to see improvements in patient satisfaction and retention, further solidifying India's reputation as a top medical tourism destination.

6. Policy Recommendations

6.1 Improving Information Transparency

One of the main challenges identified in the study is the lack of transparency in pricing and treatment options for international patients. Policy initiatives should aim to develop standardized, transparent pricing models for medical procedures that can be easily accessed online by potential medical tourists. Additionally, the establishment of a national portal that provides detailed information on accredited hospitals, available treatments, and associated costs would improve patients 'confidence before traveling to India for medical care.

6.2 Enhancing Multilingual Support

Given the significant impact of language barriers on patient satisfaction, policies should encourage healthcare institutions to offer multilingual support services, either through in-house interpreters or telephonic translation services. Government subsidies or incentives could be provided to hospitals that invest in improving communication channels for non-English-speaking patients, particularly those from the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe.

6.3 Developing a Standardized Follow-Up Care System

The study found that many patients were dissatisfied with the availability of post-operative care and follow-up services, especially after returning to their home countries. To address this issue, a standardized system of post-operative care could be developed in collaboration with international healthcare providers. This system could include telemedicine services to ensure that patients receive adequate follow-up care and consultations, even after leaving India.

6.4 Strengthening Regulatory Frameworks

There is a need for stronger regulatory frameworks that ensure the protection of medical tourists 'rights. Policies that address medical malpractice, patient recourse, and compensation for adverse outcomes should be established to enhance patient confidence in India's medical tourism sector. Additionally, healthcare providers should be encouraged to obtain international accreditation, which would increase the credibility and appeal of Indian hospitals to global patients.

6.5 Enhancing Infrastructure and Healthcare Quality

While India is recognized for its advanced medical facilities, there is a need for continuous improvements in healthcare infrastructure to maintain the country's competitive edge. Investments in state-of-the-art technology, combined with the recruitment and training of highly skilled healthcare professionals, will help India remain a top destination for medical tourism. The government should provide incentives for hospitals that upgrade their facilities to international standards.

7. Research Limitations and Future Directions

7.1 Limitations

This study's cross-sectional design limits its ability to establish causality between the factors influencing patient satisfaction and their overall experience. The reliance on self-reported data could introduce biases, such as social desirability bias, where respondents may overstate their satisfaction levels. Additionally, the convenience sampling method used in this study may limit the generalizability of the results, as it does not capture the experiences of all medical tourists in India.

Another limitation is the exclusion of medical professionals 'perspectives, which could offer a deeper understanding of the challenges they face in providing care to international patients. Moreover, the study does not explore the long-term health outcomes of medical tourists after they return to their home countries, which could significantly influence their overall satisfaction with the treatment received.

7.2 Future Directions

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies that track patient satisfaction over time to assess the long-term impact of medical treatments on international patients. Additionally, future studies should include larger and more diverse samples to capture a broader range of experiences from medical tourists representing different countries, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Further research should also consider the perspectives of healthcare providers, medical tourism facilitators, and government officials to develop a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities in India's medical tourism sector. Lastly, comparative studies between India and other major medical tourism destinations, such as Thailand and Singapore, could provide insights into best practices and areas where India can further improve its services.

8. Conclusion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the satisfaction levels of international medical tourists in India, with healthcare quality, cost-effectiveness, and communication identified as the key determinants of patient satisfaction. While India continues to attract medical tourists due to its affordable, high-quality healthcare, challenges related to information transparency, language barriers, and post-operative care must be addressed to enhance the overall patient experience.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on medical tourism by proposing a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding medical tourist satisfaction in India. By addressing the limitations identified in this study and implementing the recommended policy changes, India can further solidify its position as a leading destination for medical tourism, offering a patient-centric approach that meets the needs of a diverse international clientele.

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HOTEL COMPETITIVENESS RESEARCH – A CASE STUDY OF HOTEL IN KHANH HOA, VIETNAM

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Extended abstract

Studies on competitiveness in manufacturing and related fields have been conducted since the early 1990s. However, only recently have some researchers begun to consider competitiveness in tourism and hospitality, conceptually and empirically, focusing on tourism destinations and the hotel industry (Tsai et al., 2009). This article aims to review published studies on hotel competitiveness and synthesise the evaluation criteria. The thorough research carried out 02 in-depth interviews with 25 experts in the field of tourism. The first round of interviews aimed to assess the competitiveness of tourist destinations in the South-Central Coast Region compared to Khanh Hoa province and establish criteria for evaluating hotel competitiveness in Vietnam. In the second round, expert interviews were conducted to develop a Competitive Profile Matrix (CPM) based on four groups of criteria: Competitive position, Market Structure, Resources, and Green competitiveness, for hotels in highly competitive destinations in this region, including Da Nang, Khanh Hoa and Binh Thuan. From the matrix, the research evaluates competitiveness. It provides clear policy implications to improve competitiveness for hotels in Khanh Hoa, making the findings directly applicable to the industry and offering practical solutions to enhance hotel competitiveness.

Keywords: Hotel, Competitiveness, Khanh Hoa, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

A country's competitiveness stems from the performance of its enterprises, including the hotel industry (Barros, 2005). While community growth boosts hotel performance, hotels, in turn, contribute to the community's economic, social, and cultural development (Go, Pine, and Yu, 1994). The hotel industry benefits from a destination's economic growth, stability, community infrastructure and developments like office buildings, retail malls, and entertainment facilities (Tsai et al., 2009). These attract business and leisure travellers, increasing demand for hotel rooms. Numerous factors, such as input, process, output, and outcome, determine the competitiveness of the hotel industry (Tsai et al., 2009). Hotels use input factors to produce various products and services, and these outputs largely depend on their strategic and competitive positions in the region. The impact of these measures, in terms of tangible outcomes, is evident in the market share and price competitiveness of the hotels within the regional market (Tsai et al., 2009).

Khanh Hoa is one of the country's leading tourist centres, with great potential for tourism development. In the Action Program on building and developing Khanh Hoa Province to 2030, with a vision to 2045, the People's Committee of Khanh Hoa Province has approved the development of tourism into a key economic sector, bringing the brand of Nha Trang - Khanh Hoa tourism becomes the top destination on the international tourism map. In the 2023 Tourism Performance Report of Khanh Hoa Provincial Department of Tourism, by the end of 2023, the province had 1,217 accommodation establishments with more than 65,544 rooms. Of which, the total number of 3-5 star tourist accommodation establishments recognised is 96 establishments with 23,973 rooms, accounting for nearly 1/3 of the total number of rooms in the province. The total number of tourist accommodation establishments recognised from 1-2 stars is 66 with 1,747 rooms; the remaining 1,055 establishments are not identified with star classification. In recent years, Khanh Hoa has recorded a lot of domestic and foreign investment in the construction of accommodation facilities. The increase in the number of accommodation establishments has helped Khanh Hoa Tourism better meet the needs of domestic and foreign tourists, especially during peak seasons, with no more room shortages and better service to tourists.

However, despite contributing to recent tourism achievements in the province, hotels in Khanh Hoa province still have many weaknesses: service quality is not high, and competitiveness is lower than in other hotels in different tourist destinations having the same potential. Hotels in Khanh Hoa are still small-scale, scattered, not interconnected, and have not built their brands. Besides, the infrastructure is not synchronised; tourism products are not yet diverse and rich, and the organisational mechanism is individual and localised.

This study evaluates the competitive capability of hotels in Khanh Hoa by building a Competitive Profile Matrix (CPM) of hotels in Khanh Hoa compared to other tourist destinations with the same tourism potential. The structure of the study is organised as follows. After the Introduction, Section 2 presents an overview of the research literature and proposes a set of criteria to evaluate hotel competitiveness. Section 3 describes the research method and the data, including in-depth interview methods with research experts in the field of tourism and methods of building a competitive image matrix. Section 4 presents and discusses the research results. Finally, Section 5 will contain the achievements and limitations of the research and propose future research directions.

2. Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the competitive capability of hotels in Khanh Hoa by constructing a Competitive Profile Matrix (CPM) and comparing it to its counterparts in other destinations with similar tourism potential.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Competitiveness of Hotels

Initial research focused on competitiveness between countries (Porter, 1990). Since then, competitive capability has gradually become a significant research topic in management. The Organization for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD; 1992) defines Competitiveness as "the degree to which a country can, under free and fair market conditions, produce goods and services that meet the challenge of international markets while maintaining and expanding people's real income over the long term." D'Cruz and Rugman (1992) extended the concept of competitive capability to the enterprise level. They argue that a firm's competitiveness is its ability to design, produce, or market its products relative to competitors, especially considering price and non-price. Clark and Guy (1998) call enterprise-level competitive capability the ability to increase a business's scale and expand profits.

Competitiveness has been widely applied to evaluate the performance of various industries, including the hotel industry (Roy, 2011). Research on hotel competitiveness has focused on identifying the determinants or factors affecting hotel competitiveness. For example, a hotel's brand image is believed to be a key determinant contributing to a hotel's competitiveness (Brown and Ragsdale, 2002; Kim and Kim, 2005; Prasad and Dev, 2000). Other studies consider customer satisfaction and service quality as determinants of hotel competitiveness (Akbaba, 2006; Campos Soria, González García, and Ropero García, 2005; Mattila and Oneill, 2003; Reynolds and Thompson, 2007). Productivity is another factor influencing hotel competitiveness (Barros, 2005; Barros and Alves, 2004; Sigala, 2004).

3.2. Criteria for evaluating hotel competitiveness

The fates of businesses and countries are intertwined because countries provide an environment for companies to develop (or hinder), while businesses create economic value for the country (Garelli, 2012). The model connects macro- and micro-level research on Competitive Energy using the diamond model developed by Chikan (2008). The literature on competitive capability has been enriched with studies on various factors that contribute to competitiveness at the enterprise level, from Porter's (1985) value chain activities to different independent diversity factors such as leadership, learning, R&D, quality and labour productivity.

Competitiveness can be gauged in various ways due to different conceptualisations. In essence, there are numerous criteria to evaluate the competitiveness of enterprises, each with its unique requirements. These requirements are contingent upon the perspectives of different schools (strategic management, dynamic competitive capacity, asset-based competitive capacity, process-based competitive capacity, etc.) and the characteristics of the enterprise (business field, industry, business market, etc.).

The viewpoint of researching the competitive potential of enterprises is based on its meaning, which is that the competitiveness of enterprises must be created from the strength of the enterprise (Ngo Kim Thanh, 2012). Based on research and related theories and research (Go et al., 1994; Brown and Dev, 2000; Rudolf Grunig and Richard Kuhn, 2002; Tsai, Song and Wong, 2009; Kim and Kim, 2005; Lai Xuan Thuy, 2012; ASEAN, 2016), the authors propose

criteria for evaluating hotel competitiveness including Competitive position, Competitiveness at the market mix level, Competitiveness at the resource level, and Green competitiveness.

Table 1. Proposed criteria for evaluating hotel competitiveness

The scale	Encode	Official scale	Source
Competitive position	VTCT1	Market share	Kim and Kim (2005); Lai Xuan Thuy (2012)
	VTCT2	Brand reputation	
Competitiveness at the market mix level	PTTT1	Product/service quality	Go et al. (1994); Tsai, Song and Wong (2009); Lai Xuan Thuy (2012)
	PTTT2	Product/service category	
	PTTT3	Price competitiveness	
	PTTT4	Product/service promotional activities	
	PTTT5	Distribution channel system	
Competitiveness at the resource level	NL1	Hotel location	Go et al. (1994); Brown and Dev (2000); Tsai, Song and Wong (2009); Lai Xuan Thuy (2012)
	NL2	Room capacity	
	NL3	Quality of personnel	
	NL4	Labor productivity	
	NL5	Financial capability	
	NL6	Technical facilities	
	NL7	Public hygiene problem	
	NL8	Security and safety issues	
	NL9	Corporate culture	
Green Competitiveness	NLCTX1	Environmental protection policies and actions	ASEAN (2016)
	NLCTX2	Use green products	
	NLCTX3	Collaborate with community and local organisations	
	NLCTX4	Human resource development	
	NLCTX5	Solid waste management	
	NLCTX6	Use energy efficiently	
	NLCTX7	Efficient water use and water quality	
	NLCTX8	Air quality management (inside and outside)	
	NLCTX9	Control noise pollution	
	NLCTX10	Waste treatment and management	
	NLCTX11	Manage the handling of chemicals and hazardous waste	

Source: The summary of authors, 2024

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Research Tools

The expert method collects and processes assessments and forecasts by gathering and consulting experts in a narrow field of science, engineering or production (Skulmoski et al., 2007). The process of applying the expert method can be divided into three major stages: (1) Selecting experts, (2) Soliciting expert opinions, and (3) Collecting and processing forecast assessments.

The expert method is based on the summary assessment of experience, the ability of suitable experts to naturally reflect on the future, and the statistical processing of answers scientifically (Skulmoski et al., 2007). The Delphi method is among the most popular and used. The Delphi method (Olaf Helmer et al., 1969) is a qualitative forecasting method in which experts' opinions are combined in a series of iterations. The results of each iteration are used for the next iteration to obtain the common opinion of experts. Turoff, M., and Linstone (2002) defined the Delphi method as follows: Delphi can be seen as a method to help establish an effective group information exchange

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process to allow Team members to solve a complex problem. According to Hasson, Keeney and McKenna (2000), this method can be applied to any career field. It is a simple and flexible group facilitation technique based on a "multi-stage interactive process, designed to turn ideas into group consensus."

For this study, the authors used the Delphi method to develop a system of criteria for evaluating the competitiveness of hotels in Khanh Hoa province and build a CPM to compare and assess their competitiveness compared to their counterparts in other tourist destinations.

4.2. Sample and Data Collection

The participants of this study include scientific researchers in the field of tourism who work and teach at universities, managers in tourism departments, and hotel businesses in three destinations: Khanh Hoa, Da Nang, and Binh Thuan.

Evaluation method: Based on interviews with 25 experts in the field of tourism, the research results have determined the weights (level of importance) of each criterion for evaluating competitiveness in the field of hotel business. The level of importance is measured using a 5-point scale, in which 1 point corresponds to not at all critical, and 5 points correspond to extremely important (David, 2011). After collecting expert opinions, the weight of the criteria is determined by (1) calculating the average evaluation value of each criterion and (2) converting it to the weight of each criterion.

After collecting expert opinions on the importance of the criteria for evaluating the hotel's competitiveness, the experts continued to be interviewed about the level of implementation of the hotels against the evaluated criteria. Based on a 5-point scale to assess the level of implementation of criteria reflecting the competitiveness of hotels, 1 point is a very poor level of implementation, and 5 points is an excellent level of implementation (David, 2011). This determination is made as follows: (1) Calculate the average rating of hotels in each destination according to the criteria; (2) Convert these average rating values according to the determined weights; and (3) Determine the competitiveness of hotels at each destination through the total evaluation score of the converted criteria.

4.3. Data Analysis

Competitiveness of tourist destinations in the South-Central Coast Region

After conducting the first expert interview, the authors collected experts' opinions on the competitiveness of tourist destinations in the South-Central Coast Region. From the results of this expert survey, the study selected 02 out of 08 tourist destinations with the same potential for developing marine tourism and the highest competition prospect towards Khanh Hoa as a basis for evaluation. For the second expert interview, the authors evaluated the level of implementation of criteria on the competitiveness of hotel systems in these destinations.

The item asking about the competitiveness of tourist destinations in the South-Central Coast Region is scored from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest); the results show that the destination is competitive. The highest among the eight provinces in the South-Central Coast Region is Da Nang, with an average score assessed by experts as 7.56. Next is Khanh Hoa, which has the second highest level of competitiveness, as evaluated by experts, with an average score of 7.20. Quang Nam has the 3rd highest level of competitiveness and is only 0.72 points higher than Binh Thuan. These 02 destinations achieved average scores, with Quang Nam reaching 5.96 and Binh Thuan reaching 5.24. The remaining provinces/cities of the South-Central Coast Region, including Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, and Ninh Thuan, have a lower level of competition; the average rating from experts for these destinations ranges from 1.50 to 3.50 points (lower than the average rating in order from 01 to 08).
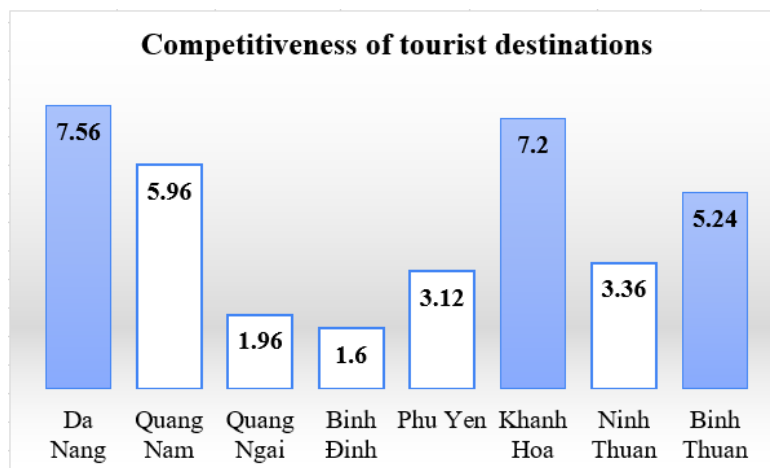
Figure 1. Competitiveness of tourist destinations in the South-Central Coastal Region

Source: The research of Authors, 2024

From the results of calculating the average value of experts' assessment scores on the competitiveness of destinations in the South-Central Coast Region, the authors have selected 03 destinations with the highest competitiveness scores to compare the level of competition of the hotel system in Khanh Hoa, including Da Nang, Quang Nam, and Binh Thuan. However, according to Decision No. 2596/QD-UBND dated September 12, 2021, promulgating the Quang Nam province tourism development program to 2025, vision to 2030, strategic orientation for tourism development in Quang Nam Province Nam will focus on developing tourism services while preserving and promoting the value of cultural heritage, natural heritage, and good traditions of the people of Quang Nam. Quang Nam province tourism does not focus on developing marine tourism like Da Nang, Khanh Hoa and Binh Thuan destinations. Therefore, the study selected only 02 destinations, Da Nang and Binh Thuan, to compare with Khanh Hoa for the second interview with experts to evaluate the competitiveness criteria implementation level.

Assessing the competitiveness of hotels in Khanh Hoa province

In the first interview with experts, the study collected expert opinions on the importance of criteria for evaluating the hotel system's competitiveness. The importance of the requirements for evaluating competitiveness is assessed based on a 5-level scale from 1 - Not at all important to 5 - Very important. After calculating the average rating of each criterion, the study estimated the importance conversion score, ensuring that the total importance conversion score of all requirements was equal to 1.

In the second interview, the experts were asked about the level of implementation/fulfilment of the criteria for evaluating the competitiveness of the hotels at each tourist destination. The level of implementation/fulfilment was assessed on a 5-point scale from 1—Very Poor Implementation to 5—Very Good Implementation. With the performance assessment scores obtained from expert interviews, the study calculated each criterion's average rating and importance score of competitiveness.

Research results show that the hotel system in Khanh Hoa has the highest competitiveness in most evaluation criteria, reaching a total evaluation score of 4,018. Next are the hotels in Da Nang, which have the second highest competitiveness, reaching 3,868 points, and the lowest is Binh Thuan, which has 3,722 points. In particular, the evaluation weight for the group of criteria on "Competitiveness at the market mix level" of hotels in Khanh Hoa is considered superior to that of Da Nang and Binh Thuan, reaching a score of 0.736. The group of criteria on "Green Competitiveness" of hotels in Khanh Hoa is also highly appreciated by experts, having higher competitiveness than the other 02 destinations, reaching a score of 1,628. Only in the criteria group of "Competitiveness at the resource level" does Khanh Hoa have lower competitiveness than Da Nang, achieving a score of 1,319.

Table 2. CPM of hotel systems in tourist destinations in the South-Central Coast Region

Criteria for evaluating the competitiveness of the hotel system	Khanh Hoa	Da Nang	Binh Thuan
Competitive position	0.335	0.332	0.331
Competitiveness at the market mix level	0.736	0.697	0.660
Competitiveness at the resource level	1,319	1,322	1,245
Green Competitiveness	1,628	1,519	1,425
TOTAL SCORE	**4,018**	**3,868**	**3,722**

Source: The research of Authors, 2024

For the group of evaluation criteria of "Competitive Position", hotels in Khanh Hoa have poorer Competitiveness than hotels in Binh Thuan for the criterion of "Market Share" and higher than other hotels in Binh Thuan. Hotel in Da Nang according to this criterion. The rating scores of hotels in 03 tourist destinations are 0.154 for Binh Thuan, 0.152 for Khanh Hoa, and 0.149 for Da Nang. However, according to the criteria of "Brand reputation", hotels in Khanh Hoa are rated higher by experts and have higher competitiveness than Da Nang and Binh Thuan.

For the evaluation criteria "Competitiveness at the market mix level," hotels in Khanh Hoa are rated higher than Da Nang and Binh Thuan in all requirements.

In the group of evaluation criteria "Competitiveness at the resource level", the hotel system in Khanh Hoa is assessed by experts to have lower competitiveness than Da Nang and higher than Binh Thuan in the criteria of "Room capacity", "Quality of human resources", "Financial capacity", and "Public hygiene issues". The remaining criteria of hotels in Khanh Hoa all have higher competitiveness, in which the criterion rated at a high level is "Labor productivity", reaching a rating of 0.159, and the criterion of "Hotel location" of the hotel system in Khanh Hoa also achieved a higher rating than the 02 compared destinations. Although 4/9 criteria in the "Competitiveness at the resource level" group are rated lower, hotels in Khanh Hoa still score higher in the remaining five criteria and achieve a total highest rating for this group of criteria.

For the last group of criteria on "Green Competitiveness", hotels in Khanh Hoa have performed very well on the 10/11 evaluation criteria in this group of criteria. Among the requirements, hotels in Khanh Hoa are rated quite highly compared to Da Nang and Binh Thuan, including the criterion of "Environmental protection policies and actions" reaching 0.169 points; "Human resource development" scored 0.180 points; "Effective water use and water quality" scored 0.164 points. Only for the criterion of "Managing the treatment of chemicals and hazardous waste" do hotels in Khanh Hoa have a lower rating than Da Nang. An exemplary implementation of the requirements in the "Green Competitiveness" group has helped the hotel system in Khanh Hoa achieve higher Competitive Energy than Da Nang and Binh Thuan.

Table 3. Detailed CPM for each group of criteria

No	Criteria for evaluating the competitiveness of the hotel system	Average rating — Importance conversion score (Pi)	Khanh Hoa Rating (Pi)	Khanh Hoa Important Points of Competitiveness	Danang Rating (Pi)	Danang Important Points of Competitiveness	Binh Thuan Rating (Pi)	Binh Thuan Important Points of Competitiveness
I		*Competitive position*						
VTCT1	Market share	4.3 — 0.038	4.00	0.152	3.93	0.149	4.07	0.154
VTCT2	Brand reputation	4.7 — 0.042	4.33	0.183	4.27	0.180	4.27	0.180
II		*Competitiveness at the market mix level*						
PTTT1	Product/service quality	4.7 — 0.042	3.47	0.146	3.40	0.143	3.73	0.157
PTTT2	Product/service categories	4.0 — 0.036	4.20	0.150	3.80	0.135	4.00	0.142
PTTT3	Price competitiveness	4.1 — 0.036	4.53	0.164	4.07	0.147	4.13	0.150
PTTT4	Product/service promotional activities	4.2 — 0.037	3.47	0.130	3.33	0.125	3.47	0.130
PTTT5	Distribution channel system	4.2 — 0.037	3.93	0.147	3.93	0.147	3.73	0.140
III		*Competitiveness at the resource level*						
NL1	Hotel location	4.1 — 0.037	4.27	0.157	4.20	0.155	3.73	0.137
NL2	Room capacity	3.7 — 0.033	3.53	0.117	3.60	0.120	3.40	0.113
NL3	Quality of personel	4.5 — 0.040	4.00	0.161	4.13	0.167	3.80	0.153
NL4	Labor productivity	4.1 — 0.036	4.40	0.159	4.27	0.154	3.87	0.140
NL5	Financial capability	4.3 — 0.039	3.47	0.134	3.73	0.144	3.53	0.136
NL6	Technical facilities	4.4 — 0.039	4.00	0.157	3.87	0.151	3.86	0.151
NL7	Public hygiene problem	4.2 — 0.037	4.13	0.155	4.27	0.160	3.80	0.142
NL8	Security and safety issues	4.3 — 0.038	3.60	0.137	3.47	0.132	3.60	0.137
NL9	Corporate culture	4.1 — 0.036	3.93	0.142	3.87	0.140	3.73	0.135
IV		*Green Competitiveness*						
NLCTX1	Environmental protection policies and actions	4.2 — 0.037	4.53	0.169	4.27	0.160	3.80	0.142
NLCTX2	Use green products	4.1 — 0.037	3.67	0.135	3.60	0.132	3.53	0.130
NLCTX3	Collaborate with	4.1 — 0.036	4.13	0.150	3.93	0.142	3.67	0.133

No	Criteria for evaluating the competitiveness of the hotel system	Average rating	Importance conversion score (Pi)	Khanh Hoa		Danang		Binh Thuan	
				Rating (Pi)	Important Points of Competitiveness	Rating (Pi)	Important Points of Competitiveness	Rating (Pi)	Important Points of Competitiveness
	community and local organisations								
NLCTX4	Human resource development	4.5	0.040	4.53	0.180	4.13	0.164	3.80	0.151
NLCTX5	Solid waste management	3.7	0.033	3.67	0.122	3.60	0.120	3.53	0.117
NLCTX6	Use energy efficiently	3.9	0.035	4.33	0.152	3.93	0.138	3.60	0.126
NLCTX7	Efficient water use and water quality	4.1	0.036	4.53	0.164	3.93	0.142	3.67	0.133
NLCTX8	Air quality management (inside and outside)	4.0	0.036	3.67	0.131	3.60	0.128	3.33	0.119
NLCTX9	Control noise pollution	4.1	0.037	4.20	0.155	3.73	0.137	3.60	0.132
NLCTX10	Waste treatment and management	3.9	0.034	4.40	0.151	3.87	0.133	3.67	0.126
NLCTX11	Manage the handling of chemicals and hazardous waste	3.8	0.034	3.53	0.120	3.60	0.122	3.40	0.115
	TOTAL	112.3	1.000		4.018		3.868		3.722

Source: The research of Authors, 2024
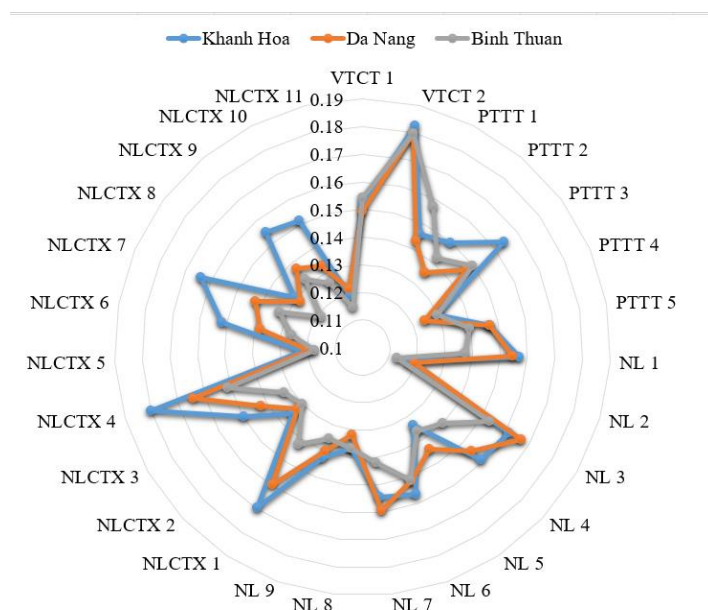
Figure 2. Radar of criteria to evaluate the competitiveness of hotels in tourist destinations in the South-Central Coast Region

Source: The research of Authors, 2024

5. Conclusion and Discussion

5.1. Conclusion

The CPM allows owners to evaluate their company against key competitors using critical success factors (Zimmerer, Scarborough and Wilson, 2008). According to David (2011), CPM identifies a company's main competitors and specific strengths and weaknesses related to the company's strategic position. This tool helps managers identify their most vigorous competitors, key factors, and weaknesses they need to improve in an overall matrix. Therefore, identifying key competitors is one of the main tasks for company managers, as well as developing offensive or defensive strategies to maintain their company's competitiveness in the market (Bergen and Peteraf, 2002).

The study results identified the tourist destinations with the most robust competition with Khanh Hoa, such as Da Nang and Binh Thuan. At the same time, the study also pointed out the strengths and weaknesses of hotels in Khanh Hoa compared to the 02 other destinations. From the results, the authors aim to build an overall picture of the current state of the competitiveness of hotels in Khanh Hoa, thereby helping authorities and hotel managers determine the strengths and weaknesses of hotels, develop specific strategies and actions to improve the competitiveness of hotels in Khanh Hoa compared to other tourist destinations in the region.

5.2. Discussion

Through 02 expert interviews, research results show that hotels in Khanh Hoa have higher competitiveness than Da Nang and Binh Thuan. For the four groups of criteria for evaluating competitiveness, hotels in Khanh Hoa perform best for the group of criteria "Competitiveness at the market mix level". This group of criteria for hotels in Khanh Hoa are rated well by experts in all requirements. An exemplary implementation of diversification and improvement of product/service quality and good promotion and distribution of tourism products/services have helped hotels in Khanh Hoa achieve higher competitiveness than other hotels in Da Nang and Binh Thuan.

In the evaluation criteria group of "Competitive Position", experts commented that the hotel system in Binh Thuan currently holds a higher market share. However, regarding brand reputation, hotels in Khanh Hoa performed better, and Khanh Hoa's total assessment score for the "Competitive Position" criteria was also higher. Implementing "Brand reputation" will help hotels in Khanh Hoa dominate and increase market share in the future, thereby improving their competitiveness compared to other tourist destinations.

Hotels in Khanh Hoa also achieved higher Competitive Energy than Da Nang and Binh Thuan in the "Green Competitiveness" evaluation criteria. This is considered a new group of criteria and is considered highly important

when evaluating the competitiveness of hotels. Hotels in Khanh Hoa have implemented this group of criteria very well, especially the requirements "Environmental protection policies and actions", "Human resource development", and "Effective and quality water use" are highly appreciated. Only in the criterion of "Managing the treatment of chemicals and hazardous waste" hotels in Khanh Hoa have lower scores than Da Nang. Hotels in Khanh Hoa need to pay attention to this criterion to help further improve their competitiveness compared to other tourist destinations in the region.

For the last group of criteria evaluating "Competitiveness at the resource level", hotels in Khanh Hoa have the most disadvantages. There are many criteria with lower evaluation scores than Da Nang among the four criteria for hotel competitiveness. Accordingly, hotels in Khanh Hoa also perform weaker than the destination Da Nang in terms of "Room capacity", "Human resource quality", "Financial capacity", and "Public hygiene issues". In this group of criteria, hotels in Khanh Hoa perform best in 2/9 criteria, including "Hotel location" and "Labor productivity". Although the total evaluation score for the group of criteria on "Competitiveness at the resource level", hotels in Khanh Hoa still achieve the highest score and have the highest level of competitiveness compared to the other 02 destinations. Nevertheless, hotels in Khanh Hoa must pay attention and perform better on currently undervalued criteria to improve their competitiveness.

Research recommendations

The research focused on building CPM, thereby identifying strengths and weaknesses, to better understand the current competitiveness of hotels in Khanh Hoa compared to other regional tourist destinations. Future research needs to conduct a more detailed analysis of the factors that affect the competitiveness of hotels by applying a linear structural model (PLS-SEM), identifying the factors that affect the competitiveness of hotels, thus proposing more precise policy implications and solutions for hotels and managers to improve the competitiveness of hotels in Khanh Hoa. The research results can be applied to assess the competitiveness of tourist destinations in other regions in the future research.

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AN OVERVIEW OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is considered one of the strategic solutions that help businesses promote business efficiency, build reputation, enhance corporate image, maintain competitive advantage, create attractiveness for employees, etc. After COVID-19, CSR has received attention from scholars. This study, which presents the findings from a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of studies related to CSR in the tourism and hospitality industry from 2013 to 2024, is a significant contribution to the field. There were 2,145 articles collected from Web of Science and Scopus for an overview analysis using Biblioshiny and VOSviewer software, of which 37 studies were analysed in depth regarding content. The study aims to identify research topics, analyse publication trends, assess geographical distribution, recognise influential sources, and identify trends and research gaps.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Hospitality, Tourism, Bibliometrics.

1. Introduction

According to statistics from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), as of the third quarter of 2023, international tourism had recovered by about 87% compared to 2019. International tourism revenue reached about 1.4 trillion USD in 2023, accounting for about 93% of the total 1.5 trillion USD in 2019 (UNWTO, 2024). This result partly reflected the recovery of travel demand. However, if not managed responsibly, the rapid increase in tourists can lead to a decline in service quality, excessive consumption of natural resources, waste increase and environmental pollution. Therefore, tourism service businesses must raise awareness and responsibility towards society, the environment, natural resources, etc., by practising social responsibility.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been developed over many decades and has become popular since the 1930s (Agudelo et al., 2019). Today, CSR has received attention from practitioners and scholars (Glavas & Radic, 2019; Grimstad et al., 2020). Businesses have gradually realised the importance of practising CSR because it is one of the strategic solutions to enhance business efficiency, build a reputation, consolidate the corporate image (Grimstad et al., 2020), maintain competitive advantage and create attractiveness for employees (Kim et al., 2020). Theoretically, most of the previous works focused on the relationship between CSR and employee commitment (Moon et al., 2014), job satisfaction (Zhu et al., 2014), job performance (Sun & Robert, 2015), consumer response (Abdullah et al., 2017), innovation (Peñalver et al., 2018), reputation (Ullah et al., 2020), image (Kim et al., 2020), financial performance (Singh & Misra, 2021) and corporate sustainability (AlDhaen, 2022), etc. Currently, the research topics related to CSR have changed. Therefore, it is necessary to find the trends and gaps in CSR-related research. In this study, bibliometric analysis was applied to the studies on CSR related to employees in the tourism and hospitality industry, in which the hotel industry is the focus for in-depth content analysis.

2. Objectives

This bibliometric analysis aims to provide a comprehensive overview of CSR research in the tourism and hospitality industry worldwide over the past ten years, from 2013 to 2024. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Identify key research topics and emerging topics;

- Analyse the number of publications and citation activity;

- Evaluate the geographical distribution of publications and research collaborations;

- List authors and influential journals;

- Explore the content of representative research in the hospitality sector

- Identify trends and research gaps in the hospitality sector.

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3. Research Methodology

3.1. Systematic Reviews Methodology

The systematic analysis process consists of 4 steps: data retrieval, data screening, data source identification for research, and data standardisation.

Step 1. Data retrieval

Two primary data sources were selected for searching: Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus. The criteria for searching documents were developed according to the following contents:

(1) General CSR of tourism and hotels;

(2) CSR to hotel employees;

(3) CSR and employee engagement in hotels;

Searching keywords included "Corporate Social Responsibility" AND (Community OR Environment OR Government OR Customer OR Tourist OR Employee OR "Employee Engagement" OR "Organizational Engagement" OR "Work Engagement" OR "Job Engagement") AND (Hospitality OR Hotel OR Resort).

Appropriate search criteria were set for the research objectives (Table 1) to ensure the comprehensiveness of the data and the reliability and persuasiveness of the bibliometric study.

Step 2. Data screening

This is a manual screening step to determine the final number of documents included in the analysis. This process eliminates irrelevant publications based on title and abstract (Page et al., 2021). The entire screening process was conducted following PRISMA guidelines (Figure 1).

Table 1: Summary of criteria for limiting search database sources

Description	Specific standard requirements
Retrieval time	26 July 2024
Database source	Web of Science, Scopus
Index (Wos)	SSCI, SCIE, ESCI, BKCI-SSH, CPCI-S
Research areas (WoS)	Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism, Enviromental Sciences, Enviromental Studies, Green Sustainable Services, Economic
Research areas (Scopus)	Social Sciences, Enviromental Sciences, Economics, Econometrics and Finance
Research timeframe	No limit
Language	English
Types of documents	Journal
Types of data	WoS: Plain Text, Full Records and Cited References Full Records; Scopus: Bibtex, Full Records and Cited References
Sample size	2,146 articles for bibliometric analysis and 37 articles for qualitative analysis.

(Source: Data analysis results, July 2024)
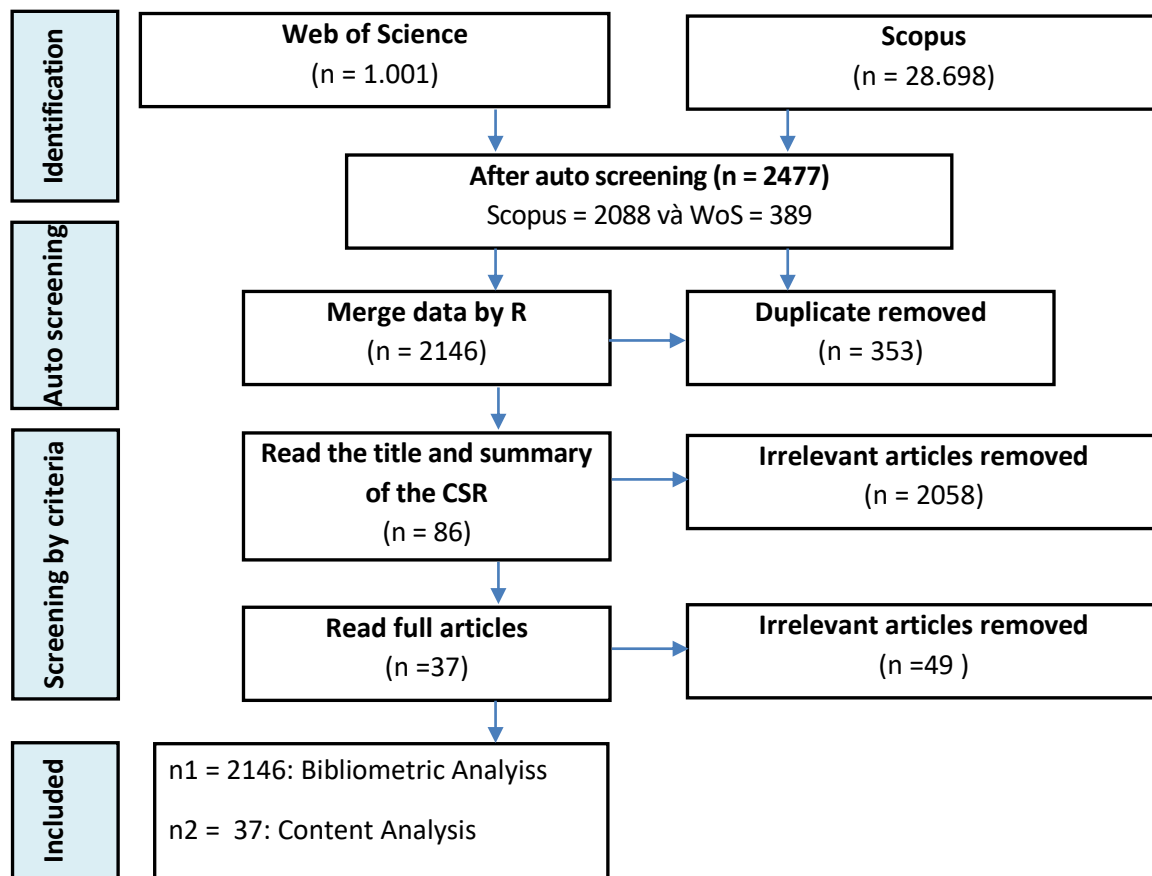
Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram

(Source: Data analysis results, July 2024)

Step 3. Data source identification for research

Identification: - 2,146 articles for bibliometric analysis.

- 37 articles for research content.

Step 4. Data standardisation

This is crucial in preparing for bibliometric analysis and ensuring data quality and standardisation. Word editing and coding were applied to the following: Author (AU), Citation (CR), Source (SO), and Keyword (DE and ID). The data was cleaned and standardised before being analysed using the function.

For example, "Thesaurus optional" is for Vosviewer, and "Text Editing" is for Biblioshiny.

2. Bibliometric Analysis Methodology

The study examined the selection of AI tools and the type of analysis, input data, and output data to resolve the research question.

Table 2. Bibliometric analysis results

Research questions	Type of Analysis	Input data	Analytic tool
1 - Research output, authors, countries, and journals of publication.	Author, country, journal analysis	2146 articles	Blibioshiny VoS
2 - General research topics.	Keyword Analysis	2146 articles	Blibioshiny VoS
3 - Research trends and gaps.	Keyword Analysis	86 articles	VOSviewer Blibioshiny Qualitative analysis
4 - Content	Content analysis	37 articles	Qualitative analysis

(Source: Data analysis results, July 2024)

3. Content Analysis Methodology

Based on bibliometric analysis, the content of studies related to CSR employees in the hotel industry was continuously analysed, thereby revealing the fundamental issues related to the gaps in the research.

Analysis Results

1. Literature review related to CSR in the tourism and hospitality industry

The following statistics provide a general picture of the literature on CSR in the tourism and hospitality industry: the number of published studies, authors with considerable citations, countries with prominent publications, etc.

The number of published research

The results of the Blibioshiny analysis showed that a total of 2,146 articles were published with the participation of 3,666 authors, of which 165 were independent writers. The studies utilized a total of 21,622 references. The average citations per document is 30.87. The annual growth rate of articles published on WoS and Scopus was 18.72%, and 2018 - 2023 was the period of solid growth and the highest in 2023, with more than 350 studies published (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Statistics of the number of published research in 2013 - 2024

(Source: Data analysis results, July 2024)

Authors

The results from the Blibioshiny tool analysed the influential authors on the topic of CSR in the tourism and hospitality industry by analysing the h_index, g-index, m_index, total citations, average annual index, and countries of work of the authors. This is an essential source of information for researchers when looking for collaborations or identifying quality sources for their research. The top five authors on this research topic are Lee S (USA), Han H (Korea), Su L (China), Frot X (UK), and Kim J (Korea) (Table 2).

Table 2: List of 10 authors with the highest citation index

Author	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	NP	PY_start	Country
LEE S	27	49	2.25	2479	61	2013	USA
HAN H	25	46	2.083	2189	54	2013	Korea
SU L	17	17	1.7	1669	17	2015	China
FONT X	19	23	1.727	1392	23	2014	UK
KIM J	19	36	2.111	1371	40	2016	USA
KIM S	18	29	1.5	937	48	2013	Korea
MATTILA A	13	29	1.182	877	31	2014	USA
OKUMUS F	14	19	1.273	779	19	2014	USA
KIM M	17	21	1.545	736	21	2014	USA
LEE J	13	18	1.083	681	18	2013	USA

(Source: Data analysis results, July 2024)

Countries

The results of the Biblioshiny analysis showed that the five countries with the highest number of publications were the United States, China, the United Kingdom, South Korea, and Spain. The United States and China were the two countries most interested in CSR, with the total number of articles published on Scopus and WoS being 567 and 443 studies, respectively. In Vietnam, 14 articles were published starting in 2017 (Figure 3).
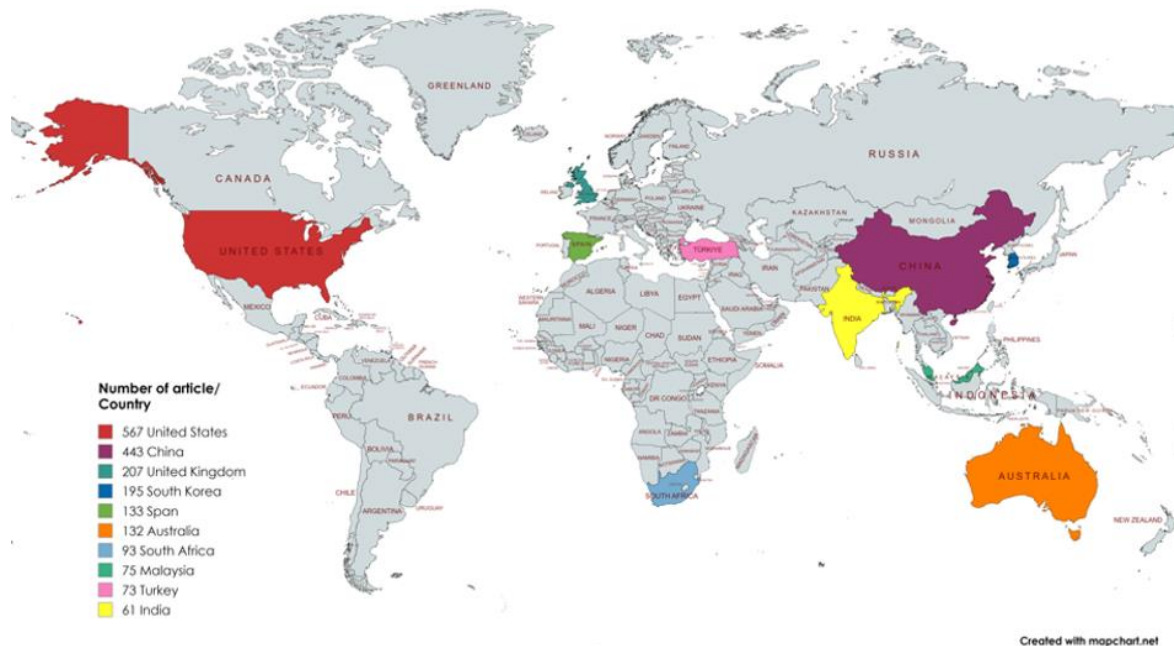
Figure 3: List of 10 countries with the most publications

(Source: Data analysis results, July 2024)

Journals

Scholars have published research on CSR in the tourism and hospitality industry in many journals (Figure 4); the most published were in the International Journal of Hospitality Management, with 386 articles, followed by the International Journal of Contemporary Management and the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management.

Figure 4: List of 10 journals with the most significant number of publications

(Source: Data analysis results, July 2024)

Research topics

The keyword analysis results in VOSviewer showed 349 Keywords divided into 13 Clusters with 3,143 Links. The most frequently appearing keywords included Corporate Social responsibility (366), Sustainability (140), Hospitality (111), Tourism (107), Hotel (85), Hospitality Industry (62), Trust (45), Customer Satisfaction (38), Employee Satisfaction (39), performance (35), Employee Engagement (23), Work Engagement (23), etc. (Figure 5).
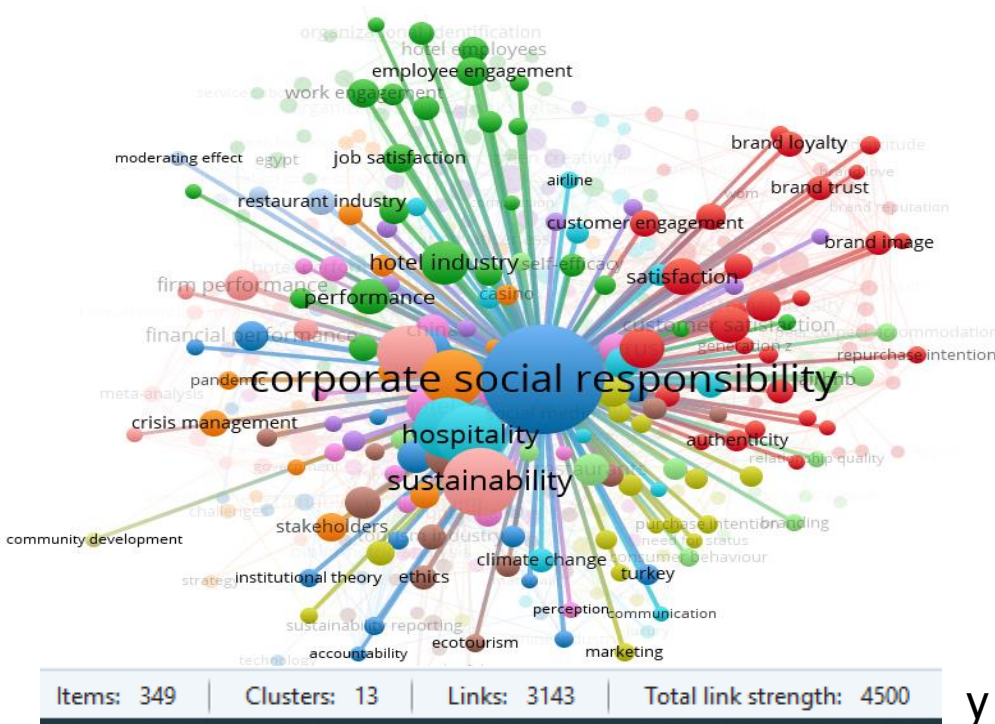
Figure 5: Summary of topics and keywords in tourism

(Source: Data analysis results, July 2024)

2. Literature review related to CSR in the hospitality industry

Research topics

VOSviewer analysis yielded 86 related articles, showing that the keyword CSR appears the most, 65 times,

with 191 links. The main keywords related to CSR employees in the hotel industry include Employee engagement, Work engagement, Organizational Commitment, Organizational Identification, Organization Citizenship Behaviour, Financial Performance, Firm performance, Hospitality industry, Hotel, Tourism, Sustainability, Quality of Life, Loyalty, Perception, Behaviour, COVID-19, … (Figure 6).
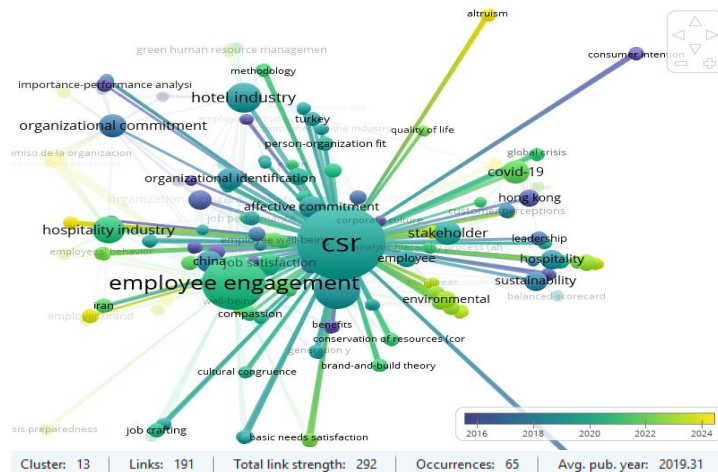
Figure 6: Summary of topics and keywords in the hotel industry

(Source: Data analysis results, July 2024)

Overview of typical research content

CSR research in the hospitality industry has received much attention from scholars. Researchers have begun to focus on the human aspect of engaging employees in CSR projects and programs to have a more comprehensive view of CSR (Ram, 2018). According to Ko et al. (2016), CSR is a multidimensional construct, and the CSR model for the hotel industry includes employees, customers, local communities, the natural environment, and owners/investors. Gürlek and Tuna (2019) approached hotel CSR according to the following factors: community, environment, employees, and customers. Wang et al. (2020) confirmed that the structure that makes up hotel CSR includes four aspects: environmental protection, employee health, business ethics and customer health. Wong & Kim (2020) made some adjustments when presenting five aspects of hotel CSR: legal, ethical, financial/economic, environmental, and social/philanthropic.

Employees' awareness of CSR positively and significantly affects organisational identification (Park & Levy, 2014). It positively affects employees' basic needs, which helps improve the quality of work life, bringing job satisfaction to employees. It is crucial in promoting hotel employee voice (Liu et al., 2021). Therefore, hotels should proactively participate in CSR activities and enhance employees' awareness of CSR by communicating the meaning of CSR activities (Liu et al., 2021). Hotels implementing CSR initiatives can bring positive outcomes to both employees and businesses. Trust and mediate the relationship between hotel CSR awareness, employee well-being, and green workplace behaviour (Su et al., 2019). AlSuwaidi et al. (2021) found that CSR is a crucial driver of green behaviour.

CSR strategies can improve employee job satisfaction when working at a hotel. When participating in community CSR activities, employees feel more satisfied with their jobs (Appiah, 2019). Supporting businesses in overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic is also one of the community-oriented CSR activities. Volunteer CSR affects employee self-esteem (Bibi et al., 2022). Satisfaction of basic needs positively affects employee happiness and self-esteem. Employee happiness is the key to innovation, competitiveness, and hotel performance (Bibi et al., 2022). In addition, CSR activities can also bring financial benefits to stakeholders and benefit the economy through local purchasing and job creation. This shows a positive relationship between CSR and hotel performance (Ghaderi et al., 2019).

Organisational culture influences various aspects of CSR (Farmaki & Stergiou, 2021). Hotels using CSR practices related to employees and customers will strengthen their reputation. By improving the hotel's reputation, CSR activities will positively affect hotel performance. Besides business performance, CSR practices promote safe behaviour and reduce negative employee impacts on work and organisation (González-Rodríguez et al., 2019).

According to Gürlek & Tuna (2019), CSR directly increases hotel employee work engagement. Employees are the ones who put CSR statements into action, so employee perceptions of CSR activities in hotels are important (Kim et al., 2018). Employees' positive perceptions of CSR will directly impact their quality of life (González-De-la-Rosa et al., 2023) and customer service quality. Therefore, hotel management must pay more attention when strategically allocating CSR investments and practices (Hu & Liu, 2020).

Implementing CSR initiatives directly improves employee well-being and enhances positive emotional states through increased organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Hayat & Afshari, 2022). However, the impact of CSR on employee well-being and job satisfaction differs between managers and employees (Kim et al., 2020). There is also a discrepancy between front-office and back-office employees regarding employee attitudes, satisfaction, and commitment to hotels implementing CSR (Fung et al., 2020). Kim et al. (2020) found that CSR areas related to social/philanthropic and ethical aspects of hotels improve employees' attitudes, satisfaction, and pro-social and pro-environmental behaviours at work. Employee intrinsic motivation was also found to positively impact employee work engagement and innovative work behaviour by Nazir & Islam (2020b). They acknowledged that work engagement significantly positively impacts employees' innovative work behaviour. However, leadership with solid social connections is vital in inspiring and motivating employees. Another study by Nazir and Islam (2020a) showed that CSR positively affects employee engagement. CSR participation provides employees with meaningful and personally valuable work experiences. The experience of participating in community-oriented CSR initiatives will help employees better participate in CSR projects at their workplace. CSR engagement practices can be a tool to improve employee engagement, employee retention, and performance in hotels (Supanti et al., 2015).

3. Global research trends in the hotel industry

Using the Biblioshiny analysis tool, the research trends clearly outlined the topics related to CSR for hotel employees. The well-considered research topics among scholars in the period 2023 - 2024 were Responsible Human Resources Management, Humanos, Environmental Management Strategy, Environmental Commitment, Environmental Performance, Pro-Environmental Behavior, Employee Environmental Performance, Sustainability, Employer Brand, Job Autonomy, Job Insecurity, Job Embeddedness, Intrinsic Motivation, Altruism, Psychological Well-Being, Crisis Preparedness (Figure 7).
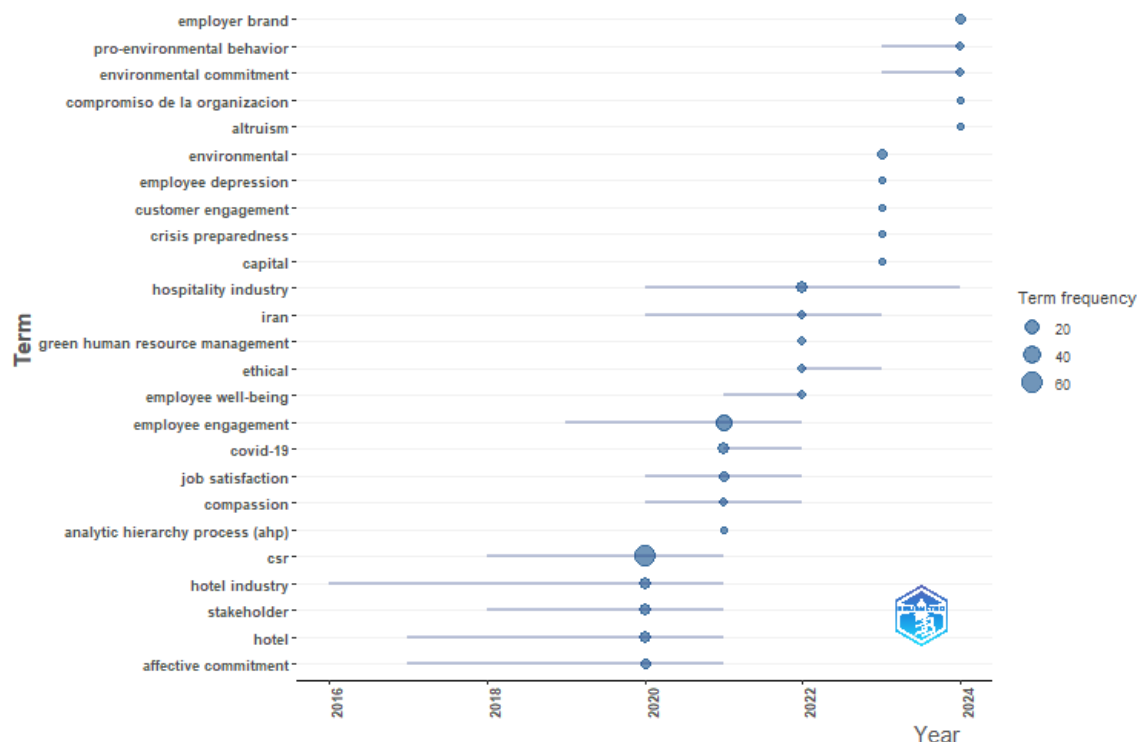
Figure 7: Research topic trends

(Source: Data analysis results, July 2024)

4. Research gaps

Thematic Map was used to analyse the trends of research topics related to CSR for hotel employees during

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2013 - 2023. Each cluster in the diagram represented a specific research topic, and the clusters' size indicated the number of terms related to each topic. Each quadrant in the Strategic Diagrams represented a separate research topic. The quadrant at the upper right of the diagram depicted the main topics (Motor Themes), distinguished by high Centrality and Density, indicating that the research was well-developed. The quadrant at the upper left of the diagram represented the distinct topics (Niche Themes), which were characterised by low Centrality and high Density and required further research. In addition, the topics located at the lower proper position of the diagram were called Basic Themes. On the other hand, the lower left quadrants represented emerging or declining themes, characterised by low concentration and density (Paganou et al., 2024).
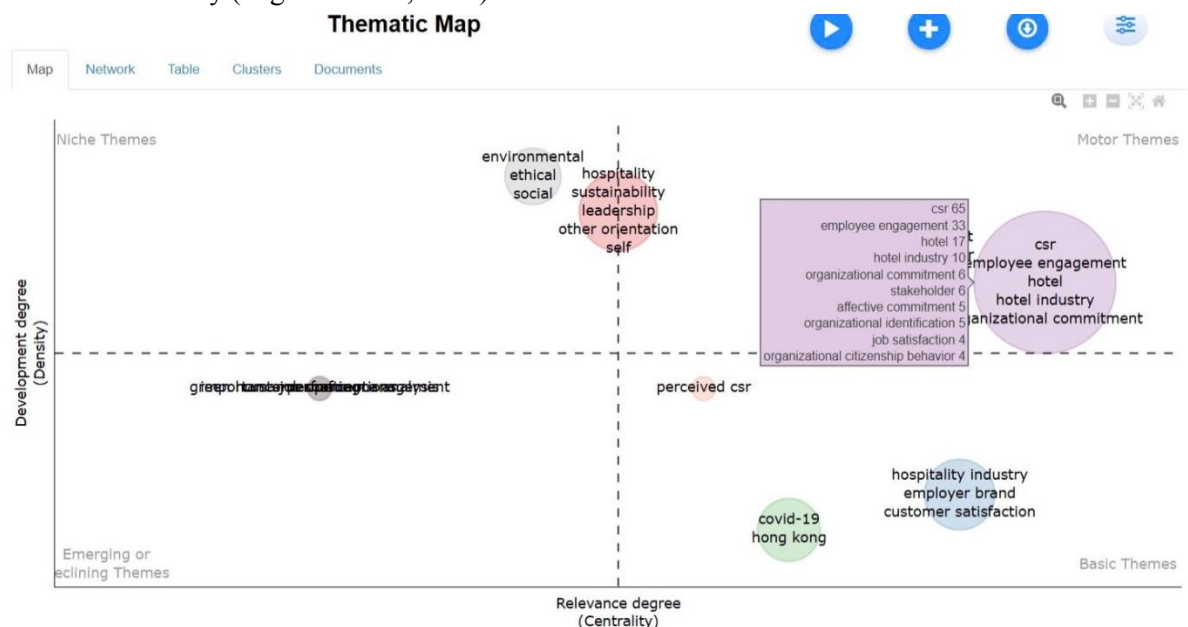
Figure 8: Thematic maps of emerging research topics and trends

(Source: Data analysis results, July 2024)

Figure 8 shows that CSR, Employee Engagement, Hotel Industry, Organizational Commitment, Stakeholder, Affective Commitment, Organizational Identification, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour are in the upper right quadrant (Motor themes). The following text should be remembered. These well-developed research topics represent prominent trends in which scholars worldwide have been interested. The results of qualitative analysis of typical studies worldwide showed that previous studies had not emphasised the impact of CSR initiatives and practices or studied employees' effectiveness when developing the hotel's CSR strategy, employees' awareness, expectations, and participation in CSR activities. Additionally, the role of demographic control variables (such as personality, qualifications, income, management level, etc.) has not been thoroughly studied. Addressing these gaps is crucial for further research. Therefore, these topics call for further related research to continue exploration.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

The initial study synthesised 29,699 articles related to the keywords through the PRISMA technique. After automatic screening, the results were that 2,146 works were eligible for bibliometric analysis in the tourism and hotel industry. From screening by criteria, 86 articles were used for bibliometric analysis regarding the hotel industry. The author then continues to conduct an in-depth analysis of the content of 37 studies related to CSR in the hospitality industry. The results of the overall research analysis related to employee CSR in the hotel business partly outlined how the research on this area is taking place worldwide. This shows that employee CSR in the hotel business is a trending topic that needs more in-depth research. The research gaps have also been clarified. Previous studies have not emphasised the impact of CSR initiatives and practices. Additionally, employees' effectiveness in building the hotel's CSR strategy and their perceptions, expectations, and participation in CSR activities have not been studied. Furthermore, the role of demographic control variables has not been thoroughly examined. Therefore, CSR research concerning employees should concentrate on investigating employees' views on how CSR practices affect their satisfaction, commitment, loyalty, and intention to stay. This should also encompass intermediate variables such as

organisational identification, behaviour, perceived external prestige, intrinsic motivation,…

2. Discussion

In general, in tourism and hotel business, scholars studying CSR mainly focus on analysing the status of CSR practices in hotels and the role and impact of CSR on employee satisfaction, customer brand preference and business competitiveness. Most studies have been published in the US, China, and the United Kingdom. International Journal of Hospitality Management, International Journal of Contemporary Management and Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management are the three journals with the most scholars' publications about CSR. Regarding the relationship between CSR and employee engagement, scholars have only studied the direct impact of CSR on employee engagement or work engagement and have not expanded on the indirect impacts through intermediate or moderating variables. The mentioned fact emphasises the importance of further investigating potential variables as mediators and moderators in the relationship between CSR and employee engagement in the hotel industry. This research direction is crucial for filling the gaps in understanding the link between CSR and employee engagement.

Research recommendations

In the future, scholars can consider exploring further one of the following research directions:

1. Research on factors to CSR initiatives and practices in hotels;

2. Employee participation effectiveness in the hotel's CSR strategy development;

3. Employee awareness, expectations, and participation in hotel CSR activities;

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THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT
IN THE RELATIONSHIP OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
AND EMPLOYEE TASK PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

Purpose

This study aims to enhance our comprehensive understanding of the impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on task performance by elucidating both the direct and indirect effects through the mediator of the psychological contract based on the Conservation of Resource theory.

Design/Methodology/approach

The study the study will be tested by using PLS-SEM techniques to analyse the sample of 300 employees in the luxury hospitality industry from the three metropolitan areas of Vietnam.

Findings

The finding is expected to show that CSR positively and significantly has a direct impact on employees' task performance and via psychological contract as a mediating influence mechanism.

Originality/value

This research develops a new framework to explain the CSR- task performance outcomes relationship using the Conservation of Resource theory.

Practical/managerial implication

The research is expected to provide managers with an understanding of the link between perceived CSR and task performance with psychological contract as a mediator in order to develop effective policies to increase positive perceptions of CSR.

Keywords: *Corporate social responsibility, task performance, psychological contract.*

1. Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has gained prominence in the hotel industry, driven by concerns such as pollution, food safety, and resource depletion (Farrington et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2016; Wells et al., 2016). While extant research on tourism and hospitality CSR predominantly concentrates on institutional and organizational aspects, the individual-level components, notably internal stakeholders like employees, have been regrettably overlooked (Wells et al., 2015). Rectifying this gap necessitates a micro-level examination of social responsibility, which proves pivotal in comprehending positive individual behavior and performance outcomes (Flammer & Luo, 2016; Supanti & Butcher, 2018). Despite CSR studies in the luxury hotel sector that scrutinize perspectives from enterprises and customers, the viewpoints of employees, who constitute vital stakeholders, have been comparatively neglected (Gürlek & Tuna, 2019; Ko et al., 2019). This research seeks to address this deficiency by investigating the impact of CSR on employee task performance within the luxury hotel sector, thereby making a meaningful contribution to CSR research in the hospitality and tourist industries.

The examination of employee behavior through the lens of the psychological contract constitutes a distinctive feature in pertinent literature (Robinson et al., 1994). While recent research has explored the association between CSR and employee attitudes and behaviors, the nexus between CSR and the psychological contract remains less elucidated (Carmeli et al., 2007; Brammer et al., 2007; Valentine & Fleischman, 2008; Evans & Davis, 2011; Mirvis, 2012). A comprehensive understanding of the relationship between organizations and employees necessitates consideration of the psychological contract, encompassing emotions, perceptions, expectations, and workplace meaning-making (Rousseau, 2001; Persson & Wasieleski, 2015). This study addresses this gap by investigating the interplay between CSR, the psychological contract, and employee task performance.

This research augments the hotel CSR literature by scrutinizing employee task performance at the micro-level, elucidating how CSR influences employee behavior through the psychological contract, and extending inquiries into individual differences in hospitality task performance reactions. Furthermore, it advances CSR literature by examining the influence of CSR activities on employee task performance in emerging economies.

2. Theoretical framework and hypothesis development

2.1. CSR and task performance

Corporate social responsibility constitutes a comprehensive framework encapsulating a company's commitment to social responsibility, responsiveness, and socially beneficial operations, extending beyond legal obligations for both societal and corporate advantages (Carroll, 1991; McWilliams & Siegel, 2000). In the context of evolving environmental dynamics, CSR has garnered significance in tourism and hospitality research (Kim & Ham, 2016; Park et al., 2014). CSR demonstrates a positive impact on hotel employees' behaviour, particularly on crucial individual outcomes such as task performance (Kim et al., 2017; Luu, 2017; Rothausen et al., 2017; Shin et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2015). The provision of CSR resources by companies results in heightened employee effort, resilience in the face of challenges, and a reduced likelihood of encountering imbalanced psychological states at work (Schaufeli et al., 2009; Sun & Pan, 2008). Over time, companies embracing CSR create more engaging and appealing job environments, contributing significantly to overall employee satisfaction (Luu, 2019). Moreover, CSR is intricately linked to task performance through organisational identification, motivating employees to exert greater effort and enhance their overall performance in the workplace (He et al., 2019). The following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. CSR practices impact employee task performance directly.

2.2. CSR and the psychological contract

Psychological contracts (PC) encapsulate employees' perceptions of implicit obligations and compromises between employers and employees, delineating mutual responsibilities and functioning as a communication conduit (Rousseau, 2001; 1989; Wang et al., 2003). Fulfilment of social responsibilities by companies, such as equitable compensation, promotional opportunities, performance-based rewards, and career development initiatives, correlates with heightened employee efforts, loyalty, advanced notice of resignation, and valuable contributions.

The psychological contract comprises transactional and relational dimensions (Rousseau, 1995). The Transactional Psychological Contract (TPC) involves short-term reciprocal relationships based on specific employee skills and competencies (Savarimuthu & Jerena Rachael, 2017). Employees commit to overtime, extra roles, or additional tasks in exchange for improved remuneration, performance recognition leading to awards, and participation in company-sanctioned training and career development initiatives (Rousseau, 1995; Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998). Breaches in a transactional contract may lead to its dissolution, as both parties anticipate absolute and equitable reciprocity, with behavioral adjustments occurring if either party fails to uphold their contractual obligations (Liu & Zhou, 2017).

Perceptions of heightened social responsibility arise when companies fulfill social commitments, provide substantial benefits or advancement opportunities, and formulate comprehensive career plans (Sabrina et al., 2019). In response, employees invest effort in overtime, extra roles, or additional tasks to secure enhanced returns, achieve performance recognition for awards, and engage in training and career advancement facilitated by the company (Rousseau, 1995; Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998). Therefore, the research hypotheses posed are:

H2. CSR is positively related to transactional psychological contracts.

The Relational psychological contract (RPC) is rooted in social-emotional reciprocation, wherein employees exchange long-term commitments, loyalty, engagement, and a willingness to adapt to internal task adjustments for sustained job orientation provided by the organization (Rousseau, 1995; Bal et al., 2010; Coyle-Shapiro & Neuman, 2004). When a company prioritizes its employees' interests by offering promotion opportunities or significant benefits, employees perceive the company as fulfilling its social obligation, fostering increased trust and commitment (Evans & Davis, 2014). Employees orient themselves toward long-term growth goals, aligning their objectives with the company's strategic goals and establishing a psychological contract (Liu & Zhou, 2017). Notably, there exists a positive relationship between CSR and the psychological contract. So we make the following research hypothesis:

H3. CSR is positively related to relational psychological contracts.

2.3. Psychological contract and task performance

Grounded in the Conservation of Resources (CoR) theory, individuals strive to acquire, retain, protect, and foster valued resources, exhibiting a proclivity to avert resource loss, particularly in adverse circumstances (Hobfoll, 2001; Lee & Ok, 2014). The psychological contract represents a positive psychological resource, compelling individuals to safeguard and uphold it (Luthans et al., 2007). Organisations, by contributing to the conservation of positive psychological resources and mitigating resource depletion, can enhance positive employee behaviour in the workplace (Avey et al., 2010). In alignment with the foundational tenet of COR, both the transactional psychological contract (TPC) and the relational psychological contract (RPC) are fulfilled through psychological resources, empowering employees to navigate workplace challenges while preserving a sense of joy and motivation. Consequently, a direct and influential link manifests between the psychological contract and task performance. The study hypothesis is as follows:

H4. The transactional psychological contract has a particularly positive impact on task performance.

H5. The relational psychological contract has a specific positive impact on task performance.

2.4. The mediating role of psychological contract

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory provides insights into the impact of various workplace resources on employee attitudes, emotions, well-being, creativity (Ghafoor & Haar, 2022), and prosocial behaviours (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2015). According to COR, resources encompass the work environment, job connections, monetary incentives, and opportunities for career advancement. A pivotal concept in COR is resource investment, involving the allocation of resources to prevent losses, recover from setbacks, and acquire additional resources (Hobfoll, 2001). Drawing from COR literature (Hobfoll et al., 2018), the utilisation of resource caravans and investment behaviours allows us to elucidate the interconnections between corporate social responsibility (CSR), the psychological contract, and task performance, as resource caravans posit the interconnectedness of diverse resources.

The psychological contract significantly shapes employees' attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions of their job responsibilities. CSR, in turn, influences employee attitudes and behaviors through the psychological contract. Employees who perceive a company's social responsibility are more inclined to value these resources, adopting proactive strategies to acquire more resources, fostering a relational psychological contract, and investing in abundant resources through extra-role behaviours, particularly task performance.

Individuals exhibit a heightened inclination to work for socially responsible organisations, scrutinising the company's long-term interests, displaying positive attitudes or actions, and reducing their propensity to leave (Behroozz et al., 2018). Organisations with robust social responsibility provide more career advancement and bonuses, cultivating engagement among employees who contribute more energy, emotions, and materials due to reciprocal norms. Social responsibilities enhance employee satisfaction, loyalty, and trust in the organisation (Peterson, 2004), giving rise to a relational psychological contract. Such employees are more likely to prioritize the company's long-term cooperative relationship, sacrifice short-term interests, and contribute to overall organizational performance (Zhao et al., 2019). From these discussions, we hypothesise:

H6. CSR has an indirect effect on increasing employee's task performances through Transactional psychological contract

H7. CSR has an indirect effect on increasing employee's task performances through Relational psychological contract

Based on above hypotheses, the proposed research model is as follows:
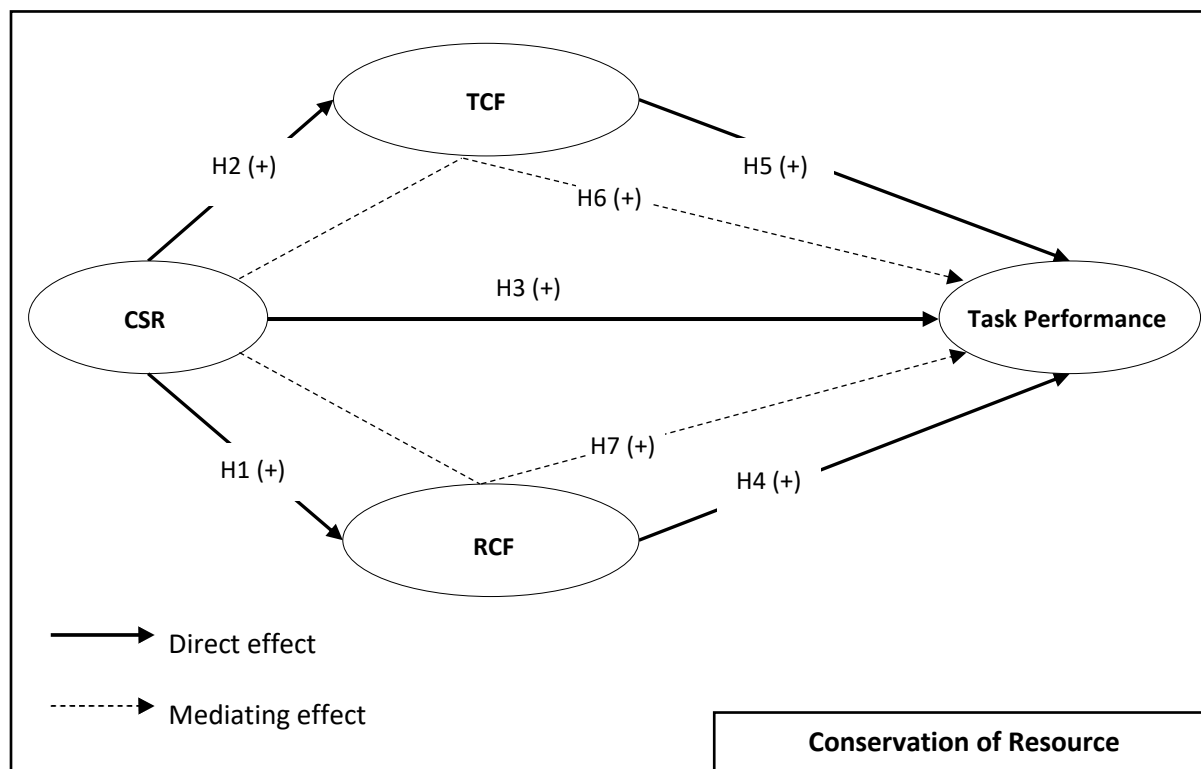
Figure 1. Conceptual framework

3. Methodology

3.1. Proposed research methodology

There are two primary phases in the research process. In the first step, the literature review is undertaken to identify the research issues and gaps. Research variables, a research model, and hypotheses are proposed based on the observed research gaps. Measurement scales are created to measure the variables in the research model. The measurement scales are adopted from previous studies. Finally, a survey questionnaire for the primary study is created in this stage.

In the second step, the primary study aims to evaluate the accuracy, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the measurement scales. A self-administered survey will be conducted to gather a sample of 300 employees from luxury hotels in Vietnam. The validity and reliability of the studied constructs and the presented hypotheses will be tested using this sample. To assess the reliability of the constructs, this study uses Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability. Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability values are expected to be higher than 0.7 to ensure the validity. The average variance extracted is used to assess convergent validity, and the cut-off value is 0.5. Finally, this study evaluates the discriminant validity using HTMT matrix, and the values of the matrix are expected to be lower than 0.85. The proposed hypotheses, including direct, and indirect, will also be tested using the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS version 3 on the collected data.

Based on the testing results, this study is going to suggest several theoretical conclusions that highlight the need to consider potential outcomes when attempting to understand the CSR research in the luxury hotel context. This study is also expected to outline serveral implications for hotel managers and HR practices to improve the perception of CSR activities among their employees. Finally, we show some present study limitations that will help future research.

3.2. Measurement scale

More specifically, the multi-dimensional construct of CSR perception will come from the study of (Turker, 2009) with seventeen items. Three-item index will be used from (He et al., 2019) to measure task performance. The psychological contract scale comprises twenty-one items from Robinson and Morrison (1995)'s scale. Demographic variables include age, gender, education, and employee tenure.

4. Research implication and limitations

4.1. Theoretical implications

This research is expected to have some significant contributions to the CSR domain. Firstly, it establishes a robust connection between CSR activities and employee task performance, demonstrating that CSR efforts benefiting both social and non-social stakeholders positively impact employees. Furthermore, the study affirms that CSR programmes enhance employee work behaviour, reinforcing the concept that engagement in CSR leads to increased resource provision and perceived resource availability, prompting greater employee investment in meeting employment requirements. This study enriches the COR theory by linking CSR to task performance.

Secondly, the findings align with Glavas's (2016) recommendation to incorporate individual-level data in the CSR framework, departing from prior CSR research focused predominantly on macroeconomic and institutional impacts on organisational performance. Recognising employees as vital internal stakeholders, this study underscores the importance of monitoring CSR's influence on individual outcomes. By providing data on employee attitudes, behaviour, and task performance, it contributes to micro-level CSR research.

Finally, by applying Western constructs, particularly COR theory, in the context of Vietnam, this research demonstrates the theory's applicability across diverse economies and industries. Amidst a recent CSR focus on the hotel and tourism industry, this study expands the scope of CSR research within hospitality by encompassing employee behaviour outcomes, providing a comprehensive framework to comprehend the mechanisms through which CSR programmes influence employee behaviour.

4.2. Managerial implications

Contrary to divergent scholarly perspectives, our data unequivocally indicates that CSR have the potential to enhance employee job performance. Middle managers should be cognizant that authentic CSR programs possess the capacity to reshape employee behavior, thereby augmenting the organization's competitive edge. Companies must invest in CSR endeavors to elevate employee performance. We advocate for the incorporation of both social and non-social dimensions into CSR initiatives integrated into daily operations and managerial activities.

Hotel managers should disseminate CSR information to their workforce. Vigilant monitoring of employee perceptions regarding their company's CSR commitments is essential, as these perceptions significantly influence employee attitudes, behavior, and performance. Discrepancies may exist between CSR implementation and employee perception, highlighting the necessity for educational and training programs to enhance CSR awareness.

4.3. Limitations and future research

The analysis presents certain limitations. The study mostly looked at how employees felt about CSR and what happened as a result. It used a cross-sectional design, which has its problems when it comes to showing how CSR affects individual outcomes over time. Future investigations should adopt a longitudinal approach to thoroughly examine the longitudinal link between CSR initiatives and task performance. Recognizing the data source as hotel staff introduces an inevitable typical deviation. To address this, the randomization of questionnaire items and scrutiny of common variance bias were undertaken to ensure methodological rigor (Shin et al., 2016). Collaboration between managers and employees in providing data to researchers is encouraged.

Our study, centering on the impact of CSR on employees, advocates for the development of a comprehensive multi-level model that integrates organizational and individual influences, bridging macro and micro-level CSR research. Acknowledging the omission of other organizational contexts in this study, future research should incorporate leadership and Human Resource Management (HRM) as predictive factors for employee attitudes and behavior. A more nuanced and comprehensive conceptual paradigm is recommended for future research on the interplay between CSR and HRM.

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A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL OF INTERNATIONAL TOURIST'S DESTINATION DECISION-MAKING: DECODING THE INFLUENCE OF PUSH-PULL-VALUE-BEHAVIOR FACTORS

Nguyen Anh Loi[1,2] & Nguyen Thi Le Huong[3]

Abstract

The tourism industry significantly impacts the global economy through job creation, foreign exchange earnings, and infrastructure development. To attract international tourists, it is crucial to understand the factors influencing their destination choice decisions (DCD). This study aims to develop a comprehensive model, the international tourist destination decision-making (ITDDM) model, integrating push-pull theory (PPT), theory of planned behavior (TPB), rational choice theory (RCT), and behavioral decision theory (BDT). The research focuses on developing measurement scales and assessing their reliability and validity to understand factors such as attitude toward destination (ATT), travel motivation (MOT), personal value (PV), perceived risk (PR), country image (CI), destination image (DI), and destination information (IS). The study employs a multi-phased approach, including a literature review, expert consultations, focus group discussions, and preliminary quantitative research. Data collection involved surveying 200 tourists in the Mekong Delta using convenience sampling, and the data was analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0 to evaluate unidimensionality, reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the scales. The findings highlight the significant influence of both push and pull factors on tourist's decisions. The validated measurement scales provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the decision-making processes of international tourists, offering valuable insights for policymakers and tourism developers.

Keywords: destination decision-making, push-pull theory, theory of planned behavior, rational choice theory, behavioral decision theory.

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is vital to the global economy, significantly contributing to job creation, foreign exchange earnings, and infrastructure development. To attract international tourists, destinations must understand the factors influencing their DCD. This research aims to develop a comprehensive model (ITDDM) that integrates PPT, TPB, RCT, and BDT to decode these influences on international tourists.

Understanding international tourist's decision-making processes from intuitive reactions to deliberate thoughts helps optimize social media and electronic word-of-mouth influence (Kreg & Kathrin, 2022), develop tourism products based on push and pull factors (Arzu, 2022), and ensure safety and security (Adina Shafi et al., 2020). These insights assist marketers and service providers in effectively adjusting their strategies (Deokhyun et al., 2019).

Developing measurement scales is crucial for ensuring the consistency and reliability of research results (Dittrich, 2022; Lamm et al., 2020). Scales must be systematically and rigorously designed, from item generation to validation, to collect accurate data aligned with predefined concepts (Grimm & Helm, 2020). Researcher's active participation ensures appropriate statistical methods are chosen, strengthening research outcome's validity and reliability (Younas & Porr, 2023). Accurate scale development enhances data quality and affects the interpretability

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and applicability of research findings in tourism policy and strategy planning.

Tailoring scales to specific localities ensures accurate measurement and research value. Developing scales for factors influencing international tourist's DCD is essential for subsequent research, enhancing scientific and practical value.

In the Mekong Delta, an underdeveloped region with great tourism potential, researching factors influencing international tourist's DCD is crucial. Known for its waterways, unique culture, and rich cuisine, the Mekong Delta faces limitations in tourism infrastructure and services. Studying and developing scales for these influencing factors can support the development of Mekong Delta tourism, improve service quality and tourist experiences, promote economic and social development, and foster sustainable tourism.

Objectives

1. Develop a comprehensive model ITDDM: This research aims to develop a new model to explain international tourist destination decision-making, incorporating factors from PPT, TPB, RCT, and BDT.

2. Examine and evaluate the influence of factors on DCD: The study will analyze the role of push-pull-value-behavior factors on international tourist destination decision-making.

3. Identify and assess the reliability of measurement scales for concepts in the research model: The research will develop appropriate measurement scales for the factors in the model and test their reliability and validity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical framework

Previous studies often used the TPB and PPT to investigate tourist's destination choice behavior. This research integrates four prominent theories to explore the complex motivations influencing international tourist destination decision-making: PPT, TPB, RCT, and BDT. PPT, introduced by Lee and expanded by Dann, explains tourist's decisions based on intrinsic (push) factors like the need for relaxation and extrinsic (pull) factors like destination appeal (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977; Lee, 1966). TPB, developed by Ajzen, posits that behavior is driven by intentions influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). RCT, grounded in economic principles and expanded by Becker and Stigler (Green, 2002), suggests that individuals make decisions by maximizing personal benefits and evaluating costs and benefits. BDT, by Tversky, combines psychology and economics, highlighting that decisions are influenced by psychological biases and social factors, not just rationality (Tversky, 2013). Combining these theories provides a comprehensive framework to understand the multifaceted nature of tourist's decision-making processes, enhancing insights into their motivations and behaviors.

Factors influencing international tourist destination decision-making

Push factors: Rooted in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, push factors are internal motivations or needs arising from imbalances or stress (Dann, 1977). These include psychological and social desires such as escaping daily life, relaxation, self-esteem, health improvement, adventure, and social interaction (Uysal et al., 2009). Personal attributes like age, gender, income, education, lifestyle, and occupation also influence travel decisions (Pestana et al., 2020). Push factors are intrinsic motivations driving tourists to make travel decisions.

Pull factors: These are destination attributes that attract tourists, such as infrastructure, local friendliness, quality of food and accommodation, safety, affordability, and cultural and historical richness (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Uysal et al., 2009). Destination image, expectations, and actual experiences play significant roles in attracting tourists. Pull factors, including accessibility and situational elements like safety and seasonality, significantly influence tourist's choices.

Interplay of push and pull factors: Understanding the interaction between push and pull factors is crucial in studying tourist behavior and destination choice (Látková, 2019). The push-pull model explains why tourists choose specific destinations, with marketing highlighting destination attributes that meet tourist's needs (Kanagaraj & Bindu, 2013; Prayag & Ryan, 2011). Push factors (motivations) are recognized first, followed by the influence of pull factors (destination attributes) (Alghamdi, 2007; Prayag & Ryan, 2011). Research shows a positive relationship between push and pull factors, both affecting DCD (Ali, 2012; Kim & Chalip, 2004).

Impact on international tourist's decisions: The push-pull framework (Uysal et al., 2009) is essential in understanding international tourist's destination choices. Push factors include personal motivations like rest, adventure, and social interaction, while pull factors focus on destination attractions such as climate, cultural heritage,

events, leisure services, image, and security (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Klenosky, 2016). The interaction between these factors is key to developing effective tourism strategies to attract and retain international tourists.

Decision-making models and destination choice

Consumer behavior and decision-making processes are crucial in tourism marketing and management. Key theoretical models by (Kotler & Keller, 2011; Um & Crompton, 1991), and (Harrison-Hill, 2000) provide detailed frameworks to understand these processes. Kotler & Keller's model includes marketing and environmental stimuli, personal and psychological factors within the consumer's black box, and the decision-making process involving problem recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives. Um & Crompton's model focuses on external factors like destination attributes and marketing communications, and internal factors such as personal characteristics, MOT, and ATT. Harrison-Hill's model identifies key factors influencing tourist's decisions, including marketing impact, geographic distance, costs, demographics, trip characteristics, and MOT. It outlines a decision process from eliminating non-interesting destinations to selecting the most suitable one. These models highlight the importance of understanding how external stimuli and internal psychosocial factors impact consumer and tourist decisions. These insights provide a robust basis for developing effective marketing strategies, optimizing tourist experiences, and enhancing tourism management and development.

Literature review on factors influencing destination choice decisions

Domestic and international studies offer a comprehensive view of factors influencing international tourist's destination choices, identifying key elements such as MOT, perceived risk, demographics, travel experience, attitude towards the destination, quality of experience, PV, IS, DI, and CI (Tab.1). Notably, destination image (F9) is the most researched factor, underscoring its importance in attracting tourists. MOT (F1) is also crucial, with studies highlighting the impact of relaxation, adventure, and social interactions. IS (F8) is widely discussed for its role in providing accurate and comprehensive details. ATT (F5) significantly influences decisions, reflecting positive or negative perceptions. PR (F2) is also notable, with concerns about safety, health, and finances being key considerations. These findings highlight the need for destination managers to enhance DI, address MOT, provide reliable information, foster positive attitudes, and mitigate perceived risks to attract international tourists effectively.

Table 1. Factors influencing international tourist destination decision-making

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9	F10
Thiene et al., 2017	☐		☐							
Karl, 2018		☐	☐	☐						
Pestana et al., 2020	☐			☐	☐					
Li et al., 2016					☐			☐		
Cong et al., 2021		☐			☐	☐				
Werenowska & Rzepka, 2020								☐		
Tham et al., 2020		☐						☐	☐	
Matikiti-Manyevere & Kruger, 2019								☐		
Trivedi & Rozia, 2019								☐	☐	
Pan et al., 2021								☐		
Bausch et al., 2021								☐		
Chaulagain et al., 2019									☐	☐
Mandasari, 2021									☐	
Fieger et al., 2019									☐	
Girish et al., 2021								☐	☐	

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9	F10
Hasan et al., 2021					☐			☐		
Pereira et al., 2021							☐		☐	
Zeleke & Biwota, 2020	☐		☐					☐	☐	
Pawaskar & Goel, 2016	☐								☐	
Wu et al., 2022	☐				☐			☐	☐	
Xinh, 2023		☐			☐				☐	
Ervina & Octaviany, 2022	☐				☐			☐	☐	
Giang, 2022							☐	☐	☐	
Le et al., 2023		☐							☐	
Tam, 2019								☐	☐	
Be & Trinh, 2022					☐			☐	☐	

Note: F1: travel motivation, F2: perceived risk, F3: demographics, F4: travel experience, F5: attitude towards destination, F6: quality of experience, F7: PV, F8: IS, F9: destination image F10: national image.

Research on factors influencing international tourist's DCD highlights several gaps. Firstly, the impact of PV and national image on DCD remains underexplored, and the moderating role of perceived risks (safety, health, financial) is not fully understood. Methodologically, there is a need for studies that integrate both push and pull factors using qualitative and quantitative approaches, such as PLS-SEM, to provide a comprehensive understanding of these influences. Most Vietnamese studies currently rely on regression models with SPSS and do not examine the interrelationships between factors. Contextually, the post-Covid-19 tourism sector is highly competitive, and international tourist arrivals have not yet reached pre-2019 levels. The Vietnamese government's Resolution No. 82/NQ-CP aims to develop tourism into a leading economic sector, making it crucial to develop effective strategies to attract international tourists. Addressing these gaps will enhance our understanding of tourist's decision-making processes and support the creation of effective marketing and promotional strategies for the Mekong Delta and other Vietnamese destinations.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a multi-phased approach to understand international tourist decision-making processes.

This research employs a multi-phased approach to understand international tourist decision-making processes.

Phase 1: literature review and theoretical framework

A comprehensive literature review will be conducted using academic sources from peer-reviewed journals (Scopus, Web of Science, etc.), industry reports, and tourism marketing materials. This review will focus on tourist destination choice, push-pull theory (PPT), theory of planned behavior (TPB), rational choice theory (RCT), behavioral decision theory (BDT), and international tourism trends. Insights gained from this review will be used to develop a theoretical framework that outlines key concepts, relationships, and hypotheses to be investigated.

Phase 2: data collection

Academic articles, industry reports, and marketing materials will be analyzed using qualitative coding techniques to identify themes, concepts, and patterns related to tourist decision-making. Thematic frameworks will synthesize the findings from this secondary data analysis, focusing on travel decision-making and destination choice, using high-quality peer-reviewed articles to inform the conceptual model. Expert interviews and group discussions are crucial for refining the measurement scale for factors influencing international tourist destination decision-making in the Mekong Delta, as well as identifying and expanding additional influencing factors. Feedback will be gathered from 28 experts with extensive tourism experience through online forms and focus group discussions. This process

includes contacting experts, preparing questions and materials, collecting responses, and analyzing feedback to optimize the measurement scale.

Phase 3: testing, selecting, and refining measurement scales

In this phase, the author conducts preliminary quantitative research to assess the reliability of the measurement scales before implementing the official quantitative research. A direct survey is conducted with 200 tourists who have visited tourist destinations in the Mekong Delta using a convenience sampling method. A 5-point Likert scale is employed to design the questionnaire for the preliminary quantitative research. Data collection takes place from May 10, 2024, to May 28, 2024. The data is processed using SmartPLS 4.0 software, and the measurement model is evaluated based on criteria of unidimensionality, reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the scales. The results of this preliminary research provide a foundation for developing the questionnaire for the official quantitative research phase, helping to refine the measurement scales and ensuring their validity and reliability for subsequent research.

Phase 4: data analysis and interpretation

The study employs both qualitative and quantitative analysis methods to explore international tourist destination decision-making. Findings from document analysis, expert interviews, and focus group discussions will be compared and contrasted to identify similarities, differences, and complementary perspectives. Triangulation will be used to strengthen research credibility and validity. Based on these integrated findings, the International Tourist Destination Decision-Making (ITDDM) model will be constructed, outlining variables, relationships, and mechanisms influencing destination choices, and explaining the model's contribution to existing knowledge. Evidence-based answers will be provided to the research questions, exploring the influence of push-pull-value-behavior factors on tourist decision-making. A thorough review of relevant literature identified seven key factors influencing international tourist destination decision-making: ATT, MOT, PV, PR, CI, DI, and IS. To further validate and potentially expand these factors, a survey involving 28 domain experts specializing in tourism, economics, and culture was conducted. The survey results indicated a unanimous agreement among all experts on the importance of these seven key factors. Preliminary quantitative research is conducted to refine the measurement scales, ensuring their validity and reliability for subsequent research.

Proposed research model and measurement scale

Development of research hypotheses

International tourism is rapidly growing, and understanding the factors influencing ITDDM is crucial for developing effective strategies. Kotler & Keller (2011) highlight the importance of marketing and environmental factors in consumer decision-making. According to Um & Crompton (1991), both external stimuli and internal socio-psychological factors influence ITDDM. Harrison-Hill (2000) also emphasizes the impact of marketing, geographic distance, and destination costs, along with MOT, personal knowledge, and emotions.

ITDDM process for international tourists, developed from theories like PPT, RCT, BDT, TPB, consumer behavior models, and synthesized factors influencing destination choice. Push factors include MOT, ATT, PV, and PR, while pull factors include CI, destination image, and IS. The process begins with need recognition, evaluation of alternatives, cost-benefit analysis, psychological processing, and finally, the destination choice decision. Developing research hypotheses based on theoretical frameworks and proven models is necessary to better understand international tourist's behavior. These factors aid in building effective marketing strategies and optimizing tourist experiences, thereby increasing satisfaction and tourist numbers.

Based on this theoretical foundation, the following hypotheses are proposed to explore the factors influencing ITDDM:

Influence of tourist attitude towards the destination: Tourist attitude towards a destination is multifaceted, including emotions, perceptions, and behaviors (Ajzen, 1991; Crompton, 1979; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). According to TPB, a positive attitude towards a destination leads to stronger intentions to visit (Ervina & Octaviany, 2022). Positive attitudes formed from perceptions, personality, and PR significantly influence future travel decisions (Cong et al., 2021; Li et al., 2016; Pestana et al., 2020). Therefore:

H1: Tourist attitude towards the destination positively affects the destination choice decision of international tourists.

Influence of travel motivation: MOT includes push factors (internal needs like escaping daily life) and pull

factors (destination attractions) (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981). The Push & Pull Theory explains that MOT positively impact ITDDM by aligning personal needs with destination attributes (Azeez, 2022). Push factors and pull factors both shape this decision (Fieger et al., 2019; Han & Hyun, 2018; Soldatenko et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2022). Thus:

H2: Travel motivation positively affects the destination choice decision of international tourists.

Influence of personal values: PV are core beliefs and principles that shape an individual's decisions and actions (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). PV affect attitudes and intentions, leading to destination choices that align with these values (Pereira et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2020). Therefore:

H3a: Personal values positively affect the destination choice decision of international tourists.

H3b: Personal values positively affect travel motivation.

H3c: Personal values positively affect tourist attitude towards the destination.

Moderating role of perceived risk: PR includes various potential dangers or negative outcomes, influencing tourist's decisions (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011; Sonmez & Sirakaya, 2002) PR negatively affects ITDDM (Baraquil & Borbon, 2022; Uslu & Karabulut, 2018; Yeung & Yee, 2020). It moderates the relationship between MOT, attitudes, and destination choices (Han et al., 2020; Han et al., 2019). Hence:

H4a: Perceived risk negatively affects the destination choice decision of international tourists.

H4b: Perceived risk negatively moderates the relationship between travel motivation and destination choice decision of international tourists.

H4c: Perceived risk negatively moderates the relationship between tourist attitude towards the destination and destination choice decision of international tourists.

Influence of country image: CI is the overall perception and reputation of a nation, including cultural heritage, natural beauty, political stability, and economic prosperity (Camprubí & Gassiot-Melian, 2023; Ferreira et al., 2022). A positive CI is a crucial pull factor, enhancing the attractiveness of destinations within the country (Aragonés-Jericó et al., 2022; Xia & Xu, 2023). Therefore:

H5a: Country image positively affects the destination choice decision of international tourists.

H5b: Country image positively affects the destination image.

Influence of destination image: Destination image is the overall perception and impression of a tourist destination, including tangible and intangible aspects like infrastructure, services, safety, climate, culture, and personal experiences (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Crompton, 1979). A positive destination image acts as a pull factor, enhancing attractiveness and influencing ITDDM (Le et al., 2022; Tham et al., 2020; Trivedi & Rozia, 2019). Therefore:

H6a: Destination image positively affects the destination choice decision of international tourists.

H6b: Destination image positively affects travel motivation.

H6c: Destination image positively affects tourist attitude towards the destination.

Influence of destination information: IS includes all details about a destination's features, services, experiences, and other relevant factors, shaping tourist's perceptions and decisions (Kotler & Keller, 2011). Information about the destination enhances its attractiveness and influences ITDDM by providing reliable data and shaping social norms supporting tourism (Agyapong & Yuan, 2022; Li et al., 2016; Matikiti-Manyevere & Kruger, 2019; Trivedi & Rozia, 2019; Werenowska & Rzepka, 2020). Thus:

H7a: Destination information positively affects the destination choice decision of international tourists.

H7b: Destination information positively affects the destination image.

H7c: Destination information positively affects tourist attitude towards the destination.

H7d: Destination information positively affects travel motivation.

Measurement scale

The qualitative study, starting with a literature review and expert consultations, aimed to identify and refine the scales for evaluating factors influencing international tourist destination decision-making (DCD). Expert insights were invaluable in validating and adjusting observational variables, ensuring scientific and practical relevance. Group

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discussions further optimized these scales, ensuring they accurately and comprehensively reflect the concepts being measured. Contributions from experts with extensive experience and high qualifications in tourism, culture, and economics enriched the research tool's validity and effectiveness.

Tourist attitude towards destination: Experts agreed to retain all three items with clarity adjustments: ATT1 "I feel this destination is great", ATT2 "Visiting this destination is a valuable experience", and ATT3 "Visiting this destination brings positive impacts" (Girish et al., 2021; Jalilvand et al., 2012).

Travel motivation: Five out of six items were retained, with MOT1 simplified to "Explore the destination" and MOT5 removed. The retained items are: MOT2 "Experience different cultures and lifestyles", MOT3 "Escape daily routine", MOT4 "Learn new things or improve knowledge", and MOT6 "Relax and reduce stress" (Correia & Pimpao, 2008; Li & Cai, 2011; Pawaskar & Goel, 2016)

Personal values: All six items were retained with adjustments to emphasize individual freedom, respect, positive impact, joy, quality of life, relationships, and belonging(Cosme Fernandes & Lages, 2002; Fritzsche & Oz, 2007; Li et al., 2016).

Perceived risk: Five out of six items were retained, reflecting health, expectations, infrastructure, transportation, and safety concerns. RP5 was removed. The retained items are derived from (Cong et al., 2021) and (George, 2010).

Country image: All five items were retained with updated language to highlight Vietnam's security, political stability, economic growth, technology in tourism, and cultural heritage (Chaulagain et al., 2019).

Destination image: All eleven items were retained, and one new item (DI12) was added to highlight cultural symbols of the Mekong Delta (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Gallarza et al., 2002; Hương & Quân, 2019; Qu et al., 2011).

Destination information: All five items were retained with wording changes to reflect information sources such as social media, family and friends, service providers, and articles (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012; Jalilvand et al., 2012; Pawaskar & Goel, 2016; Shyle & Hysi, 2015).

Destination choice decision: All three items were retained, reflecting a confident and final decision to choose the destination for upcoming trips (Lam & Hsu, 2004; Mutinda & Mayaka, 2012)

Conceptual framework

Based on the provided hypotheses, the international tourist destination decision-making research model will examine the impact of various factors on tourist's decision-making processes.
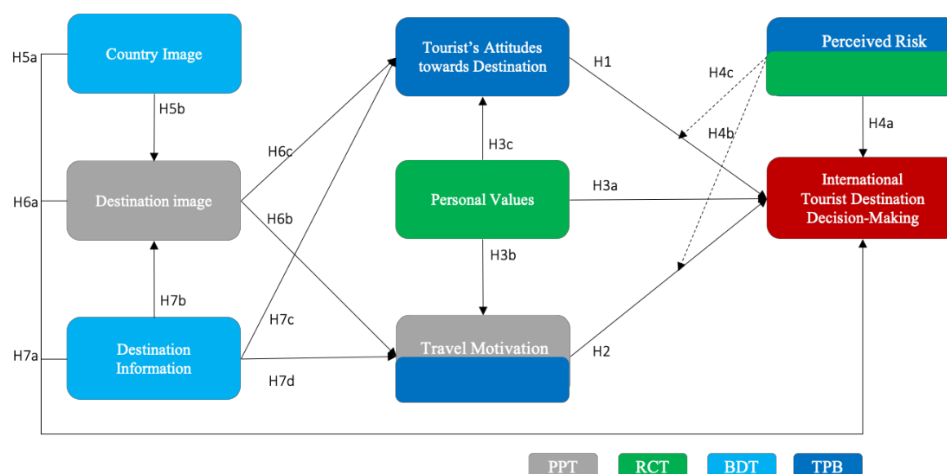
Fig. 1. Model of international tourist's destination decision-making. Source: Authors.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Assess the unidimensionality, reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the measurement scales.

Statistical sample characteristics

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The authors distributed 200 survey questionnaires and received 189 valid responses. Based on survey data on tourism in the Mekong Delta, it can be observed that the majority of tourists (80.9%) visit the Mekong Delta for the first time, and many travel in groups (58.2%). The area is particularly popular with families (42.3%), meeting the demand for travel that combines relaxation and exploration (58.2%). Tourists are primarily female (58.2%), aged 21-40 (58.2%), highly educated (87.8%), and have stable incomes (with over 3000 USD accounting for 62.9%). While Asian tourists make up the majority (42.3%), the presence of European (26.5%) and American tourists (15.9%) indicates the potential for market diversification in the Mekong Delta.

From the survey results, it is evident that the majority of tourists visiting the Mekong Delta are first-time visitors, though there is a level of loyalty from repeat visitors. Package tours and sightseeing/relaxation trips are popular choices, often undertaken with family and friends. Most tourists come for sightseeing and relaxation, though some also have business purposes. The majority of tourists are highly educated and have relatively stable incomes.

Reliability evaluation of measurement scales

Unidimensionality reflects the degree to which the questions in a scale measure the concept they represent. In this context, factor loadings were analyzed to determine the suitability of questions in scales such as tourist attitude towards destination, travel motivation, PV, PR, CI, destination choice decision-making, destination image, and IS. Unidimensionality reflects the extent to which variables in the scale measure the same concept, evaluated through factor loadings (Outer Loading) and Cronbach's Alpha. Questions with factor loadings below 0.400 need to be removed (Hair et al., 2017), and the Cronbach's Alpha (CA) value should be greater than 0.700 for the entire scale. If CA is lower, consider removing variables with low factor loadings (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 2. Factor loadings (outer loading) analysis round 2

	ATT	CI	DCD	DI	IS	MOT	PV	RP	RP x MOT	RP x ATT
ATT1	0,839									
ATT2	0,811									
ATT3	0,837									
CI1		0,834								
CI2		0,849								
CI5		0,767								
DCD1			0,945							
DCD2			0,798							
DCD3			0,950							
DI10				0,644						
DI11				0,718						
DI12				0,724						
DI2				0,809						
DI3				0,808						
DI4				0,501						
DI5				0,855						
DI6				0,882						
DI7				0,842						
DI8				0,831						
DI9				0,657						
IS1					0,831					
IS2					0,822					
IS3					0,839					
IS4					0,815					

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	ATT	CI	DCD	DI	IS	MOT	PV	RP	RP x MOT	RP x ATT
IS5					0,844					
MOT1						0,869				
MOT2						0,914				
MOT4						0,692				
MOT5						0,891				
PV1							0,905			
PV2							0,919			
PV3							0,854			
PV5							0,858			
RP1								0,931		
RP2								0,897		
RP3								0,781		
RP6								0,826		
RP x MOT									1,000	
RP x ATT										1,000

Source: Data analysis results

Following the removal of variables CI3 and CI4 from the CI scale, DI1 from the Destination Image scale, MOT3 from the Travel Motivation scale, PV4 and PV6 from the PV scale, and RP4 from the PR scale, we conducted further analysis on the remaining factor loadings to evaluate the unidimensionality of the scales. The results showed that all the retained variables had factor loadings above the 0.400 threshold, indicating their suitability for measuring their respective constructs. This confirmed the appropriateness of the scales in capturing the intended concepts and their reliability for further research analysis.

Evaluating Cronbach's Alpha (CA) is crucial for measuring reliability. This analysis examines Cronbach's Alpha for different scales including ATT, CI, DCD, DI, IS, MOT, PV, and PR to determine the internal consistency of each scale.

Table 3. Cronbach's alpha, Composite reliability and Average variance extracted

	Cronbach's alpha (CA)	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
ATT	0,773	0,776	0,687
CI	0,754	0,773	0,668
DCD	0,884	0,944	0,811
DI	0,924	0,937	0,578
IS	0,888	0,889	0,690
MOT	0,864	0,878	0,716
PV	0,907	0,919	0,782
RP	0,886	0,924	0,740

Source: Data analysis results

All scales in the study (Table 3) have Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding the 0.7 threshold, indicating acceptable reliability and good internal consistency. Specifically, the values are: ATT (0.773), CI (0.754), DCD (0.884), DI (0.924), IS (0.888), MOT (0.864), PV (0.907), and RP (0.886). Notably, DCD, DI, IS, PV, and RP scales have very high Cronbach's Alpha values (above 0.85), indicating very high reliability and excellent internal consistency.

The evaluation of factor loadings (Outer loading) and Cronbach's Alpha is essential for determining the unidimensionality and reliability of the scales. The analysis shows all scales have high factor loadings and Cronbach's

Alpha, exceeding 0.7, indicating high reliability. After removing variables with low factor loadings (CI3, CI4, DI1, MOT3, PV4, PV6, and RP4), the remaining scales all have factor loadings above 0.400. The scales ATT, MOT, PV, RP, CI, DCD, DI, and IS are all suitable for measuring the research concepts. Moreover, Cronbach's Alpha values for these scales range from 0.754 to 0.924, confirming excellent internal consistency. This confirms that the scales used in the study are reliable and appropriate for measuring the research concepts.

Internal consistency reliability evaluation

Composite Reliability (CR) is used to assess the internal consistency of scales. A CR value of 0.700 or higher indicates high reliability. All scales in this study (Table 3) have CR values above 0.700, confirming high reliability and internal consistency. Specifically, the CR values are: ATT (0.776), CI (0.773), IS (0.889), MOT (0.878), DCD (0.944), DI (0.937), PV (0.919), and RP (0.924). Notably, DCD, DI, PV, and RP scales have very high CR values (above 0.85), indicating excellent reliability and internal consistency. These results confirm that the scales used in the study are reliable and suitable for measuring the research concepts.

Convergent validity evaluation

Convergent validity indicates the extent to which items of a scale are related. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is used to assess this, with a threshold of 0.500. All scales in this study have AVE values above 0.500 (Table 3), indicating high convergent validity. Specifically, the AVE values are: ATT (0.687), CI (0.668), DCD (0.811), DI (0.578), IS (0.690), MOT (0.716), PV (0.782), and RP (0.740). This confirms that more than half of the variance in the observed variables is explained by the latent constructs, ensuring that the scales accurately reflect the concepts they are designed to measure.

Discriminant validity evaluation

The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) is used to assess discriminant validity, with a threshold of 0.900. All HTMT values in this study are below 0.900, indicating clear differentiation between constructs. Specific HTMT values include: ATT and CI (0.084), ATT and DCD (0.629), ATT and DI (0.422), ATT and IS (0.570), ATT and MOT (0.503), ATT and PV (0.215), ATT and RP (0.128), CI and DCD (0.153), CI and DI (0.118), CI and IS (0.086), CI and MOT (0.093), CI and PV (0.109), CI and RP (0.118), DCD and DI (0.430), DCD and IS (0.541), DCD and MOT (0.513), DCD and PV (0.368), DCD and RP (0.250), DI and IS (0.351), DI and MOT (0.437), DI and PV (0.149), DI and RP (0.138), IS and MOT (0.562), IS and PV (0.314), IS and RP (0.090), MOT and PV (0.335), MOT and RP (0.050), PV and RP (0.068). These values confirm that the constructs in the research model are clearly distinct from one another, ensuring the validity and reliability of the model.

Table 4. Heterotrait-Monotrait

	ATT	CI	DCD	DI	IS	MOT	PV	RP	RP x MOT	RP x ATT
ATT										
CI	0,084									
DCD	0,629	0,153								
DI	0,422	0,118	0,430							
IS	0,570	0,086	0,541	0,351						
MOT	0,503	0,093	0,513	0,437	0,562					
PV	0,215	0,109	0,368	0,149	0,314	0,335				
RP	0,128	0,118	0,250	0,138	0,090	0,050	0,068			
RP x MOT	0,076	0,094	0,287	0,118	0,097	0,278	0,106	0,160		
RP x ATT	0,068	0,028	0,301	0,040	0,110	0,094	0,038	0,340	0,437	

Source: Data analysis results

DISCUSSION

Validation of measurement scales and impact on the initial research model

During the preliminary study, the measurement scales were evaluated and refined to ensure validity and reliability. However, this did not result in any changes to the initial hypotheses and research model. Specifically:

Evaluation and elimination of non-standard scales: (i) **reliability and validity assessment**: Measurement

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scales were evaluated based on Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Scales that did not meet the required standards were eliminated to ensure that only scales with high reliability and validity were used in the formal research. (ii) **refinement of existing scales**: Refinement improved the quality of the measurement scales without altering the structure or nature of the factors in the research model.

No new factors discovered: (i) **objective of the preliminary study:** The objective of the preliminary study was to evaluate and refine existing measurement scales, not to discover new factors. Thus, the factors in the initial research model remained unchanged. (ii) **initial research design:** The initial research model was developed based on a solid theoretical foundation and previous studies, ensuring that all important factors were comprehensively covered.

Expert consensus: (i) **100% expert agreement**: During the qualitative research phase, all experts agreed with the proposed factors in the research model. Their contributions mainly focused on refining the measurement scales rather than suggesting new factors. (ii) **consensus on factors:** This confirmed that the initial research model comprehensively covered all important and necessary factors.

Objectives of the initial hypotheses: (i) strong theoretical foundation: The initial hypotheses were constructed based on Push-Pull Theory (PPT), Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Rational Choice Theory (RCT), and Behavioral Decision Theory (BDT). These hypotheses were designed to examine the relationships between key factors in the research model. (ii) no need for changes: Since no new factors were added and the existing factors were validated for reliability and validity, the initial hypotheses remained unchanged.

In summary, the preliminary study focused solely on evaluating and refining existing measurement scales without discovering new factors, resulting in no changes to the research model and initial hypotheses. This ensures that the research continues in the predetermined direction, examining the relationships between previously identified key factors.

Measurement scales for research concepts

In the context of international tourism development, understanding the factors influencing DCD of tourists is crucial. This research focuses on synthesizing measurement scales to assess concepts related to tourist's attitudes, travel motivations, PV, PR, CI, destination image, IS, and international tourist's DCD. These scales are designed to provide a comprehensive and accurate view of tourist's behavior and perceptions regarding destinations, specifically the Mekong Delta

The attitude scale for international tourists towards a destination is reflected through three aspects: emotion, cognition, and behavior. Specifically, international tourists feel that this is a wonderful destination, consider visiting this destination to be a very valuable experience, and believe that visiting this destination brings positive impacts. To better understand the travel motivations of international tourists, the travel motivation scale includes factors such as exploring the destination, observing and experiencing different cultures and lifestyles, learning new things or enhancing knowledge, and relaxing and reducing stress. Additionally, the PV scale of international tourists is reflected through the freedom to make decisions according to their wishes, always being respected, creating a positive influence on those around them, and building and strengthening good relationships with others.

To assess the level of concern of international tourists, the PR scale reflects their worries about whether the climate conditions of the destination are suitable for their health, whether the travel experience meets their expectations, the adequacy of infrastructure development, and the potential security risks to their personal safety. In considering the CI, this scale evaluates Vietnam through the assurance of personal security, a stable political environment, and a rich cultural heritage. Specifically, the destination image scale of the Mekong Delta includes factors such as a rich ecosystem, diverse landscapes, a variety of suitable accommodation, entertainment, and shopping services, diverse art forms reflecting local cultural identity, attractive local cuisine, friendly and hospitable people, easy accessibility, convenient transportation, reasonable prices, fresh air, a mild and pleasant climate, peaceful and poetic scenery, and cultural symbols such as floating markets, fruit gardens, conical hats, and checkered scarves.

Moreover, to better understand the information sources that international tourists often seek, this scale includes channels such as social media to learn about the destination, online travel reviews before visiting, information from family and friends to make informed decisions, information from travel service providers and promotional materials to compare prices and services, and reading articles, magazines, and travel guides to learn about new cultures, unique places, and the latest travel trends. Finally, the destination choice decision (DCD) scale includes international tourists

deciding to choose this destination for their upcoming trip, deciding to make this the final destination for their trip, and being completely confident in this decision without needing further information.

By using these measurement scales, the author can collect detailed and comprehensive data on the behavior, cognition, and decisions of international tourists when choosing a travel destination. This provides crucial information for developing effective and sustainable tourism strategies for the Mekong Delta region.

Tabe 5. Synthesis of the evaluation results of the measurement scales for the research concepts

No.	Observed variable code	Original scale	Qualitative research results	Quantitative scale validation results
1	ATT1	As a tourism destination, I think that it is very good.	I feel this is a great destination	accept
2	ATT2	I think visiting tourism destination is a valuable behaviour.	I believe visiting this destination is a very valuable experience	accept
3	ATT3	I think visiting tourism destination is a positive behaviour.	I think visiting this destination brings positive impacts	accept
4	MOT1	To explore uncharted territory or adventure activities	Explore the destination of daily life	accept
5	MOT2	To observe and experiencing different cultures and lifestyles	Observe and experience different cultures and lifestyles	accept
6	MOT3	Escaping from routine	Escape from the routine	reject
7	MOT4	Learning new things or increasing knowledge	Learn new things or improve knowledge	accept
8	MOT5	Going places friends have not been	-	reject
9	MOT6	Physical relaxation/Relieving stress	Relax and reduce stress	accept
10	PV1	More freedom to act	I am free to make decisions according to my own will	accept
11	PV2	Being well respected	My opinions are always respected by others	accept
12	PV3	Influential, having an impact on people and events	I create a positive influence on those around me	accept
13	PV4	A more stimulating and adventurous life	This place brings me joy and improves my quality of life	reject
14	PV5	Warm relationships with others	Visiting this destination helps me build and strengthen good relationships with others	accept
15	PV6	Sense of belonging	When I am here, I feel a sense of belonging and connection	reject
16	RP1	Worried about the climatic conditions of the destination	I am concerned whether the climate conditions at the destination will be suitable for my health.	accept
17	RP2	Worried that the travel experience has	I worry that the travel	accept

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No.	Observed variable code	Original scale	Qualitative research results	Quantitative scale validation results
		not met expectations	experience at this destination may not meet my expectations.	
18	RP3	Worried about poor destination infrastructure	I am concerned that the infrastructure at the destination may not be fully developed.	accept
19	RP4	Worried about the inconvenience of destination traffic	I worry that transportation inconvenience at the destination may affect my travel schedule	reject
20	RP5	Worried about the chances of seeing wild animals	-	reject
21	RP6	I felt worried about my personal safety	I am worried about potential security risks to my personal safety at the destination	accept
22	CI1	Personal security is not a problem	Personal security is ensured in Vietnam.	accept
23	CI2	A secure country/ A stable political environment	A safe country with a stable political environment	accept
24	CI3	An economically stable country	A safe country with a stable political environment Vietnam's economy grows steadily as a developing country	reject
25	CI4	A technologically developed country	A safe country with a stable political environment Vietnam's economy grows steadily as a developing country	reject
26	CI5	Rich cultural heritage	Vietnam has a rich and unique cultural heritage	accept
27	DI1	A good name and reputation	A tourism destination loved by many travelers	reject
28	DI2	Wealth and beauty of landscape/great variety of fauna and flora scenery/natural wonders	Rich ecosystem and diverse landscapes.	accept
29	DI3	Good infrastructure of hotels and apartments/ awide variety of outdoor activities/opportunities for water sports/ activities/ nightlife and entertainment/ shopping facilities	I can choose from a variety of accommodations, entertainment, and shopping services that meet my needs.	accept
30	DI4	Various forms of traditional performing arts	The Mekong Delta has a variety of rich art forms, such as Đờn ca tài tử, Cải lương, and Hò, reflecting the local cultural identity.	accept
31	DI5	Varied gastronomy	Attractive and diverse local	accept

No.	Observed variable code	Original scale	Qualitative research results	Quantitative scale validation results
			cuisine.	
32	DI6	Hospitable, friendly people	Warm and hospitable people.	accept
33	DI7	Easy access to the area	Easy access and convenient transportation.	accept
34	DI8	Price, value, cost	Reasonable prices	accept
35	DI9	Clean environment	Fresh air	accept
36	DI10	Good weather	Mild and pleasant climate	accept
37	DI11	Peaceful and poetic	Peaceful and poetic landscapes	accept
38	DI12	-	Floating markets, orchards, conical hats, and traditional scarves - cultural symbols associated with the Mekong Delta.	accept
39	IS1	Seek information on social networks when deciding to make a trip	I often search for information on social media to learn about the destination.	accept
40	IS2	I frequently gather information from tourist's online travel reviews before I travel to a certain destination	I frequently gather information from online travel reviews by previous tourists before visiting a certain place.	accept
41	IS3	Information sources from family and friends	I often consult family and friends to ensure my decision is wise.	accept
42	IS4	Information sources from travel agencies and brochures	I often collect information from travel service providers and promotional materials to compare prices and services of different travel companies.	accept
43	IS5	Reports in newspapers, magazines/guidebooks	I often read articles, magazines, and travel guides to learn about new cultures, unique locations, and the latest travel trends.	accept
44	DCD1	I would very much wish to visit	I have decided to choose this destination for my upcoming trip.	accept
45	DCD2	Final destination choice	I have decided to make this destination the final stop of my upcoming trip.	accept
46	DCD3	I need more information to decide on visiting	I completely trust my decision to choose this destination without needing any further information.	accept

Source: Authors.

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Research model on factors influencing destination choice decisions of international tourists

The research model on the factors influencing the destination choice decisions of international tourists can be divided into specific stages, each affected by different factors. The theories of Kotler & Keller (2011), Um & Crompton (1991), and Harrison-Hill (2000) emphasize that this decision-making process is influenced by both external stimuli and internal psychosocial factors. The following outlines how push factors, pull factors, values, and behaviors impact the decision-making process of tourists:

Stage 1 - Need Recognition (PPT): In this stage, travel motivation and destination image are the primary factors. Travel motivation includes desires for exploration, cultural experiences, learning, and relaxation. A positive destination image, such as diverse landscapes, abundant services, performing arts, cuisine, and hospitality, also plays a crucial role in forming this motivation (Hypotheses H6b, H7d). A positive image of the destination further creates a positive attitude among tourists (Hypotheses H6c, H7c).

Stage 2 - Evaluation of Alternatives (RCT): After recognizing the need, tourists evaluate their options based on personal values and perceived risks. Personal values such as freedom, respect, positive influence, and good relationships impact the destination choice decision (Hypotheses H3a, H3b, H3c). Perceived risks, including concerns about climate, unmet expectations, infrastructure, and security, negatively affect this decision (Hypotheses H4a, H4b, H4c).

Stage 3 - Influence of Emotions (BDT): During this stage, tourists' emotions are influenced by information about the destination and national image. A positive national image, such as security, political stability, and distinctive cultural heritage, facilitates the destination choice decision (Hypotheses H5a, H5b). A favorable destination image also strongly motivates tourists (Hypothesis H6a). Information from social media, travel reviews, family, friends, service providers, and promotional materials all play significant roles (Hypotheses H7a, H7b).

Stage 4 - Determination of Behavioral Intentions and Final Decision (TPB): Finally, factors such as attitude, travel motivation, and perceived risks combine to determine behavioral intentions and the final decision of tourists. A positive attitude towards the destination, strong travel motivation, and low perceived risks lead to a higher likelihood of destination choice (Hypotheses H1, H2).

The proposed research model elucidates the decision-making process of international tourists' destination choices through four stages: need recognition, evaluation of alternatives, influence of emotions, and determination of behavioral intentions and the final decision. Factors such as travel motivation, personal values, perceived risks, national image, destination image, and destination information have significant impacts at each stage.

Comprehensive framework for international tourist's destination choice

The findings of this research are particularly relevant for the Mekong Delta, a region with significant tourism potential yet facing developmental challenges. The region's unique cultural heritage, diverse ecosystems, and rich local cuisine present substantial pull factors that can attract international tourists. The robust measurement scales developed in this study, such as those for destination image and PV, highlight the importance of these attributes in influencing tourist decisions.

The Vietnam's positive CI, reinforced through stable political conditions and rich cultural heritage, can enhance the destination's appeal. The strong reliability and validity of the CI and DI scales ensure that these factors are accurately measured, providing valuable insights for local policymakers and tourism developers.

Tourist's PR, such as concerns about infrastructure and personal safety, are critical considerations in the Mekong Delta context. The PR scale effectively captures these concerns, allowing for targeted improvements to address tourist anxieties. Enhancing infrastructure and ensuring safety can mitigate these PR, thus positively influencing travel motivations and attitudes.

The MOT scale underscores the need for diverse and enriching experiences, such as exploring local cultures and relaxing in natural settings. The Mekong Delta's ability to offer these experiences can be a significant draw for international tourists. Tailoring marketing strategies to emphasize these motivations can enhance the region's attractiveness.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, this model describes the decision-making process of international tourists when choosing a destination. The factors include IS, CI, DI, PV, MOT, ATT, and PR. The decision-making process occurs through stages of information reception, image and motivation formation, risk assessment, and final decision. Each stage is influenced and adjusted by relevant factors, leading to the final destination choice decision. The validated measurement scales provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors influencing international tourist's destination choices. For the Mekong Delta, leveraging these insights can guide the development of effective tourism strategies, addressing both the pull factors that attract tourists and the push factors that drive their travel decisions. By focusing on improving infrastructure, enhancing safety, and promoting the region's unique cultural and natural assets, the Mekong Delta can better position itself as a premier destination for international tourists.

Limitations of the study: The use of convenience sampling may lead to representation limitations; however, it provided valuable insights within the specific research context. The survey period from May 10, 2024, to May 28, 2024, might not fully capture all tourism trends, yet it still offers a reliable overview of international tourist's behavior during that season. Some observational variables were excluded to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the scales, which might omit certain aspects of tourist behavior. The study primarily examined predefined factors such as CI, destination image, travel motivation, and PR. This approach may overlook some new factors, but it ensures that the most important factors have been thoroughly researched. Standardized scales were used to ensure data consistency and reliability, providing a solid foundation for future research, even if they may not reflect all specific variations at different destinations.

For future research, quantitative studies with larger samples should be conducted to explore the relationships within the model more thoroughly in the Mekong Delta context. This will provide richer data, enhancing the accuracy and generalizability of the findings, and offering more specific and effective recommendations for policymakers and tourism developers in the region.

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CURRENT STATUS OF INDUSTRIAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN BINH DUONG PROVINCE

Phan Van Trung[1]

Abstract:

Binh Duong is considered the industrial center of Vietnam. Currently, there are about 30 industrial parks operating in many diverse fields in Binh Duong province. This is a great potential for Binh Duong province to develop industrial tourism. However, this type of tourism has only developed in Binh Duong in recent years. This study applies observation, survey, data collection and processing methods to clarify the current status of industrial tourism development in Binh Duong province. The research results indicate that Binh Duong Province has oriented its development towards industrial tourism. Several industrial parks and factories have participated in tourism development which have the relatively completed infrastructure for industrial tourism.. However, the number of industrial parks and factories involved in tourism activities remains low and there are still some limitations regarding infrastructure, destination services, human resources, and industrial tourism development policies. Based on the analysis of the current state of industrial tourism development in Binh Duong province, the research team has proposed several solutions to further promote this type of tourism in the Province in the future.

Keywords: Binh Duong province, current situation, industrial tourism

Introduction

Industrial tourism is a type of tourism that includes visits to operating companies and industrial heritage sites; it brings visitors experiences related to products, production processes, applications, and historical contexts (Alexander H.J. O. et al, 2016). Industrial tourism enriches tourism products and helps attract a diverse range of visitors, particularly those interested in technology, manufacturing and industrial processes. This helps reduce the dependence on traditional forms of tourism such as beach tourism and ecotourism,… Industrial tourism offers opportunities for visitors, especially students, to learn about production processes, modern technology, and industrial management. This helps enhance knowledge and awareness of industry and sparks passion and interest in industrial careers. Through industrial tours, the image and brand of businesses and industrial parks will be widely promoted. This not only helps to boost the reputation and prestige of the businesses but also helps the local area attract more tourists and investors.

Binh Duong currently has 30 industrial parks with a total area of 12,670.5 hectares and an average occupancy rate of 87.4%. In addition to the list of industrial parks, the province also has 12 industrial clusters covering an area of 790 hectares, with a relatively high occupancy rate of 67.4%. The model of building industrial parks in Binh Duong has also become a standard for infrastructure, investment attraction, production management and environmental protection for other localities in Vietnam. Some prominent industrial parks in Binh Duong include VSIP, My Phuoc, Song Than, Dong An,… (Pham, H., 2024). The industrial parks in Binh Duong are home to hundreds and thousands of factories and enterprises with modern production scales, offering a diverse range of products and fields. Among these are many nationally and globally branded products in the fields of garment, consumer goods, electronics, food, … which are from major corporations such as Panasonic, Pepsico, Unilever, Vinamilk,... These are significant potentials for the development of industrial tourism in Binh Duong province (Binh Duong Tourism Promotion Center, 2021). In addition, the Resolution of the 11th Party Congress of Binh Duong Province for the 2021-2025 term has oriented the province towards "sustainable development in the direction of a smart, civilized, and modern city; by 2030, Binh Duong will become a modern industrial center, and by 2045, it will be a smart city of the region and the country." This is an important orientation that can help industrial tourism in Binh Duong develop distinctive features to attract visitors in the future.

The development of industrial tourism can help Binh Duong province enhance its image and brand, not only domestically but also internationally, attracting additional investors and tourists. In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, combining tourism with modern industry can create novel and appealing tourism products,

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attracting young tourists who are knowledgeable and passionate about technology. Researching and developing industrial tourism will increase community awareness of the importance of industry and tourism, thereby promoting local participation and supporting in tourism activities.

Despite Binh Duong province's significant potential for developing industrial tourism, this type of tourism has not been effectively utilized. Researching the current situation helps identify strengths and weaknesses, thereby proposing practical solutions for developing industrial tourism in Binh Duong province. The research results provide crucial data and information to assist relevant authorities, tourism managers, and businesses in planning and adjusting policies for industrial tourism development effectively.

Objectives

Analysis of the current state of industrial tourism development in Binh Duong province. Proposing several solutions to promote the development of industrial tourism in Binh Duong province.

Theoretical framework and research methodology

1. Theoretical framework of industrial tourism

1.1. Concept of industrial tourism

The term industrial tourism has different meanings. In the US, some use the term industrial tourism when they talk about a commercial approach to tourism, maximising the return on investment (for example Wemhaner, 1976). In some cases, this seems only a difference in language: Industrietourismus (German), tourisme industriel (French), turismo industrial (Spanish), turisme industriale (Italian), etc. However, it appears that in some countries, industrial tourism is mainly about visiting operational firms, while in other countries it refers to visiting industrial heritage (non-operational firms), or comprehends both meanings. In Germany and France, for instance, many people associate industrial tourism with industrial heritage, and not with visiting operational firms. The terms Werkstourismus (factory tourism) or Betriebsbesichtigungen (company visits) are more widespread in Germany, while also the French prefer to use the more neutral visites d'enterprises (company visits). In the anglo-saxon literature it is common to make a distinction between industrial tourism (visiting operational firms) and industrial heritage tourism (according to Alexander H.J. O. et al, 2016).

Based on the conceptual analysis of industrial tourism researchers, Alexander Otgaar has proposed the concept, industrial tourism involves visits to sites that enable visitors to learn about economic activities in the past, the present and the future. (Alexander H.J. O, 2010). Industrial tourism tours are organized to take visitors to locations related to industrial and economic activities. These tours may be guided by experts or industry professionals, utilizing supportive equipment to provide detailed information. They include visits to factories, production facilities, mines, or industrial sites that have ceased operations but are preserved to showcase past technologies and production methods. These locations focus on developing future technologies and manufacturing processes, such as laboratories, research centers of technology companies or advanced industrial parks. Visitors have the opportunity to learn about economic, industrial and technological activities from previous eras. This involves exploring industrial heritage, understanding historical production methods and technologies, their contributions to the economic development of a region or country. Through tours of operational production facilities and advanced industrial parks, visitors gain insights into modern production processes, technologies and industrial management practices. This helps visitors gain a realistic view of modern industry and economy. Visits to research centers, high-tech projects, and advanced industrial parks provide visitors with insights into future industrial development trends. This includes learning about new technologies, modern production processes and ongoing projects aimed at addressing future economic and environmental challenges.

At the seminar "Introduction to Industrial Tourism in South Korea" held in Hanoi, some experts introduced the concept: Industrial tourism utilizes traditional industrial sectors and industrial heritage sites such as factories, production workshops, and business product showcases combined with tourism products to create integrated and appealing tourist destinations. Industrial tourism is a specialized form of tourism that incorporates elements from traditional industries and industrial heritage to develop tourist destinations. These elements may include factories, production workshops, and business product showcases. The goal of industrial tourism is to combine these elements with tourism products to create attractive and unique destinations. These destinations not only provide entertainment experiences but also offer information and knowledge to tourists. Visitors have the opportunity to learn about production processes, the history and development of industries, as well as modern technologies and techniques. In this way, industrial tourism satisfies tourists' desires for exploration, research, and experiences, while contributing to

the preservation and development of industrial heritage.

According to Liudmyla Bondarenko, industrial tourism is a specialized field that combines visits to facilities created by past technologies and modern engineering works, aiming to achieve research, psychological or aesthetic purposes (Bondarenko, L., 2021). Therefore, according to Bondarenko, industrial tourism is not as common as resort tourism or ecotourism. It is a specific field focusing on exploring and understanding various aspects of industry from historical to modern times. Industrial tourism includes tours of factories, industrial plants, industrial parks or other production facilities. Visitors can witness production processes, technologies used, and operational management firsthand. Industrial tourism encompasses visits to old industrial sites, such as historical factories, ancient engineering works, and landmarks related to the industrial revolution. Additionally, tourists can experience advanced technologies and modern infrastructure in contemporary industrial parks. These tours are educational, aimed at learning and researching technologies, production processes, and industrial management. This is particularly beneficial for students, researchers, and professionals in the industrial sector. Industrial tourism provides a novel experience that stimulates tourists' curiosity and interest. It helps visitors gain a deeper understanding of industrial development and its societal impacts.

Based on these concepts, industrial tourism can be described as a specialized form of tourism where tourists visit and experience industrial facilities, including factories, industrial plants, production workshops and other industrial heritage sites. The primary goal of industrial tourism is to create appealing destinations by combining elements from the industrial sector with tourism products. This aims to satisfy tourists' desires for exploration, research and experiential learning.

1.2. The practice of industrial tourism development

In the UK, industrial tourism attracted around 5 million visitors annually by 1989. The following year, 294 companies in the UK were open to visitors, accounting for 6% of all tourist attractions in the country. In New South Wales, Australia, over 10% of tourists visited an industrial tourism site in 2004. During the same year, nearly 8 million people visited an industrial park in France. Frew (2000) provided an overview of various industrial tourism attractions (in the US, UK, and Japan) and visitor numbers, highlighting aspects of industrial tourism.

Table 1. A selection of visitor attractions in the UK, Japan and the US

Industrial Tourism Attraction	Visitors per year
Cadbury World (UK, chocolate factory)	400,000
Toyota motor Corporation (Japan)	300,000
Ben and Jerry's Homemade (USA, Ice-cream Production)	170,000
Wedgwood (USA, Pottery Factory)	100,000
British nuclear Fuels (USA, nuclear site clean-ups)	100,000
Wr outhwaite and son (USA, ropemakers)	75,000–100,000
Cumberland Pencils (USA)	64,000

(Few, 2000, according to Alexander H.J. O. et al, 2016)

The leading countries by quantity of the number of tourists in industrial tourism in the EU are Germany (more than 66 million tourists), France (16 million), Italy (15 million), as well as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Spain, Belgium, Austria, Portugal and the Czech Republic. The growth rate of industrial tourism services reached more than 35% in Latvia, 20% in Bulgaria, 20% in Lithuania, 17% in Estonia, due to the improvement of existing tourism products, the emergence of new tourist routes, improvement of hotel, transport and other related services. In America there are almost no businesses closed to tourists (according to Bondarenko, L., 2021).

2. Research methods

2.1. Observation method

The research team used the observation method to record tourism activities at industrial tourism sites. They investigated the current state of infrastructure, technical facilities and human resources at locations where industrial tourism activities have been implemented in Binh Duong province. These are important bases for assessing the current situation and proposing several solutions to promote the development of industrial tourism in Binh Duong province.

2.2. Survey method

The research team developed a questionnaire consisting of 26 attributes to assess the current state of tourism development at industrial tourism sites in Binh Duong province. The study conducted a survey of 200 randomly selected tourists at four locations, including the Yakult factory; Fito Pharma factory and Fito museum; Minh Sang Plaza shopping center; and Tuong Binh Hiep lacquer village. The survey was conducted from May 3, 2024, to June 2, 2024. The questions were designed according to 7 groups of factors affecting the attractiveness of industrial tourism destinations (infrastructure and technical facilities; product display space; visitor experience services; service quality; human resources; destination promotion; visitor satisfaction) with a 5-level Likert scale (1 - Strongly Disagree; 2 - Disagree; 3 - Neutral; 4 - Agree; 5 - Strongly Agree).

The minimum sample size was 130 (valid responses were 160 out of the 200 distributed questionnaires), and the sample size was determined according to the formula $n \geq m*5$, where the component factors are $m = 27$ (Hair et al, 2014), meeting the sample size requirements as stipulated. The survey results were processed using SPSS 23.0 software.

2.3. Methods of collecting and processing data

The research team collected secondary data from research organizations and studies related to industrial tourism. Documents on industrial tourism from the Department of Culture, Sports & Tourism of Binh Duong province and the Binh Duong Tourism Promotion Center were also collected. This data was selected to clarify the theoretical basis of industrial tourism, as well as the potential and current state of industrial tourism development in Binh Duong province.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

1.1. Potential for industrial tourism development in Binh Duong province

Geographical advantages: Binh Duong province is located in the Southern Key Economic Region, adjacent to Ho Chi Minh City and neighbouring provinces such as Dong Nai, Tay Ninh and Binh Phuoc. It is well-connected to major transportation routes such as National Highway 13, the My Phuoc - Tan Van Expressway, provincial Roads 745, 743, 741 and Ring Road 4. This location not only facilitates trade but also makes it easy to travel and attract tourists from nearby areas.

Strong industrial development: In 1995, the first industrial park in Binh Duong was established (Song Than 1 industrial park). To date, the province has 30 operational industrial parks, including major ones like VSIP, My Phuoc, Dong An, Song Than and Viet Huong. Binh Duong is currently one of the provinces with the highest industrialization rate in the country. These industrial parks are not only centers of production and export but also attractive sites for tourists interested in technology and manufacturing processes.

Diversity of industries: Binh Duong hosts a wide range of industries from electronics manufacturing, wood processing, and textiles to automobile production and plastic products. This diversity offers tourists many options when visiting factories and industrial parks, providing a comprehensive view of industrial development in the area.

Numerous large corporations and brands: Investment attraction in Binh Duong has gradually become more selective, focusing on projects with advanced technical and production technology, especially large projects that contribute to urban and high-quality service development. Many major investment projects from renowned global corporations such as Japan's Tokyu, Procter & Gamble (P&G), Kumho, SCG Siam Cement, Uni-President, Maruzen Foods and Mapletree have chosen Binh Duong as an attractive and safe investment destination.

Modern infrastructure: The operational industrial parks in Binh Duong have the modern and synchronized infrastructure with accompanying services meeting the requirements of businesses, making them attractive destinations for FDI. Most large enterprises investing in Binh Duong choose to locate in centralized industrial parks. These industrial parks have industrial ecosystems, transportation systems, modern infrastructure, clean and beautiful landscapes (Binh Duong Tourism Promotion Center, 2021). Additionally, the province has strongly developed telecommunications, electricity, and water services to serve the industrial parks well. These factors create favorable conditions for the development of industrial tourism in Binh Duong province.

Diverse industrial tourism activities: Tourists can visit manufacturing plants to learn about production processes, technology usage and product quality management. Factories of major corporations such as Vinamilk, Pepsico, Unilever, Lego, electronics manufacturing companies and ceramics production companies will be attractive

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destinations. Visiting factories helps tourists better understand production technology and product quality standards. Industrial parks like VSIP can organize comprehensive tours, introducing the planning, management and operations of a modern industrial park. These tours will help tourists understand the operation and contribution of industrial parks to the economy. Through this, tourists can see the development and potential of Binh Duong's industry.

Other attractive types of tourism: Binh Duong has many ecological areas, fruit orchards and eco-tourism sites. Combining visits to industrial parks with eco-tourism experiences will add diversity and richness to the tourists' trips. Visitors will not only learn about industry but also relax, enjoy the green space and participate in outdoor recreational activities.

Industrial tourism development policy: With the tourism development strategy to 2025 and orientation to 2030, Binh Duong is gradually improving tourism infrastructure, promoting and applying information technology to enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of the tourism industry (Nguyen, K. O., 2023). Industrial tourism has been a focus of development in recent years. This tourism product is also highly anticipated by many travel service companies for exploiting tours and routes when bringing tourists to Binh Duong. In 2021, the Binh Duong Tourism Promotion Center organized surveys of several companies, factories, production facilities and industrial tourism product display booths, combined with seminars and feedback sessions to perfect Binh Duong's industrial tourism service products. The program attracted the participation of many tourism and travel service businesses in the province and some neighboring provinces such as Tay Ninh, Dong Nai and Binh Phuoc. Through the survey, most participants highly appreciated the potential of exploiting Binh Duong's industrial tourism products. Based on the survey and feedback from participants, the Department of Culture, Sports & Tourism of Binh Duong province developed a plan to build and develop industrial tourism products in the province. Mr. Nguyen Thanh Phong, Deputy Director of the Department of Culture, Sports & Tourism of Binh Duong province, added that linking and connecting tours and routes to visit factories, companies and production facilities in industrial parks with tourism sites and businesses inside and outside the province aims to introduce this new type of tourism to a wide range of domestic and international tourists (Hong, T., 2021).

Binh Duong has the great potential to develop industrial tourism thanks to its advantageous geographical location, robust industrial development, modern infrastructure, and policies to develop industrial tourism into a distinctive type of tourism for the province. Exploiting and developing this type of tourism not only brings economic benefits but also enhances the image and position of Binh Duong on the tourism map of Vietnam and internationally.

1.2. Current situation of industrial tourism development in Binh Duong province

1.2.1. Industrial parks and industrial points participating in tourism activities

In many countries around the world, industrial tourism is not new, but it is still relatively novel in Vietnam. Binh Duong is currently an 'industrial capital' with numerous modern industrial parks. Therefore, the Department of Culture, Sports & Tourism of Binh Duong province has oriented the development of industrial tourism to become a distinctive type of tourism for the province. According to Pham Hong Thi, Deputy Director of the Binh Duong Tourism Promotion Center, since the end of 2020, the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Binh Duong province has planned to build and develop industrial tourism products in the area with the aim of leveraging the strengths in industrial development and developing industrial tourism to meet the sightseeing and learning needs of tourists. Binh Duong is linking and connecting tours and routes to visit factories, companies, and production facilities in industrial parks with tourism sites and tourism service businesses inside and outside the province to introduce this new type of tourism to a wide range of tourists.

In the initial phase, the province focused on exploiting the industrial parks and manufacturing plants in Thuan An city, including: VSIP I industrial park, Dong An industrial park, Yakult Manufacturing plant, Fito Pharmaceutical museum and the Crocodile Skin Manufacturing plant. In phase 2, the province will expand to include industrial parks and manufacturing plants in Ben Cat town, My Phuoc industrial park, Vinamilk Plant and others. However, according to Pham Hong Thi, after two years of COVID-19, businesses took an additional year to restructure personnel and prepare tour construction plans, so by early 2023, industrial tourism in Binh Duong officially started (Huyen, T., 2024).

Visiting industrial parks: Currently, Binh Duong has allowed tourists to visit the VSIP, My Phuoc, Viet Huong and Song Than industrial parks. Additionally, Becamex Corporation and the Management Board of Binh Duong industrial parks also organize visits to industrial parks and manufacturing plants, but these are primarily for investors and their partners.

Visiting industrial sites:

- Yakult factory: Yakult Vietnam Co., Ltd. welcomes an average of about 3,000 visitors per month to tour the production line, learn about the operational process, and discover the company's history. This site has become popular in Binh Duong for over a year, attracting many students, adults, families and children aged four and up. Groups wishing to tour the Yakult Vietnam factory can schedule a visit on the website and call the company's hotline. The tours are entirely free of charge. Visitors are provided with information about the organizational structure of the Yakult factory and Yakult Co., Ltd. in Vietnam; they can explore the 3D painting exhibition area, the production process, and souvenir stalls; and purchase the company's products (Huyen, T., 2024).

The Yakult factory is open to visitors from Monday to Saturday. Each day, it hosts an average of 4–5 tours, with a maximum of 240 visitors per tour. The factory is specially designed so that the entire production process can be viewed through glass on the first floor, and the production process is explained from the fermentation room to the packaging room. During the factory tour, visitors learn about the company and Yakult products through information and visuals.

- Fito Pharma factory and Fito museum: The Fito Pharma factory specializes in producing traditional herbal medicines based on ancient remedies that have existed for centuries, in collaboration with medical and pharmaceutical experts and research institutes both domestic and international. Besides pharmaceutical production, Fito Pharma has also built a museum area to preserve and showcase the beauty, cultural, and scientific values of Vietnam's traditional medicine (Binh Duong Tourism Promotion Center, 2021). The Fito museum (Vietnam museum of traditional medicine - Binh Duong branch) is a complex of over 2,000 square meters featuring beautiful buildings in the traditional architectural styles of Vietnam's three regions. It is only open on Tuesdays and Saturdays, primarily welcoming foreign tourist groups, students and locals interested in the medical and pharmaceutical fields. According to Le Song Ho, a guide at the Vietnam museum of traditional medicine - Binh Duong branch, the museum receives over 100 visitors each month, with an entrance fee of 180,000 VND, and 280,000 VND for a tour that includes the factory's production line. Visitors can explore a collection of 1,000 herbal drawings, considered the largest herbal illustration collection in Vietnam; unique large artifacts such as stone grinders and large mortars; models of traditional medicine; free pulse examination and diagnosis; and hands-on experiences in making medicines,…

- Minh Sang Plaza Shopping Center: Minh Sang Plaza Shopping Center showcases and sells a variety of ceramic products under the Minh Long I brand, belonging to Minh Long I Co., Ltd. The company, established in 1970, inherits the legacy of four generations of the Ly family. Initially producing ceramic art for export, the company has been manufacturing high-end household ceramics since 1995. Minh Long is one of the few brands to achieve a breakthrough and gain a top reputation in the ceramics industry. At Minh Sang Plaza, visitors have the opportunity to explore Minh Long's range of ceramic products, including high-end ceramics, household ceramic products, ceramic jewelry, and the Horeca ceramic line for hotels and restaurants. For visitors passionate about ceramics, they can learn about the craft and watch documentary films on ceramics, and even participate in hands-on experiences by creating their own ceramic products on a potter's wheel (Binh Duong Tourism Promotion Center, 2021). Minh Sang Plaza Shopping Center is open from 8 AM to 8 PM every day of the week for visitors and shoppers.

- Tuong Binh Hiep lacquerware village: The lacquerware craft has existed and developed for over 200 years in Tuong Binh Hiep, Binh Duong province. Throughout its existence and development, lacquerware artisans have continuously refined and integrated cultural values into each lacquer product. Notably, applied lacquer products have significantly contributed to the local economy and culture by participating in both domestic and international markets. With these values, the Tuong Binh Hiep lacquerware craft was recognized as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in 2016 (Binh Duong Tourism Promotion Center, 2021). At Tuong Binh Hiep lacquerware village, visitors can tour lacquerware workshops such as Tu Bon, Dinh Hoa, Bui Thanh Long and Thanh Binh Le.

While industrial tourism is experiencing many positive developments, the number of industrial parks and factories participating in industrial tourism activities is still limited and not widespread compared to the 30 industrial parks with thousands of operating factories in Binh Duong province. According to Mr. Pham Hong Thi, this limitation is largely due to many factories not investing in or having the skills to create tourist attractions, keeping production lines confidential, and many units focusing purely on business activities and therefore not wanting to connect and open for tours (Huyen, T., 2024).

1.2.2. Infrastructure and technical facilities

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Infrastructure and technical facilities in industrial parks and industrial points are invested comprehensively and modernly. Survey results show that over 70% of surveyed tourists agree or strongly agree with the criteria in the infrastructure and technical facilities category. The criterion with the highest satisfaction rate among tourists is the convenient transportation system, with an agreement rate of 83.7%. However, some locations have limitations regarding parking lots and timely provision of destination information services, with only 56.8% of tourists satisfied with this criterion.

1.2.3. Tourism services at destinations

Experiential services for tourists: Tourists visiting industrial tourism destinations in Binh Duong province gain insights into the history, production processes and work culture. Over 60% of tourists are satisfied with these criteria. However, experiential activities at industrial tourism destinations are not diverse and recreational activities are not attractive. These two criteria have agreement rates of only 37.5% and 43.8%, respectively.

Exhibition space for products: The majority of surveyed tourists are satisfied with destination criteria having exhibition spaces displaying products and fully showcasing destination products. However, only 53.8% of surveyed tourists agree with the criteria for spacious and airy areas for appreciating or viewing products.

Service quality: Most tourists agree with the service quality at industrial tourism destinations in Binh Duong province, with an average score of 3.91 points for this group of criteria. Over 75% of tourists agree with criteria such as unique characteristics of tourism destination products and guaranteed quality of services, unique goods, competitive prices.

1.2.4. Human resources

The current status of human resources for industrial tourism in Binh Duong province faces many challenges. Currently, the province lacks high-quality human resources in the tourism industry, impacting the potential development of local tourism. Some major events held in Binh Duong, such as the World Scientific Urban Association Congress (WTA) and the Horasis Asia Economic Forum, still require the mobilization of volunteers to meet translation and information exchange needs, highlighting the shortage of professional human resources (Hoang, P., 2019). Survey results show that only 46.1% agree with the criteria for professional presenters and tour guides at industrial tourism sites.

1.2.5. Destination promotion

The province intends to support factories, companies, and industrial production facilities in introducing and promoting images, brand products, production processes, and goods to a large number of tourists and consumers (Huyen, T., 2024). However, information about industrial tourism tours has not been widely disseminated. Information channels such as tourism websites, social media, and promotional events have not been effectively utilized. Survey results show that only 36.9% of tourists agree or strongly agree with clear and comprehensive destination introduction criteria. 44.4% of tourists agree or strongly agree with easy information search criteria. 45.0% of tourists agree or strongly agree with diverse and rich promotion methods.

1.2.6. Industrial tourism development support policies

Although Binh Duong province is focusing on building and developing industrial tourism products, it mainly focuses on supporting policies for promoting and introducing images and products, lacking specific policies and incentives for industrial tourism. This limits the development and investment in the industrial tourism sector in Binh Duong province.

In summary, the infrastructure, services at destinations, human resources and industrial tourism development policies in Binh Duong province are undergoing many positive changes. However, the number of industrial zones and factories participating in industrial tourism activities is still limited. Additionally, there are still some issues related to infrastructure, services at destinations, human resources, and industrial tourism development policies that need to be improved.

1.3. Some solutions to promote industrial tourism development in Binh Duong province

1.3.1. From the perspective of state agencies

The Department of Culture, Sports & Tourism of Binh Duong province needs to establish standards for industrial tourism destinations. Organize surveys and evaluations, issue certifications, and announce industrial tourism sites that meet standards in the province.

Support businesses in establishing facilities to serve tourists, such as product introduction centers, exhibition areas and product sales.

Collaborate with travel companies to develop tours to visit factories and industrial parks.

Support the training of the tourism workforce for industrial tourism destinations. Connect tourism businesses with schools to develop short and medium-term training programs in tourism for industrial tourism destinations. Ensure that employees at businesses have sufficient skills and knowledge to assist tourists.

Utilize media, social networks, and tourism websites to promote the image of industrial tourism in Binh Duong. Support businesses in promoting and introducing the image and products of the destination.

Develop policies to support the development of industrial tourism, such as providing tax incentives, credits for businesses participating in industrial tourism activities. Encourage cooperation between state agencies and private enterprises in investing and developing industrial tourism.

1.3.2. From the perspective of enterprises

Improve the facilities: Developing industrial tourism is a way for businesses to build their image, expand their market, and generate additional income. To achieve this, enterprises need to proactively improve their infrastructure, such as parking lots, restrooms, souvenir shops and areas for enjoying or admiring products.

Create diverse and attractive experiential activities: such as offering tours of manufacturing plants, helping tourists better understand production processes and technologies. Establish museums or exhibition areas showcasing the history and development of the enterprise, as well as its flagship products. Organize experiential activities, such as allowing tourists to try simple production processes.

Enhance promotion and product introduction: Use websites, social media, and online platforms to promote industrial tourism tours. Collaborate with travel agencies to incorporate factory tours into tourism programs. Produce high-quality videos, articles and images about industrial tourism experiences to attract tourists.

Train and improve the quality of employees: guides need to have extensive knowledge of the enterprise's production processes and products, as well as good communication skills. Ensure that all employees involved in tourism services are trained in customer service and have basic knowledge of industrial tourism.

Close cooperation with state agencies and other enterprises: Collaborate with the Department of Culture, Sports & Tourism of Binh Duong province to develop destinations that meet standards and train human resources. Collaborate with other businesses and tourist destinations in the area to create a chain of attractive tourist attractions.

2. Discussion

Binh Duong province enjoys a favorable geographical location near Ho Chi Minh City which is situated within a key economic region in the South with a thriving industrial sector and comprehensive infrastructure. This provides favorable conditions for the development of industrial tourism in Binh Duong, a promising and emerging tourism sector. Large industrial parks such as VSIP, My Phuoc, Song Than and Viet Huong not only serve as modern production centers but also attract visitors and researchers from both domestic and international destinations. Some enterprises within these industrial parks actively contribute to tourism development by offering tours of their manufacturing facilities, production lines, and showcasing modern technological processes. This approach effectively promotes the image of businesses and their products, while enhancing awareness of modern industry.

However, Binh Duong still faces significant challenges in the development of industrial tourism. Firstly, the lack of a systematic and cohesive tourism development strategy has hindered the effective exploitation of industrial tourism potential. Many businesses have not fully grasped the benefits of industrial tourism and remain limited in their efforts to welcome visitors. Additionally, challenges related to infrastructure, promotion, and human resources also impact the development of industrial tourism in Binh Duong.

To sustainably and effectively develop industrial tourism, Binh Duong needs to implement specific solutions. The province requires a clear strategy for industrial tourism development which is built on close cooperation between government agencies and businesses. There is a need to enhance the promotion and introduction of potential and industrial tourism tours to both domestic and international tourists through modern and efficient communication channels. It is necessary to focus on training and enhancing the capacity of tour guides and personnel in the industrial tourism sector. This ensures that tourists have enjoyable experiences while contributing positively to building a favorable image of industrial tourism in Binh Duong.

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In conclusion, industrial tourism in Binh Duong is in its initial stages and has considerable potential and opportunities. However, realizing this potential requires concerted efforts and synchronized cooperation from various stakeholders to establish industrial tourism as a distinctive tourism sector that positively contributes to the socio-economic development of Binh Duong province.

Research recommendations

Several limitations of the study need to be addressed in future research. First, the sampling method used in the study was non-probability convenience sampling, which reduces the objectivity of the research. Second, the limited number of survey points reduces the comprehensiveness of the study. Thirdly, it is necessary to further survey the opinions of experts and managers of destinations to gather more comprehensive information on the current state of industrial tourism development in Binh Duong province.

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FACTORS AFFECTING TOURISTS' BOOKING INTENTIONS ON ONLINE TRAVEL AGENTS (OTAS) IN VIETNAM

Huyen Thanh Pham[1]
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Extended abstract

In recent years, booking lodging online has become a popular trend as it is convenient. This research aims to investigate the factors influencing tourists' booking intentions when using Online Travel Agents (OTAs) in Vietnam. This study drew upon the Theory of Consumption Values (TCV) and applied a quantitative approach to examine the factors affecting tourists' booking intentions using OTAs in Vietnam. 262 valid samples were collected. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and SmartPLS software. The results showed that tourists' attitudes toward online agents and their preference value positively and significantly impacted their online booking intentions. The quality benefit value had the most positive and indirect effect on booking intentions, mediated by attitudes toward the platforms, followed by monetary value and preference value. On the contrary, social and information values were found to have no impact on tourists' intentions to book accommodations in Vietnam. Based on the outcomes of this study, academic implications, and practical recommendations will be provided to OTA service providers and further studies to gain insights into the OTA market in the context of Vietnam.

Keywords: Online Travel Agents, Attitudes, Online Booking Intentions, Theory of Consumption Values

Introduction

In 2017, the tourism and travel sector had 4.6% economic growth, exceeding the global economy and all other significant industries for the seventh consecutive year. The travel and tourism business had a 50% faster GDP growth rate than the overall economy. In the same year, 313 million people were employed worldwide, accounting for one in every ten jobs, and contributed 10.4% to the global GDP (ICAO, 2018). Online travel agents (OTAs) offer tourist services such as flight tickets, accommodations, holiday packages, destination tickets, and transportation via the Internet (Ray et al., 2021). Punnasuparom and Choibamroong (2020) found that guests gain their first impressions of hotels through their official website or searches on the web. Additionally, numerous travelers would rather be looking for lodging details through online travel agents (OTAs) before booking the accommodations. The online booking sector now generates income. Online platforms are predicted to grow in importance due to their appeal to customers (Guo, Ling, Dong, and Liang, 2013).

According to a survey conducted by Vietnam Report in 2022, most tourists prefer to arrange their travel services using mobile applications like Traveloka and Booking.com (78.5%). With travel increasingly integral to the lives of Vietnamese consumers, the popularity of mobile applications catering to various aspects of travel has surged. Online Travel Agents (OTAs) have particularly thrived, offering convenience, promotional incentives, and personalized information. This has significantly heightened awareness and recognition among Vietnamese citizens.

Objectives

This research aims to identify the factors that affect booking intentions using OTAs in Vietnam. Therefore, this study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identify factors that directly affect tourists' attitudes toward OTAs.

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2. Identify factors that directly affect tourists' booking intention on OTAs.

3. Identify factors that indirectly affect tourists' booking intention on OTAs with the mediation of attitude.

Hypothesis

The Theory of Consumption Values

The Theory of Consumption Values (TCV) was developed by Sheth et al. (1991), which defines five fundamental values, namely functional, emotional, social, conditional, and epistemic, that impact consumer behavior. To understand consumption values, this theory has gained widespread recognition and has been widely and successfully applied in a variety of contexts (Dhir et al., 2018; Kaur et al., 2018; Mäntymäki and Salo, 2015; Mäntymäki et al., 2014).

The TCV has shown to be especially helpful in the hospitality and tourism industry, as demonstrated by its application in the marketing of destinations (Phau et al., 2014) and the analysis of airline frequent flyer programs (Long and Schiffman, 2000). The TCV's multi-dimensional perspective, which considers both the affective and cognitive aspects of consumption, is one of its main advantages. As Williams and Soutar (2009) indicate, this all-encompassing perspective is essential to comprehend the multifaceted nature of tourism services.

Monetary Value

Existing research on mobile applications has revealed that the pricing (Jamrozy and Lawonk, 2017) components of functional value have a substantial relationship with usage intent. Price value is widely used along with product or service quality to assess perceived value (Mohamad et al., 2021). Most buyers would consider perceived pricing as a crucial factor in their purchasing choice (Chiang and Jang, 2007). The impact of pricing on customer search has been explored (Rutz and Trusov, 2011; Ghose et al., 2014; Baye et al., 2009). It was discovered that a reduced price generates more clicks for an online store (Baye et al., 2009). Similarly, Ghose et al. (2014). demonstrated that price is adversely correlated with customer rate of visiting PC-based websites. Hotel reservations are an example of high involvement in purchasing decision-making (Ert and Fleischer, 2016). Buyers evaluate online pricing with offline rates to identify the most cost-effective option (Kim and Gupta, 2009). Rheem (2010) found that 43% of clients will quit an online travel booking site if the overall price exceeds their willingness to pay. Talwar et al. (2020) found that monetary value positively correlates with the customers' purchase intention toward OTAs.

H1a. Monetary Value directly influences tourists' attitudes toward OTAs.

H1b. Monetary Value directly influences tourists' booking intention on OTAs.

H1c. Monetary Value indirectly influences tourists' booking intention on OTAs with the mediation of attitude.

Quality of Benefits Value

Perceived benefit is an effective tool in shaping consumer intentions such as purchase intention for using online features and services (Calisir et al., 2014). Furthermore, perceived benefit is connected to the psychological component of customers seeking adjustment, as buyers will quickly rate their appropriateness with the websites, they browse to gain details or receive services. Wu (2003) defined perceived benefits in online purchasing as the total of advantages that satisfy a consumer's demands or desires. According to Kim et al. (2008), perceived benefits refer to a consumer's view about how much they would profit from an online transaction with a specific website. The perceived benefit is not restricted to financial benefits but also covers a variety of elements that generate advantages during the purchasing procedure (Hien et al., 2022; Mai et al., 2021; Talwar et al., 2020).

In the context of Online Travel Agents (OTAs), perceived benefit refers to how much a customer feels they will profit from adopting OTAs. Talwar et al. (2020) claimed that the quality of benefits value is assessed based on convenience, regularity in providing advantages, and upholding a superior standard of benefits. The perceived advantage encompasses a variety of factors, including usefulness and convenience. Convenience is the identification of utilities that save consumers time and effort when purchasing or utilizing a product or service (Berry et al. 2002). According to Han et al. (2017), consumers benefit from the ease and speed of online purchases. Furthermore, customers may benefit from a variety of benefits, including lower prices because of active digital competition, as well as easier transactions, which will boost the consumers' value for use. Perceived benefits of Internet purchasing provide major benefits for customers, establishing a positive attitude towards it. Previous studies on e-commerce have shown that perceived benefits play a substantial role in determining customer attitudes (Kim et al., 2008; Delafrooz et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2012).

H2a. Quality of Benefits Value directly influences tourists' attitudes toward OTAs.

H2b. Quality of Benefits Value directly influences tourists' booking intention on OTAs.

H2c. Quality of Benefits Value indirectly influences tourists' booking intention on OTAs with the mediation of attitude.

Social Value

Tandon et al. (2021) identify social value as a key factor in retaining customers from diverse cultural and theoretical backgrounds. According to Kaur et al. (2021), a product's social worth might enhance buyers' sense of self, clients with strong social values are more likely to engage with products or services. According to Khan and Mohsin (2017) and Talwar et al. (2020), customers prioritize self-worth, social approbation, and symbolic meaning for others when purchasing things. Social value is linked to enhancing a person's social reputation, forming social relationships, and achieving consensus among peers (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Social value is what people think of an option based on its relationship with distinct social groupings (Sheth, Newman & Gross, 1991). Additionally, Phau et al. (2014) discovered that social value had a considerable impact on destination tourism preferences. Morosan & DeFranco (2016) discovered that social variables had a beneficial impact on tourists' desire to utilize hotel mobile applications.

H3a. Social Value directly influences tourists' attitudes toward OTAs.

H3b. Social Value directly influences tourists' booking intention on OTAs.

H3c. Social Value indirectly influences tourists' booking intention on OTAs with the mediation of attitude.

Information Value

Information is the most important component for assessing tourist websites (Talwar et al. 2020). The more useful information that assists consumers in making choices, the better (Zhu and Kim, 2019; Negash et al., 2003). Tarute et al. (2017) found the value of information in many media, including voice, visuals, words, and video. In e-commerce, information quality refers to how a consumer perceives information offered by a website or mobile application (Min, Lee, & Jo, 2021). It also considers the variety of content and usefulness (Phuong & Dai Trang, 2018; Chen & Chang, 2018; Shin & Cho, 2019). In addition, correct and current information must be presented to encourage customers to buy intents (Ali, 2016).

Talwar et al. (2020) define information value as the acquisition of information on various deals, promotions, and the terms and conditions associated with OTA applications. Clients usually obtain information online before acquiring a product or service (Forsythe and Shi, 2003). Information quality, particularly whether details are reliable, up-to-date, and clear, is an aspect of OTA service quality (Chen & Chang 2018). Chu (2001) and Zickefoose (2001) underscored the significance of informative content on travel websites. In a study by Shim et al. (2001), the relationship between consumers' intention to utilize the Internet for searching product information and their inclination toward online purchasing was investigated. Their findings demonstrated a strong link between customers' desire to utilize the Internet for product information searches and their favorable tendency to make online purchases, in the context of this study, through Booking.com.

H4a. Information Value directly influences tourists' attitudes toward OTAs.

H4b. Information Value directly influences tourists' booking intention on OTAs.

H4c. Information Value indirectly influences tourists' booking intention on OTAs with the mediation of attitude.

Preference Value

Talwar et al. (2020) defined preference value as a conditional measurement that includes cancellations with no charge, promotional incentives, and OTAs offering additional properties. Hu and Yang (2019) discovered that promotional rates are crucial for tourists during both the evaluation and purchasing stages. Research by Gretzel and Yoo (2019) highlights the correlation between customer preferences and attitudes towards OTAs. Good experience with the customers' preferences such as reasonable prices, transparent terms and conditions, and individualized suggestions might lead to favorable sentiments toward OTAs (Choi & Kim, 2020). In contrast, discontent resulting from elements such as hidden fees, and inaccurate data may contribute to unfavorable views (Li & Hsiao, 2020).

H5a. Preference Value directly influences tourists' attitudes toward OTAs.

H5b. Preference Value directly influences tourists' booking intention on OTAs.

H5c. Preference Value indirectly influences tourists' booking intention on OTAs with the mediation of attitude.

Attitude

Attitude plays a vital role as a supportive agent (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008. Attitude toward behavior refers to the degree to which one evaluates the performance of a particular action favorably or unfavorably (Ajzen, 1985). An attitude signifies an assessment reflecting the degree of positive or negative sentiment directed towards a specific subject (Thurstone, 1931). It represents an acquired predisposition and bias that prompts responses to that object (Allport, 1935).

Prior studies have explored the preferences for products or services among individuals, factors motivating purchasing decisions, and reactions toward others (Solomon et al., 2014). Chau & Hu (2001) further support this finding by demonstrating that attitude, along with other variables, positively impacts behavioral intentions. Similarly, Moon & Kim (2001) examine the effect of users' attitudes toward the websites, revealing a positive and noteworthy correlation between attitude and users' behavioral intentions (Shih & Fang, 2005). Bhattacherjee (2000) discovers that attitude plays a significant role in influencing behavioral intentions in online purchasing. According to Fishbein & Ajzen (1992), behavioral intention is closely associated with attitude. Positive attitudes among tourists heighten the likelihood of purchasing intention (Um & Yoon, 2021).

H6. Attitude directly influences tourists' booking intention on OTAs.

Booking intention

Consumer intent to buy has been extensively studied in marketing studies because it serves as a component that reflects behavioral intention (Zeithaml et al., 1996) and is said to reflect what customers do (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Measures of intention outperform behavioral measurements in reflecting buyer intentions since actual acts may be affected by something a business provides, such as discounts and coupons, instead of real desires (Day, 1969). Casaló et al. (2015, 2010) describe purchasing intents as travelers' desire to reserve hotel accommodations. While Sreejesh & Anusree (2016) define hotel booking intention as the willingness of a customer to stay at a hotel. Hoteliers utilize Internet booking platforms to save money and give more convenient service to their visitors (Abdullah et al., 2019, 46). Online hotel booking intention refers to a consumer's intent to reserve a room through a hotel website (Lien et al., 2015) or their willingness to engage in an online transaction (Saw et al., 2015).
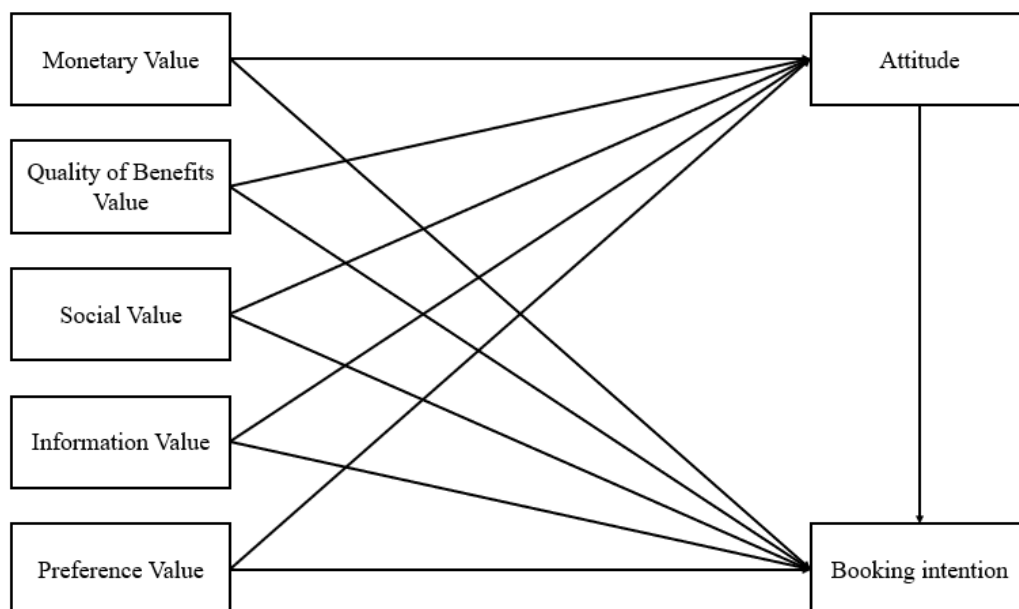
Figure 1: Research Model

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

The study aims to identify the factors influencing tourists' booking intention using OTAs in Vietnam. The target respondents are those who know or have previously used OTAs in Vietnam. A prerequisite for participation is that individuals must be at least 18 years old, ensuring they can make decisions regarding travel arrangements.

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Screening questions were included in the questionnaire to approach the right participants who meet all criteria.

2. Research Tools

According to Creswell (2013), quantitative research is a technique that investigates the connections between variables in a study. Such techniques are ideal for detecting and validating correlations between variables. Surveys are often used to collect data for quantitative research (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Therefore, quantitative techniques are used in this research to examine the factors affecting tourists' booking intentions using OTAs in Vietnam.

3. Data Collection

The samples of this study were collected through a questionnaire conducted online. The target respondents of the survey are above 18 years old. They must have known or used OTAs in Vietnam before. A convenience sampling method was used to collect the data.

285 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents within 2 weeks, from the 26th of March to the 9th of April 2024. Among them, 262 collected questionnaires were valid and accounted for 91.93%. The 23 invalid questionnaires were because those respondents had never known of or used OTAs before (8.07%).

4. Data Analysis

SPSS and SmartPLS were used in this study to analyze the collected data. SPSS 29 was used to analyze demographic data and descriptive data. SmartPLS 4 was used for reliability tests, validity tests, as well as hypotheses tests.

Demographic Information

Among the 262 valid respondents of this research, 60.7% of them are female, 37.4% are male, and the rest 1.9% prefer not to mention their gender. The majority of the age group of this research is from 18 to 25, accounting for 63.74%. 221 of them are bachelors (84.35%). The most common income per month of the respondents is below 5 million VND (39.31%), followed by 5 to 10 million VND (30.15%). 42.74% of the respondents reported that they used OTAs 2 to 3 times in the previous year to book hotel rooms. The two most widely known and used OTAs in this study are Traveloka (43.89%) and Booking.com (30.15%).

Table 1. Demographic information

	Variable	Frequency (No.)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	98	37.4
	Female	159	60.7
	Prefer not to say	5	1.9
Age	18 – 25	167	63.7
	26 – 35	55	21.0
	36 – 45	26	9.9
	46 – 55	8	3.1
	56 and above	6	2.3
Education Level	Highschool and below	10	3.8
	Vocational education or associate degree	12	4.6
	Bachelor	221	84.4
	Postgraduate	19	7.3
Income (VND)	Less than 5 million	103	39.3
	5 – 10 million	79	30.2
	10 – 15 million	40	15.3
	15 – 20 million	21	8.0
	Above 20 million	19	7.3
Times used	0 time	39	14.9
	1 time	61	23.3

Variable		Frequency (No.)	Percent (%)
	2 – 3 times	112	42.7
	4 – 5 times	32	12.2
	6 – 7 times	8	3.1
	8 – 9 times	0	0
	9 – 10 times	0	0
	More than 10 times	10	3.8
	Booking.com	79	30.2
	Agoda	53	20.2
Favorite OTA	Traveloka	115	43.9
	Trivago	9	3.4
	Expedia	1	0.4
	Trip.com	1	0.4
	Others	4	1.5

Reliability and Validity

Table 2 shows the measurement model's overall internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.8 (George & Mallery, 2003), indicating good internal consistency reliability. Moreover, all item loadings were greater than 0.7, implying high indicator reliability (Carmines & Zeller, 1979; Hair et al., 2017).

The convergent validity of the measurement scales was assessed through composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). The CR values ranged from 0.897 to 0.950, well above the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2009), suggesting strong convergent validity. Furthermore, the AVE values for all constructs exceeded the critical value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2009). As shown in Table 2, the AVE values for all latent variables were substantially higher than 0.5, indicating high levels of convergent validity for the measurement model.

Table 2. Evaluation of Measurement Model

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Monetary Value	MV1	0.821	0.858	0.904	0.701
	MV2	0.864			
	MV3	0.820			
	MV4	0.844			
Quality of Benefits Value	QBV1	0.843	0.852	0.910	0.772
	QBV2	0.893			
	QBV3	0.900			
Social Value	SV1	0.925	0.939	0.956	0.844
	SV2	0.937			
	SV3	0.916			
	SV4	0.896			
Information Value	IV1	0.839	0.828	0.897	0.744
	IV2	0.891			
	IV3	0.858			
Preference Value	PV1	0.859	0.838	0.902	0.755
	PV2	0.888			

	PV3	0.859			
Attitude	ATT1	0.869	0.899	0.930	0.768
	ATT2	0.878			
	ATT3	0.894			
	ATT4	0.865			
Booking Intentions	BI1	0.921	0.921	0.950	0.864
	BI2	0.945			
	BI3	0.922			

To establish the distinctiveness of the constructs within the model, discriminant validity was assessed. Discriminant validity is achieved when an indicator's outer loading on its associated construct is greater than its cross-loadings with other constructs (Hair et al., 2017). Additionally, the Fornell-Larcker criterion requires that the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each latent variable exceeds its highest correlation with any other construct in the model (Hair et al., 2017). The results presented in Table 3 demonstrate that the constructs in the measurement model exhibited discriminant validity.

Table 3. Discriminant validity (Fornel-Larcker criterion)

Variables	ATT	BI	IV	MV	PV	QBV	SV
ATT	**0.876**						
BI	0.876	**0.929**					
IV	0.695	0.692	**0.863**				
MV	0.766	0.754	0.757	**0.837**			
PV	0.677	0.719	0.740	0.688	**0.869**		
QBV	0.824	0.773	0.700	0.823	0.675	**0.879**	
SV	0.333	0.283	0.157	0.253	0.147	0.375	**0.919**

Structural Model Assessment

The coefficient of determination (R^2) is a measure that quantifies the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variables within the model. Evaluating the R^2 values for endogenous constructs provides insights into the model's predictive ability. R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 are considered substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). The results revealed substantial predictive power within the model, as evidenced by the R^2 values for the endogenous constructs. Specifically, the R^2 value of tourists' attitudes toward OTAs is 0.725, which indicates that 72.5% of the variance in this construct is explained collectively by the five predictor variables: monetary value, quality of benefits value, social value, information value, and preference value. Furthermore, the R^2 value of booking intentions using OTAs is 0.791, which implies that 79.1% of the variance in tourists' intentions to book through OTAs is accounted for by the six predictor variables, which include the mentioned five variables and attitudes.

The path coefficients, t-values, and p-values were calculated using the PLS algorithm and bootstrapping procedures with 1000 subsamples (Table 4). The results revealed that monetary value ($\beta = 0.163$, $p < 0.05$), quality of benefits value ($\beta = 0.488$, $p < 0.05$), and preference value ($\beta = 0.140$, $p < 0.05$) had a significant positive effect on attitudes toward OTAs, supporting H1a, H2a, and H5a. However, social value and information value did not significantly influence attitudes toward OTAs, leading to the rejection of H3a and H4a ($p > 0.05$).

Furthermore, preference value ($\beta = 0.194$, $p < 0.05$) and attitudes toward OTAs ($\beta = 0.607$, $p < 0.05$) showed significant positive relationships with booking intentions using OTAs, supporting H5b and H6. In contrast, monetary value, quality of benefits value, social value, and information value did not significantly impact booking intentions using OTAs ($p > 0.05$), which rejects H1b, H2b, H3b, and H4b.

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Table 4. Results of structural model (Direct relationships)

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficients	t-value	R^2	F^2	p-value	Supported
H1a	MV → ATT	0.163	2.178	0.725	0.025	0.030	Yes
H2a	QBV → ATT	0.488	7.832	0.725	0.229	0.000	Yes
H3a	SV → ATT	0.070	1.833	0.725	0.015	0.067	No
H4a	IV → ATT	0.115	1.605	0.725	0.016	0.109	No
H5a	PV → ATT	0.140	2.018	0.725	0.028	0.044	Yes
H1b	MV → BI	0.114	1.635	0.791	0.015	0.102	No
H2b	QBV → BI	0.033	0.456	0.791	0.001	0.649	No
H3b	SV → BI	0.008	0.270	0.791	0.000	0.787	No
H4b	IV → BI	0.016	0.221	0.791	0.000	0.825	No
H5b	PV → BI	0.194	3.554	0.791	0.069	0.000	Yes
H6	ATT → BI	0.607	10.908	0.791	0.485	0.000	Yes

This study also examined how attitudes toward OTAs mediated the relationships between the independent factors and booking intentions using OTAs. Table 5 shows that monetary value ($\beta = 0.099$, $p < 0.05$), quality of benefits value ($\beta = 0.297$, $p < 0.05$), and preference value ($\beta = 0.085$, $p < 0.05$) have significant indirect effects on tourists' booking intentions on OTAs through the mediation of attitudes toward OTAs. These findings support H1c, H2c, and H5c. However, the indirect effect of social and information value was shown to be non-significant, thereby rejecting H3c and H4c ($p > 0.05$).

Table 5. Results of structural model (Indirect relationships)

Hypothesis	Relationship	Indirect effect	t-value	p-value	Supported
H1c	MV → ATT→ BI	0.099	2.074	0.038	Yes
H2c	QBV → ATT→ BI	0.297	6.581	0.000	Yes
H3c	SV → ATT→ BI	0.042	1.750	0.080	No
H4c	IV → ATT→ BI	0.070	1.576	0.115	No
H5c	PV → ATT→ BI	0.085	1.987	0.047	Yes

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

This study is based on the TCV to develop a framework to examine how monetary value, quality of benefits value, social value, information value, preference value, and attitudes toward OTAs influence tourists' booking intentions on OTAs. Among the antecedents of booking intentions, attitudes toward OTAs have the most significant direct influence with $\beta = 0.607$, followed by preference value ($\beta = 0.194$), monetary value ($\beta = 0.114$), quality of benefits value ($\beta = 0.033$), information value ($\beta = 0.016$), and lastly is the social value ($\beta = 0.008$).

Regarding the hypothesized indirect impact on booking intentions on OTAs with the mediation of attitude, the quality of benefits value has the most significant relationship ($\beta = 0.297$), followed by monetary value ($\beta = 0.099$), preference value ($\beta = 0.085$), information value ($\beta = 0.070$), and social value ($\beta = 0.042$). As observed in the result, the social value demonstrated the weakest influence on booking intentions using OTAs, both directly and indirectly, underscoring its limited role in shaping tourists' intentions to book through OTAs.

2. Discussion

The research findings revealed a direct and significant influence of tourists' attitudes toward OTAs on their intentions to book through these platforms. This result corresponds to the study by Le and Bui (2022), which found that an individual's attitude toward OTAs is one of the key factors of their online hotel booking intentions on OTAs in Vietnam. The findings highlight the vital role that attitudes play in shaping consumers' tendency to use OTAs for booking accommodations in Vietnam.

Monetary value positively influenced attitudes towards OTAs but did not directly impact booking intention. However, it had a significant indirect effect on booking intention by mediating attitude towards OTAs, supporting the study of Agag & El-Masry (2017). Quality of benefits value significantly impacted attitudes towards OTAs, supported by Amaro & Duarte (2015), Sahli & Legohérel (2015), and Agag & El-Masry (2016), but did not directly influence booking intentions. Nevertheless, it had a positive indirect effect on booking intention through the mediation of attitude, consistent with Ponte et al. (2015), Bilgihan & Bujisic (2015), Agag & El-Masry (2016), and Amaro & Duarte (2015).

Social value did not affect attitudes towards OTAs or booking intentions, either directly or indirectly through the mediation of attitudes, contrasting with findings by Phau et al. (2014) and Talwar et al. (2020). Similarly, information value did not affect attitudes towards OTAs or booking intentions, either directly or indirectly through the mediation of attitudes, contradicting studies by Morosan & DeFranco (2016).

On the other hand, preference value exhibited a significant direct influence on both attitudes and booking intentions towards OTAs and indirectly affected booking intention through the mediating effect of attitude towards OTAs, corresponding with previous research by Lee et al. (2013), Xu & Fox (2014), and Talwar et al. (2020).

Research recommendations

Based on the insights derived from this study, OTA service providers can strategically leverage the findings to enhance their offerings and cater more effectively to the Vietnamese market's needs and expectations. By implementing these strategic adjustments, OTA platforms can effectively address the multifaceted consumption values of the Vietnamese market, fostering positive attitudes and ultimately driving increased booking intentions through their platforms. To enhance the booking intention, OTAs should put more focus on creating a favorable attitude toward their platforms among tourists. This can be fulfilled offerings and on providing user benefits such as convenience, high-quality service, attractive promotional offerings, and alignment with tourists' preferences.

According to the study, OTA users are more likely to buy travel products online when they believe they are getting a good deal in terms of quality and price. To increase online bookings, travel companies should focus on improving the user experience through convenience and providing a high, consistent level of benefits. This can be accomplished by providing an easy-to-use interface, a quick booking process, and utilizing modern technology. The OTA applications and websites, for example, may provide a more convenient and faster way to complete payment by integrating with some of Vietnam's largest and most popular banks and e-wallets.

The study's findings highlight the important function that users' preference values play in shaping their intentions to book travel products and services via OTAs. By gaining a comprehensive awareness of the specific preference values held by their target audiences, OTAs can tailor their offerings, user experiences, and marketing strategies accordingly. Based on the findings of this study, users are more concerned with the benefits of using OTAs, such as free cancellations and the presence of their preferred properties on these platforms.

Significantly, this study provides how critical consumption values influence the booking intention of OTA users in Vietnam. The findings from this study provide OTA service providers with an opportunity to strategically adapt their services to the unique Vietnamese marketplace. Given these insights, businesses may modify their platforms and services to meet the specific requirements of the tourists. By utilizing these understandings of the Vietnamese customers' scenery, OTA businesses can gain a competitive advantage and build stronger relationships with their target audiences.

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FACTORS AFFECTING CUSTOMERS' PURCHASE INTENTION ON FOOD DELIVERY APPS: A CONSUMER VALUE PERSPECTIVE

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Extended abstract

The study aims to investigate factors influencing customer purchase intention to adopt food delivery apps (FDAs). In recent years, FDAs have gained tremendous popularity due to their ease of use and speed of service. The industry has boomed worldwide, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, there is a lack of understanding of how consumers' perceptions of FDAs' prominent features and benefits would influence their buying intention. Based on the Theory of Consumption Values (TCV), this paper examines how customer consumption values towards FDAs influence their purchase intention. The mediating role of attitude is also investigated.

A quantitative methods approach is used in this research. An online survey collected responses from 307 participants from Vietnam who have experience with or have known about FDAs. The reliability and validity of the measurement scales and the proposed hypotheses were tested by using SmartPLS software.

Based on the study findings, two out of five consumption values directly influence consumers' intention to use FDAs in Vietnam, including emotional and conditional values. Meanwhile, the relationships between functional, emotional, social, and epistemic values and purchase intention are significantly mediated by consumer attitudes toward FDAs. These results can help businesses better implement and adjust their strategies to enhance customer perceived values and their buying intention.

Keywords: *food delivery apps, theory of consumption values, attitude, purchase intention*

Introduction

The expansion of online-to-offline (O2O) has fundamentally transformed the landscape of the hospitality industry, which merges digital marketing and sales of goods and services with traditional brick-and-mortar businesses (Kaur et al., 2021; Talwar et al., 2021; Xu, 2017; Xu and Huang, 2019). Food delivery apps (FDAs), thriving in today's tech-driven world, have emerged as a prominent example of O2O platforms (Kaur et al., 2020; Hwang and Kim, 2019; Talwar et al., 2021). FDAs offer ordering and delivery of food and beverages from restaurants to customers' desired locations with some simple steps on the phone. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic further amplified the impact of O2O platforms in the hospitality sector. Consumers increasingly opted for contactless services like those offered by FDAs, prioritizing them over traditional in-person interactions (Hwang et al., 2020). In the period of stability and normalization after COVID-19, the popularity of FDAs has been fueled by several factors, including increasingly busy lifestyles (Ray et al., 2019). Notably, FDAs appeal particularly to urban residents whose fast-paced lives make food delivery a convenient and valuable solution (Kaur et al., 2021).

It is categorized into 2 main types of FDAs: restaurant-operated apps and intermediary delivery apps. In Vietnam, some typical restaurants that develop their own food delivery applications are KFC, Jollibee, The Coffee House, Highland Coffee… However, the latter type, which is the third-party platform, is more common amongst the Vietnamese people, for instance: GrabFood, ShoppeFood, GoFood, etc. Before COVID-19, the market size in this field was just 255.3 million U.S. dollars. Until 2023, this number had increased dramatically by 1,673.2 million U.S. dollars and is expected to reach 2,709.7 million dollars in 2025 (Statista, 2024). This number proves that Vietnam is the potential market for FDAs and will keep continue to grow in the future. Vietnam's digital landscape is rapidly expanding. High smartphone usage (73.5% of adults) and increased internet access (65% with fiber optic) set the stage for this growth. The country's digital economy is the fastest growing in Southeast Asia, driven by a surge in e-commerce. This growth is a response to the pandemic's "new normal," and consumers intend to continue heavily using online platforms. Food delivery and online grocery shopping are especially popular, and urban residents lead in the use of all digital services (Hoang & Tan, 2023).

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The significant impact of FDAs, particularly in the food retail industry, has sparked scholarly interest in how consumers engage with these platforms. Research has explored factors influencing users' intentions to use FDAs (Yeo et al., 2017) and how their values influence their adoption (Kaur et al., 2021). As this research area is still in its nascent stages, further investigation is necessary to fully grasp the nuances of this evolving landscape. Firstly, existing research on the factors influencing consumer decisions and intentions surrounding food delivery apps (FDAs) is limited (Kaur et al., 2021; Ray et al., 2019; Xu and Huang, 2019). Secondly, even fewer studies have focused on how consumer attitudes and values specifically drive FDA adoption and use (e.g., Ray et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020). Additionally, most academic studies rely heavily on technology-focused theories to explain consumer behavior towards FDAs (e.g., Yeo et al., 2017).

While existing theories reveal technology-based reasons for using FDAs, they lack the depth to explain why people adopt them and what benefits or values they seek (Ray et al., 2019). This research aims to bridge this gap and address these limitations by applying the Theory of Consumption Values (TCV) (Sheth et al., 1991) as a foundation for the framework to understand consumer decisions in purchasing FDAs in this context. As far as the author's concerns, there is no research focus on all of these five values in the FDAs context. The fullest one was researched by Tandon et al. (2021) who investigated three values, which are functional, conditional, and social. This paper will complement the other emotional value and epistemic value besides the other three. This contributes to the completion of the theory in the FDAs context.

Objectives

1. To examine the influence of consumption values on purchase intention on food delivery apps.

2. To analyze the mediating role of attitude in the relationship between consumption values and purchase intention on food delivery apps.

3. To provide recommendations for FDAs platforms to make adjustments in order to increase the consumption values perceived by customers.

Hypotheses

Purchase intention

Ajzen and Fishbein's (1972) research found that purchase intention conveyed the individual's perceived likelihood of carrying out an action. To put it another way, its definition is the likelihood, willingness, and potential to buy a good or service (Dodds et al., 1991). This means that if customers were drawn to a product, they were likely to remember it and possibly buy or utilize it in the future. Purchase intention was also defined as a consumer's deliberate and precise purpose to acquire or use a product (Spears & Singh, 2004). Besides being linked to buying specific products or brands (Hosein, 2012), purchase intention can also refer to the general openness to buying something. For instance, it can describe a traveler's willingness to visit a particular destination (McQuitty et al., 2000; Chen et al., 2014).

Several studies have found a strong connection between a consumer's intention to purchase and their actual buying behavior. For example, Morwitz and Schmittlein (1992) viewed purchase intention as a gauge of a user's decision to buy. Similarly, according to Hill et al. (1977) as well as Kalwani and Silk (1982), purchase intention is considered one of the most reliable indicators of actual purchasing behavior. This means that generally, a stronger positive attitude towards a product or service translates to a higher desire of purchasing (Nia & Zaichkowsky, 2000). It can be said that a higher purchase intention leads to a stronger desire to acquire the product or service.

Theory of consumption values

TCV provides a means of comprehending how customers select a specific product from a variety of brands and products that are available for purchase—or not (Sheth et al., 1991). Another definition of consumption values proposed by Biswas & Roy (2015) was the extent to which the overall assessment of a customer's net utility or fulfillment with a product after purchase satisfies their demand. The idea of consumption values is founded on three essential claims: (1) multiple consumption values influence consumer choice, (2) different consumption values have varying effects on every particular decision-making situation, and (3) consumption values are independent (Sheth et al, 1991). For these scholars who are studying customer value, the release of TCV has been a helpful resource for studying consumer behaviors (Karjaluoto et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2023).

According to Sheth et al. (1991), there are 5 types of values based on the theory of consumption values: functional value, social value, conditional value, epistemic value, and emotional value. TCV, however, only offers a

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general conception of these values. Recent studies in the hospitality sector emphasize the necessity of evaluating context-specific consumption values to acquire a more comprehensive picture of customer behavior (Talwar et al., 2020). Obtain from Tandon et al. (2021), this paper adds two more values which are emotional and epistemic values to provide a completion of the theory of consumption values on FDAs purchase intention.

Functional value

Functional value refers to the perceived usefulness of a product or service based on its ability to fulfill practical needs. In the context of FDAs, features that enhance convenience and ease of use contribute to functional value. Consumers often evaluate functional value by comparing the features and functionalities of different options, creating a kind of "choice attribute profile" in their minds. (Sheth et al., 1991). Many studies show that consumers value products that meet their practical needs, especially those related to quality and affordability (Kuo et al., 2018; Kaur et al., 2021; Talwar et al., 2020).

Some studies found a positive link between functional value and the intention to use certain services, like ecotourism (Jamrozy and Lawonk, 2017), environment-friendly clothing (Xu et al.2014), or food choices (Díaz et al., 2012; Kaur et al., 2020; Talwar et al., 2021). These researchers suggest that value for money is a more critical factor in such cases. It is reasonable to believe that quality, price, and the overall perception of getting good value for money might be favorably linked to the intention to utilize FDAs.

Previous research suggests that online shoppers are motivated by factors like lower prices (Jung et al., 2014). They often compare prices across different platforms to find the most affordable option (Yeo et al., 2017). In the realm of online FDAs, this translates to a preference for platforms offering the most competitive prices. Ali et al. (2010) further emphasize that customer perception of price value is influenced by the overall service quality. In other words, a positive attitude towards an FDA is more likely to develop if it combines competitive prices with good service quality.

Thus, the hypotheses are developed:

H1.1. Functional value shows a favorable correlation with customer's attitude.

H1.2. Functional value shows a favorable correlation with purchasing intention.

Social value

Social value refers to the perceived worth of a product or service based on its association with certain social groups. In the context of FDAs, this can be influenced by the app's perceived association with specific demographics, social trends, or even cultural identities. Consumers may use a mental "social image profile" to assess this value, considering how using a particular FDA aligns with their social values and desired image (Sheth et al., 1991).

Studies by Gilovich et al. (2015) suggest experiences contribute to social value by allowing self-expression. For instance, choosing organic food (Kushwah et al., 2019) or using popular services (Kuo et al., 2018; Talwar et al., 2020) can enhance self-image and social standing, leading to continued use. Friends and social circles also influence choices, as shown by the connection between social value and app usage in travel and messaging (Talwar et al., 2020; Dhir et al., 2018). Companies leverage this by promoting products through social media and user-generated content, appealing to the desire for social connection and positive self-image (Oestreicher-Singer and Zalmanson, 2011). Therefore, the authors believe feeling good about oneself due to social status is likely a factor in using FDAs.

Research suggests a strong connection between positive personal attitudes, adherence to social norms, and the likelihood of engaging in behaviors (Bananuka et al., 2020; Elshaer et al., 2021; Mejia et al., 2021; Tsai et al., 2020). This highlights the significant role of social factors in shaping attitudes. In the context of food delivery apps, this social influence can extend to how individuals perceive the practices of these services.

The study proposes hypotheses on social value:

H2.1. Social value shows a favorable correlation with customer's attitude.

H2.2. Social value shows a favorable correlation with purchasing intention.

Conditional value

Conditional value refers to the perceived worth of an option that arises due to specific circumstances surrounding the decision (Sheth et al., 1991). In the context of FDAs, this means an app might hold greater value depending on the situation. Consumers might unconsciously consider these situational factors when making choices, creating a kind of choice contingency profile.

Research suggests discounts might drive overall service use and reveal a positive link between promotions and specific situations. Discounts and rebates can incentivize purchases like real estate (Hoe et al., 2018) or specific food items depending on the context (Lin and Huang, 2012). Further evidence comes from studies on online travel agencies (Talwar et al., 2020) and food delivery apps (Kaur et al., 2021) in India, where situational benefits like special offers and convenience significantly boosted user demand. This trend extends to organic food choices as well, with research by Kushwah et al. (2019) highlighting the influence of situational benefits on buying decisions.

Research by Hamilton and Srivastava (2009) suggests that consumers are more sensitive to changes in shipping and handling charges than to changes in product prices. Several studies support this notion, demonstrating how delivery charges can act as a barrier to online purchases (Huang & Oppewal, 2006; Xia & Monroe, 2004). Concerning food delivery apps circumstances, where delivery fees are a core component of the service, understanding consumer sensitivity to these charges becomes even more critical. Therefore, this paper posits that a customer's preference for a particular delivery fee structure can be directly proportional to their overall attitude towards using FDAs.

H3.1. Conditional value shows a favorable correlation with customer's attitude.

H3.2. Conditional value shows a favorable correlation with purchasing intention.

Emotional value

A profile of the emotions associated with the alternative is used to evaluate emotional value (Sheth et al., 1991). Consumers choose options based on the positive experiences they create or avoiding negative ones, measured by the emotions linked to the option.

Research shows that positive emotions influence our intentions (Huang et al., 2017; Miniero et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2020). Food delivery apps (FDAs) offer several features that can create positive emotions in users. They make food quickly available, save customers time, and offer discounts that make people feel good (Ray et al., 2019). These positive experiences create a sense of connection with the app and encourage people to use it (Yang et al., 2020; Schlenker et al., 1973). Our overall experiences with a brand or app shape our opinions (Ling et al., 2010). Positive, enjoyable experiences leave us feeling good and more likely to purchase (Riley, 2010; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010).

According to Ruiz-Molina and Gil-Saura (2008), a consumer's attitude towards a product or service is heavily influenced by the emotional value associated with purchasing it. In the context of FDAs, this emotional value can play a significant role in shaping user attitudes.

From previous statements, hypotheses are created:

H4.1. Emotional value shows a favorable correlation with customer's attitude.

H4.2. Emotional value shows a favorable correlation with purchasing intention.

Epistemic value

Epistemic value involves the curiosity, novelty, and knowledge associated with an option. It is about being drawn to options that offer new experiences or learning opportunities, measured by the level of curiosity, newness, and grasp acquired (Sheth et al., 1991). This was found to be true for teenagers when it comes to online shopping (Mantymaki and Salo, 2015) and even in decisions about healthy food consumption (Thome et al., 2019).

A study comparing Japanese and Western adventure travelers found that Japanese tourists place a higher value on novelty and curiosity (Williams et al., 2017). This same study also revealed that the desire to learn and discover new things has a positive connection with the intention to use online travel companies (Talwar et al., 2020). Consumers driven by epistemic value typically settle into their new routines of consumption after feeling satisfied with the adjustment (Sheth et al., 1991).

The knowledge-attitude-behavior model proposes a sequential relationship where knowledge acquisition is a key first step. As individuals gain knowledge about a product or service, it influences their cognitive processes, shapes their perceptions, and ultimately affects their attitudes (Chen et al., 2022; Dhir et al., 2021). These changes in attitude then manifest in observable behaviors. Based on the food delivery apps' conditions, knowledge acquisition can play a significant role in shaping user attitudes and influencing their intention to use the service.

Hypotheses are proposed to analyze this assumption:

H5.1. Epistemic value shows a favorable correlation with customer's attitude.

H5.2. Epistemic value shows a favorable correlation with purchasing intention.

Customer's attitude towards FDAs purchase intention

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) emphasizes attitude as a core factor influencing an individual's intention to use technology (Hong et al., 2017). Studies have shown that positive user attitudes towards mobile devices translate to a greater likelihood of using them (Kim et al., 2009) or predict users' continued use of those services (Shaikh and Karjaluoto, 2015).

Within the context of FDAs, Belanche et al. (2020) established a noteworthy positive effect of attitude on both user intention to use these apps. Dhir et al. (2021) discovered a link between positive environmental attitudes and individuals' intention to purchase green clothing. Likewise, Tandon et al. (2020) discovered a favorable correlation between customers' purchasing intentions for organic food and their attitudes. Studies report significant associations between attitude and consumer behavior in areas including food waste behavior (Stefan et al., 2013), tourist destination choices (Hwang et al., 2019), adoption of mobile commerce (Wu & Wang, 2005), and even the adoption of artificial intelligence services (Belanche et al., 2019).

We propose the following relationship:

H6. Customer's attitude shows a favorable correlation with purchasing intention.

The mediating influence of attitude

Some theories like the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) suggest attitude plays a mediating role between beliefs and intentions, research on technology adoption finds this role can be inconsistent (Davis et al., 1989). The mediating role of attitude has also been investigated in the context of intention to buy green cars by Han et al. (2017), Noor and Teoh (2015). This study suggests that attitude acts as a mediating variable, influencing the connection between consumption values and consumer behavior towards FDAs. This research, therefore, focuses on attitude as a mediating variable to examine the influence of these newly proposed dimensions.

H7. The association between FDA consumption values and purchase intention is mediated by users' attitudes regarding utilizing an FDA.
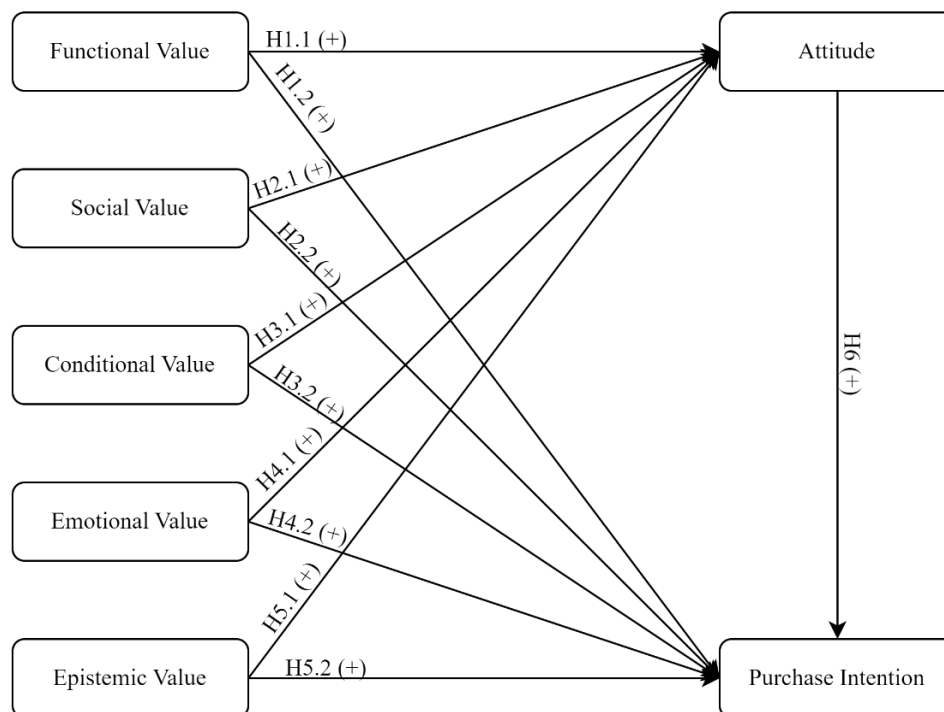
Figure 1. Proposed research model

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

The study aims to investigate the perceived customer values that lead to the tendency to use FDAs in the Vietnam context. Targeted respondents are those who have known or ordered food through online applications

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before. Another criterion to be included in the survey is that the participants must be aged 18 years old and above. This is to ensure that they have enough capability to make decisions for online purchasing. The survey was distributed within Vietnam. 307 valid responses were collected.

2. Research Tools

In this study, a quantitative method approach is employed to determine the influence of five TCV characteristics on intention to adopt FDAs via the mediating effect of attitude. Surveys are a popular and widely used form of data collection in quantitative research.

3. Data Collection

To ensure high-quality responses and minimize participant fatigue, the survey will be concise (under 15 minutes) and conducted online via social media and Google Forms for its accessibility and efficiency. Online surveys offer advantages like eliminating paper and manual data entry and reaching a wider geographic range (Evans & Mathur, 2005). As a thank you, participants will receive gifts after completing the survey. With online distribution, the survey reached 300 responses in a week, primarily through Meta.

4. Data Analysis

Two software programs were used to analyze the data: SPSS for basic analysis (descriptive analysis) and SmartPLS for more advanced assessments. SmartPLS was used to evaluate the reliability and validity of the data, as well as to perform bootstrapping analysis. The final conclusions of the study are based on the results generated by SmartPLS.

Demographic information

Table 1 summarizes the demographic information of 307 participants. Overview, the number of female participants (80.1%) outweighs those of males (19.9%). The main age group using FDAs is from 18 to 25 years old, which accounted for 91.9%. The monthly income of participants varies from under 1 million to above 40 million dong, as shown in the table. Most respondents said to have or pursuing Bachelor degree.

Table 2. Demographic summary

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	61	19.9
	Female	246	80.1
Age	18 - 25	282	91.9
	26 - 35	13	4.2
	36 - 45	7	2.3
	Above 45	5	1.6
Income	Under 1 million dong	59	19.2
	1 - 5 million dong	173	56.4
	6 - 10 million dong	44	14.3
	11 - 20 million dong	24	7.8
	21 - 30 million dong	1	0.3
	31 - 40 million dong	1	0.3
	Above 40 million dong	5	1.6
Education	Completed High school	11	3.6
	Pursuing/Completed Professional degree/vocational school	15	4.9
	Pursuing/Completed Bachelors	272	88.6
	Pursuing/Completed Masters/Doctorate (Ph.D. or equivalent)	9	2.9

Validity and reliability

In the table below, all indicators have Cronbach's alpha reliability above 0.7, showing good consistency in data. Another measurement approach, which is composite reliability also indicates a good score within the proposed threshold. In general, the results expose a high reliability of internal consistency.

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According to Hair et al. (2009), the outer loading coefficient for a significant observation variable should be at least 0.7. This group of writers argues that outer loading values less than 0.4 should be omitted from the model. After testing whether all the research items meet Hair et al. (2007) requirements, some whose outer loadings below 0.7 have been eliminated from the model. They are: ATT7, ATT8, EPV4, FV1, FV2, FV3, FV4. The remaining items displayed in the table have high reliability.

Table 3. Evaluation of model assessment

Construct	Item code	Outer loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
Attitude (ATT)	ATT1	0.821	0.888	0.915	0.643
	ATT2	0.811			
	ATT3	0.817			
	ATT4	0.832			
	ATT5	0.746			
	ATT6	0.780			
Epistemic Value (EPV)	EPV1	0.830	0.738	0.849	0.654
	EPV2	0.856			
	EPV3	0.735			
Purchase Intention (FPI)	FPI1	0.864	0.871	0.907	0.662
	FPI2	0.883			
	FPI3	0.763			
	FPI4	0.834			
	FPI5	0.712			
Functional Value (FV)	FV5	0.864	0.846	0.907	0.765
	FV6	0.880			
	FV7	0.880			
Emotional Value (PLA)	PLA1	0.785	0.864	0.902	0.648
	PLA2	0.812			
	PLA3	0.846			
	PLA4	0.760			
	PLA5	0.818			
Conditional Value (PVL)	PVL1	0.807	0.789	0.876	0.702
	PVL2	0.842			
	PVL3	0.863			
Social Value (SST)	SST1	0.871	0.942	0.954	0.775
	SST2	0.910			
	SST3	0.925			
	SST4	0.857			
	SST5	0.888			
	SST6	0.826			

Table 2 displays good convergent validity, ranging from 0.643 to 0.775. The AVE results exceed the minimum threshold of 0.5 for all constructs. This means each construct explains over half the variation in its measures, indicating a strong connection between the measures and the underlying concept they represent.

Discriminant validity, assessed using Fornell-Larcker's method (1981), ensures each concept in the model is truly distinct. A construct's influence on its own measures should be stronger than its influence on other constructs. Table 3 confirms this distinctiveness for the proposed constructs.

Table 4. Fornell and Larcker Discriminant Validity

	ATT	EPV	FPI	FV	PLA	PVL	SST
ATT	0.802						
EPV	0.540	0.808					
FPI	0.649	0.456	0.814				
FV	0.545	0.385	0.406	0.875			
PLA	0.771	0.551	0.619	0.497	0.805		
PVL	0.267	0.325	0.475	0.197	0.298	0.838	
SST	0.437	0.340	0.113	0.374	0.401	-0.180	0.880

Structural model assessment

Table 4 below provides statistical information about the direct effects of TCV on customer's attitudes. It is shown that functional value (β=0.168, p<0.001, T>1.96), social value (β=0.122, p<0.01, T>1.96), emotional value (β=0.565, p<0.001, T>1.96), and epistemic value (β=0.105, p<0.05, T>1.96) have positive and significant relationship on customer's attitude towards FDAs as path coefficient indicators are larger than 0, p values are smaller than 0.05 and, T statistics are all higher than 1.96. Therefore, hypotheses H1.1, H2.1, H4.1, and H5.1 are supported. However, the conditional value has no significant since the p-value is higher than 0.05, and T statistics is smaller than 1.96. Hence, hypothesis H3.1 is unsupported.

Table 5. Direct effects of TCV on customer's attitude and purchase intention

Hypothesis	Path	Path coefficients	T statistics	p values	Supported
H1.1	FV -> ATT	0.168	3.627	0.000***	Yes
H2.1	SST -> ATT	0.122	3.01	0.003**	Yes
H3.1	PVL -> ATT	0.053	1.497	0.134	No
H4.1	PLA -> ATT	0.565	11.348	0.000***	Yes
H5.1	EPV -> ATT	0.105	2.033	0.042*	Yes
H1.2	FV -> FPI	0.056	1.178	0.239	No
H2.2	SST -> FPI	-0.161	3.212	0.001**	No
H3.2	PVL -> FPI	0.235	4.772	0.000***	Yes
H4.2	PLA -> FPI	0.234	3.166	0.002**	Yes
H5.2	EPV -> FPI	0.061	1.175	0.24	No
H6	ATT -> FPI	0.413	6.318	0.000***	Yes

Hypotheses testing results of the direct impact of TCV on FDAs purchase intention are displayed in table 4. It can be inferred from the data that attitude (β=0.413, p<0.001, T>1.96), emotional value (β=0.234, p<0.01, T>1.96), and conditional value (β=0.235, p<0.001) have favorable statistical significance on customer purchase intention on FDAs. Thus, these hypotheses H3.2, H4.2, H6 are supported. Social value though has a significant level below 0.01, it has a negative impact on FPI, which is against the proposed hypothesis. Therefore, the direct relationship between SST and FPI is rejected. Hypotheses H1.2, H2.2, and H5.2 are also unaccepted as the significance levels are over 0.05, and T statistics are below 1.96.

As shown in table 5, the indirect effects of attitude towards EPV, FV, PLA, SST to FPI are supported. Specifically, epistemic value receives results at β=0.043, p<0.05; functional value at β=0.069, p<0.01; emotional value at β=0.233, p<0,001; social value at β=0.05, p<0.01. This means these four values positively and significantly indirectly impact customer intention to use FDAs. In contrast, conditional value shows no significant to indirect effect as p-value is larger than 0.05. Therefore, this value is rejected in terms of testing the mediating role of attitude. Looking at the indirect effects, emotional value (pleasure and arousal) has the biggest impact (β = 0.233). This is

followed by functional value (β = 0.069) and social value (β = 0.05). Epistemic value has the weakest indirect effect (β = 0.043).

Table 6. Indirect effects on FDA purchase intention

	Path coefficients	T values	P values	Supported
EPV -> ATT -> FPI	0.043	2.009	0.045*	Yes
FV -> ATT -> FPI	0.069	3.051	0.002**	Yes
PLA -> ATT -> FPI	0.233	5.283	0.000***	Yes
PVL -> ATT -> FPI	0.022	1.446	0.148	No
SST -> ATT -> FPI	0.05	2.700	0.007**	Yes

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

A study analyzed factors influencing consumers' intentions to use FDAs using an expanded TCV model. The study polled 307 FDA consumers using a five-value model, including functional, social, conditional, emotional, and epistemic. The research found positive associations between conditional value, emotional value, and attitude with FDAs' purchase intentions, but no significant association between functional, social, and epistemic values. The mediating role of attitude was found to be indirect, with only conditional value having an insignificant indirect effect. The study's results have significant implications for theory and practice concerning FDAs.

2. Discussion

The research findings indicate that users who perceive an FDA as offering them valuable functionalities, such as monetary quality of benefits value or value quality, tend to have a more positive attitude towards these apps. This aligns with research by Wang et al. (2018) who suggest that perceived value, encompassing both monetary and quality benefits, can significantly influence user attitudes. While prior research suggests a strong link between price and quality and purchase intention (Kaur et al., 2021, 2020; Talwar et al., 2020), the direct relationship between functional value and purchase intention in this study was not statistically significant.

Social values and attitudes about FDAs were shown to have a strong positive correlation. This finding aligns with research by Kristia et al. (2023) who suggest that social influence can be a significant factor in shaping user behavior. However, the results regarding the direct relationship between social value and purchase intention were unexpected as it showed a negative relationship between these two variables. This finding contradicts some previous studies which highlight the positive influence of social value on purchase intention in online services like travel agencies (Talwar et al., 2020a) and even FDAs (Kaur et al., 2021).

A positive relationship was found between conditional value and purchase intention. This aligns with previous research by Tandon et al. (2020) and Kaur et al. (2021) who found that perceived gains can significantly influence user adoption of FDAs. These findings also resonate with broader studies on technology-based services (Talwar et al., 2020) and consumer behavior related to food products (Kushwah et al., 2019), highlighting the general importance of preference value in purchase decisions. The hypothesis regarding the direct effect of conditional value on user attitudes predicted a positive relationship, but the study did not find a statistically significant connection. This finding is supported by some existing literature (Hume, 2008; Kim et al., 2012; Othman et al., 2013) which suggests an unfavorable link between perceived benefits and user attitudes.

The study highlighted the significant role of emotional value in influencing user attitudes and purchase intentions towards FDAs. Lin and Huang (2012) suggest that positive emotions can significantly influence both user attitudes and purchase intentions. Similarly, Núñez-Fernández et al. (2021) found that positive anticipated emotions play a strong role in shaping user attitudes and intentions.

A favorable correlation was discovered between epistemic value and user attitude regarding FDAs. This aligns with research by Kristia et al. (2023) who suggest that users who perceive themselves as learning and gaining new knowledge from an app have more tendency to build a favorable attitude towards it. Similarly, Kaur et al. (2021) and Kushwah et al. (2019) claimed that there is a positive link between epistemic value and user awareness in other contexts. The study also found an indirect impact of epistemic value on purchase intention mediated by attitude. This suggests that while gaining knowledge through an FDA might not directly translate into a desire to use it, it can positively influence a user's attitude towards the app, which in turn can affect their purchase intention.

The outcome of attitude on FDAs purchase intention shows that attitude has a direct favorable effect on customer intent to use food ordering apps. The finding is supported by Belanche et al. (2020). According to this study's outcome, customers have a solidified attitude toward such applications and their underlying advantages; as a result, the customer's positive attitude is a key factor in the choice to utilize. This result also aligns with the research works of Yadav et al. (2019) and Shankar et al. (2022).

Research recommendations

First, this research suggests that offering good value for money (functional value & conditional value) is key to attracting customers to food delivery apps (FDAs). This includes setting reasonable prices, offering combo meals/smaller portions, and frequent promotions/discounts, especially during peak times. Free or reduced delivery fees are also attractive. Businesses can partner with others for deals and restaurants can offer app-exclusive promotions. Effective promotions can attract cost-conscious users and lead to increased app usage and a competitive edge. Ultimately, providing good value can create positive emotions in customers, leading to higher purchase intent.

Second, this study highlights the importance of positive emotions in driving food delivery app purchases. To achieve this, FDAs should focus on features that enhance user experience. This includes a user-friendly app design and ensuring high-quality food from restaurants is accepted on the platform. Additionally, personalized and unexpected promotions can create positive surprises and encourage users to complete their purchases.

Third, the finding emphasizes social value's role in influencing user attitudes towards food delivery apps. Features like group ordering and sharing reviews can foster a sense of community and helpfulness. FDAs can leverage this by offering rewards for sharing and referrals, as well as implementing social programs. Examples include partnering with charities for donations or offering eco-friendly options. These actions can make users feel like they're contributing to a positive social impact.

Fourth, there is a link between epistemic value and user attitudes towards food delivery apps. To encourage this, FDAs should improve communication about app benefits and offer features that educate users. Examples include detailed restaurant information, interactive quizzes about local cuisine, and rewards for exploring app features. These efforts can increase user engagement and ultimately, purchase intention.

Fifth, marketing and advertising are the two effective ways to direct people's attitudes towards using FDAs. Key platforms include Facebook and TikTok. Effective strategies include promoting deals, using visually appealing food advertisements, raising awareness about social initiatives, and keeping users informed about app updates and features. These tactics can cultivate positive user attitudes based on the theory of consumption values.

This study on food delivery services in Vietnam has several limitations. It is primarily focused on the Vietnamese market, which may not be applicable to other countries due to cultural contexts and varying brand recognition and customer loyalty. Additionally, there is a gender imbalance with a higher proportion of females and respondents in the younger age group, potentially affecting the results. The study also fails to explore other factors that might impact user decisions, such as the potential relationships between consumer values and personality traits. Future research could explore these relationships or explore the impact of additional factors like personality traits, customer loyalty, app design, and ease of use on the intention to adopt food delivery services.

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BARRIERS TO BOOKING INTENTION THROUGH ONLINE TRAVEL AGENCIES: A CASE STUDY OF VIETNAM

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Extended abstract

The global online travel market, which includes booking from online travel agencies (OTAs) and hotel websites, has witnessed significant growth in 2023, reaching a valuation of 599 billion US dollars (Statista, 2024a). Amidst this growth, a survey conducted by Rakuten Insight in June 2023 revealed that only 54 percent of Vietnamese customers had used OTAs for their travel booking (Statista, 2023). Despite the increasing trend of using OTAs for booking, some research is still needed to explore this area. This research aims to explore the effects of functional barriers, psychological barriers, and technological vulnerability barriers on booking intention, especially in the context of OTAs in Vietnam. Moreover, it also investigates the mediating role of consumer attitudes toward OTAs. A quantitative approach was used to collect data via online survey questionnaires distributed to Facebook groups and forums dedicated to travelers sharing their experiences in Vietnam, with a total of 435 responses received. This research purpose is to enhance understanding and address booking barriers for OTA service providers in Vietnam, thereby improving their services and increasing booking intention among consumers. The findings indicate that perceived complexity, privacy, and security barriers, benefit barriers, the need for human interaction, perceived technological dependence, and attitude have significantly negative direct impacts on booking intention through OTAs. Furthermore, attitude significantly mediates the indirect effects of perceived complexity, privacy and security barriers, benefit barriers, need for human interaction, and perceived technological dependence on booking intention. Theoretical and practical implications are provided for future research to further explore the impact and applications of the findings.

Keywords: Booking Intention, Customer Resistance to Innovation, Online Travel Agencies, Attitude

Introduction

The tourism sector plays a crucial role in propelling worldwide economic growth, fostering cultural exchange, and creating employment opportunities across various regions. In recent years, tourism has emerged as the leading and most rapidly expanding industry, which has made a significant contribution to economic advancement and societal development (Lenzen et al., 2018; Rastegar et al., 2021). According to the 2023 World Travel and Tourism Council report, the Travel & Tourism industry witnessed notable expansion, generating a staggering $2.29 trillion US dollars in revenue. The development of the travel and tourism industry and changes in living standards have forced the rapid growth of the online travel market. Among them, the global online travel market, which includes booking from online travel agencies (OTAs) and hotel websites, has witnessed significant growth in 2023, reaching a valuation of 599 billion US dollars (Statista, 2024a). It is predicted that around 82 percent of the total revenue in the hotel market will stem from online sales by 2028 (Statista, 2024b).

In Vietnam, the tourism industry has generated 673.5 trillion VND (approximately 27.77 billion USD), accounting for 10.8 percent of the total revenue (General Statistics Office, 2023). According to the Vietnam E-commerce Association, Vietnam's online travel market is forecasted to reach 12 billion USD in 2025, exceeding two times in 2020. Vietnam is recognized as a country with great potential for online tourism due to its large and young population, rapidly growing internet usage, an increasing number of people using social networks and mobile devices, and the remarkable expansion in the travel and tourism industry in recent years. In line with the fast growth of the online travel industry, it is anticipated that OTAs will hold a major role in determining how Vietnam's tourism industry develops in the future (Vietnamnews, 2024). Although it is predicted to have extreme growth in the future, only 54 percent of Vietnamese customers had used OTAs for their travel bookings in 2023 (Statista, 2023). This is

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considered a fairly low rate because OTAs are considered one of the five most popular online sources in the world. However, there is still a large potential for OTAs to grow in the Vietnamese market if OTAs can address barriers that make Vietnamese customers hesitate to use them.

The existing research on innovation in services usually focuses on positive factors, such as the technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Most of the studies that analyze customer resistance to innovation are based on Ram & Sheth's (1989) model. However, this model is limited to two barriers (functional and psychological) and requires adaptation specifically within the digital technology context (Heinze et al., 2017). This research contributes to the current literature by proposing a framework that combines functional barriers, psychological barriers (Ram & Sheth, 1989), and technological vulnerability barriers (Heinze et al., 2017) and then examining the impacts of those barriers on booking intention, especially in the context of OTAs in Vietnam. It also investigates the indirect effects of those barriers on booking intention through the mediation of consumer attitudes toward OTAs.

Objectives

This research aims to identify the barriers that affect the booking intention on OTAs in Vietnam. Hence, it is expected to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the barriers that directly affect customers' booking intention on OTAs in Vietnam.

2. To identify the barriers that indirectly affect customers' booking intention on OTAs in Vietnam through the mediation of attitude.

3. To provide recommendations for OTA service providers to enhance customers' booking intentions through OTAs in Vietnam.

Hypotheses Development

Booking intention

According to Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2019), purchase intention is the term used to describe a customer's potential future willingness to pay for a specific good or service, considered a fundamental idea in consumer behavior research and is frequently seen as a critical predictor of actual purchase behavior (Schiffman et al., 2008). Besides, Sigala (2017) defined purchase intention in the context of OTAs refers to the inclination of customers to make a travel-related purchase through those digital platforms. Further, Tsao et al. (2015) defined booking intention as the possibility that a client will make a reservation. Several existing kinds of research have found influential factors on booking intention across many aspects. Talwar et al. (2020) have pointed out three types of barriers (usage, risk, and value barriers) that directly affect customers' intention to purchase through OTAs. Tsao et al. (2015) and Casado et al. (2020) claimed that from the standpoint of consumer conformance, hotel reviews influence the desire to book. Also, the connection between attitude and booking intention was discussed in the earlier research such as Confente and Vigolo's (2018) findings highlighted the impact of attitude on online hotel booking intention across four generations.

Perceived complexity

Usage barrier is presented when an innovation requires customers to change their usage pattern to adopt it (Kleijen et al., 2009). Customers tend to resist innovation when facing usage barriers (Ram,1989). However, removing usage barriers or customer complexity perception is extremely essential to better adapt to customers (Chen and Kuo, 2017). Research has shown that adoption barriers can lead to customers' resistance to innovation, particularly in the use of new technological services such as online shopping (Gupta & Arora, 2017), m-commerce (Moorthy et al., 2017), mobile services (Joachim et al., 2018), mobile banking (Mora et al., 2017), and online travel agencies (Talwar., et al 2023b). On the other hand, a study also showed the effects of the perceived complexity of new technology services on customer intentions. For example, Mani and Chouk (2018) identified perceived complexity as influencing customers to reject smart services. Further, Bruner and Kumar (2005) also stated that due to the small screen and difficulty in reading and typing, mobile devices are perceived as complicated to use. In addition, these challenges may account for customer resistance to mobile service (Laukkanen, 2016). Some studies have also pointed out a significant impact on customers' attitudes when using e-banking (Abukhzam & Lee, 2010) or travel shopping apps (Lim et al., 2022). In addition, the relationship between perceived complexity and customers' intention to use app-travel shopping through the mediation of attitude was also explored by Lim et al. (2022). In this study, the usage barrier is used as perceived complexity because of the perceived cognitive work required by

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consumers to utilize OTAs services. As a result of previous research on the correlation between perceived complexity, attitude, and intention to use services, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a. Perceived complexity directly affects booking intention toward OTAs.

H1b. Perceived complexity directly affects customers' attitude toward OTAs.

H1c. Perceived complexity indirectly affects booking intention toward OTAs through the mediation of attitude.

Privacy and security barrier

A risk barrier is recognized as the hesitation resulting from losses when expecting a satisfactory outcome (Laukkanen et al., 2008). The level of confusion and unpredictability corresponding to innovation is denoted as the risk barrier (Chen & Kuo, 2017). These risks can lead to the resistance behavior of customers to innovation (Kleijnen et al., 2009). To some extent, all innovations involve uncertainty and the possibility of unwanted side effects (Ram and Sheth, 1989). The effect of risk barriers on customers' intentions has been analyzed in some existing research across many contexts. For example, Laukkanen (2016) and Guttentage and Smith (2017) studied the security and privacy risks of using mobile apps. Lu et al. (2011) demonstrated the adverse impact of the risk barrier on buying intention mobile payments. Moreover, some findings indicated the relationship between privacy and security and customers' attitudes toward using online banking systems (Jahangir and Begum, 2008) or Airbnb (Yang et al., 2016). Also, attitude has been found to play a mediating role in the relationship between privacy and security barriers and customers' intention to use e-shopping (Ha & Stoel, 2009). The concern about online transaction security and provided information reliability may lead to privacy and security barriers preventing users from adopting OTAs. Therefore, the hypotheses are proposed below:

H2a. Privacy and security barriers directly affect booking intention toward OTAs.

H2b. Privacy and security barriers directly affect customers' attitude toward OTAs.

H2c. Privacy and security barriers indirectly affect booking intention toward OTAs through the mediation of attitude.

Benefit barrier

Based on Ram and Sheth (1989), a value barrier occurs when customers believe a product or service is less performative and valuable financially than its substitutes. Customers prefer to use OTAs for their travel bookings, as OTAs enable them to compare prices and use multiple-choice deals to get the best monetary value (Talwar et al., 2020). Hence, a barrier related to the benefits of using OTAs arises when customers find that all of the benefits of using OTAs are less than with other alternatives or not enough. The influence of value barriers on consumers' intentions has been studied in the past in a variety of contexts, such as online shopping (Lian & Yen, 2014), mobile games (Oktavianus et al., 2017), m-commerce (Moorthy et al., 2017), mobile services (Joachim et al., 2018), and internet banking (Laukkanen, 2016). Additionally, scholars have observed a positive relationship between value barriers and user resistance towards e-banking (Yu & Chantatub, 2016), as well as travel technology (Jansukpum & Kettem, 2015). Besides, according to Nel and Boshoff (2021), negative attitudes regarding the use of digital-only banks are correlated with perceived value barriers. Further, the relationship between value barriers and attitudes towards online shopping (Al-Debei et al., 2015) or e-banking (Lee, 2009) also presents the mediation role of attitude in the relationship between perceived benefit and intention to use mobile banking. Based on the model of Ram and Sheth (1989) and the work of Talwar et al. (2020), the following hypotheses are shown as follows:

H3a. Benefit barrier directly affects booking intention toward OTAs.

H3b. Benefit barrier directly affects customers' attitude toward OTAs.

H3c. Benefit barrier indirectly affects booking intention toward OTAs.

Self-image incongruence

Venkatesh and Bala (2008) stated that image in the adoption of innovation research refers to the degree to which users believe using innovation will elevate their social status. However, in customer resistance to innovation studies, image is known as a psychological barrier associated with the innovation identity (Mani & Chouk, 2018). In essence, an innovation has a specific identity based on its origin, including the kinds of goods or services it belongs to or the classifications in which it falls (Ram and Sheth, 1989). Those identities create a negative image in the customer's mind (Ram & Sheth, 1989). The inconsistency between customers' images and products or services'

images is referred to as an image barrier. Customer perceptions of innovations, product users' perceptions, and their own perceptions are often psychologically compared, according to Anton et al. (2013). This comparison leads to the influence on customer attitude toward using the innovation. Many existing types of research have highlighted the adverse effect of incongruence between innovation perception and the use of self-image based on the theory of self-congruence, which also negatively impacts the customer's intention (Hosany & Martin, 2012). Apart from this, Mani and Chouk (2018) have discovered how customers' intentions to use smart services are affected by self-image incongruence. Further, the lack of self-image congruence was found to have a negative impact on customer's attitudes (O'Cass and Grace, 2008). Indeed, the customer may tend to refuse to use a service when this service is not in line with their value. In this study, the image barrier will be identified as self- image incongruence, in which customers find their self-image is compatible with OTA's image. Hence, the hypothesis is presented:

H4a. Self-image incongruence barrier directly affects booking intention toward OTAs.

H4b. Self-image incongruence directly affects customers' attitude toward OTAs.

H4c. Self-image incongruence indirectly affects booking intention toward OTAs through the mediation of attitude.

Need for human interaction

A traditional barrier happens when customers perceive that the innovation is not compatible with their norms, beliefs, values, and existing experiences (Ram and Sheth, 1989). In the technological age, the traditional barrier refers to the need to interact with humans while experiencing the service (Laukkanen & Kiviniemi, 2010). Indeed, as technology continues to advance, there is a growing expectation for services to be efficient and automated, which can create resistance when traditional human interaction is required. Dabholkar and Bagozzi (2002) assert that the significance of human interaction for customers during service utilization is the reason behind the necessity of human interaction. Past studies have examined the effect of the need for human interaction on customer experience in many aspects. Mani and Chouk (2018) explored the need for human interaction to impact customer's intention to use smart services. Marr and Prendergast (1993) emphasized the negative effect of the need for human interaction on their decision-making. Also, Walker and Johnson (2006) demonstrated how the desire for human communication can affect consumers' attitudes. The development of technologies reduces the importance of direct contact and transaction in the service industry. However, parallel with that the desire for direct communication will cause customers to refuse to use OTAs and instead seek out businesses that prioritize human interaction. Based on the model of Ram and Sheth (1989) and the work of Mani and Chouk (2018), the hypothesis is as follows:

H5a. Need for human interaction directly affects booking intention toward OTAs.

H5b. Need for human interaction barrier directly affects customers' attitude toward OTAs.

H5c. Need for human interaction barrier indirectly affects booking intention toward OTAs through the mediation of attitude.

Technology anxiety

Given the rapid advancement of technology across many areas of everyday life, it is necessary to comprehend consumers' ability and desire to accept new technology (Meuter et al., 2003). Parasuraman (2000) has proposed a concept of technological readiness to examine customers' use of new technology to achieve their objectives. This concept is defined as a propensity to adopt technology, expecting to become the factor affecting the tendency to use new technologies (Parasuraman, 2000). In contrast, technology anxiety causes customers' hesitation, honor, and depression in the tendency to adopt new technology (Igbaria & Parasuraman, 1989). In the case of computers associated with the technological readiness concept, Venkatesh (2000) explained technology anxiety as the degree of apprehension and fear occurring when customers face the likelihood of using the computing devices. In essence, anxiety related to technology belongs to a type of psychological barrier that can impact the customer's acceptance of new services (Meuter et al., 2003). Evanschitzky et al. (2005) showed the negative relationship between technology anxiety and customer intention to use service innovations. Customers' resistance to smart service can also be attributed to technology anxiety, as illustrated by Mani and Chouk (2018). Also, Celik and Yesilyurt (2013) found that technology anxiety directly affects attitudes to the use of technology in the education area. However, a lack of research has identified the influential factors of technology anxiety on booking intention via the mediation of attitude, especially in the OTA context. The widespread proliferation of technologies in various aspects shows a high probability of enhancing anxiety about these technologies and leads to negative customer attitudes and intention to

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book through OTAs. Besides, OTAs based on new technologies may also contribute to technology anxiety due to the unfamiliarity and uncertainty associated with using online platforms for travel bookings. Therefore, the hypothesis is as follows:

H6a. Technology anxiety directly affects booking intention toward OTAs.

H6b. Technology anxiety directly affects customers' attitude toward OTAs.

H6c. Technology anxiety indirectly affects booking intention toward OTAs through the mediation of attitude.

Perceived technological dependence

Ball-Rokeach et al. (1985) defined media dependence as a situation where a person perceives this capacity to achieve his or her goals depends on the level of the information resources in the medium. Thus, people gradually depend on mass media-controlled information resources (Internet, social networking sites, and television) to accomplish their objectives (Grant et al., 1991). Within this study, technological dependence is the psychological barrier that appears when customers fear using technology will lessen their need for control or when they believe they must rely on it to accomplish their goals. The existing literature has explained the negative impact on customers' dependence. For instance, Mani and Chouk (2018) stated that perceived technological dependence positively influences customer resistance to innovation. Based on the concept of Ratchford and Barhart (2012), dependence was identified as a factor that impacts customer adoption of technology. Further, customers are perceived as dependent when they are unable to function without them, leading to negative attitudes towards those technologies (Shu et al., 2011). Following the previous works (Ratchford & Barhart, 2012; Mani & Chouk, 2018), the hypotheses are formulated below:

H7a. Perceived technological dependence directly affects booking intention toward OTAs.

H7b. Perceived technological dependence directly affects customers' attitude toward OTAs.

H7c. Perceived technological dependence indirectly affects booking intention toward OTAs through the mediation of attitude.

Attitude

Positive or negative feelings regarding participating in a particular behavior are reflected in an individual's attitude (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975). This mindset serves as a motivating factor for the formation of action intentions, reinforced by the expected results associated with one's activities (Bagozzi, 1992). While a pessimistic attitude is an undesirable emotional disposition toward someone or something (Zan & Di Martino, 2007), an optimistic attitude emerges when an action is perceived as desirable or fulfilling (Bagozzi, 1992). In this sense, a negative attitude toward adopting new concepts or technological advancements might be seen as a disagreement with innovation. According to Bizer et al. (2011), when the activity occurs in a negative setting, developing unfavorable views leads to greater behavioral intentions that are congruent with those attitudes. Customers with negative opinions toward OTAs may be discouraged from using them for their travel booking since they have worries about psychological risk, a lack of value they perceive, problems with security and privacy, and the intricacy of the booking procedure. Thus, the following is the suggested hypothesis:

H8. Attitude directly affects booking intention toward OTAs.
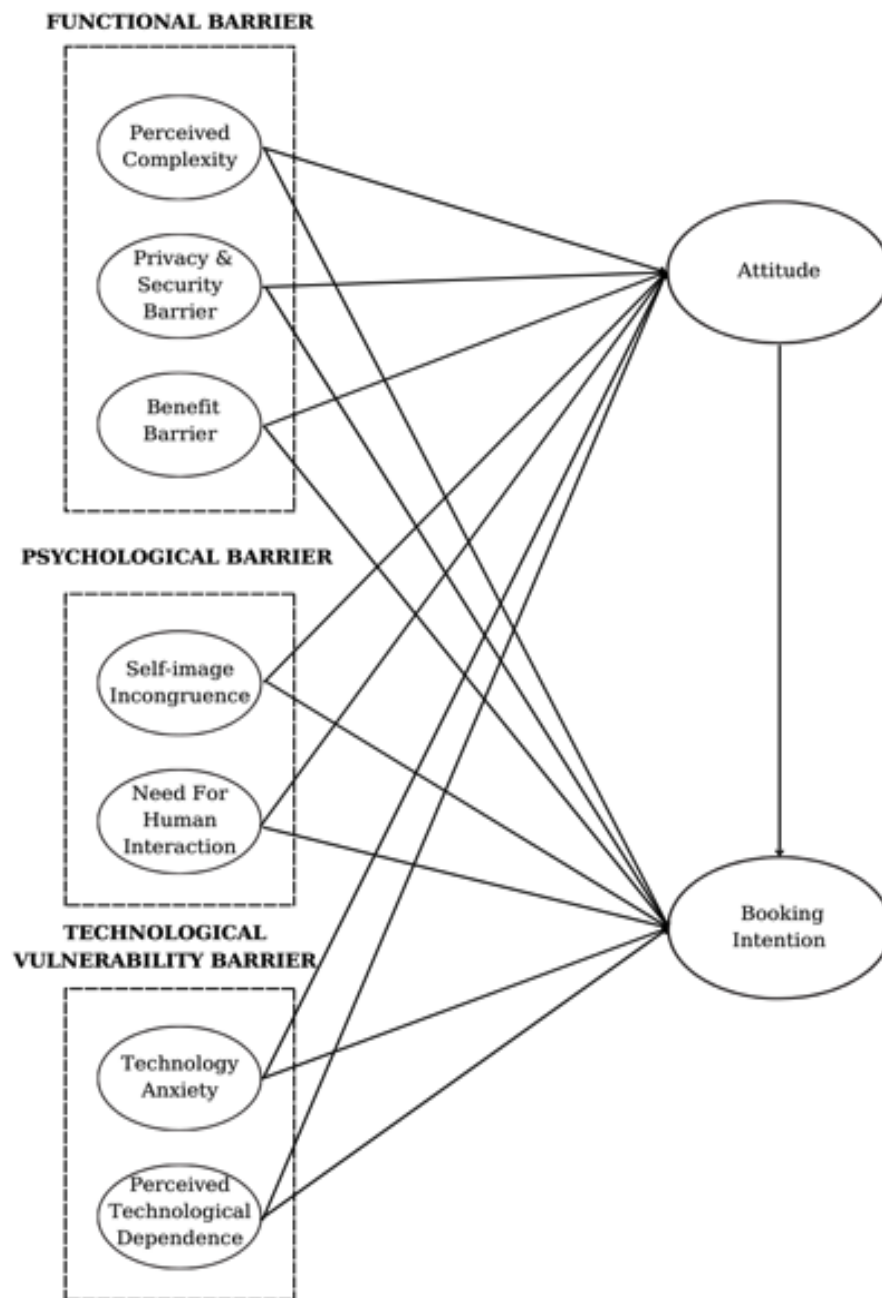
Figure 2: Theoretical Framework

(Adapted by Ram and Sheth, 1989; Henize, 2017)

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

The purpose of this research is to identify the barriers that have an impact on the intention to book through OTAs in Vietnam. The targeted respondents of the survey comprised 435 respondents, are individuals living in Vietnam who have known or experienced using OTAs for travel booking before. Also, to make sure all respondents have the capacity to make travel decisions, the survey is aimed at people above 18 years old. The educational backgrounds of survey participants comprise high school, college, or university, and postgraduate, and their monthly income ranged from 3 million to above 20 million.

2. Research Tools

This study best suits the quantitative approach as it aims to measure and quantify specific variables related to consumers' booking intentions through OTAs in Vietnam. The study used an online survey to explore the proposed framework and hypotheses. The questionnaire was designed based on research questions and existing publications.

3. Data Collection

The data collection process took four weeks, and the survey was uploaded to popular travel communities in Vietnam on social platforms and sent directly to those who have experienced OTAs. The targeted respondents of the survey are individuals living in Vietnam who have known or experienced using OTAs for travel booking before. Also, to make sure all respondents have the capacity to make travel decisions, the survey is aimed at people above 18 years old.

4. Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed by using SPSS version 20 for descriptive statistical analysis and SmartPLS version 4 for assessing the reliability and validity of the measurement scales, and for performing partial least squares structural equation modeling.

Demographic information

In this research, a total of 435 respondents participated in the survey, comprising 203 male participants (accounting for 46.7 percent) and 232 female participants (accounting for 53.3 percent). Among them, 30.1 percent of respondents are in the age range of 18 to 24, and 45.5 percent of respondents are from 25 to 30. In addition, table 1 shows that 55.9 percent of respondents have used online travel agencies fewer than three times within a year.

Table 1: Demographic Analysis

Characteristics	Subgroup Categories	Frequency (no.)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	203	46.7
	Female	232	53.3
Age	18-24	131	30.1
	25-30	198	45.5
	31-50	70	16.1
	51-65	36	8.3
Education Level	High School	70	16.1
	College - University	295	67.8
	Postgraduate	70	16.1
Monthly Income	Under 5 million VND	43	9.9
	From 5 to 10 million VND	226	52.0
	From 10 to 20 million VND	113	26.0
	Over 20 million VND	53	12.2
Frequency of OTAs usage within a year	Under 3 times	243	55.9
	From 3 to 6 times	141	32.4
	From 6 to 9 times	26	6.0
	Over 9 times	25	5.7

Reliability and validity

The table below presents the reliability and validity analysis, assessing whether the scale measurement used in this research consistently reflects the construct. This study used the PLS-SEM Algorithm to compute outer loadings to assess the quality of observed indicators. According to Hair et al. (2017), a minimum threshold of 0.7 is recommended for the outer loadings of variables. If the value of outer loadings is under 0.4, variables should be considered for exclusion. Additionally, if the outer loadings value falls within the range of 0.4 to 0.7, the decision to retain or discard the variables depends on other indices such as Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The data analysis indicates that almost all indicators meet the quality requirements. However, the outer loadings of variable PC6 are lower than 0.7 but still fall between 0.4 and 0.7. Despite this, Cronbach's Alpha, CR, and AVE of the PC6 indices still meet the requirements. Thus, it is recommended to retain PC6.

In terms of the validity and reliability of the research scale, Hair et al. (2017) suggested focusing on Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. A scale ensuring validity and reliability should achieve a Cronbach's Alpha value

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above 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978; Hair et al., 2017). Moreover, according to George and Mallery (2003), a model that has all indicators exceeding 0.8 is considered to have high internal consistency. In general, the measurement model proposed in this study concluded to achieve high reliability.

Table 2: Evaluation of Measurement Model

Construct	Item	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Booking Intention	BI		0.776	0.856	0.599
	BI1	0.811			
	BI2	0.730			
	BI3	0.760			
	BI4	0.791			
Attitude	AT		0.830	0.898	0.746
	AT1	0.894			
	AT2	0.855			
	AT3	0.842			
Perceived Complexity	PC		0.904	0.925	0.643
	PC1	0.793			
	PC2	0.817			
	PC3	0.868			
	PC4	0.883			
	PC5	0.856			
	PC6	0.580			
	PC7	0.775			
Privacy and Security Barrier	PSB		0.897	0.936	0.829
	PSB1	0.909			
	PSB2	0.904			
	PSB3	0.919			
Benefit Barrier	BB		0.911	0.944	0.848
	BB1	0.920			
	BB2	0.912			
	BB3	0.931			
Self-Image Incongruence	SI		0.756	0.848	0.651
	SI1	0.785			
	SI2	0.734			
Need For Human Interaction	NHI		0.914	0.946	0.853
	NHI1	0.928			
	NHI2	0.923			
	NHI3	0.921			
Technology Anxiety	TA		0.793	0.877	0.703
	TA1	0.822			
	TA2	0.848			
	TA3	0.846			
Perceived Technological Dependence	PTD		0.835	0.901	0.752
	PTD1	0.880			
	PTD2	0.842			
	PTD3	0.879			

Discriminant validity was tested to ensure the degree of distinctiveness between each construct in the model, meaning each construct should differ from others and capture distinct phenomena. When the outer loadings of each indicator within a construct are higher than the cross-loading with other constructs, the model is assumed to have strong discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2017). Also, the square root of AVE values for each construct should be higher than the greatest correlation of any other construct in the model using the Fornell-Larcker technique (Hair et al., 2017). Based on the data analysis in the two tables below, the model further verified its discriminant validity.

Table 3: Discriminant Analysis

	AT	BB	BI	NHI	PC	PSB	PTD	SI	TA
AT	**0.864**								
BB	-0.690	**0.921**							
BI	0.717	-0.732	**0.774**						
NHI	-0.690	0.744	-0.741	**0.924**					
PC	-0.711	0.753	-0.753	0.751	**0.802**				
PSB	-0.673	0.718	-0.735	0.715	0.747	**0.911**			
PTD	-0.479	0.512	-0.543	0.437	0.499	0.480	**0.867**		
SI	-0.084	0.149	-0.084	0.133	0.118	0.135	0.030	**0.807**	
TA	-0.125	0.221	-0.133	0.175	0.139	0.125	0.206	-0.038	**0.839**

Structural model assessment

The structural model assessment involves evaluating the relationship between latent variables in a structural equation model (SEM). This assessment helps to examine the collinearity, coefficient of determination ($R2$), and effect size ($f2$), together with the significance of the path coefficients and mediating relationships.

Addressing the collinearity issue is the initial step in assessing the structural model. It is a vital step because the high collinearity in predictor latent variables can lead to biases in the path coefficients. However, the Variance Inflation Factor, or VIF, is an effective tool that can help to assess the collinearity problems by measuring the regression of particular dependent and independent variables. Vittinghoff et al. (2012) stated that VIF should be lower than 10. Table 4 demonstrates the VIF values are all acceptable, indicating that the model can proceed further.

R^2 represents the percentage of the variance of the dependent variables explained by its corresponding independent variables (Hair et al., 2017). The higher the R^2, the stronger the relationship between the two variables. The value of R^2 usually falls within the range of 0 to 1, with a value above 1 indicating a higher level of predictive accuracy (Hair et al., 2021). Hair et al. (2014), the R2 value of 0.75, 0.5, and 0.25 classifies the endogenous constructs as substantial, moderate, or weak, respectively. Based on the table below, the values of R^2 for attitude and booking intention are 0.6 and 0.709, respectively, demonstrating moderate predictive accuracy. In other words, seven predictor variables make up 60 percent of the variance in attitude. The variance in booking intention is explained by eight predictor variables, including seven variables mentioned and attitude, accounting for 48.7 percent. Generally, the model confirms its moderate level of predictive accuracy.

Table 4: Results of Structural Model Evaluation

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient	t-value	p-value	R^2	f^2	Signifi -cane (p<0.05)
H1a	PC -> BI	-0.257	4.052	0.000	0.709	0.051	Supported
H1b	PC -> AT	-0.181	3.176	0.002	0.600	0.033	Supported
H2a	PSB -> BI	-0.168	2.886	0.004	0.709	0.044	Supported
H2b	PSB -> AT	-0.191	3.410	0.001	0.600	0.026	Supported
H3a	BB -> BI	-0.124	2.300	0.021	0.709	0.015	Supported
H3b	BB -> AT	-0.177	2.972	0.003	0.600	0.024	Supported
H4a	SI -> BI	0.028	0.905	0.336	0.709	0.003	Rejected
H4b	SI -> AT	0.027	0.915	0.36	0.600	0.002	Rejected
H5a	NHI -> BI	-0.200	3.727	0.000	0.709	0.042	Supported
H5b	NHI -> AT	-0.205	3.797	0.000	0.600	0.034	Supported
H6a	TA -> BI	0.029	1.158	0.247	0.709	0.003	Rejected
H6b	TA -> AT	0.028	0.770	0.441	0.600	0.002	Rejected
H7a	PTD -> BI	-0.130	3.439	0.001	0.709	0.044	Supported
H7b	PTD -> AT	-0.096	2.489	0.013	0.600	0.016	Supported
H8	AT -> BI	0.180	3.566	0.000	0.709	0.044	Supported

The path coefficient measures the direct impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable by indicating the expected change in the dependent variable. The value of the path coefficient ranges from -1 to 1 (Hair et al., 2017). A coefficient's standard error determines its significance, which can be determined using bootstrapping. This distribution allows for calculating the coefficient's standard error, p-value, and t-value. Table 4 proved that Perceived Complexity (β = -0.257, p<0.05), Privacy and Security Barrier (β = -0.168, p<0.05), Benefit Barrier (β = -0.124, p<0.05), Need for Human Interaction (β = -0.200, p<0.05), and Perceived Technological Dependence (β = -0.130, p<0.05) have a negative and remarkable impact on Booking Intention and Attitude (β = 0.180, p<0.05) shows a positive and considerable meaning on Booking Intention. Therefore, H1a, H2a, H3a H5a, H7a, and H8 are supported. In contrast, Self-image Incongruence (β = 0.028, p>0.05) and Technology Anxiety (β = 0.029, p>0.05) indicate positive but insignificant related to Booking Intention, so H4a and H6a are rejected. Furthermore, Perceived Complexity (β = -0.181, p<0.05), Privacy and Security Barrier (β = -0.191, p<0.05), Benefit Barrier (β = -0.177, p<0.05), Need for Human Interaction (β = -0.205, p<0.05), Perceived Technological Dependence (β = -0.096, p<0.05) have significant effects on Attitude. Thus, H1b, H2b, H3b, H5b, H8b are supported. Meanwhile, Self-image Incongruence (β = 0.027, p>0.05) and Technology Anxiety (β = 0.028, p>0.05) present a positive but insignificant effect on Attitude. Therefore, H4b and H6b are not supported.

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A mediating relationship occurs when a variable mediates the relationship between dependent and independent variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The following table describes the results of mediating relationship testing. Perceived Complexity (β = -0.046 p<0.05), Privacy and Security Barrier (β = -0.030, p<0.05), Benefit Barrier (β = -0.032, p<0.05), Need for Human Interaction (β = -0.037, p<0.05), and Perceived Technological Dependence (β = -0.017, p<0.05) have a negative and significant indirect impact on Booking Intention through the mediation of Attitude. Hence, H1c, H2c, H3c, H5c, and H7c are supported. On the other hand, H4c and H7c are not supported because Self-image Incongruence (β = 0.005, p>0.05) and Technology Anxiety (β = 0.005, p>0.05) have an insignificant impact on Booking Intention through Attitude.

Table 5: Mediating Effects

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	T-value	p-value	Significance (p<0.05)
H1c	PC -> AT -> BI	-0,046	2,604	0.009	Supported
H2c	PSB -> AT -> BI	-0,030	2,175	0.030	Supported
H3c	BB -> AT -> BI	-0,032	2,315	0.021	Supported
H4c	SI -> AT -> BI	0,005	0,878	0.380	Rejected
H5c	NHI -> AT -> BI	-0,037	2,405	0.016	Supported
H6c	TA -> AT -> BI	0,005	0,795	0.427	Rejected
H7c	PTD -> AT -> BI	-0,017	1,974	0.048	Supported

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

The findings illustrate that the Perceived Complexity, Privacy and Security Barrier, Benefit Barrier, Need for Human Interaction, and Perceived Technological Dependence have a direct influence on Attitude and Booking Intention. Moreover, the Perceived Technological Dependence with β = -0.096 indicates the strongest relationship with Attitude, followed by Benefit Barrier (β = -0.177), Perceived Complexity (β = -0.181), and Privacy and Security Barrier (β = -0.191).

It also investigates the indirect relationship between those barriers to Booking Intention through the mediation of Attitude. Yet, two variables (Self-image Incongruence and Technology Anxiety) are shown to have insignificant effects on Attitude and Booking Intention. Furthermore, except for the Attitude with a positive effect on Booking Intention, the Benefit Barrier (β = -0.124) still indicates the most significant negative factor, followed by the Perceived Technological Dependence (β = -0.130) and Privacy and Security Barrier (β = -0.168).

2. Discussion

This research found that Perceived Complexity negatively directly influenced Booking Intention and Attitude. This finding supports the study of Mani and Chouk (2018), who concluded that perceived complexity is one of the most challenging factors in adopting smart services, and Joachim et al. (2018), who confirmed that the usage barrier has a negative and direct impact on customers' intention to adopt innovation. In contrast, this finding was not supported by Talwar et al. (2020) because they proved that customers would not be dissuaded from using OTAs with the challenging usage pattern. This research aligns with previous findings that perceived complexity significantly affects attitudes toward vending machines (Tongnamtiang and Leelasantitham,2019) and app-travel shopping (Lim et al., 2022). Lim et al. (2022) further supported this finding, stating that attitude significantly mediates the impact of perceived complexity on the intention to purchase through travel shopping apps.

Privacy and Security Barriers generated a negative direct effect on Booking Intention and Attitude and an indirect effect on Booking Intention through the mediation of Attitude. The outcome of the direct relationship between Privacy and Security Barriers on Booking Intention is supported by many prior studies. Mani and Chouk (2018) stated that the security risk related to being hacked when using smart services made customers not intend to adopt it. Furthermore, Talwar et al. (2020) proved the significant influence of privacy and security barriers on

purchase intention towards OTAs barrier on purchase intention towards OTAs. Yang and Ahn (2016) believed that the security policy of Airbnb positively influenced the attitudes towards it. Besides, Lu et al. (2005) stated that perceived risks, including the fear of private information being stolen, indirectly impacted customers' intention to use online applications through the mediation of attitude.

Benefit Barrier is one of two factors that have the strongest effects on Booking Intention and Attitude. Contrary to the research's findings, according to Mani and Chouk (2018), the price did not dramatically change the customer's intention to use the service. This study also contradicted the outcomes of Kleijen et al. (2004), who proved that the higher the quality of technological services content, the less importance of perceived benefits, especially perceived price. However, this outcome aligned with the findings of Talwar et al. (2020), who found that benefit barriers negatively directly impact the purchase intention from OTAs. The perception of benefit directly influences customers' attitudes towards online shopping, as suggested by Al-Debei et al. (2015). In addition, Lee (2009) stated—in line with the results of this study—that attitude mediated the association between perceived benefit and intention to use e-banking.

The need for Human Interaction was proved to have a negative direct and indirect effect on Booking Intention. A study on factors impacting the intention and attitude of online shoppers toward auto delivery robots illustrated that the Need for Human Interaction negatively directly affects customers' attitudes and intentions to use it (Edrisi & Ganjipour, 2022). This result is also in line with Mani and Chouk (2018), who stated that the Need for Human Interaction significantly impacts customer resistance to smart service. It can be concluded that although technological services like OTAs are becoming increasingly popular, the human element still plays a crucial role in shaping consumer attitudes and intentions toward them.

Besides, it was proved that Perceived Technological Dependence indirectly influenced Booking Intention through the mediation of Attitude. In contrast, this study was not parallel with Mani and Chouk's (2018) findings indicating that perceived technology anxiety did not directly affect customers' intention to use smart services; however, he stated that perceived technological dependence indirectly impacts customers' intention to use smart service through the mediation of skepticism.

The findings proved that Attitude has a positive and direct impact on Booking Intention. Hong et al. (2017) also stated that attitude plays an important role in customer intention to use applications, which supported the outcomes of this study. Moreover, this result supports the finding of Agag and El-Masry (2016), indicating that attitude has directly influenced online booking intention for low-habit customers. This study was also in line with the research outcomes of Gardiner et al. (2013), which illustrated that attitude had a significant and direct impact on the intention to make travel decisions among customers. Rather, there were some results also supporting this study's outcomes, including Kim et al. (2009), who found that attitude positively affects the intention to use mobile devices, and Shaikh and Karjaluoto (2015) confirmed that attitude further increases the intention to use mobile applications for business purposes.

The study found that self-image incongruence did not significantly affect booking intention and attitude, suggesting that customers did not reject OTAs if they perceived a lack of service image congruence. In contrast, some previous have found that self-image congruence is consistent in understanding why customers resist new services (Mani & Chouk, 2018; Antón et al., (2013). Besides, there was no significant relationship between Technology Anxiety on Booking Intention and Attitude. This finding contradicted some studies that presented that technology anxiety was a major psychological factor that impacted customers' adapting to new services (Mani & Chouk, 2018; Evanschitzky et al., 2015).

Research recommendations

Previous research on innovation adoption has primarily focused on positive factors, such as the technology acceptance model (TAM), the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT), or the service-dominant logic. However, there is a lack of deep investigation into factors preventing customers from adopting online travel agencies (OTAs) in Vietnam. Ram and Sheth's (1989) model is limited to two barriers: functional and psychological, which require adaptation in the digital technology context. The psychological barrier in Ram and Sheth's model primarily determines the image barrier related to unfavorable service image, while the traditional barrier contains the need for personal contact. This new psychological category is illustrated by the advancement of technology within 20 years, which has significantly changed people's attitudes and behavior. Understanding consumers' vulnerability to technology is a major challenge for market researchers. This research contributes by combining Ram and Sheth's

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model with Heinze et al.'s (2017) technological vulnerability barriers to investigate negative factors affecting booking intention through OTAs in the Vietnam online travel market. The study also demonstrates the missing link of previous research by showing the indirect impact of these barriers on booking intention through the mediation of attitude.

This study focuses on the Vietnamese tourism industry and offers practical recommendations for OTA service providers to enhance the effectiveness of their platforms and foster customers' intention to book accommodations through them. Firstly, to improve user experience, OTA service providers should create an easy-to-use interface, simplify platform design and navigation, reduce booking steps, and provide clear instructions for new users. Additionally, OTA platforms should include customer support options such as chatbots and helplines to address any problems or concerns. Secondly, to address privacy and security issues, OTA service providers should offer transparent privacy policies and clear communication about customer privacy. Cooperation with hotels is crucial to ensure information privacy and protect customers' private information from potential cyber threats. Investing in system security is also essential to protect customers' data and reduce the perception of security risks. Mani and Chouk (2018) shared the same perspective to this research, indicating that companies should focus on providing an easier-to-use service. Thirdly, OTA service providers should emphasize their unique advantages, such as competitive pricing, exclusive deals, and personalized recommendations to overcome the perception that OTAs' benefits are insignificant. Offering loyalty programs, rewards, and exceptional service experiences can further demonstrate the value proposition of booking through OTAs. With the same idea as this study, Talwar et al. (2020b) emphasized the importance of providing tangible benefits (reducing convenience fees during happy hours, reducing room rates for loyal customers, free cancellation, and exclusive deals such as free meals or spa) on ensuring customers perceived OTAs do not provide valuable benefits. Fourthly, human interaction is a crucial factor influencing customers' intention to book in the digital age. OTA service providers should feature personalized customer services, such as live chat support or customer service hotlines, to ensure customers can reach out immediately when they need assistance. The study by Mani and Chouk (2018) stated that companies should offer immediate support related to smart service usage when customers need any help. This implication shares a similar idea to this research. Lastly, it is essential to assist customers in overcoming the fear of technological dependence, as it significantly impacts attitude and booking intention to use OTAs. To achieve this, OTA service providers should always provide alternative offers rather than pressuring them to use the services. In essence, freedom of choice should be emphasized, allowing customers to feel in control of their decision-making, and reducing the fear of technological dependence.

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INDUSTRY 4.0 TECHNOLOGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE HOTEL OPERATIONS: A SWOT ANALYSIS

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Extended abstract

Purpose: Conduct a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis to evaluate the implications of employing industry 4.0 technologies for sustainable hotel operations. The results of this SWOT analysis can offer industry professionals a valuable reference point when they contemplate implementing Industry 4.0 technologies in their hotel operations.

Methodology: This paper employs a narrative literature review approach using the snowballing technique, wherein additional papers were identified based on the initial selection of relevant papers.

Findings: The utilisation of Industry 4.0 technologies in hotel operations presents a dual-edged proposition. On one hand, it offers substantial support in advancing sustainability initiatives within the industry. Conversely, it also brings forth a set of inherent weaknesses and potential threats that necessitate astute management. The successful navigation of these challenges can ultimately lead to a harmonious and mutually beneficial coexistence, exemplifying a win-win scenario for sustainable hotel operations.

Originality: This review is a pioneering endeavour because, based on our current understanding, no prior attempts have been made to conduct a SWOT analysis of Industry 4.0 technologies within the hospitality sector.

Keywords: *SWOT analysis, Industry 4.0, Sustainable hotel operations.*

Introduction

Sustainable development stands out as one of the primary challenges in the hotel sector (Melissen et al., 2016). As governments face increasing demands to cut down on CO2 emissions, digitalisation can play an important role in reducing CO2 emissions (Lekkas et al., 2021). Technological advancements and innovations lead to paradigm shifts (Lasi et al., 2014). The first industrial revolution enhanced productivity by harnessing steam power, the second industrial revolution facilitated assembly line production with the introduction of electricity, and the third industrial revolution saw the automation of production processes through the utilisation of electronics and information technology (Von Tunzelmann, 2003). Industry 4.0 or the fourth industrial revolution is characterised by the core elements of robotics, digitalisation, and cyber-physical systems, profoundly impacts technological innovations (Mubarak & Petraite, 2020). Digital sustainability is an endeavour to create and implement intelligent technologies to ensure sustainable economic growth without ignoring the principles of sustainable development (Mondejar et al., 2021). Digital transformation stands out as a potential catalyst for the achievement of the net-zero goal by the adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies, including robotics, artificial intelligence, service automation, cloud computing, and the Internet of Things (IoT) (Kurniawan et al., 2023). Within the context of tourism and hospitality industry, it is evident that energy, water, and waste management have emerged as pivotal components in an evolving sustainability management strategy (Jones & Wynn, 2019). As per Ben and Zeqiri (2022), within the hotel sector, the expanded use of IoT, robotics, big data, blockchain, and 3D printing can contribute towards enhanced energy efficiency, reduced water consumption, decreased food waste, and thus in the advancement of circular hospitality.

Energy Management

Effective energy conservation plays a crucial role in addressing global climate-related concerns (Dunlap & Brulle, 2015). Hotel facilities are positioned among the top five subsectors in terms of energy usage within the service and commercial building sector (Chen, 2019). Innovative technologies like Internet-of-Things (IoT) can consolidate multiple systems, such as air-conditioning, heating, and window control, onto a cohesive platform, often called a "smart management" system. This allows hotel guests to conveniently control room conditions through a single device, while also enhancing the productiveness of hotel operations (Eskerod et al., 2019). Many hotels are adopting vacancy sensors to automatically switch off lights and other electrical equipment in unoccupied corridors or rooms.

Additionally, they are utilising temperature control systems, LED lights and compact fluorescent bulbs to reduce energy consumption (Kansakar et al., 2019).

Harish and Kumar (2016) state that integrating suitable HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) systems into new constructions could result in energy savings ranging from 20% to 50%. A computer-based system called the Energy Management System (EMS) can automatically switch off lights or reduce the temperature during periods of low demand (Kapiki, 2010). EMS can monitor and regulate a building's energy consumption in real time, so building energy management systems are employed to enhance energy conservation by adjusting indoor and outdoor heat and by managing the operation of coolers and boilers (Levermore, 2000). The system, known as the Building Automation System (BAS), also referred to as the Building Control System (BCS) or Building Management System (BMS), monitors and regulates the internal thermal comfort within the building facilities. As per Shaikh et al. (2014), it is estimated that, approximately thirty per cent of energy savings can be realised by deploying BAS.

Water Management

Water consumption has always remained high in hotels (Gössling et al., 2012). Water quality can be guaranteed, and real-time water usage monitoring can be ensured by using smart water quality monitoring systems that use remote sensing technology enabled by the Internet of Things (Prasad et al., 2015). Saseendran and Nithya (2016) explained the working of an automated water usage monitoring system which uses wireless sensor nodes and a software. Sensor nodes are placed at every water outlet to sense the flow of water, and the internet of things (IOT) is used to continuously monitor and track water usage via the wireless sensor nodes. Ahemed and Amjad (2019) explored a water management system (WMS) that monitors water storage tanks and responds when water levels exceed certain thresholds. Pereira-Doel et al. (2019) conducted a study on a hotel in Spain that had integrated smart technology into twenty individual rooms. Their research revealed that real-time feedback led to an average reduction of 12.06% in guest shower durations.

Waste Management

Wen et al. (2018) investigated an Internet of Things (IoT)-based system for managing food waste specifically tailored for restaurants. This system integrates Radio-Frequency Identification (RFID) and sensor technologies and features a smart food waste collection truck equipped with RFID readers to provide catering companies with real-time data on food waste items. Pirani and Arafat (2014) argued that waste mapping, a tool increasingly utilised in developing circular economy action plans, can help reduce waste generation in the hotel industry. Hong et al. (2014) introduced an Internet of Things (IoT) based intelligent garbage system designed to gather and analyse information on food waste. Implemented as a one-year pilot project in Seoul's Gangnam district, the outcomes indicated an average reduction in food waste of 33%.

Objective

Although the SWOT framework was initially designed to assess market forces influencing a company's position, it has proven an effective framework for evaluating the integration of emerging technologies within a particular domain (Engelbrecht et al., 2019). Based on the academic literature review, this paper attempts a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis of Industry 4.0 technologies as a tool to promote sustainability in the hospitality sector of the tourism industry. The aim is to enhance comprehension of both the favourable and adverse effects of digitalisation, ultimately facilitating informed decisions regarding investments in new digital technologies.

Methodology

When literature reviews result in new synthetic insights, they can be as innovative as primary research papers (Hampton & Parker, 2011). There are two common types of reviews: (a) systematic reviews and (b) non-systematic or narrative reviews (Ferrari, 2015). We chose to pursue a non-systematic or narrative review because reviews that systematically analyse published results often exclude a significant number of studies compared to narrative reviews (Pautasso, 2019). Several databases such as Web of Science and Scopus were searched for relevant papers. Using backwards and forward snowballing, we uncovered more sources by looking at the references of the articles we initially found (backward snowballing) and by exploring newer articles that have cited the articles we were already using (forward snowballing). This helped us to expand our pool of references and sources.

Data Analysis

1. Strengths

Mitigate staff shortage: There is a worldwide dearth of trained staff to work in the hospitality sector (Robinson & Barron, 2007). One possible solution to the labour crisis in Europe, China, Japan, South Korea, and other countries with plummeting birth rates could be substituting human employees with modern technologies (Ivanov & Webster, 2019). Staff shortages are being mitigated by replacing humans in hospitality areas with robots, chatbots, and self-service check-in/check-out machines (Kim et al., 2022).

Improved Guest Satisfaction: The application of new technologies such as Robots, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Service Automation (RAISA) create a novel (Lin & Mattila, 2021), fun, and enjoyable service experiences for customers (Hu et al., 2021). AI assists users in locating superior and more pertinent information, enhances their mobility, refines their decision-making abilities, and, in the end, offers an enhanced tourism experience (Tussyadiah & Miller, 2019).

Maintaining Hygiene & Cleanliness: Customers have ranked hotel hygiene and cleanliness as the most important factor when selecting a hotel (Park et al., 2019). Many big hotels have begun adopting advanced cleaning technologies for enhanced disinfection, e.g., electrostatic sprayers, ultraviolet-light technology, etc. (Garcia, 2020).

Touchless Service: Following the post-Covid pandemic period, numerous well-known hotel brands, including Marriott, Hilton, and Hyatt, have begun integrating technology systems such as mobile check-in systems to facilitate social distancing and minimise staff interaction with hotel guests (Shin & Kang, 2020).

Forecasting and Predictive maintenance: Sensors help to pass on information about the machinery and equipment's health and provide updates about the need for maintenance (Farahani et al., 2019). AI-based forecasting can be used to understand tourist demand (Buhalis & Leung, 2018) and hotel guest demands. Furthermore, these are used for financial management, human resource allocation and marketing strategy development (Claveria et al., 2015).

Promote Circular Hospitality: Ben Youssef and Zeqiri (2022) proposed that increased use of innovative technologies like the IoT in the hotel sector can induce an increase in energy efficiency, reduction in water consumption, reduction in food waste, reduce transport and travel and promote circular hospitality. The various Industry 4.0 tools can help to achieve net zero economy vision (Okorie et al., 2023).

Streamlining Operations: Technology-assisted service delivery, guests' smart room controls, mobile check-in/out, etc. can increase operational efficiency (Özen & Özgül Katlav, 2023). As per Bulchand-Gidumal (2022), AI enhances stock management, optimises energy control in facilities, and aids in managing tourist consumption. It also assists in financial management by factoring in anticipated revenues and arrivals. AI solutions can achieve higher productivity and efficiency in business processes (Lakshmi & Corbett, 2020).

Cost Reduction: According to Kar et al. (2021), reduced operation costs are one of the economic drivers for technology adoption. By employing service robots, hotel companies can decrease labour costs (Ivkov et al., 2020). Energy, water and waste management initiatives ultimately lead to money savings.

Promote Health and Well-being: AI solutions decrease the workload of mundane and repetitive tasks (Kar et al., 2021) which might reduce employee stress, leading to overall well-being (Stray, 2020). Adopting technological innovations to minimise guest interactions with hotel staff can effectively mitigate health risks for customers (Kussmann, 2020).

2. Weaknesses

Decreased Human Engagement: Self-service technologies (SST) like digital check-in/out replace a frontline service employee with technology (Van Doorn et al., 2017). Service automation may enhance efficiency and productivity, but it lacks the capacity to engage with guests in a friendly manner through adept communication, emotional engagement and adaptability and thus, service automation can never compete with human employees on these criteria (Stoyanova-Bozhkova et al., 2020).

High Setup and Upkeep Cost: The installation of technology typically demands significant resources and space, involving high costs encompassing initial setup, maintenance, and enhancements (Zhang et al., 2011). Due to the substantial investment required, small service providers may find it challenging to afford advanced technologies (Murphy et al., 2017).

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Dependence on Human Intelligence: Artificial intelligence, being an emerging field, is considered incapable of surpassing human intelligence (Laurent et al., 2015). In situations of emergencies and complex problem-solving, customers still rely on the capabilities of the human workforce (Lommatzsch, 2018).

Customer Reluctance- Customers do not consistently view smart technologies in a positive light (Buhalis et al., 2023) and the introduction of technologies may attract customer resistance (Wang et al., 2023). Certain customers acknowledge the importance of conserving water and energy and reducing waste; however, they may be unwilling to utilise low-flow showerheads and shampoo dispensers in their rooms (Ogbeide, 2012).

Churning: Introducing and adopting service robots and automation raise feelings of insecurity among employees (Alisic & Wiese, 2020). As workplace technology continuously advances and erodes workers' expertise, workers often undergo elevated levels of anxiety, sadness, and frustration (Gabriel & Pessl, 2016). Earlier research has indicated that employees are more likely to resign when they undergo stress in competitive conditions (Gim et al., 2015).

Bias & Ethical Challenges: AI-based decision-making may magnify pre-existing biases and evolve new biases (Ntoutsi, 2020). AI can potentially lead to undesirable and ethically problematic consequences, including biases and discrimination, privacy and security breaches, societal distortions such as unemployment, economic exploitation, and weakened democratic processes (Stahl, 2021).

3. Opportunities

Competitive Advantage: Organisations can attain a competitive advantage through AI-driven management (Schrettenbrunner, 2020). The adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies contributes to sustainable practices, and as a consequence, green certifications, such as the EU Ecolabel, have the potential to enhance not only the hotel's connections with its immediate stakeholders, such as customers and suppliers (Aboelmaged, 2018) but also foster a more favourable corporate image and reputation among the broader public (Barbulescu et al., 2019).

Creating Technical Jobs: Numerous studies have indicated that deploying service robots and automation has increased employees' perceived job insecurity (Frey & Osborne, 2017; Tuomi et al., 2020) however the result of the study conducted by Lestari et al. (2021) presents compelling evidence that this does not hold true, especially for hospitality students. This finding is explained by the fact that Generation Z is renowned for its tech-savvy nature, and they anticipate that adopting Industry 4.0 technologies will create numerous job opportunities in the future.

Customization & Enhanced Profits: By harnessing extensive data sources analysed by AI-based algorithms, businesses can provide customers with timely, personalised choices driven by a real-time, comprehensive understanding of their preferences. This approach minimises wasted marketing and operational efforts, increases customer satisfaction, and increases profitability (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019).

Revamping Course Curriculum: The course curriculum should be revised and updated in sync with changes in the business environment (Garbie, 2017). Ellahi et al. (2019) conducted qualitative research with the intention of updating the curriculum and teaching approaches to align with the principles of Industry 4.0. Their suggestions involve a curriculum matrix that incorporates subjects such as data science, machine learning, virtual reality, cloud computing, IoT, and other emerging technologies. This is designed to acquaint students with the concepts of Industry 4.0.

Balancing Tech & Human Workforce: The effective integration of technology with human capabilities can significantly enhance service encounters (Bowen, 2016). Huang and Rust (2018) suggest that assigning routine tasks to service robots provides executives with an opportunity to enable employees to concentrate on more intricate aspects of service production and delivery. This is especially relevant for tasks demanding creativity, problem-solving, or empathy. Balanced options, such as human-robot systems, appear to offer more rational opportunities (Reis et al., 2020).

Prevent Over Tourism: Over tourism refers to an influx of an excessive number of tourists at a particular destination, leading to various negative impacts (Dodds & Butler, 2019), including environmental pollution (Zeqiri et al., 2020). Alternative forms of tourism (Akis, 2011), like virtual reality, offer an affordable (Dewailly, 1999) and eco-friendly method of travel (Wiltshier & Clarke, 2016), which might mitigate the impact of over-tourism which in turn would help hotels to effectively manage and conserve their resources, lowering their environmental impact.

Upskilling of Employees: The integration of Industry 4.0 necessitates a higher level of expertise, prompting companies to allocate substantial resources annually for employee training and ongoing education. This investment aims to enhance employees' skill sets in alignment with the demands of Industry 4.0 and foster competence for specialised roles (Bag et al., 2021).

Promotes Innovation: Firms' focus on technology-led innovation has been a significant driver of success (Vial, 2019).Technology brings forth a spectrum of innovations within the evolving smart hospitality industry (Buhalis & Leung, 2018), transforming all associated processes (Paluch et al., 2020).

Promotes Sustainability: AI solutions have the potential to facilitate sustainability (Patrício & Rieder, 2018) by tackling issues associated with resource constraints and environmental limitations (Lakshmi & Corbett, 2020). Additionally, AI solutions can contribute to cost optimisation and sustainable performance within supply chains (Baryannis et al., 2019).

4. Threats

Job Losses: Due to the accuracy, inexhaustible energy, and machinery skill proficiency, businesses can economise financial resources across numerous domains by employing AI instead of human workers to carry out various tasks (Smith & Anderson, 2014). RAISA can potentially eliminate, or at the very least substantially reduce, certain entry-level positions such as bellboys, housekeepers, waiters and even drivers (due to autonomous cars). Consequently, this could significantly limit job prospects for specific social demographics, including individuals with lower education levels and students seeking part-time employment (Ivanov, 2019). Bowen and Morosan (2018) forecasted that around 25% of jobs in the hospitality sector would be automated by 2030.

Vendor Lock-in Effect: 'Vendor lock-in' is the dependence of the customer (here hotels) on a supplier to a certain extent (Sjoerdstra, 2016). When robotics's components and software packages are not standardised and cannot be easily interchanged among different robotics manufacturers, the expenses associated with a hotel transitioning to a new robot supplier will rise. This could lead the hotel company to become locked into a vendor relationship overly reliant on a specific supplier (Simpson, 2019).

Dependency on Technology: While AI and machines cannot fully replace knowledge workers (Pettersen, 2019), the increasing reliance on machines has sparked speculation that AI might surpass human intelligence (Nam, 2019). Already there are indications are that self-service customers are not necessarily satisfied with a provider's self-service channel but stuck with it (Buell et al., 2010) and in future this might increase due to dependency on technology.

Privacy & Security: The integration of technology can give rise to concerns regarding the privacy of the customers and about the safeguarding of confidential information (Bitner et al., 2000). Numerous authors have highlighted the potential privacy risks AI systems pose due to their extensive data collection capabilities and their capacity to extract patterns and information from this data (Tussyadiah & Miller, 2019). Certain nations remain hesitant to adopt facial recognition technology because of concerns related to privacy and data security (Bowyer, 2004). In the past many hotels' reservation systems have been hacked.

Conclusion and Discussion

The connection between climate change and tourism is reciprocally impactful (Conefrey & Hanrahan, 2022). The emerging technological revolution, Industry 4.0, has the potential to contribute to the fight against climate change; however, the extent of its success remains a subject of debate (Ben Youssef & Zeqiri, 2022). SWOT Analysis is a method utilised to evaluate the 'strengths,' 'weaknesses,' 'opportunities,' and 'threats' linked to an organisation, plan, project, individual, or business venture (Gurl, 2017). Based on the narrative review, we carried out a SWOT Analysis of industry 4.0 technologies for sustainable hotel operations. The findings of the SWOT analysis are summarised in Figure 1 below—

Table 1. SWOT Analysis of Industry 4.0 technologies

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
• Mitigate Staff Shortage • Improved Guest Satisfaction • Maintaining Hygiene and Cleanliness • Touchless Service • Forecasting and Predictive Maintenance • Promote Circular Hospitality • Streamlining Operations • Cost Reduction • Promote Health and Well-being	• Decreased Human Engagement • High setup and Upkeep cost • Dependence on Human Intelligence • Customer Reluctance • Churning • Bias and Ethical Challenges	• Creating Technical jobs. • Competitive Advantage • Customization & Enhanced Profits • Revamping Course Curriculum • Balancing Tech and Human Workforce. • Prevent Over Tourism • Upskilling of employees • Promotes Innovation • Promotes Sustainability	• Job Losses • Vendor lock-in effect • Dependency on Technology • Privacy and Security

Based on our understanding of the literature, we conclude that incorporating Industry 4.0 advancements into hotel operations introduces a multifaceted opportunity and may significantly assist in promoting sustainability efforts in the sector. On the flip side, it may present a range of inherent vulnerabilities and possible risks that would require skilful handling. To mitigate adverse impacts and attain genuine sustainability in business, it's imperative to embrace digitalisation cautiously.

Limitations & Future Research

Traditional literature reviews may yield diverse outcomes due to absence of rigor (Massaro et al., 2016). We acknowledge that this review is nonreplicable. To mitigate this limitation, future researchers can use a structured data extraction and synthesis approach. Future researchers could consider collecting and analysing primary data via data collection tools such as surveys and interviews to gather more aspects and up-to-date information on applying innovative technologies in sustainable hotel operations. Comparative research across different industries can provide valuable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities of Industry 4.0 technologies in hospitality. Researchers can conduct more targeted SWOT analyses focusing on specific sustainability aspects or particular technologies within the context of hotels. They can explore interventions or strategies to mitigate the weaknesses and threats identified in the SWOT analysis. Furthermore, future researchers may investigate the perspectives of various stakeholders, including hotel guests, employees, and management, regarding the use of innovative technologies in sustainable operations.

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ANALYZING BALINESE BEHAVIOUR POST-PANDEMIC: THE PHENOMENON OF STAYCATION

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Extended abstract

This research aims to determine the behaviour of the Balinese people towards the staycation trend in the post-pandemic period in Bali. The results of this research can be used as a reference or reference in research related to studying the characteristics and travel motivations of tourists at a tourist destination.

The data analysis technique used in this research is a quantitative analysis technique using descriptive analysis. This research used 250 Balinese people who carried out staycations during the post-pandemic period. The study's findings indicate that staycationers' tastes vary and that both physical and emotional motivation elements impact staycations.

Keywords: Tourist Behavior, Tourist Reference, Tourist Motivation, Post-Pandemic, Staycation

Introduction

The Covid-19 epidemic has caused a decline in global tourism development since 2020. Covid-19 has been circulating the globe for about two years, affecting Indonesia's tourism industry. There is no doubt that this has a huge effect on the state of the Indonesian economy. Several municipal government regulations have made it more difficult for the tourism sector to survive, particularly for the hotel industry. The relationship that travel destinations have with visitors will be crucial in the future, therefore hotels need to build trust and business ties. This awareness will expand when hotel management can openly disclose efforts to establish safe environments via print and social media. Due to the hotel industry's reliance on the health of the travel and airline industries, it will be extremely challenging for all hospitality segments, including leisure, business, and adventure. To overcome these issues and prepare for guests by forming new routines, the lodging has done all possible.

Around 250 million foreign visitors arrived in the first five months of 2022, according to the most recent UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, indicating a notable rebound in international travel. As a result, the industry has regained over half (46%) of its pre-pandemic levels from 2019. In comparison, there were 77 million arrivals between January and May of 2022 (UNWTO, 2022). People are less likely to travel around the holidays as a result of the epidemic, which has led to a spike in the popularity of staycations. As people travel closer together, there has been a shift in the pattern, with both locals and domestic tourists exhibiting encouraging indicators in various markets. Travellers take a "staycation," or vacation near home. A staycation is an extended period spent by an individual staying in their hometown and engaging in local activities. You may make up for a day off with a staycation. Due to travel restrictions, travellers are seeking out outdoor experiences like rural tourism in addition to the staycation trend. Travelers' perceptions of the significance of positively impacting local communities are influenced by the existence of sustainability, authenticity, and locality, and they are becoming more and more in search of authenticity.

A staycation needs to be planned according to certain rules, like establishing a time limit and making a daily schedule that aims to provide the impression of a holiday. Well-thought-out staycations can be just as fun as vacations. Once hotels saw how effectively these concepts may be leveraged to revitalize their business, they began marketing staycations, workcations, and drivecations to prospective consumers who were willing to leave their homes (Sadhale, 2021).

According to Hsieh et al. (2010), one tactic to build consumer confidence is to use vouchers to generate demand. In 2009, despite China's economic and financial crisis, travel coupons were given out (Yan & Zhang, 2012). Following the COVID-19 outbreak, several nations are beginning to discuss the use of travel incentives like tourism vouchers. Offering a domestic vacation certificate instead of cash is the intended inducement. Travel will focus on

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local and regional markets, therefore this approach has been suggested as an intervention technique in many different countries, even regions or cities (Cvelbar et al., 2021).

While "voluntary staycations," another term for staycations, are taken into consideration as a proportion of the local tourist market, staycations also refer to vacations taken at or near one's home (de Bloom et al., 2017). According to Grech et al. (2020), staycations have consequently emerged as a significant driver of the tourism sector and the hotel business. Saving money is a major benefit of taking a staycation. Staycations are much less expensive for lodging, meals, and transportation than long-distance vacations. It's easy to understand why people are interested in staycations again given the state of the world economy and the detrimental effects of COVID-19 (Zhang et al., 2022).

A staycation, according to Wixon (2009), is a brief period—sometimes even a holiday—that is spent at home or in a setting that evokes the traditional holiday spirit. According to a similar description provided by Vaǔcková (2009), a staycation is when someone chooses to explore their local area while remaining at home rather than going somewhere else. When it comes to vacation travel within a place or nation overall, the substantial changes in tourism and hospitality brought about by COVID-19 since early 2020 have progressively positioned the staycation notion as the opposite of overseas and long-distance travel (Yan et al., 2022).

According to Google Trends, the staycation trend grew significantly by 153% between January 2018 and June 2019. Additionally, according to Google Trends, the most popular search at the time for travel locations was Bali (Metropolitan. id, 2019). The term "staycation" saw a 3.4-fold increase in searches in 2019. 2019 saw no end to the staycation tourism boom; in fact, staycations continue to be the most popular travel trend. When Wego Travel surveyed its users in 2020, 37% of them selected a family vacation, 26% went on a staycation, 13% went on a nature tourism trip, and 12% visited their hometown (Wego Travel, 2020). The research indicates that, despite not ranking highest, the staycation trend is still very popular, with a relatively small percentage difference. It is anticipated that the public will be interested in the staycation tourism trend, according to Travel.kompas.com (2020). Many lodging establishments provide staycation packages, which is evidence of this. Staycations, however, involve more than just lodging; they often involve leisure activities that you may do close to home, such as visiting nearby tourist sites. Another travel trend that may boost the local economy is the staycation.

The peak increase in the staycation tourism trend happened in October 2020, according to Raywhite News (2021), according to the 2020 Google Trends graph. The staycation tourism trends graph from Google Trends for 2021 continues to show very high numbers and notable growth. Staycations, or vacations spent largely alone while travelling to keep oneself safe, have gained popularity among travellers (Kemenparekraf.go.id, 2021). It's been suggested that the COVID-19 outbreak and the economic downturn aren't the only things driving the staycation trend—rather, these two causes are fueling it faster. Staycations are a tourism trend that has the potential to last longer than just the economic downturn. This is because many people can only take short vacations, making it difficult for them to travel outside of their immediate area or overseas. As a result, staycations will likely become increasingly popular. Given the current state of the economy and persistent health issues, it will be challenging to reverse the trend of staycation tourism anytime soon (Forbes.com, 2020).

Bali is well-known around the world. Bali has experienced the fastest growth rate of any destination in the world from the beginning of 2022, thanks to the strategy of reducing restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Bali has Southeast Asia's fastest growth rate of any location. The first part of March 2022 saw an increase in the number of foreign visitors to Bali. 152 per cent more people searched for Bali, and 33 per cent more people searched for "staycations" (Itsnaini, 2022). Future vacation plans are mostly driven by the "travelling" community's need to find a new equilibrium that will enable them to forget the major challenges brought on by the pandemic (Brundu et al., 2021).

A poll of students at a university in northeast Ohio revealed that the millennial generation took the highest percentage of staycations. There are travel packages available for hotels to offer to customers in the four clusters (James et al., 2017). For millennials, the staycation experience is a chance to fulfil their vacation ambitions. Relevance in the real world Hotel management must keep creating Instagrammable spaces and rooms and create themed packages by working with neighbouring businesses and attractions to draw in millennial interest in the post-COVID-19 era (Moon & Chan, 2022).

Place attachment supports the staycation experience in Hong Kong, and a sense of presence carries out the quality of the experience. Additionally, psychological detachment and the consolidation of experience quality function as mediators that can be preserved in the research model (Yan et al., 2022). The phenomena of staycations

demonstrate how mobility and tourism are related, as well as how important it is to frame the idea of mobility in tourism (Coles, 2015). Cresswell (2010) on the politics of mobility, considers how contemporary rhetoric shapes immobility. Contrary to what the media projected ten years ago, opinions about staycations have continued to grow as the economy has improved (Germann, 2009).

Nonetheless, the purpose of staycations is to acquaint travellers with (non-foreign or non-exotic) surroundings. According to Besson (2017), a staycation is a shift from regular activities to a vacation that is primarily focused on the subject's mindset and disposition rather than the setting or activities. For travellers who still lack the courage to interact with other travellers, staycations are an option. This is going to incentivize hotels in Bali to offer additional amenities like yoga lessons, cooking classes, Balinese dance, and meditation (Suciati & Suadnya, 2021). According to trip descriptors, the millennial age is characterized by its preference for vacations and leisure, which includes taking trips with friends and taking staycations during holidays (Lauw et al., 2022).

Objectives

The purpose of this study is to ascertain how Balinese citizens of Bali behaved about the staycation trend during the post-pandemic era. In addition, the outcomes of this study can serve as a benchmark for future comparable investigations about the examination of tourist traits and travel behaviours within a tourism hotspot. To boost tourism in Bali during the post-pandemic phase, it is believed that this research would be able to offer input for policy decisions. It is anticipated that this research will be able to help the tourism sector in its efforts to get ready for changes in travel and behaviour trends among tourists in the post-pandemic period.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

250 Balinese individuals who took staycations in the wake of the pandemic served as the research samples. In this study, nonprobability sampling by incidental sampling will be employed as the sampling method. This study's observations centre on the actions of Balinese tourists participating in staycation activities at various research sites, including tourist destinations in the regencies of Tabanan, Gianyar, and Bangli. To ascertain the traits and travel habits of tourists visiting Bali in the aftermath of the pandemic, this study employs a survey methodology with the aid of a questionnaire instrument.

2. Research Tools

This study employed quantitative analysis with descriptive analysis as its method of data analysis. In this quantitative study, the descriptive data analysis approach is a method of examining, characterizing, and condensing events or phenomena from data collected by direct field observation as well as data collected through the distribution of questionnaires to respondents. A table or graph will be used to display the data. The objective of this quantitative descriptive study is to provide a comprehensive and detailed account of the occurrence of the different phenomena under investigation.

3. Data Collection

Data from studies explains why the majority of Balinese who took staycations following the COVID-19 pandemic were from Badung Regency (32.8%), followed by Denpasar City (31.2%). In summary, after the epidemic, city dwellers particularly those in Badung and Denpasar prefer to spend their leisure time on staycations. Within the same period, less than 10% of residents of the regencies of Bangli, Buleleng, Gianyar, Jembrana, Karangasem, Klungkug, and Tabanan took staycations. This can be explained by the fact that residents of these seven districts are not inclined to have a vacation due to their rural location away from the bustle of cities.

Gender-wise, it was indicated that 40.4% of those who took post-pandemic staycations were men and 59.6% were women. According to age, the age group over 50 years old makes up 13.6% of those who take staycations, followed by those between the ages of 18 and 25 (25.6%), 26 to 30 (24%), and over 50 (13.6%). This explains why Gen-Z (those in the 18–25 age range) and the Millennial Generation are the next generation to favour staycation activities over travel. Because they may engage in inexpensive and time-efficient activities with friends during staycations, Gen-Z like them. In addition, the fear of missing out, or "FOMO," is another reason why they take a staycation and visit locations that are popular with them.

The majority of those who took post-pandemic staycations had bachelor's degrees (43.2%), followed by postgraduate degrees (26%), high school/vocational school degrees (15.6%), and diplomas (14.8%). In the post-pandemic period, 47.6% of them who took staycations were single, which is consistent with the predominant age

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group of 18 to 25 years old. When it comes to staycations, the younger generation typically travels in groups with friends, keeps up with local news, and takes pictures and videos of the destination to post on social media. Married couples with up to 32.4% of school-age children rank second in this category. These families want to spend the weekend together to avoid boredom and take advantage of a laid-back atmosphere away from their jobs or regular schedules.

When it comes to the type of people that take staycations, Balinese workers make up the majority (30.8%), followed by civil servants (27.2%), students (17.6%), government employees (9.2%), self-employed individuals (8.4%), and housewives and other individuals. This is consistent with the predominant income group, which is made up of those earning between Rp 3,100,000 and Rp 5,000,000. This indicates that persons who take staycations are middle-class to upper-class, allowing them to engage in a wide range of activities during their trip. Those with an income between IDR 3,100,000 and Rp 5,000,000 per month, or up to 29.6% of the total, are the majority of Balinese who take staycations. Those with an income between Rp 5,100,000 and Rp 10,000,000, or up to 23.6%, are the next most common income group. Yet the third group to go on a staycation after a pandemic is persons without a source of income. This illustrates how local Balinese people's ability to take staycations in the post-pandemic period is not restricted by their poor income. In the post-pandemic period, 18.4% of those without income who were students took staycations. This demonstrates how staycations have taken on a life of their own for some individuals, particularly young members of Generation Z.

Those with an income between IDR 3,100,000 and Rp 5,000,000 per month, or up to 29.6% of the total, are the majority of Balinese who take staycations. Those with an income between Rp 5,100,000 and Rp 10,000,000, or up to 23.6%, are the next most common income group. The third group of people to go on a staycation after a pandemic is, however, those without a source of income. This demonstrates that, during the post-pandemic period, local Balinese people's ability to take staycations is not restricted by their poor income. In the post-pandemic period, 18.4% of those who are students and do not have a source of income took staycations. This demonstrates how staycations have taken on a life of their own for some individuals, particularly young members of Generation Z.

Almost 54.4% of respondents said they had visited Bali more than once, indicating the wide range of frequency with which people have had staycations throughout the pandemic. Two staycations during the pandemic, accounting for 27.6% of the total, were the most frequented during the post-pandemic period, with one staycation accounting for 28.4% of the total. Interestingly, the frequency of staycations in Bali has increased in the post-pandemic period compared to the pandemic period. This is evident from the fact that the post-pandemic period's frequency of 3 to 5 times was higher than the pandemic period's frequency at the same frequency. This demonstrates that, in addition to the increased confidence that staycations have garnered since the pandemic, the staycation trend has begun to take on a life of its own for Balinese.

4. Data Analysis

a) Preferences in Planning a Staycation.

The concepts of engagement, leisure, and negotiation all depend on motivation. Motivating people to participate in particular leisure activities is the "push factor" (Manfredo et al., 1996). Recreational activity participation may be motivated by personal psychological or sociological endeavours. Achieving goals including boosting self-esteem, appreciating nature, breaking free from routine, and interacting with others are some of the motivations behind engaging in recreational activities. The willingness to engage and the proportional intensity of the impediments determine how the negotiating process turns out. In light of this, it is believed that limitations and desires have an inverse connection (Hubbard & Mannell, 2001; Son et al., 2008; White, 2008).

Motivation is a fundamental concept in human behaviour theory. Our comprehension of human motivation is shaped by a few fundamental ideas. Human motivation is thought to originate from the discrepancy between desired and actual circumstances. One of the psychological factors influencing customer purchase behaviour is motivation, according to research by Kotler and Make (2014). They contend that motivation is a need that peaks, generates conflict, and ultimately compels action to lessen or prevent that conflict.

Since the pandemic, people's behaviour in taking staycations has been influenced by the X3 indicator's highest physical motivation (35.2%), which indicates that people are more interested in staycations because of the attractions, lodging, activities, restaurants, and other tourism-related products. This demonstrates that even after the pandemic, individuals still enjoy staying put and doing leisurely things. The second reason for choosing staycations is their lower product pricing (22%) when compared to other tourist excursions, which is followed by being near home

(17.6).

Balinese people's decision to take staycations is influenced by emotional incentives in addition to physical drive. Staycations are popular with Balinese individuals who want to find serenity, escape their routine, and relax outside of their home (71.2%), followed by exploring new places (20%), feeling nostalgic (7.6%), and relieving stress from work (1.2%). The majority of Balinese took a staycation following the epidemic with their partner (16.8%), family (53.6%), close friends (18.8%), and alone (10.8%).

b) Motivation in Choosing Staycation Products

One of the tourist amenities that has a strong connection to the staycation travel trend is lodging. In Bali, many lodging options provide staycation packages, including villas, homestays, star and non-star hotels, camping or glamping sites, and other lodging. Travel accommodations stand to gain the most from this trend in travel. When Balinese people take staycations following the pandemic, they prefer villas over hotels, glamping, or homestays. The majority of respondents (42%) favour villas over camping (20.4%), while non-star hotels are the least popular. The selection of a villa is highly backed by a study by Trirasri and Tangpatthanakit (2022), which indicates that travellers give careful consideration to the type of lodging they choose for a staycation and that they typically prefer quiet, secluded, and secure lodging.

Balinese people choose to have all the amenities available (27.2%) over affordable prices (24.6%) when selecting a location to stay during a staycation. Pegipegi.com reports that, as of 2022, millennials and Generation Z typically want low costs. They have a preference for modestly furnished lodgings that complement the surrounding environment. The results of the Expedia Group poll on American Multi-Generational Travel Trends indicate that millennials and Gen Z are unlikely to want to travel in the same way twice, thus they may switch between different kinds of lodging. Price considerations are not limited to the millennial generation; some individuals consider prices when purchasing housing.

Consumers who want to shop at low prices often enjoy promotions and discounts offered by different platforms. This way of thinking is based on the study's findings, which show that the majority of participants are between the ages of 18 and 25; they also have modest incomes. The selected lodging also needs to have a reliable internet connection since it facilitates the capture of pictures and their subsequent uploading to travellers' social media accounts. When it comes to staycations, individuals choose prices that fit their budgets; the range that they choose to pay is typically between Rp 500,000 and Rp 1,000,000. This pricing is fairly reasonable given the community's current economic situation and the lodging options available.

Ubud is a popular destination for staycations. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic till now, Ubud has gained popularity as a destination for staycations and has established a reputation as a healing area. Ubud is the most searched-for location worldwide, according to Travel Insight with Google statistics (Kompas.com, 2023). In addition to Ubud, the public's favourite places for staycations include Kintamani (18.8%) and Bedugul (13.2%). Those who want to escape their daily routine are drawn to the refreshing air and breathtaking scenery. Along with a variety of lodging choices, this place boasts naturally occurring lakes and mountains that greatly enhance visitors' staycation activities. In the meantime, several spots with stunning beach views—Kuta, Seminyak, Canggu, Tulamben, Nusa Penida, and Nusa Dua—were selected by respondents for a staycation in Bali.

When on a staycation, natural tourist attractions are preferred over man-made or cultural ones. The most popular tourist destinations for staycations are those that are natural since they are thought to be safer, are located in open areas with pure air, and make social distancing easier to adopt. People go with the idea of a staycation because natural attractions are tourist destinations that typically offer stunning vistas and a fresher atmosphere to help with fatigue relief and mental renewal. This study supports the findings of Andriani and Batusangkar (2021), who found that, when it comes to staycations, visitors prefer natural tourism (71.7%) to cultural, culinary, retail, and other types of tourism. They prefer places in rural areas (36%) with a beautiful natural atmosphere, mountainous areas (35.6%), and beaches (19.6%).

c) The Activities in Carrying Out a Staycation

43.2% of them reported working while on their vacay, while 56.8% of them stated they did not engage in any office-related activities. 2.8% of respondents did not appreciate the current lodging options while on their staycation, compared to 97.2% who said they did. A staggering 88.8% of participants reported engaging in tourist activities while on their staycation, while only 11.2% said they didn't. Room accommodations are the most popular type of lodging during a staycation (84.4%). In the meantime, 88% of all tourism activities done during their staycation

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involve visiting natural sites. This is a result of people's continued preference for outdoor activities notwithstanding the government's declaration that Bali is safe from the COVID-19 virus.

Balinese people participate in culinary tourism in addition to enjoying lodging options and exploring the natural world. Cinnamon tourism was reported by 5.6% of respondents, while culinary tourism was reported by the bulk of respondents (94.4%). When it comes to places to go on staycations, small food stalls selling traditional Balinese cuisine are the most popular culinary tourism destinations (31.2%), followed by traditional markets (25.6%), restaurants (25.2%), and fast food restaurants (2.4%). People choose different types of culinary tourism depending on where their staycation is taking place. Ubud is the destination of choice for staycations, and it also has a ton of unique food spots that are open to the general public.

Balinese cuisine is the recommended meal to eat while on a staycation. For locals, Balinese cuisine has a distinct identity. The main staple of Balinese cuisine, a culinary tradition exclusive to Bali, is typically rice. Balinese cuisine favourites among the locals include "nasi jingo, satay lilit, and ayam betutu". Because Balinese food offers a variety of flavours and spices that make for a lively and enjoyable dining experience, local Balinese people adore it. Balinese people enjoy a variety of gastronomic delights outside Balinese cuisine, which is their primary preference. These include fast food, other Indonesian cuisines, and international cuisines like Korean, Japanese, and Western.

d) Types of Payment during Staycation

Balinese travellers prefer to pay with debit or credit cards (33.2%), with QRIS (15.6%) having the lowest preference. When taking a staycation, this kind of payment using a debit or credit card is incredibly simple to complete, eliminating the need for cash. Even so, 25.6% of consumers still make their payments using cash.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

Several conclusions can be drawn from the previous explanation. Balinese people's behaviour in taking a staycation during the pandemic is influenced by several variables, including emotional and physical motivation. The physical incentive is best shown by the presence of highly alluring tourist sites, lodging, activities, dining options, and other tourism-related items close to the staycation destination. In the meantime, the best indication of emotional motivation is the fact that Balinese people use staycations to relax, find serenity, and break from routine. Balinese people want to spend their staycations with their families and friends, and they choose to stay in villas for this reason. The villa was selected due to its reasonable cost and comprehensive amenities. The majority of Balinese residents chose to take staycations in the Ubud region, usually in rural places with a focus on ecotourism. Balinese people like eating traditional Balinese food, which is frequently accessible in tiny stalls and even traditional marketplaces when they are on vacation.

2. Discussion

Traveller behaviour, including preferences for vacation activities, destinations, and companions, will undoubtedly be influenced by the post-pandemic perspective. The management effect of staycations in Bali that Balinese individuals conducted in the aftermath of the epidemic was to give the tourism sector a more diverse range of viewpoints. Tourism industry players are attempting to diversify their revenue streams in light of the drop in visitor numbers by creating staycation packages that appeal to locals. Discounts on lodging, dining, and other amenities like spas and leisure programs may be included in these packages. As a result, there will be less reliance on foreign visitors and more revenue. Furthermore, staycations give locals the chance to discover and savour Bali's uniqueness, which increases the appeal of staycations in Bali by allowing the hotel industry and other lodging options used by the community to offer authentic experiences like local cuisine and cultural performances.

Reducing the effects of the present pandemic requires close cooperation between the government and the tourism sector. Developing legislation that supports local tourism, creating programs that encourage more visits from tourists, and collaborating on joint marketing are all examples of ways that stakeholders can work together.

Research recommendations

The following recommendations can be made in light of the research findings:

1. To boost the interest of Balinese individuals living in urban areas in taking staycations, it is imperative to create tourism offerings that align with the Balinese people's disposition toward self-improvement, tranquillity, and leisure pursuits.

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2. Balinese staycation activities are a fantastic chance to expand as a segment choice that the tourism industry, particularly lodging service providers, can focus on by providing tourism activities and staycation packages.

3. After the pandemic, Balinese people in particular are still very interested in stayingcations, with rural areas being the most popular destinations. This is a great chance for tourist villages to capitalize on this interest, especially in terms of opportunities for the millennial and Generation Z segments.

4. Because there aren't enough samples from this research to fully combine the different market segments, more targeted studies must be conducted on each market segment to obtain a more detailed understanding of their travel habits and preferences. This information can then be utilized to develop more targeted marketing campaigns.

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FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF WELLNESS TOURISM BY VISITORS FROM HO CHI MINH CITY

Vo Chi Linh[1]

Extended abstract

Ho Chi Minh City serves as a vital economic center in Vietnam. Like numerous other metropolitan areas globally, it presents improved living prospects, yet residents grapple with challenges such as pollution, congestion, and work-induced stress, gradually impacting their physical and mental well-being.

Presently, residents are increasingly attentive to these repercussions, prompting exploration of coping mechanisms, notably through tourism, with wellness tourism gaining traction. This form of tourism prioritizes activities fostering physical and mental well-being, facilitating environmental connections and self-discovery. Its aim is to attain peak well-being amidst life's pressures.

To elucidate the determinants guiding visitors' choices in wellness tourism from Ho Chi Minh City, the author undertook a study titled "Factors influencing the choice of wellness tourism by visitors from Ho Chi Minh City," rooted in the theoretical framework of health tourism (wellness and medical tourism). The research model identified eight factors impacting the decision to opt for healing tourism: Travel Motivation, Quality of Care, Safety and Security, Attractive Destinations, Reasonable Costs, Accessibility, Communication Marketing, Reference Groups.

Quantitative research findings substantiated that eight of these factors significantly shape the decision to engage in healing tourism, validating the initial hypotheses. Moreover, the study offers managerial implications to steer the development of wellness tourism.

Keywords: *Health tourism; Wellness tourism; Medical tourism; Ho Chi Minh City; The choice*

Introduction

Wellness tourism is increasingly recognized as a significant trend within the travel industry, aimed at improving individuals' overall quality of life by providing relief from the stresses of daily living. It involves travel intended to enhance health and well-being through a variety of holistic activities and services. Scholars and organizations acknowledge that wellness tourism encompasses diverse experiences designed to promote health, balance, and overall well-being.

According to Cohen (2008), wellness tourism refers to individuals traveling away from their usual environments to maintain or enhance their mental and physical well-being through healthcare services offered at their destination. Smith and Kelly (2006) describe it as a multidimensional concept incorporating aspects like balance, spirituality, and integration of physical and mental health with social and environmental elements.

Additionally, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines wellness tourism as activities aiming to improve and balance various domains of human life, including physical, mental, emotional, occupational, intellectual, and spiritual aspects. Wellness tourists are primarily motivated to engage in preventive, proactive, and lifestyle-enhancing activities such as fitness, healthy eating, relaxation, pampering, and healing treatments.

In summary, wellness tourism represents a comprehensive approach to travel focused on enhancing individual health and well-being through holistic activities and specialized destination services.

The modern lifestyle, characterized by high stress levels, long working hours, and urban living conditions, has fueled a rising interest in wellness tourism. Cities like Ho Chi Minh City, as crucial economic centers, illustrate the challenges faced by urban residents: pollution, congestion, and work-related stress, which can significantly impact physical and mental health. In response, wellness tourism has emerged as a popular means to escape these pressures and rejuvenate both body and mind. Many individuals are actively seeking dependable destinations where they can improve their health and reduce stress. They prioritize destinations that offer assured service quality, safety, reasonable prices, as well as scenic beauty and rich cultural experiences. In their decision-making process, they often rely on feedback from fellow travelers and appealing promotional offers. Furthermore, they frequently seek advice from friends, family, and healthcare professionals to ensure well-informed travel choices.

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To explore the determinants influencing visitors' choices in wellness tourism from Ho Chi Minh City, the study titled "Factors Influencing the Choice of Wellness Tourism by Visitors from Ho Chi Minh City" adopts a theoretical framework rooted in health tourism (wellness and medical tourism).

Objectives

1. Explore and identify the primary factors influencing residents of Ho Chi Minh City in their decision to engage in wellness tourism.

2. Investigate the underlying motivations and preferences that drive individuals from Ho Chi Minh City towards wellness tourism destinations.

3. Provide recommendations based on findings to stakeholders in the tourism industry to enhance offerings and attract more visitors interested in wellness tourism.

Hypothesis

1. Independent Variable

Many researches have concentrated on the factors influencing the choice of heath tourism destination by visitors in order to understand why visitors make this decision. In the study by Daumantas Bočkus et al. (2023), travel motivation is identified as one of the most crucial factors influencing the decision to choose wellness tourism destinations. Reasons such as escaping daily life and work pressures or the desire to achieve inner peace and spiritual development are genuine needs that drive people to select wellness tourism as a way to rejuvenate themselves. Similarly, the research by Yeon-Jin Lim, Hwa-Kyung Kim & Timothy J. Lee (2015) also confirms that travel motivation significantly impacts the decision to choose wellness tourism. Based on these studies, the author posits hypothesis as follows:

H1 - Travel Motivation: The primary motivations driving residents of Ho Chi Minh City to engage in wellness tourism significantly influence their destination choices.

Next, the quality of healthcare services emerges as a paramount concern for travelers when deciding on a wellness tourism destination. According to Haşim Çapar and Özgür Aslan (2020), travelers prioritize healthcare and medical professionals who are certified and legally licensed. They seek personalized and tailored healthcare plans that cater to their unique needs and preferences, along with the strict implementation of safety protocols to prevent injuries and infections. Furthermore, studies by J. A. Quintela, A. G. Correia & J. G. Antunes (2013), or Mukhles Al-Ababneh (2013), also emphasize that the quality of healthcare services significantly influences travelers' choices. The author posits hypothesis as follows

H2 - Quality of Care: Perceptions of the quality of healthcare services offered at wellness tourism destinations impact the likelihood of visitors from Ho Chi Minh City choosing to travel there

Safety and security are always top concerns in our daily lives, and this is also clearly reflected in travel decisions. Tourists consistently consider these factors as decisive when choosing a destination, especially in wellness tourism, where safety and security play an extremely important role. The goal of wellness tourism is to care for both physical and mental health, and if safety and security issues are not ensured, this goal loses its meaning. In the study by Nsizwazikhona Simon Chili (2018), tourists' perceptions of safety and security before their trip are considered fundamental factors influencing their decision to choose a destination. Additionally, the research by Haşim Çapar and Özgür Aslan (2020) also highlights the impact of these factors on tourists' decisions. Therefore, the author posits the following hypothesis:

H3 - Safety and Security: The perceived safety and security measures at wellness tourism destinations play a critical role in visitors' decision-making process.

Additionally, an attractive destination always exerts a strong appeal to tourists, and wellness tourism is no exception. Wellness tourism requires a setting that aligns with the purpose of the trip. Therefore, the attractiveness of a destination where visitors believe they can enjoy beautiful scenery, explore the uniqueness and charm of the local cultural community, and experience traditional local healthcare practices plays a crucial role. The study by Debadyuti Das, Pratap K.J. Mohapatra, Sushil Kumar Sharma & Ashutosh Sarkar (2007), demonstrates how tourists' expectations regarding the attractiveness of a destination influence their decision-making process. Similarly, the research by Bernd Frederik Reitsamer, Alexandra Brunner-Sperdin, and Nicola E. Stokburger-Sauer (2016) shows that the attractiveness of a destination affects tourists' choice and loyalty. Based on these findings, the author proposes the following hypothesis:

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H4 - Attractive Destinations: Destinations that offer attractive natural landscapes and cultural experiences are more likely to attract visitors from Ho Chi Minh City for wellness tourism.

The cost of the trip is always one of the main concerns for tourists, and it can be a significant barrier to their destination choice. Tourists tend to choose destinations where the costs are within their financial means, while still meeting their healthcare needs. The study by Gökhan Aydin and Bilge Karamehmet (2017) indicated that cost is one of the main factors influencing tourists' choices, and reasonable costs are always attractive to them. Similarly, the research by I Gusti Made Wendri., et al. (2019) on factors influencing the intention to pursue wellness tourism (a study in Bali) also highlighted that cost is an influential factor. Therefore, the author proposes the following hypothesis

H5 - Reasonable Costs: Affordability and cost-effectiveness of wellness tourism packages influence the decision-making of residents from Ho Chi Minh City.

Convenience and ease of access to health tourism destinations are crucial factors that tourists consider when making their choices. Proximity to accommodation or direct flight options are often prioritized, along with destinations offering shuttle services or transportation from bus stations or airports. In studies by authors such as Haşim Çapar and Özgür Aslan (2020), Yeon-Jin Lim, Hwa-Kyung Kim, and Timothy J. Lee (2015), as well as Gökhan Aydin and Bilge Karamehmet (2017), accessibility to destinations has been identified as influencing tourists' decisions in health tourism destination selection. Therefore, the author proposes the following hypothesis.

H6 - Accessibility: Easy accessibility and convenient travel options to wellness tourism destinations enhance their appeal to visitors from Ho Chi Minh City.

Communication and marketing today consistently impact the choices of travelers. Companies and organizations continually seek ways to attract and guide their customers through these tools. The increasing influence of social media significantly affects travelers' decisions, serving as a rapid and direct means of customer engagement. In the study by author Yaowapa Pathomsirikul (2019), the impact of marketing strategies on Chinese tourists' decision-making and loyalty toward medical and wellness tourism in Thailand was evident. Similarly, authors Elvis Agyapong & Jianqiong Yuan (2022) explored the influence of social media on international students' travel destination decisions in China, highlighting the strong appeal of social networks in shaping tourism choices. Consequently, the author proposes the following hypothesis:

H7 - Communication Marketing: Effective marketing strategies and promotional efforts significantly influence the awareness and attractiveness of wellness tourism destinations among residents of Ho Chi Minh City.

Information about destinations from family, friends, and colleagues is always valuable to tourists when they decide to choose healing tourism. Tourists always trust what those around them say. Additionally, the advice of health experts or the influence of celebrities also has a certain reference value for customers. Word-of-mouth and reviews from customers who have experienced healing tourism serve as trust factors for new customers in choosing a destination. In the study by Laurie Murphy, Gianna Mascardo, and Pierre Benckendorff (2007), the importance of word-of-mouth (WOM) information sources in the travel decision-making process is highlighted. The research by Xinxin Guo & Juho Antti Pesonen (2022), explores the impact of online travel reviews on destination image, thereby influencing tourists' decision-making. The author proposes the following hypothesis:

H8 - Reference Groups: Recommendations and reviews from friends, family, and healthcare professionals influence visitors' perceptions and decisions regarding wellness tourism destinations.

2. Dependent Variable

Selecting medical tourism as a means to help tourists escape life's pressures allows them to achieve a balance between work and personal life. The experiences gained from these trips contribute to accumulated knowledge, which can then be shared with others as a way to demonstrate a positive attitude toward the community. Moreover, numerous other attractive destinations await your discovery in future journeys. Research by the authors Yeon-Jin Lim, Hwa-Kyung Kim & Timothy J. Lee. (2015); Haşim Çapar, Özgür Aslan. (2020); Debadyuti Das, Pratap K.J. Mohapatra, Sushil Kumar Sharma &Ashutosh Sarkar (2007), has shown us clearly that the decision to choose medical tourism is always influenced by the above factors. From there, The author proposes the following hypothesis:

H0 - The Choice Of Wellness Tourism By Visitors.

3. The Proposed Research Model

Based on the above hypotheses, the the authors proposes the following research model:
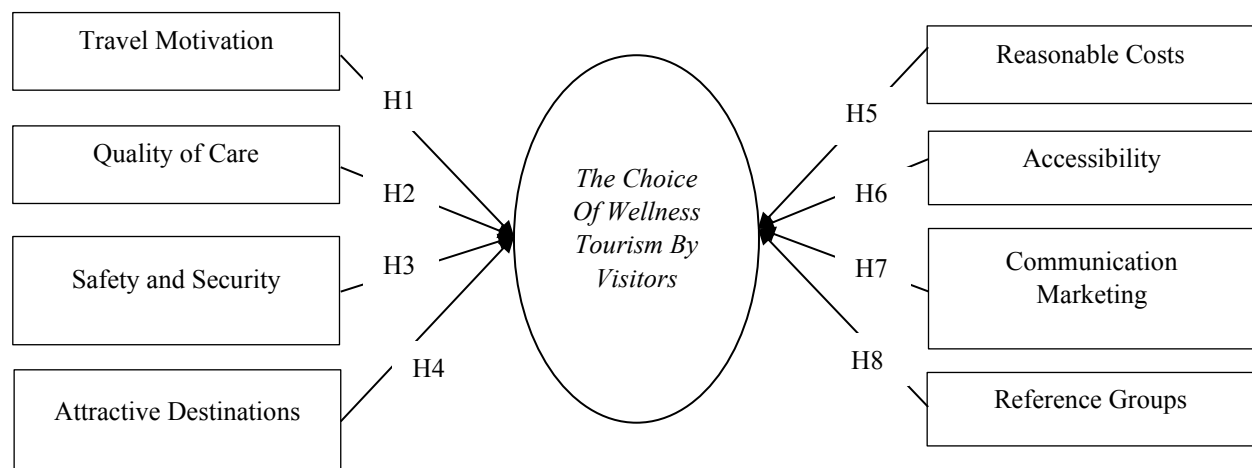
Figure 1. Proposed Research Model

Source: by the authors

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

The study focuses on residents of Ho Chi Minh City who have participated in wellness tourism or are expressing an interest in it. The population includes individuals from diverse demographic backgrounds, covering various age groups, genders, average income levels, educational levels, and occupations within the city.

The study will employ a stratified random sampling technique. This approach involves dividing the population into distinct subgroups (strata) based on relevant demographic variables such as age, gender, and income. Samples will then be randomly selected from each stratum to ensure representation across the different population segments.

2. Research Tools

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a subset of the sample to gain deeper insights into participants' experiences and perceptions of healing tourism.

Questionnaires: Structured questionnaires will be designed to gather quantitative data from participants. Closed-ended questions will help in collecting demographic data and specific opinions, while open-ended questions will allow participants to express their thoughts and experiences in more detail.

Online Surveys: An online survey platform was used to distribute the questionnaires to a broader audience.

Statistical Software: Software SPSS will be used for the statistical analysis of the quantitative data collected from questionnaires and online surveys.

3. Data Collection

The quantitative study was conducted through a survey on the Google Forms platform, and it received 419 responses from residents who had participated in or were interested in wellness tourism and were living in Ho Chi Minh City from April 2023 to June 2023. Out of these, 406 responses were valid. The collected survey results were used to measure the reliability and validity of the scales

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Sample

Table 1 contains personal information about gender, age, and income of respondents. The research sample reflects the diversity in characteristics of wellness tourism-interested customers.

Table 1. Demographic features

Personal information	Frequency	Total	Percent (%)
Gender	Female	212	52.2
	Male	194	47.8
Age	Under 20	16	3.9
	20 - 30	110	27.1
	31 - 40	132	32.5
	41 - 50	93	22.9
	Over 50	55	13.5
Education level	High school	39	9.6
	Intermediate/College	166	40.9
	University	138	34.0
	Postgradute	63	15.5
Occupation	Student	51	12.6
	Private area	136	33.5
	Govermment area	114	28.1
	Freelancer	79	19.5
	Other	26	6.4
Monthly income	Under 4 million VND	7	1.7
	5 – 10 million VND	64	15.8
	11 – 15 million VND	128	31.5
	16 - 20 million VND	120	29.6
	Over 20 million VND	87	21.4
Ever participated in wellness tourism	Yes	333	82.0
	Not yet	73	18.0

Source: by the authors

4.2. Analyze The Reliability Of The Scales

Based on the results of evaluating the reliability of the scales (see Table 2), the scales all give Cronbach's Alpha coefficient results > 0.7 and the total variable correlation of the, demonstrating the reliability of the scale for the factors (Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin B. J., & Anderson R. E, 2014). Additionally, the total correlation coefficient of the observed variables > 0.3, indicating a significant relationship among all variables. Therefore, these observed variables were accepted and included in the exploratory factor analysis (EFA).

Table 2. Analyze The Reliability Of The Scales

Reference	Scales	Observed variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
Daumantas Bočkus et al. (2023); Yeon-Jin Lim, Hwa-Kyung Kim & Timothy J. Lee. (2015)	**Travel Motivation (TM)**	TM1	0.838	0.598
		TM2		0.627
		TM3		0.620
		TM4		0.557
		TM5		0.672
		TM6		0.608
Haşim Çapar, Özgür Aslan. (2020); J. A. Quintela, A. G. Correia & J. G. Antunes. (2013); Mukhles Al-Ababneh. (2013)	**Quality of Care (QOC)**	QOC1	0.840	0.580
		QOC2		0.596
		QOC3		0.648
		QOC4		0.688
		QOC5		0.588
		QOC6		0.600
Nsizwazikhona Simon Chili. (2018); Haşim Çapar, Özgür Aslan. (2020)	**Safety and Security (SAS)**	SAS1	0.743	0.580
		SAS2		0.531
		SAS3		0.596
Debadyuti Das, Pratap K.J. Mohapatra, Sushil Kumar Sharma & Ashutosh Sarkar. (2007); Bernd Frederik Reitsamera, Alexandra Brunner-Sperdinb & Nicola E. Stokburger-Sauera. (2016).	**Attractive Destinations (AD)**	AD1	0.781	0.603
		AD2		0.599
		AD3		0.555
		AD4		0.583
Gökhan Aydin & Bilge Karamehmet. (2017); I Gusti Made Wendri., et al. (2019); Haşim Çapar, Özgür Aslan. (2020)	**Reasonable Costs (RC)**	RC1	0.773	0.608
		RC2		0.611
		RC3		0.603
Haşim Çapar, Özgür Aslan. (2020); Yeon-Jin Lim, Hwa-Kyung Kim & Timothy J. Lee. (2015); Gökhan Aydin & Bilge Karamehmet. (2017).	**Accessibility (ACC)**	ACC1	0,745	0.554
		ACC2		0.592
		ACC3		0.569
Yaowapa Pathomsirikul. (2019); Agyapong & Jianqiong Yuan (2022)	**Communication Marketing (CA)**	CA1	0.803	0.518
		CA2		0.621
		CA3		0.628
		CA4		0.707
Laurie Murphy, Gianna Mascardo and Pierre Benckendorff (2007); Xinxin Guo & Juho Antti Pesonen (2022)	**Reference Groups (RG)**	RG1	0.797	0.610
		RG2		0.515
		RG3		0.637
		RG4		0.675
Yeon-Jin Lim, Hwa-Kyung Kim & Timothy J. Lee. (2015); Haşim Çapar, Özgür Aslan. (2020); Debadyuti Das, Pratap K.J. Mohapatra, Sushil Kumar Sharma &Ashutosh Sarkar (2007)	**The Choice Of Wellness Tourism By Visitors (TCBV)**	TCBV1	0.804	.649
		TCBV2		.651
		TCBV3		.652

Source: Results of data processing from SPSS by the authors

4.3. Exploratory Factor Analysis

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.739
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity.	Approx. Chi-Square	7030.919
	df	528
	Sig.	0.000

Source: Results of data processing from SPSS by the authors

The standard of the factor analysis method is that the KMO = 0.739 greater than 0.5 and Barlett's test has a significance level of sig < 0.05 to prove that the data used for factor analysis is appropriate and between the variables are correlated with each other, which proves that the data used for factor analysis is completely appropriate. Barlett's test result is 7030.919 with Sig significance level. = 0.000< 0.05, showing that the observed variables are correlated with each other in the overall

4.4. Principal components analysis with Varimax rotation.

Conducting tests on the independent variables in the model produced small correlation coefficients, so the first conclusion that can be drawn is that there is no multicollinearity between the independent variables. The ENTER method was used in the regression analysis and to test the initial hypotheses. The results show that the VIF coefficient of the independent variables is less than 2, confirming that there is no multicollinearity among the variables in the research model (Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin B. J., & Anderson R. E, 2014) Therefore, the variance changes and the results from the regression model analysis are reliable.

Table 4. The results of the regression coefficient analysis for the variables in the model

Model Summary										
Model	**R**	**R²**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**	**Summary**					**Durbin-Watson**
					R²	**F**	**df1**	**df 2**	**Sig**	
1	0.819	0.672	0.665	0.43849	0.672	101.441	8	397	0.000	2.017

Coefficients								
Model		**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**t**	**Sig.**	**Collinearity Statistics**	
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**			**Tolerance**	**VIF**
1	(Constant)	-.414	0.166		-2.500	0.013		
	TM	.311	0.035	0.290	8.779	0.000	0.758	1.319
	QOC	.281	0.035	0.261	8.112	0.000	0.798	1.253
	SAS	.175	0.031	0.186	5.690	0.000	0.778	1.285
	AD	.209	0.032	0.212	6.565	0.000	0.792	1.263
	RC	.154	0.032	0.164	4.877	0.000	0.735	1.361
	ACC	.160	0.030	0.171	5.282	0.000	0.793	1.260
	CA	-.045	0.031	-0.045	-1.450	0.148	0.850	1.177
	RG	.013	0.029	0.014	0.460	0.646	0.905	1.104
a. Dependent Variable: TCBV								

Source: Results of data processing from SPSS by the authors

Thus, the regression model is written as follows:

TCBV = 0.290*TM + 0.261*QOC + 0.186*SAS + 0.212*AD + 0.164*RC + 0.171*ACC − 0.045*CA + 0.014*RC

Based on the analysis results, 6 hypotheses were accepted (H1,H2,H3,H4,H5,H6). The Sig coefficient to test the independent variables H7 and H8 is greater than 0.05, so these two independent variables were not accepted.

Discussion and Conclusion

1. Discussion

The results of the paper show the impact of Travel Motivation (TM) Quality of Care (QOC) Safety and Security (SAS) Attractive Destinations (AD) Reasonable Costs (RC) Accessibility (ACC) on The Choice Of Wellness Tourism By Visitors (TCBV).

Research shows that travel motivation has the most influence on the choice of wellness travel. Reasons such as escaping from everyday life and work, or the desire to achieve inner peace and spiritual development, are real needs that drive people to choose wellness tourism as a way to rejuvenate themselves. This is similar to the study by Daumantas Bočkus et al. (2023). Thus, travel motivation itself, as a necessity, influences the decision to choose wellness tourism.

The quality of care is the second most influential factor in the decision to choose wellness tourism, and this impact aligns with the previous research by Haşim Çapar and Özgür Aslan (2020). This result is reasonable because, in wellness tourism, customers highly value factors that affect their physical and mental health. They participate in wellness tourism to rejuvenate themselves and enhance their health. Therefore, customers carefully evaluate and consider the travel program, professional staff, facilities, and locations, ensuring that these elements are sufficiently good to make the decision to choose wellness tourism.

The attractive destinations is the third most influential factor in the decision to choose wellness tourism. Wellness tourism requires a setting that aligns with the purpose of the trip. Therefore, the allure of a destination where visitors can enjoy beautiful scenery, explore the unique and charming local culture, and experience traditional wellness activities plays a crucial role. This impact is supported by the research of Debadyuti Das, Pratap K.J. Mohapatra, Sushil Kumar Sharma, and Ashutosh Sarkar (2007), which demonstrates that tourists' expectations of a attractive destinations influence their decision-making process. An appealing destination not only fosters loyalty but also encourages visitors to return in the future.

Safety and security are the fourth most influential factors in the decision to choose wellness tourism. Travelers always consider these factors as key criteria when selecting a wellness destination, as safety and security play an extremely important role. The goal of wellness tourism is to enhance physical and mental health, and if safety and security issues are not ensured, this goal loses its significance. This is consistent with the research by Nsizwazikhona Simon Chili (2018), which found that tourists' perceptions of safety and security before their trip are fundamental factors influencing their choice decisions.

Accessibility is the fifth factor influencing the decision to choose wellness tourism. People tend to select destinations that are close to their residence, and for farther locations, having a direct flight is a significant advantage. Destinations that offer shuttle services or are convenient for public transportation are also favored. This is consistent with studies by Haşim Çapar and Özgür Aslan (2020), and Yeon-Jin Lim, Hwa-Kyung Kim, and Timothy J. Lee (2015). Accessibility to destinations significantly impacts the decision to choose a wellness tourism destination.

Reasonable cost is the sixth factor influencing the decision to choose wellness tourism. Travelers tend to select destinations that fit within their financial capabilities while still meeting their wellness needs. This aligns with the research by Gökhan Aydin and Bilge Karamehmet (2017). Therefore, reasonable cost is a crucial factor that travelers always carefully consider, ensuring a balance between their needs and their ability to pay. A product is chosen when it meets both of these criteria from the customer's perspective.

Marketing communication and reference groups are two important factors in tourism, but they are not decisive factors influencing customers' choice of wellness tourism for the following reasons:

Primary objective of wellness tourism: Customers choose wellness tourism mainly for the purpose of physical and mental health care. Factors such as travel motivation; quality of care; safety and security; attractive destinations; reasonable costs; accessibility play a more crucial role in their decision-making process.

Personalization of experience: Wellness tourism often requires a highly personalized experience, based on the unique needs and health conditions of each individual. Marketing communication and reference groups cannot replace the relevance and effectiveness of specific health care services.

Reliability of information: Although marketing communication and reference groups can provide information

and influence customer perceptions, the final decision is usually based on reliable information from medical experts, reviews from past customers, and thorough research on the services provided

Different priorities: Wellness tourists tend to prioritize practical and specific factors such as service quality, reasonable cost, and comfort, rather than being overly influenced by advertisements or opinions from others

2. Conclusion

This study highlights the factors influencing the choice of wellness tourism by visitors, including travel motivation; quality of care; safety and security; attractive destinations; reasonable costs; and accessibility.

Travel Motivation is the most influential factor. Reasons such as escaping everyday life and work, and the desire for inner peace and spiritual development drive people to choose wellness tourism for rejuvenation. This finding aligns with the study by Daumantas Bočkus et al. (2023).

Quality of Care is the second most influential factor. This result is consistent with previous research by Haşim Çapar and Özgür Aslan (2020), as wellness tourism customers highly value factors affecting their physical and mental health.

Attractive Destinations rank as the third most influential factor. The allure of destinations where visitors can enjoy beautiful scenery, explore unique local culture, and experience traditional wellness activities plays a crucial role. This impact is supported by the research of Debadyuti Das et al. (2007).

Safety & Security is the fourth most influential factors. Travelers consider these factors key criteria when selecting wellness destinations, as the primary goal is to enhance physical and mental health. This aligns with the research by Nsizwazikhona Simon Chili (2018), which found that tourists' perceptions of safety and security are fundamental factors influencing their choice.

Accessibility is the fifth influencing factor. Destinations close to home or with direct flights, shuttle services, or convenient public transportation are preferred. This finding is consistent with studies by Haşim Çapar and Özgür Aslan (2020), and Yeon-Jin Lim et al. (2015)

Reasonable Cost is the sixth factor. Travelers tend to select destinations that fit within their financial means while meeting their wellness needs. This aligns with research by Gökhan Aydin and Bilge Karamehmet (2017), highlighting the importance of balancing needs and affordability.

Research recommendations

The study has achieved its specific objectives but has certain limitations:

1. The research was conducted only in Ho Chi Minh City and has not been extended to other major cities such as Hanoi, Da Nang, which have similar demographic and socio-economic characteristics to Ho Chi Minh City. The author intends to broaden the scope in future studies.

2. Factors influencing the decision to choose wellness tourism, such as political and economic stability, legal frameworks, and cultural differences, were not addressed in this study. Therefore, future research could consider these limitations to propose recommendations for future studies.

3. Two factors, namely marketing communication and reference groups, could be considered for inclusion as mediating variables in future studies.

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DISCONNECTED BLISS: EVALUATING THE TRAVEL SATISFACTION OF DIGITAL DETOX HOLIDAY (DDH)

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Abstract

In the contemporary digital era, excessive use of technology is associated with various physical, mental, and social challenges. In response, an increasing number of individuals are engaging in digital detox holidays, during which they intentionally disconnect from digital devices. The primary objective of the study is to examine the influence of digital detox holiday (DDH) motives on travel satisfaction and subsequent tourist loyalty. This study employs quantitative research, utilising purposive sampling to survey 315 participants who have undertaken digital detox holidays. The results demonstrate that motives such as mindfulness, novelty, self-expression, and escapism significantly enhance travel satisfaction and further travel satisfaction influences tourist loyalty among digital detox tourists. This research highlights an emerging and underexplored phenomenon in tourism and hospitality. The findings offer practical implications for policymakers and service providers, suggesting that hotels and resorts can strategically position themselves as digital detox retreats by offering targeted digital detox programs. These insights contribute to a better understanding of the needs and preferences of digital detox tourists, enabling the development of more tailored and effective services.

Keywords: Digital detox, Travel satisfaction, Tourist loyalty, Digital free holiday

Introduction

Information communication technology has improved convenience and efficiency in contemporary life (Oh et al., 2013). Therefore, tourism professionals utilise various digital tools such as mobile apps, social media, and online booking platforms to enhance customer service and deliver the best possible experiences (Zvaigzne et al., 2023). Similarly, customers use these digital tools to make their holidays memorable and enjoyable (Sharma et al., 2020).

However, on the other hand, "digital technologies and social media" can adversely affect tourists' well-being and mental health (Rahim et al., 2021). These adverse effects are associated with a variety of physical, psychological, and social issues, including sleep disturbances, health complications, anxiety, and challenges in maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships (Lee et al., 2014). Hence, an increasing number of individuals aim to take a break from their digital devices temporarily, seeking balance away from the constantly connected world (J. Li et al., 2018). This trend, where people voluntarily limit their digital media usage and reduce reliance on digital devices, is termed "digital detox" (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020).

Embracing digital-free tourism not only enhances the wellbeing of tourists, but also provides an alternative form of tourism that caters to those seeking a more authentic and technology-free experience (Legwand & Matoga, 2021). It is clear that digital-free tourism offers a unique and valuable opportunity to elevate tourist well-being experiences (Radtke et al., 2022; Wilcockson et al., 2019). In places like Himachal and Uttarakhand, India, some hotels offer a digital detox by having guests leave their devices at the front office and enjoy activities like yoga and nature walks (Pathak, 2016).

Recent literature has raised questions about the pervasive use of ICT (Dickinson et al., 2016; J. Li et al., 2018; Tanti & Buhalis, 2016). Previous studies have examined travelers' desires for connectivity and disconnection while visiting camping destinations (Dickinson et al., 2016) and investigated factors influencing and distracting from connectivity, along with the impacts of staying connected or disconnected (Tanti & Buhalis, 2016). (J. Li et al., 2018)

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conducted a study based on 17 interviews exploring travel behaviours, while Cai et al. (2020) utilized qualitative interviews and media discourse analysis to understand digital free travelers' emotional responses. Floros et al. (2021) analyzed the perceptions of millennial tourists while taking digital free travel and Egger et al. (2020) investigated motivations for engaging in "digital free tourism" among young travellers through interviews. (Jiang & Balaji, 2021) studied factors influencing travellers' decisions to choose digital detox holidays and their impact on behavioral intentions. Despite growing interest in digital-free travel, a significant gap remains: limited studies have specifically addressed the travel satisfaction and loyalty of Digital Detox Holiday (DDH) (Egger et al., 2020; Jiang & Balaji, 2021). This gap underscores the need for further investigation to comprehensively understand the influence of eight factors of DDH on travel satisfaction and tourist loyalty. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the travel satisfaction and loyalty of Digital Detox Holiday Tourists (DDHT).

By examining these eight factors of DDH on travel satisfaction and further travel satisfaction impact on tourist loyalty, it sheds light on the impact of unplugging from technology during vacations. This study enhances theoretical understanding and provides tourism professionals with essential insights to create impactful marketing strategies and communication plans for this expanding niche market.

Literature review

Digital detox is an intentional effort to disengage from online or social media platforms (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020; Ugur & Koc, 2015). This idea has gained prominence in recent times, as individuals actively and voluntarily resist pervasive ICT usage and continuous engagement with social media (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). Mindfulness, nature connectedness, technostress, social bonding, relaxation, novelty, self-expression, and escapism are the eight movtives of digital detox holiday (Jiang & Balaji, 2021). Technostress refers to the stress and discomfort individuals experience due to their use of digital technologies, such as smartphones and computers (Tarafdar et al., 2015). It drives people to seek digital free tourism to relieve stress from digital devices, aiming to regain balance, reduce fatigue, and improve well-being (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Harmon & Duffy, 2023). Mindfulness is the practice of being fully present and engaged in the current moment, aware of your thoughts, feelings, and surroundings without judgment (Tanay & Bernstein, 2013). In the context of tourism, mindfulness involves intentionally disconnecting from digital distractions to enhance mental clarity, reduce stress, and promote overall well-being (Davis et al., 2015; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Talukder et al., 2024).

Self-expression involves conveying one's individuality, thoughts, and emotions to authentically express one's identity by disconnecting from digital distractions (Jiang & Balaji, 2021; Kirmani, 2009). Social bonding, defined as the formation of strong relationships with friends and family (Jiang & Chen, 2019), drives the desire to disconnect from devices for meaningful face-to-face interactions and improved travel experiences (Bian et al., 2020; Qu, 2024). Natural connectedness, the sense of unity with the natural environment, is often linked with digital detox holidays set in remote, natural locales that offer a break from urban life and immersion in nature (Enli & Syvertsen, 2021; Jiang & Balaji, 2021). Relaxation entails rejuvenating the body or mind and experiencing a sense of peace (Siamionava et al., 2018). Escapism involves seeking refuge from unpleasant realities or distractions from problems and pressures (H. Li et al., 2015). Novelty, defined as the pursuit of new and exciting experiences (Dann, 1981), motivates many travelers to seek out fresh destinations and engage in unique activities. In today's digital age, disconnecting from technology offers a unique experience and real-world interactions, attracting those seeking novel adventures (Egger et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020).

Travel satisfaction

Maximising customer satisfaction, enhancing customer retention, and generating loyalty is crucial for an organization's profitability and long-term success (Rychalski & Hudson, 2017). Satisfaction is defined as "a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption fulfilment, including the levels of under or over fulfilment" (Oliver, 1997, p. 13). In tourism literature, tourist satisfaction can be described as the degree of contentment a tourist experiences at a destination in relation to their pre-visit expectations or a comprehensive assessment of product experiences post-purchase (Heung & Cheng, 2000; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). This satisfaction represents the emotional response individuals feel—whether pleased or disappointed—resulting from comparing their expectations with actual outcomes (Armstrong & Kotler, 2003). Consequently, the service provider should focus on engaging tourists before and during their experiences to enhance satisfaction (Prebensen et al., 2016). Tourist satisfaction is a crucial element in service providers as it significantly influences tourist behavior and their intention to revisit the same destination (Loi et al., 2017). Therefore, measuring

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satisfaction and gathering feedback from tourists are vital for destination policymakers and service providers to identify potential issues that may lead to tourist dissatisfaction, potentially affecting future visits (Reisinger & Turner, 2003). Assessing tourist satisfaction regarding the digital detox experience can help service providers tailor their efforts to improve the travel experience for DDH participants and create a successful destination marketing strategy.

Tourist loyalty

Gaining and retaining loyal customers is key to a company's sustainable success (TaghiPourian & Bakhsh, 2015). Consumers demonstrate high loyalty through repeated purchases of a product and by displaying positive attitudes toward the brand or product (Pritchard & Howard, 1997). Therefore, creating and sustaining traveler loyalty has consistently been a significant concern for industry experts and researchers in the tourism field (Bowen & McCain, 2015; Chua et al., 2015; Shoemaker & Lewis, 1999). Loyalty is characterized by customers' strong commitment to consistently purchase a preferred product or service in the future (Oliver, 1999). In the context of tourism literature, destination loyalty refers to tourists' intent to revisit the same destination and to recommend it to their friends or relatives (Toyama & Yamada, 2012). Tourist loyalty may be influenced by factors such as travel satisfaction, experience, value, service quality, performance, pricing, and brand reputation (Backman & Crompton, 1991; Oliver, 1999). Tourist loyalty comprises two key dimensions: attitudinal and behavioral loyalty (Oppermann, 2000). Attitudinal loyalty pertains to the psychological attachment towards a product, whereas behavioral loyalty focuses on the frequency of product purchases (Chua et al., 2017; Oliver, 1997, 1999). In tourism literature, attitudinal loyalty is widely recognized and thus forms the basis of our study.

Hypotheses development

DDH motives and travel satisfaction

Mindfulness, characterized by awareness and non-judgmental observation of one's thoughts about a destination, influences tourists' behaviours, perceptions and satisfaction (Kang & Gretzel, 2012; Loureiro et al., 2019, 2020; Loureiro & Fialho, 2017). Through semi-structured interviews, it was found that mindfulness can inspire individuals to pursue digital-free tourism (Egger et al., 2020). Furthermore, (Iacob et al., 2024) discovered a positive link between mindfulness and tourism experiences, indicating that mindful travelers exhibit more eco-friendly behaviors, greater satisfaction, and more memorable experiences, which can lead to increased loyalty to the destination. This mindful approach is essential for promoting well-being. However, the specific relationship between mindfulness and satisfaction in digital device-free travel remains untested. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis

H1: Mindfulness positively influences the travel satisfaction

Nature connectedness encourages travellers to take digital device-free holidays because constant presence of technology can distract them from enjoying the natural beauty during their trip (Rickwood, 2022). For instants, online platforms and electronic devices stop travellers from fully enjoying the experiences at holiday destinations (Cai & McKenna, 2024). DDH allows vacationers unplug from their devices and enjoy outdoor activities in nature, helping them feel more connected to the natural world (Arenas-Escaso et al., 2024). Various studies have demonstrated that nature connectedness plays a crucial role in enhancing overall subjective well-being and increasing travel satisfaction (Asan et al., 2024; Asan & Daskin, 2024; Baceviciene & Jankauskiene, 2022; Chang et al., 2020; Rosa et al., 2019). Floros et al. (2021) highlight that millennials perceive the appreciation of natural surroundings as a significant benefit of digital-free travel. Their findings show that the influence of nature connectedness on travelers' experiences, satisfaction, and well-being is significant. Therefore, we hypothesize that natural connectedness positively influences travel satisfaction in the context of DDH travel.

H2: Nature connectedness positively influences the travel satisfaction

Travellers often find digital devices frustrating during holidays (Hassan & Saleh, 2024). For instance, being on the phone and constantly checking emails can affect the whole travel experience (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Y.-K. Lee et al., 2014). Moreover, the ongoing need to stay active on social media and stay updated with others' activities can be irritating for vacationers (Hao et al., 2024). Lee et al. (2023) study investigated the influence of technostress on hotel guest satisfaction, highlighting "Wi-Fi, hotel apps, and smart TVs" as major stressors based on guest experiences. The study concluded that technostress significantly affects guest satisfaction. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that travellers aim to disconnect from digital devices during holidays to avoid annoyance and frustration and enhance travel satisfaction. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis.

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H3: Technostress positively influences the travel satisfaction

Human beings naturally seek social connection and a sense of belonging (Raman, 2023). However, excessive digital communication can hinder interpersonal interactions during holidays (Dickinson et al., 2016). Engaging in digital device-free travel allows holidaymakers to prioritize in-person communication with family and friends, strengthening relationships and promoting harmony (Radtke et al., 2022). Similarly, taking a break for one week from social media moderately increased social connectedness (Brown & Kuss, 2020). In various studies, it has been empirically tested that social bonding significantly influences tourists' travel satisfaction (Bian et al., 2020; Gautam, 2022; Liu et al., 2022) and subsequently fosters loyalty toward the destination.

H4: Social bonding positively influences travel satisfaction

Engaging in digital device-free holidays (DDH) allows travelers to fully immerse themselves in their holiday experiences by either minimizing or cutting off access to technology (Egger et al., 2020). The absence of digital distractions brings tranquility and calmness, helping travelers feel refreshed and rejuvenated (Arenas-Escaso et al., 2024). For example, hotel guests reported better relaxation and had a better experience when they disconnected from their electronic devices and temporarily took a break (J. Li et al., 2018). Hence, we assume that relaxation generates travel satisfaction, leading us to propose the following hypothesis:

H5: Relaxation positively influences travel satisfaction

In a world where ICTs and digital devices are integral to daily life, a digital device-free holiday (DDH) offers travelers a unique and exciting experience. The relationship between novelty and satisfaction has been extensively studied across various fields, consistently demonstrating a significant impact of novelty on consumer satisfaction (Assaker & Hallak, 2013; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Williams & Soutar, 2009). Furthermore, novelty value has been identified as a significant predictor of satisfaction and future intentions (Nguyen et al., 2020; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Assaker et al. (2011) argued that tourists experience higher satisfaction when their desire for novelty is met or exceeded. Based on these arguments, we propose the following:

H6: Novelty positively influences the travel satisfaction

Engaging in a DDH allows travelers to demonstrate their values, such as work-life balance and family bonds, and reflect personal lifestyles characterized by peace, simplicity, authenticity, and calmness (Sandua, 2024). This enables travelers to express their true selves. Self-expression has been identified as a motivator for various types of tourism, including bicycle, ecotourism, and cultural tourism (Ritchie et al., 2010; Trauer, 2006). Self-expression positively influences tourists' personal happiness (subjective well-being) in sports tourism (Bosnjak et al., 2016). We hypothesize that self-expression significantly impacts travel satisfaction for DDH tourists.

H7: Self-expression positively influences the travel satisfaction

Escapism is a key factor explaining why individuals seek out hedonic products and services to fulfill their motives. In a world full of technology, a new form of escapism has emerged: the desire to disconnect from digital devices (Hoving, 2017; Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). By embarking on a digital device-free holiday (DDH), travelers can temporarily escape from unpleasant realities and everyday problems (Rickwood, 2022). In the context of creative tourism, Ali et al. (2016) found that escapism is a strong predictor of travel satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Therefore we propose the following hypothesis:

H8: Escapism positively influences the travel satisfaction.

Travel satisfaction and tourist loyalty

Travel satisfaction is a crucial metric that reflects a traveler's emotional and cognitive evaluation of their travel experiences. This measure is not only pivotal in understanding individual travel experiences but also plays a significant role in determining future travel behaviors, such as loyalty (De Vos & Witlox, 2017). The relationship between travel satisfaction and loyalty has been extensively studied across various tourism and consumer behavior domains, consistently showing that higher levels of satisfaction lead to increased loyalty (Bowen & McCain, 2015; Hung & Khoa, 2022; Kasiri et al., 2017; Le Chi Cong, 2016; Sangpikul, 2018; Silvestre et al., 2008; Wu, 2016). In the context of Thai wellness spas and hot springs destinations, satisfaction significantly impacts travel intention and loyalty (Kusdibyo, 2022; Wisitnorapatt & Sirirat, 2023). In today's competitive market, companies prioritize customer satisfaction to bolster tourist loyalty, underscoring the importance of initial satisfaction levels in influencing repurchase intentions and positive word-of-mouth (Meilatinova, 2021; Raza et al., 2020). Therefore we propose the hypothesis as follows.

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H9: Travel satisfaction has a positive influence on loyalty

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework connecting the motives of digital detox holidays to travel satisfaction

Research Methodology

Populations and Sample

A quantitative study was conducted to examine the effects of DDH motives on travel satisfaction and subsequent loyalty among digital detox holiday tourists. A purposive sampling method was used for participant selection and data acquisition. Data were collected from travellers who had participated in a DDH lasting more than four days, resulting in 315 valid responses from March to May 2024. Earlier research suggests that using at least 100 samples is adequate for conducting partial least squares structural equation modelling (Reinartz et al., 2009). Therefore, our sample size of 315 is considered more than adequate for robust data analysis.

Measurement development

The measurement scale for DDH motives, adopted from Jiang & Balaji (2021), incorporated the constructs of Mindfulness, Nature Connectedness, Technostress, Social Bonding, Relaxation, Novelty, Self-Expression, and Escapism. The items for travel satisfaction include three items adopted from (J.-H. Kim, 2018). The items for loyalty consist of three items taken from (Bagheri et al., 2023). All the items were rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) using a five-point Likert scale.

Data collection

This study employs a quantitative approach, utilizing a questionnaire as the primary data collection method. The respondents of the present study were people who went for retreats, wellness tourism, and yoga tourism in Himachal and Uttarakhand (India), seeking mental and physical rejuvenation and voluntarily opting for digital detox to attain bliss. The reason we have taken these two states as a data collection is because mostly people are travelling to these region for retreat, wellness tourism and digital detox holidays. A total of 380 questionnaires were distributed among potential participants, resulting in 315 completed and usable responses. Out of the 315 respondents, 145 were male and 170 were female. The majority of tourists, 52%, were between the ages of 21-35, and 43% were graduates. Prior to distributing of questionnaire, participants were asked for their willingness to participate in the research. Feedback was gathered from three academics and 30 respondents, who were subsequently excluded from the final data analysis.

Data analysis

Measurement model

This study employed PLS software (version 4.1.0.4) to conduct data analysis. The software facilitated a comprehensive examination of these relationships, analyzing both measurement and structural models effectively to achieve the study's objectives. The first step involved analysing the convergent validity of the model, which included assessing indicator loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). Table I reflects that, all indicator loadings exceeded the recommended value of 0.708 (Hair et al., 2014), except for four mindfulness items which were deleted for not meeting the criteria. The AVE for all variables ranged from 0.667 to 0.814, surpassing

the recommended value of 0.50, while CR ranged from 0.888 to 0.930, exceeding the recommended value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2014). Figure 2 reflects the results of the measurement model.
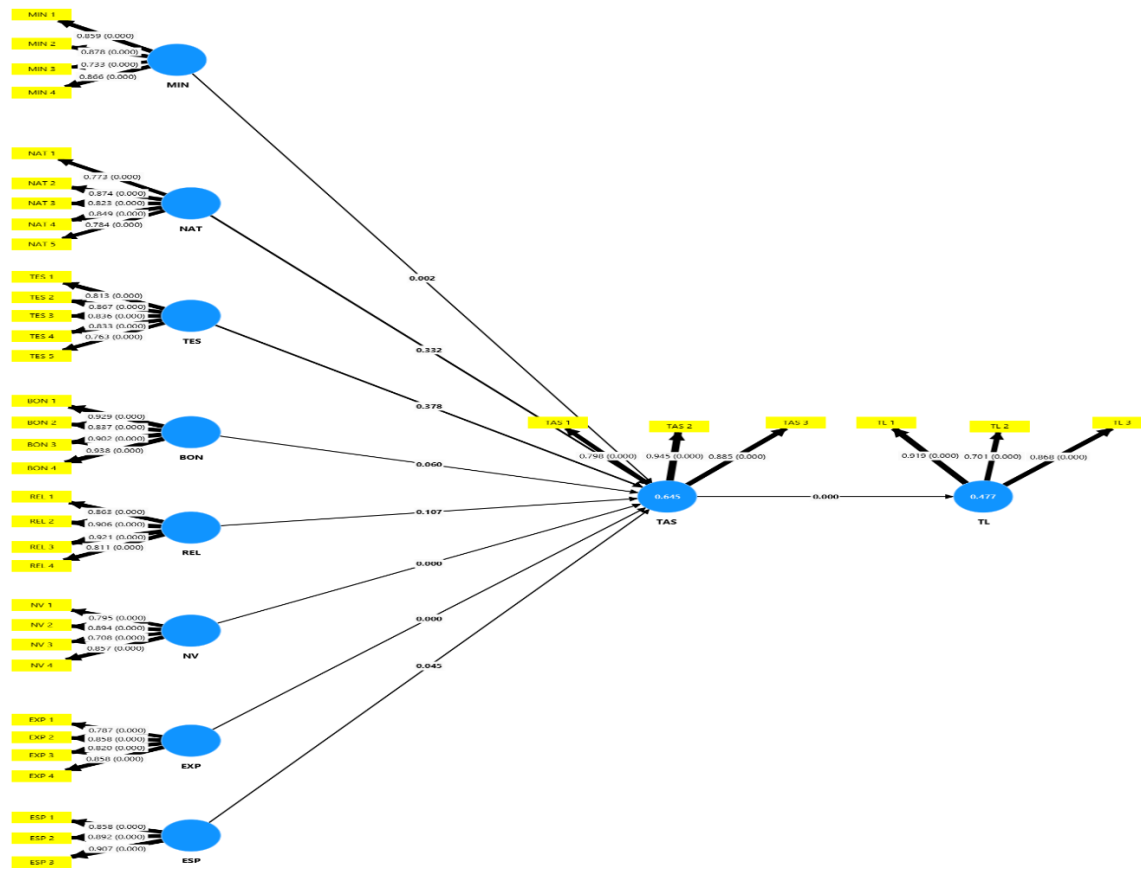
Figure 3

Table 7 Evaluation of reflective measurement models

Construct	Items	Loading	alpha	(rho_a)	(rho_c)	(AVE)
Mindfulness	MIN1	0.859	0.857	0.891	0.902	0.699
	MIN2	0.878				
	MIN3	0.733				
	MIN4	0.866				
Nature connectedness	NAT1	0.773	0.880	0.888	0.912	0.675
	NAT2	0.874				
	NAT3	0.823				
	NAT4	0.849				
	NAT5	0.784				
Technostress	TES 1	0.813	0.881	0.888	0.913	0.678
	TES 2	0.867				
	TES 3	0.836				
	TES 4	0.833				
	TES 5	0.763				
Social bonding	BON1	0.929	0.924	0.939	0.946	0.814
	BON2	0.837				

Construct	Items	Loading	alpha	(rho_a)	(rho_c)	(AVE)
	BON3	0.902				
	BON4	0.938				
Relaxation	REL1	0.863	0.898	0.903	0.930	0.768
	REL2	0.906				
	REL3	0.921				
	REL4	0.811				
Novelty	NOV1	0.795	0.837	0.869	0.888	0.667
	NOV2	0.894				
	NOV3	0.708				
	NOV4	0.857				
Self-expression	EXP1	0.858	0.851	0.857	0.899	0.691
	EXP	0.892				
	EXP3	0.907				
	EXP4	0.858				
Escapism	ESP1	0.858	0.863	0.863	0.916	0.785
	ESP2	0.892				
	ESP3	0.907				
Satisfaction	SAT1	0.798	0.850	0.868	0.909	0.770
	SAT2	0.945				
	SAT3	0.885				
Loyalty	TL1	0.919	0.850	0.868	0.909	0.770
	TL2	0.701				
	TL3	0.868				

Note 1 AVE stands for average variance extracted, and CR stands for composite reliability.
Note: See Appendix for the names of the items

The model's discriminant validity was assessed using the HTMT ratio approach (Rasoolimanesh & Ali, 2018), as shown in Table 2. According to (Ali et al., 2018), HTMT values should be below 0.9 to confirm discriminant validity. Overall, the measurement model demonstrates sufficient convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 2 Discriminant validity using HTMT ratio

	BON	ESP	EXP	MIN	NAT	NV	REL	TAS	TES	TL
BON										
ESP	0.287									
EXP	0.681	0.602								
MIN	0.548	0.262	0.460							
NAT	0.596	0.224	0.555	0.749						
NV	0.432	0.415	0.541	0.211	0.318					
REL	0.739	0.274	0.806	0.831	0.880	0.250				
TAS	0.684	0.388	0.856	0.510	0.578	0.554	0.757			
TES	0.476	0.396	0.497	0.627	0.532	0.260	0.599	0.411		
TL	0.726	0.537	0.686	0.544	0.477	0.511	0.740	0.780	0.488	

Table 3 presents the results of the hypothesis testing. We found that H1, mindfulness positively influences travel satisfaction of DDH, is supported (t = 1.883, p < 0.002). H2, nature connectedness, is not supported, as its effect on travel satisfaction is not significant (t = 0.971, p = 0.332). Contrary to our assumption, H3, technostress does not have a significant effect on satisfaction (t = 0.882, p = 0.378). H4, social bonding, is also not significant (t = 1.883, p = 0.060). H5, relaxation, does not significantly influence travel satisfaction (t = 1.612, p = 0.107). However, H6, novelty positively influences travel satisfaction of digital detox holidays (t = 5.029, p < 0.000), and H7, self-expression positively influences travel satisfaction (t = 5.012, p < 0.000). H8, escapism has a significant positive effect on satisfaction (t = 2.003, p < 0.045). Finally, H9, satisfaction strongly and positively influences loyalty (t = 16.670, p < 0.000). The SRMR was below the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating the model fits well. Figure 2 shows R square values of 0.645 for satisfaction and 0.477 for loyalty, which are both considered very strong and acceptable.

Table 3 Results of hypothesis testing

Path	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values	97.5% Bias corrected confidence interval	Supported
BON -> TAS	0.051	1.883	0.060	[-0.023, 0.180]	No
ESP -> TAS	0.035	2.003	0.045	[-0.134, 0.002]	Yes
EXP -> TAS	0.088	5.012	0.000	[0.301, 0.654]	Yes
MIN -> TAS	0.069	3.051	0.002	[0.099, 0.371]	Yes
NAT -> TAS	0.074	0.971	0.332	[-0.222, 0.072]	No
NV -> TAS	0.050	5.029	0.000	[0.140, 0.339]	Yes
REL -> TAS	0.110	1.612	0.107	[-0.077, 0.361]	No
TES -> TAS	0.049	0.882	0.378	[-0.134, 0.061]	No
TAS -> TL	0.041	16.670	0.000	[0.602, 0.763]	Yes

Conclusion and Discussion

The present study investigates the impact of the eight motives for Digital Detox Holidays (DDH) identified by Jiang and Balaji (2021). It examines how each motive predicts travel satisfaction and how this satisfaction subsequently leads to loyalty among DDH participants through a qualitative approach. The findings confirm the significant influence of several motivational factors of DDH on travel satisfaction, including mindfulness, novelty, self-expression, and escapism. Mindfulness (H1) emerged as a key predictor, positively impacting tourist satisfaction. This aligns with previous research highlighting mindfulness as a means to enhance relaxation and immersion in travel experiences (Iacob et al., 2024; Jiang & Balaji, 2021) and significantly influence satisfaction (Loureiro et al., 2019, 2020; Loureiro & Fialho, 2017). It turned regular holidays into meaningful and enriching experiences. Tourists seeking novel experiences and opportunities for self-expression reported higher levels of satisfaction (H6, H7). It has been confirmed that taking a vacation without prioritizing digital devices allows travellers to express themselves fully (Bosnjak et al., 2016) and this new kind of experience can enhance the overall experience of tourists (Nguyen et al., 2020; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Additionally, the desire for escapism—escaping daily routines and digital distractions was significantly associated with increased satisfaction (H8) which aligns with the previous study by (Ali et al., 2016). These findings highlight the importance of providing a variety of activities that meet these motivations to improve visitor experiences and satisfaction. The current study also reveals that tourist satisfaction significantly influences loyalty within the realm of Digital Detox Holidays (DDH). This finding aligns with previous studies that show satisfaction is crucial for encouraging loyalty among tourists (Bagheri et al., 2023; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Understanding and enhancing loyalty is crucial for digital detox tourist destinations, as loyal tourists drive repeat visits and recommend the destination their social circles, contributing to sustained revenue and market position (Kasiri et al., 2017; Silvestre et al., 2008).

This study significantly contributes to the theoretical knowledge of Digital Detox Holidays in tourism by exploring the DDH scale in new contexts. This study expands the knowledge of previous studies in the realm of digital detox (Cai & McKenna, 2024; Egger et al., 2020; Floros et al., 2021; Hassan & Saleh, 2024; Jiang & Balaji, 2021; Radtke et al., 2022) and offers a fresh perspective on DDH experiences. The practical implications provide actionable

insights for tourism management and marketing strategies. Tourism providers should leverage motivational factors like novelty, self-expression, and escapism to create engaging DDH experiences. Wellness centers, yoga retreats, and digital detox resorts can use these factors to create personalized digital detox products that attract tourists seeking authentic and immersive travel experiences. They can offer activities such as nature walks, engagement with the local community, yoga, spa treatments, and meditation. Providing these activities can encourage mindfulness and relaxation, enriching the visitor experience and ultimately fostering greater satisfaction and loyalty among guests.

Research recommendations

This study has made a significant contribution, but it is not without its limitations. Firstly, the sample size was small due to constraints in time and resources. Therefore, future research is recommended to employ larger sample sizes. Additionally, this study focused exclusively on exploring the impact of motives related to digital detox holidays (DDH) on tourist satisfaction and loyalty. However, there is potential for further research to delve into aspects such as word-of-mouth promotion, revisit intention and memorable tourism experiences. Conducting future studies to explore these other dimensions would enrich the understanding of DDH effects.

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THE MARKETING MIX FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DECISION OF THAI TOURISTS IN CHOOSING 4 - STAR HOTELS IN KHAO KHO DISTRICT, PETCHABUN PROVINCE, THAILAND

1st Atchara Woraprasongphol[1]

2nd Sangkae Punyasiri [2]

Extended abstract

The study titled "The Marketing Mix Factors Influencing the Decision of Thai Tourists in Choosing 4-Star Hotels in Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province" has three main objectives (1) To examine the factors of the marketing mix related to the decision of Thai tourists in choosing 4- star hotels in Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province (2) To compare the decision-making of Thai tourists in choosing 4-star hotels in Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province, categorized by demographic factors (3) To investigate the marketing mix factors that influence the decision of Thai tourists in choosing 4-star hotels in Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province. The sample group used in the study consisted of 400 Thai tourists who have previously used the services of 4- star hotels in Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province. Data was collected through questionnaires. The statistics used for analysis included frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Hypotheses were tested using t-test and F-test, with pairwise comparisons made using the LSD method and regression analysis presented in the form of One Way ANOVA, at a significance level of 0.05.

The study's findings revealed that several factors influenced the decision of Thai tourists in choosing 4-star hotels in Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province. The analysis included demographic data of respondents and marketing mixed factors to understand the decision-making characteristics of the target group. The demographic factors indicated that the majority of respondents were female (56.40%), belonged to Generation Y (aged 26-43), held a bachelor's degree (56.00%), had an income of over 100,000 baht (22.50%), were engaged in trading or owned businesses (36.20%), and used hotel websites as their booking channel (27.00%). The analysis of marketing mix factors showed that overall, these factors were of high importance. Environmental characteristics had the highest average, followed by product factors, with promotional factors having the lowest average. In the detailed analysis of marketing mix factors: (1) Product factors had the highest average, especially in terms of room cleanliness and hotel reputation. (2) Price factors had the lowest average, particularly regarding the value of services. The decision-making of Thai tourists in choosing 4-star hotels was found to be highly influenced by their likelihood to recommend the hotel to others, their intention to choose the hotel, and their desire to return in the future.

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The hypothesis testing results showed that different demographic factors of respondents significantly affected the decision of Thai tourists in choosing 4-star hotels in Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province at a statistical significance level of 0.05, supporting the established hypothesis. This was particularly true for the income and occupation of the respondents. Other factors, such as gender, age, education level, and hotel booking channels, did not significantly affect the decision of Thai tourists in choosing 4-star hotels in Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province at a statistical significance level of 0.05, thus rejecting the established hypothesis. The factors that influenced the decision of Thai tourists in choosing 4-star hotels in Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province were product, marketing promotion, and environmental characteristics, explaining 65.80% of the variance in decision-making. However, price, location, staff, and service processes did not significantly affect the decision-making at a statistical significance level of 0.05, thus rejecting the established hypothesis.

Keywords: Marketing Mix, Decision-making Process of Thai Tourists, 4-star Hotel, and Phetchabun Province.

Introduction

Tourism is a service industry that plays a significant role in Thailand's economy. Not only does it generate the highest revenue in the country, but it also stimulates the growth of businesses such as hotels and accommodations, which have high operational performance (Pattana Thanakritphutimet, 2016). However, the hotel sector faces intense competition due to the emergence of new tourist destinations and the increase in newly opened accommodation entering the market. Meanwhile, business costs for operators, including prices of goods, energy, and financial costs

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like interest rates, are trending upward, posing challenges to business plans for 2023. The recovery outlook is cautious, with the nationwide occupancy rate for 2023 expected to be around 52-60%, still lower than the 70.08% rate in 2019. Hotel revenue for 2023 is projected to be around 500-600 billion baht, also lower than pre-COVID levels, and the recovery will be uneven. Hotels in popular destinations for Thai tourists, such as the western and northern regions, are expected to recover well (Kasikorn Research Center, 2023). The continuous expansion of the hotel market in recent years has attracted new operators to enter the market. Additionally, online booking service providers like Agoda and Booking have expanded aggressively, increasing the number of accommodation options available to tourists, reflecting intensifying competition among hotel operators, which continues to pressure occupancy rates and average room rates to remain steady from previous periods (Kasikorn Research Center, 2018). Phetchabun Province is considered a large city with significant development in commerce, business, services, transportation, and various types of tourism, including nature, culture, health, sports, and food tourism. These attractions are well-known to both Thai and international tourists. Consequently, many hotels have sprung up in Phetchabun Province to accommodate and facilitate travelers and tourists. Hotels play a crucial role in providing services and creating a positive impression for visitors. During a visit to Khaem Son Subdistrict, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province, it was observed that Khao Kho offers numerous resorts and accommodations spread across various subdistricts, all located on mountains. Visitors can choose resorts according to their preferences. For those wanting to stay close to the misty sea, accommodation in Khao Kho Subdistrict is recommended, while larger hotels, such as 4-star hotels, are typically located in Khaem Son Subdistrict, as it is near Route 12, convenient for traveling to nearby attractions like Phu Thap Boek and Phu Hin Rong Kla (Warisa Khawsan, 2020).

According to the research by Napath Thaneerat and Phakjira Nakbanlang (2021), direct marketing strategies targeting tourists, where tourists can compare various information such as prices, services, amenities, and location on their own, have led operators to increase promotional competition. Both hotel-owned channels and intermediaries are used to attract tourists. The trend of tourists booking accommodations immediately before travel further stimulates operators to offer price-based promotions to encourage immediate bookings. Additionally, tourists can cancel their bookings within a specified period without any charges. This situation presents management challenges for hotel businesses. Pattana Thanakritphutimet (2016) found that 4-star hotels face issues with customer care, such as personalized attention, differentiated service, inability to remember customers' names, and a need for more attention to various activities like souvenir shops, beauty salons, barber shops, cooking, and craft activities, playgrounds, bicycles, and golf. There are also issues with maintaining the hotel's landscape, ensuring cleanliness, providing adequate lighting throughout the night, having a fully equipped business center, and ensuring safety around the swimming pool, among others. Problems with immediate customer reception, wait times for check-in and check-out, luggage handling, and in-room dining services also need addressing to enhance service quality beyond customer expectations.

Objectives

1. To study the factors of the marketing mix influencing Thai tourists' decision to choose 4-star hotels in Khaem Son Subdistrict, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province.

2. To compare the decision-making of Thai tourists in choosing 4-star hotels in Khaem Son Subdistrict, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province, classified by demographic factors.

3. To study the factors of the marketing mix affecting Thai tourists' decision to choose 4-star hotels in Khaem Son Subdistrict, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1 Respondents with different demographic factors will have differing decisions in choosing 4-star hotels in Khaem Son Subdistrict, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province.

Hypothesis 2 The factors of the marketing mix influence Thai tourists' decision to choose 4-star hotels in Khaem Son Subdistrict, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province.

Research Framework

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Independent Variable

Dependent Variable

Demographic Factors

1 Gender
2 Age
3 Education Level
4 Income
5 Occupation
6 Hotel Booking Channels

The decision-making process of Thai tourists in choosing to use 4-star hotel services in Khaem Son Subdistrict, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province

1 Decision-making

Marketing Mix Factors

1 Product Aspect
2 Price Aspect
3 Place Aspect
4 Promotion Aspect
5 People (Staff) Aspect
6 Process (Service) Aspect
7 Physical (Environment) Aspect

Research Methodology

This research employs a quantitative research design, specifically using survey research. A questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. Relevant concepts, theories, and research studies were reviewed to guide the research, ensuring that the study comprehensively covers the topics of interest. The questionnaire was also reviewed by experts to ensure its validity.

1. Populations and Sample

Population Thai tourists who have used the services of 4-star hotels in Khaem Son Subdistrict, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province, with an unspecified population size.

Sample A total of 400 Thai tourists who have used the services of 4-star hotels in Khaem Son Subdistrict, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province. This sample size was determined using Yamane's (1973) table for calculating sample sizes, with a 95% confidence level and a 0.05 margin of error.

2. Research Tools

The research instrument used in this study is a questionnaire. The development of the questionnaire followed these steps.

2.1 Literature Review Studied relevant documents and research on demographic factors and marketing mix factors that influence Thai tourists' decisions to choose 4-star hotels in Khaem Son Subdistrict, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province, to define specific terms and guide the creation of the questionnaire.

2.2 Question Development Created questions about the factors and questions about Thai tourists' decision-making in choosing 4-star hotels to align with the defined terms.

2.3 Expert Review Submitted the developed questionnaire to three experts to check for content validity, language appropriateness, and to calculate the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) index, aiming for scores of 0.50 or higher. Then, revised and adjusted the wording and sequence of the questionnaire according to the experts' recommendations.

2.4 Pilot Testing Conducted a tryout of the revised questionnaire with 30 Thai tourists who used 4-star hotels but were not part of the sample group.

2.5 Reliability Testing Analyzed the pilot test results to determine the reliability of the questionnaire by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with an acceptable threshold of 0.70 or higher.

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2.6 Final Questionnaire Compiled the final version of the questionnaire to be used for data collection with the sample group. Questionnaire Structure: The questionnaire is divided into three sections.

Section 1: Demographic Factors of Respondents for example Gender, age, education level, income, occupation, and hotel booking channel. This section uses a checklist of questions.

Section 2: Marketing Mix Factors Includes product, price, place, promotion, people, process/service, and physical evidence. This section uses a 5-point Likert scale:

5 = Strongly Agree

4 = Agree

3 = Neutral

2 = Disagree

1 = Strongly Disagree

Section 3: Decision-Making of Thai Tourists Includes perception of needs and decision to use services. This section also uses a 5-point Likert scale similar to Section 2.

3. Data Collection

Interpreting rating scores.

4.51 – 5.00 = Very High

3.51 – 4.50 = High

2.51 – 3.50 = Moderate

1.51 – 2.50 = Low

1.00 – 1.50 = Very Low

To obtain comprehensive data for this research, two types of data were collected.

3.1 Secondary Data: Collected from various documents and academic works relevant to the research. This data was gathered from libraries and related agencies to help define the research framework and to be referenced in the research report.

3.2 Primary Data: Collected through surveys using the following methods.

3.2.1 Questionnaire Creation: Created a questionnaire using Google Forms and distributed it to the sample group via online channels such as Line or Email.

3.2.2 Field Data Collection: The researcher conducted in-person visits and distributed the questionnaire directly to the sample group.

3.2.3 On-Site Data Collection: For in-person surveys, the researcher waited to collect the completed questionnaires or arranged to collect them at a later time as appropriate.

4. Data Analysis

The data for this research was analyzed using the statistical software SPSS. The statistical methods applied in this research are divided into two groups.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics: Includes frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation to describe the characteristics of various variables and to address the research objectives.

4.2 Inferential Statistics: Includes t-tests, F-tests with pairwise comparisons using the LSD method, and regression analysis to test the research hypotheses.

Conclusion and Discussion 1. Conclusion

Research Findings Summary is as follow.

Demographic Factors of Respondents: The majority of respondents were female, accounting for 56.40%. Generation Y (ages 26-43) represented 43.70%. Bachelor's degree holders made up 56.00%. Respondents with incomes over 100,000 Baht accounted for 22.50%. The predominant occupation was in trade/business, representing 36.20%. The most frequent booking channel was the hotel's website, used by 27.00%.

Marketing Mix Factors: Overall, the marketing mix factors were rated at a high level. The highest average was for environmental characteristics, at the highest level, followed by the product factor, also at the highest level. The

lowest average was for the promotion factor, rated at a high level. (1) Product Aspect: Overall, the product factor was rated at the highest level. The highest average score was for the cleanliness of the rooms, followed by the hotel's reputation and image, both at the highest level. The lowest average score was for the hotel's security system, still rated at the highest level. (2) Price Aspect: Overall, the price factor was rated at the highest level. The highest average score was for clear pricing of rooms, food, and service rates, followed by a variety of room price options, both at the highest level. The lowest average score was for the value for money of the rooms, food, and services, rated at a high level. (3) Place Aspect: Overall, the place factor was rated at a high level. The highest average score was for providing information and having multiple booking channels, such as phone, Facebook, email, Line, etc., rated at the highest level. The second highest was for clear signage outside the hotel, at a high level. The lowest average score was for the hotel's convenient location, rated at a high level. (4) Promotion Aspect: Overall, the promotion factor was rated at a high level. The highest average score was for online advertising and promotion, rated at a high level. The second highest was for regular promotional activities, also at a high level. The lowest average score was for hosting booths or sample room tours, rated at a high level. (5) People Aspect: Overall, the people factor was rated at a high level. The highest average score was for staff providing friendly, enthusiastic, polite, and amiable service, rated at the highest level. The second highest was for staff knowledge, understanding, expertise, and service skills, also at the highest level. The lowest average score was for staff's ability to communicate in foreign languages, such as English and Chinese, rated at a high level. (6) Process/Service Delivery Aspect: Overall, the process factor was rated at the highest level. The highest average score was for the accuracy and reliability of various payment systems, such as cash, credit cards, transfers, etc., rated at the highest level. The second highest was for the accuracy in service delivery, also at the highest level. The lowest average score was for the handling of immediate service issues, such as the call center service, rated at a high level. (7) Physical Evidence Aspect: Overall, the physical evidence factor was rated at the highest level. The highest average score was for the relaxing atmosphere around the accommodation, rated at the highest level. The second highest was for the proper segmentation of services, such as parking, dining areas, and relaxation gardens, rated at the highest level. The lowest average score was for the hotel's safety certification (SHA and SHA+), rated at the highest level.

Thai Tourists' Decision to Choose 4-Star Hotels in Khao Kho: Overall, the decision- making factor was rated at the highest level. The highest average score was for recommending the 4-star hotels in Khao Kho to others, rated at the highest level. The second highest was for the intention to choose 4-star hotels in Khao Kho, also at the highest level. The lowest average score was for the intention to return to the 4-star hotels in Khao Kho in the future, still rated at the highest level.

Hypothesis Testing Results: The hypothesis testing revealed that differences in demographic factors among respondents significantly affected the decision-making process of Thai tourists in choosing 4-star hotels in Khao Kho. Specifically, income and occupation differences were statistically significant at the 0.05 level, confirming the hypothesis. However, differences in gender, age, education level, and booking channels did not significantly affect the decision-making process, leading to the rejection of the hypothesis.

The marketing mix factors that significantly influenced the decision-making process were product, promotion, and physical evidence, all statistically significant at the 0.05 level, confirming the hypothesis. These factors explained 65.80% of the variance in the decision-making process. However, price, place, people, and process factors did not significantly affect the decision-making process, leading to the rejection of the hypothesis.

2. Discussion

Hypothesis 1: Demographic factors among survey respondents vary, influencing Thai tourists' decisions to choose 4-star hotel services in Khaem Son Sub-district, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province differently.

From the study, it was found that respondents' income and occupation differ, influencing Thai tourists' decisions to choose 4-star hotel services in Khaem Son Sub-district, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province differently. However, respondents' gender, age, education level, and hotel booking channels do not significantly affect Thai tourists' decisions to choose 4-star hotel services in Khaem Son Sub-district, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province. The researcher observed that tourists with lower income (15,000 Baht and 20,001-40,000 Baht) tend to decide less frequently to use 4-star hotel services in Khaem Son Sub-district, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province compared to those with higher income categories (20,001-40,000 Baht, 40,001-60,000 Baht, 60,001-80,000 Baht, 80,001-100,000 Baht, and above 100,000 Baht). Similarly, tourists with certain occupations such as employees, freelancers, and business owners tend to decide more frequently to use 4-star hotel services in Khaem Son Sub-

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district, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province compared to students and government employees. This aligns with Kwanmal Thongniam's (2019) concept that decision-making comprises perception of needs, information search, option evaluation, service usage decision-making, and post-service behavior. This is consistent with Natthawat Phrangam's (2022) research on the influence of marketing factors on the intention to use accommodation businesses of Generation Z tourists in the lower northern region, which found that marketing factors in using accommodation services of Generation Z tourists in the lower northern region as a whole and in various aspects are at a high level, namely the service delivery channel, marketing promotion, and personnel.

Respondents who work as company employees, freelancers, or business owners are more likely to choose 4-star hotels in Khaem Son Sub-district, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province than students. Respondents who are government employees or state enterprise employees tend to choose these hotels less than those who own businesses. Students choose these hotels less than retirees. These findings align with Kwankamon Thongniam (2019), who stated that service decision-making includes recognizing the need, searching for information, evaluating alternatives, making the service decision, and post-service behavior. This is also consistent with Nathawat Prangam (2022), who found that marketing factors significantly influence Generation Z tourists' intentions to use accommodation businesses in the Lower Northern Region 1. Salinee Chaiwatthanaporn (2022) found that the marketing mix influences Thai tourists' decisions to use 4-star hotels in Bangkok.

Hypothesis 2: Marketing Mix Factors Influencing Thai Tourists' Decision-making in Choosing 4-Star Hotels in Khaem Son Sub-district, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province

From the study, it was found that factors related to Product, Marketing Promotion, and Environmental Characteristics significantly influence the decision-making of Thai tourists in choosing to use services of 4-star hotels in Khaem Son Sub-district, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province. However, Price, Location, Staff, and Process/Service factors do not significantly affect the decision-making of Thai tourists in choosing to use services of 4-star hotels in this area.

Researchers observe that Environmental Characteristics, such as the surrounding atmosphere of relaxation, proportionate service allocation such as parking, dining areas, and recreational gardens, complete facilities like elevators, bathrooms, trash bins, and parking areas, and safety certification standards (SHA and SHA+) positively impact tourists' decisions. Product factors, such as room cleanliness, hotel reputation, aesthetic room designs, comprehensive room amenities (air conditioning, TV, WIFI), and varied room types (single, double, suite), also play a crucial role in decision-making. Regarding Marketing Promotion, regular online advertisements, internet promotions, continuous sales promotion programs, special packages for sales promotion, discounts for members or returning customers, and display booths or open house showcases that influence recommendations to use hotel services to others demonstrate an intention to use and revisit 4-star hotels in Khaem Son Sub-district, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province in the future. These findings align with Jutharat Hiranwatthanasuk (2018), who discussed the marketing mix comprising product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence. Nathawat Prangam (2022) found that marketing factors significantly influence Generation Z tourists' intentions to use accommodation businesses. Salinee Chaiwatthanaporn (2022) found that physical evidence, product, and marketing promotion are critical in deciding to use 4-star hotels in Bangkok. Similarly, Napath Thaneerat and Phakjira Nakbunleng (2021) found that marketing mix factors, such as marketing promotion and physical evidence, significantly influence hotel choices in Phitsanulok. Paisan Boonchujoy (2020) found that product and physical evidence significantly influence Thai customers' satisfaction in choosing Grand Inter Hotel, Samut Sakhon. Kanyawit Sirisrimangkon (2019) found that the marketing mix influences the perception of service value in hotels in Mueang District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province. Kitti Huaichan (2019) found that the marketing mix directly influences decisions to choose 4-star hotels in Pattaya, with product and physical evidence being significant factors. Lastly, Kwankamon Thongniam (2019) found that the marketing mix significantly influences Thai and Japanese tourists' decisions to use hotels in Ayutthaya District and Uthai District, Ayutthaya Province, particularly in marketing promotion and physical evidence.

Research recommendations

1. Product Aspect: It was found that the hotel has a security system with the lowest average score. Therefore, operators should install CCTV cameras in all areas where large crowds gather to monitor non-security-related abnormalities affecting the lives and property of hotel tourists.

2. Marketing Promotion Aspect: It was found that there is a minimal average score in showcasing sample

rooms through booths or open displays. Therefore, operators should conduct live streaming online to showcase sample rooms for tourists to view at any time.

3. Environmental Characteristics: It was found that the hotel has been certified with safety standards (SHA and SHA+ marks) with the lowest average score. Therefore, operators should adhere strictly to safety standards (SHA and SHA+ marks) and seek accurate certification according to standards or assessment criteria to demonstrate recognized standards.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further Studies: Consider studying other aspects such as the quality of service delivery of 4-star hotels in Khaem Son Subdistrict, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province; service landscape of 4-star hotels, brand value of services in 4-star hotels, technology acceptance related to services of 4-star hotels, digital marketing factors affecting 4-star hotel services, behavior of choosing 4-star hotel services, attitudes towards 4-star hotel services in Khaem Son Subdistrict, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province, etc.

1. Target Populations for Study: Study various populations including international tourists, hotel operators, hotel staff, and relevant government officials.

2. Use of Additional Tools: Utilize additional tools such as interviews, observations, and Focus Groups for enhanced understanding and deeper insights into customer behaviors and expectations.

These recommendations aim to support the development of 4-star hotels in Khaem Son Subdistrict, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun Province, aligning business strategies more effectively with market demands and improving overall service quality.

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THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION AND JOB SATISFACTION IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKPLACE OSTRACISM, CUSTOMER INCIVILITY, AND TURNOVER INTENTION: A CASE STUDY OF HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN VIETNAM

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Extended abstract

This study aims to investigate the effects of workplace ostracism and customer incivility on turnover intention. A serial mediation process through emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction is also proposed to explain the aforementioned relationship between workplace ostracism, customer incivility and turnover intentions—a case study of employees working in the hotel industry in Vietnam. For the betterment of a hotel's operation, scholars have investigated the influences of either workplace ostracism, regarded as an internal factor (Schilpzand, Leavitt, & Lim, 2016) or customer incivility, regarded as an external contributor - on turnover intention (Sakurai & Jex, 2012; Han, Bonn, & Cho, 2016). The current research combines both workplace ostracism and customer incivility into one research model, and investigate their impacts on turnover intention, especially in the context of Vietnam's hospitality industry.

This study used a quantitative approach by collecting data from survey questionnaires from 316 employees working in hotels across Vietnam. The findings demonstrate that workplace ostracism and customer incivility both have positive impacts on employee turnover intention. Also, emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction mediate the relationship between workplace ostracism, customer incivility, and turnover intention. Academic and practical implications are provided for future research and practitioners in the final part of this research.

Keywords: *Turnover intention, Workplace ostracism, Customer incivility, Emotional exhaustion, Job satisfaction.*

Introduction

The hospitality industry, encompassing sectors like hotels, plays a significant role in the global economy, generating a substantial revenue of $4.7 trillion in 2023 (Statista Research Department, 2023), thereby contributing to national GDPs. Specifically, according to the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2023), the added value of the hospitality sector grew by 12.24%, making a 0.31 percentage point contribution to the growth of Vietnam's gross domestic product.

Paralleling its growth trajectory, the hospitality industry requires an increasingly skilled workforce. Yet, employee turnover constitutes serious managerial concerns in the sector. The industry is facing an alarming staff turnover rate, higher than other industries, resulting in substantial additional costs annually (O'Neill et al., 2011; Pranoto, 2011). High employee turnover leads to significant costs, including expenses related to hiring and training new employees, as well as the exhaustion of organizational knowledge and cohesive culture.

O'Neill & Davis (2011) stated that a poor degree of job satisfaction is the cause of the high turnover. Job discontent occurs when an employee has a poor attitude towards their job (Nwobia & Aljohani, 2017). Unsatisfied

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personnel can have a detrimental impact on a firm due to their lack of enthusiasm, poor performance, and unfavorable attitudes. These further adverse impacts can spread to other associates, which overall affect entire divisions and the company's financial health. Job discontent leads to decreased job performance and might cause employees to experience low morale and consider leaving their employment.

Not to mention, as the tourism and hospitality industry relies heavily on its people to thrive in a competitive market and deliver exceptional customer service, this industry, especially this subject is so important to both managers and researchers (Zopiatis et al., 2014). Many studies have explored employee satisfaction and turnover intentions, highlighting their significance (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000; Ro & Lee, 2017; Cho et al., 2016; McPhail et al., 2015; Hristov & Chirico, 2019).

In the meantime, studies have raised concerns about emotional weariness in the workforce, on the grounds that it might lower individuals' intrinsic motivation at work, leading to decreased job satisfaction and influencing their decisions to leave their jobs. Scholars, namely, Schilpzand, Leavitt, & Lim (2016) explore workplace mistreatment, focusing on ostracism occurring within the working environment and its effects on employee emotional stability. In the meantime, research is also looking into the substantial adverse consequences of customer incivility on service employees' work-related outcomes (Sakurai & Jex, 2012; Han, Bonn, & Cho, 2016). Conversely, the combined effects of internal (workplace ostracism) and external (customer incivility) stressors on emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, and intention to leave the organization remain unexplored.

The rigorous and stressful atmosphere in the hotel industry hinders employees from providing exceptional service and triggers thoughts of quitting (Ram, 2018). Ostracism, a ubiquitous yet subtle kind of emotional weariness within hotels, is a type of interpersonal abuse that negatively impacts employees' psychological and mental well-being (Williams, 2007). Ostracism is defined in literature as a process of social rejection or exclusion, where individuals or groups are ignored or excluded by others. According to Williams and Nida (2009), excluding someone from a group might have a more adverse effect on that person than violence, intimidation, and badgering. Ostracism or social rejection endangers fundamental needs such as belonging, self-esteem, and self-respect, and has been proven to decrease employees' work engagement, lead to emotional exhaustion, and raise turnover intentions among employees.

Moreover, hotel employees who are subjected to incivility from patrons exhibit the same pattern. According to Sakurai & Jex, (2012); and Sliter, Jex, Wolford, & McInnerney, (2010), hospitality personnel possibly face external stressors in the form of client complaints and dissatisfaction. These staff must adhere to the principle that 'the customer is always right,' even when dealing with impolite guests (Sliter et al., 2010). Meeting customer satisfaction consistently can be emotionally draining. Maintaining a welcoming atmosphere, feigning emotions, and projecting positivity regardless of circumstances may heighten the burden, resulting in a damaging influence on work performance, welfare, and job satisfaction (Chu, Baker, & Murmann, 2012).

Customer incivility refers to conduct that is perceived as insensitive, disrespectful, or vulgar and is displayed with vague intentions toward another individual, indicating a lack of regard for that person (Andersson and Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001). Customer incivility, despite being low in intensity and unnoticed, is seen to be among the most serious types of misconduct toward guest service agents (Sliter et al., 2010). Empirical evidence demonstrates that exposure to uncivil behaviors of customers impacts an individual's performance by reducing engagement, creativity, and task performance, ultimately leading to reduced organizational productivity (Porath, Foulk, & Erez, 2015; Schilpzand, Pater, & Erez, 2016). Hur, Moon, and Jun (2016) found that patron incivility in South Korean hotels led to heightened feelings of exhaustion among service professionals, subsequently reducing their intrinsic motivation in the workplace. Lower levels of intrinsic motivation in employees increase the likelihood of their quitting intentions being transformed into actual behavior.

Hotel employees in Vietnam have the responsibility to get their emotions carefully managed and present a pleasant demeanor while serving customers, regardless of their personal feelings. They must conform to the organization's preferred emotions to guarantee customer satisfaction. Yet, these workers are prone to emotional exhaustion, work-induced stress that depletes emotional reserves due to overwhelming psychological pressures, according to Karatepe and Aleshinloye (2009). The work-related stressor has been discovered to impair organizational effectiveness. The same study by Karatepe and Aleshinloye (2009) also showed that emotional weariness deteriorated professional performance and raised the likelihood of quitting. Emotional fatigue was also found to be negatively correlated with job performance by Wright and Cropanzano (1998). Emotionally fatigued personnel may not have the necessary cognitive resources to respond politely to impolite clients (Van Jaarsveld et al., 2010).

Scholars have investigated the influences of either workplace ostracism, regarded as an internal factor (Schilpzand, Leavitt, & Lim, 2016) or customer incivility, regarded as an external contributor - on turnover intention (Sakurai & Jex, 2012; Han, Bonn, & Cho, 2016). Past research has separately analyzed the effects of those two factors. Furthermore, there have been limited studies examining the impact of these factors on employee turnover intention within Vietnam's hospitality industry. Hence, there is a prominent space for the current research to combine both workplace ostracism and customer incivility into one research model, and investigate their impacts on turnover intention, especially in the context of Vietnam's hospitality industry. This study aims to identify the impacts of workplace ostracism and customer incivility on the turnover intention through the mediation of emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction.

Objectives

This study aims to identify the impacts of workplace ostracism, and customer incivility on the turnover intention of employees working in Vietnam's hospitality industry. Consequently, it is expected to fulfill the following objectives:

1. To examine the relationship between workplace ostracism, customer incivility, and turnover intention.

2. To examine the mediating role that emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction play in the relationship between workplace ostracism, customer incivility, and turnover intention.

3. To give suggestions and recommendations on how hotel organizations can improve job satisfaction and impede turnover intention.

Hypotheses Development

Workplace ostracism

Workplace ostracism is defined as the deliberate exclusion or disregard of an individual within a professional setting (Ferris et al., 2008). Experiencing exclusion from colleagues or superiors significantly impedes group performance and foster a hostile work environment (Joshi & Roh, 2009) on the grounds that it becomes more challenging for employees to work together subjectively and effectively. Considering these findings, this study aims to investigate the influence of workplace ostracism within the context of tourism.

Emotional exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion, a core component of burnout, signifies a state of emotional depletion and overextension; it often arises in response to prolonged exposure to excessive psychological demands at work, leading to a drain on energy and emotional reserves (Boles et al., 1997; Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009). Meta-analyses by Bedi (2019) and Howard et al. (2020) corroborate these findings, highlighting reduced engagement, belongingness, and well-being alongside heightened cynicism and emotional exhaustion in ostracized employees. Also, Koopmann et al. (2015) posit various mechanisms through which customer incivility can trigger emotional exhaustion and potentially lead to burnout.

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a crucial concept within the field of organizational psychology, signifying an employee's positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of their job in relation to fulfilling their personal values (Locke, 1969). It is known to be influenced by a multitude of factors within the organizational environment, such as workplace ostracism and customer incivility, stress levels, role conflict and ambiguity, role perceptions and content, and organizational and professional commitment.

Turnover intention

Turnover intention is portrayed as the readiness of an employee to deliberately pull back from an association (Price, 2001). Karatepe and Aleshinloye (2009) posit that customer-contact employees, upon perceiving a threat to their resources, including the risk of loss of accumulated resources or the inability to gain returns on invested resources at work due to workplace exclusion as well as customer arrogance, experience emotional depletion. This psychological tax can lead to dissatisfaction and increased propensity to seek employment opportunities elsewhere.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: Workplace ostracism (WO) directly affects emotional exhaustion (EE).

H2a: Workplace ostracism (WO) directly affects turnover intention (TI).

H3: Emotional exhaustion (EE) directly affects job satisfaction (JS).

H4: Job satisfaction (JS) directly affects turnover intention (TI).

H5a: Workplace ostracism (WO) indirectly affects turnover intention (TI) through the mediation of emotional exhaustion (EE) and job satisfaction (JS).

Customer incivility

Defined as "low-quality interpersonal treatment that employees receive from their customers during service interactions" (Koopmann et al., 2015, p. 34), customer incivility, while less extreme than physical aggression, occurs frequently and can be detrimental to employees' well-being (Porath & Erez, 2007). Research has established a significant link between customer incivility and employee stress, emotional exhaustion, and, turnover intentions (Alola et al., 2019; Han et al., 2016; Kern & Grandey, 2009; Pu et al., 2022). This necessitates further investigation into mitigating strategies and support systems to protect hotel employees from the detrimental effects of customer incivility.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1b: Customer incivility (CI) directly affects emotional exhaustion (EE).

H2b: Customer incivility (CI) directly affects turnover intention (TI).

H5b: Customer incivility (CI) indirectly affects turnover intention (TI) through the mediation of emotional exhaustion (EE) and job satisfaction (JS).

The conceptual model of this research was developed based on previous literature. Firstly, it proposes that workplace ostracism and customer incivility can directly affect turnover intention. Secondly, it hypothesizes that emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction mediate the relationship between workplace ostracism, customer incivility and turnover intention (Figure 1).
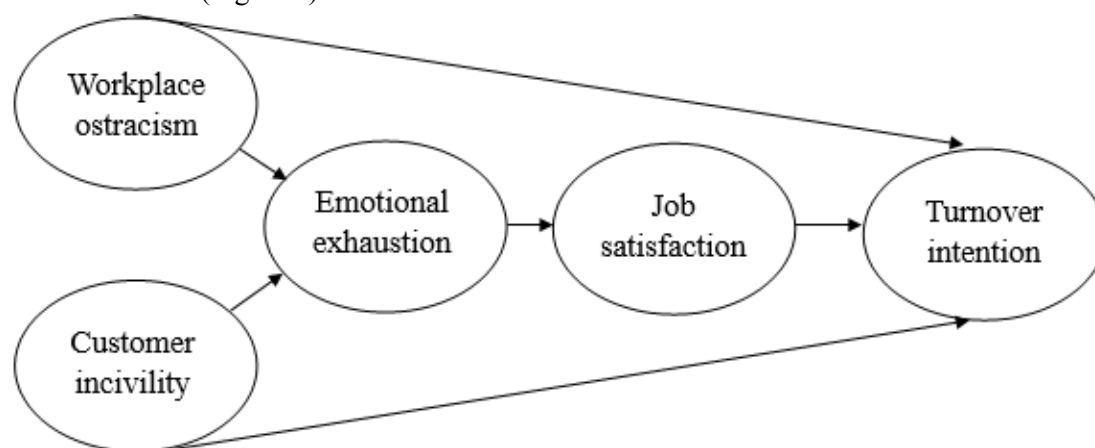
Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Research Methodology

Populations and Sample

This study aimed to investigate the direct effects of workplace ostracism and customer incivility on turnover intention. A serial mediation process through emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction was also proposed to explain the relationship between workplace ostracism, customer incivility, and turnover intentions. The survey targeted employees working in hotels in Vietnam. To ensure that participants are capable of making decisions regarding their employment as well as answering the survey, they must be over 18 years old. As such, the target respondents for this study were adult citizens of Vietnam who have experience working in the hotel industry. 316 valid responses were collected and retained for the data analysis process.

Research Tools

In this current study, a quantitative method was used to test the impact of factors affecting intention to leave through the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction. In conducting quantitative research, surveys are commonly used as a dominant method for collecting data (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

Data Collection

The data was collected through online surveys. The questionnaires were distributed to online social groups and forums on Facebook for Hospitality associates and the ones about to be where they share about their feelings and experiences while working with guests as well as job opportunities in the hotel industry in Vietnam.

Convenience and purposive sampling techniques were utilized to recruit participants, which made the target respondents easily accessible and available (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Inclusion criteria were established to ensure participants meet specific characteristics relevant to the research question, such as having been employed in a hotel position and having direct interaction with customers, both internal and external.

316 questionnaires satisfied all the recruitment standards were collected within 4 weeks, from March 27 to April 25, 2024. This sample size meets the suggestion of Comrey & Lee (1992), who stated that a sample size of two hundred is acceptable and 300 is good enough to represent the population of the research.

Data Analysis

The primary data source for this study was collected through survey questionnaires. The collected data was analyzed through SPSS and SmartPLS software. SPSS was used for descriptive analysis while SmartPLS was used for reliability tests, validity tests, and partial least square to test the hypothesized relationships between workplace ostracism, customer incivility and turnover intention.

Demographic Information

The sample of this research consists of 205 female respondents (accounting for 64.9%) and 111 male respondents (accounting for 35.1%). In terms of age, the respondents' profile can be described as follows: 70.6% were between 18 and 27 years old, 26.6% were between 28 and 37 years old, 2.2% were between 38 and 47 years old, and the rest were 48 years old or older. In addition, most of the respondents had experience working as receptionists, while 4.4% took the position of security and 0.6% was the back-of-the-house officers. While most of the participants (73.7%) had a bachelor's degree, their marital status revealed that 91.1% of them were single and work experience ranged from less than 2 years to over 10 years (Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of demographic information

Variable		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	205	64.9
	Male	111	35.1
Age	18 to 27	223	70.6
	28 to 37	84	26.6
	38 to 47	7	2.2
	48 and above	2	0.6
Marital status	Single	288	91.1
	Married	28	8.9
Position	Housekeeping	49	15.5
	Receptionist	131	41.5
	Security	14	4.4
	Technician	16	5.1
	Waiter	104	32.9
	Back Officer (HR, MKT, Sales, etc.)	2	0.6
Tenure	Less than 2 years	217	68.7
	3-6 years	79	25
	7-10 years	12	3.8
	More than 10 years	8	2.5
Educational level	Up to primary school	4	1.3
	Secondary or high school	21	6.6
	Some college education	58	18.4
	Bachelor's degree or higher	233	73.7

Reliability and Validity Analysis

Table 2 below illustrates the overall internal consistency of the measurement model. The Cronbach's alpha values for all indicators are over 0.8, indicating that the model exhibits high internal consistency reliability (George & Mallery, 2003). Besides, the outer loading values of all items are greater than 0.7 implying that all indicators have high reliability (Carmines & Zeller, 1979; Hair et al., 2017). The validity of the result is additionally supported by all composite reliability values exceeding the threshold level of 0.7, as reported by Hair et al. (2017) and Gefen, Straub, & Boudreau (2000). Overall, the measurement model achieves a high degree of reliability.

Table 2. Evaluation of the measurement model

Construct	Item	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Workplace ostracism	WO1	0.749	0.947	0.955	0.679
	WO2	0.838			
	WO3	0.873			
	WO4	0.742			
	WO5	0.875			
	WO6	0.854			
	WO7	0.806			
	WO8	0.882			
	WO9	0.870			
	WO10	0.730			
Customer incivility	CI1	0.720	0.858	0.899	0.641
	CI2	0.788			
	CI3	0.894			
	CI4	0.827			
	CI5	0.763			
Emotional exhaustion	EE1	0.806	0.926	0.944	0.773
	EE2	0.899			
	EE3	0.918			
	EE4	0.886			
	EE5	0.881			
Job satisfaction	JS1	0.922	0.933	0.957	0.881
	JS2	0.956			
	JS3	0.938			
Turnover intention	TI1	0.893	0.910	0.944	0.848
	TI2	0.933			
	TI3	0.936			

Convergent validity of the measurement model was assessed using average variance extracted (AVE). Following the recommended threshold of 0.5 for acceptable convergent validity (Henseler, 2017), all latent variables in table 2 in the analysis exhibited AVE values exceeding this benchmark. This suggests that the measures adequately capture their intended constructs.

To ensure the distinctiveness of each construct in the model, discriminant validity was evaluated. This ensures that the constructs capture unique aspects rather than overlapping concepts. Strong discriminant validity is achieved when two conditions are met; first of all, in terms of the outer loadings, each indicator's loading on its intended

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construct should be higher than its loadings on other constructs (Hair et al., 2017). Secondly, the Fornell-Lacker criterion requires the square root of a construct's AVE (average variance extracted) to be greater than its highest correlation with any other construct (Hair et al., 2017). Table 3 provides evidence supporting the model's discriminant validity.

Table 3. Discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker's method)

Variables	CI	EE	JS	TI	WO
CI	**0.801**				
EE	0.495	**0.879**			
JS	-0.416	-0.576	**0.939**		
TI	0.495	0.631	-0.632	**0.921**	
WO	0.382	0.499	-0.524	0.515	**0.824**

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model evaluation involves examining the model for collinearity issues, coefficient of determination (R^2), size and significance of path coefficients and mediating relationships.

To assess multicollinearity, variance inflation factor (VIF) values were examined. A commonly accepted threshold suggests that VIF values below 5 indicate no significant collinearity concerns (Hair et al., 2017). Gratifyingly, all constructs in the model exhibit VIF values below this threshold, implying no multicollinearity issues.

The R^2 value denotes how much variance of the endogenous latent variables that are explained by all exogenous latent variables linked to it. Endogenous constructs are considered as substantial, moderate, or weak for the R^2 value of 0.75, 0.5, 0.25 (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). R^2 values of emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction and turnover intention are 0.353, 0.330, and 0.487, respectively. In other words, 35.3% variance of emotional exhaustion is explained by two predictor variables (workplace ostracism and customer incivility) and three predictor variables including two mentioned earlier and emotional exhaustion explain 33% variance of job satisfaction; four aforementioned predictor variables explain 48.7% variance of turnover intention. Overall, the model exerts weak predictive power.

The analysis of effect sizes reveals the following:

Regarding emotional exhaustion, all two constructs (workplace ostracism and customer incivility) have a medium effect size on the corresponding dependent variable.

For job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion has a large effect size. Meanwhile, workplace ostracism and customer incivility exhibit a small effect and job satisfaction demonstrates a medium effect on turnover intention.

Table 4. Results of structural model (Direct relationships).

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient	STD	t-value	R^2	f^2	Supported
H1a	WO → EE	0.000	0.052	6.998	0.353	0.175	Yes
H1b	CI → EE	0.000	0.055	6.531		0.168	Yes
H2a	WO → TI	0.000	0.055	5.230	0.487	0.054	Yes
H2b	CI → TI	0.000	0.056	5.917		0.090	Yes
H3	EE → JS	0.000	0.041	14.161	0.330	0.498	Yes
H4	JS → TI	0.000	0.057	7.547		0.241	Yes

Table 4 also summarizes the path coefficients obtained from the analysis, along with the corresponding t-values and p-values generated through bootstrapping with 1000 samples.

The analysis reveals positive and statistically significant relationships ($p < 0.05$) between workplace ostracism

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(β = 0.363, p-value = 0.000), customer incivility (β = 0.356, p-value = 0.000), and emotional exhaustion. Therefore, these findings support hypotheses H1a and H1b, suggesting that the two factors (workplace ostracism and customer incivility) positively influence emotional exhaustion.

Meanwhile, the results also suggest that there are statistically significant and positive associations (p < 0.05) between the turnover intention and the following variables: customer incivility (β = 0.241) and workplace ostracism (β = 0.199). These findings further support hypotheses H2a, and H2b, implying that both workplace ostracism and customer incivility contribute to a greater turnover intention among employees.

In contrast, emotional exhaustion is shown to have a negative and significant effect on job satisfaction as the path coefficient from emotional exhaustion to job satisfaction is negative (β = -0.576; p < 0.05). The same negative pattern happens with the relationship between job satisfaction (β = -0.428; p < 0.05) and turnover intention, making them support the following hypotheses: H3 and H4.

Examining the path coefficients more closely, we can identify the most influential factors for each dependent variable. Workplace ostracism (β = 0.363) emerges as the most significant driver of emotional exhaustion, followed by customer incivility (β = 0.356). Regarding factors influencing employee turnover intention, job satisfaction has the strongest effect (|β| = 0.428), followed by customer incivility (|β| = 0.241). Workplace ostracism (|β| = 0.199) has a considerably weaker impact on turnover intention.

Table 5: Indirect effects testing

Hypothesis	Relationships	Path coefficients	t-values	P values	Supported
H5a	WO → EE → JS → TI	0.089	4.349	0.000	Yes
H5b	CI → EE → JS → TI	0.088	4.334	0.000	Yes

Table 5 presents the findings regarding the analysis of indirect effects on turnover intention. The results suggest that both workplace ostracism (β = 0.089, p < 0.05) and customer incivility (β = 0.088, p < 0.05) exert positive and statistically significant indirect effects on turnover intention. This lends support to hypotheses H5a and H5b.

Among these two indirect relationships, workplace ostracism appears to have a stronger influence (|β| = 0.089) compared to customer incivility (|β| = 0.088).

Conclusion and Discussion

Conclusion

The analysis reveals that both workplace ostracism and customer incivility exert positive and direct effects on emotional exhaustion. Particularly, workplace ostracism demonstrates a stronger influence on employee emotional exhaustion, suggesting that it warrants particular managerial attention. While the impact of customer incivility is "quite low" in absolute terms, it remains statistically significant. Notably, both workplace ostracism and customer incivility positively influence employee turnover intention. However, among the three predictors of intention to quit (workplace ostracism, customer incivility, and job satisfaction), job satisfaction has the greatest impact on the corresponding dependent variable, then customer incivility and workplace ostracism, in the order from large to small of effect size. Finally, the analysis supports the mediating roles of emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction in the relationship between the independent variables (workplace ostracism and customer incivility) and turnover intention.

Discussion

This research contributes to the existing knowledge base of the tourism and hospitality sector in diverse ways. Primarily, it casts light on greater insights into the effects that workplace ostracism and customer incivility have on mental well-being and, most importantly, on the intention to quit the jobs of employees working in the hotel industry in Vietnam.

The findings are consistent with research that has applied the COR theory (Hobfoll et al., 1989), such as Koon and Pun (2017); Baranik et al. (2017); Alola et al. (2019); Al-Hawari et al. (2020); Anasori et al. (2021), to name just a few, which have proven that either workplace ostracism (internal stressor) or customer incivility (external stressor) have huge impacts on employee turnover intentions. The inherent characteristics of the service industry necessitate employees to adopt a service orientation characterized by the motto "the customer is always right" (Sliter et al., 2010). This entails fostering a welcoming environment, employing emotional effort to maintain a pleasant demeanor, and striving to deliver exceptional service even in interactions with rude customers. Consequently, such frequent

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exposure to customer incivility and workplace ostracism depletes personal resources causing service industry employees to be susceptible to physical, psychological, and emotional exhaustion at work, which leads to the growth of turnover intent (Wright and Cropanzano, 1998). Moreover, the findings confirm the relevance of Locke et al.'s (1969) model for assessing employee turnover intention.

Not to mention, the current study adds to the scanty literature on the global scale, especially adding to the Vietnamese literature on the effects of ostracism and customer incivility on turnover intention in the hospitality industry since the combined assessment of the impacts of both the internal (workplace ostracism) and external stressor (customer incivility) on turnover intention has been severely disregarded. Additionally, it reveals the significant role that emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction play as mediators in the process by which an insulted and shunned employee develops a lower level of job satisfaction and plans to quit the job. The findings from this study, in turn, contribute hugely to the deeper managerial understanding of employee well-being and turnover intention, hence sustaining the organizational economic health.

Research recommendations

Drawing on the research findings and the recent state of the hospitality sector, this section offers recommendations focusing on the following aspects for hotel management, particularly human resources professionals, to address employee turnover intention.

First, the findings have proven that workplace ostracism has a significant impact on employee turnover intentions. Thus, so as to heighten employee job satisfaction and lower turnover intentions, human resources experts should prioritize measures against workplace ostracism and cultivate a safe and inclusive work environment. This can be achieved by establishing and promoting the accessibility of open communication channels between employees and the management board. Anasori et al. (2021) have also agreed with the corresponding suggestions, believing it would timely enhance the state. Such circumstances would empower victims of ostracism to not only immediately report acts of mistreatment but also relieve the emotional burden and understand the reason behind the exclusion. Additionally, open communication allows hoteliers to identify and address underlying toxic organizational dynamics, ultimately reducing the risk of losing talented associates and incurring high turnover costs.

Second, as workplace ostracism has been proven to affect directly emotional exhaustion, incentives and bonuses in such situations play an indispensable role in retaining talent as well as boosting employee morale and mitigating their emotional exhaustion. Namely, organizing annual incentive trips can be a positive strategy for both the board of directors and employees. These trips provide an opportunity for managers to demonstrate their contribution to employee well-being and organizational progress. For employees, these experiences foster a positive and inclusive work environment, further reducing the likelihood of exclusion and associated emotional exhaustion.

In the meantime, customer incivility also poses a threat to employee emotional well-being. To mitigate this issue, hoteliers should take a multifaceted approach. The first step is to acknowledge customer incivility as a serious problem that negatively impacts employees. By fostering a culture of awareness, the management board can encourage open communication about these experiences, hence timely and effectively eliminating the issue.

Furthermore, hotel managers should regularly conduct internal surveys with employees as it provides the board of management with valuable insights into employee concerns, emotional well-being, and specific experiences with customers' uncivil behaviors. The collected information can then be used to implement appropriate measures to address these issues. Moreover, it is the management's duty to solicit feedback from guests, which helps them to identify situations or service gaps that may contribute to uncivil behavior. Analyzing this feedback suggests strategies to enhance the overall perceived quality of hotel offerings and guest satisfaction. Ultimately, by improving the guest experience, hoteliers can potentially reduce the frequency of uncivil behavior. This approach aligns with the suggestions of Alola et al. (2019), who emphasize the importance of timely intervention to improve the overall employee's emotional health.

In addition to raising awareness, employee training plays a crucial role in mitigating the negative consequences of customer incivility. Effective training programs can equip employees with the skills and strategies necessary to effectively respond to uncivil behavior. By preparing employees for potential incidents, training can help minimize the initial shock and emotional fatigue associated with unexpected encounters.

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Not to mention, the findings suggest that customer incivility is a typical determinant of employee turnover intention. Therefore, supportive mechanisms are necessary to alleviate the consequences of customer incivility as well as employee turnover intention. This aligns with solutions proposed by Hur et al. (2016), who advocate for interventions that foster a more positive work environment. Such interventions might include hosting regular emotional sharing sessions, where employees can express their burdens and emotional exhaustion. These practices have a significant positive impact on the betterment of employees, which in turn lowers organizational deviance and fosters the service quality they deliver to guests. Consequently, employer branding, organizational profitability along with the provision of job opportunities and services to the community are promoted.

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HARNESSING SMART TECHNOLOGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE ADVENTURE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SABAH: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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Abstract

Sabah, a Malaysian state renowned for its rich biodiversity and stunning landscapes, has emerged as a prominent destination for adventure tourism. This narrative review explores the potential of smart technologies to elevate the sustainability and competitiveness of adventure tourism in Sabah. Starting with an overview of Sabah's adventure tourism sector, its economic significance, and growth prospects, the review introduces the concept of smart tourism and its relevance to adventure tourism development. A thorough exploration of existing literature and data sheds light on the current landscape of adventure tourism in Sabah, analyzing popular activities, tourist demographics, and environmental impacts. From jungle trekking to diving in pristine marine environments, Sabah offers a diverse array of adventure experiences that attract travelers globally. Smart technologies are transforming adventure tourism experiences and management. Mobile apps for navigation and booking, wearable devices for safety, and IoT sensors for environmental monitoring are revolutionizing the adventure tourism landscape. Case studies and best practices from global adventure tourism destinations provide invaluable insights into successful smart tourism initiatives, showcasing innovative approaches and offering inspiration for Sabah's tourism stakeholders. The review identifies specific opportunities for integrating smart technologies into Sabah's adventure tourism, emphasizing infrastructure development, connectivity enhancement, and stakeholder collaboration as pivotal factors. However, challenges such as technological limitations, policy constraints, and socio-cultural considerations must be addressed to effectively implement smart tourism initiatives. Sustainability and community participation are central themes in the discourse on smart adventure tourism development. Strategies aimed at minimizing negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts while maximizing benefits for local communities are imperative for long- term success. The narrative review offers insights into the future of smart adventure tourism in Sabah, recommending policy interventions, stakeholder engagement strategies, and technological innovations to foster sustainable and inclusive growth. The review provides a comprehensive analysis of the opportunities and challenges associated with harnessing smart technologies for adventure tourism development in Sabah. It offers practical insights for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and technology developers, paving the way for a more sustainable and competitive adventure tourism industry in Sabah.

Keywords:Adventure tourism; Smart technologies; Sustainability; Challenges; Sabah

1 Introduction

Adventure tourism, a rapidly growing sector within the global tourism industry, offers unique experiences that often combine physical activity, natural environment engagement, and cultural immersion (Janowski et al., 2021). In the context of Sabah, a Malaysian state renowned for its rich biodiversity, rugged landscapes, and cultural heritage, adventure tourism presents a significant opportunity for economic growth and sustainable development (Hampton & Jeyacheya, 2013).

Smart technologies, encompassing tools such as the big data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI), and mobile applications, have revolutionised various industries by optimising operations, improving customer experiences, and promoting sustainability (Gretzel et al., 2015). In adventure tourism, these technologies can offer transformative potential (Ateljevic, 2020; Sheldon, 2020). For instance, IoT devices can enhance safety through real-time monitoring of environmental conditions and tourist locations, while AI-driven data analytics can provide valuable insights into tourist behaviours and preferences, enabling more personalised and efficient services (Rane et al., 2023). Additionally, mobile applications can facilitate seamless communication and information dissemination, enriching the overall tourist experience (Koo et al., 2016; Leung, 2022). This study aims to identify and evaluate how such technologies can be harnessed to foster sustainable adventure tourism development in Sabah.

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The primary objectives of this research are threefold: Firstly, to investigate the current utilisation of smart technologies within Sabah's adventure tourism sector and assess their effectiveness in promoting sustainability. Secondly, to identify the key challenges faced by stakeholders in integrating these technologies, including infrastructural, financial, and regulatory barriers. Thirdly, to propose strategic future directions and practical recommendations for policymakers, tourism operators, and technology providers to enhance the adoption and impact of smart technologies in sustainable adventure tourism. This narrative review will highlight the broader discourse on sustainable tourism development and provide a roadmap for leveraging technological advancements to achieve sustainability goals in the adventure tourism industry.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Adventure tourism

Adventure tourism is one of the fastest growing tourism sectors and a major part of the tourism industry (Beckman et al., 2017; Cheng et al., 2018; UNWTO, 2014). The Adventure Travel Trade Association (2018), conservatively estimates that the international adventure tourism market is worth USD683 billion, not including domestic travel nor Asian outbound travel. While precise evaluation of adventure tourism's global economic value is not feasible due to its unrefined scope (Sung et al., 2000), its monetary and non-monetary benefits have been highlighted. The UNWTO (2014) suggests that one of the key drivers of increased demand of adventure tourism is increased urbanisation and digitalisation, resulting in consumers seeking active, authentic experiences that highlight natural and cultural values. The adventure tourism industry therefore provides much sought-after escapes as well as ecological, cultural and economic benefits to destinations. These benefits include attracting high-value customers, the encouragement of sustainable practices, and support of local economies due to low economic leakage (Adventure Travel Trade Association, 2016; UNWTO, 2014).

Sabah is one of the states in Malaysia that possesses a great potential in the development of Adventure tourism aiming especially at international visitors. The existence of suitable adventure tourism environment in Sabah allows the state to host several annual small-scale international sport events such as Mount Kinabalu International Climbathon, Sabah Dragon Boat Race, Borneo International Marathon and Borneo Safari International off-Road Challenge (Tourism Malaysia, 2012). Moreover, the state is blessed with unique geography and natural resources that makes it a perfect place for adventurous and sporting activities such as mountain torq's activities, mountain climbing, water sports activities, scuba diving, jungle trekking and golfing (Mat Som at al., 2012; Sabah Tourism, 2012). It is surprising, however, that there is a relatively scarce amount of research done on travel motivations in South East Asian Countries (Kim & Prideaux, 2005), travel and sport tourism in Malaysia (Aminuddin et al., 2009; Yousefi & Marzuki, 2012), be it the main sport events or the small-scale sport events in Sabah to be specific.

Consequently, knowledge on adventure tourism behaviour in Sabah is lacking. Without this information, it is impossible to address any practical issues concerning the development and marketing matters. As much as the information on adventure tourism behaviour is affecting the tourism marketing activities, its effects on the sector also essentially yet still unknown. A distinction between the domestic and international adventure tourist would provide a better picture on how much adventure tourism market affected the economy of Sabah. Nationalities may determine the extent of common resemblance between a destination and the tourist's home country (climate, lifestyle, money value) thereby influencing destination choice for those seeking familiar experiences. In short, undertaking domestic-international group's comparison can be used as an effective market segmentation variable and for understanding tourists' push motives and preferences in terms of destination attributes (Prayag & Ryan, 2011).

2.2 Smart technologies

According to Neuhofer et al. (2015), smart tourism refers to specific applications that enhance tourists' experiences and create added value for customers. More specifically, smart tourism technologies are tools, products, and services that generally add value by fostering higher connectivity, interaction, personalisation, and co-creation (Buonincontri & Micera, 2016; Neuhofer et al., 2015) and enhance overall travel experiences (Femenia-Serra & Ivars-Baidal, 2018; Simeon et al., 2017). Moreover, smart tourism can also be considered an ecosystem formed by a smart business network, smart destinations, and smart technology infrastructures to maximise the value of the services and experiences for tourists (Femenia-Serra et al., 2019; Gretzel et al., 2015; Um & Chung, 2019), mediate the tourist experience (Tussyadiah et al., 2018 Wang et al., 2012), and provide the info-structure for value co-creation (Buhalis, 2019; Buhalis & Foerste, 2015). For this reason, tourists will select a destination that offers a superior information infrastructure such as faster internet connectivity and networking (Ghaderi et al., 2019; Kelly & Lawlor, 2019; Li et al., 2017).

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Other scholars have integrated smart tourism systems such as decision support systems, ambient intelligence, mobile-connected devices, beacons, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), mobile apps, integrated payment methods, smart cards, cloud computing, and radio- frequency identification (Gretzel et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2017; Jeong & Shin, 2019). In a smart tourism context, the application of these technologies plays a significant role in providing tourism consumers and service providers with accurate information, better decision support, greater mobility, and high-quality tourism experiences (Cimbaljević et al., 2019; Sigala & Chalkiti, 2014).

2.3 Sustainability Practices

In the modern era of tourism, the paramount significance of sustainability practices among tourism firms is difficult to overlook, as they are essential for building harmonious and sustainable socio-economic development (Njoroge et al., 2019). As sustainability practices have become a key imperative, particularly for the tourism industry, there is no compromise on this issue to succeed in this lucrative sector. Heidari et al. (2018) demonstrated that sustainability practices in tourism have emerged as one of the fastest-growing sectors globally. Many world-renowned successful corporations are well known for the sustainable environments they create.

As a result, research regarding sustainability issues is becoming an increasingly vital area in this service-driven tourism sector.The term sustainability is considered a corporate means of generating long-lasting and sustained firm value by considering the ways of operations from ecological, social, and economic perspectives (Haanes, 2016). This practice is becoming increasingly crucial for industries, particularly the tourism industry, on a global scale for its socio-economic betterment and to sustain in the competitive world as a means of acquiring competitive advantage (Haanes, 2016). According to the literature, the main purpose of adopting sustainability is to minimize harmful socio-environmental and economic impacts, leading to the path of sustainable development (Schaltegger & Hörisch, 2017).

3 Methodology

Narrative reviews aim to offer a comprehensive and descriptive overview of a specific topic, such as the challenges encountered in harnessing smart technologies for sustainable adventure tourism development in Sabah. The first step involves conducting an extensive literature search to identify pertinent sources related to "smart technologies in Sabah." This search encompasses academic articles, books, reports, newspaper articles, and other materials discussing the topic and its associated issues. Online databases and library resources are typically utilized for this purpose.

The next step involves setting inclusion and exclusion criteria. The researcher defines criteria for including or excluding sources in the review. For this study, only academic articles published within a specific timeframe or sources directly addressing the challenges of smart technologies in adventure tourism in Sabah are considered. The researcher then extracts relevant information from the selected sources, identifying the issues faced by smart technologies in adventure tourism in Sabah, their causes, impacts, and any proposed solutions or responses.

In narrative reviews, the research design is qualitative. The researcher identifies recurring themes and patterns in the challenges faced. This study involves content analysis to organize and categorize the information. The researcher synthesizes the findings from various sources to create a cohesive narrative that presents the issues related to smart technologies in Sabah. The narrative review may include research context, cultural significance, and the broader implications of these challenges on adventure tourism and the local community.

4.Findings

4.1 Infrastructure Barriers in Adventure Tourism

Adventure tourism in Sabah faces several infrastructure development challenges that impede its growth and sustainability, such as environmental degradation, inadequate infrastructure, and limited community involvement. Sabah's rich biodiversity and natural attractions attract adventure tourists, but increased activity leads to significant environmental impacts. Popular sites, especially in east Sabah, suffer from overcrowding, poor waste management, and environmental degradation, necessitating sustainable practices to preserve ecological integrity (Baloch et al., 2022; Stainton, 2023). Infrastructure development, particularly in rural areas, is a major challenge. Inadequate transportation, accommodation, and amenities deter tourists and limit the growth of adventure tourism (Akkus & Erciş, 2019; Carneiro et al., 2016). Despite projects like the Pan Borneo Highway, many areas still suffer from poor infrastructure, affecting tourist experiences and local economic benefits. Community involvement is crucial but hindered by barriers such as lack of capital, knowledge, and resources (Kala & Bagri, 2020). Often, tourism ventures benefit external entities, leaving locals with minimal roles and benefits. Existing infrastructure is inadequate for the

increasing number of tourists, particularly in rural areas (Kamarudin et al., 2020). Although air connectivity has improved post-pandemic, last-mile connectivity remains poor, with many sites difficult to access due to insufficient roads and transportation services.

4.2 Policy, Regulatory, and Stakeholder Coordination Challenges

Regulatory issues further impede progress. Lengthy bureaucratic processes for permits and overlapping federal and state jurisdictions create inefficiencies, deterring investment in infrastructure projects. Environmental sustainability adds another layer of complexity, as Sabah's sensitive ecosystems require careful planning to avoid harming biodiversity, especially in rainforests, mountains, and marine parks (Bui et al., 2021; Lehmann & Joseph, 2012). However, local communities in Sabah are frequently excluded from planning processes due to a lack of awareness, education, and financial resources, resulting in resistance and unequal benefit distribution (Celesistinus & Zakaria, 2023). Additionally, poor coordination and communication among stakeholders can lead to fragmented efforts, inefficiencies, and misunderstandings.

4.3 Socio-Cultural and Environmental Challenges

Integrating smart technologies into Sabah's adventure tourism presents significant socio- cultural and environmental challenges. One major concern is the potential disruption to local cultures and traditions. The influx of technology can lead to cultural homogenization, where unique local practices may be overshadowed by global trends facilitated by smart devices and digital platforms (Khan et al., 2020). Additionally, the digital divide poses a socio-cultural barrier; many local communities may lack access to or familiarity with advanced technologies, creating disparities in tourism participation and benefits (Hjalager, 2019). Environmental challenges are equally pressing. Smart technologies, such as IoT sensors and drones, can help monitor environmental conditions and ensure sustainable tourism practices. However, their implementation must be carefully managed to avoid negative impacts on Sabah's sensitive ecosystems. For instance, the overuse of drones in protected areas can disturb wildlife, and excessive reliance on technology may lead to the neglect of traditional, sustainable practices (Gössling & Hall, 2021). Furthermore, the energy consumption and electronic waste associated with smart technologies can pose environmental threats if not properly addressed (Buhalis et al., 2022).

5 Future Directions

The future of infrastructure development in adventure tourism in Sabah centers on enhancing connectivity, improving basic amenities, and promoting sustainable practices. These efforts aim to boost the region's attractiveness as a premier adventure tourism destination while addressing the socio-economic needs of its population. Improving connectivity is crucial. The Pan Borneo Highway aims to enhance road access to remote destinations like Mount Kinabalu and the Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre, facilitating easier travel for tourists and supporting local economies (Soldatenko & Backer, 2019; World Bank, 2016). Additionally, the Sabah Maju Jaya (SMJ) Development Plan emphasizes the development of railway services to provide an economical and environmentally friendly alternative to road travel, further enhancing the region's transportation infrastructure (Yuniarto, 2019).

Investing in basic amenities is essential for sustaining adventure tourism in Sabah. The 2024 State Budget allocates substantial funds to address issues like inadequate clean water supply and developing new water infrastructure in rural areas. These improvements are crucial for maintaining hygiene and health standards, particularly in remote locations. Further investments in enhancing the electricity supply, including the establishment of the Sabah Energy Commission, will ensure a stable and sustainable energy supply. Efforts to develop green and renewable energy sources align with global sustainability goals and enhance the eco-friendly appeal of Sabah's adventure tourism. Sustainability is central to Sabah's long-term tourism strategy. The SMJ Development Plan focuses on green infrastructure and sustainability networks to preserve the natural landscapes essential for adventure tourism (Monteiro et al., 2020; Schiappacasse & Müller, 2015). This includes implementing sustainable practices, protecting natural resources, and promoting eco-tourism initiatives. The establishment of the Sabah Climate Action Council and climate change mitigation projects further demonstrate the commitment to sustainable development (Macleod, 2021).

Additionally, reviving iconic events and promoting community-based tourism (CoBT) play key roles in enhancing Sabah's appeal while ensuring that local communities benefit directly from tourism. By concentrating on these key areas, Sabah aspires to establish itself as a premier destination for adventure tourism, providing diverse and enriching experiences for travelers while upholding a commitment to sustainability and socio-economic development. Table 1 summarizes the future directions suggested in this narrative review.

Table 1. Summary of Future Directions for Infrastructure Development in Adventure Tourism in Sabah.

Authors & Year	Description
Soldatenko & Backer, 2019	● Enhancing road connectivity to remote destinations like Mount Kinabalu and the Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre through the Pan Borneo Highway.
World Bank, 2016	● Improving road access to remote adventure tourism sites, contributing to overall connectivity enhancements.
Yuniarto, 2019	● Developing railway services under the Sabah Maju Jaya (SMJ) Development Plan to provide economical and environmentally friendly travel alternatives.
Sabah State Government, 2024	● Allocating substantial funds in the 2024 State Budget to improve clean water supply and develop new water infrastructure in rural areas. ● Enhancing electricity supply, establishing the Sabah Energy Commission, and investing in green and renewable energy sources for a stable and sustainable energy supply.
Soldatenko & Backer, 2019	● Enhancing road connectivity to remote destinations like Mount Kinabalu and the Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre through the Pan Borneo Highway.
World Bank, 2016	● Improving road access to remote adventure tourism sites, contributing to overall connectivity enhancements.
Yuniarto, 2019	● Developing railway services under the Sabah Maju Jaya (SMJ) Development Plan to provide economical and environmentally friendly travel alternatives.
Monteiro et al., 2020	● Focusing on green infrastructure and sustainability networks to preserve natural landscapes vital for adventure tourism, as outlined in the SMJ Development Plan.
Schiappacasse & Müller, 2015	● Implementing sustainable practices, protecting natural resources, and promoting eco-tourism initiatives to enhance the eco-friendly appeal of adventure tourism in Sabah.
Ibrahim et al., 2016	● Establishing the Sabah Climate Action Council and initiating climate change mitigation projects to demonstrate commitment to sustainable development.

6 Conclusion

To establish a sustainable adventure tourism sector in Sabah, it is essential to focus strategically on infrastructure development, connectivity enhancement, and stakeholder collaboration. These elements are critical for fostering tourism growth, ensuring equitable benefit distribution, and preserving the environment. Infrastructure development, such as modern transportation networks, accommodation facilities, and visitor centres, is fundamental for successful tourism, enhancing the tourist experience by providing easy access to remote adventure sites and ensuring safety and comfort (Chan et al., 2021). Connectivity enhancement, particularly digital and physical, is crucial, enabling online bookings, real-time information sharing, and smoother travel while supporting local businesses and fostering community economic growth (Discover Sustainability, 2023). Effective stakeholder collaboration involving governments, private enterprises, local communities, and NGOs is vital for creating a conducive environment for adventure tourism through collaborative planning, addressing local needs, and empowering locals with the skills needed to participate in tourism activities (Graci, 2013; Jamal & Stronza, 2009). Integrating these approaches can build a resilient, sustainable tourism sector in Sabah that benefits local communities, conserves natural resources, and offers unique experiences, with commitment from all stakeholders being crucial for long-term success and sustainability.

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STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF INTERNSHIP PROGRAM: A STUDY OF THE SCHOOL OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM, HUE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Internships have become a key part of the college curriculum. In the context of tourism and hospitality education, internships are viewed as a crucial activity for students due to the wealth of benefits they provide. This research aims to examine tourism students' perspectives on professional internship programs, particularly students at the School of Hospitality and Tourism at Hue University (HUHT). To gather research data, the study employed in-depth and semi-structured interviews with 16 students selected through stratified random sampling from four specialized departments at HUHT. The results indicate that the internship programs at HUHT have both advantageous and disadvantageous elements in the students' perceptions. Students generally feel satisfied with the compulsory internship programs as they understand the benefits for their future career path, while some reveal their dissatisfaction deriving from the lack of connection between their academic training and internship placements and the impact of the internship duration on their regular coursework.

Keywords: Professional internship programs, tourism industry, student's perception, Hue University, HUHT

Introduction

An internship is generally defined as working under supervision as part of professional training (Guile & Lahiff, 2013, cited in Kroon & Franco, 2022). In the context of the tourism industry, an internship is described as an educational experience that involves undertaking work, either paid or unpaid, in a relevant department or organization related to the student's field of study under the direct supervision of a practicing expert and a faculty member. By completing internship programs, students earn academic credits (Zopiatis, 2007, as cited in Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013).

Internships provide advantages to students, educational institutions, and industry. From the learners' perspective, according to Kroon and Franco (2022), there are two significant benefits that the interns would achieve by participating in this programs, namely 1) developing knowledge, skill, judgement, entrepreneurial flair, and identity, and 2) the establishment of networks to assist them in securing permanent/contract-based employment or self-employment. First, Internships give students valuable experience and skills that complement their academic learning (Chen, 2012). As explained by Zopiatis and Theocharous (2013), this experience facilitates the application of theoretical values that students learn in the classroom to real-world scenarios, thereby closing the chasm between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Second, by engaging in internship experiences, students gain invaluable firsthand exposure to the operational realities of the tourism industry. The transition from student to professional life, often fraught with challenges, presents a significant life stage change (Anjum, 2020). Thus, through internships, students are empowered to make career decisions by actively exploring various tourism specializations. These internships serve as a crucial training ground for developing essential job-related competencies, such as time management, task prioritization, effective teamwork, and adept interpersonal communication skills – all of which are fundamental for achieving optimal job productivity (Anjum, 2020; Singh & Dutta 2010; Mihail, 2006). Moreover, the interaction between the students and the internship host forms a network of sharing knowledge and information (Ruhanen et al., 2012).

On the other hand, through professional internship programs, the relationship between trainers and employers is tightened (Kroon & Franco, 2022; Chang & Chu, 2009). In response to the tourism and service economy's rapid expansion, educational organizations in this field have become indispensable in providing the sector with the necessary manpower by training qualified employees (Mensah et al., 2024). Therefore, internships are considered a fundamental component of the employability policies of numerous governments and postsecondary institutions worldwide, with some requiring them as a prerequisite for graduation (Hora et al., 2020). For example, all students

in the Hospitality and Tourism (H&T) Management field must participate in an internship program that lasts two to six months at industry-related enterprises, either independently or as recommended by the academy (Vo et al., 2022).

Mensah et al. (2024) state a surge in research interest in hospitality and tourism internships research. Nevertheless, the extent of research conducted on this subject in Vietnam is relatively restricted. The number of studies is relatively scarce due to the novelty of this topic, which has only gained attention in recent years (e.g. Khuong, 2016; Nghia & Duyen, 2018; Vo et al., 2022). Previous studies frequently concentrate on elucidating the satisfaction and outcomes of internships among students. In fact, the Vietnamese government has implemented legal regulations regarding professional internships in universities. In May 2023, Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh approved Resolution No. 82/NQ-CP, which outlines strategies for the recovery and long-term growth of the tourism industry. The 6th solution in this resolution explicitly outlines the directions for enhancing personnel training and improving the quality of advanced training. It also emphasizes the importance of developing and disseminating training program standards in the tourism sector. As Vietnam's economy transitions, its tourism sector has boomed over the past decade (Bui et al., 2022). As a result, the number of tourism training units is increasing. Currently, there are bachelor's training institutions dedicated to tourism and services in all three regions of the country. Therefore, this topic needs more research to be able to solve the above problems.

Objectives

In the central region, the School of Hospitality and Tourism at Hue University (HUHT) is a key university for the training of human resources in the tourism industry. From its inception, the school has prioritized the establishment of the Practice and Corporate Partnership Center which dedicated to cultivating business relationships and facilitating student internships. The centre annually arranges the professional internship course for several hundred HUHT students. The criteria for selecting and arranging the internship classes include the training program, the number of internship units, the internship recruitment quotas of each internship unit, the number of students per class, the majors, and the student's internship experience or recruitment interviews. Given the large number of students each year, arranging and scheduling internship locations and timings are very challenging and complex. Thus, it is essential to acknowledge that there are also limitations and difficulties for all parties involved in this internship program.

By selecting the HUHT as a case study, this research aims to elucidate student perceptions of internship programs within their academic journey and their satisfaction with the existing internship curriculum. Internship programs are an activity that accounts for a large proportion of the student's curriculum. Many previous studies only stopped at evaluating students' contributions to businesses without clearly assessing students' perceptions of the internship program they participate in. These results bring potential to interested researchers, university administrators and business managers with the quality of internship programs. Concurrently, this study provides novel empirical evidence for the theoretical foundation underpinning the internship practices of hospitality and tourism students.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

The student's training program at HUHT consists of two main groups of compulsory internship modules, including professional internships and graduation internships. The Practice and Corporate Partnership Center of HUHT offers professional internships for students. Depending on their majors, students need to complete two or three course of these internships. Graduation internships are conducted during the final year, and students are responsible for identifying appropriate internship units. Within the scope of this research, only compulsory professional internship modules (known as internship programs) are explored.

This study used an in-depth semi-structured interview method to gather research data. With its flexibility in nature, semi-structured interviews enable the emergence of unanticipated topics that are relevant to the topic (Berg, 2007). In this study, the interviewees are students who had completed at least one three-month professional internship program. The authors employed the stratified random sampling technique to select participants from the four established majors at HUHT: Tourism studies, Hospitality management, Event management and communication technology, and Travel and tour operation. In qualitative research, there are no established guidelines regarding the size of the interviewing sample. Hennink and Kaiser (2022) suggest that the largest possible sample size should not be greater than 17 respondents, but Dworkin (2012) states that a research size of 5 to 50 respondents is appropriate. Thus, this investigation used the phenomenon of information saturation, which occurs when the data collection

process ceases to generate any new or pertinent information (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022), to ascertain the final number of respondents.

2. Research Tools

The interview questionnaire is segmented into three sections. The initial section aims to elucidate student demographic information. The second part focuses on examining (1) internship experience, (2) benefits of internships and (3) students' satisfaction with the internship programs. The final part revolves around comprehending the remaining constraints within the internship programs. All students were informed and consulted about the interview recording for ethical purposes. The interviews were captured using an audio recorder combined with notes taken by both authors. Throughout the entire interview process, no photographic evidence was obtained.

3 Data Collection

The authors conducted face-to-face interviews with one student in each major. The homeroom teachers and the Center for Practical Training and Business Cooperation nominated these students for participation. The authors explained the goals and importance of this research to the students before starting the interview. The interviews were taken place in the quiet corner of the canteen area to make the students feel relaxed. These students were encouraged to provide feedback on the process of their internships. The interviews lasted 20 minutes on average, depending on the respondent's willingness to share their opinions. The research team terminated the research sample of 16 respondents after four rounds of interviews due to information saturation. After completing the interview, each student received a small gift.

4. Data Analysis

The records were transcribed verbatim as a text file on Microsoft Word software and analyzed using the thematic analysis method. The author employed the 6-step process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) for conducting thematic analysis. The analysis commenced with the authors acquainting themselves with the data through note-taking and multiple re-readings of the transcripts and noting down any initial ideas. Subsequently, the authors conducted a meticulous line-by-line coding with all the obtained data. Based on the coding results, the authors identified themes by grouping codes with similar or closely related meanings. Finally, the group thoroughly examined the complete content, clarified the topic created, and delivered the analysis findings. Figure 1 presents the data analysis process in this study.
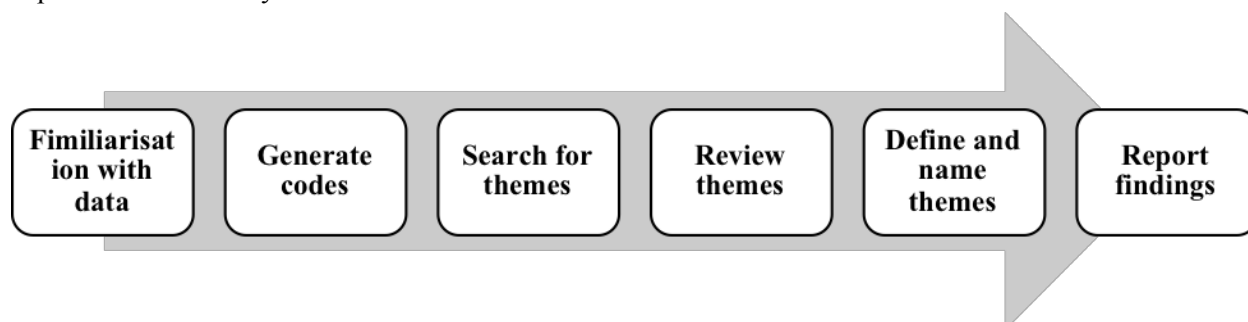
Figure 1. The six steps of thematic analysis

(Source: Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

1.1. Sample characteristics

This study included 16 students for the semi-structured in-depth interviews. Table 1 below presents the research sample characteristics.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristics		Frequencies (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	4	25.0
	Female	12	75.0
Year of Study	Second-year	6	37.5
	Third-year	10	62.5
Department	Hospitality Management	6	37.5
	Travel and Tour Operation	5	31.3
	Event Management and Communication Technology	2	12.5
	Tourism Studies	3	18.7
Residential Status	With family	10	62.5
	Alone	6	37.5

(Source: Authours' own construction)

Table 1 reveals that most of the students are female, with only four respondents being male. In terms of year of study, there are no first-year or senior students in this sample. Most respondents are from the department of Hospitality Management and Travel and Tour Operations. Regarding the respondents' residential status, the majority of the group (62.5%) reside with their family, while the remaining 37.5% live alone.

1.2 Finding Results

1.2.1 The importance of internship in tourism education

In general, students recognized the necessity of HUHT's internship programs. All respondents mentioned the necessity and significance of internship programs during the study period to help them understand their majors and future careers. Although they have to face challenges, the students admit the importance of internship programs. Students often use keywords such as important, necessary, and valuable to emphasize their points.

The first benefit many interviewees answered is the comprehensive understanding of the nature of the tourism and hospitality industry due to the compulsory internship modules. As a result, the students can choose a suitable or relevant career for their majors. This deep understanding, achieved through a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical experience, is a significant accomplishment. It is a realization that no matter how many theoretical lessons they have learnt, the essence of the industry can only be grasped through personal experience in reality.

"I understood much more about the future jobs I would do. If there is no compulsory internship modules, I cannot know what my future work will be" (R7)

"I am equipped with more practical knowledge about the work in tourism industry, and I am no longer vague about the jobs I will pursue in the future" (R2)

"After doing the internship, I know more about my future job, who I would work with, and how I would do it. I have determined that the job I will do after graduation is the job at the hotel where I had my internship" (R16)

After completing internship programs, students can understand the operation and management of a business, specifically tourism and hotel businesses, through learning and complying with the company's regulations, interacting with colleagues, seniors, and supervisors, and serving customers during the internship period. From there, students could gain proficiency in meeting working requirements such as *"...work continuously in a shift or overtime, and understand the pressure of work with the high standards"* (R2), operating and managing teams, and understanding customer needs because the interns *"have chances to communicate and serve many different types of customers… (R12)*, which provides a great opportunity for students to gain practical knowledge in all aspects.

"Every day, I serve many different guests. They are domestic guests from the North to the South and international guests from Southeast Asia, Asia, Europe, or America... I was explained by the staff about the habits of each different customer group. Subsequently, I can distinguish them through their requests and behaviour, from

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which I can serve them better" (R14)

The second benefit the respondents claimed they have learnt is their confidence and self-development to better suit the tourism industry's human resource requirements in the job market. Actually, students have not only gained practical knowledge but have also significantly enhanced their soft skills during the internship. 12 out of 16 respondents shared that one of important soft skills they have developed after their internships is time management skillR11 said that he is able to plan out his work, determine which tasks are most or least important and spend his time accordingly, while R10, R12, and R15 can handle multiple responsibilities simultaneously during peak time. R5, R8, R9, and R14 also mentioned they tried to arrive on time and be punctual, such *as "...showing up for shifts, meetings, and events on time"* (R5). It is a basic time management skill but really difficult for Vietnamese students because they *"get familiar with showing up several minutes late when going to school"* (R9).

In addition to time management skills, internships can allow interns to demonstrate teamwork, problem-solving, and emotion management skills as a result of interviews. This growth in soft skills is significant for the comprehensive learning experience provided by the internship.

"...collaborating effectively with colleagues in Front Office and other departments including housekeeping, food and beverage, sales and marketing" (R7)

"I learned how to communicate clearly and professionally with team members, which leads to high work efficency" (R13)

"Regarding resolving guest's complaints, I learned how to identify issues or challenges that arise and analyze the root causes, then gather relevant information to understand the problem fully. I also tried to remain calm and composed when dealing with stressful situations, exercise patience and empathy when interacting with frustrated guests. Sometimes, I had to manage my emotions to provide excellent customer service" (R12)

1.2.2 Students' satisfaction with the internship programs

Students expressed their level of satisfaction through various issues related to the internship supervisors, the internship position, the internship duration, and some difficulties encountered while participating in internships at the enterprises.

Students highly appreciate the care, support, and guidance provided by the lecturers and the school's internship organization unit, specifically the HUHT Practice and Business Linkage Center. Their readiness to answer students' questions and help them resolve complex issues during the internship is deeply valued. Unlike other tourism training programs, HUHT organizes student internship programs according to assigning specific schedules and locations for each student. Additionally, each internship group has a lecturer, known as a supervisor, who closely monitors and supports the students during the internship period. Students are usually briefed by the Center's staff and the supervising teachers on the school's and the host organization's internship regulations and specific information to prepare for the internship at each enterprise. R3 indicated that *"The lecturer has already informed me in detail about the work regimes and what I need to prepare for the internship".* The lecturers also consistently motivate and support the students throughout the internship and address any difficulties they face, such as health issues, internship rights, or excessive overtime work. R3 continued to share her classmates and she had their questions answered regarding the work. Based on the interviews, most students feel more at ease knowing that they have attentive lecturers supporting them throughout their internship experience. Other respondents demonstrated:

"Although there were not many difficulties during my internship, I know that the lecturers are always attentive and supportive at any time, so I still feel completely at ease" (R7)

"The lecturer shared specific step-by-step guidance for me, from the internship preparation to the work process, and supported me in completing the procedures after the internship" (R9)

On the other hand, the differences in students' perspectives from different majors about the internship work were pointed out after in-depth interviews with the respondents. Students from the Hospitality Management department positively evaluate their internship positions in enterprises, while students from other departments, such as Travel and Tour Operation and Tourism, consider the assigned tasks to have little relevance to their field of study. The main reason could be that the student internship positions are mainly in hotels, restaurants, resorts, and entertainment centres. These are enterprises with a significant demand for student interns, with many positions that do not require high qualifications and which students can handle without significantly affecting the work results. Therefore, students from the Hospitality Management department would feel delighted with the internship program

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as they can practice tasks related to their field of study, such as front desk officers, restaurant servers, and housekeeping staff. In contrast, some students are unsatisfied with their assigned tasks, as they are not directly related to their major.

"I got to intern in the positions I wanted, which were in front office and housekeeping. I learned a lot of knowledge and skills in my field" (R6)

"I'm studying Tour Operation Management but I wasn't offered to work as a tour guide or tour operator. My internship job was a restaurant waitress" (R11)

"I learned Tourism Studies so that I hoped that I could have an intern at governmental agencies to understand macro-level tourism development activities. However, I couldn't" (R12)

"I hoped I would get to intern at a travel company and participate in customer trips, but for all my internships, I've worked in hotels and entertainment centers" (R13)

In addition, many students believe that the internship period affects the study time at the school during the academic year. Due to the schedule of the training program of each major, there are two to three modules of professional internships considered compulsory courses in the first three years of the training program, and the number of students participating in internships each year is enormous. Moreover, the demand for internship recruitment is year-round and is not fixed at any particular time of the year. Therefore, the internship time of students is arranged in many different periods from January to December, which leads to the fact that class schedules are shifted and differ from the regular study period from May to June of the following year. Students feel disrupted and need help to arrange time for other courses such as English, physical education, and even personal matters.

"I did not know the specific time of the internship, which makes it difficult for me to balance the internship with our other academic and personal commitments" (R8)

"I took internships from April to June 2023 and November 2023 to January 2024. My learning schedule lasted until the end of August, and then I did not have any summer holidays for the last two years" (R15)

Regarding the difficulties HUHT students have to overcome within the internships, the students who live with their families before taking internships face more challenges than students living alone away from their families. Eight out of ten respondents living with family said they miss home and find it challenging to take care of themselves. R13 said that she felt tough when she had to be away from her family for three months of the internship; in the first few weeks, she often had a poor appetite due to the different eating habits and felt sad because she missed home. In contrast, the students who are used to living away from their family all said that when they went for the internship away from home, they felt *"easy to get used to the new living environment"* (R3) and *"could take care of themselves"* (R7). Therefore, students living with their families usually cannot adapt well to the new environment and find the university's internship program unsatisfactory.

2. Discussion

This research makes substantial contributions to both the theoretical and practical domains. This study aligns with numerous prior research. Essentially, students perceive internships as a valuable chance to acquire knowledge and skills. Students would apply the theoretical knowledge they acquire at university to practical use, thereby enhancing their comprehension (Ruhanen et al., 2013). At the same time, employees and supervisors exchange an extensive amount of novel knowledge based on their collective experiences (Ruhanen et al., 2012). Within this study, students acknowledged the value of internships in fostering personal development and enhancing their understanding of their prospective career path. This has been confirmed by Hora et al. (2020), as students find themselves in a real professional setting, distinct from their daily environment during the internship. Students communicate with other employees and their supervisors, and interact face-to-face with customers within a service industry workplace. For tourism students in Vietnam, they see these as challenges during their internship (Vo et al., 2022) but also as an opportunity to reevaluate themselves. Consequently, students enhance their communication and interaction abilities, their capacity to manage circumstances and cultivate teamwork while working shifts. Consistent with Daugherty's (2011) research, students claimed to have increased maturity, improved confidence, and a deeper comprehension of their life responsibilities, especially for students living with family. Students living with their families, due to the specific characteristics of Asian culture, receive attention and care from their parents and grandparents (Hoang & Kirby, 2020) in many aspects of their daily lives. Therefore, the internship process is an entirely new life experience, making them feel difficult. This is a significant addition to the literature on internship programs in Vietnam, as

previous studies have yet to address the influence of family on students' evaluation and perception of these programs. Holdsworth (2006) states that residential status plays a crucial role in determining the extent to which students feel they can adjust to university life. Hence, it is imperative to conduct additional investigation into this aspect while studying the subject of internships. In addition, when students are given practical assignments, they gain a more distinct understanding of their prospective careers within the service and tourism sector. Students gain a broader understanding of work culture and the real-life situations they have to encounter. Subsequently, they can make informed decisions regarding selecting an appropriate job position. According to the research conducted by Ramaprasad et al. (2022), students who have more internship experiences and are content with those experiences find it easier to adapt and become more aware of the job.

In practical contribution, the research results point out the difficulties and concerns of students about the relationship between their field of study and the internship position, as well as the internship timing throughout the year. This further enable tourism and hospitality universities to refine internship program strategies. The internship periods should be planned earlier so students can proactively arrange their other personal and academic commitments. The university should strengthen connections with local businesses to create opportunities for students to intern without significantly impacting their schedules. Additionally, expanding cooperation with tourism and travel companies would allow students to intern in roles more closely aligned with their field of study. For business, the managers also understand students' expectations and thereby provide policies for efficient internship programs. By doing this, organizations would lower the cost on finding and recruiting potential future employees.

The results of this study also provide a crucial basis for increasing awareness among students, families, and communities regarding the significance of internships in the educational system's learning process. This can result in an increased number of students actively pursuing internships, thereby enhancing their academic experience and better preparing them for their future careers. Universities and entrepreneurs should design programs that are more aligned with student needs and learning outcomes.

Research recommendations

This study acknowledges three limitations. First, the authors limited this investigation to students of HUHT at Hue University. Second, the research sample did not include final-year students since the data collection period coincided with the time at which students completed their studies and departed the school to pursue internships and complete their dissertations. Finally, this study only assesses students' perceptions and identifies factors influencing their satisfaction with the professional internship program. However, the study does not discuss the extent of the influence of the factors mentioned above.

Future research, in light of the aforementioned constraints, is crucial to address the identified limitations. In terms of research subjects, the authors should include all students, from first-year to senior, as well as broaden the research area geographically. The perspectives of students from various regions can vary as a result of cultural differences. In relation to research methods, apart from carrying out qualitative methods with the aforementioned research sample, it is possible to employ quantitative or mixed-method studies. The research topic should explore the correlation between factors that influence students' perceptions of the internship program, while also delving deeper into the psychological factors and outcomes associated with the internship program.

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THE ROLE OF EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE ON HOUSEKEEPING TECHNOLOGY ATTACHMENT IN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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Extended abstract

The aim of this research is to study the role of employee experience (EX) and housekeeping technology attachment in hospitality industry. Housekeeping is one such department which involves lots of laborious work and tasks which shall be automated to increase effectiveness, the trends of technology are positively impacting the hotel including the housekeeping department. The current study investigates the role of employee experience on housekeeping technology attachment. The relationship between employee experience and housekeeping technology attachment is assessed in this study. Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the business argument for EX was mostly centered on the competition for talent, with research suggesting that people were actively seeking other employment opportunities (Bridger and Gannaway, 2021) Despite the significant trend of technology are positively impacting the hotel industry, some study is still needed for exploration within this area. Past studies have focused on consumer experience, brand experience and brand attachment (Iglesias, Singh & Batista-Foguet,; 2011; Itam, & Ghosh, N. 2020),). However, the role of employee experience and housekeeping technology attachment from a stakeholder perception has had less investigation, hence this study intends to bridge this gap, particularly in this Malaysia case study. This study used a quantitative approach by collecting data through online survey questionnaires. The samples were discovered by firstly contacting hotel employees; once permission was given the researcher began to collect data and distribute the survey questionnaire formsto our target samples. A total of 969 samples were received, coming from many countries around the world. The data were analyzed by using PLS-SEM Analysis technique.

Keywords: Keywords –employee experience (EX), work life balance, work quality, future growth/opportunity and housekeeping technology attachment.

Purpose/Problem Statement - The aim of this research paper is to study the role of employee experience on housekeeping technology attachment. Many past studies have focused on the experience of brand experience, consumer experience, brand attachment, emerging phenomenon of housekeeping technology, the impact of housekeeping technology and marketing of hospitality industry. However, research that directly focuses on housekeeping technology attachment is relatively scarce, especially, for the many in the literature most of them have studied the functionality and usability technology on buying intention but not on the housekeeping technology attachment.

Originality/value – This research provides value by discussing the key measurement of employee experience (EX) and discusses the original issue whether it is rational for employees in hospitality industry. The three factors of employee experience (ex: work life balance, work quality & future growth or opportunity) on housekeeping technology attachment. The use of "experience" as a delivery model was initially operationalized in the service sector, which resulted in promising financial results. Consequently, several other industries followed it, which ultimately created an "experience economy" (Schmitt, 2010). EX can be defined as – "the set of perceptions, emotions and feelings experienced by an employee through their involvement in work and within the organizational climate, which provides them with positive reinforcement to develop, engage, contribute and retain within the organization for good" (Itam and Ghosh, 2020). This contribution incorporates in an information technology adoption model and attachment to shed light on the individuals/employee's dispositions to avail themselves of to adopt interactive innovations. In this case, it implies that certain functionality and responsiveness of technical capilities can trigger employees to increase

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their attachment with these mobile on a habitual basis.

Design/methodology/approach – Quantitative data was gathered from 969 hospitality employees. They were analyzed through a partial least squares (PLS) approach.

Findings/Discussion – The results found that the components of employee experience (EX) in terms of work life balance had a negative effect on employee attachment towards housekeeping technology. Furthermore, there is a positive effect between employee experience (EX) in terms of work life balance and future growth or opportunity). Therefore, hospitality and tourism stakeholders involved in the development of hospitality technology should concentrate on expanding the types of technology attachment available so that tourists with varying hospitality interests can be accommodated. Therefore, tourism stakeholders involved in the development of hospitality and tourism industry should concentrate on enhancing information infrastructure.

Theoretical implications – The study integrates usability, interactivity, aesthetic and digital experience factors with a functional construct and psychological construct. It examines their effects on the technology acceptance model (TAM)'s, attachment model and behavioral intentions.

Practical implications – This study suggests that there is scope for the hospitality service providers to enhance the quality and functionality of their e-commerce and mobile apps, in order to improve their employees' perceptions about the utility of these ubiquitous service technologies. Hotel industry stakeholders, hotel owners, and government sectors are able to apply the findings of the study to establish effective hospitality and tourism destinations, react to the needs of local and international tourists, and promote the image of hospitality in the future for such hospitality community centers.

Social implications (Policy contribution) – The hospitality industry and government sector should formulate policies and improve plans for hospitality employees as a framework for development, which include the establishment of a hospitality technology association to be the main host impelling concrete hospitality and tourism industry, and for the creation of an international hospitality and tourism network to expand the hospitality and tourism market widely.

Research limitations – In-depth studies from the perspective of hospitality employees could be conducted in the future to collect insights from hospitality employee performance. This will result in a clearer development of hospitality technology in each issue. The limitation of this study is that it was conducted after the COVID-19 outbreak; thus, researchers must consider the hospitality employee of different types industry as a priority.

Introduction

Hospitality is a sector that operates in the field of providing services to guests or consumers, especially in terms of accommodation, food and beverages, recreation, and transportation. Not only that, hospitality has close links with the tourism sector, as both focus on providing a satisfying and enjoyable experience for tourists. Some examples of those that are included in the hospitality sector are hotels, eateries, and online travel agencies. Hotels provide temporary accommodation for guests with a variety of facilities and services. Eatery is a business that provides food and beverages to guests with varied concepts and menus. The three have an important role to play in supporting the development of the tourism sector, which is one of the most strategic and potential economic sectors in the world. According to data from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the tourism sector contributed 10.4 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019 and absorbed some 330 million jobs (Azanella & Nugroho, 2020). However, the hospitality and tourism sectors are also facing many challenges and problems, especially as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. According to data from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the tourism and travel sector has experienced a decline of 49.1% in its contribution to global GDP in 2020, from 10.4% in 2019 to 5.5% in 2020. According to statistics from Statista, the global hotel occupation rate will decline by 46.3% in 2020 (Statista, 2021). According to data from McKinsey, demand for outdoor food and beverages has fallen by 40% in 2020, which is equivalent to $239 billion less than in 2019 (Kuijpers et al., 2020). According to Phocuswright data, global online travel agent sales (OTAs) will have fallen by 57% by 2020, falling from $712 billion in 2019 to $307 billion in 2020 (Kapoor et al., 2016). One factor that can help the hospitality and tourism sectors rise and flourish in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic is customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is the level of happiness or pleasure experienced by a customer after using a company's product or service. Besides, customer satisfaction is also crucial to the hospitality sector, as it can affect the loyalty, reputation, and profitability of the company. Therefore, hotel owners, eateries, and online travel agents strive to be able to adapt the products or services offered to the expectations and needs of customers, as well as improve the performance and quality of the company

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by creating a competitive advantage that can distinguish the company from its competitors and offer added value and differentiation that can attract and retain customers. Based on the exposure above, what are the customer satisfaction factors in the hospitality sector, especially in hotels, eateries, and online travel agencies? The next question is, are there differences in the factors that affect customer satisfaction at hotels, dining establishments, and online travel agencies? Customer satisfaction is one of the key factors that determine the success and sustainability of a business, especially in the hospitality sector. Hospitality is the sector that operates in the field of guest services, such as hotels, eateries, and online travel agencies. To measure and increase customer satisfaction in the hotel sector, it is necessary to understand the theories related to the concepts and factors that affect client satisfaction. The Quality-of-Service Theory was developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry and states that customer satisfaction is the result of a comparison between the quality of service expected and the service perceived (Rangkuti, 2017). The quality of the expected service is influenced by factors such as needs, experience, and communication. The service perceived is affected by five dimensions, namely physical proof, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. This theory can be applied to measuring and improving the quality of services in the hotel, eatery, and online travel agency industries. While the Disconfirmation of Expectations theory was proposed by Oliver in 1980 to measure customer satisfaction based on the difference between expectations and perceived performance (Albahar et al., 2023), this theory assumes that customers have certain expectations before buying or using a product or service, and then they will compare those expectations to perceived performance. If the performance is perceived to be satisfactory or above expectations, then the customer will feel positive confirmation (Hossain et al., 2023). This theory can be applied to develop marketing strategies that offer added value, differentiation, and loyalty through unique and exciting experiences in the hotel, eatery, and online travel agency industries. The three-factor customer satisfaction theory is also known as the Kano-Seraku theory or the Kano revision theory, which is the development of the Kano model theory that has only two categories, namely mustbe and attractive (Lee et al., 2023), (Hu et al., 2023)

According to (Jin et al., 2022), the three-factor customer satisfaction theory is a theory that classifies the attributes of a product or service into three categories, namely: 1 Performance Factor: Attributes related to the functional performance of the product or services, such as speed, accuracy, quality, etc. These attributes have a positive influence on the satisfaction of the customer; the higher the performance, the more satisfied the customer is. 2 Excitement Factors: Attributes related to things that should surprise or satisfy the client, like bonuses, rewards, additional features, etc. These attributes also have a negative influence on customer satisfaction, but they are not expected by the customer, so if there is one, it will increase satisfaction, but if there are none, it will decrease satisfaction. 3 Basic Factors: Attributes related to those things that must be in products or services, such as price, availability, security, etc. This theory can help a company determine the attributes of products or services that are important to customers, allocate resources effectively, and increase customer loyalty by meeting customer needs, expectations, and wishes (Chen et al., 2022).

The hotel industry is continuously growing with the help of new technology being brought to operations. Technology is being introduced into each and every corner of a hotel. Housekeeping is an operational department at a hotel that is in charge of the cleaning, maintenance, and aesthetic exterior design upkeep of the hotel's rooms, public areas, back areas, and general surroundings and also that is one of the backbones among its four major departments. In accordance with Das (2021), to improve the work service and to raise the standard of the housekeeping service. Housekeeping is defined as "the provision of a clean, comfortable, safe, and aesthetically pleasing environment." stated by (Raghubalan and Raghubalan, 2015). Recently, the role of the housekeeping staff was to prepare clean guestrooms on a timely basis, but now enormous changes have occurred in hotel housekeeping. This highly fuelled and rapidly rising business requires new trends and technologies to strengthen hotel operations. After all, the housekeeping department is responsible for bringing the largest share of profit to the hotel (Kumar & Eduversity, 2020).

Furthermore, because a room can be sold multiple times, the sale of rooms accounts for a large amount of a hotel's earnings. However, if the rooms remain unsold, there will be a significant income loss and it quickly becomes clear that rooms are more perishable than food. Ham et al (2005) reported that the rapid advancement and commercialization of new technologies has prompted hotels and other hospitality-related businesses to embrace technological improvements gradually. Different technology helps hotels to improve performance, increase administrative efficiency, and market their enterprises abroad. While technology has been used in the hotel industry from the late 1970s in the form of computerized reservation and global distribution systems, it was not until the 1990s that technology began to have a substantial impact on the industry (Ham et al., 2005). As the majority of hotel

employees are equipped with technology, their capability of using them not only for personal communications but also for work-related activities is assumed to be high stated that more than one-third of the hotel industry's employees consisted of Generation Y or Millennials, born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s, who are tech-savvy and digital natives. Considering the characteristics of the current workforce in the hotel industry, most employees are believed to be ready to use technology for their work. In responding to the changes in the current workforce, housekeeping department in hotels should seriously consider accommodating employees' technological needs to retain and attract the new generation of employees who will appreciate the use of technology in their workplace. According to Nielsen, Forrester (2020) reported that enabling employees to use technology significantly increased their productivity and customer engagement. Hotel employees can efficiently perform various work-related tasks at any places by building more personalized and interactive relationships with their customers, compliant with hotels' cohesive technology strategies. However, the overall effects of emerging technological advancement on employee experience (EX) related outcomes such as attachment on housekeeping technology have not been thoroughly and empirically examined from the perspective hospitality and tourism industry. Realizing the gap in the extant literature, more research is needed for employee experience (EX) dimensions. To our knowledge, no research has been carried out on employee experience (EX) on housekeeping attachment in hotel industry in Malaysia. In an attempt to address these gaps, this study is to examine the employee experience (EX) factors of work life balance, tangible rewards, work quality, future growth/opportunities and enabling environment on the housekeeping technology attachment. Therefore, the employee experience (EX) factor is critically important for the hospitality and tourism industry in Malaysia. This study aims to address these gaps through a questionnaire survey of a sample of 1,200 respondent from housekeeping staff from several hotels in Kuala Lumpur and southern Malaysia. Therefore, the research objectives are as follows:

Objectives

1. To examine the role of employee experience (EX) on housekeeping technology attachment in hospitality and tourism industry.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Employee experience and COVID-19 pandemic

The evidence of employee experiences research can be traced back to 1998 when researchers observed that positive experiences are essential to developing positive attitude **(**Rucci et al., 1998). In research conducted by MIT to examine how employee experiences influence corporate value creation, they found the EX and customer satisfaction as key differentiating factors that helped business firms outperform their competitors (Dery and Sebastian, 2017). Employee experience was postulated based on customer experience management, which originates at the heart of a business (Itam and Ghosh, 2020). Following the focus shift in the thoughts of marketing concepts from "satisfaction" to "experience", organizations aimed to restructure the HR policies, strategies and activities to improve the overall employee experience (Itam and Ghosh, 2020). The use of "experience" as a delivery model was initially operationalized in the service sector, which resulted in promising financial results. Consequently, several other industries followed it, which ultimately created an "experience economy" (Schmitt, 2010). EX can be defined as – "the set of perceptions, emotions and feelings experienced by an employee through their involvement in work and within the organizational climate, which provides them with positive reinforcement to develop, engage, contribute and retain within the organization for good" (Itam and Ghosh, 2020). Previous industry research reports are of the view that EX significantly influences business growth, employee engagement, productivity, profitability and facilitates creating competitive advantage (Nelson and Doman, 2017). Employee experience is driven by a number of individual and organizational variables and interactions among them. Previous studies have attempted to explore various dimensions of EX and measure it as a higher-order construct (Yadav and Vihari, 2021). However, researchers disagree on whether or not the results of these studies are conclusive (Gheidar and ShamiZanjani, 2020; Shambi, 2021). The current study attempts to fill this research gap by identifying the key dimensions of employee experience through Online Experience Review (OER) that provide a detailed account of first-hand employee experience.

However, in the prior research explored the factors influence employee performance during the crisis, Tan and Antonio (2022) have observed perceived leadership, teleworking output, a sense of purpose and organizational commitment as primary antecedents of employee adaptive performance and employee experiences during the pandemic. Extant literature and recent industry reports are of the view that though the majority of businesses and people disliked the developments caused by the pandemic, some express favorable opinions (PwC, 2021; Tusl et al.,

2021). Eftimov (2022), in a contemporary review paper summarizing sixteen studies that examine how the pandemic has impacted employee-employer interaction, concluded that employee experience is one of the critical factors that will shape work in the near future and beyond. Recent global surveys conducted to examine the employee experience showed that the pandemic had a negative and significant impact on financial performance, productivity, organizational culture, employee engagement and employee well-being (WTW, 2021)**.**

2.2 Housekeeping Technology Attachment

Research Model
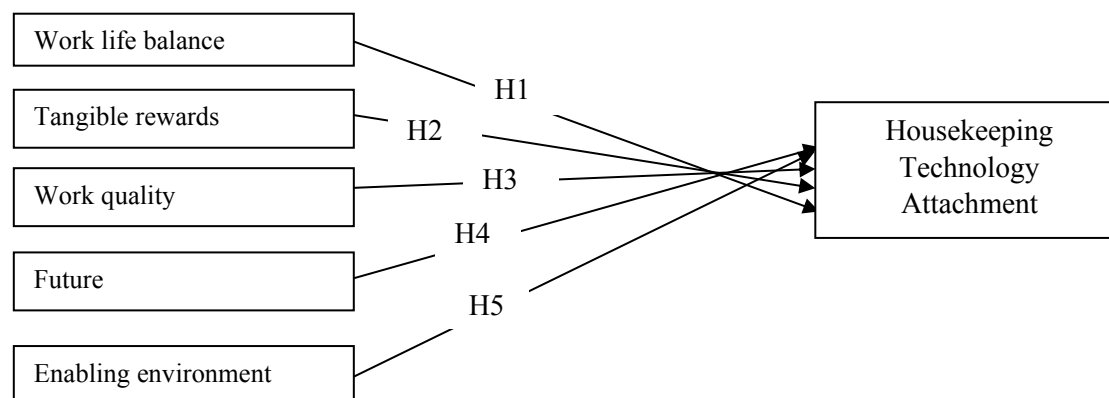
Hypothesis Testing

H1: There is a positive effect of work life balance on housekeeping technology attachment in hospitality and tourism industry

H2: There is a positive effect of tangible rewards on housekeeping technology attachment in hospitality and tourism industry

H3: There is a positive effect of work quality (ex: job rotation, work hours & work intensity) in hospitality and tourism industry.

H4: There is a positive effect of future growth/opportunities (ex: skill development & career advancement) in hospitality and tourism industry

H5: There is a positive effect of enabling environment (ex: company policies, organizational politics & job security) on housekeeping technology attachment in hospitality and tourism industry.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

The objective of this study is to test the relationship of Perceived Employee Experience (EX) together with its dimension and Housekeeping Technology Attachment. The population and sample data for this research was housekeeping staff in hotel industry in central of KL and urban Klang Valley. The sample of the population for this study was 969 housekeeping staff. Non probability sampling was used in this research study. Convenience sampling approach was adopted as it helps in getting data from experienced respondents (Hair et al., 2008; Saunders et al., 2016). Convenience sampling in this study meant that the participant had to satisfy the following criteria:

- Participants must be 18-year-old or above.
- Participants must be an employee in housekeeping department.
- Participants must have experienced using the housekeeping technology in the housekeeping department.

A sample of 969 meet the assumption of multivariate data analysis as it satisfied the 10:1 criterion of sample estimation for SEM (Hair et al., 2006; Price, 2016). To further define the minimum required sample size, an a priori type of power analysis with G*Power 3.1 software was used (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, and Lang, 2009). A-priori sample size calculator facilitates in computing sample size which is required for structural equation modelling procedure (Soper, 2019). Based on the anticipated effect size of 0.15, the desired statistical power level of 0.99, and a probability level of 0.01, and eight predictor variables with a minimum sample size of 262 was suggested by the calculator. The sample size for this study was 969 which exceeded the required minimum sample required to detect the desired effect size.

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2. Data Collection

Data were collected from a new sample of 969 respondent who had working in housekeeping department and experienced using housekeeping technology. Data were collected from online consumer using a personal face-to-face survey. The data collection took seven days at these three locations. The average time for each location was five hours per day. The Klang Valley was chosen because of high Internet penetration rate of 67.2 percent (MCMC, 2020). Thus quantitative method was utilize to analyze data consistent with the research.

Table 1:

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (π)	Percentage (%)
Age	18-25	20	20
	26-34	48	48
	35-45	32	32
Gender	Male	47	47
	Female	53	53
Education	Primary school	2	2
	Secondary school	2	2
	Undergraduate degree	28	28
	Postgraduate degree	40	40
Ethnicity	Malay	38	38
	Indian	28	28
	Chinese	24	24
	Mixed	10	10
Employment status	Full time	37	37
	Employed	48	48
	Self employed	15	15
Income level	Less than RM2000	15	15
	RM2000-RM3500	32	32
	RM3500-RM5000	43	43
	More than RM5000	10	10
Marital status	Married	48	48
	Single	41	41
	Single Parent	11	11

3.Data Analysis

3.1 Measurement Model Assessment

In order to assess the measurement model, (Hair et al., 2019) recommend steps of reflective measurement model assessment were followed. The first step involves the examination of indicator loadings. The second step was related to the assessment of internal consistency reliability. In the third step, the convergent validity of each construct was examined. The fourth step involves the assessment of discriminant validity. Thus, the assessment of measurement model in SEM-PLS is assessed by indicator loadings examining indicator loadings, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity.

3.1.1 Indicator Loadings

Assessment of the measurement model begins with an examination of the indicator loadings. Table 2 indicates that all loadings exceeded the 0.70 threshold and were significant (t-statistics > 1.96) and hence retained for further analysis. On the other hand, Carlson, de Vries, Rahman, and Taylor (2017) recommend a threshold level of 0.6 for suitable indicator loadings. Similarly, Sarstedt et al. (2017) recommend indicator loadings above 0.70. To achieve discriminant validity, cross-loadings were inspected between variables. Few cross-loading item were identified. For

example, Wlb3 and Wq2 were cross loading on tangible rewards factor and Fg2 and Tr2 were cross-loading on other factors. However, the value of cross loading is 0.60 which is less than 0.80. and all cross-loading item remained. While retaining all of this item, this study ensures that all items do capture all the constructs domain facet/meaning and did not affect content validity of the construct.

Table 2: Indicator Loadings (n=969)

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Work Life Balance	WLB1 WLB2 WLB3	0.86
Tangible rewards	TR1 TR2 TR3	0.93
Work Quality	WQ1 WQ2 WQ3	0.91
Future growth/opportunities	FG1 FG2 FG3	0.85
Enabling Environment	EE1 EE2 EE3	0.89
Housekeeping Technology Attachment	HA1 HA2 HA3	0.90

3.1.2 Internal Consistency Reliability

Reliability demonstrates the degree of consistency between multiple items of a variable (Hair et al., 2013). PLS-SEM provides Jöreskog's (1971) composite reliability (CR) values which can be used as a measure of internal consistency reliability (Sarstedt et al., 2017). Table 5.5 illustrates that the values of the composite reliability of all constructs were greater than 0.70, hence demonstrating an acceptable level of internal consistency reliability.

To assess the structural model, this study followed the steps of structural model assessment recommended by Hair, Risher, et al. (2019). The first step involves the examination of the collinearity statistics using VIF values. The next step is the coefficient of determination, i.e., R^2 and the blindfolding-based cross-validated redundancy measure, i.e., Q^2 were assessed. In the third step, the model's out-of-sample predictive power was assessed. The final step was related to the assessment of the statistical significance and relevance of the path coefficients, (i.e., β).

Besides, this study also assesses the moderating relationships that are being proposed in the research model. The moderating effect is tested using a product indicator approach which is proposed by Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2008). Furthermore, this method is ideally suited for PLS-SEM due to no assumption regarding the shape of the variables or samplings' distributions (Hair *et al*., 2017).

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability (CR)	AVE
Work Life Balance	0.86	0.87	0.91
Tangible rewards	0.93	0.94	0.94
Work Quality	0.91	0.91	0.93
Future growth/opportunities	0.92	0.92	0.94

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability (CR)	AVE
Enabling Environment	0.92	0.92	0.94
Housekeeping Technology Attachment	0.91	0.89	0.92

Table 3:Composite Reliability

3.1.3 Assessment of Convergent Validity

In this study, the measurement model's convergent validity is assessed by examining its average variance extracted (AVE) value. Convergent validity is deemed adequate when constructs have an average variance extracted (AVE) value of at least 0.5 or more (Hair *et al*., 2018). Table 6.6 reveals that all constructs have AVE ranging from 0.680 to 0.787, which exceed the recommended threshold value of 0.50. This result shows that the study's measurement model has demonstrated adequate convergent validity.

Table 4: Convergent Validity (n=969)

Construct	AVE	CR	Convergent Validity
Work Life Balance	0.760	0.847	Established
Tangible rewards	0.680	0.940	
Work Quality	0.787	0.910	
Future growth/opportunities	0.737	0.920	
Enabling Environment	0.728	0.940	
Housekeeping Technology Attachment	0.726	0.940	

3.1.4 Assessment of Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity is a measure of the absence of overlap between different constructs which are conceptually distinctive (Saunders et al., 2016).

Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015) argue that Fornell-Larcker's criterion for assessing discriminant validity does not perform when the item loadings do not differ significantly. Henseler et al. (2015) offer the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of the correlations as an alternative criterion for assessing discriminant validity. The HTMT criterion is defined as the mean value of the correlations between observed variables across constructs relative to the mean of the average correlations for the observed variables measuring the same construct (Hair, Risher, et al., 2019; Sarstedt et al., 2017). Thus, the HTMT values should be preferably lower than 0.85 for conceptually distinct constructs.

Table 5.9 presents the result of the HTMT value between Interactivity (INT) and Online Consumer Review (OCR) was less than the threshold of 0.85, hence achieving discriminant validity, similarly HTMT value between OCWC and DCX are also less than 0.90 which is also acceptable due to the conceptual proximity of the OCWC and DCX. The result of HTMT on Table 5.9 shows all constructs' values are less than 0.90, indicating that the discriminant validity is satisfactory.

Table 5.9: Discriminant Validity Assessment - Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) Test Results

	Usability	Interactivity	Aesthetic	OCR	OCWC
Usability web experience	0.830				
Interactivity web experience	0.791	0.702			
Aesthetic web experience	0.537	0.693	0.715		
Online Consumer Website Commitment (OCWC)	0.702	0.590	0.681	0.722	
Online Consumer Review (OCR)	0.700	0.659	0.647	0.713	0.759

Discriminant validity is a measure of the absence of overlap between different constructs which are conceptually distinctive (Saunders et al., 2016). Table 5 presents the result of the HTMT value between enabling environment and future growth opportunities was less than the threshold of 0.85, hence achieving discriminant validity, similarly HTMT value between Housekeeping Technology Attachment and Enabling Environment are also less than 0.90 which is also acceptable due to the conceptual proximity of the OCWC and DCX. The result of HTMT on Table 5 shows all constructs' values are less than 0.90, indicating that the discriminant validity is satisfactory.

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Table 5: Discriminant Validity Assessment - Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) Test Results

	Work Life balance	Tangible Rewards	Work Quality	Future growth/opportunities	Enabling environment	Housekeeping Technology Attachment
Work Life Balance	0.830					
Tangible rewards	0.791	0.702				
Work Quality	0.537	0.693	0.715			
Future growth/opportunities	0.702	0.590	0.681	0.722		
Enabling Environment	0.700	0.659	0.647	0.645	0.759	
Housekeeping Technology Attachment	0.694	0.674	0.725	0.776	0.713	1.00

3.2 Structural Model

3.2.1 Assessment of Lateral Collinearity

Collinearity represents the linear relationship or shared variance among some of the predictor variables that are part of the structural model (Mason and Perreault, 1991). To assess the collinearity, variance inflation factor (VIF) values were calculated by using latent variable scores of the predictor variables in the PLS-SEM. VIF values of above 5 indicate the existence of a collinearity problem among the predictor variables (Mason and Perreault, 1991). The outcome of the lateral collinearity test indicates that all Inner VIF values of the other independent variables (i.e,1.956) that need to be examined for lateral multicollinearity are less than 5, indicating that lateral multicollinearity is of no concern in this study (Hair *et al.*, 2017).

Table 6: Lateral collinearity Assessment

Constructs	VIF
Work life balance	1.845
Tangible rewards	1.947
Work quality	2.146
Future growth/opportunities	2.653
Enabling Environment	2.213

3.2.2 Assessment of R² and Q²

Q² value is a good measure of the predictive accuracy of the model (Geisser, 1974; Sarstedt et al., 2017; Stone, 1974). In order to compute Q² value, the blindfolding procedure in PLS-SEM was used where an omission distance of 8 was selected to eliminate every eighth data point of the endogenous construct's indicators in a single blindfolding run (Sarstedt et al., 2017). An omission distance between 5 and 10 has been recommended by Hair, Hollingsworth, Randolph, and Chong (2017). Q² value generated by the cross-validated redundancy approach was used for the structural model as it indicates the predictive relevance of the PLS path model (Sarstedt et al., 2017). Q² values greater than 0, 0.25, and 0.50 indicate small, medium, and large predictive relevance of the structural-path model respectively (Hair, Risher, et al., 2019). On the other hand, Sarstedt et al. (2017) state that Q² values greater than zero are acceptable.

An assessment of Stone-Geisser's predictive relevance (Q^2) is essential because it checks if the data's points of indicators in the reflective measurement model of the endogenous construct can be predicted accurately. This can be achieved by utilising the blindfolding procedure in Smart PLS software. Housekeeping technology attachment are the endogenous constructs in the model, so they are selected for running the Blindfolding Algorithm.

It should be observed that the proposed model has good predictive relevance for the endogenous variables. Chin (1998) suggests that a model demonstrates good predictive relevance when its' Q² value is larger than zero, as shown in Table 7.

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Table 7: Coefficient of (R^2) and (Q^2)

Endogenous Latent Variable	R^2 Value	Q^2 Value
Housekeeping Technology Attachment	0.580	0.569

Q^2 is the "1-SSE/SSO" value as shown in the "Construct
Crossvalidated Redundancy" section in blindfolding

R squared represents the variance explained in each of the dependent variables in the structural model (Sarstedt et al., 2017) and is thus a measure of the explanatory power of the structural model (Shmueli and Koppius, 2011). The R^2 indicates in-sample predictive power (Rigdon, 2012). The values of R^2 of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 are considered weak, moderate, and substantial respectively (Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt, 2011; Hair, Risher, et al., 2019). However, Falk and Miller (1992) recommend an R^2 value of greater than 0.10. In information system(IS) research, an R^2 value of 0.20 is considered high (Carlson et al., 2017; De Vries and Carlson, 2014).

3.2.3 The Effect size f2 and q2 of Housekeeping Technology Attachment and Employee

Experience (EX)

The next step in structural model evaluation is to assess the effect of a specific exogenous construct on the endogenous construct if it is deleted from the model. It can be achieved by examining the f^2 and q^2 effect sizes, which can be derived from R^2 and Q^2, respectively. The f^2 effect size can be calculated manually by applying the formula i.e. (R^2included - R^2excluded) / (1 - R^2included). PLS-SEM provide assessment for the effect size for specific exogenous construct (i.e.,work life balance, tangible rewards, work quality, future growth/opportunities and enabling environment) and Housekeeping Technology Attachment

The result in Table 7 on summary of EX dimensions and housekeeping technology attachment indicate that all independent variable work life balance, tangible rewards, work quality future growth and enabling environment has a medium to large effect in producing the R^2. On the other hand, the results for work life balance and tangible rewards indicate that they have a small effect size in producing the R^2 for the housekeeping technology attachment. Furthermore, the predictive relevance of the model is examined using the blindfolding procedure. The result shows that all the two Q^2 values for housekeeping technology is larger than 0, indicating that the model has predictive relevance (Hair *et al.,* 2017). The result indicates the q^2 effects size for work life balance, tangible rewards, work quality and future growth and enabling experience on housekeeping technology attachment is small to medium effect size.

Table 7: Coefficient of (R^2) and (Q^2)

Relationship	Std Beta (β)	Std Error (SE)	p-value	t-value	Decision
Work Life Balance -> Housekeeping Technology Attachment	-0.056	0.028	0.000	1.664**	Supported
Tangible rewards-> Housekeeping Technology Attachment	0.005	0.011	0.897	0.130	Not supported
Work quality-> Housekeeping technology attachment	0.273	0.120	0.000	8.481**	Supported
Future growth opportunities-> Housekeeping technology attachment	0.396	0.031	0.000	11.510**	Supported
Enabling Environment-> Housekeeping technology attachment	0.386	0.126	0.000	7.569**	Supported

*Note: *p< 0.05; t- value > 1.628 (one tail; 90% sig level)*

Conclusion and Discussion

The purpose of the present study is to explore the key drivers of employee experience (EX) after the pandemic by evaluate the sentiments and importance associated with the various determinants of employee experience. The multiple regression analysis and dominance analysis revealed the relative importance of pre-defined EX-factors to the overall employee experience. Furthermore, the significance of sentiments (composite, positive and negative) and text attributes (subjectivity and review length) on the overall rating was underscored through multiple regression

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analysis. By performing a set of analyses based on the EX-factors and text attributes, we were able to obtain meaningful and novel insights. This study extends the literature on the construct of "employee experience" by exploring its various dimensions and opens new avenues for future research.

The dominance analysis demonstrates that skill development is one of the most significant factors in defining the total employee experience across industries, signaling that training and development played a critical role in shaping employee experience after the pandemic. The effectiveness and efficiency of training or skill development programs and a potential hindrance to professional growth have been observed as one of the most important drivers of great attrition (Smet et al., 2021). This finding could be attributed to the fact that many organizations paid less attention to upskilling their employees and failed to channel the potential of their employees through skill development. Therefore, management should focus on increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of training programs and promoting a hybrid employee training and skill development model. In addition, designing training programs with an apt alignment of the organizational goals with employees' professional growth would enhance employee experience.

Fourth, the transfer of business from physical space to the digital domain is an ongoing process in today's business scenario. Organizations increasingly recognize the importance of technology in not just automating labor but also improving the employee experience. The epidemic has further explored the possibilities for firms to embrace a hybrid work paradigm that allows employees to work remotely and plan to shift their mode of work to a hybrid work model. In addition, the condition where a new virus or infection wave, or other similar disrupting event appears is likely to reoccur (Farooq and Sultana, 2022); companies should be prepared to react rapidly with action plans. These days, more and more organizations are planning to sustain the positive changes that occurred during the pandemic, such as work from-home, flexible work hours, cost-optimized business models, etc (Manroop and Petrovski, 2022). Such transformation in companies influences employee experience and job performance (Laiho et al., 2022). Since the importance of various EX-factors varies in digital space from physical one, companies should focus on digital employee experience (DEX) factors to match the pace of digital advancements and facilitate employees to adjust to the virtual workspace. In light of the paradigm shift from physical workspaces to hybrid work models, businesses are recommended to critically evaluate the interplay between digitization and HR practices in the context of people management in order to achieve a strong culture, agility and an enhanced employee experience (Eftimov, 2022). Business managers should consider the drivers of DEX that affect employee job performance in virtual workspaces, such as online employee engagement, infrastructure for home-office, online employee interactions, employee productivity, mental health and work-life balance (Gheidar and ShamiZanjani, 2020).

Research recommendations

➢ The first theoretical implication is that this study conceptualizes employee experience (EX) and housekeeping technology attachment using the theoretical lens of attachment theory and theory of acceptance model (TAM). Thus, this study offers a novel EX from the perspective of attachment theory which recognize the central role of employee as the author of their own experience rather than the brand.

➢ The findings of this study would facilitate managers in making informed decisions, provide employees with a better experience during the adoption of the pandemic-caused sustainable business practices (such as hybrid work model, digital workspaces, etc.), shape/enhance digital employee experience and deal with possible future contingencies. Future research is advised to explore the range of sentiments and emotions associated with different EX-factors, as well as how their relative importance and sentiments have changed over time.

➢ By performing a set of analyses based on the EX-factors and text attributes, we were able to obtain meaningful and novel insights. This study extends the literature on the construct of "employee experience" by exploring its various dimensions and opens new avenues for future research.

➢ Future research could test a variety of logical moderators such as antecedents' effects might different by branded services versus products (Berry, 2000) notes distinct differences in service branding some of which could influence emotional attachment. When the offering is intangible, customer-facing employees may drive attachment. However, attachment may develop for the service worker rather than the service brand (e.g., attachment to an investment advisor rather than a brokerage brand). Our respondents generated no service brand descriptions; thus, we offer this as an important area for future research.

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EXPLORING LOCAL PERCEPTIONS AND EMPOWERMENT IN COMMUNITY-LED CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN PULAU KUKUP NATIONAL PARK: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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Extended abstract

In the global pursuit of sustainable development, the role of local communities in conservation efforts has become a critical focus. These communities, embedded in their natural surroundings, provide unique perspectives and stewardship crucial for shaping sustainable tourism practices. This research investigates the dynamics of community-led conservation efforts, emphasizing local perceptions and empowerment in Pulau Kukup National Park. The study aims to understand how local communities perceive and engage with conservation initiatives and the impact of empowerment on these efforts. Utilizing a quantitative approach, data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire distributed to the residents around Kampung Permas Besar, Pontian. Descriptive analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Findings highlight substantial support from residents for tourism development, recognizing its potential to enhance employment and socioeconomic status. Despite a preference for maintaining traditional occupations, locals acknowledge the benefits of ecotourism, such as guiding and boating opportunities. The study reveals that community pride in their natural heritage fosters a commitment to conservation and sustainable tourism. Empowerment is identified as a key factor in successful conservation and tourism strategies. Local residents' active participation in decision-making processes and conservation activities, supported by government initiatives, enhances community spirit and sustainable development. The study recommends further research on economic impacts, sustainable practices, community empowerment strategies, and the integration of cultural heritage into tourism. The support and involvement of local communities are pivotal for the success of ecotourism in Kukup National Park. By aligning conservation goals with local interests, these efforts can ensure long-term environmental and socio-economic benefits, fostering a sustainable future for both local residents and visitors.

Keywords: Community-led Conservation, Empowerment, Attitudes, Sustainable Tourism

Introduction

In the global pursuit of sustainable development, the role of local communities in conservation efforts has emerged as a crucial focal point. These communities, embedded in their natural surroundings, offer unique perspectives and stewardship that are invaluable in shaping sustainable tourism practices. This research endeavors to delve into the dynamics of community-led conservation efforts, focusing particularly on how local perceptions and

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empowerment influence these initiatives. By understanding and amplifying the voices of these communities, which aim to uncover pathways towards more inclusive and effective conservation strategies that simultaneously enhance sustainable tourism outcomes.

Over decades, the concept of sustainable tourism has evolved from a niche interest to a global imperative, driven by growing awareness of environmental degradation and cultural homogenization. Central to this evolution is the recognition that successful conservation and tourism development must harmonize with local needs and aspirations. Community-led conservation efforts represent a paradigm shift in this context, emphasizing the active participation of residents in decision-making processes and management practices.

Community-led conservation efforts have emerged as a critical strategy in addressing environmental challenges and promoting sustainable tourism. These initiatives prioritize the engagement and empowerment of local communities, recognizing their integral role in the stewardship of natural resources. The increasing emphasis on community involvement in conservation projects stems from the growing understanding that local populations possess valuable ecological knowledge and have a vested interest in the sustainable management of their environment (Berkes, 2021).

The concept of community-led conservation is rooted in the principles of participatory governance and sustainable development. It advocates for the decentralization of conservation management, transferring authority and responsibility from central governments and external agencies to local communities. This approach is not only seen as more equitable but also more effective, as it aligns conservation goals with the socio-economic interests of local stakeholders (Ostrom, 2020). Furthermore, community-led conservation has been linked to enhanced biodiversity outcomes and improved resilience of ecosystems (Chazdon et al., 2020).

Sustainable tourism is intricately connected to community-led conservation. Sustainable tourism aims to minimize negative environmental impacts while generating economic benefits and promoting cultural heritage (Dodds & Butler, 2019). By integrating conservation efforts with tourism, local communities can create a symbiotic relationship where the preservation of natural and cultural resources enhances tourism experiences, and tourism revenues support conservation initiatives (Stone & Nyaupane, 2022). This dynamic underscores the importance of local perceptions and empowerment in the success of both conservation and tourism strategies.

Recent studies have highlighted the critical role of local perceptions in shaping the outcomes of community-led conservation projects. Perceptions of fairness, inclusivity, and benefit-sharing significantly influence community support and participation (Schreckenberg et al., 2020). Empowerment, defined as the process through which individuals and communities gain control over their lives and environment, is a fundamental component in fostering active participation and sustained commitment to conservation efforts (Friedman et al., 2021).

Empirical evidence suggests that when local communities perceive conservation projects as inclusive and beneficial, they are more likely to engage in and support these initiatives (Anderson et al., 2021). Conversely, perceptions of exclusion or inequity can lead to resistance and undermine conservation goals. Therefore, understanding and addressing local perceptions and empowerment dynamics is essential for the design and implementation of effective community-led conservation and sustainable tourism programs.

These efforts not only leverage traditional knowledge and practices but also empower communities to take ownership of their natural and cultural heritage. Such empowerment is crucial not only for effective conservation outcomes but also for fostering sustainable livelihoods and promoting social cohesion. Moreover, by aligning conservation goals with community interests and values, these initiatives have the potential to enhance the resilience of ecosystems and cultures alike, thereby ensuring long-term benefits for both residents and visitors.

However, the path to integrating local perceptions and empowerment into sustainable tourism practices is fraught with challenges. These include navigating power dynamics, ensuring equitable distribution of benefits, and addressing competing interests among stakeholders. By critically examining case studies and theoretical frameworks, this research aims to illuminate both the successes and obstacles encountered in community-led conservation efforts worldwide. Through this exploration, we seek to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how sustainable tourism can be realized as a collaborative endeavor—one that honors local knowledge, respects cultural diversity, and safeguards the natural environments upon which both communities and tourists depend.

According to the Johor National Parks Corporation (JNPC), Pulau Kukup National Park Wetlands stands out as one of the largest uninhabited mangrove islands globally. Established in 1997, its primary purpose is the conservation of 647 hectares of mangrove islands hosting a diverse range of mangrove-associated flora and fauna,

including species classified as rare or threatened. Recognized as a national park under the Johor State Parks Corporation Enactment 1989 since 27 March 1997, Pulau Kukup was additionally designated by the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (RAMSAR) in 2003 for its unique contribution to preserving the island's natural beauty.

Beyond its conservation efforts, Pulau Kukup National Park contributes to local communities surrounding the park. These communities benefit from tourism generated by the park, which supports local businesses such as guided tours, accommodations, and restaurants. The park also serves as an educational resource, offering opportunities for research and environmental education programs that engage both residents and visitors alike. The presence of boardwalks, viewing platforms, and informative signage further enhances the park's accessibility and educational value, providing a platform for visitors to appreciate and learn about the rich biodiversity present, including monkeys, wild boars, and mudskippers. Thus, Pulau Kukup National Park not only protects valuable ecosystems but also fosters sustainable tourism and community involvement in conservation efforts.

Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to examine the role of local perceptions and empowerment in the effectiveness of community-led conservation efforts in Pulau Kukup National Park, with a particular focus on the implications for sustainable tourism. This research aims to:

1. Analyze how local communities perceive and engage with conservation initiatives.

2. Investigate the impact of community empowerment on the success and sustainability of conservation projects in Pulau Kukup National Park

Through this research, the study seeks to provide empirical evidence and practical insights that can inform the design and implementation of more effective and equitable conservation and tourism policies.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

This study seeks to provide empirical evidence and practical insights that can inform the design and implementation of more effective and equitable conservation This study employs a quantitative approach, utilizing data collected through a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to the local community of Kampung Permas Besar, Pontian. Data collection was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS).

The population targeted in this research comprises the local community of Kampung Permas Besar, Pontian. Respondents were selected from among household or family leaders. The current population of Kampung Permas Besar is 378 residents, primarily engaged in agriculture, fishery, government, and commercial sectors. The population experiences fluctuations due to births and deaths and tourism policies.

In this study, non-probability sampling was employed as the study method due to its appropriateness and practicality compared to probability sampling (Royce & Bruce, 1999). The self-administered survey questionnaire was personally distributed and collected after respondents had completed it. This sampling technique is straightforward, with targeted respondents being readily accessible.

2. Research Tools

A questionnaire was utilized in this quantitative approach, incorporating various explanations adapted from previous related studies. Specifically, the study aims to determine residents' attitudes (Cooke et al., 1999), local community empowerment (Boley et al., 2016), and support for future tourism development (Lankford & Howard, 1994), based on established research. A six-point Likert scale will be used in the survey, where 1 indicates "disagree" and 6 indicates "strongly agree."

At this stage, the formulation of goals and objectives, identification of research problems, and determination of the research purpose were conducted. Given that the local community in Kampung Permas Besar predominantly comprises Malay citizens, the questionnaire was distributed in the Malay language. Table 1 below shows the variables and the number of items to be answered in the survey.

SECTION	VARIABLES	NO. OF ITEMS	SOURCE
A	Demographic	10	-
B	Residents' Attitude	16	(Cooke et al., 1999)
C	Local Community Empowerment	12	(Boley & Mc Gehee, 2014)
D	Personal Benefits from Ecotourism Development	10	(Boley & Mc Gehee, 2014)
E	Support for Future Ecotourism Development	5	(Boley & Mc Gehee, 2014)
	Total Question	55	-

3. Data Collection

3.1 Primary Data

Door-to-door distribution was chosen for the questionnaires due to its higher response rate compared to other methods (Andereck & Nickersen, 2009). The self-administered surveys were randomly given to villagers who were available and willing to participate. The questionnaire included five sections: residents' demographics, attitudes, empowerment, personal benefits, and support for future ecotourism development, along with open-ended questions. All responses were treated confidentially, and the data will be analyzed in the findings.

A self-administered questionnaire was selected because it allows respondents to complete it at their convenience, either individually or in groups. This method is advantageous in motivating respondents, as they can take their time to think about each question and choose a suitable moment to respond (Mangione, 1995). Additionally, the absence of an interviewer provides privacy, which encourages respondents to disclose illegal or socially undesirable behaviors or attitudes that they might be reluctant to reveal in a face-to-face interview (Tourangeau & Smith, 1996).

3.2 Preliminary Site Visit

A preliminary visit was conducted at Kampung Permas Besar a week before the data collection. This visit aimed to build rapport with the local community, become familiar with the study area and its issues, test the research instruments, identify respondents, and finalize the sampling method. Lessons learned from this visit were used to improve the research instruments and refine the approach towards the local community.

3.3 Establish Rapport and Site Familiarization

The preliminary visit aimed to establish rapport with the local community and familiarize the researcher with the study area, as it was the researcher's first visit. This visit provided valuable insights into the community's attitudes and empowerment regarding local ecotourism, facilitating a smoother questionnaire distribution process. Additionally, the researcher gathered important information about Kampung Permas Besar (KPB), Kukup Island National Park, local community activities, and their involvement in ecotourism at Kukup Island National Park. Familiarizing with the site helped the researcher understand the environment and dynamics of KPB, ensuring a more effective data collection process.

4. Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis is employed to outline the fundamental characteristics of the data in a study. This method includes presenting frequencies, percentages, and mean values to depict various aspects of the respondents. Specifically, it is utilized to describe demographic profiles, residents' attitudes, local community empowerment, and local community support for future ecotourism development.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

The development of tourism activities in Kampung Permas Besar (KPB) and facilitating tourist access has

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garnered substantial support from local residents. This endorsement underscores the potential of ecotourism to boost employment opportunities and socioeconomic status in Pontian. Despite a preference among many locals to maintain their current occupations as fishermen or business owners, there is recognition of the indirect benefits ecotourism brings, such as job opportunities in guiding and boating, which contribute to their overall economic well-being.

The local community takes great pride in their association with Pulau Kukup National Park (PKNP), cherishing the opportunity to showcase its unique mangrove ecosystem to visitors. While there is a slight hesitation about the extent of their influence in tourism decision-making, residents believe their input is valuable and can shape the future of tourism at PKNP. This involvement fosters community spirit and encourages broader participation in conservation efforts. Mangrove preservation activities in Kampung Permas Besar have strengthened community bonds and provided platforms for active participation in various ecotourism initiatives, such as tree planting and island clean-ups. Support from the Iskandar Regional Development Authority (IRDA) through language and vocational courses further emphasizes the government's commitment to local welfare and ecotourism promotion.

Local support for opening access to PKNP highlights the community's recognition of natural resources as key attractions. They advocate for educational programs within ecotourism development to raise awareness and appreciation of natural heritage, ensuring that economic benefits complement rather than replace traditional practices. The conservation of diverse species in PKNP is essential for sustainable tourism, which aims to minimize negative environmental impacts while supporting local livelihoods.

The empowerment of the local community in tourism development is critical. By incorporating their feedback and suggestions, the community acts as a protector of the mangrove forest, ensuring the preservation of its habitat and ecosystem. Psychological and social empowerment, fostered by pride in their unique environment and strengthened community bonds, enhances collaboration and tourism success. Political empowerment through access to decision-making processes further solidifies their role as key stakeholders.

In conclusion, the local community's support and active involvement are crucial for the success of ecotourism development in Pulau Kukup. Their engagement ensures that tourism development aligns with local needs, preserving cultural and environmental integrity while fostering a sustainable future for all stakeholders a resilient future for coastal communities' development.

2. Discussion

The research indicates a robust agreement among the local community regarding the development of tourism activities in Kampung Permas Besar (KPB). This consensus underscores the community's recognition of tourism as a vehicle for economic growth, particularly through the creation of job opportunities related to ecotourism. The willingness to facilitate tourist access and actively engage in ecotourism planning highlights a forward-thinking approach that aligns with sustainable development goals.

Interestingly, while there is strong support for tourism development, most respondents expressed reluctance towards generating additional income through tourism activities in Pulau Kukup National Park (PKNP). This dichotomy reflects a contentment with their current livelihoods as fishermen and business owners, yet an acknowledgment of the benefits ecotourism brings in terms of supplementary income and improved socioeconomic status. The roles of tour guides and boat drivers, often embraced by locals, illustrate how ecotourism can enhance economic well-being without displacing traditional occupations. Residents of KPB and PKNP take immense pride in their association with the national park, feeling honored by visitors' appreciation of their unique homeland. This pride is not merely sentimental; it drives a desire to represent their community and share the distinctive features of PKNP, which is renowned as one of the world's largest uninhabited mangrove islands. Such cultural pride fosters a sense of responsibility towards conservation and sustainable tourism practices.

Despite the pride and enthusiasm for ecotourism, respondents slightly agree on their right to voice opinions and participate in tourism-related decision-making. However, they believe their input is influential, shaping the future of tourism in PKNP. This sense of community spirit and the encouragement to engage in ecotourism activities are crucial for the long-term success of sustainable tourism initiatives. The active involvement in mangrove preservation and other environmental initiatives strengthens community bonds and highlights the collective effort towards sustainable development.

The support from the Iskandar Regional Development Authority (IRDA) in providing language and vocational courses emphasizes the government's commitment to enhancing local well-being and promoting ecotourism. These educational opportunities, ranging from language skills in Mandarin and Japanese to vocational training in food

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preparation and boat repair, equip the community with the necessary skills to thrive in a tourism-driven economy.

The community's overwhelming support for opening access to PKNP for tourism activities is driven by an understanding that natural resources are key attractions. They advocate for educational programs within ecotourism development to raise awareness and appreciation of natural heritage. This approach aims to preserve cultural traditions and ensure that economic benefits from tourism complement rather than replace traditional practices.

Local community empowerment is a recurring theme in the research, highlighting its importance in effective tourism development. Psychological empowerment, fostered by pride and self-esteem, social empowerment through community collaboration, and political empowerment via access to decision-making processes, are all essential components. These forms of empowerment ensure that the community's role as key stakeholders is recognized, enhancing the overall ecotourism experience and contributing to sustainable tourism development.

The community's proactive stance, as emphasized by local champion like Baharudin Bin Yusuf (Tok Din), showcases the importance of continuous planning and development efforts to sustain and attract tourist interest. The active participation in supporting new infrastructure and engaging in programs designed to enhance the ecotourism experience is a testament to their commitment to sustainable development.

In a nutshell, the local community's support and active involvement are pivotal for the success of ecotourism development in Pulau Kukup. Their engagement, driven by government promotion and continuous planning efforts, ensures that tourism development aligns with local needs, preserving cultural and environmental integrity. This collaborative approach fosters a sustainable tourism environment that benefits both the community and visitors, highlighting the importance of local empowerment and active participation in shaping the future of ecotourism development.

Research recommendations

1. **Economic Impact Analysis**: Conduct a comprehensive economic impact analysis to quantify the benefits of ecotourism on local communities. This research can assess both direct and indirect economic contributions, such as increased employment opportunities, income generation from tourism activities, and the economic ripple effects on local businesses.

2. **Sustainable Tourism Practices**: Investigate the best practices in sustainable tourism that can be applied to Pulau Kukup National Park (PKNP) and Kampung Permas Besar (KPB). This research should focus on minimizing environmental impact, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting long-term sustainability in tourism development.

3. **Community Empowerment Strategies**: Explore effective strategies for empowering local communities in tourism planning and management. This can include educational programs, skill development initiatives, and mechanisms for greater political participation. Evaluating the success of existing programs supported by the Iskandar Regional Development Authority (IRDA) can provide valuable insights.

4. **Longitudinal Studies on Social and Psychological Impacts**: Conduct longitudinal studies to understand the social and psychological impacts of tourism development on local communities. This research can track changes in community cohesion, residents' sense of pride, and overall well-being over time.

5. **Cultural Preservation and Tourism Integration**: Examine how cultural traditions can be preserved and integrated into the tourism experience. Research should focus on developing tourism products that celebrate local heritage and provide educational value to tourists, ensuring that economic benefits complement rather than replace traditional practices.

6. **Tourism Carrying Capacity and Environmental Conservation**: Study the carrying capacity of PKNP to determine the optimal number of tourists that can be accommodated without degrading the natural environment. This research should inform policies to balance tourism growth with the conservation of mangrove ecosystems and biodiversity.

7. **Role of Government and Policy Development**: Analyse the role of government policies in supporting sustainable tourism development. This can include evaluating the effectiveness of current policies, identifying gaps, and proposing new policy frameworks that promote community involvement and environmental conservation.

8. **Innovative Ecotourism Models**: Investigate innovative ecotourism models from other regions that could be adapted for PKNP and KPB. Comparative studies can provide insights into successful approaches and help in designing customized ecotourism strategies that align with local needs and contexts.

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By addressing these areas, future research can contribute to the sustainable development of ecotourism in Pulau Kukup and Kampung Permas Besar, ensuring that both environmental conservation and socio-economic benefits are achieved. Development are met, thereby securing a resilient future for coastal communities' development.

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THE IMPACT OF SMART TOURISM SERVICE ECOSYSTEM ON TOURISTS' REVISIT INTENTION: THE CASE OF HO CHI MINH CITY, VIET NAM

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Extended abstract

The smart tourism service ecosystem integrates tourism services between human factors and the technological environment to enhance the tourism experience. The study was conducted based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model framework to consider different aspects, such as social, cultural, physical, and environmental stimuli that affect simultaneously memorable tourist experiences as internal reactions and satisfaction, intention to visit again as the final reaction. A quantitative study using PLS-SEM techniques to test and predict the model by surveying 407 tourists who have visited HCMC and used the "Vibrant HoChiMinh" application between March-May 2024 ato validate this framework. These findings provide insight into the relationship between smart tourism service ecosystems, memorable tourist experiences, satisfaction, and revisit intention. Based on the findings, we discuss theoretical and managerial implications and suggest directions for future research.

Keywords: *Smart tourism service ecosystem; Memorable experience; Satisfaction; Intention to revisit; Ho Chi Minh city, Viet Nam*

Introduction

Tourism is an industry with a high proportion of services, aiming to create travel experiences for tourists. A tourist destination can provide a difference in tourism products and services (Buhalis, 2000). Tourism services at a destination require the participation of many stakeholders who exchange resources and interact to co-create value for tourists so it can be conceptualized as a service ecosystem (VanRiel et al., 2019). The tourism service ecosystem can be viewed as a set of interdependent entities based on the geographic scope of the destination, which can be local, regional, or national. On the other hand, the tourism destination itself often includes many stakeholders, such as tourists, and economic stakeholders (manufacturers, distributors, consumers, government agencies...) Management agencies have mechanisms to interact with each other (Polese et al., 2018).

Gao et al. (2022) proposed a conceptual framework of service design for a destination's service ecosystem by integrating the dynamic thinking of social ecosystems and the collective thinking of design service. The tourism service system at a destination has had many research aspects. From a tourism marketing and management perspective, Binter et al. (2016), and Chi et al. (2020) emphasize service delivery, branding, and destination image; tourism service quality (Chin & Lo, 2017; Park et al., 2011); tourist satisfaction (Jensen et al., 2017; Teshome & Demissie, 2018) and tourist loyalty (Akroush et al., 2016). Another stream of research emphasizes ecosystems often associated with technological aspects, discussing how to use technology (especially ICT) to achieve value co-creation between actors in tourism services to introduce the concept of smart service ecosystems (Buhalis, 2019; Polese et al., 2018; Chuang, 2023). From a technical approach, Feng et al. (2014) studied the mechanism of smart tourism services based on cognitive context. In addition, the results show that the specific design in the service to the entity's characteristics, also considers using characteristics and the user's contextual information, helping the design better match the real needs of the user's actions. This service mechanism better meets tourism service needs than traditional tourism services.

From a service engineering vendor context, Zimmermann et al (2016) investigate bottom-up continuous integration of micro-granular architectures for a large variety of dynamically evolving systems and services, like Microservices and Internet of Things.

From the tourist perspective, there has been no research on consumers' choice to revisit one destination relating to STS, specifically the implementation of certain service technologies (VanRiel et al., 2019; Polese et al., 2018; Gao et al., 2020). Chuang (2023) has only proposed and tested the STS measurement scale and outlined directions for further research on the impacts on tourist behavior. Based on the above analysis, this study considers the Ho Chi Minh City tourist destination as the research context with specific STSs based on the application on mobile devices named Vribant Ho Chi Minh to test. The study uses the service-dominant logic (SDL) approach and the SOR theory as the background theory to explore the relationship between STS, memorable tourism experience, and intention to revisit. The purposes of this study are: (1) to examine the relationship between the STS ecosystem and memorable tourism experience; (2) to investigate the relationship between MTE and tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit. This study contributes significantly to several divergent insights in the existing literature on the role of the smart tourism services ecosystem, memorable tourism experience, and tourists' intention to revisit.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

Smart Tourism Service Ecosystem

STS raises from "smart systems" initiatives that combine smart services with specific applications focusing on the tourism sector or destinations (Xiang et al., 2021). STS system's goal is to integrate convenience with precision through an easily accessible platform in the context of technological advancement (Gretzel et al., 2015b). Therefore, STS platforms such as smart tourism applications or websites allow tourists to integrate service offerings in a concurrent smart environment, where user experience is improved their experiences in real life (Choe and Fesenmaier, 2017). It's interesting how such a platform can bring together tourism-oriented services and modern technology to offer tourists valuable information and assist them in making informed decisions about rentals, hotel bookings, and restaurant choices. Li et al. (2017) have emphasized the importance of utilizing technology to enhance the overall travel experience for tourists....

The smart tourism service system emphasizes the connection of a series of online booking services and incentive services between sectors at a destination such as attractions (Wang et al., 2016), transportation (Gonzalez et al., 2020), accommodation (Stankova et al., 2019), catering and shopping (Flavián et al., 2020). In developing interactive services that connect local organizations with travelers for their access to speedy service delivery, the STS platform must meet the personalized needs of travelers with coordination between representatives of tourism management agencies and service providers (Gretzel et al., 2015). Therefore, tourists can experience new ways of finding information and enjoying the services available to them, and may even have the opportunity to demonstrate their value co-creation behaviors through the interactive process. Collaborate with other stakeholders (companies, governments, and intermediaries) in the smart tourism ecosystem. In this process, tourists actively engage with service providers and collaborate to co-create engagement and share their own experiences that directly lead to innovation (Gretzel et al., 2015). Technology-enabled services have become important in tourism research with an emphasis on the process and behavior of co-creating tourism value (Wang et al., 2017) towards sustainability.

In the smart tourism ecosystem, companies provide smart services by applying open information systems and technology platforms that enable companies to manage their business model dynamic. Therefore, when companies want to provide innovative services they must consider using intangible resources such as data, technology, and infrastructure in the tourist environment (Barile et al., 2017) to optimize tourists' travel experiences

Chuang (2023) proposes that the core service elements of a STSE include smart attraction, smart transportation, smart accommodation, smart diet, smart purchase, and smart payment (see Fig. 1). These components can serve as main dimensions for measuring the effectiveness of a STSE. Specifically, the smart attraction service facilitates instant tourist experiences and decision support by connecting attractions with stakeholders through dynamic platforms with information-rich communication flows (Jovicic, 2019; Wang et al., 2016). The smart transportation service offers location-based information, navigation, public transport quality, and parking through the integration of transportation systems and technology (Bhaskar Naik et al., 2019; Gonzalez et al., 2020). The smart accommodation service provides tourists with access to information and communication technologies (ICT)-integrated convenient booking services and accommodation information. It also suggests appropriate accommodation based on tourists' demands (Buhalis & Leung, 2018; Stankov et al., 2019). The smart diet service grants tourists access to ICT-used dining information and solutions, along with convenient ordering services offering suitable and healthier meals (Okumus et al., 2018; Sarcona et al., 2017; Vo-Thanh et al., 2022). The smart purchase service incorporates ICT with e-commerce environments to create m-commerce platforms, enabling tourists to access product information and

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make purchases anytime and anywhere (Flavián et al., 2020). Finally, the smart payment service grants tourists access to digital payment systems and mobile applications to enable secure and efficient transactions for tourism-related expenses, enhancing convenience for tourists (Chuang, 2023).

Fig. 1. **Smart Tourism Service Ecosystem**

(Source: Adopted from Chuang, 2023)

Service-dominant logic-SDL

Service-dominant logic is the foundation of service science that represents a practical application of the main
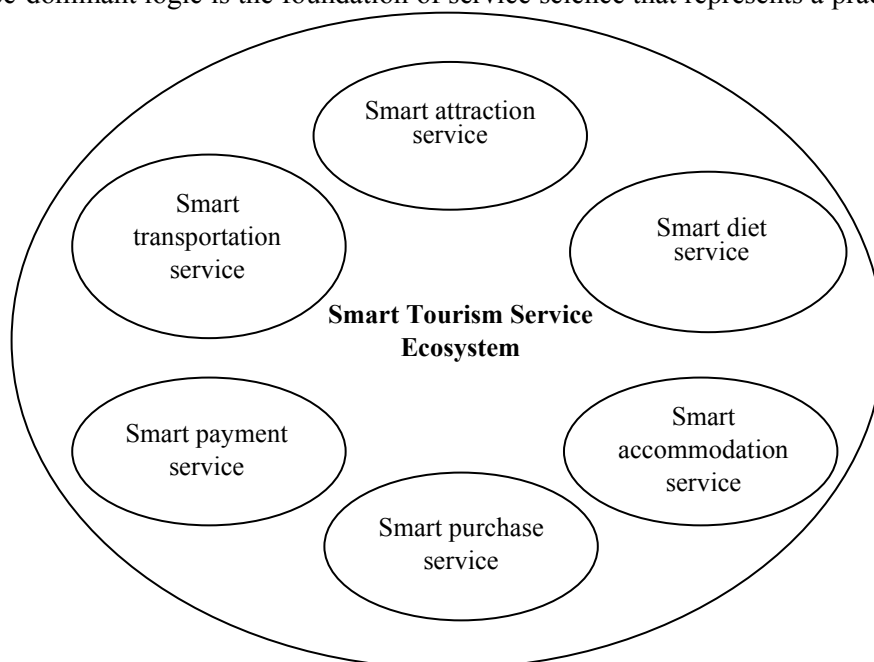
assumptions of Vargo & Lusch (2004) to explore appropriate methods and processes for discovery and implementation management implications of the new service system. Therefore, S-D logic provides the theoretical basis for establishing a perspective and disseminating new concepts and language to give birth to a new framework to explain how services are delivered in exchange as a system (Polese et al., 2018).

The core of S-D logic are three perspectives adopting the service perspective on services: (1) services and the relationship between goods and services; (2) customer-supplier relationship; (3) value. According to this perspective, service exchange is the ability of users to use an application to create mutual benefits for all parties involved (Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

With many information and communication technology applications relying on the popularity of Web 2.0 and social media, tourists are always connected, which opens up new possibilities for them to proactively create an experience, choose, and create value in each step of consuming tourism products and services (Neuhofer et al., 2014, Wang et al., 2016). When applying SDL to the tourism field, based on the foundation of SDL components such as cloud services, Internet of Things, and user Internet service systems, Wang et al., (2016) proposed that SDL used to determine the future direction of smart tourism destinations by realizing co-creation experiences, and increasing perceived value for tourists through the STS ecosystem. This platform also includes providing services, consuming tourism products to create experiences for oneself (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Wang et al., 2016).

Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory

The SOR theoretical framework originates from the field of environmental psychology. It suggests that the stimuli can influence and alter the internal states or organism (Organism) of the individual. In turn, these internal states trigger an approach or avoidance response (Response) from individuals (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). The model's utility in assessing tourist responses facilitates a comprehensive understanding of tourists' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences toward external stimuli as well as their subsequent behaviors (Manthiou et al., 2017). Therefore, this study takes the SOR model as a starting point to attempt to explain the physical and emotional responses that occur due to interactions between the exposure system and different stimuli, as well as the results of

these reactions to the tourist experience.
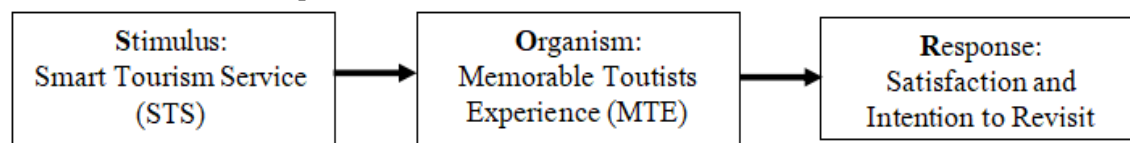
Figure 2. **SOR Framework**

(Source: Research' Suggest)

The SOR model includes various essential aspects such as attitudes, emotions, cognitions/emotions, judgments, beliefs, motivations, and thoughts to explain responses about the quality of service provided and enhance the tourist experience at the destination. User feedback, therefore, becomes invaluable as it allows adjustments to be made to the apps, ensuring they are more adapted to the specific needs of tourists visiting STD.

Stimulus are environmental cues that regulate individuals' psychological states (Jung et al., 2021), influence their cognition, and serve as a starting point for decision-making (Koo et al., 2010). These attributes are the starting point for tourist behavior to enhance their awareness and provoke them to act consciously or unconsciously (Koo et al., 2010). In the context of tourism, social stimuli refer to the interactions between individuals and the society around them; attributes that brought into the minds of tourists include social stimuli, such as attractive attractions (Wang et al., 2016), smart mobility (Gonzalez et al., 2020), tourist accommodation (Stankova et al., 2019), cuisine and shopping (Flavián et al., 2020). These interactions influence how tourists behave and perceive themselves and others (Kucukergin and Uygur, 2019; Kumar et al., (2021a); Kumar et al., (2021b); Packer and Ballantyne, (2016)). When tourists receive positive social stimuli related to a particular destination, they will perceive it as valuable and trustworthy (Gharaibeh et al., 2018). It may enhance their travel experience (Ronaghi and Ronaghi, 2022).

Environmental stimuli include purely features found in the area surrounding the attraction, such as landscape, air conditions, sightseeing (Wang et al., 2020), or convenience in moving from this attraction to the hotel, resort, catering, or shopping supported through smart services. Therefore, these stimuli can positively/negatively impact tourist behavior, bridge cultural differences, and facilitate understanding of the host culture and its consequences positively impacting the tourist experience.

Finally, Pizam and Tasci. (2019); Radic et al. (2021); Zhang and Xu. (2019) discuss that cultural stimulation includes co-creation activities when being served, interacting with staff at accommodation facilities, and eating at restaurants will be shared on social media. These stimuli can greatly influence the perceived attractiveness of a tourist destination. STS system gives visitors unique cultural experiences, such as visiting historical sites, participating in cultural festivals, or enjoying local dishes on AR, VR, and video platforms 3D/360^0. By understanding and capitalizing on unique cultural stimuli, tourism service providers can tailor their offerings to appeal to specific target audiences and enhance customer-perceived value.

Memorable Experience (ME), Satisfaction, and Intention to Revisit

Building on the views of Pine and Gilmore (1998), many service organizations emphasized delivering enjoyable experiences to their customers (Voss et al., (2008). This perspective holds that services in the tourism industry are always experiential, and tourists actively construct their on-site experiences through interaction with STS at the destination. Experiences are stored in each individual's memory, and allows them to remember and reflect on their experiences again. For this reason, ME research has emerged and is becoming increasingly important.

Kim et al. (2012) suggest that ME is constructed selectively from travel experiences based on the individual's evaluation of the experiences. Accordingly, the authors define ME as travel experiences that are positively remembered and recalled about one/several travel services provided to customers. The conceptual model and measurement scale for each component of ME were proposed and discussed by Kim et al. (2012) including hedonism, pleasure, novelty, meaning, and local culture. The current study uses the Kim et al. (2012) model to examine the direct and indirect effects of ME. There are several reasons for this approach. First, the components of different MEs are quite similar. Second, Kim et al. (2012) scale is the first and most frequently cited. Third, several empirical studies have strongly validated and supported this scale.

A STSE can provide tourists with access to plenty of information and various tourism activities, immersing them in the destination. By implementing the STSE, destination management organizations are attempting to enhance tourists' experience and boost destination competitiveness. As tourists often seek unique and memorable experiences,

destinations should aim to offer such experiences to increase tourists' satisfaction (Torabi et al., 2022). Previous studies have shown that tourists' positive and memorable experiences during the visits enhance their satisfaction (Jeong & Shin, 2020; Torabi et al., 2022; Yoo et al., 2017). Moreover, in the volunteer tourism context, memorable experience has been found to exert a positive effect on tourists' behavioral intentions such as intention to revisit and intention to recommend to other people the destination (Sthapit, Bjork, et al., 2024).

Satisfaction refers to a tourist's positive assessment of their travel experience (Jiang et al., 2018), which directly affects the intention to revisit a destination (Torabi et al., 2022; Vo-Thanh et al., 2018). Intention to revisit refers to tourists' plan to visit the same site or destination again and is a form of post-consumption behavior (Cole & Scott, 2004; Vo-Thanh et al., 2018). Several studies indicate that satisfaction mediates the relationship between memorable experience and intention to revisit a particular destination (Chen & Rahman, 2018; Torabi et al., 2022).

Drawing on the SOR theory, we propose that various dimensions of a STSE, as stimuli (S), enable travelers to gain memorable experiences (O) during their visits, enhancing their satisfaction (O), and thereby increasing their intention to revisit (R). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₁: Smart accommodation service (H₁ₐ), smart attraction service (H₁ᵦ), smart transportation service (H₁ᵧ), smart diet service (H₁ₐ), smart purchase service (H₁ₑ),and smart payment service (H₁f) positively influence tourists' memorable experience.

H₂: Memorable experience positively influences satisfaction.

H₃: Memorable experience positively influences intention to revisit.

H₄: Satisfaction positively influences intention to revisit.
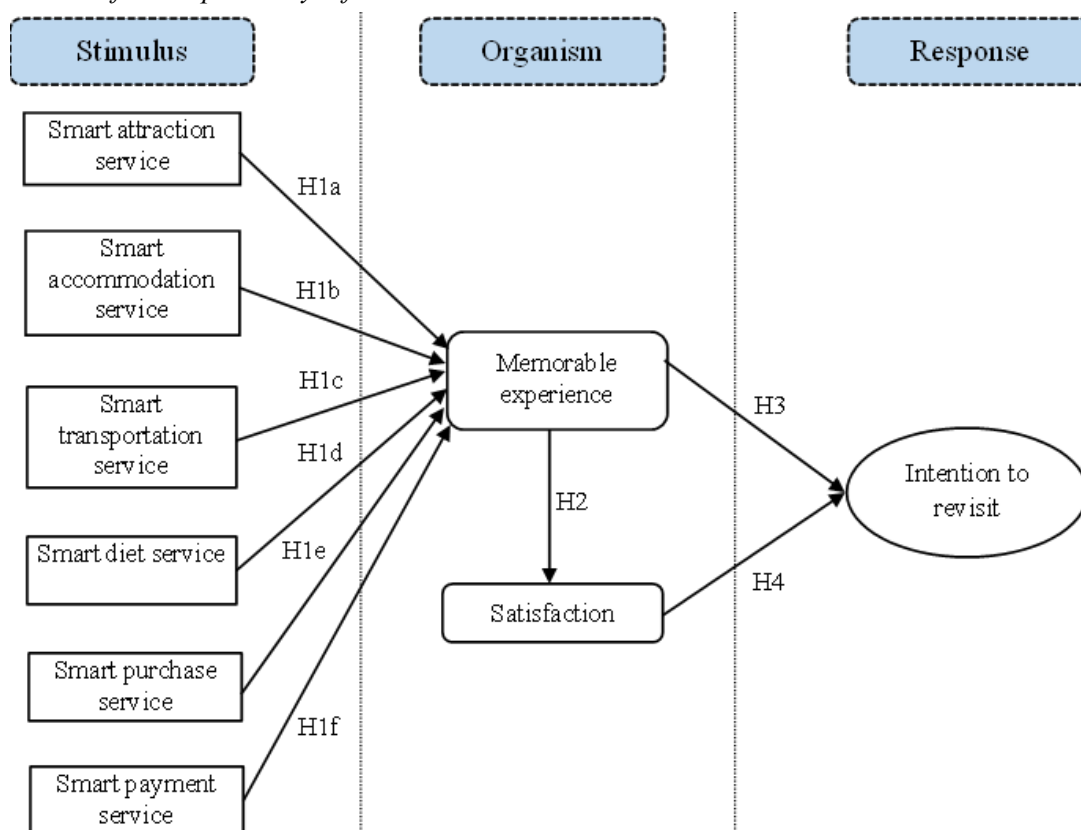
Fig. 2. **Research model**

(Source: The authors)

Methodology

Study Site

Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) is a prominent metropolis for finance, banking, trade, commerce, and tourism in Vietnam and the ASEAN region. Leveraging advancements in information and communication technologies (ICTs)

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such as mobile applications (Apps), virtual reality (VR), artificial intelligence (AI), and 3D/360-degree mapping, HCMC is actively curating a "smart tourism services" ecosystem. The "Virbant HCM" App and VR360 map (https://map3d.visithcmc.vn/) serves as a cornerstone, offering a comprehensive digital platform for tourists. It integrates geospatial information systems (GIS) to provide up-to-date details on attractions, lodging options, and itinerary planning, empowering tourists with personalized experiences. The App extends its functionality beyond traditional tourism services by incorporating points-of-interest (POIs) for shopping venues, entertainment facilities, transportation options, and upcoming events, fostering a holistic travel experience. Furthermore, HCMC is pioneering the utilization of VR and AI to enhance tourist attraction management and visitor engagement. VR experiences allow for immersive pre-travel exploration, while AI-powered chatbots can provide real-time information and recommendations. 3D/360-degree mapping technologies further enrich the tourist experience by offering virtual tours and facilitating spatial navigation. This focus on technological integration extends beyond the tourism sector. The presence of technology-enabled hotels, such as Wink Hotel. Besides, HCMC is pioneering the application of digital transformation in museum operations to enhance visitor experiences and effectively conserve cultural heritage, such as: National Museum of History, War Remnants Museum, Southern Women's Museum, Ao Dai Museum,... 366 HCMC tourism resources have been updated to the Google Earth and Google Map platforms. The remaining products are posted on e-commerce transactions (shopee, traveloka) ... Aiming to become a smart tourist city, Ho Chi Minh City is building a booth to look up tourist information and take field virtual trip. In the coming time, HCMC will develop a chatbot system to support tourism information; Upgrade the QR code application system in information, introduce RFID technology parameters; Developing the project to build the IOC Smart Tourism Operating Center. At the same time, the Department of Tourism will distribute specialized agencies, People's Committees of 21 districts and Thu Duc City to update the location, information, and images of locations serving and supporting tourists such as the police, medical stations, mini supermarkets, community toilets on the Google Maps platform; Update data about culture and art of famous places on the Google Art & Culture platform. In conclusion, HCMC stands as a compelling example of leveraging technological advancements to create a smart tourism services ecosystem. By integrating a multitude of ICT solutions, HCMC is well on its way to establishing itself as a premier smart tourism destination in Southeast Asia.

Sampling and Data Collection

The target population comprises tourists who have visited HCMC and used the "Vibrant Ho Chi Minh" application between March-May 2024. Convenience sampling was then implemented within designated locations to collect data from a sample size of 450 tourists. These locations encompassed Wink Hotel, Independence Palace, Tan Son Nhat international Airport, Dimond Palace, National Museum of History, War Remnants Museum, Southern Women's Museum, Ao Dai Museum.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections and built in English before being translated into Vietnamese. Back-translation was performed to ensure the validity of the questions (Moswete & Darley, 2012). Survey questions were crafted to be clear, simple, and specific to minimize item ambiguity. To ensure data quality, attention check questions were included in the survey, and respondents who did not meet the minimum completion threshold were excluded. A total of 407 usable responses were obtained (39,1% women; respondents ranged in age from 18 to over 60 years old).

The scales used are similar to those of study 1. In there, the STSE scales were adapted from Chuang (2023), satisfaction scale was adapted from Nieves-Pavón et al. (2023), intention to revisit was adapted from Vo-Thanh et al. (2018), worth of mouth scales was adapted from Torabi et al. (2023). All these measurement scales were validated in previous studies and assessed using a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Descriptive analysis was conducted using SPSS 28. CFA and PLS-SEM using SmartPLS 4 were performed to assess the measurement and structural models (Hair et al., 2019).

Results and Discussion

Measurement model

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to identify potential patterns among items. Following Hair et al. (2022), we removed items with low loading and cross-loading (< 0.6) when the Cronbach's alphas of corresponding constructs increased, resulting in only 41 items left. As shown in Table 1, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) values of all constructs were greater than 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal reliability of the items in this study. Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.50 to 0.75,

exceeding the threshold value of 0.5. Moreover, the outer loadings ranged from 0.68 to 0.89, all statistically significant at the p = 0.001 level, supporting construct convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the square root of the AVE for each construct with the inter-construct correlations.

Table 1. **Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, AVE**

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Accommodation	0.76	0.79	0.70
Attraction	0.80	0.80	0.50
Diet	0.92	0.92	0.72
Memorable experience	0.80	0.81	0.63
Payment	0.84	0.85	0.67
Purchase	0.90	0.90	0.63
Intention to revisit	0.84	0.84	0.75
Satisfaction	0.78	0.79	0.59
Transportation	0.87	0.88	0.66

(Source: The authors)

As shown in Table 2, all the diagonal values (the square roots of AVEs) exceeded the inter-construct correlations, satisfying the criterion for discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2. **Fornell-Larcker Criteria**

	Acc	Att	Diet	ME	Pay	Pur	IR	S	T
Acc	**0.836**								
Att	0.507	**0.706**							
Diet	0.444	0.351	**0.846**						
ME	0.352	0.538	0.389	**0.794**					
Pay	0.422	0.562	0.418	0.515	**0.821**				
Pur	0.413	0.737	0.277	0.508	0.511	**0.794**			
IR	0.264	0.368	0.327	0.520	0.384	0.408	**0.868**		
S	0.301	0.538	0.270	0.558	0.422	0.565	0.615	**0.768**	
T	0.421	0.534	0.424	0.469	0.932	0.512	0.368	0.396	**0.815**

Note: Acc (Accommodation); Att (Attraction); Pay (Payment); Pur (Purchase); S (Satisfaction); IR (Intention to Revisit); ME (Memorable Experience).

(Source: The authors)

Structural model

Results of hypotheses testing

To test hypotheses, we assessed the path coefficients (β) and their levels of significance performing a bootstrapping with resampling (5,000 resamples). Results of the hypotheses testing are summarized in Table 3. Regarding the role of STSE, the test was significant for attraction service ($\beta_{Att-MT} = 0.205$, $p < 0.05$); diet service ($\beta_{Diet-MT} = 0.175$, $p < 0.05$); purchase service ($\beta_{pur-MT} = 0.202$, $p < 0.05$) and smart payment service ($\beta_{PAY-ME} = 0.408$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H_{1b}, H_{1d}, H_{1e} and H_{1f}. Memorable experience (ME) was found to be significantly related to revisit intention ($\beta_{ME-RI} = 0.257$, $p < 0.05$), confirming H_2. Memorable experience (ME) was found to be significantly related to satisfaction ($\beta_{ME-S} = 0.558$, $p < 0.05$), confirming H_3. Memorable experience (ME) was found to be significantly related to WOM ($\beta_{ME-WOM} = 0.232$, $p < 0.05$), confirming $H4$. In addition, satisfaction (S) was related to intention to revisit (IR) ($\beta_{S-IR} = 0.472$, $p < 0.05$), validating H_5. Finally, satisfaction (S) was related to intention to WOM ($\beta_{S-WOM} = 0.628$, $p < 0.05$), validating H_6.

However, significant relationships were not observed between smart accommodation service, smart transportation service and memorable experience (H_{1a}: β_{Acc-ME} = -0.003, H_{1a}: β_{T-ME} = -0,197. These hypotheses are not supported.

Table 3. Hypotheses Testing Results

H#	Path	Coefficient	T values	P values	Result
H_{1a}	Accommodation -> ME	-0,003	0.048	0.962	Not supported
H_{1b}	Attraction -> ME	0,205	2.310	0.021	**Supported**
H_{1c}	Transportation -> ME	-0,197	1,890	0,059	Not supported
H_{1d}	Diet -> ME	0,175	3.103	0,002	**Supported**
H_{1e}	Purchase -> ME	0,202	2,478	0,013	**Supported**
H_{1f}	Payment -> ME	0,408	4,776	0,000	**Supported**
H_2	ME -> RI	0,257	3,713	0,000	**Supported**
H_3	ME -> S	0,558	13,129	0,000	**Supported**
H_4	S -> RI	0,472	7,616	0,000	**Supported**

(Source: The authors)

Robustness of the Model

This study used R^2 and Q^2 to consider the structural model's explanatory power and predictive relevance respectively (Hair et al., 2022). R^2 is the variance in the endogenous latent variables (dependent variables) explained by the exogenous latent variables (independent variables) in the structural model. The R^2 value of intention to revisit was 0.424, meaning that 42.4% of the variance in intention to revisit and was explained by tourists' satisfaction. Besides, the R^2 value of intention to revisit was 0.610, meaning that 61% of the variance in intention to revisit and was explained by tourists' satisfaction. Finally, according to Hair et al. (2019), a Q^2 value greater than 0.00 indicates that the research model predicts a particular dependency structure. As shown in Table 4, the Q^2 values of all constructs were greater than 0.00, indicating that the structural model has predictive relevance.

Table 4. **Q^2 values**

	SSO	SSE	Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)
Accommodation	1221	746.194	0.389
Attraction	2442	1718.236	0.296
Diet	2442	984.808	0.597
Memorable experience	1628	1003.139	0.384
Payment	1628	888.309	0.454
Purchase	2849	1412.837	0.504
Intention to revisit	1221	628.506	0.485
Satisfaction	1628	1120.571	0.312
Transportation	2035	1035.257	0.491
WOM	1221	741.070	0.393

(Source: The authors)

Discussion

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of attraction, diet, payment, and purchase (i.e., allowing travelers to discover, use, and share attraction, diet, payment, and purchase) and create memorable experiences for travelers, enhancing their satisfaction and thereby increasing their intent. to review. This study confirms the findings of previous studies on the role of satisfaction in forming revisit intention (Jeong & Shin, 2020; Torabi et al., 2022).

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In the HCMC destination context, the remaining STSE factors (transportation services, smart accommodation services) do not have a significant impact on memorable experiences, suggesting that the impact of these factors may vary depending on the context.

Implications and Conclusions

Theoretical Implications

This study has several implications for theory in the following ways. First, our study contributes to understanding of the STS ecosystem by identifying influencing factors based on Chuang's (2023) conceptual framework and Kim et al. (2018). More specifically, this study selected six factors from Chuang (2023).

Second, to the best of our knowledge, this study is among the first studies that provide empirical evidence to support the notion that the STS ecosystem and its quality directly influence the intention to revisit. Extant studies either provided some conceptual arguments on smart tourism service mechanisms based on context awareness (Feng et al. 2014) or Service design for the destination tourism service ecosystem (Gao et al. 2022). The measurement criteria in the STS factors ensure reliability and validity for continued use in subsequent research. Based on our research findings, we claim that our research model has the potential to be applicable in terms of the role of STS ecosystem users' memorable tourism experience formation in the context of other smart travel for future research.

Finally, this study contributes to the literature regarding the STS ecosystem formation process. This is an interesting subject in the tourism research field. However, if we look at the literature on STS formation in the context of smart tourism services, most of the extant studies have confined themselves to conceptual studies without any empirical validation. Moreover, empirical studies have focused only on the research context from Western cases. Our study fills this research gap by assessing Vietnamese users' STS ecosystem formation in Ho Chi Minh City.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations and provides some directions for future research. First, this study considers the effect of tourists' payment, diet, attractions, and accommodation experience when using STS, but it is not significant. For example, multiple experiences of the payment or catering on sites or accommodations may differently influence tourists' perceptions compared to their first visit to the site because it enables travelers to feel more comfortable with surrounding areas. Therefore, for future research, it is required to include users' experience of visiting a different destination with this proposed research model.

Second, this study surveyed domestic tourists and investigated STS in HCM City in Vietnam. Therefore, it may be problematic to generalize the proposed model to other regions. Although our findings can provide tourism suppliers with insights into the role of the STS ecosystem, to increase the validity of the research model, it is recommended that future research should investigate others from various countries.

Finally, as it is known, conducting an online survey has some limitations in terms of the representativeness of our samples. Although the method is efficient and convenient for data collection, sample composition may be limited to domestic tourists. Therefore, a future study is suggested to investigate foreign tourists, both online and offline surveys including a field survey at the travel site to strengthen the generalizability of the research model.

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THE IMPACT OF AIR ASIA ON SRI LANKA'S TOURISM INDUSTRY: OPPORTUNITIES AND REALITIES

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This study examines the potential benefits of Air Asia's reentry into Sri Lanka's aviation market and its impact on the tourism sector. With 11 weekly flights to various Asian, Australian, Chinese, and Japanese destinations, Air Asia's low-cost options are attracting millennial tourists seeking affordable, enriching experiences, reshaping Sri Lanka's tourism landscape. The primary goal is to explore opportunities presented by low-cost airlines and assess their long-term viability using theoretical frameworks like Tourism Destination Theory, Theory of Planned Behaviour, Diffusion of Innovation Theory, and Expectancy-Value Theory. These frameworks help analyze the competitiveness of Sri Lanka's tourism sector and the factors influencing traveler choices. A sample of 56 Air Asia passengers arriving at five Sri Lankan locations (Ella, Galle, Habarana, Kandy, and Yala) reveals that affordable pricing and excellent service are key determinants for choosing Air Asia. The airline's extensive network and accessibility significantly influence traveler decisions, offering unique opportunities to explore Sri Lanka. Millennials, in particular, share their experiences via social media, promoting low-cost travel options. Despite the positive impact, the study notes a lack of other low-cost airlines in Colombo compared to other South Asian destinations. Travelers suggest the entry of more low-cost carriers to enhance connectivity and pricing options. Recommendations include developing a low-cost national carrier and expanding Fits Air's international connections. Overall, Air Asia's return is transforming Sri Lanka's travel and tourism industries, but further expansion of low-cost carriers could enhance its appeal as a vacation destination.

Keywords: Air Asia, Sri Lanka tourism, Low-cost airlines, Traveler preferences Tourism impact

Introduction

The global aviation landscape has witnessed a paradigm shift with the re-entry of Air Asia into the Sri Lankan market, ushering in a new era of opportunities and challenges for the nation's burgeoning tourism industry. This study delves into the multifaceted impact of Air Asia on Sri Lanka's tourism sector, exploring the potential advantages and the underlying realities that have unfolded since the resumption of its operations after the temporary suspension caused by the global pandemic.

Background of Air Asia's Entry into Sri Lanka

Air Asia, a prominent player in the airline industry, has been a crucial link connecting Asia to Sri Lanka for many years. The airline has played a pivotal role in transforming the travel landscape by offering affordable and efficient connectivity between Sri Lanka and various destinations, including Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. Presently, Air Asia operates 11 weekly flights, providing a feasible and cost-effective travel option for those seeking direct connections to destinations like Thailand and Singapore. This strategic move not only enhances accessibility but also opens up new horizons for travelers seeking budget-friendly alternatives.

Importance of Low-Cost Airlines in Transforming Tourism

Low-cost airlines, epitomized by Air Asia's presence in Sri Lanka, have become instrumental in democratizing air travel. These carriers make air travel accessible to a broader demographic, especially attracting young adults who prefer affordable options (Jayasinghe and Boyagoda, 2020). With 11 weekly flights, these airlines foster year-round tourism, transforming Sri Lanka into a more accessible destination.

The economic impact of low-cost airlines is not confined to the airline industry alone; it extends to local businesses and communities. The increased tourist influx stimulated by affordable travel generates economic activity, benefiting local businesses and SME operators. This economic symbiosis is a sustainable approach to tourism

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development.

The advent of low-cost carriers has shifted paradigms in travel behavior. These carriers, including Air Asia, encourage flexibility in travel decisions, catering to spontaneous trips. Furthermore, they attract a diverse range of travelers, including budget-conscious tourists and younger demographics, while affordable fares foster repeat visits and explorations (Mamrina et al, 2023).

The entry of Air Asia has triggered a ripple effect, compelling other players in the industry to innovate and adopt competitive pricing strategies (Mamrina et al, 2023). Because low-cost carriers are expanding the market, more people can now afford to travel by air, which increases competition and forces established airlines to rethink their pricing policies. As a result, new competitors have entered the Sri Lankan industry, including FitZ Air, Indigo, AirArabia, and FlyDubai, as well as other local companies.

The entry of Air Asia into the Sri Lankan aviation market has caused a surge in interest and a change in the country's travel and tourist sector. While the resurgence of this affordable travel option has drawn a wave of millennial travellers looking for low-cost yet interesting experiences, the study acknowledges the need to investigate further the effects and prospects that Air Asia's presence offers to Sri Lanka's tourism industry. Understanding the dynamics and effects of low-cost airlines, particularly Air Asia, on Sri Lanka's tourism environment is the main study challenge.

The return of Air Asia has caused a shift in the dynamics of Sri Lanka's tourism sector. The aim of this study is to record and investigate the evolving traveller behaviours and inclinations, particularly among the millennial generation, due to the availability of reasonably priced travel options (Mamrina et al., 2023). The paper acknowledges that Air Asia's presence may yield certain advantages; nonetheless, it also underscores the importance of evaluating the possible disadvantages and pragmatic realities. This research challenge focuses on the necessity to balance the benefits provided by low-cost airlines against an evaluation of their long-term sustainability and impact. The research makes use of a number of theoretical frameworks, such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, the Tourism Destination Theory, and the Expectancy-Value Theory, to give a thorough understanding of the competitiveness, development stage, and decision-making processes of Sri Lanka's tourism industry. The significance of thorough analysis supported by theoretical underpinnings is emphasised by this research challenge.

This study aims to investigate the effects on Sri Lanka's tourism business of Air Asia's reintroduction into the aviation market. The emphasis is on recognising and comprehending the potential brought about by low-cost carriers such as Air Asia, as well as evaluating the viability of these opportunities for long-term, sustainable growth.

Objectives

1. To identify the driving forces behind travelers choosing Air Asia as their preferred airline for journeys to Sri Lanka.

2. To evaluate the influence of factors such as excellent service, affordable pricing, and the extensive network of destinations offered by Air Asia on travelers' decision-making.

3. To explore the impact of Air Asia on Sri Lanka's tourism industry through the lens of a sample of 56 randomly chosen passengers arriving at various locations within the country.

4. To determine the effectiveness of Air Asia's accessibility in providing a unique opportunity for travelers, especially those in the millennial generation, to explore and learn more about Sri Lanka.

5. To investigate the role of social media and word-of-mouth in disseminating information about Air Asia's low-cost travel option and its impact on attracting a new demographic of budget-conscious tourists.

6. To identify the challenges and recommendations for the expansion of low-cost carriers in Colombo, emphasizing the need for a diverse range of price options and a broader network of connections.

The study aims to provide valuable insights into the potential transformative impact of Air Asia's presence, as well as support the strategic expansion of Sri Lanka's tourism industry.

Literature Review

In addition to altering the structure of Sri Lanka's tourism industry, Air Asia's introduction into the country's aviation business has necessitated a detailed examination of several foreign studies and theoretical frameworks in order to properly comprehend the repercussions. This literature review will first look at the life cycle and

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competitiveness of the tourism destination theory in order to better comprehend the study's objectives. It will then look into the Diffusion of Innovation, Expectancy-Value Theory, and Theory of Planned Behaviour. In order to establish topics for the interview guide, we will also examine earlier studies on the impact of low-cost airlines on international travel.

Tourism Destination Theory: Life Cycle and Competitiveness

Tourism Destination Theory serves as a fundamental framework for comprehending the intricacies of the life cycle and competitiveness within tourist destinations (Navarro-Navarro et al, 2023). Sri Lanka, renowned for its rich cultural heritage and diverse landscapes, stands poised to reap the benefits of this theoretical approach, particularly in the wake of a resurgence in tourism catalyzed by the re-entry of Air Asia. The application of the life cycle perspective enables a nuanced assessment of Sri Lanka's present stage of tourism development and the ability to anticipate future trends (Mior Shariffuddin et al, 2023). This becomes particularly crucial as the nation becomes a magnet for millennial tourists seeking not only affordable but also enriching experiences, necessitating a strategic understanding of the tourism life cycle for sustainable planning and development (Mior Shariffuddin et al, 2023).

The competitiveness aspect of Tourism Destination Theory holds equal significance in the context of Sri Lanka's evolving tourism landscape. The introduction of a low-cost airline such as Air Asia injects a new and dynamic competitive element into the equation. Assessing how Sri Lanka positions itself on the global stage and dissecting the factors that either contribute to or hinder its competitiveness becomes imperative for achieving the study's objectives (Navarro-Navarro et al, 2023). This theoretical lens provides a structured approach to identifying potential opportunities for growth and evaluating the long-term impact that Air Asia might wield over Sri Lanka's tourism sector (Mior Shariffuddin et al, 2023).

In a more detailed exploration of the life cycle perspective, Sri Lanka can be seen as a destination transitioning from the growth phase to maturity. The influx of millennial tourists attracted by Air Asia marks a resurgence and a potential extension of the growth phase. Understanding the dynamics of this transition will be instrumental in crafting tailored strategies for sustainable tourism development (Mior Shariffuddin et al, 2023).

Moreover, competitiveness analysis through Tourism Destination Theory involves a meticulous examination of Sri Lanka's unique selling propositions (USPs) against global benchmarks (Navarro-Navarro et al, 2023). The presence of Air Asia introduces a cost-oriented competitive dynamic, challenging traditional paradigms and encouraging a reevaluation of existing strategies to enhance the overall attractiveness of Sri Lanka as a tourism destination (Mior Shariffuddin et al, 2023). This assessment extends beyond pricing to encompass factors such as cultural richness, natural beauty, and historical significance, all of which contribute to the nation's competitiveness in the global tourism arena (Shuk-Ching Poon and Waring, 2010).

Theories of Planned Behavior, Diffusion of Innovation, and Expectancy-Value Theory

The Theories of Planned Behavior, Diffusion of Innovation, and Expectancy-Value Theory stand as invaluable lenses through which we can gain profound insights into the intricate decision-making processes of travelers, especially when it comes to selecting a low-cost airline such as Air Asia for their journeys to Sri Lanka (Ulker-Demirel and Ciftci, 2020).

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) asserts that individual intentions, attitudes, and subjective norms collectively shape behavioral decisions. In the context of this study, delving into the factors influencing travelers' choices of Air Asia involves an exploration of their intentions, attitudes toward low-cost travel, and the impact of social norms. Understanding the psychological underpinnings of their decision-making processes is crucial for deciphering the motivations that drive individuals to opt for a low-cost carrier and, in turn, how this influences Sri Lanka's tourism dynamics (Ulker-Demirel and Ciftci, 2020).

A thorough framework for comprehending how innovations—in this case, the revival of Air Asia—are accepted by customers is offered by the Diffusion of Innovation theory. Through an analysis of the phases of awareness, interest, trial, and adoption, a road map that clarifies the dynamics of Air Asia's reintroduction in Sri Lanka and traveller acceptance can be created. According to Shuk-Ching Poon and Waring (2010), this theory is especially pertinent to comprehending how new ideas in the travel sector, like the revival of a low-cost airline, spread among the target population and influence their decision-making processes.

The Expectancy-Value Theory emphasises the significance of expectancies and perceived value in shaping decision-making. An analysis of customers' expectations regarding Air Asia's services and the benefits of choosing

this low-cost airline over more established ones can provide light on the motivations behind their choices (Ulker-Demirel & Ciftci, 2020). By providing a detailed knowledge of how visitors weigh the benefits and drawbacks of selecting Air Asia, it aids in a more full assessment of the effects of this low-cost airline on Sri Lanka's tourism industry (Shuk-Ching Poon and Waring, 2010).

All of these theories work together to support the study's goals by offering a strong behavioural and psychological framework. They support the examination of Sri Lanka's tourist industry's competitiveness, its developmental stage, and the complex network of variables influencing passengers' choices of Air Asia's inexpensive flights. Through these theoretical perspectives, the study aims to not only unravel the 'why' behind travel choices but also to provide a foundation for strategic recommendations that align with the psychological drivers of the target audience (Ulker-Demirel and Ciftci, 2020).

Impact of Low-Cost Airlines on Global Tourism Destinations

Examining the impact of low-cost airlines on global tourism destinations provides a valuable perspective for contextualizing the study within the broader international landscape. Numerous studies attest to the transformative effects experienced by destinations worldwide following the entry of low-cost carriers, shedding light on the potential consequences and benefits Sri Lanka might encounter with the resurgence of Air Asia.

In the European market, the advent of low-cost airlines has not only increased accessibility but has also acted as a catalyst for stimulating economic activities in various regions. Cities such as Barcelona, Amsterdam, and Prague serve as notable examples where the influx of budget-conscious The way they travel has significantly changed their tourism dynamics. There has been an increase in visitors to these locations, which suggests that travel habits and interests have changed significantly.

Low-cost carriers have brought about significant changes in South-east Asia as well. According to Shuk-Ching Poon and Waring (2010), this entails the creation of new routes, an increase in the frequency of travel, and the promotion of economic development in nations like Malaysia and Thailand. These low-cost airlines' improved accessibility has helped to democratise travel by making it more feasible for a wider range of people to visit and experience these locations. As a result, the types of tourists have diversified, with tourists on a tight budget making up a sizable portion of the market.

These international studies highlight the diverse effects low-cost airlines may have on travel destinations. More accessibility draws a more varied range of tourists in addition to increasing the number of visitors (Mamrina et al., 2023). The surge of budget-conscious travellers has a large positive impact on local businesses and localities, hence having considerable economic ramifications. In addition, the competition sparked by low-cost carriers encourages innovation in the sector, pushing established airlines to reevaluate their whole service portfolio and price policies (Shuk-Ching Poon and Waring, 2010).

As Sri Lanka positions itself within this global context, the resurgence of Air Asia has the potential to bring about similar transformative effects. By examining the experiences of other destinations globally, particularly in Europe and Southeast Asia, the study gains valuable insights into the potential consequences and benefits that may unfold. This broader perspective enriches the understanding of how the entry of a low-cost airline can shape tourism dynamics, stimulate economic growth, and influence the overall competitiveness of a destination on the global stage.

The interview guide will explore four key themes. Motivations and Decision-Making, Awareness and Adoption, Perceived Value and Expectations, and Competitiveness and Developmental Stage. The first theme will delve into the psychological aspects influencing travelers' decisions to choose Air Asia, examining the motivations behind their choice. The second theme will investigate travelers' awareness, interest, trial, and adoption stages concerning Air Asia's resurgence, utilizing the Diffusion of Innovation theory. The third theme will focus on exploring travelers' expectations of Air Asia's services and assessing the perceived value of choosing this low-cost option over traditional airlines, in alignment with the Expectancy-Value Theory. The fourth theme will assess Sri Lanka's competitiveness in the global tourism market and determine the developmental stage of its tourism sector, as viewed through the lens of Tourism Destination Theory.

By integrating these themes into the interview guide, the study can gather rich, nuanced data that aligns with the theoretical frameworks explored and provides a holistic understanding of the impact of Air Asia on Sri Lanka's tourism industry.

Research Methodology

Research Methodology

1. Population and Sample

This qualitative study targeted tourists arriving via Air Asia at five distinct locations within Sri Lanka: Ella, Galle, Habarana, Kandy, and Yala. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to randomly select 56 participants from these locations, ensuring that a diverse range of perspectives and experiences were captured. The selected sample allowed for an in-depth exploration of the motivations behind choosing Air Asia as the preferred airline and the underlying reasons for travelers' visits to Sri Lanka. The sample size of 56 was deemed appropriate to provide comprehensive insights into the travel decisions and impacts observed.

2. Research Tools

The primary research tool used in this study was the semi-structured interview guide. This guide was developed based on pre-identified themes derived from an extensive literature review, encompassing factors such as decision-making processes, expectations, and the impact of Air Asia on travel choices. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility, enabling participants to elaborate on their experiences while ensuring that key thematic areas were thoroughly explored. Recording forms were also utilized to accurately capture the participants' responses during the interviews.

3. Data Collection

Data collection occurred over a one-month period in October 2023. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the five targeted locations. Each interview was guided by the pre-developed interview guide to ensure consistency and comprehensiveness in data collection. The interviews were recorded with the participants' consent, allowing for detailed and accurate data capture. This method enabled the researchers to gather rich, qualitative data directly from the participants, providing deep insights into their travel decisions and experiences with Air Asia.

4. Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected from the interviews were subjected to rigorous thematic and content analysis. This involved transcribing the recorded interviews and systematically coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns. Thematic analysis facilitated the extraction of meaningful insights related to the driving forces influencing travel decisions and the broader impact of Air Asia on Sri Lanka's tourism landscape. The content analysis further helped in organizing the data into coherent categories, enabling a nuanced interpretation of the participants' narratives. This dual approach ensured that the analysis was thorough and reflective of the diverse experiences and perspectives of the sampled population.

Table 1 : Summary of Key Findings on Air Asia's Impact on Travel Decisions

Question	Themes	Number of Responses
Q1: Decision-Making Process	Cost-Effective Travel	23
	Positive Past Experiences	15
	Convenient Flight Schedules	12
	Recommendations from Others	6
Q2: Factors Influencing Preference	Affordable Pricing	28
	Extensive Destination Network	21
	Positive Online Reviews	15
	Convenient Booking Process	9
Q3: Motivation for Choosing Air Asia	Budget-Conscious Travel	25
	Previous Positive Experiences	18
	Incentives and Promotions	11
	Recommendation by Peers	7
Q4: Psychological Aspects/Personal Preferences	Perceived Value	20
	Desire for Adventure	14
	Flexibility in Travel Plans	11

	Trust in Low-Cost Airlines	11
Q5: Awareness of Air Asia's Resurgence	Online Advertisements	22
	Social Media Platforms	18
	Friends and Family	11
	Travel Forums and Blogs	5
Q6: Stages from Awareness to Decision	Awareness	26
	Interest	18
	Trial	8
	Adoption	4
Q7: Expectations of Air Asia's Services	Cost-Effective Services	27
	On-Time Performance	15
	Comfortable Seating	11
	Quality of In-Flight Services	9

Table 1 (cont.)

Q8: Perceived Value of Choosing Air Asia	Affordability	29
	More Travel Opportunities	17
	Acceptable Service Quality	8
	Trade-Offs for Lower Costs	2
Q9: Sri Lanka's Competitiveness as a Tourist Destination	Unique Cultural Experiences	22
	Natural Beauty and Landscapes	19
	Historical Significance	10
	Value for Money	5
Q10: Influence of Air Asia on Perception of Sri Lanka	Positive Influence on Perceptions	26
	Increased Accessibility	15
	Greater Diversity of Travelers	8
	Neutral/No Significant Impact	7
Q11: Impact of Air Asia on Travel within Sri Lanka	Increased Travel Opportunities	24
	Cost Savings	18
	Enhanced Exploration	11
	Positive Impact on Local Economy	3
Q12: Effectiveness in Providing Unique Opportunities for Millennials	Increased Exploration by Millennials	28
	Cultural and Educational Opportunities	15
	Positive Impact on Millennial Travel Trends	8
	Limited Impact on Exploration	5
Q13: Source of Information on Air Asia's Low-Cost Travel Option	Social Media Recommendations	30
	Word-of-Mouth	18
	Online Reviews and Forums	5
	Traditional Advertising	3
Q14: Influence of Information on Decision to Choose Air Asia	Very Influential	26
	Moderately Influential	17

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	Slightly Influential	8
	Not Influential at All	5
Q15: Challenges and Recommendations for Expanding Low-Cost Carriers	Limited Low-Cost Options	22
	Infrastructure Challenges	18
	Marketing and Awareness	12
	Enhanced Airport Facilities	4

Source: Author's work adopted from Primary Data Collection

These findings offer a comprehensive overview of the diverse perspectives and experiences of participants, providing valuable insights into the driving forces behind their choices and the impact of Air Asia on their travel decisions within Sri Lanka.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

The findings of this study illuminate key aspects that resonate with the theoretical underpinnings discussed in the literature. Notably, the dominance of affordability in participants' decision-making aligns seamlessly with the Expectancy-Value Theory, wherein the perceived value of a service or product significantly influences consumer choices. In the context of air travel, the affordability factor becomes a pivotal determinant, emphasizing its role as a primary driver for choosing Air Asia.

Furthermore, the Theory of Planned Behavior finds resonance in participants' considerations, where subjective norms, attitudes, and intentions play integral roles in shaping their decisions to opt for Air Asia. This alignment underscores the psychological dimensions involved in travel choices, highlighting the importance of understanding and catering to the subjective perceptions and social influences that guide individuals towards low-cost airline options.

The Diffusion of Innovation theory stages, observed in participants' responses, mirror the real-world adoption process of Air Asia's reintroduction. From the initial awareness of the airline's return to the eventual adoption as a preferred travel choice, these stages affirm the relevance of diffusion theories in explaining the acceptance and integration of innovations in the aviation sector.

While the Tourism Destination Theory, focusing on the life cycle and competitiveness of destinations, aligns with participants' perceptions of Sri Lanka's unique cultural experiences and natural beauty as crucial factors in its competitiveness, the study signals the need for adaptation. The transformative impact of low-cost airlines, such as Air Asia, on a destination's developmental stage suggests that the existing framework may require refinement to account for the dynamic influence of budget-friendly carriers.

The theoretical frameworks, effective in elucidating individual decision-making processes, reveal their limitations when addressing the collective impact of low-cost carriers on a destination. The transformative effects of Air Asia's re-entry into Sri Lanka necessitate a deeper exploration of how such airlines shape and redefine a destination's overall developmental trajectory. This calls for an evolution in theoretical frameworks to encompass the broader, systemic changes that low-cost carriers bring to the tourism landscape.

Practical Contributions

The study's practical implications for Sri Lanka's tourism industry are profound. The emphasis on affordability identified in the findings provides a strategic avenue for the country to position itself as a budget-friendly destination. By leveraging this appeal, Sri Lanka can attract a broader range of budget-conscious tourists who seek cost-effective travel options. Collaborating with low-cost carriers, such as Air Asia, becomes imperative for aligning promotional efforts and enhancing overall affordability. Crafting travel packages that specifically target budget-conscious travelers and promoting them through various channels can capitalize on this opportunity.

Additionally, recognizing the positive impact on the local economy, highlighted by participants, suggests the need for sustainable tourism practices. Sri Lanka can implement community engagement initiatives to ensure that economic benefits generated by increased tourist influx are distributed more equitably across local communities. By integrating sustainability into its tourism strategy, Sri Lanka can not only attract environmentally conscious travelers but also foster a positive image globally.

The study indicates that the resurgence of Air Asia has the potential to shape future travel patterns, particularly among millennials. Understanding the preferences of this growing market segment becomes crucial for Sri Lanka's tourism industry. Tailoring promotional strategies to resonate with millennials, emphasizing accessibility, unique experiences, and cultural offerings, can position Sri Lanka as a go-to destination for this demographic. Creating immersive cultural and educational experiences can further enhance the appeal for future travelers.

Moreover, the study's recommendations for overcoming challenges, such as the limited variety of low-cost carriers in Colombo, have broader implications for the aviation industry. Encouraging the entry of more low-cost carriers can foster healthy competition, driving innovation and expanding the overall market. This increased connectivity not only benefits Sri Lanka but also enhances the attractiveness of the region for global travelers.

The Future Landscape of Travel and Tourism

As low-cost carriers continue to play a transformative role in shaping travel patterns, Sri Lanka's tourism industry needs to adapt and innovate. The findings emphasize the importance of an online presence and positive word-of-mouth in influencing travel decisions. Investing in digital marketing strategies, user-friendly online platforms, and online customer engagement can significantly contribute to the success of both Sri Lanka's tourism industry and low-cost carriers operating in the region.

The potential shift in the demographic composition of tourists, particularly with millennials emerging as a significant market, suggests that Sri Lanka should position itself as a destination catering to their unique preferences. This includes not only affordability but also immersive cultural and educational experiences. Collaborations with low-cost carriers should be aligned with the evolving expectations of this demographic, emphasizing experiences over traditional luxury, to further enhance Sri Lanka's appeal in the future travel landscape. Overall, the study lays the groundwork for strategic planning that can guide Sri Lanka's tourism industry toward sustainable growth and increased global competitiveness.

Implications

This study holds significant theoretical implications for existing tourism theories, particularly those related to destination development, traveler behavior, and the impact of low-cost carriers.

The findings contribute to the Tourism Destination Theory by showcasing the transformative impact of low-cost carriers, such as Air Asia, on Sri Lanka's tourism environment. While the theory traditionally focuses on the life cycle and competitiveness of destinations, this study suggests a need for adaptations to incorporate the dynamic influence of budget-friendly airlines on a destination's developmental stage. Future theoretical developments in destination studies could explore models that better capture the symbiotic relationship between low-cost carriers and destination evolution.

The study's alignment with the Theory of Planned Behavior, Diffusion of Innovation, and Expectancy-Value Theory enriches the understanding of travelers' decision-making processes in the context of low-cost airline choices. Future research could delve deeper into the nuances of these theories, exploring how cultural, social, and economic factors influence individual intentions and behaviors in the ever-evolving landscape of affordable travel options.

Future theoretical research could focus on developing frameworks that specifically address the collective impact of low-cost carriers on destination competitiveness and development. The study suggests that existing theories may fall short in capturing the broader systemic changes introduced by the resurgence of low-cost airlines. Exploring novel theoretical perspectives that consider the interconnected dynamics between airlines, destinations, and traveler preferences would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving tourism landscape.

Moreover, the study hints at the need for theories that encapsulate the role of digital media and social networks in shaping travel decisions. The influence of social media and word-of-mouth, particularly among the millennial demographic, suggests that future theoretical developments should consider the evolving role of online platforms in shaping travel behaviors and preferences.

The practical implications of this study extend to tourism stakeholders, including policymakers, tourism boards, and industry professionals. Stakeholders should leverage the emphasis on affordability revealed in the study to craft targeted marketing campaigns promoting Sri Lanka as a budget-friendly destination. Collaborative efforts with low-cost carriers, both international and potential domestic carriers, can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes. Tourism stakeholders should actively engage in strategic partnerships, promoting the unique experiences Sri Lanka offers in tandem with the affordability provided by low-cost carriers.

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The study emphasizes the positive impact on the local economy, signifying the importance of sustainable tourism practices. Tourism stakeholders should prioritize community engagement initiatives, responsible tourism guidelines, and environmental conservation efforts. This not only ensures the equitable distribution of economic benefits but also contributes to the long-term preservation of Sri Lanka's natural and cultural assets.

To enhance the overall tourism experience, stakeholders should invest in infrastructure and technology. Upgrading airport facilities, adopting digital technologies, and streamlining processes contribute to a seamless and efficient travel experience. Policymakers and industry professionals should consider implementing educational and training programs for tourism personnel to align with the evolving expectations of travelers, particularly the millennial demographic.

Furthermore, the study suggests the potential for a shift in the demographic composition of tourists, with millennials emerging as a significant market. Stakeholders should tailor their offerings to cater to the preferences of this demographic, emphasizing experiences over traditional luxury. Collaborations with low-cost carriers can be strategically aligned with the evolving expectations of millennials, positioning Sri Lanka as a destination that offers not only affordability but also unique and immersive cultural experiences.

2. Discussion

Thematic Analysis - Insights and Patterns

Objective 1: Identifying the Driving Forces Behind Travelers Choosing Air Asia for Journeys to Sri Lanka

The primary driving force behind travelers choosing Air Asia is its affordability. A significant majority of participants (23 out of 56) emphasized the cost-effectiveness of Air Asia as a key factor in their decision-making process. This highlights the airline's ability to attract budget-conscious travelers looking for economical travel options. Additionally, positive past experiences with Air Asia play a notable role, with 15 participants citing favorable previous interactions with the airline as a compelling reason for their choice. This indicates that a strong track record and reliable service history contribute significantly to the airline's attractiveness and customer loyalty.

Objective 2: Evaluating the Influence of Various Factors on Travelers' Decision-Making

Affordability emerges as the most influential factor in travelers' decision-making, with 28 out of 56 participants identifying it as a critical consideration. The extensive network of destinations offered by Air Asia also plays a significant role, as noted by 21 participants, underscoring the importance of accessibility and route availability. While excellent service and other factors are considered, it is clear that pricing and network coverage are pivotal. Moreover, positive online reviews (15 responses) and recommendations from friends and family (6 responses) highlight the importance of word-of-mouth and digital presence, demonstrating how external opinions shape travelers' choices.

Objective 3: Exploring the Impact of Air Asia on Sri Lanka's Tourism Industry

Air Asia significantly enhances travel opportunities within Sri Lanka, as acknowledged by 24 out of 56 participants. This finding aligns with the objective of understanding the airline's influence on the tourism industry, indicating that the availability of low-cost flights facilitates increased travel within the country. Furthermore, a few participants (3 out of 56) specifically note the positive impact on the local economy, reflecting the broader implications of low-cost carriers on regional development and economic stimulation.

Objective 4: Assessing the Effectiveness of Air Asia's Accessibility for Millennial Travelers

Air Asia's accessibility is particularly effective in providing unique travel opportunities for millennials, with 28 out of 56 participants emphasizing the increased exploration possibilities for this demographic group. This insight aligns with the objective of assessing the airline's impact on specific traveler segments. Additionally, participants highlight the airline's role in offering cultural and educational opportunities (15 responses), emphasizing its positive influence on travelers' learning experiences and cultural engagement during their visits to Sri Lanka.

Objective 5: Investigating the Role of Social Media and Word-of-Mouth in Promoting Air Asia

Social media emerges as a significant influencer in disseminating information about Air Asia's low-cost travel options, with 30 out of 56 participants identifying it as their primary source of information. This underscores the substantial impact of social media platforms on travel decisions. Word-of-mouth also plays a crucial role, as indicated by 18 participants, reinforcing the power of personal recommendations in shaping travelers' perceptions and choices. These insights demonstrate the critical role of digital and personal communication channels in attracting budget-conscious tourists.

Objective 6: Identifying Challenges and Recommendations for Expanding Low-Cost Carriers in Colombo

Participants highlight several challenges and recommendations for expanding low-cost carriers in Colombo. A prominent challenge is the limited variety of low-cost options, with 22 out of 56 participants expressing a demand for increased diversity in budget-friendly carriers. Additionally, infrastructure challenges are recognized by 18 participants, suggesting a need for significant improvements to facilitate the growth of low-cost airlines. These insights underscore the importance of enhancing infrastructure and increasing the availability of affordable travel options to support the expansion of low-cost carriers and meet the needs of budget-conscious travelers.

Research recommendations

The insights garnered from this study offer valuable guidance for policymakers aiming to capitalize on the opportunities presented by the resurgence of low-cost carriers, particularly Air Asia, in Sri Lanka's aviation and tourism sectors. One of the primary recommendations is the expansion of low-cost carriers operating in Colombo. The study's findings indicate that the current limited variety of low-cost airlines poses a challenge for travelers. Policymakers should actively encourage and facilitate the entry of more low-cost carriers to diversify options for travelers. This not only promotes healthy competition but also enhances connectivity, making Sri Lanka a more attractive destination for a broader range of tourists. Collaborative efforts with international low-cost carriers should be initiated, showcasing the unique appeal of Sri Lanka as a destination and emphasizing the potential market opportunities. In addition to encouraging international low-cost carriers, policymakers should explore the establishment of a low-cost national carrier. Creating a domestic low-cost airline could provide an additional layer of accessibility for local and international travelers alike. A low-cost national carrier can cater specifically to the unique demands of the Sri Lankan market, offering affordable travel options to various domestic and international destinations. This initiative not only stimulates economic activity within the country but also contributes to the overall growth and competitiveness of Sri Lanka's aviation sector. Policymakers should actively seek and facilitate strategic partnerships between Sri Lanka's aviation authorities and existing low-cost carriers like Air Asia. Such collaborations can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes, including route expansions, promotional campaigns, and joint initiatives to enhance the overall travel experience. Building strong partnerships can position Sri Lanka as a preferred destination for low-cost carriers looking to expand their networks, bringing in a steady flow of budget-conscious tourists. To support the expansion of low-cost carriers, policymakers should prioritize investments in aviation infrastructure and technology. Upgrading airport facilities, streamlining immigration processes, and adopting digital technologies to enhance the overall travel experience are essential steps. Improved infrastructure not only facilitates the smooth operation of low-cost carriers but also contributes to a positive image of Sri Lanka as a modern and efficient travel destination. As the study highlights the positive impact of tourism on the local economy, policymakers should integrate sustainable tourism practices into their strategies. Community engagement initiatives, responsible tourism guidelines, and environmental conservation efforts should be prioritized. This ensures that the economic benefits generated by the influx of tourists are distributed equitably, and Sri Lanka's natural and cultural heritage is preserved for future generations. To align with the evolving expectations of travelers, especially the millennial demographic, policymakers should invest in education and training programs for the tourism industry. Emphasizing cultural awareness, language proficiency, and service excellence will contribute to a more enriching and satisfying experience for tourists. Well-trained personnel can positively impact the overall perception of Sri Lanka as a destination, encouraging repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth.

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HOMESTAY SERVICE QUALITY AT AGRICULTURAL TOURISM DESTINATIONS IN THE CENTER OF THE MEKONG DELTA, VIETNAM

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Extended abstract

Agricultural tourism is a type of tourism, which is highly concerned to develop in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. At agricultural tourism destinations, homestay is a typical form of accommodation, an inseparable product of this tourism type. To increase profits for homestays at agricultural tourism destinations and tourists' satisfaction, and also to develop sustainably, it is necessary to research and improve the service quality (SQ) at those homestays. Thus, the aim of this study is to assess the quality of homestay services at agricultural tourism destinations in the centre of the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. The SQ model, SERVQUAL combined with the IPA model to solve the research issue. Six criteria of the service quality including tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and cultural performance were applied to evaluate in the present research. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. From June to December 2023, a survey of 258 tourists was conducted at homestays belonged to agricultural tourism destinations in Can Tho (CT) City by physically and online. Descriptive statistics and paired-samples T-tests were used to analyze the collected data. The study concluded that all criteria were highly evaluated towards the significance, whereas the productivity when homestay owners conducted was found to be less-than-expected. Besides, international tourists showed higher evaluation towards the significance and the productivity of those homestays than that of domestic ones. The research result implied that homestay owners should plan to improve the SQ at their homestays in order to be consistent with the reality and suitable for the target tourist groups.

Keywords: *Agricultural tourism destination, homestay, service quality, the MeKong Delta, Vietnam*

Introduction

Many recent surveys revealed that travelers have showed a strong desire traveling in various ways, and homestays have been becoming more and more prevalent for lodging. As a component of the non-standard lodging sector, the homestay tourist business is growing substantially and also becomes crucial to the growth of tourism (Ma et al., 2022). According to Doan et al. (2023), homestays are well-known tourism and hospitality businesses that offer lodging services in many remote locations and rural areas. Homestays are sorts of home-sharing business, typically run by families. Not only do they mainly provide lodging, food, and beverages, as well as genuine cultural encounters with local hosts (Mura, 2015), but also they support the sustainable community development (Pasanchay & Schott, 2021).

In Vietnam, although accommodations like homestays for tourists have appeared in most provinces and cities, ones in suburban areas, rural areas, mountainous areas, or ethnic minority areas are more popular. Homestays are usually built in accordance of the local characteristics in each region in order to take advantages of the natural beauties and local and cultural resources. In the Mekong Delta, these accommodations have grown significantly since the previous years due to a notable increase in foreign visitors (Mai et al., 2021). CT City, known as the capital city of the Mekong Delta (Vietnam) has a great potential for developing tourism. Moreover, the political and economic stability is also the reason accounting for the attraction of CT City to both domestic and international tourists.

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Nowadays, agricultural tourism destinations in CT City are numerous, including about 30 homestays (Lam, 2024). Many households in rural areas in CT City have built homestays with unique architecture designs to meet the needs of tourists, who would like to experience the lifestyle of local people. Many of those homestays are located in Phong Dien District, Cai Rang Ward and parts of Binh Thuy Ward. However, when tourists travel to CT City, they usually have a wide choice of accommodations belonged to well-known brand hotels and such as Sheraton, Muong Thanh Luxury Hotel, Azerai Resort, etc. In addition, in a constantly shifting competitive landscape recently, the majority of homestay operators were unable to satisfy the changeable needs of their customers (Ismail et al., 2016). Thus, the SQ has become one of the key differentiators and important competitive factors in today's business conditions because it directly influences tourists' satisfaction and intention to re-patronize (Ismail et al., 2016), positive word of mouth, and an increase of sales profit (Tussyadiah, 2016). Some scientists have researched the quality of accommodation services in numerous countries and areas in order to propose tourism entrepreneurs enhancing the quality of services at accommodations and obtaining customers' satisfaction and loyalty. Biswakarma (2015) conducted a study measuring tourists' satisfaction towards homestays in Nepal; as a result, the finding shows that amenities and safety, reception, local cuisine and accommodation, local lifestyle and costumes, and cultural performance had a strong impact on tourists' satisfaction towards the services at homestays in Nepal. In the coastal countryside of Shenzhen (China), Ma et al. (2022) assessed the tourists' experience of rural homestays in coastal areas by the importance-performance analysis (IPA) method and revealed some findings assessing the SQ at homestays. In Vietnam, Van and Viet (2019) measured the effects of the SQ at homestays in Ben Tre (Southern Vietnam). The results show that tourists' satisfaction, which is influenced by 05 components of homestay SQ (05 components of the SERVQUAL model), and cultural exposure. Besides, Mai et al. (2021) demonstrated the positive impact of the service recovery on the satisfaction and word of mouth of international visitors towards homestays in the Mekong Delta (Vietnam). Through the review of related studies and documents, although many studies have been conducted on the quality of homestay services in recent years, a few has been associated five components of the classical SERVQUAL model with the cultural activities at homestays. As a result, a research gap was noticed and implied for the further studies. Moreover, the relevant findings on the SQ recommend that services suppliers should find efficient directions for revising SQ with a combination analysis of a measurement model of SQ (SERVQUAL or SERVPERF) and the importance-performance analysis (IPA) (Park & Yi, 2022). That IPA is a simple and effective technique can assist practitioners in prioritizing customer's attributes when enhancing the SQ and customers' satisfaction (Deng, 2007). Therefore, the current study employed the IPA model to assess the quality of homestay services by using five SERVQUAL dimensions and cultural performance dimensions at agritourism attractions in CT City, which is very important for academics and practice.

Objectives

1. Firstly, the study intends to discuss the importance and performance of the SQ at homestays in agritourism destinations in CT City with a combination analysis of a measurement model of SERVQUAL and IPA.

2. Secondly, a comparison of the importance and performance of quality elements between domestic and foreign tourists regarding SQ of homestays in agritourism destinations in CT City.

Theoretical framework

SERVQUAL model

SERVQUAL model (SQ) was developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) based Five Gaps theory (Five gaps SQ model) of Parasuraman et al. in 1985. The difference between a customer's expectations of a service offering and their views of the service they actually received is how the SERVQUAL model defines SQ. (Parasuraman et al., 1985). A good SQ is viewed as one that fulfills or exceeds the customer's expectation of the service (Parasuraman et al., 1985). The model in question is widely employed by tourism researchers to assess the caliber of services rendered in the tourist industry and industries associated with it (Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1995; Baker and Fesenmaier, 1997; Childress & Crompton, 1997). According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), the five dimensions considered distinct components of the perceived SQ model (SERVQUAL) are: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy.

IPA model

Martilla and James (1977) argued that the IPA model was related to importance and performance from a customer perspective. This analysis tool is commonly used to measure service performance (Tzeng & Chang, 2011). When deciding what steps to take or what improvements to make in the many areas of customer management and

SQ, they proposed that decision-makers prioritize two dimensions: importance and performance (Duke & Persia, 1977; Arbore & Busacca, 2013). In hospitality research, IPA is taking effective measures to keep competitive (Sörensson & Friedrichs, 2013), and IPA is frequently combined with other methods in hospitality research, like SERVQUAL (Cheng et al. 2019). Many scholars have applied the IPA model to assess customer satisfaction with the SQ of hospitality (Lai & Hitchcock, 2016; Jou & Day, 2021; Chen et al., 2022; Petaković et al., 2022). According to Ma et al. (2022), the IPA approach is widely employed in destination-tourism image evaluation and positioning studies because it is simple to comprehend and intuitive. Therefore, we applied the IPA model to measure homestay SQ in CT City. This method creates a two-dimensional graphic that shows how important and effective product/service features are in the eyes of customers by calculating the mean value of importance and performance. It then divides these traits into four quadrants, each of which has a distinct management strategy. Figure 1, which is a graphic representation of the IPA that is separated into four quadrants. The four quadrants and implications of IPA are:

Quadrant I: The criteria in quadrant I are very important to tourists, but the performance is low. Therefore, the owners of homestay agencies should promote the development of these criteria.

Quadrant II: The criteria in quadrant II are important to tourists, and the owners of homestay agencies have performed well. Therefore, the owners of homestay agencies will maintain, preserve, and promote those criteria.

Quadrant III: The criteria in quadrant III are not important as well as their performance is also low. And so, the owners of homestay agencies don't need to concentrate resources on developing these criteria.

Quadrant IV: The criteria in quadrant IV are not important to tourists, but performance is good. Therefore, the owners of homestay agencies don't need to use additional resources to develop these criteria because it will create waste.
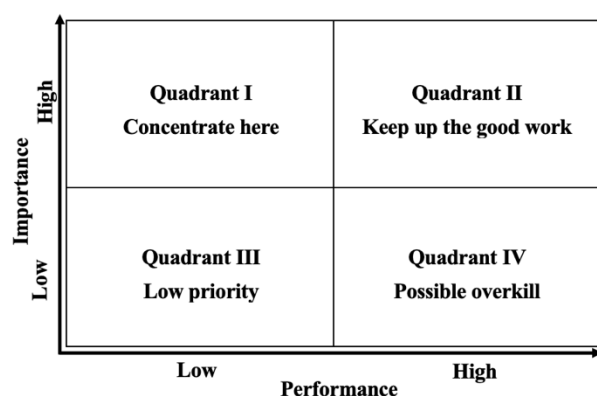
Figure 1. Importance-performance analysis grid

Source: Martilla & James (1977).

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

The research data were collected through a survey of tourists who stayed and used services in agritourism homestays in CT City. The convenience sampling method and snowball sampling were conducted to collect data in the study. The distribution of tourists among the respondents was fairly balanced, according to the statistical results of the demographic features in Table 2. Of the 258 valid questionnaires, 54.7% of the respondents were foreign tourists, who came from Poland, France, Italy, England, Switzerland, the U.S.A, India, Germany Korea, Sweden, Hungary, Canada, Austria, Spain, Thailand, Japan, China, Australian, Brazil, Singapore, and Turkey. A total of 117 domestic guests (45.3%), mainly came from many provinces and cities in Vietnam.

The number of males and females were approximately equal (52.3% of females and 47.7% of males). The respondents' age group was mostly in the 36 to 53 age range (44.6%), then in the 18 to 35 age range (30.2%), and in the above 53 age range (25.2%). The participants, who were married people were 59.3%, and single people (40.7%). In addition, 58.5% of them had a university degree. When it came to occupation, 42.2% of respondents were office workers, which was the largest percentage.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the respondents

Demographic variants		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	123	47.7
	Female	135	52.3
Age	18-35	78	30.2
	36-53	115	44.6
	Above 53	65	25.2
Marriage	Single	105	40.7
	Married	153	59.3
Educational levels	High school	16	6.2
	Vocational/College degree	34	13.2
	Bachelor's degree	151	58.5
	Graduate degree	57	22.1
Occupation	Office workers	109	42.2
	Public sector workers	25	9.7
	Self-employed	89	34.5
	Managers/operators	35	13.6

Source: Results of analysis by the authors

2. Research Tools

The main tool used in this quantitative research is a questionnaire. All the scale items were from the related studies. Then, they were adapted to fit the tourism context in Vietnam and reflect the SQ at homestays in the agritourism destination in CT City. Measurement items included six dimensions. The research used five dimensions of SQ of the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) including tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. SERVQUAL was used in several sectors, however, SQ scales should be changed according to career characteristics (Babakus & Ho, 1998). Therefore, an adaptation was made to the model, five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model were adapted from related studies (Table 1). In addition, the study also added one extra variable a cultural performance dimension into the existing model to assess the homestay SQ at agritourism destinations in CT City, Vietnam. CT City is well-known for the agritourism destination associated with the unique culture shaped by the local rivers and gardens culture in the Mekong Delta. Numerous of cultural performing arts, which are typical in the Southern region in Vietnam have been considered as folk music genres and countryside songs. Especially, Don Ca Tai Tu Nam Bo, or The Southern Folk Music, was recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2013. To serve tourists accommodating at the homestays, the hosts or tourism entrepreneurs have to organize these performances for entertaining and expressing the local culture. Thus, this dimension was included in the questionnaire to assess tourists' perspectives towards entertaining and getting practical experiences during the time accommodating at homestays in CT City.

Table 2. Interpretation of observed variables in the research model

Dimensions	Observed variable	Reference resources
Tangibles (TAN)	TAN1: Appearance of host	Van and Viet (2019), Wahid et al. (2017)
	TAN2: Visually appealing facilities	Van and Viet (2019, Zijing and Pu (2020)
	TAN3: Adequate equipment and capacity	
	TAN4: Clean environment	
	TAN5: Ornamentation of green landscape	Ma et al. (2022)
	TAN6: Beauty and uniqueness of architectural design	

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Dimensions	Observed variable	Reference resources
	style	
Reliability (REL)	REL1: The credibility of accommodation information on sales channels	Petaković et al. (2022)
	REL2: Ability to perform the promised services	Ismail et al. (2016), Van and Viet (2019)
	REL3: Programs were offered as in the package	Ismail et al. (2016), Van and Viet (2019)
	REL4: Homestay keeps its records accurately	Ismail et al. (2016), Van and Viet (2019)
Responsiveness (RES)	RES1: Provide promt service	Ismail et al., (2016), Van and Viet (2019)
	RES2: Willingness to help	
	RES3: Prioritize the visitor's need	
	RES4: The host is polite, kind and educated	
Assurance (ASS)	ASS1: Host's knowledge and skills	Ismail et al. (2016), Van and Viet (2019)
	ASS2: Offering safe and secure activities	
	ASS3: Offering safe precaution	
Empathy (EMP)	EMP1: Understand visitor's need	Ismail et al. (2016), Van and Viet (2019)
	EMP2: Treating guests in a friendly manner	
	EMP3: Specific attention to visitors' special needs	
Cultural performance (CP)	CP1: Authentically presented culture by the host community/family during my homestay	Biswakarma (2015)
	CP2: The cultural programs (traditional dance and songs) during my homestay	
	CP3: The other cultural events during my homestay	

The questionnaire had two sections. The first section was designed to elicit demographic data from the respondents including gender, age, occupation, etc. The second one was related to the homestay SQ with 06 items. Moreover, the questionnaire was divided into two parts according to the IPA model, with the same items in order to assess both the level of importance and the level of performance. All items were measured with a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The model is shown in Table 2.

3. Data Collection

The research data were collected through a survey of tourists who stayed and used services in agritourism homestays in CT City. The survey was mainly taken place at homestays in Phong Dien District, Cai Rang Ward, and some regions belonging to Binh Thuy Ward. Besides, an online interview by Google Forms was also employed in this study. In total, there were 276 participants who responded to the survey including 148 observations through an online survey, and 128 observations were collected directly from June 2023 to December 2023. However, eighteen incompletely or incorrectly filled-out questionnaires were removed. Finally, 258 valid responses were analyzed. Besides, the study used an observation method at some homestays at agricultural destinations in CT City. In total, there are five observation times from June 2023 to December 2023.

4. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by the statistical package program for social sciences (SPSS 25.0 for Windows). The methods applied in the present study to analyze the collected data included: (i) The descriptive statistics method was used to analyze the data about gender, age (years), educational background, occupation of tourists under a percentage, and the number of respondents; (ii) Paired Samples T-test method was used to analyze the difference between the level value of performance and the value of the importance of tourists about homestay SQ in agritourism destinations. The test results show the difference between the average of the two groups of importance (I) and performance (P).

Then, the difference P - I > 0 means good SQ. If P - I < 0, the SQ is not good, and the larger the negative difference, the lower the SQ and vice versa.

Result

Importance-performance analysis of homestay SQ in the center of the Mekong Delta, Vietnam

Table 1. Homestay SQ

Variables		Importance (I)	Performance (P)	GAP (P-I)	Sig. (2 tailed)
Tangibles	TAN1	4.20	2.86	-1.337	.000***
	TAN2	4.21	3.17	-1.039	.000***
	TAN3	4.13	3.12	-1.012	.000***
	TAN4	4.24	2.74	-1.500	.000***
	TAN5	4.21	2.70	-1.508	.000***
	TAN6	4.23	2.55	-1.682	.000***
Reliability	REL1	4.07	3.08	-.996	.000***
	REL2	4.15	3.10	-1.050	.000***
	REL3	4.01	2.78	-1.229	.000***
	REL4	3.64	2.99	-.655	.000***
Responsiveness	RES1	4.10	2.46	-1.640	.000***
	RES2	4.01	2.41	-1.605	.000***
	RES3	3.85	2.92	-.934	.000***
	RES4	4.12	3.17	-.957	.000***
Assurance	ASS1	4.11	2.65	-1.465	.000***
	ASS2	4.11	2.44	-1.671	.000***
	ASS3	4.16	2.45	-1.702	.000***
Empathy	EMP1	3.94	2.83	-1.109	.000***
	EMP2	3.69	3.08	-.605	.000***
	EMP3	3.62	3.04	-.578	.000***
Cultural performance	CP1	3.99	2.43	-1.558	.000***
	CP2	4.02	2.47	-1.550	.000***
	CP3	3.89	2.96	-.930	.000***

Source: Results of analysis by the authors

The results in Table 3 show that no factor has a Sig value >0.05, meaning all factors in the five SQ criteria have a difference in average value between the level of importance and the level of performance. At the same time, the average value between P-I is smaller than zero, which shows that all criteria for homestay SQ at the agritourism destinations in the center of the Mekong Delta, Vietnam has a difference between the level of importance and the level of performance. Thus, it means that SQ in all of these criteria is not performed well. Among them, the biggest difference is ASS3 "Offering safe precaution" (P- I= -1.702), followed by TAN6 "Beauty and uniqueness of architectural design style" (P- I= -1.682), ASS2 "Offering safe and secure activities" (P-I=1.671), RES1 "Provide prompt service" (P-I=1.640) and RES2 "Willingness to help" (P-I= -1.605). This shows that homestay owners need to prioritize improvements in order to make progress toward improving SQ in the five factors mentioned above. The factor with the smallest difference is EMP3 "Specific attention to visitors' special needs" (P-I= -0.578), EMP2 "Treating guests in a friendly manner" (P- I= -0.605), and REL4 "Homestay keeps its records accurately" (P- I=-0.655). These factors have a fairly low difference, so if the homestay owner tries to improve, it will definitely enhance and ensure SQ in the future, especially the EMP3 factor. In general, the importance of SQ factors is always rated as highly important by tourists, but performance is lower. In particular, the average value of importance is rated by

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tourists from 3.62 to 4.24, while the average value of performance is rated by tourists from 2.41 to 3.17. This shows that the quality of service provided at the homestay in CT City is not uniform and does not meet tourists' expectations.

After analyzing the data with Paired-sample T-test, we analyze the data for importance and performance through the IPA matrix. The results show that the IPA matrix has been created into 4 different quadrants, and each quadrant will have separate SQ factors (Figure 2). *Quadrant I (Concentrate here):* This quadrant includes six quality factors: TAN4, TAN5, TAN6, ASS1, ASS2, ASS3. These factors have an average importance score of over 4 points but a performance level of less than 3 points. *Quadrant II (Keep up the good work):* In quadrant II of the evaluation, tourists rate eight factors as highly important with a rating above 4.00 (from 4.01 to 4.21), and their performance is also highly rated (from 3.10 onwards): TAN1, TAN2, TAN3, REL2, and RES4. *Quadrant III (Low priority):* Quadrant III includes the following elements: CP1, CP2, RES2, and REL3. In this quadrant, the importance and performance of tourists are both rated at a low level. However, the factors in this quadrant all have a fairly high average value of importance (nearly 4.00 or more), are located close to and tend to move into quadrant I (development focus), this means that tourists also consider these factors to be sizable. *Quadrant IV (Possible overkill):* In quadrant IV, the importance of homestay SQ factors is rated low by tourists, but implementation performance is high. These factors include: EMP1, EMP2, EMP3, REL1, REL4, RES3, and CP3. The REL1 factor alone has a fairly high average score (M=4.01), close to quartile II (high importance and high performance).
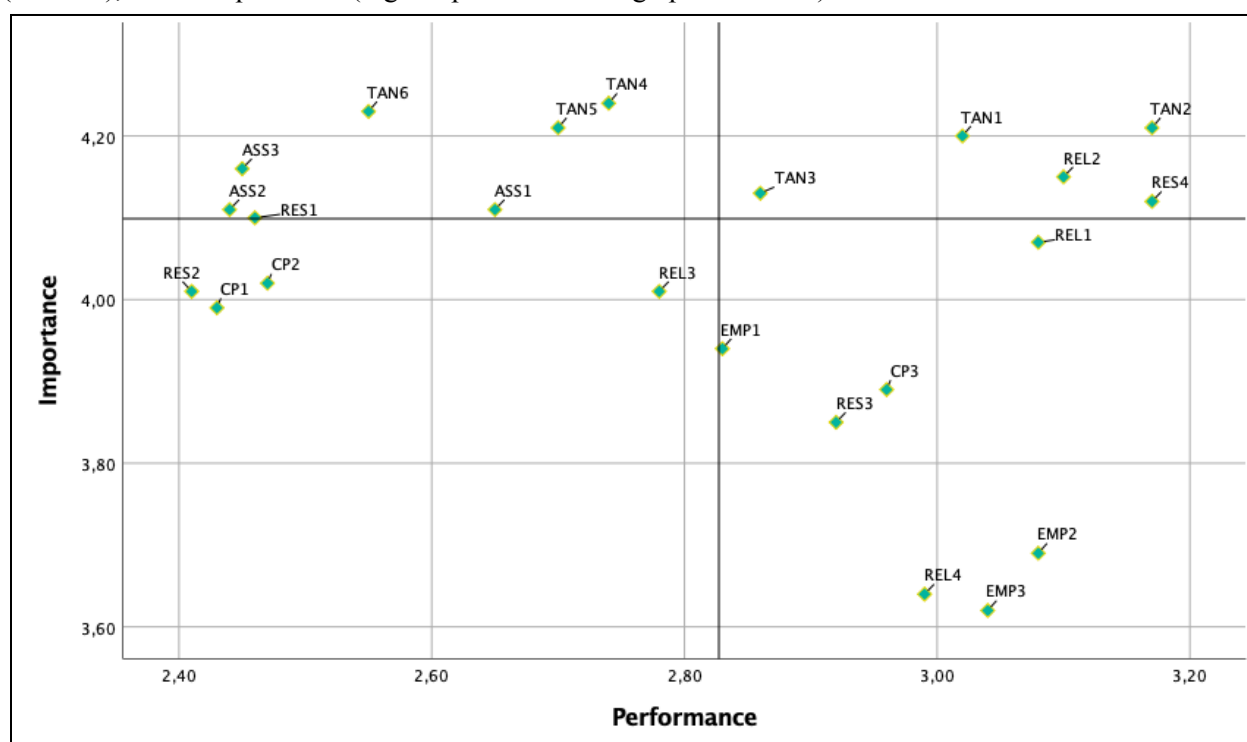
Figure 2. Result of IPA matrix

Source: Results of analysis by the authors

Comparison of the importance and performance of quality elements between domestic and foreign tourist

Based on the results of comparative analysis and assessment of the importance and performance of homestays at agricultural tourism destinations in the Mekong Delta between two groups of guests; It is shown that the evaluation of SQ factors varies, while some factors are rated low, others are rated high (Figure 3). However, in general, there is a difference in evaluation between international tourists and domestic tourists. In terms of both the importance and actual performance of SQ factors, international tourists rate them higher than domestic tourists. This shows that, although international tourists have high requirements for quality in the service process, they are easier to satisfy than domestic tourists.
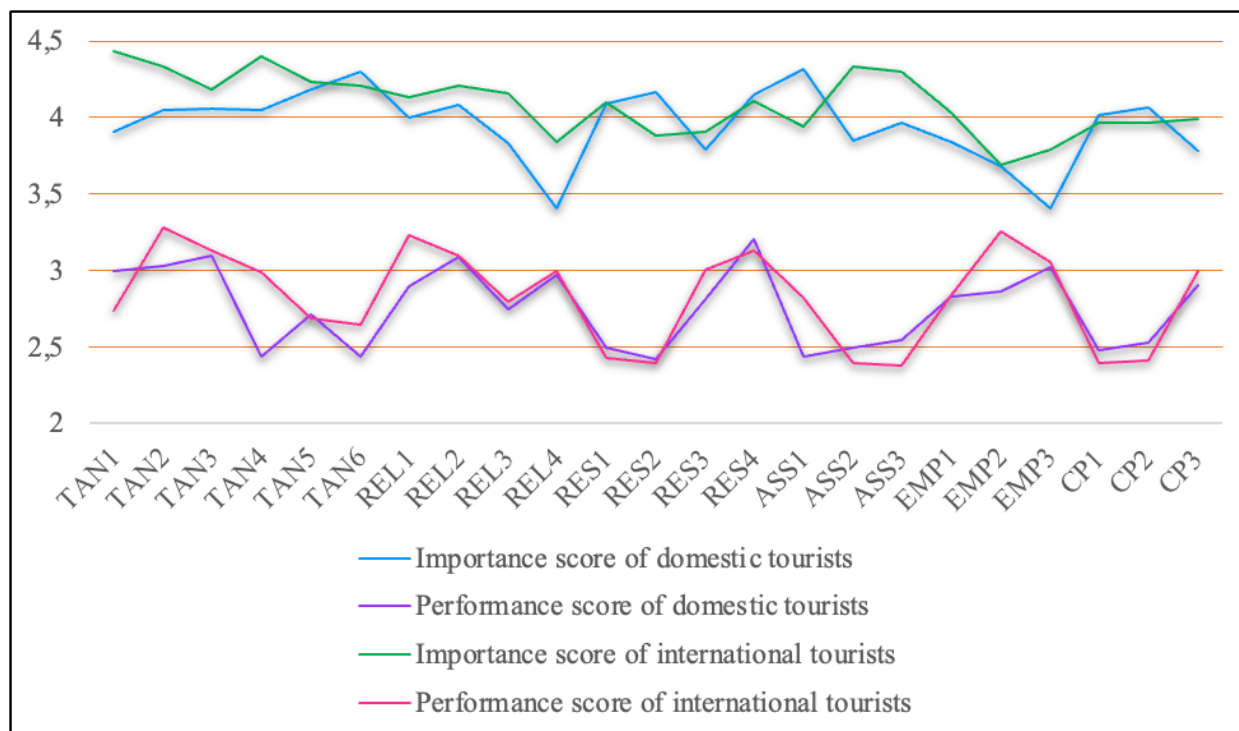
Figure 3. Importance-Performance comparison

Source: Results of analysis by the authors

Regarding the importance of assessment, there are significant differences in the assessment between international tourists and domestic tourists when evaluating the SQ of homestays in the agricultural tourism destination in the center of the Mekong Delta. There are a total of 16 out of 23 factors that international tourists rate as more important compared to domestic tourists, while domestic customers rate the remaining 7 SQ factors more highly including TAN6, RES2, RES4, ASS1, EMP1, CP1, and CP2. This suggests that homestay owners should invest in SQ elements suitable that cater to their potential customers. Among the 23 factors, the factors with the lowest difference in importance are RES1 (±0.01), RES4 (±0.04), TAN5 (±0.05), and CP1 (±0.05). The biggest differences belong to factors CP2 (±0.08), EMP3 (±0.56), and TAN1 (±0.52). Similarly, the assessment of the performance of SQ factors at the homestay also differs between the two groups of guests. However, the difference between the factors is not too large (Table 4). There is regarding the importance of assessment, there are significant differences in the assessment between international tourists and domestic tourists when evaluating the SQ of homestays in the agricultural tourism destination in the center of the Mekong Delta. There are 13/23 SQ factors whose performance is rated higher by international tourists than by domestic tourists. The remaining 10 factors are rated higher by domestic tourists than international visitors.

Table 4. Importance and performance of quality elements between domestic and foreign tourist

Items	Importance			Performance		
	Domestic tourist	International tourist	Disparity	Domestic tourist	International tourist	Disparity
TAN1	3.91	4.43	±0.52	3.00	2.74	±0.26
TAN2	4.05	4.33	±0.28	3.03	3.28	±0.25
TAN3	4.06	4.18	±0.12	3.10	3.13	±0.03
TAN4	4.05	4.40	±0.35	2.44	2.99	±0.55
TAN5	4.18	4.23	±0.05	2.71	2.69	±0.02
TAN6	4.30	4.21	±0.09	2.44	2.65	±0.21
REL1	4.00	4.13	±0.13	2.90	3.23	±0.33
REL2	4.08	4.21	±0.13	3.09	3.10	±0.01

Items	Importance			Performance		
	Domestic tourist	International tourist	Disparity	Domestic tourist	International tourist	Disparity
REL3	3.83	4.16	±0.33	2.75	2.80	±0.05
REL4	3.41	3.84	±0.43	2.97	3.00	±0.03
RES1	4.09	4.10	±0.01	2.50	2.43	±0.07
RES2	4.17	3.88	±0.29	2.42	2.40	±0.02
RES3	3.79	3.91	±0.12	2.81	3.01	±0.20
RES4	4.15	4.11	±0.04	3.21	3.13	±0.08
ASS1	4.32	3.94	±0.38	2.44	2.82	±0.38
ASS2	3.85	4.33	±0.48	2.50	2.40	±0.10
ASS3	3.97	4.30	±0.33	2.55	2.38	±0.17
EMP1	3.84	3.69	±0.15	2.83	4.03	±1.20
EMP2	3.68	3.79	±0.11	2.86	2.84	±0.02
EMP3	3.41	3.97	±0.56	3.02	3.26	±0.24
CP1	4.02	3.97	±0.05	2.48	3.06	±0.58
CP2	4.07	3.99	±0.08	2.53	2.40	±0.13
CP3	3.78	4.43	±0.65	2.91	2.41	±0.50

Source: Results of analysis by the authors

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

Homestays have gradually become a typical accommodation form in agricultural tourism destinations in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. Not only are they idyllic and nostalgic in overall atmosphere, but also bring tourists practical experiences and chances to expose the local life and customs. With the aim of improving the quality of services, enhancing tourists' satisfaction and loyalty, sustainably developing this accommodation business in agritourism destinations, the current study measured the quality of homestay services in agricultural tourism destinations in the center of the Mekong Delta by applying five SQ criteria in the SERVQUAL model of Parasuraman et al. (1988) and adding a criterion "cultural performance" related to typical elements of the traditional rural culture of the people of Southern Vietnam. Besides, the IPA model of Martilla and James (1977) was also used in combination to evaluate the quality of homestay services. The result showed that tourists mainly underestimate the level of implementation of homestay SQ criteria in agricultural tourism destinations in CT City. The IPA matrix shows that SQ factors are concentrated in quadrant I (Concentrate here), quadrant II (Keep up the good work), and quadrant IV (Possible overkill); Factors located in quadrant III (Low priority) tend to move closer to quadrant I. Furthermore, when comparing the assessment of SQ between international tourist groups and domestic tourists, the study shows a difference in the assessment of importance between the two groups of tourists. Most notable is the assessment of the importance and actual performance of SQ factors, which international tourists rate higher than domestic tourists.

2. Discussion

The IPA matrix shows that SQ factors are concentrated in quadrant I (Concentrate here), this quadrant includes six quality factors. These factors have an average importance score of over 4 points but a performance level of less than 3 points. This shows that these factors are considered very important to tourists, but the performance of homestays at the agritourism destination in the central Mekong Delta, Vietnam is still low. Therefore, these elements are deemed below standard and represent a weakness that requires improvement. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourists have become increasingly concerned about environmental hygiene and safety when engaging in tourism activities. Therefore, environmental hygiene and safety are considered highly important by tourists. However, homestays ensure these factors are at a low level (average values are below 2.80). In fact, hygiene issues at homestay locations are not guaranteed, especially the bad smells from nearby animal cages, some poultry still roam in the garden, such as chickens and ducks, so hygiene issues are not yet guaranteed, the water of some ponds and

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lakes have not treated, and bushes have not been cleaned, etc. This also affects the safety of tourists, especially visitors from urban areas and foreign countries. Tourists are very easily allergic to insects (mosquitoes, flies), and these animals can harm them. The ponds and lakes at some homestay locations lack fences or signs warning of water depth, which could be unsafe for tourists. Moreover, the knowledge and skills of the homestay owner are also considered important by tourists (M = 4.11), because they think that the host needs to have tourism knowledge and skills to better serve guests such as welcoming guests, foreign language skills, understanding the psychology of guests, etc. Although homestay owners receive local training on tourism, they are mainly farmers who switched to tourism activities, so they are often weak in tourism and hospitality expertise. Therefore, this suggests that homestay owners and local state management agencies in charge of tourism need to pay attention and improve this factor. Tourists often choose homestays to stay in order to enjoy the fresh air and green environment, however, through the average performance score of the TAN5 factor, we see that it only reaches 2.70; Therefore, homestay owners need to plant more trees and create more green landscapes at the homestay. Besides, the uniqueness and aesthetics of homestay architecture create appeal to tourists, but homestay accommodation facilities at agricultural tourism destinations in CT City are currently disappearing with this unique identity. Homestays have sprung up like mushrooms, but the architecture is almost the same, built like a modern hotel or motel, rarely having unique architecture with culture in rural or agricultural areas (typically, some homestays at agritourism destinations in CT city have unique architecture like Mekong Ecolodge homestay, Mekong Rustic homestay, and Vam Xang orchard). Besides, in quadrant II (Keep up the good work) of the evaluation, tourists rate eight factors as highly important. From there, it can be seen that these factors have been ensured by the homestays in terms of SQ for tourists. Because the hosts operating in homestay activities are all farmers who transitioned d from agricultural production to tourism, the hosts always have spontaneous, kind, and friendly personalities, always calmly guide visitors to experience, and are not rude or stubborn; This factor also has the highest average performance value among all evaluated factors (RES4=3.17). In addition, the host's appearance is always taken care of, wearing traditional Ba Ba shirts to serve guests (it is the traditional clothes of the people in the South of Vietnam), both showing professionalism and showing the traditional indigenous culture. Besides, the equipment and facilities at the homestay are fully equipped, meeting the needs of tourists including bedrooms, toilets, and personal items in the room etc. these items become eye-catching to visitors when they are made from local materials, such as bamboo, coconut tree wood, and woven water hyacinth; This is also enjoyed and approved by tourists because it is environmentally friendly. Quadrant III (Low priority) includes four elements. However, factors located in quadrant III (Low priority) tend to move closer to quadrant I. This is partly because most tourists staying at homestays come from localities or countries outside the Mekong Delta to stay and experience, so they want to learn and experience local culture. However, not all homestay accommodations at agricultural tourism destinations in CT City also have cultural performances (traditional singing and dancing) because it is not their forte or in that locality there are not many people who understand art and culture. At the same time, however, the traditional cultural performances in some homestay locations no longer existed, but are replaced by modern cultural features such as music with high-capacity equipment, urban-style costumes, singing songs that do not have the melody of traditional and homeland, etc. Tourists, whether from distant places or foreign lands, consistently require assistance from staff or hosts to enhance their experience, including guidance on sightseeing, dining instructions, directions, assistance in unexpected situations, etc. Similar to REL3, this factor lies in maintaining the current quality but also needs attention because it can move to the first or fourth quartile in the future. Therefore, homestay owners need to pay special attention to these factors to improve SQ in the future. Quadrant IV (Possible overkill) include six items. Looking at Figure 2, we can see that all three elements of this Empathy criterion are in this quadrant, meaning that homestay accommodation establishments have met SQ, ensuring satisfaction of tourists' needs. Homestay owners are always able to meet the needs of tourists. They have enough services, equipment, and experience services for tourists. Moreover, they also always pay attention to their special requests. However, the EMP1 factor "Understand visitor's need" is located close to the third quadrant, showing that homestay owners need to pay more attention to this, and always research and survey visitor market needs to meet the needs of the tourist market. Besides, in CT City, there are often many festival events related to local culture and agricultural cultures such as the Southern Traditional Cake Festival, Tan Loc Islet Fruit Festival, Cai Rang Floating Market Cultural Festival,... These festivals take place regularly and every year, so tourists can experience the local culture during their travels and stay in agritourism destinations in CT City. In addition, the reliability of accommodation information, accuracy in information storage, and prioritization of meeting tourists' needs during their stay also meet the quality and satisfaction of tourists. In short, the characteristics in this quadrant are considered unimportant to tourists, but the supplier performs well, so the supplier only needs to maintain the current quality

without investing and further development.

The result of a distinction between assessing performance and assessing importance shows that, whether they are international or domestic tourists, they all want quick service (RES1), polite, kind, and knowledgeable hosts (RES4), the homestay is always green landscape (TAN5), and traditional cultural features must be authentically presented by the host or community (CP1). Besides, based on comparison results it is suggested that homestay owners in agricultural tourism destinations in the center of the Mekong Delta, the case in CT City (Vietnam), should ensure they consistently meet all the above requirements. This factor is crucial for both operating the homestay and welcoming guests, as it is of common importance to both groups of visitors. In addition, international tourists are more inclined to experience cultural events (such as traditional or modern festivals) compared to domestic tourists because they are interested in learning about the traditional culture of the locality they are visiting. Furthermore, international tourists value the appearance of hosts and servers at homestays, as well as appreciate their attention to special requests such as allergies to food ingredients. Despite the homestays serving in a popular style, international tourists also expect neatness and professionalism from hosts and servers. Therefore, homestay owners need to pay special attention to these factors when serving international guests. The factors rated higher by domestic tourists belong to the criteria RES, TAN, ASS, EMP, and CP. This comparison result suggests that homestay owners should make efforts to enhance SQ, especially for domestic guests. The performance of SQ factors by homestay owners for the two guest groups with the smallest difference belongs to REL2 (±0.01), TAN5 (±0.02), RES2 (±0.02), EMP2 (±0.02), TAN3 (±0.03), REL4 (±0.03), and REL3 (±0.05). This suggests that there is a similar assessment of performance by both groups of customers. EMP1 is the only factor that exhibits a significant difference in performance evaluations between the two customer groups. Regarding EMP1, domestic tourists rated it 2.48 points, whereas international tourists gave it a rating of 4.03 points. This shows that the homestay owner partially understands the needs of international tourists during their stay, whereas domestic tourists do not. The reason for this significant difference is partly because the assessment of the importance of the EMP1 factor by international visitors is not high, but the actual performance of the homestay is better than their expectations. Based on this comparison result, homestay owners must improve SQ and tailor factors to each specific group of guests. In general, in the comparison results in Table 4, no matter the difference in performance assessment between the international and the domestic tourist groups, the performance of most factors is lower than the importance ratings. Therefore, homestay owners can use this information to build, develop, and improve guest services.

This article makes a theoretical contribution in combining five criteria to measure SERVQUAL SQ with the criterion of "cultural performance" to bring specificity to homestay accommodation facilities at agricultural tourist destinations, thereby further developing a model for evaluating SQ for homestays in countries that develop forms of tourism associated with agriculture. Besides, the research also expanded its contributions to the theoretical framework by combining the SERVQUAL model with the IPA model to measure SQ as recommended by Park and Yi (2022). In addition, this study further strengthens and confirms the IPA and SERVQUAL models in assessing the quality of tourism and hotel services. In addition to theoretical contributions, the research has also contributed important aspects in practice: (i) the research has shown business households and tourism local state management agencies the current quality of homestay services at agricultural tourism destinations in CT City - the center of the Mekong Delta, Vietnam in recent times for appropriate improvements; (ii) At the same time, the research has shown which SQ factors are important to each group of guests so that homestay owners can make improvements appropriate to their target customer group in the future.

Research recommendations

Although this article makes important contributions to both theory and practice, the research also has some limitations and this also provides a basis for future research.

1. First, the research was only conducted in the center of the Mekong Delta - CT City, so future research can expand the research area to compare SQ with other Agricultural tourism destinations in neighboring provinces.

2. Second, this SQ assessment has only been done based on quantitative methods, so in the next research, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, or analysis data based on online reviews can be added.

3. Finally, future research could add criteria for service prices or experiential activities to measure tourist evaluation of SQ of homestays in agricultural areas.

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MOTIVATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS
OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS JOINING NIGHT TOURS:
A CASE STUDY OF HERITAGE SITES IN HANOI, VIETNAM

Xuyen Nguyen Thi[1]

Purpose/Problem Statement - The study aims to explore the motivations and expectations of international tourists joining night tours at three heritage sites in Hanoi, Vietnam. Hanoi has launched fifteen night tours to start a series of activities to orient the development of Hanoi's night tourism, not only helping to "awaken monuments and heritages" but also contributing greatly to the development of Hanoi night tourism and national economic development. From November 24th to November 26th, 2023, Ha Noi organized the launch ceremony of Ha Noi night tourism products, introducing the lighting art experience spaces "Ha Noi Night - Touching Point of Emotions," and announced the decision to recognize the Hoan Kiem Lake area - surrounding area and Ha Noi's Old Quarter as city-level tourist areas (*Vietnam National Authority of Tourism – VNAT, 2023)*. Night tourism products have been invested in and renewed in terms of content and form. Some products have been newly built and introduced for the first time. In particular, night tourism products at heritage destinations are renewed by applying "smart tourism technologies" to help increase tourist experiences, enrich and diversify Hanoi's night tourism products. Despite the aim of Hanoi tourism governments in designing and providing night tourism products, it is significant to find out the motivations and expectations of international tourists joining night tour programs at heritage sites in Hanoi. However, to the best of our knowledge, no attempt has been made to understand international tourists' motivation and expectations towards night tours at heritage destinations. To fill these gaps, the present study attempts to explore international tourists' motivation and expectations with regard to night tourism products in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Originality/value – This research develops a theoretical framework for pull and push factors toward heritage tourism. The results find that both pull and push factors motivate international tourists to participate in night tour programs at heritage sites in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Design/methodology/approach – This study used a qualitative approach by collecting data through individual interviews. Interpretive researchers attempt to understand a phenomenon from the interviewee's perspective, and the means to achieve this is through in-depth interviews. This study used a semistructured questionnaire with open-ended questions to assist in the collection of interviewees' personal motivations and expectations. A total of 15 in-depth interviews were conducted with tourists coming from different countries around the world who participated in night tours at the Temple of Literature, Thang Long Imperial Citadel, and Hoa Lo Prison. The two main research questions are: ''Why do international tourists participate in night tours at heritage sites?" and "What do international tourists expect from night tours at heritage sites?". The data were analyzed by using themes.

Findings/Discussion – The motivations and expectations are varied and multi-faceted and include pull and push factors, but are also related to cultural heritage tourism, recreation, and additional factors. A conceptual model is presented of the motivations of pilgrimage center visitors based on the push-pull motivational framework. The study finds that the tourists attending night tour programs are due to push and pull motivations, in which the intention to engage with local cultures and explore recreational activities in Hanoi at night are the two most significant reasons for push factors.

Implications – The study could help tourism stakeholders understand the motivations and expectations of international tourists joining night tour. Therefore, it can be seen as good material for building night tours to meet international tourists' needs. At the same time, it provides some suggestions to promote night tourism programs in Vietnam in general and Hanoi in particular to attract more foreign tourists.

Research limitations – This study has several limitations that encourage additional investigation. Firstly, the demographics of the international tourists who participated in this study could be specific, for example, young tourists. Secondly, this study is at a preliminary stage, and only the qualitative approach was adopted. Future research could build on the findings of this research and develop a measurement scale for international tourists' motivation

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and expectation to join night tours at heritage sites so that quantifiable results can be obtained.

Keywords – *Night tours, heritage sites, motivations, expectations, international tourists, Hanoi.*

1. Introduction

In the world, the night economy has attracted attention and been mentioned a lot in recent years. Many countries have promoted the development of the night economy, especially countries with strengths in tourism that have proactively opened the nighttime service industry to maximize revenue (Hoa, 2020). At many famous tourist destinations, nightlife is an interesting highlight for tourists and also a "gold-mine" for the local. The night economy has contributed tens of billions of pounds and created jobs for millions of workers in the UK each year, contributing to creating a vibrant, open UK and one of the most interesting destinations for tourists around the world (EY, 2018). In the US, developing "cities that never sleep" has become one of the key economic development strategies. This trend is also spreading strongly in some countries in Asia such as Japan, Korea, Thailand and in recent years, China (Lien, 2020). In addition to attracting international and domestic tourists to participate in night-time commercial activities and services, state management agency also build legal corridors so that these activities can operate scientifically, safe and effective with the goal of creating breakthrough development for the economy.

In Vietnam, on July 27, 2020, the Prime Minister signed Decision No. 1129/QD - TTg on Approving the Project to develop the night economy in Vietnam with the goal of exploiting the potential for economic development at night to take full advantage of new economic development opportunities, improve people's income and lives, and limit risks and negative impacts on ensuring political security and social self-safety. Implementing Decision No. 1894/QD-BVHTTDL dated July 14, 2023 of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism on promulgating the Project on several models for developing night tourism products. Under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism's project, five models of night tourism product development are targeted. These include cultural artistic performances, sports, health care and beauty services, shopping and night entertainment, night tours, and culinary culture. Bui Hoang Son, permanent member of the National Assembly's culture and education committee, said that to successfully carry out night-time tourism and bring about high economic efficiency, it needs appropriate investment in infrastructure like lighting, public utilities and transport to ensure safety and convenience for tourists. Night tours also require solid policies and regulations to encourage the engagement of businesses, and protect the environment. It can be said that there is huge potential to develop night-time tourism. However, to make that move effective, the engagement of management agencies, enterprises and the community is essential.

Hanoi is the capital, political, economic, and scientific center and is identified as a key tourism center of Vietnam. The number of international tourists to Hanoi accounts for about 30% of the number of visitors to Vietnam. According to a report by the VNAT, in 2023, the total number of tourists to Hanoi will reach 22.6 million, an increase of 32.4% over the same period in 2022. Vietnam welcomed 12.6 million international visitors, 3.4 times higher than 2022, far exceeding the target of 8 million international visitors in 2023. Hanoi promotes the development of night tourism products, contributing to making night tourism the main product to develop the night economy in Hanoi. Hanoi has launched fifteen night tour programs to start a series of activities to orient the development of Hanoi's night tourism, not only helping to "awaken monuments and heritages" but also contributing greatly to the development of Hanoi night tourism and national economic development. From November 24th to November 26th, 2023, Ha Noi organized the launch ceremony of Ha Noi night tourism products, introducing the lighting art experience spaces "Ha Noi Night - Touching Point of Emotions," and announced the decision to recognize the Hoan Kiem Lake area - surrounding area and Ha Noi's Old Quarter as city-level tourist areas (*Vietnam National Authority of Tourism – VNAT, 2023).* Night tourism products have been invested in and renewed in terms of content and form. Some products have been newly built and introduced for the first time. In particular, night tourism products at heritage destinations are renewed by applying "smart tourism technologies" to help increase tourist experiences, enrich and diversify Hanoi's night tourism products. Despite the aim of Hanoi tourism governments in designing and providing night tourism products, it is significant to find out the motivations and expectations of international tourists joining night tour programs at heritage sites in Hanoi. However, to the best of our knowledge, no attempt has been made to understand international tourists' motivation and expectations towards night tour programs at heritage destinations. To fill these gaps, the present study attempts to explore international tourists' motivation and expectations with regard to night tourism products in Hanoi, Vietnam. The study's objectives are summarised as follows:

1. To identify international tourists' motivation to night tour programs at heritage sites in Hanoi;
2. To analyse international tourists' expectations towards night tour programs at heritage sites;

3. To provide recommendations for night tour programs at heritage sites in Vietnam.

2. Literature Review

Night tour programs in Hanoi offer international tourists an opportunity to experience the city's cultural and social life after dark. These tours provide a unique perspective on the city's heritage, cuisine, and local customs. Understanding international tourists' motivations and expectations is crucial for developing and managing effective night tour programs. This literature review examines existing research on international tourists' motivations for participating in night tours, their expectations from these programs, and the implications for the tourism industry in Hanoi.

2.1. Motivations for Participating in Night Tours

International tourists are driven by various motivations when selecting night tours, which can be broadly categorized into cultural, social, and experiential factors.

Cultural Exploration: According to Kim and Choi (2019), one of the primary motivations for international tourists to engage in night tours is the desire for cultural exploration. Their study found that tourists are interested in experiencing local traditions, historical sites, and cultural performances that are unique to the nighttime environment. Night tours offer a chance to engage with aspects of Vietnamese culture that are less accessible during the day, such as local festivals, traditional foods, and historic landmarks illuminated at night (Kim & Choi, 2019).

Novelty and Curiosity: A study by Chen and Tsai (2020) highlighted novelty and curiosity as key motivators for international tourists. Tourists are drawn to the idea of experiencing Hanoi from a different perspective and exploring areas of the city that are not available during daytime tours. This sense of novelty is often associated with the allure of discovering hidden gems and experiencing the city's nightlife, which contrasts with their everyday experiences (Chen & Tsai, 2020).

Relaxation and Leisure: Lee et al. (2021) explored how relaxation and leisure are significant motivations for night tours. Their research revealed that international tourists view night tours as a way to unwind and enjoy a leisurely evening, which includes activities such as dining at local restaurants, strolling through night markets, and enjoying the serene ambiance of the city's landmarks after dark (Lee et al., 2021).

Social Interaction: Research by Williams and Busser (2019) showed that social interaction is a strong motivation for international tourists participating in night tours. Tourists often seek opportunities to meet new people, both other travelers and locals, during these tours. Social interactions can enhance their overall experience and contribute to a sense of community and belonging (Williams & Busser, 2019).

2.2. Expectations from Night Tour Programs

Understanding what international tourists expect from night tour programs helps in designing experiences that meet their needs and preferences.

Authenticity and Local Experience: A key expectation identified by Lee and Lee (2022) is the authenticity of the experience. Tourists expect night tours to provide genuine and immersive experiences that reflect the true essence of Hanoi's culture. They seek interactions with local residents, opportunities to sample authentic Vietnamese cuisine, and visits to traditional sites rather than commercialized tourist attractions (Lee & Lee, 2022).

Safety and Comfort: According to Nguyen and Nguyen (2023), safety and comfort are crucial expectations for international tourists on night tours. Tourists anticipate that tour operators will ensure their safety through well-organized itineraries, knowledgeable guides, and secure transportation. Comfortable and enjoyable experiences are also essential, which includes well-planned activities and high-quality service (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2023).

Educational Value: Chen and Wu (2021) found that international tourists expect educational components in night tours. Tourists look for informative experiences that offer insights into Hanoi's history, culture, and traditions. Educational value can be provided through knowledgeable guides, engaging storytelling, and opportunities for tourists to learn about local practices and historical sites (Chen & Wu, 2021).

Unique and Memorable Experiences: Research by Li and McKercher (2020) highlighted that international tourists expect night tours to offer unique and memorable experiences. Tourists seek experiences that stand out from typical daytime activities and create lasting memories. Unique experiences might include special events, exclusive access to certain attractions, or unique perspectives on familiar landmarks (Li & McKercher, 2020).

Research on international tourists' motivations and expectations for night tour programs in Hanoi reveals a

complex interplay of cultural, social, and experiential factors. Tourists are motivated by the desire for cultural exploration, novelty, relaxation, and social interaction. Their expectations include authenticity, safety, comfort, educational value, and memorable experiences. Meeting these motivations and expectations has significant implications for the design, marketing, and management of night tour programs.

3. Research Methodology

The qualitative research method used in this study aims to understand motivation and expectation of international tourists joinning nigh tours at heritage sites in Hanoi. The research process was conducted as follows:**App**

Approach	Data collection methods	Materials for analysis	Analysis methods
Qualitative methods	In-depth interview with semistructured questionnaire	Interviewees' sharing	- Content analysis - Theme analysis
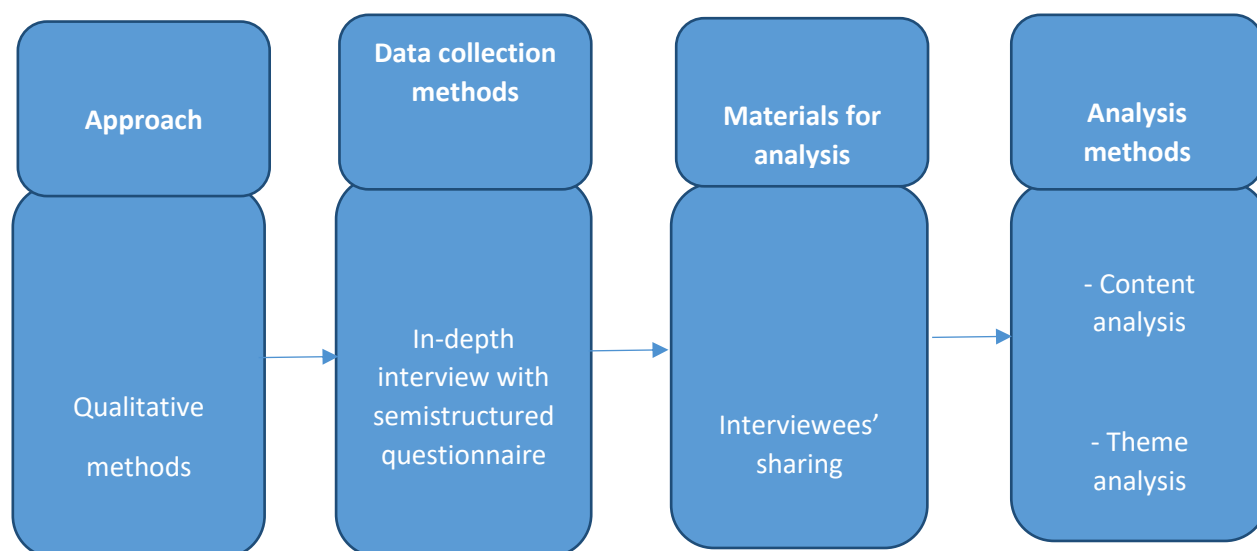
Figure 3.1. Research procedure

3.1. Data Collection

The current study employed the interpretivism paradigm. Interpretivists believe that people create reality (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Interpretive researchers attempt to understand a phenomenon from the interviewee's perspective, and the means to achieve this is through in-depth interviews. This study used a semistructured questionnaire with open-ended questions to assist in the collection of interviewees' personal data and experience. The questionnaire has two sections. The first section aims to gather demographic information, and the second section assesses international tourists' motivation and expectation from their perspectives. Several questions: ''What motivated you to choose this night tour at heritage sites in Hanoi?", "What specific aspects of the night tour attracted you?", "Did you have any specific goals or expectations when you decided to join this tour?", "What were your expectations before the tour began?", "What information did you have about the night tour before you joined?", and "Were there any specific features or elements you hoped to experience during the night tour at heritage sites in Hanoi?" were included in the interview protocol. The development of the above questions was inspired by literature on Push and Pull theory (Crompton, 1979) and Expectation -Confirmation Theory (ECT) (Oliver, 1980).

The selection of the interviewees followed purposeful sampling, with two key criteria. First, the interviewee has to be a foreign tourist. Second, the interviewee who participated in one of the night tour products at the Temple of Literature, Thang Long Imperial Citadel, and Hoa Lo Prison, so that international tourists can share what motivate them join the night tour and what they expect from the tour at heritage destinations. Apart from these two criteria, the researchers attempted to achieve a good diversity of the interviewee profiles. All walks of life were included, ranging from university students to educators and academics, from people who hold freelance jobs to those working in the government departments. In addition, the researchers also tried to achieve a good mix of age groups. The number of interviewees was not pre-determined, instead the researchers went on with the interviews until a noticeable saturation was identified, there was no new information related to this topic coming out from the interviews. The average duration of each interview was 15-30 minutes. As all interviewees are international tourists and they are comfortable using English then all the interviews were conducted in English language.

3.2. Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded upon obtaining consent from the interviewees and transcribed verbatim immediately after each interview was completed. After the content of the transcript was verified, the corresponding information was used for further analysis. Altogether, this study conducted 15 interviews (Table 4.1). Content analysis was then performed to analyse the data. Content analysis allows researchers to investigate the text without any influence or direction from any 'a priori' theory or concept; thus, what is revealed from this study is open for discussion (Jennings, 2001). In addition, researchers work collaboratively until consistent and similar results are achieved and no additional information is discovered from the interviews. The coding process was conducted in a bottom up manner. The researchers worked invidually on the transcript at the initial coding process. The coding process followed four stpes:

Identifying meaningful text units;

Developing the text units into different codings

Categorising the codings into broader themes

Interpreting the themes.

4. Findings

The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 4.1. The results obtained 15 interviews from international tourists joining night tours at the Temple of Literature, Thang Long Imperial Citadel, and Hoa Lo Prison, with 8 people having bachelor degrees (accounting for 53.3%), 6 holding master degrees (40%) and a PhD (6.7%). This result shows that a proportion of international tourists with high education levels have favorable conditions to access night tours at heritage sites. The results also show that international tourists from all walks of life with a wide range of age (25 – 54 years old) concern about night tours at three heritage sites in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Table 4.1. Demographic characteristics of international tourists participating in the interview

No	Sex	Age	Nationality	Education Level	Occupation
1	F	25-34	Chinese	Bachelor	Students
2	M	35-44	Japanese	Master	Educators and Academics
3	M	25-34	American	Bachelor	Business Professionals
4	F	45-54	Chinese	PhD	Educators and Academics
5	F	35-44	American	Master	Business Professionals
6	M	25-34	South Korean	Master	Business
7	F	25-34	French	Bachelor	Frelancer
8	F	45-54	French	Bachelor	Educators and Academics
9	F	45-54	South Korean	Master	Government Officials
10	M	25-34	German	Bachelor	Business
11	M	35-44	American	Master	Government Officials
12	M	45-54	Australian	Bachelor	Government Officials
13	F	45-54	American	Bachelor	Frelancer
14	F	35-44	Australian	Master	Educators and Academics
15	M	45-54	British	Bachelor	Business

The content analysis generated interesting findings, which can be categorised into international tourists' motivation and expectation joining night tours at heritage sites in Hanoi, Vietnam. The study finds that the tourists attending night tours are due to push and pull motivations, in which the intention to engage with local cultures and historical experiences, and explore recreational activities in Hanoi at night are the two most significant reasons for push factors. The international tourists expressed their willingness to participate in night tours at heritage sites in various ways, including unique experience, scenic beauty and photographic opportunities, and escaping from daytime crowds.

The findings in table 4.2 indicate that international tourists are drawn to night tours for several reasons. Firstly,

local historical and cultural curiosity is a major motivator. All international tourists are fascinated by the desire for authentic experiences, historical narratives and experiencing heritage sites in a different ambiance after dark, which adds a sense of mystery and exclusivity. Secondly, most of international tourists are interested in exploring recreational activities like interactive workshops on traditional Vietnamese arts like calligraphy to learn to write Vietnamese characters and understand their meanings or enjoy traditional music performance and a relaxing tea experience. Thirdly, unique experiences are very appealing. Night tours often offer different perspectives and activities that aren't available during the day. For instance, the lit-up temples and the evening ambiance can make the historical sites feel more magical and immersive. Moreover, cultural activities such as local music performances or traditional food tastings are often included in night tours, which adds to their appeal. Lastly, escape from the daytime crowds is another reason. Heritage sites can get quite crowded during the day, so a night tour offers a more serene experience. The motivations for night tours and daytime tours do overlap but differ in emphasis. During the day, tourists are more likely to be motivated by educational opportunities and photographic interests. They want to see the sites in their full glory, take pictures, and learn about the history and culture. Night tours, on the other hand, focus more on providing atmospheric experiences and special events. The daytime experience is more about exploration and discovery, while the night tour is about creating a memorable and unique experience that offers a different kind of enjoyment and engagement with the heritage site.

Table 4.2. International tourists' motivation joining night tours at heritage sites in Hanoi

Motivations (Frequency)	Salient points	Tourists' sharing
Local historical and cultural curiosity (15)	Desire for authentic experiences	Personal stories and testimonies from former prisoners, offering a more personal connection to the past.
	Interest in historical narratives	Narrate the story of how Confucius's teachings were central to the education of Vietnamese scholars and the historical significance of the first graduates of the National University.
	Experiencing heritage sites in a different ambiance.	The use of traditional lanterns to illuminate the Citadel creates a magical atmosphere that enhances the historical ambiance of the site.
Explore recreational activities (13)	Immerse in Vietnamese culture in an engaging environment	Interactive workshops on traditional Vietnamese arts like calligraphy, learn to write Vietnamese characters and understand their meanings.
	Leisurely enjoyment	Traditional music performance and a relaxing tea experience. Night tours are not open during the day
Unique Experiences (12)	A sense of special access to historical sites.	Using 3D Mapping technology, combined with professional lighting and sound techniques
	Implementing technology	Sparkling lighting system
	Stunning night-time aesthetics	
Scenic Beauty and Photographic Opportunities (9)	Elegant traditional Vietnamese architecture	The combination of traditional tiled roofs, wooden pavilions, and stone paths creates a harmonious and visually appealing environment.
	Serene Atmosphere	Night tours offer a quieter, more peaceful experience where tourists can enjoy the beauty and historical significance of the site without the usual crowds.
Escape from Daytime Crowds (7)		The calm and quiet environment at night provides an opportunity for introspection and a deeper appreciation of the historical and cultural significance of the site.
	Reflective Environment	

Table 4.3 shows detail of several key expectations of international tourists for night tours at heritage sites in Hanoi, Vietnam. They often expect a unique and immersive experience that sets the tour apart from a daytime visit. This includes having knowledgeable and engaging guides who can provide interesting stories and insights about the heritage sites. They also look forward to a comfortable and safe experience, which includes clear safety instructions, and proper management of the tour group. Additionally, many tourists anticipate cultural enrichment activities such as local food sampling, traditional performances, or interactive experiences that offer a deeper connection to Vietnamese culture and history.

Table 4.3. Expectations of international tourists from night tours at heritage sites in Hanoi

Expectations (Frequency)	Salient points	
Authentic Cultural Experiences (14)	Traditional Cultural Performances	Experience performances of Vietnamese folk music.
	Exploration of Ancient Architecture and Artifacts	Explore ancient architecture and view historical artifacts.
	Historical Artifacts and Exhibits	Expect to see artifacts and exhibits related to the prison's past.
High-Quality and Engaging Tours (12)	Historical accuracy	Accurate, detailed information about history and significance.
	Unique and mmersive	A distinctive, atmospheric experience that highlights the site's character at night.
Educational Content (11)	Cultural Respect	A respectful and culturally sensitive presentation of history and traditions.
	Historical Background	Expect to learn about the prison's origins under French colonial rule and its use during the Vietnam War.
	Architectural Features	Insights into the Citadel's architectural design, including its defensive structures, palace buildings, and ceremonial spaces.
	Cultural Practices	Explain traditional ceremonies held at the Temple
Safety and Comfort (11)	Ensuring a Safe Experience	The night tours will be conducted in a secure environment with appropriate safety measures
	Providing Comfort	Provide essential amenities such as drinking water and shaded rest areas
Visual and Sensory Appeal (8)	Beautiful Nighttime Scenery	Expect to see the Temple's architecture and gardens in a visually stunning way during the night
	Authentic Displays	Look for authentic artifacts and exhibits that reflect the prison's past
	Incorporate multimedia elements	Recreate historical events and daily life in the Citadel, offering an immersive experience

5. Conclusion and Discussion

5.1. Conclusion

The results of the research to meet the specified objectives. To identify international tourists' motivation to night tour programs at heritage sites in Hanoi, Vietnam. Previous studies have shown that understanding international tourists' motivations (Kim & Choi, 2019; Chen & Tsai, 2020; Lee et al., 2021; Williams & Busser, 2019) and expectations (Lee & Lee, 2022; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2023; Chen & Wu, 2021; Li & McKercher, 2020) is crucial for developing and managing effective night tour programs. This study explored what motivate international tourists and what they expect when participating night tours regarding the development of heritage tourism. The results revealed five key motivations, namely, local historical and cultural curiosity, exploring recreational activities, unique experiences, scenic beauty and photographic opportunities, and escaping from daytime crowds. The findings stated

their expectations, they are authentic cultural experiences, high-quality and engaging tours, educational content, safety and comfort, and visual and sensory appeal.

5.2. Discussion

The results of this study obeyed on Push and Pull theory (Crompton, 1979) and Expectation - Confirmation Theory (ECT) (Oliver, 1980). While motivations, such as local historical and cultural curiosity, is discussed in prior studies the rest, exploring recreational activities, is less touched on in the existing literature, especially when it comes to night tours at heritage destinations in Vietnam. The above findings also stated that international tourists have a big favor for enjoying scenic beauty, taking photos or making videos to share their experience on social networks such as Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Tiktok, etc. The findings has enriched our understanding on what international tourists expect when it comes to a specific context of night tours at heritage sites in Hanoi. Their expectations include authentic cultural experiences, high-quality and engaging tours, educational content, safety and comfort, and visual and sensory appeal.

From the perspective of the government and practitioners, by addressing these international tourists' motivations and expectations as the findings of the research have several implications for the development and management of night tour programs in Hanoi. Firstly, in terms of tour design and marketing, understanding foreign tourists' motivations can guide the design and marketing of night tours. For example, emphasizing authentic cultural experiences, showcasing the novelty of nighttime activities, and promoting relaxation opportunities can attract tourists. Marketing strategies should highlight the unique aspects of Hanoi's nightlife and the benefits of night tours over daytime experiences (Kim & Choi, 2019; Chen & Tsai, 2020). Secondly, the study results showed that international tourists are motivated to explore recreational activities. Therefore, the government or practitioners could develop certain activities, such as interactive workshops on traditional Vietnamese arts, traditional music performances, relaxing tea experiences, which allow them immerse in Vietnamese culture in an engaging environment and enjoy leisure time. Moreover, meeting expectations related to safety, comfort, and educational value requires high standards of service quality. Tour operators should invest in well-trained guides, ensure safe and comfortable enviroment at heritage sites, and provide engaging and informative content for tours (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2023; Lee & Lee, 2022). By addressing the motivations and expectations of international tourists, night tours can enhance overall tourist satisfaction. Ensuring that tours provide authentic, memorable, and educational experiences, while also maintaining high safety and comfort standards, can lead to positive reviews and repeat business (Li & McKercher, 2020; Chen & Wu, 2021). In conclusion, through this qualitative and interpretive study, our understanding of international tourists' motivation and expectation joining night tours at heritage sites in Hanoi, Vietnam is enhanced methodologically and theoretically.

6. Research recommendations

This study has several limitations that encourage additional investigation. Firstly, the demographics of the interviewees who participated in this study could be diversified further. Many stakeholders, such as community groups, developers, government workers, business owners, neighbourhood leaders and commission members, were not included in this study. Secondly, this study is at a preliminary stage, and only the qualitative approach was adopted. Future research could build on the findings of this research and develop a measurement scale for residents' generativity and their behaviour in heritage preservation so that quantifiable results can be obtained. Future research could further explore how evolving tourist preferences and global trends impact night tourism in Hanoi, and investigate innovative approaches to enhance the sustainability and appeal of night tours.

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DESTINATION ATTRACTION THROUGH GASTRONOMY: THE CASE OF VIETNAM

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Extended abstract

As competition between tourism destinations intensifies, local culture becomes a crucial element in attracting and entertaining tourists. Gastronomy, central to the tourist experience and significant in destination identity formation, plays a pivotal role. This paper explores how gastronomy and food experiences attract tourists to Vietnam. The study reveals that gastronomy significantly enhances Vietnam's tourism and destination identity. Managed effectively, gastronomic tourism fosters cultural exchanges between tourists and local communities. The research utilizes Vietnam as a case study. Gastronomy tourism, when integrated with marketing strategies and local participation, can enhance destination branding, evoke memorable experiences, and support economic development. Key methods include in-depth interviews and document analysis, highlighting tourists' perceptions and the potential of food as a tool for destination marketing. The findings suggest that promoting Vietnam's rich culinary heritage through various marketing initiatives can strengthen its appeal as a gastronomic destination, ultimately contributing to the country's tourism and economic growth.

Keywords: gastronomy, tourism, destination, tourist experience, Vietnam

Introduction

Often accounting for 30% or more of tourist expenditure, food is absolutely vital for the evolution of tourism offerings. Usually, this expenditure goes towards nearby companies, therefore boosting the local economy. Local, real, and unique experiences strongly related to destinations that tourists visit attract them more and more. According to Ab Karim and Chi (2011), many tourists travel specifically to seek culinary experiences. These food experiences are often seen as distinct from everyday eating, with a strong emphasis on authenticity and uniqueness (Richard, 2002). Authenticity, novelty, and locality are fundamental elements that enhance tourists' food experiences. Furthermore, food and tourism have a potentially strong relationship in terms of branding, imaging, and positioning a destination or region. This relationship can significantly enhance the overall image of all products and services available in the area (Michael Hall, 2012). Developing countries, in particular, are active suppliers in the global tourism market, leveraging their unique culinary heritage to attract tourists. This study aims to explore how gastronomy can enhance the attractiveness of a destination. It investigates the link between tourists' food experiences and destination identity, using Vietnam as a case study. The research highlights the importance of integrating local cuisine into tourism marketing strategies to create a memorable and authentic visitor experience.

Objectives

1. To analyze the impact of gastronomy on Vietnam's tourism.

2. To investigate the role of local cuisine in forming destination identity.

3. To explore strategies for enhancing gastronomic tourism in Vietnam.

Research Methodology

In-Depth Interview

As Benney and Hughes (1970) assert, the interview serves as the "favored digging tool" of social researchers. Generally, qualitative interviewing is characterized by its flexibility and dynamic nature (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). This approach is often described as nondirective, unstructured, nonstandardized, and open-ended. In-depth interviewing, a term commonly used in qualitative research, involves face-to-face encounters between the researcher

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and informants. These encounters aim to understand the informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words.

According to Legard, Keegan, and Ward (2003), in-depth or unstructured interviews are a fundamental approach to gathering data in qualitative research. Classic ethnographers, like Malinowski, emphasized the significance of actively interacting with others in order to comprehend their perspectives (Burgess, 1982a), emphasizing the influence of language in conveying meaning. The in-depth interview is commonly characterized as a type of dialogue (Burgess, 1982a, 1984; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The term 'conversation with a purpose' was coined by Sidney and Beatrice Webb to describe interviews. This term highlights the essential role of interviews in the construction of knowledge about the social environment through everyday human contact, as discussed by Rorty in 1980.

In this study, we propose that in-depth interviews are the most crucial method for comprehending tourists' experiences and food consumption in detail.

Documentary Method

The documentary research approach was utilized to collect significant papers, reports, statistical data, and published information relevant to this study. The thorough examination of pertinent documents and secondary data serves as an essential foundation for the researcher to establish a clear research direction. This process guarantees that the research makes a systematic and valuable contribution to the existing knowledge in the relevant field of interest (Tinh, 2009). Depoy and Gitlin (1998) assert that researchers should situate their novel discoveries within the context of prior studies when presenting the knowledge generated in a study.

Tony L. (2005) contends that secondary data analyses across all research approaches help identify gaps in existing knowledge about particular research topics and suggest specific methods for securing the most valid data related to the questions or topics under study. These secondary sources include scholarly and popular publications, archival and statistical data from various administrative sources at national, state, and local levels, other archival documents such as maps, atlases, abstracts of titles, and title deeds, records and data collected by various organizations, and personal and individual data such as diaries, family histories, biographies, autobiographies, and tombstones.

Secondary sources offer published statistical data on various aspects of the tourism industry, such as annual tourism arrival figures, tourist spending, growth rates, investments in the sector, tourism infrastructure, the economic and local community impacts of the tourism industry, the number of food and beverage businesses, and tourists' experiences and recommendations.

Information was collected from the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT), General Statistical Offices at different levels, government annual reports and provincial agencies, and the Department of Culture, Sport, and Tourism. Additionally, data were obtained from notable newspapers, media channels, and websites related to the tourism field, such as The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Vietnam Tourism, Asian Food Channel, CNN, DailyMeal.com, vietnamfood.org, vietnamtour.net, and TripAdvisor.com.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

The promotion of gastronomic tourism in Vietnam has proven to be a significant driver for attracting tourists and enhancing the overall travel experience. This study has highlighted various strategies and tools employed to market Vietnamese cuisine, such as restaurant rankings, television shows, home cooking classes, food festivals, gastronomic tours, and the utilization of websites and social media platforms. The integration of these diverse marketing approaches has successfully showcased the rich and unique culinary heritage of Vietnam, making it an appealing destination for food enthusiasts.

Vietnam's diverse culinary experiences, ranging from street food to high-end restaurant cuisine, have been effectively promoted through various media channels. TV shows like "Martin Yan-Taste of Vietnam" and "Robert Danhi-Taste of Vietnam" have played a crucial role in popularizing Vietnamese cuisine both domestically and internationally. Home cooking classes offered by renowned chefs like Nguyen Dzoan Cam Van have provided tourists with hands-on experiences that deepen their appreciation of Vietnamese culinary arts.

Food events and festivals have also contributed significantly to promoting Vietnamese cuisine. Events such as the World Food Festival have provided platforms for showcasing traditional dishes from different regions, thereby

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enhancing the visibility of Vietnamese gastronomy on a global scale. Furthermore, gastronomic tours offered by travel companies like Saigontourist and Indochina Charm Int'l Travel have allowed tourists to immerse themselves in the local food culture, offering a blend of culinary education and cultural exploration.

2. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the importance of a multifaceted approach in promoting gastronomic tourism. The success of Vietnam's gastronomic tourism can be attributed to the synergy between various promotional tools and the country's rich culinary heritage. However, to sustain and enhance this success, several key considerations must be addressed.

1. Strengthening Quality and Hygiene Standards: As noted by tourists, maintaining high standards of cleanliness and hygiene is crucial for the credibility and attractiveness of street food vendors. Implementing inspection systems and awarding certifications to vendors who meet these standards can improve tourist confidence and satisfaction.

2. Enhancing Culinary Education and Training: Continued education and training for local chefs and vendors on international culinary standards and customer service can further elevate the quality of food experiences offered to tourists. Collaboration with tourism schools and culinary institutes can facilitate this process.

3. Targeted Marketing Strategies: Identifying and targeting specific tourist segments that are most likely to be attracted by the food experiences linked to Vietnam is essential. Tailored marketing messages that highlight the unique aspects of Vietnamese cuisine and its health benefits can attract health-conscious tourists and food enthusiasts.

4. Collaborative Promotion Efforts: Building a network of stakeholders, including food producers, restaurateurs, tourism associations, and regional tourism organizations, can ensure the continuity and quality of the gastronomic message being promoted. Collaborative efforts can amplify the impact of national and international marketing campaigns.

5. Leveraging Digital Platforms: The use of websites and social media platforms has been effective in reaching a global audience. Continuous updates and interactive content on these platforms can engage potential tourists and keep them informed about new culinary experiences and events in Vietnam.

In conclusion, the promotion of gastronomic tourism in Vietnam has made significant strides, but ongoing efforts are needed to maintain and build upon this momentum. By addressing quality standards, enhancing culinary education, implementing targeted marketing strategies, fostering collaborative efforts, and leveraging digital platforms, Vietnam can solidify its reputation as a premier destination for food tourism and create lasting positive impressions on tourists.

Research recommendations

Based on the findings and discussions in this study, several avenues for future research can be identified to further explore and enhance the understanding of gastronomic tourism in Vietnam:

1. Examine how digital media platforms (e.g., social media, food blogs, online travel forums) influence tourists' perceptions and decisions regarding Vietnamese gastronomic tourism.

2. Conduct a comparative study of gastronomic tourism strategies and their outcomes in Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia.

3. Investigate the economic contributions of gastronomic tourism to local economies in different regions of Vietnam.

4. Explore the role of gastronomic tourism in preserving traditional Vietnamese culinary practices and local food heritage.

5. Analyze the key factors that influence tourist satisfaction and their overall gastronomic experience in Vietnam.

6. Assess the current state of food safety and hygiene in street food tourism and its impact on tourist perceptions and experiences.

7. Develop and evaluate targeted marketing strategies for specific niche segments within gastronomic tourism, such as vegan or organic food tourism.

8. Conduct longitudinal studies to track changes in gastronomic tourism trends, tourist preferences, and the effectiveness of marketing campaigns over time.

9. Investigate the potential for integrated tourism experiences that combine gastronomic tourism with cultural and historical tourism in Vietnam.

10. Examine the implementation and impact of sustainable practices in gastronomic tourism, including the use of local and organic ingredients.

By pursuing these research directions, scholars and practitioners can deepen their understanding of the dynamics of gastronomichall tourism in Vietnam and contribute to the development of strategies that maximize its benefits for tourists, local communities, and the national economy.

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EXPLORING DIVERSE EXPERIENCES IN THE RURAL TOURISM PRODUCTS OF THE SOUTHWEST REGION OF VIETNAM: A COMPARATIVE RESEARCH BETWEEN CON CHIM ISLET AND VAM HO BIRD SANCTUARY

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Abstracts

Activities within rural tourism products in the Southwest region appear monotonous and similar across different local destinations in the area. This similarity arises from the fact that each locality in the region develops products utilizing comparable natural resources and cultural elements from the river. Theoretical reviews and empirical studies on visitor experiences have revealed that despite tourists engaging in the same activities, their experiences can vary. This study employed qualitative methods, including field observations, focus group discussions, and one-on-one in-depth interviews, to collect data. The findings demonstrated that the experiences of visitors who participated in the experiment, involving five activities during two trips to Con Chim Islet or Bird Islet and Vam Ho Bird Sanctuary, were distinct. These outcomes suggest that when tourism resources are identical, the focus should be on designing the product experience rather than solely emphasizing product design. The study provides new insights into the nuanced differences in tourist experiences and underscores the importance of experience design in rural tourism.

Keywords: Con Chim Islet, comparative research, rural tourism experience, Vam Ho Bird Sanctuary

JEL: M31, Z32, L83

1. Introduction

The tourism products in the Southwest region of Vietnam seem monotonous and similar, as evidenced by the names of the products and the integrated activities within them. From Tien Giang to Ben Tre, Tra Vinh, Vinh Long, and Can Tho, almost everywhere features typical activities of the rural water region, such as paddling in three-leaf boats, cycling, enjoying local rustic cuisine, and visiting fruit gardens. Indeed, with similar tourism resources, it is

difficult to create unique tourism products that visitors can immediately recognize the differences through marketing channels. The effort to design distinctive products for local destinations within the region may cause the loss of the uniqueness of the Mekong Delta's water tourism. Meanwhile, according to Volo (2009), the same tourism activity can create different experiences for tourists within the same market segment. Therefore, this research is conducted with the expectation of contributing to proving that the tourism products of the Southwest region, although similar, provide different experiences for visitors. The research results will help open up new directions in the strategic development of tourism in this region, emphasizing the importance of designing experiential products rather than product-oriented designs.

Cồn Chim Islet is situated in Tra Vinh province, while Vam Ho Bird Sanctuary is located in Ben Tre province. Despite being in different provinces, it is possible to travel from Ho Chi Minh City along the same route to Ben Tre City, and then continue along National Highway 60 for approximately 52 km. This journey takes around half an hour by ferry to reach Cồn Chim Islet, where the Cồn Chim Community Tourism Area is situated. For the purposes of this article, Cồn Chim Islet will refer to this location. On the other hand, reaching Vam Ho Bird Sanctuary, which is home to Hai Van Farm - Vam Ho Bird Sanctuary, referred to as Vam Ho in this article, is more straightforward as it does not require a ferry crossing. The travel distance is also shorter, around 40 km. Cồn Chim Islet is approximately 20 km away from the mouth of the Co Chien River, while Vam Ho is at a similar distance from the mouth of the Ba Lai River. Both locations are among the nine (now eight) estuaries of the Mekong Delta that flow into the sea, resulting in similarities in terms of landscape and local communities. Moreover, the names of these two places can easily lead to misunderstandings, implying that both tourist destinations harbor numerous resident bird species. In reality, this is only accurate for Vam Ho Bird Sanctuary, whereas Cồn Chim Islet acquired its name due to its resemblance to a flying bird when viewed from above.
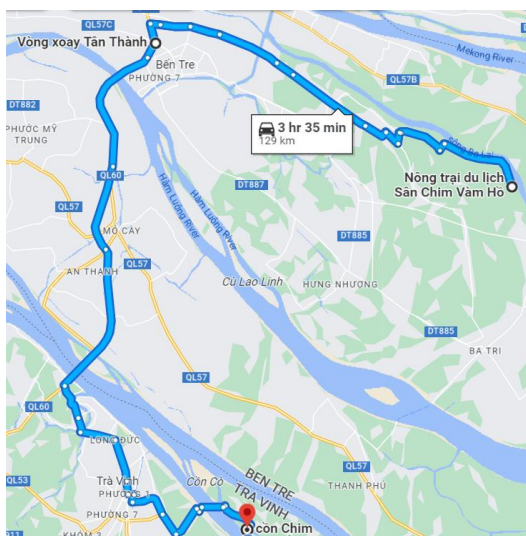
Figure 1. Route to Con Chim Islet and Vam Ho

Source: extracted from Google Maps

Although both places are involved in rural water tourism, they operate under different models. Cồn Chim Islet follows a community-driven tourism model, while Vam Ho operates under a community-based enterprise model. As a result of these distinct operating models, the service approach in these two places differs significantly. At Cồn Chim Islet, each activity is facilitated by a local household, enhancing its authenticity. On the other hand, at Vam Ho, all activities are organized and provided by Hai Van Farm, showcasing a higher level of professionalism. It is important to note that while Vam Ho primarily focuses on educational tourism, this aspect is not mentioned in the current research. The objective of this research is to compare visitor experiences with rural water tourism products in the Mekong Delta region.

Figure 2. Brand identity of Vam Ho and Con Chim

Source: Left photo (My Hanh)

Right photo: https://thamhiemmekong.com/thong-tin-du-lich-mien-tay

2. Literature review

The concept of experience in product consumption has been a topic of discussion among researchers since the 1990s. However, it wasn't until the early 21st century that a consensus on the components of experience began to emerge, with a shift in approach from business-centric to user-centric perspectives. According to Godovykh and Tasci (2020, p. 22), product experience is defined as "the overall response of perception, sensation, emotion, and intention, ranging from negative to positive, throughout the stages before, during, and after consumption." This definition was proposed by the authors based on a comprehensive study of the historical formation and development of the experience concept, along with a review of 19 empirical studies on tourism, entertainment, consumer behavior, and general management. Travel experiences can take the form of direct experiences from individuals who have undertaken a trip or indirect experiences through listening to stories from friends, family, or acquaintances (Highmore, B., 2002).

Experience can be approached from two perspectives: lived experience and evaluated experience. Lived experience refers to the actual experiences tourists have during their visit, encompassing all sensory and emotional responses as they happen. This includes the immediate reactions and feelings of tourists while they are engaged in activities. Evaluated experience, on the other hand, involves the reflection and assessment of those experiences after they have occurred. It is influenced by past experiences, interactions, and the role of travel companions (Gram, 2005; Jung, 2015). Evaluated experiences are how tourists remember and judge their lived experiences, often leading to a summary evaluation of the trip. Most research on travel experiences focuses on the evaluated experience, yet understanding lived experience is crucial for designing authentic and impactful tourism products (Gram, 2005). Evaluated experience captures the overall judgment of the trip, while lived experience provides insights into the moment-by-moment interactions and feelings. Travelers have the ability to evaluate their lived experiences as either positive or negative. Positive travel experiences are influenced by past experience memories, interactions with others, and the role of travel companions throughout all stages of the journey (Jung, 2015).

This study adopts the concept of tourism experience proposed by Godovykh and Tasci (2020, p. 22), as it provides a comprehensive overview of the historical development of the concept and empirical research. The evaluated experience is derived from the direct experience of travelers and consists of four components: perception, sensation, emotion, and intention, across three phases: pre-trip, during the trip, and post-trip. The traveler's perception can be divided into three stages: (1) the exposure stage, when the traveler receives relevant information; (2) the attention stage, when the traveler considers and reconsiders the information they have received; and (3) the comprehension stage, when the traveler tries to interpret the information (Quinlan Cutler & Carmichael, 2010, p. 127). Sensation refers to the traveler's sensory perceptions of the product through the five senses: vision (eyes), hearing (ears), taste (tongue), smell (nose), and touch (skin). Emotion represents the emotional states such as joy, excitement, interest, boredom, and disappointment, which are present in most travel experiences. Intention refers to what the traveler intends to do in the future.

In addition to Godovykh and Tasci's framework, other researchers have also emphasized the multidimensionality of tourism experiences. Pine and Gilmore (1998) introduced the concept of "experience economy", where businesses must organize memorable events for customers, and memories themselves become

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products. Uriely (2005) has emphasized the importance of the subjective nature of tourism experiences, arguing that personal background, mood and context play important roles in shaping tourism experiences. Furthermore, Neuhofer, Buhalis, and Ladkin (2012) discussed how technology-enhanced experiences can transform traditional travel experiences by providing personalized and context-aware services.

More recent studies have explored the implications of these concepts in various contexts. Campos et al (2018) studied the co-creation of tourism experiences and the role of tourists and service providers in creating shared value. Tung and Ritchie (2011) proposed a model for understanding memorable travel experiences, identifying factors such as emotional reactions, expectations, consequences, and memory as important factors.

These frameworks and studies highlight the complexity and richness of tourism experiences, emphasizing the importance of a sophisticated approach in designing and evaluating tourism products. By integrating these perspectives, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of how similar tourism activities can yield different experiences depending on the context and implementation.

3. Methodologie

The study was designed using a qualitative method with a data collection process consisting of multiple steps, as depicted in Figure 1. Qualitative data collection is typically conducted in the field through direct interactions with people. This approach enables researchers to observe participants' actions within their natural context. In qualitative research, questionnaires or tools developed by other researchers are often not utilized or relied upon (Creswell, 2014).

Field participant observation, one-on-one interviews, and group interviews are commonly employed techniques for collecting qualitative data on visitor experiences (Tussyadiah, 2014). To utilize these data collection techniques, the research team organized a trip to Con Chim Islet on December 20, 2022, and a trip to Vam Ho on March 27, 2023. As the data is intended for comparative analysis, five criteria were followed during the organization of the two trips: (1) the trip cost to be covered by participating tourists, (2) the duration of the experience at each destination to be 8 hours, (3) the same number of tourists participating in both trips, (4) the same tourists participating in both trips, and (5) the same activities being surveyed on both trips.

Group interviews were conducted at all three stages: before, during, and after the trips. A total of six group interviews took place, with four group interviews conducted during and after the trips in the field. Each group consisted of 6 to 8 people (Creswell, 2014). The research team identified eight tourists, denoted as B, D, Hh, Hg, L, N, T, and Th, who agreed to participate in both trips. This group of tourists has traveled together to various destinations in the Southwest region, such as Ca Mau, Bac Lieu, An Giang, Can Tho, Dong Thap, Vinh Long, and has resided in Ho Chi Minh City for at least 40 years. They are of retirement age, have a university degree or higher, and notably, have visited Vam Ho multiple times, with the most recent visit in January 2022. Therefore, the trip to Con Chim Islet was organized in advance for visitors to compare their experiences with those in Vam Ho. Subsequently, the trip to Vam Ho was arranged to allow visitors to further compare their assessments with their past memories of experiences in Con Chim Islet.

One-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted with three out of the eight guests after the trip, from May 6, 2023, to May 13, 2023. These interviews aimed to gather additional information to supplement the data collected from group consultations. Group consultations can sometimes lead to the aggregation of opinions influenced by the majority or by influential individuals within the group, or they can result in hastily taken notes, leading to unclear information.

The questions used in both group and one-on-one interviews were formulated based on the concept of experience employed in this study. The group interview question before the trip was: "What are your thoughts and feelings about Con Chim Islet/Vam Ho?" During and after the trip, group interviews were conducted to collect information addressing the question: "How do you feel about each activity you experienced in Con Chim Islet/Vam Ho?" The selection of the five activities for visitors to experience was based on the information provided by the management of Con Chim Islet and Vam Ho (see Table 1).

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Table 1. Activities and menu for visitors to experience in Con Chim and Vam Ho

No	Activities	Menu
1	River Sightseeing	Coconut juice (1 coconut/pax)
2	Cycling	Vietnamese pancakes
3	Food Enjoyment	Bông bần[1] salad
4	Folk Games	Coconut steamed shrimp
5	Interactions with Local People	Fish and Bong Ban hot pot

Source: excerpt from product introduction information of Vam Ho and Con Chim Islet in 2023

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Before the trip

The initial skepticism among tourists about visiting Con Chim Islet stemmed from perceived similarities with Vam Ho. However, detailed information about the unique experiences offered at Con Chim Islet, particularly the involvement of local households in activities, helped shape more positive perceptions and led to a consensus to visit. This highlights the significant role of pre-trip information in distinguishing destinations.

When asked to visit Con Chim Islet, there were differing opinions among the tourists. One tourist (T) expressed their skepticism, stating, "Con Chim Islet is like Vam Ho, both involve taking a boat on the river, riding a bicycle, making leaf cakes, throwing cans... And as for the food, there are also some pancakes, cork salad, fish hot pot cooked with cork, steamed shrimp with coconut, etc. What else is there?" Another tourist (Hg) mentioned, "Con Chim must have birds like in Vam Ho."

However, other tourists had a different perspective. One of them (L) argued, "If you haven't been to Con Chim Islet, how can you know if it resembles Vam Ho? If they are the same, you should go once and see for yourself." Similarly, another tourist (Hh) suggested, "Instead of going to Vam Ho, why not go to Con Chim Islet once? It doesn't matter at all."

After receiving more information, particularly about how each activity in Con Chim Islet is provided by local households, the group reached a consensus and agreed to book a one-day tour with Tra Vinh Tourism Company. The ferry ride at Con Chim Islet was viewed as a mere transportation method, while Vam Ho's river cruise, enhanced by guided explanations and additional services, offered a more engaging experience. This difference underscores the importance of activity design in creating memorable experiences..

4.2 During the trip

Experience of River Sightseeing: The perspectives on river sightseeing in Con Chim Islet and Vam Ho varied significantly. One tourist (L) described taking the ferry across Con Chim Islet as merely a means to go from the mainland to the dunes, and watching the river was merely an observation along the way. In contrast, tourists in Vam Ho found the experience more engaging due to the explanations provided and additional services available. Tourist T stated, "At night, you can watch fireflies and listen to echoes during the ferry ride in Con Chim Islet, whereas in Vam Ho, you can only observe the river." Tourist Hh expressed a preference for the ferry because it offered a unique mode of transportation that few other places had, and it provided the freedom to take pictures on the river. Tourist T, B, and Hh argued that the river sightseeing experience was much better in Vam Ho as it offered a broader view of the river, with boats, barges, and birds in flight, creating a more captivating scene. The disparity in the visitors' experiences of river sightseeing in the two locations can be attributed to differences in the activities themselves, even though they are introduced under the same name. In Vam Ho, a river cruise is offered as a standalone activity, whereas in Con Chim Islet, it is only a complementary part of the overall package, along with transportation and food services.

Cycling Experience: Cycling at Con Chim Islet was favored for its interaction with local people and nostalgic value, contrasting with Vam Ho's more structured and less interactive cycling routes. Tourist L found biking in Con Chim Islet to be highly interesting because it allowed for walking through the village and interacting with friendly local people. Tourists D and B emphasized the pleasure of navigating narrow and rugged paths, which they found more rewarding than cycling on the beautiful wide roads of Vam Ho. However, tourists Hh, Hg, and L mentioned

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[1] *Bong Ban is a typical plant in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. It has a round bud shape, the pistil is white and purple, which is beautiful but not fragrant.*

that riding a cyclo around the lake in Vam Ho was more enjoyable, while cycling in Con Chim Islet evoked nostalgic feelings of riding a bicycle to school during their childhood. They expressed emotional attachment to this activity, as they were old individuals hailing from a small province and having fond memories of cycling in their youth. It's worth noting that renting a bicycle for the whole day cost only 25,000 VND, which the entire group considered to be a worthwhile investment. Based on observations, young tourists visiting Vam Ho tended to prefer riding cyclos for the novelty and the fun it offered when exploring the destination with friends.

Regarding Folk Games: Traditional games at Con Chim Islet were more engaging due to their nostalgic value and the dedicated space for play, compared to Vam Ho's focus on water games. Tourist B mentioned that in Con Chim Islet, only games played on the home field were available, whereas in Vam Ho, there were additional water games, which they were hesitant to try. The entire group expressed that everywhere they went was truly enjoyable, with a particular fondness for traditional games like playing with cans, reminiscent of their childhood. They also found jumping rope in Con Chim Islet to be a lot of fun. In Con Chim Islet, there is a dedicated house for playing games, which adds to the excitement and thrill compared to Vam Ho. The appeal of these games lies in the way they are facilitated, and the participants involved. A skilled game facilitator with effective communication skills can encourage active participation and create a more thrilling atmosphere. However, in Vam Ho, there is a preference for water games such as canoeing and swinging, while land games are not readily available. Guests have to request specific tools, which can diminish the excitement for visitors.

Regarding Food Enjoyment: The unique culinary experiences at each destination highlighted the role of local ingredients and cooking methods in enhancing visitor satisfaction. Vam Ho's pancakes, with their unique vegetable accompaniments, were particularly praised. Tourist Hg and N shared their experiences, stating that in Con Chim Islet, each family prepares a different dish, such as banh xeo or leaf cake, creating a unique opportunity to visit different houses, converse with the hosts, and feel like distant relatives. However, in Vam Ho, the farm kitchen serves as a communal dining space, lacking the same sense of familial connection found in rural areas. According to tourists L and Th, although pancakes are ubiquitous in the Western region, each place has its own distinct characteristics. They regarded Vam Ho pancakes as the best they have encountered, noting that they were not excessively oily, striking a perfect balance of flavors, and accompanied by a superior mixed fish sauce compared to other places. Visitor N, B, and Hh expressed that the pancakes in Con Chim Islet, although not as exceptional as those in Vam Ho, were still better than those found in certain shops in Saigon. Tourist Th and T highlighted the uniqueness of the vegetable accompaniments in Vam Ho's banh xeo, which not only featured farm-grown vegetables but also incorporated wild and uncommon varieties. The combination of these vegetables created a taste that couldn't be found elsewhere, including ingredients like broccoli, lettuce, and herbs. The entire group unanimously agreed that Vam Ho's pancakes left a lasting impression, not only in comparison to Con Chim Islet but also when compared to other places they had visited. It is worth noting that banh xeo is a delicacy prevalent throughout the Southwest region, and it was ranked fourth among the top 10 Vietnamese delicacies by CNN in 2017 and recently ranked 10th among the best Vietnamese street foods by Taste Atlas in 2023. This group of tourists demonstrated a high level of appreciation for food, discerning the differences in banh xeo between Con Chim Islet, Vam Ho, and other places. Visitors with limited exposure to local cuisine may not notice such distinctions, making it essential for the destination to facilitate the recognition of these differences through live food introductions during service.

Regarding Interactions with Local People: Direct interactions with local residents at Con Chim Islet provided a more authentic and emotionally rich experience compared to the professional but less personal interactions at Vam Ho. A group of tourists (T, N, Hh, Hg) mentioned that in Vam Ho, their interactions were limited to the local staff working on the farm, whereas in Con Chim Islet, they had the opportunity to meet and engage with a more diverse range of people, including landlords, innkeepers, and passersby. They noted that having lunch in Vam Ho provided a relaxing experience within the serene green surroundings of the farm, creating a distinct contrast from Con Chim Islet. While lying in the hammock and engaging in conversations with the owner, they felt a sense of being residents of the dune village in their own homes. Due to the rich memories and experiences this group of tourists had with villages, they preferred to interact with the local population. The authenticity of this activity was more pronounced in Con Chim Islet than in Vam Ho, making it their preferred choice. However, it is important to note that young tourists who did not grow up in rural areas may have different preferences and perceptions. This highlights the significance of considering the diverse needs of customer groups based on demographic characteristics, as they can lead to varying experiences with the same product. Therefore, selecting the appropriate target market to cater to is crucial in tourism development.

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4.3 After the trip

The entire group echoed the sentiments of tourist T, who remarked, "I initially thought Con Chim Islet would be similar to Vam Ho, but it turned out to be quite different." Tourist D also expressed surprise, stating, "I expected Con Chim Islet to be boring, but it was definitely worth the money." Furthermore, everyone expressed their intention to further explore these destinations in the future. One visitor mentioned, "Next time, I will stay overnight in Con Chim Islet to experience sleeping in the dunes and witnessing the captivating sunset and sunrise, to see if it differs from Vam Ho." Another visitor commented, "Next time I visit Vam Ho, I plan to cycle outside the farm and explore the village to compare it with Con Chim Islet." These remarks indicate that the visitors were highly satisfied with their trip and are enthusiastic about returning for another visit.

The reviews of visitors' experiences in both Con Chim Islet and Vam Ho were overwhelmingly positive. This aligns with the findings of Jung (2015) and supports the notion that this group of tourists, who share the same age range, similar interests, and have been traveling companions on numerous occasions, have their judgments significantly influenced by fond memories of past experiences and their positive relationships with fellow travelers.

Although all visitors had a pleasurable and cost-effective experience in both destinations and expressed their intention to return, it is important to note that there were variations in their experiences of each activity due to the distinct offerings of Con Chim Islet and Vam Ho. This finding confirms that the same tourism activity can yield different experiences depending on the specific destination.

Table 2. Summary of differences in experience in Con Chim Islet and Vam Ho

No	Activities	Differences in experience
1	River Sightseeing	Vam Ho is more interesting than Con Chim Islet
2	Cycling	Con Chim Islet is more interesting than Vam Ho
3	Food Enjoyment	Vam Ho's pancakes are better than Con Chim Islet's
4	Folk Games	Con Chim Islet is more excited than Vam Ho
5	Interactions with Local People	Con Chim Islet is more realistic, more emotional than Vam Ho

5. Conclusion

The study aimed to assess visitors' experiences with five similar activities in Con Chim Islet and Vam Ho, piloted with a group of eight tourists. The research findings reveal that despite engaging in the same type of activities, the tourists had distinctly different experiences during their trips. This supports the idea that tourism product experiences should be thoughtfully designed rather than focusing solely on product features. Such an approach addresses the issue of product duplication in destinations with similar tourism resources. However, it is important to note that this does not eliminate the need for innovation and the introduction of new activities. When new activities are incorporated into existing products, visitors can discern the differences right from the pre-trip stage.

Field observations indicated that both Con Chim Islet and Vam Ho are actively seeking ways to integrate new activities into their offerings to mitigate duplication. Vam Ho, for instance, offers activities such as visiting the Vam Ho bird sanctuary, organizing tours to the Ba Lai River and Ba Lai Dam during the day, and arranging night excursions to witness fireflies illuminating the cork trees along the river. In Con Chim Islet, they have transformed their approach to serving pancakes. Rather than having guests enjoy them at home, pancakes are now served in a riverside hut situated by the Co Chien River, providing guests with a breezy and airy environment.

Although the study was experimental in nature and involved a group of only eight tourists from the same market segment, the use of field observation techniques and comprehensive group discussions throughout the entire process before, during, and after the trip yielded satisfactory results. These findings can serve as a valuable reference for further studies. Future research directions could include conducting qualitative studies with customers of different ages from other source markets such as Can Tho City or Hanoi, or conducting quantitative studies targeting the same market segment to replicate the results of this study. Additionally, the research results imply that given the limited capacity of tourist destinations, it is crucial to select the appropriate market segment to cater to in order to enhance the value of travel experiences. This aspect can be explored as a potential research avenue building upon the findings of this study.

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical role of experience design in rural tourism. By focusing on creating meaningful and engaging experiences, destinations can differentiate themselves and offer lasting value to tourists. This approach not only enhances tourist satisfaction but also supports sustainable tourism development by promoting local culture and engagement..

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EVALUATING TOUR GUIDES' COMPETENCES AT HERITAGE TOURISM DESTINATIONS (A CASE STUDY IN BOROBUDUR)

1st Saryani
2nd Hardani, Putu²
3rdEnny Mulyantari³

Extended abstract

Borobudur is a World Heritage Site that is popular among travelers. Tourists come not simply to travel but also to learn about history, necessitating the services of an experienced tour guide. Tour guides are human resources working in the tourism sector who explain the history and philosophy of tourist destinations (Pereira & Mykletun, 2017). The purpose of this study is Evaluate and improve the services provided by local tour guides. This evaluation is essential due to how it allows tourists experience a more memorable and informative experience

The research used qualitative approaches, such as participatory observations and in-depth interviews, as well as observing the activities of five informants as tour guides and five visitors to Borobudur. Atlas TI version 9 was used for the data analysis. It was used to create a new document, coding analyze, axial coding, selective coding, networking analysis, and concluded.

This report analyzes and summarizes the evidence demonstrating that well-informed tour guides positively impact the number of visitors to historical places. This will enable them to give experience as tour guides and successfully apply their performance competencies. These include the following: communication, leadership, intercultural, and service quality competencies. in order for visitors to recognize the historical site's importance and enjoy it. It promoted a fruitful interaction and the personal growth of the guide as well as the guest. The research can still be expanded to other locations, as it is limited to tour guides in historical sites. According to this research, tour guides ought to comprehend digitization to better serve the larger guest..

Keywords: *Tour Guide, Heritage Tourism*

Introduction

Borobudur is a World Heritage Site that attracts tourists. Tourists visit not only to travel but also to learn history, so they need a reliable tour guide. Tour guides are human resources in the field of tourism that explain the history and philosophy of world tourist sites as tourism (Pereira & Mykletun, 2017). This follows the role of tour guides and leaders (Ababneh, 2018; Alazaizeh et al., 2019; Bojkovi and Bojkovi, 2017; Cohen et al., 2002; Noakes et al., 2017; Weiler and Black, 2015). Research on scouting began in the late 1970 and the early 1980 (Chen et al. 2018). Several studies have examined the professionalism of tour guides (Ap and Wong, 2001; Cetin and Yarcan, 2017; Hwang and Lee, 2019). In addition, tour guides are discussed as responsible leaders, educators, tour ambassadors, and facilitators (Pond, 1993). However, an evaluation of the competence of heritage tour guides is required. The purpose of this study is Evaluate and improve the services provided by local tour guides. This evaluation is essential due to how it allows tourists experience a more memorable and informative experience

Objectives

1. Heritage destinations

Tourists are multiplying, including choosing unique and authentic tourist locations such as heritage tourism. This will impact regional development if the government focuses on heritage tourism because this development will impact the number of tourists visiting heritage areas. Heritage destinations are tourist destinations that have gone through various criteria as valuable sites. Therefore, after passing this nomination, they apply conservation regulations and practices according to expert recommendations to preserve their authenticity (Labadi, 2013; Smith, 2006). Heritage sites are generally defined as those with significant characteristics such as aesthetic, spiritual, historical, cultural, natural, sociological, and anthropological values (Luo, 2004; Yang et al., 2010). However, through this historical site, the public and tourists can enjoy exciting tourist spots and understand them as historical values (Light, 2015), thereby providing meaningful experiences for tourists (Jethro, 2016). This impacts the annual increase in tourists visiting heritage destinations (Kempiak et al., 2017).

Historic buildings are fascinating because tourists learn about their authenticity. This historical building offers

beauty and historical value that differs from one location to another so that tourists can visit it according to their needs. Heritage destinations contain locations with cultural, historical, and architectural value. This destination is in great demand for tourists to learn. There are several classifications of heritage destinations; for example, when viewed from the shape, you can see the Taj Mahal in India, the Great Wall of China, the Borobudur Temple in Indonesia, and many more.

Borobudur is one of the heritage destinations recognized as an international tourism site by UNESCO (https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/id). Borobudur is a heritage destination with immovable heritage in the form of historical buildings, monuments, and sites. The Borobudur site contains reliefs with underlying cultural values, such as perceptions of religious, historical, and sociocultural beliefs.
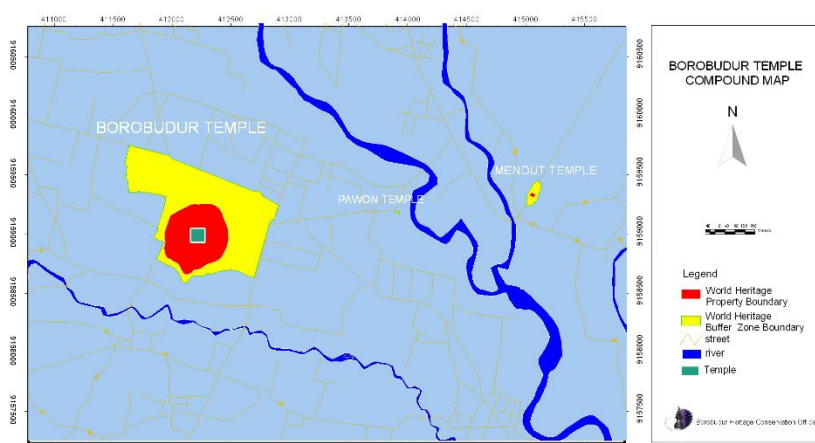
Fig 1 Heritage Destination: Borobudur Temple Map

Source: https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/592/maps/

As a heritage destination, Borobudur needs a reliable tour guide, so pilgrims and tourists are directed to understand the meaning of historical and sociocultural values based on reliefs. Borobudur is a building in the form of a magnificent temple, and is one of Indonesia's most important cultural and archaeological landmarks. One of the unique features of Borobudur Temple is its historical and cultural value. This can be observed in the Borobudur Temple Complex, where a Mahayana Buddhist temple was built in the 9th century, the largest Buddhist temple in the world. The temple has nine stacked platforms, a hexagon, and three circles, with the center of the dome at the top. It was also decorated with 2,672 relief panels and 504 Buddha statues. With this, many Buddhists visit the Borobudur Temple to worship, and tourists learn about the relief at the center of the historical and cultural interpretation of Borobudur.

2. Tour Guiding literature

Tour guides play an essential role in understanding history and culture. Tour guides accompany tourists who are traveling; therefore, their performance requires special skills to be learned and professionally achieved (Cetin & Yarcan, 2017). Tour guides are essential to tourism, so they must undergo extensive training to reach a professional level (Yoga Pratama Agus Darma & Gaho Rahmat, 2022). The tour guides are licensed workers who accompany individual and group travelers. His work includes explaining heritage sites in terms of their history and philosophy in an informative, entertaining, and inspiring language for tourists. His work explains that one group of travelers provides an opportunity to interact more closely, so that tourists have their own experiences and satisfaction. Tour guides, as tour leaders, also direct how to behave well inside the world heritage site (Galí & Aulet, 2019). To achieve this, it is necessary to have a competent tour guide.

This requirement can be an absolute necessity for tour guides to provide transparent information that meets the needs of tourists. Most tourists who have already understood the intended location still do not know detailed information, especially related to its history. Tourists need a tour guide to explain the history of a tourist attraction in detail. The clarity of tour guides in explaining this will be the main attraction for tourists to complete tour programs. *The World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations* (2010) defines a tour guide as representing a travel agency that

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manages tourist trips. In addition, a tour guide must have careful travel planning so that tourists are not lost while following the tour. By performing his duties and role as a tour guide who shows this tourist map, a tour guide becomes an intermediary between tourists and the social environment visited.

3. Tour Guide Competence

The concept of competence is widely used and defined with various understandings according to countries, authors, and diverse theories. Competence develops according to the focus and scope of the field of work (Schep et al., 2018). To provide services, one must have the necessary knowledge and skill. Competency is a criterion that describes the characteristics of performance competencies on which performance is based and evaluated (Manxhari et al., 2017). Accordingly, to be competent, a guide for work implementation must be made as well as how to assess it as an evaluation. These assessment criteria can be used to define core competencies against the indicators used to measure them (Asumeng, 2014). One field with core competencies is tour guides. Tour guides are essential for transferring information to tours and competency standards are required. Therefore, tour guides must have an in-depth knowledge of a place or tourist destination. The main task of a tour guide is to provide information and guidance to tourists during a tour. The task of providing information is because a tour guide must have good knowledge of the history, culture, geography, and tourist attractions in the place to which they are guided. Tell stories to tourists along the way. In addition, an itinerary must be arranged so that the tour guide can plan the travel route, identify points of interest, and manage the travel time to fit the schedule.

a. Service Quality Competence

Service quality competence of tour guides developed according to needs and technological advances. The Service Quality concept originates from the five-dimensional framework of the service quality model, including tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Yurur et al., 2021). These five dimensions were developed according to the field of study. Tourists are satisfied with providing good services. This illustrates how tourists perceive travel workers as polite, friendly, hardworking, and ready to help (Kim, 2014). In addition, quality of service is often formed through interaction and social contact between tour guides and tourists. Tourists rate the quality of this service according to their experience (Rauch et al., 2015).

Service quality is a customer's expectation with a perception of service; indirectly, it will always be related, and there is mutual harmony if they understand each other's needs. Tourists expect to obtain good services, and a good tour guide will provide them during tourist activities. On this side, a tour guide will serve tourists well so that their needs are fulfilled and the quality of the tour guide's services can be felt.

b. Communication Competence

Communication refers to the transfer of information to tourists through a language that can be understood. Therefore, tour guides must have the communication skills to explain to tourists in a language that they can understand. Tour guides and operators agree that the most critical attributes are advanced communication skills, information dissemination, and knowledge (Aloudat, 2017). Tour guides provide information about tourist attractions and cultures between local hosts and tourists; therefore, the guide's communication competence is crucial (Al-Okaily, 2021; Leclerc & Martin, 2004; Teng & Tsaur, 2021). Therefore, tour guides must have communication skills (especially presentation skills) to improve professionalism (Rutledge, 2022)

c. Intercultural Competence

Tourism is the most culturally related area of research, as it involves social connections and interactions among tourists, employees, and intercultural managers with a high and sustained level of engagement (Koc, 2021). In the context of Intercultural Competence, tour guides can connect cultural differences (Press 2014). The influence of culture on tourism plays a vital role, because participation in tourism work activities has more to do with tourists from various countries with diverse cultures. Intercultural competence describes the ability to interact efficiently in different cultural environments (Koc 2021). This ability is used to understand and perceive cultural and intercultural sensitivity. These different values involve understanding and respecting ways of life, traditions, and value systems that differ from those of other cultures. Intercultural sensitivity involves being curious, but able to accept cultural differences and effectively communicate and interact with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

d. Leadership Competence

Facing the challenges that exist in the development of tourism today, critical skills are necessary to compete and win opportunities that exist in competition. Therefore, a guide must master Leadership Competence. An ethical

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leadership style demonstrates normatively appropriate behavior through personal actions and interpersonal relationships and articulates such behavior to travelers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making. Leadership Competence is a manner of conduct that acknowledges and preserves the rights and worthiness of individuals being led (Dhar, 2016). As the leader of a tourist group, a tour guide focuses on serving tourists by identifying customer issues, displaying passion, upholding professional and ethical guidelines, fostering an atmosphere of trust, and innovatively adapting to changes. Thus, tour guides can decide and arrange clearly so that tourists still follow tour rules (Al-Okaily, 2022).
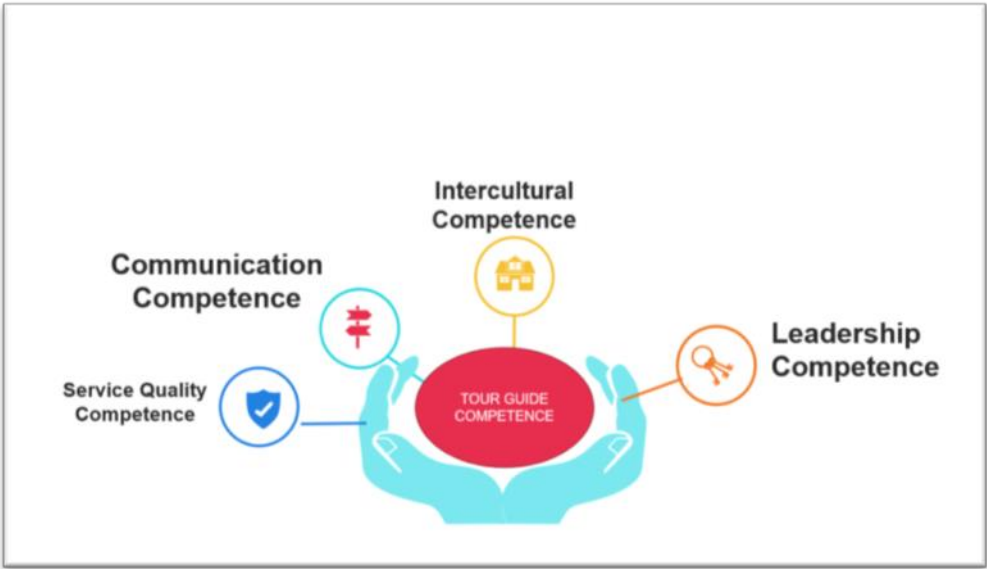
Fig 2 Tour Guide Competence of the Heritage Destination
(Source: authors construct, 2023)

Research Methodology (Topic Font: Time New Romans (Bold) 12 pts.)

Qualitative methods were used in this study. The researchers gathered information through participatory observations and in-depth interviews. They gathered data by conducting in-depth interviews and observing the activities of five tour guides who were part of the HPI (Himpunan Pramuwisata Indonesia) and five visitors. Detailed and extensive interviews were conducted with various tour guides and visitors at the Borobudur Temple. Data analysis was conducted using Atlas TI version 9. Atlas.ti was initially used by creating a new document called the heuristic unit (HU). The open coding process identifies concepts by determining similarities and differences according to the results of the interviews and observations. Axial coding was performed by coding each record, and Selective Coding was performed by selecting appropriate data. The next step was the coding and networking analysis. The end was concluded.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

This report analyzes and summarizes the evidence demonstrating that well-informed tour guides positively impact the number of visitors to historical places. This will enable them to give experience as tour guides and successfully apply their performance competencies. These include the following: communication, leadership, intercultural, and service quality competencies. in order for visitors to recognize the historical site's importance and enjoy it. It promoted a fruitful interaction and the personal growth of the guide as well as the guest. The research can still be expanded to other locations, as it is limited to tour guides in historical sites. According to this research, tour guides ought to comprehend digitization to better serve the larger guest.

2. Discussion

The results of the interviews with tour guides showed that they could increase the number of visitors to Borobudur. Their competencies were as follows:

Competence	Indicator

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a. Service Quality Competence	➢ Quick to adapt to different cultural work environments
	➢ Able to understand other people's feelings and motives
	➢ Capable of serving according to tourist needs
b. Communication Competence	➢ Proficient in English communication
	➢ Skilled in effectively communicating and engaging with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds in a versatile manner
	➢ Willing to change one's way of communicating and interacting
c. Intercultural Competence	➢ Adaptable to different cultures
	➢ Capable of intercultural communication
	➢ Adept at resolving intercultural conflicts
	➢ Willing to interact with tourists from different cultures
	➢ Capable of respecting the norms and taboos of other cultures
	➢ Able to appreciate cultural differences
	➢ Open-minded and tolerant of different cultures
	➢ Understands the value of cultural diversity
	➢ Culturally sensitive and aware
d. Leadership Competence	➢ Interest and enthusiasm in the group
	➢ The act of establishing a secure atmosphere
	➢ Positive Creating Situation
	➢ Taking decision leading
	➢ Object Protector
	➢ Professional Time management

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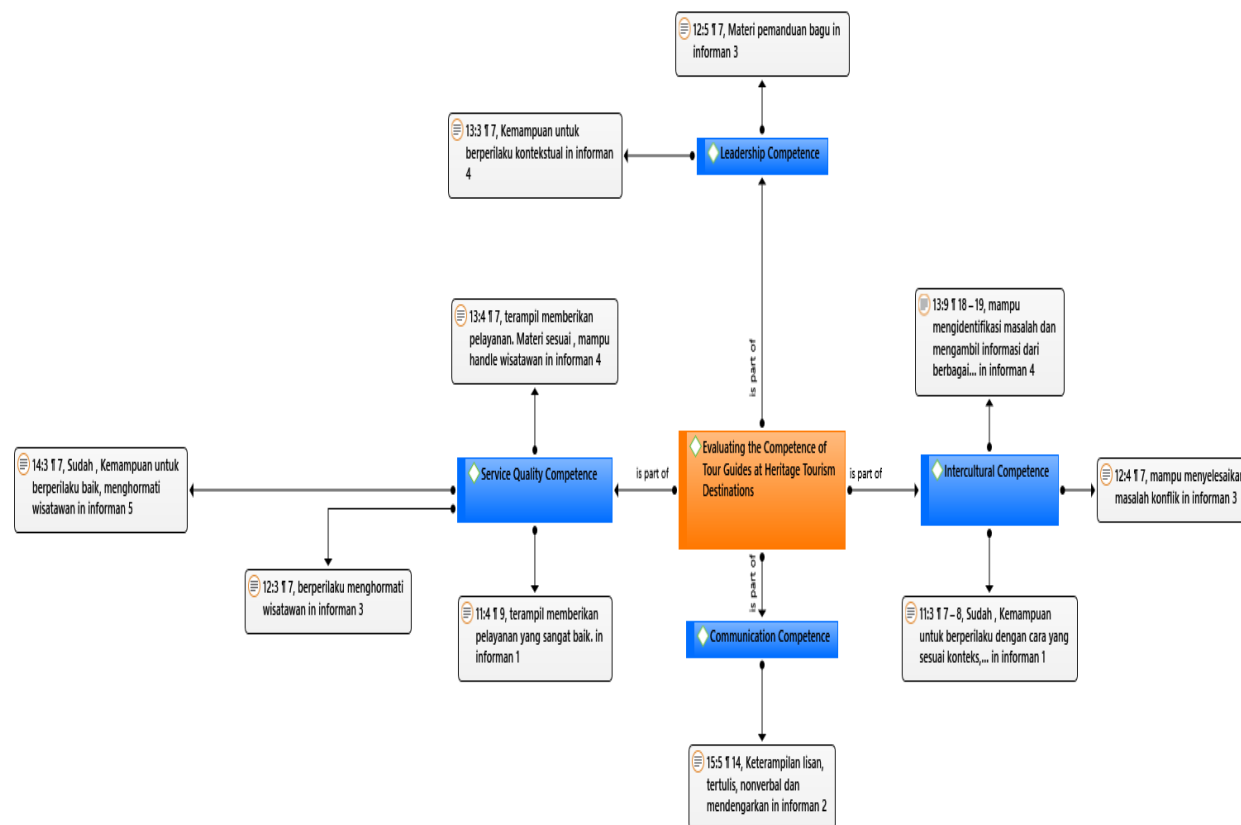
Fig 3 Results of data processing with atlas ti 9

Guide Competence of the Heritage Destination

(Source: authors, 2023)

A. Quality Service Competence

Regarding Quality Service Competence, tour guides must be able to provide good service. This good service can explain the guide material in detail and provide good services such as friendliness, willingness to help, and ability to work in a different cultural environment. The following is an indicator of quality service competent from a tour guide:

➢ **Quick to adapt to different cultural work environments**

On the other hand, tour guides are also required to serve as directors of tour itineraries provided by travel agencies. Travel plans are carried out by understanding other people's feelings and motives when following a tourist trip by instilling a cultural understanding that attracts tourists' attention. Therefore, in the context of good service, tour guides must select transparent materials that tourists can understand. Clear and concise guidance materials provide tourists satisfaction. This material is one of the things that tour guides must master: As a good tour guide, this material was developed in several ways, from reading literature, asking questions about history, and mastering experiences.

➢ **Able to understand other people's feelings and motives**

In carrying out his duties as a tour guide to provide good quality, the tour guide must choose the material to be given when guiding. This is important so that the tour guide adjusts to feelings and motives. There is a difference in tourists' motivations. Tourists like tour guides who can adjust to this. Tourists are comfortable narrowing down and filling out tour-guide materials. Sometimes, the content of the tour guide also needs to have jokes, so that tourists are not tired of listening and following.

On the other hand, tourists visiting tourist attractions have various motivations according to their perceptions, experiences, information, and self-existence on social media, so they develop into motivations for traveling. Based on this, tour guides must understand the diverse motivations of tourists so that the guiding activities become interesting. For example, tourists outside Indonesia tend to learn a lot about the history, philosophy, and characteristics of the people visited when visiting heritage attractions. This causes tour guides to be more sensitive

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to the needs of these tourists. In addition, young people with different motivations for handling Indonesian tourists tend to look for more photo spots to share on social media. It is also different if socialite women seek photo spots and shopping locations. Based on this, tour guides must immediately understand the motivation of tourists based on their background and immediately adjust when guiding them. Tourists often do not realize this motivation.

Tour guides in the Borobudur area were able to provide services based on the motivation of tourists, which can be found in interviews with informants who mentioned that the armpits for guiding their tours were adjusted to the itinerary given by the travel bureau. However, this does not rule out the possibility that if tourists ask for an extension of the tour by visiting other tours around the Borobudur Area, they will still be served according to the agreement between tour guides, tourists, and travel agencies.

➢ **Capable of serving according to tourist needs**

To provide good service, tour guides must also be able to provide what tourists want. Tourism combiners in the Borobudur area can provide services according to tourists' needs. Various tourist attractions are offered in the Borobudur Area at rates that suit the tourist budget. The tour guides will kindly deliver tourists according to their wishes and needs of the visiting tourists. This is one of the factors that make tourists feel at home to stay in the Borobudur area.

In addition, tour guides interpret the needs of tourists as a challenge to properly serve as a core service, which is the essence of the tour guide service that they must consistently deliver.

B. Communication Competence

➢ Proficient in English communication

Tour guides in the Borobudur area can speak foreign languages, particularly English. Communication in English is essential for becoming a tour guide for superpriority tourism objects. This is also related to the number of foreign tourists who visit the Borobudur area, not only traveling but also learning about the history of Borobudur. Tour guides with communication competence will be able to transfer information well so that suitable mediation will provide interpretation, communication, and expectations of tourists in line with the tour guide. This occurs in tour guide activities in the Borobudur Area, where communication is an intermediary that can improve tourist experience. Good communication techniques provided by tour guides can encourage tourists to think and connect well. This connection is established between natural and cultural heritage, including places, sites, people, art facts, and natural and historical events, which can foster a sense of care and togetherness between tour guides and tourists.

Professional tour guides are not only able to communicate in English but also translate the cultural diversity that exists in the Borobudur Area by involving tourists to experience the original life in Borobudur, get to know the history of the site, and understand the course of the story in the reliefs of the Borobudur temple. Borobudur relief is a unique attraction to learning, particularly for foreign tourists. They wanted to visit and learn to understand the reliefs of the Borobudur very carefully.

Communication as a tour guide is vital; therefore, tour guides always try to learn about it. The communication developed and adapted by these tour guides is based on local wisdom and provides a wedge for the renewal of tourist activities oriented towards cultural matters and diversity. In addition, communication has developed more between individuals and groups of tourists. Tourists who participate in tourist activities are also very enthusiastic because they learn new things about Borobudur culture based on their perceptions. In tour guide activities, tourists can exchange information related to the development of the time and directly ask about the culture, diversity, and uniqueness encountered by the tour guide. This is inseparable from the efficacy of foreign-language tour guides, especially English, in delivering materials.

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Fig 4 Guide Competence of the Heritage Destination

(Source: authors, 2023)

➢ Skilled in effectively communicating and engaging with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds in a versatile manner.

Tour guides communicate information and messages according to the tour guide materials to be delivered. This pattern develops according to the motivations and characteristics of tourists. Borobudur tour guides have this expertise according to the needs of tourists, and the pattern of communication and service is well-developed. Tour guides receive training and learning before guidance, so that tourists can understand the material presented. This ability is continuously honed and developed following the training carried out by the tourism office and in groups to develop capabilities. Tour guides realize this by developing their ability to provide the best guidance services. When implementing tour guides, they always follow work practices in the right direction.

➢ Willing to change one's way of communicating and interacting

Tour guides in the Borobudur area can provide services based on tourists' needs. By assisting with tourists' requests, the tour guide performed the task well. However, this attitude affects the promotion of returning tourists to Borobudur. One of these needs is to communicate in the language used by the tourists. Therefore, in the tour-guide community, some of the

C. Intercultural Competence

➢ **Adaptable to different cultures**

Cultural differences are one of the things that have existed for a long time. This relationship develops as cultural civilization develops, thus creating a social environment from generation to generation that can accept these differences. Cultural differences are one of the challenges to adapting to tourists, but tour guides in the Borobudur area can overcome this. This does not allow the rest of the tour guides to serve cultural differences with the tourists.

In serving these cultural differences, tour guides always consider the culture in the Borobudur Area as one of the unique things to learn and develop. In this regard, tour guides always learn and develop guidance materials that are conveyed to tourists, so that they are always interesting. Tour guides developed this guiding material by asking historians and experts questions. Therefore, tour-guide materials are suitable.

This adaptation went very well because the tour guide was always enthusiastic about working, so tourists were satisfied when visiting. Tour guides often encounter cultural and linguistic differences; however, they can also be described well. These tour guides practice and collaborate with other tour guides. Tour guides can make this map of cultural differences one of the things that enriches the experience of tour guide work.

➢ **Capable of intercultural communication**

During its development, these tour guides were able to communicate in different social environments. This can be seen from the interview results, which show that tour guides can describe these cultural differences through services and materials. The tour guide materials were delivered by reviewing the origins of tourists. Tourists have various characteristics. However, this difference in character is a challenge for tour guides to develop competence in this field. Additionally, they are inseparable from the spirit of tour guides in serving tourists. This ability is also supported by verbal communication skills, which are visible in that almost all tour guides can communicate well in

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foreign languages with grammar that is easy to understand and use proper rules.

Tour guides in working intercultural communication compile tour guide scripts as story narratives following the reliefs at the Borobudur Temple. In addition, the guide script was arranged based on the Borobudur area according to tourist visits. The manuscript of the temple area contains the story that Borobudur is a vast landscape consisting of rivers and hills, among which small temple buildings are located in the center of Mount Merapi. In the beliefs of the local community, the temple contains sacred things as places of worship. By compiling this script, tour guides can work well, particularly for tourists from different cultures. This difference is one of the challenges faced by tour guides in explaining Borobudur.

➢ **Adapting to Resolving Intercultural Conflicts.**

Regarding adaptation skills in resolving intercultural conflicts, two factors that underlie the ability of tour guides–communication and intercultural communication skills–are vital in handling conflicts that occur when guiding tours. Verbal and non-verbal communication skills include attractive facial expressions and proper voice intonation. The problems that arise in two-way tours are usually addressed by hearing tourists' complaints and then responding well to tour guides. Therefore, in providing solutions to intercultural conflicts, tour guides always use logic and hospitality without disturbing tourists' feelings so that trips to guide tours continue to run smoothly.

Tour guides work patiently to deal with cultural conflicts and strive to understand the root causes of these conflicts based on cultural differences. By applying this principle, tour guides can work and contribute to creating a harmonized community with tourists.

➢ **Willing to interact with tourists from different cultures**

Maintaining and collaborating interactions between tour guides and tourists can thus be developed. Tour guides always maintain direct eye contact, and some still need to learn to convey ideas. The tour guides were punctual and had good presentation skills, dynamic skills, time management skills, explanation skills, and smooth information about Borobudur. In addition, tour guides also work with effective interactions to encourage positive interactions by working through interactions that understanding cross-cultural differences and non-verbal cues and avoiding misunderstandings.

➢ **Capable of respecting the norms and taboos of other cultures**

The inherent differences of every tourist who visits can be overcome well by tour guides. This ability cannot be distinguished from the training in which they perform well. Norms developed in a suitable environment can create tour guides in the Borobudur area. This facilitates tourists' comfort while on tour. Thus, tourists receive authentic experience from tour guides.

Borobudur tour guides actively collaborate with different cross-cultures by respecting diversity, embracing different tourist perspectives, and respecting norms.

➢ **Able to appreciate cultural differences**

Appreciating cultural differences is a tour-guiding skill related to understanding and respecting the diversity of tourist attitudes. The tour guides in Borobudur communicate well. This expression can be performed well by tour guides with open mindsets. Open-mindedness involves a tour guide's willingness to accept diverse perspectives. In other words, these tour guides can assess tourists from a broad perspective, and not just based on their cultural conscience.

In addition, the Borobudur tour guide also has cultural awareness of both the culture in Borobudur and that of tourists. This cultural difference relates to how people view and respond to these differences, including traditions, history, and social conditions. With this diversity, tour guides have a sense of empathy by understanding what experiences tourists want to obtain and the feelings of tourists themselves. Thus, tour guides have insights that develop according to the tourists' diverse perspectives.

➢ **Open-minded and tolerant of different cultures**

Tour guides are always open-minded and highly tolerant of cultural differences as a quality of self, fostering understanding and working with tourists from different backgrounds. The aspects of tour guides that work in this regard include acknowledging and appreciating cultural diversity, and avoiding stereotypes.

Tour guides work with honest and open communication, so travelers feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and beliefs. This building has a positive influence, so that tourists feel close and comfortable following the tour to

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completion. Borobudur tour guides always try to ask questions and clarify when there is a misunderstanding of communication or flexibility. This attitude was built to be open to new ideas and approaches for guiding tourists. Collaboration between tour guides and tourists is realized to produce creativity when guiding tourists.

Thinking openly about these cultural differences can open up opportunities for revisiting tourists. Moreover, supported Borobudur tour guides can work actively by creating an inclusive environment, and tourists with cultural differences can be accepted and appreciated.

> **Understands the value of cultural diversity**

Tour guide in Borobudur, able to understand the value of cultural diversity as

Wealth from the work perspective This allows tour guides to expand their knowledge and understanding of tourists in various parts of the world. This fosters attitudes, approaches, and ideas that develop as creative work. This makes tour guides better equipped to work effectively, particularly when exchanging cultural customs with tourists.

This attitude impacts the personal growth of tour guides outside the comfort zone in accepting new ideas and experiences. In addition, it contributes to the ability to adapt without leaving behind unique traditions and cultural heritage in the Borobudur area. This has been passed down from generation to generation to work as a tour guide in Borobudur.

> **Culturally sensitive and aware**

The tour Guide in Borobudur can work by following the sensitivity and awareness of culture as guiding material to provide a positive and respectful experience for tourists from various backgrounds. Some things found included tour guides who always carried out continuous learning while still carrying out cultural themes by reading, attending seminars, and interviewing locals and experts. Additionally, tour guides have worked well in accordance with how they respect diversity, learn foreign languages, and are flexible. This reflects an open attitude towards adapting the tour approach according to the tourist group. In addition, tour guides have gestures and expressions by understanding and respecting tourist customs related to gestures, body language, and expressions, including grooming while driving. The grooming tour guide is adjusted to cultural norms in the Borobudur area while maintaining aesthetic value, including explaining every meaning of clothing used, which is well explained by the tour guide.

When working, tour guides always avoid conversations related to sensitive and controversial matters such as topics of conversation about politics and privacy. This ensured that tourists did not offend. In addition, the tour guide offers exciting experiences and activities, such as traveling around the Borobudur area by driving Jeep, tracking activities at the top of Setumbu, and visiting tourist villages around Borobudur. This option is conveyed and offered to tourists, so they have a considerable travel experience in the Borobudur area.

D. Leadership Competence

> **Interest and enthusiasm in the group**

Tour guides work actively when guiding tours in a travel group by building connections, sharing ideas, and fostering a sense of happiness. This follows the tour guide performance steps by starting the tour guide, namely, starting a conversation with a brief introduction and remembering all names of tourists who participated in the tour. This introduction is a bridge that can strengthen friendships and cooperation. The geographical location of Borobudur is then introduced. This makes it easier for tourists to understand their position.

In addition, the guide focuses on the goals of the group. This enthusiasm rubs off tourists' passion to actively participate in tour guides. This attitude fosters a supportive work environment and encourages tourists to listen actively to tour materials. This enthusiastic interaction has become a good and fun experience during tour activities. However, it should also be understood that tour guides can always make the atmosphere happy and not dull. Because the material for guided tours is practiced if boring, tourists also do not respond well, resulting in them being angry and disappointed. Thus, Borobudur tour guides have demonstrated enthusiastic and happy working attitudes.

> **The act of establishing a secure atmosphere**

Tour guides in Borobudur have worked well, one of which is to create a safe atmosphere so that the risk of crime and discomfort can be minimized and tourists feel safe and protected. This security can be seen from the beginning of tourists entering the Borobudur area, which many security officers have guarded and tour guides are equipped to save tourists.

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This can be seen from the training results, followed by a tour guide on security awareness, and practicing it well. In addition, tour guides are members of tour guide associations who share information regarding security incidents. Thus, in the event of a crime or disaster, tourists can be immediately and appropriately evacuated by tour guides who help each other and collaborate while working to guide tourists. Each tour guide was equipped with crisis management knowledge to understand the roles, responsibilities, and strategies during a crisis.

➤ **Positive Creating Situation**

The tour guides at Borobudur have worked well; for example, they can communicate positively by explaining the material honestly and honestly, following existing facts. In addition, they can also listen to the complaints of tourists, which are usually related to hot weather conditions, and tourists can ask for rest. In addition, some tourists ask the tour guide to stop taking pictures happily around the temple and enjoy and understand the meaning of temple relief. However, tourists sometimes ask tour guides to display good photo spots. This attitude continues to grow, encouraging better performance among tour guides and optimism at work.

The optimism of these tour guides develops following a positive mindset, and focuses on solutions if there is a misunderstanding between tourists and tour guides. In addition, a favorable situation can also be created through tourists' appreciation in the form of smiles and sincere thanks. While working, the tour guide will provide questions related to the guiding material, and end with a question on where tourists who can hold will be appreciated.

The tour guide in Borobudur also introduced tourists to local culture through dance. These include jaranan, "topeng ireng", "jathilan", "ndolalak", "gatoloco", "ndayakan", "kobro siswo", "strek rodat", and "slawatan". These dances can be used as guiding materials for creating a positive and pleasant atmosphere. Cultural forces in this community can increase the enthusiasm of tourists participating in tourist activities. The positive behavior and attitude of the Borobudur tour guide can also create an example for tourists to carry out what is allowed and not allowed while in Borobudur. The effort to work well with this tour guide is an ongoing process that is consistently committed to being well-implemented to create a healthy and constructive environment.

In addition, the tour guide in Borobudur offers interactive experiences involving tourists in the tour guide process. The Borobudur area can present a variety of tourist attractions, one of which is pottery in the hamlet of Kiringan. There are also atung Jerams, which are integrated as elements of tourist attraction activities.

➤ **Taking decision leading**

Borobudur tour guides can make good decisions at work, which is an essential aspect of their roles as tourist leaders. A tourist leader can make the correct decisions. The following are some essential points related to decision-making regarding tour guides. Before work, the tour guide collects information about the tourists' nose, material to be delivered, time of guidance, itinerary, and guide order. This is also done by coordinating and consulting with other tour guides, so that the guide runs smoothly.

Furthermore, the Borobudur tour guide considers various actions by evaluating their potential success, risks, and benefits. This decision-making style is a democratic and collaborative approach that involves tour guide team members. In addition, feedback is established for continuous policy improvement and adjustment according to travelers' needs.

➤ **Object Protector**

Tour guides also act as vital "Object Protectors" in Borobudurs. The most vital object is the Borobudur Temple. This is because the Borobudur Temple has spiritual and historical value as a place of worship for Buddhists. Traditionally, a tour guide's primary responsibility includes providing tourists with information on historical sites, cultural landmarks, and other points of interest. However, the development of the role of "Protector of Objects" is one of the ideas that tour guides provide knowledge and play a role in maintaining and preserving tourist attractions. Tour guides in Borobudur can work by providing education related to conservation. Emphasizing the importance of temple preservation in history and culture requires conservation efforts. In addition, it is also necessary to provide insight into the threats faced by the Borobudur Temple and its surroundings and take action to protect it. This sometimes happens; tourists climb to the top of the stupa, even though this is contrary and can damage the temple. In addition, tourists visiting the Borobudur jading area carelessly throw garbage. This is unfortunate when tourists do not adequately implement an appeal.

One of the primary tasks of tour guides is to enforce the existing rules and regulations. Ensure that travelers comply with rules and regulations to minimize their impact on the objects or sites visited. In addition, there is a need

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for Borobudur tour guides to educate tourists to be responsible and promote the sustainability of tourism objects around Borobudur. This is related to the areas around Borobudur, such as Borobudur Temple, Mendut Temple, and Pawon Temple, which are very vulnerable to damage or degradation. The Borobudur tour guide has worked well by campaigning for information related to preserving heritage areas in Borobudur, such as encouraging tourists to treat objects and sites with respect, avoiding behavior that can cause harm, communicating the meaning of symbols, the history of objects and culture, and fostering a sense of responsibility for tourists.

In addition, tour guides inform tourists of emergency protocols that must be followed in the event of natural disasters, accidents, or other unexpected events that can threaten the integrity and condition of tourist objects.

➢ **Professional Time management**

Time management is crucial for professional tour guides as it ensures that tour-guiding activities run smoothly and enjoyably for tourists. Professional Time management of tour guides can compile detailed travel plans when obtaining orders in the Borobudur area. The tour planner consists of the time at which each activity starts and ends, and the travel time between locations. In addition, the Borobudur tour guide has also made a Priority Main Attraction, namely, the new Borobudur Temple, continuing its other Borobudur temples, such as Pawon Temple, Mendut Temple, Setumbu Peak, Chicken church, and Borobudur tourism village. Identifying attractions and prioritizing time duration are very important so that tourists can maximally enjoy existing tourist attractions, and tour guides are flexible with photo spots according to tourist requests.

The tour guides maintain communication according to the schedule of visits to tourist attractions. The tour guide then continues to monitor the Time Throughout the Tour by adjusting the itinerary and tourist requests, for example, by asking them to extend the duration of the tour. However, it is better if the tour guide directs tourists to be on time and adhere to the schedule.

Research recommendations

The research can be expanded to other locations, as it is limited to tour guides in historical sites. According to this research, tour guides ought to comprehend digitization to better serve the larger guest.

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STRATEGIC ISSUES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF GEO-TOURISM DESTINATION IN BAWEAN ISLAND, INDONESIA

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Extended abstract

Geotourism is a form of tourism that focuses on the natural and geological features of a destination. It involves traveling to experience and learn about the Earth's geological landscapes, processes, and history, while also promoting conservation and sustainability. Geotourism aims to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the planet's geological heritage and its interconnectedness with other aspects of the environment and culture. It promotes the conservation of geological sites and the sustainable management of natural resources. Geotourism encourages responsible travel practices that minimize environmental impact and support local conservation efforts. By highlighting the value of geological sites, geo-tourism can support conservation initiatives and the protection of natural heritage. Bawean Island is located in the Java Sea which is separated from Java Island about 120 km north of Java Island. The uniqueness and geological history found on Bawean Island give the island the potential for tourism development with the geotourism concept. A development strategy is needed to realize Bawean Island as a geo-tourism destination. The study aims to prepare strategic planning for the development of geo-tourism destinations.

The study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the input of data from primary and secondary data. Primary survey activities were carried out using interview methods, field observations, and in-depth interviews with related agencies. Secondary data collection was obtained through literature studies such as reviewing journals, books, research results, websites, journal articles, and agency documents. The qualitative descriptive analysis method is to analyze, describe, and summarize various conditions and situations from various data collected in the form of interviews or observations regarding the problems being studied that occur in the field. Activities to identify potential problems in geotourism development on Bawean Island were carried out using SWOT analysis. SWOT analysis is a technique used to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to formulate development strategies.

Bawean Island has a variety of geological conditions, biodiversity, and cultural heritage. Based on its geographical location and geological history, Bawean Island has unique geological content that only exists in Bawean. This geological factor is the reason for the existence of endemic flora and fauna in Bawean. Strategic Issues are conditions that must be considered or prioritized in development planning because of their significant impact on the entity (region/community) in the future. Strategic issues in developing geotourism on Bawean Island include: (1). Collaboration on tourism development; (2). Preservation of the diversity of customs, tradition, culture and spiritual values; (3). Preventive efforts to mitigate disasters; (4). Improvement of service and access to public infrastructure; (5). Improvement of the role and function of community group; (6). Availability of funding for maintaining the geosites; (7). Government role in the development of geosites.

Keywords: *geo-tourism; geological diversity and history; tourism destination; Bawean Island; strategic issue; geopark development*

Introduction

Geotourism is a unique form of tourism that offers experiences with various interests through its characteristic, namely geoheritage (Dowling and Newsome, 2010). Geoheritage refers to the geological heritage of an area which includes rock formations, geological structures, minerals, and other geological phenomena that have scientific, educational, aesthetic, and cultural value (Page, 2018). Through geotourism, tourists can explore and understand the

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history of the earth and the geological processes that shape the current landscape (Page, 2018). Geotourism not only provides the opportunity to enjoy natural beauty but also educates visitors about the importance of conservation and preservation of geological heritage, geotourism often involves activities that are environmentally friendly and sustainable, thereby contributing to the welfare of local communities and environmental preservation (Dowling and Newsome, 2010). Thus, geotourism not only offers recreation but also knowledge and awareness of the importance of preserving geological heritage for future generations. Geoheritage is not only about geological diversity but also related to biodiversity and cultural diversity, as regulated in Presidential Regulation No. 9 of 2019 concerning the Development of Geoparks.

Bawean Island has unique geodiversity potential, namely related to ancient volcanoes that occurred as a result of marine transgression and regression in the past, this geological condition has an impact on the biodiversity potential of Bawean Island where ancient volcanoes form a unique flora and fauna ecosystem, Bawean Island also has the potential for cultural diversity due to its geographical location which is an island in the middle of the Java Sea surrounded by other cultures and civilizations (Arrasyid, et al., 2023). The diversity of potential found on Bawean Island requires comprehensive and collaborative coordination from various parties to ensure the sustainability and usefulness of existing resource potential. However, the management of this diversity of resources is still less integrated and unsustainable, that is, management is still carried out individually (Wardani, et al., 2017). The management results in less optimal development of the potential of existing resources so that there is no increase in sales value or benefit value of existing resources. Management of sustainable ecotourism In addition to protecting the island from environmental degradation brought on by man-made and natural elements, sustainable eco-tourism management is a critical topic for tiny island nations (Armono, et al., 2018).

Geotourism development requires comprehensive planning because based on the Regulation of the Minister of National Development Planning/Head of the National Development Planning Agency Number 15 of 2020 concerning the National Action Plan for the Development of Indonesian Geoparks, geotourism development contains the substance of conservation, education, infrastructure development, disaster mitigation, economic development, tourism development towards geoheritage (geodiversity, biodiversity, cultural diversity). The development of geoparks, particularly in rural areas, can lead to the creation of new economic prospects, jobs, and revenue streams (Farsani, et al., 2011). The island of Bawean has abundant potential for ecotourism and includes endemic animals, beaches, mountains, rivers, and a variety of plants (Trimanto, et al., 2016). So planning and development needs to be done holistically and collaboratively. There are 17 potential geosites on Bawean Island, so in this research, a study will be carried out on 17 geosites on Bawean Island to find out the strategic issues that exist in the geoheritage on Bawean Island. This research was carried out concerning the Regulation of the Minister of National Development Planning/Head of the National Development Planning Agency Number 15 of 2020 concerning the National Action Plan for the Development of Indonesian Geoparks, so that the strategic issue of geotourism on Bawean Island which is the output of this research can be in line with the direction of geopark development in Indonesia.

Objectives

In connection with this background, the objectives of this research are as follows:

1. Identify weaknesses, strengths, potential and threats related to geotourism on Bawean Island;
2. Analyze strategic issues related to geotourism development on Bawean Island.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

The population in this research is all stakeholders who have urgency and legitimacy, and who are the objects of research on Bawean Island. Determining the sample was carried out using a purposive sampling method, namely selecting samples based on certain predetermined criteria, and also using the snowballing sampling method to get recommendations for figures according to certain predetermined criteria. Determination of sample criteria from government circles, namely regional officials who have the authority to manage geoparks, in this case namely (1) Department of Tourism and Creative Economy, Culture, Youth and Sports, (2) Regional Development Planning, Research and Development Agency, (3) Department of Public Works and Spatial Planning, (4) Regional Disaster Management Agency, (5) Natural Resources Conservation Agency, (6) Department of Cooperatives, Micro Enterprises, Industry and Trade, (7) District Apparatus. Determining the sample criteria from members of the public is the manager or administrator of each geosites.

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2. Research Tools

This research uses a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative and qualitative analysis. Data for quantitative analysis uses information from questionnaires, while qualitative analysis uses data and information from observations and interviews.

3. Data Collection

Data collection to answer the first objective uses qualitative methods through in-depth interviews, literature reviews, policy studies, and field observations. Meanwhile, data collection to answer the second objective uses quantitative methods through assessment questionnaires with a Likert scale. Data collection was also carried out through in-depth interviews with stakeholders in the government and the community. The interview was conducted based on the pillars of geotourism development related to geosites on Bawean Island.

4. Data Analysis

Data analysis for the first objective is to use the SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat) method to identify geoheritage conditions so that weaknesses, strengths, potential, and threats to geosites on Bawean Island can be identified. Data analysis was carried out based on observations and information from government stakeholders and the community. Meanwhile, data analysis in the second objective uses quantitative methods so that from the issues obtained in the first objective it can be seen which issues are strategic.

Discussion and Conclusion

1. Discussion

Bawean Island is located between Java Island and Kalimantan Island. Bawean Island is an island separate from Java Island, about 120 km north of Java Island. Administratively, Bawean Island with an area of 197.42 km2 is included in Gresik Regency. To get to Bawean Island, you can take two routes, namely the air route and the sea route. It was originally named Majeti Island or Majdi Island which comes from Arabic and means coin. It is called a coin because the shape of the island is almost round like a coin. Meanwhile, foreign tourists call it Boyan Island, as do Bawean descendants who were born there and raised in Malaysia, Singapore, or Australia, the term Boyan is more familiar to them, so they are called the Boyaness tribe in Singapore (Usman, 1992). In the past, sea transportation was smooth and regular because it was a triangular route between Surabaya, Bawean, Banjarmasin, and Singapore which was served by ships (Usman, 1992). During the Dutch colonial rule (1743-1945) several office facilities were built which are quite adequate, namely post offices and giro; telephone and telegraph offices; meteorology and geophysics office; rice warehouses, salt warehouses, oil, weapons; housing and other facilities.

Bawean Island is composed of volcanic rock (lava and pyroclastic), sand sedimentary rock, and limestone. Apart from that, there are hot springs which show that volcanic activity on Bawean Island is still active (Usman, 2012). Regional stratigraphically according to research by Aziz et al. (1993), Bawean Island is composed of several rock formations, including the oldest formation, namely the Gelam Limestone Formation, which in the field conditions, for example, marble (onyx) is found which is an altered product of limestone (Figure 1).

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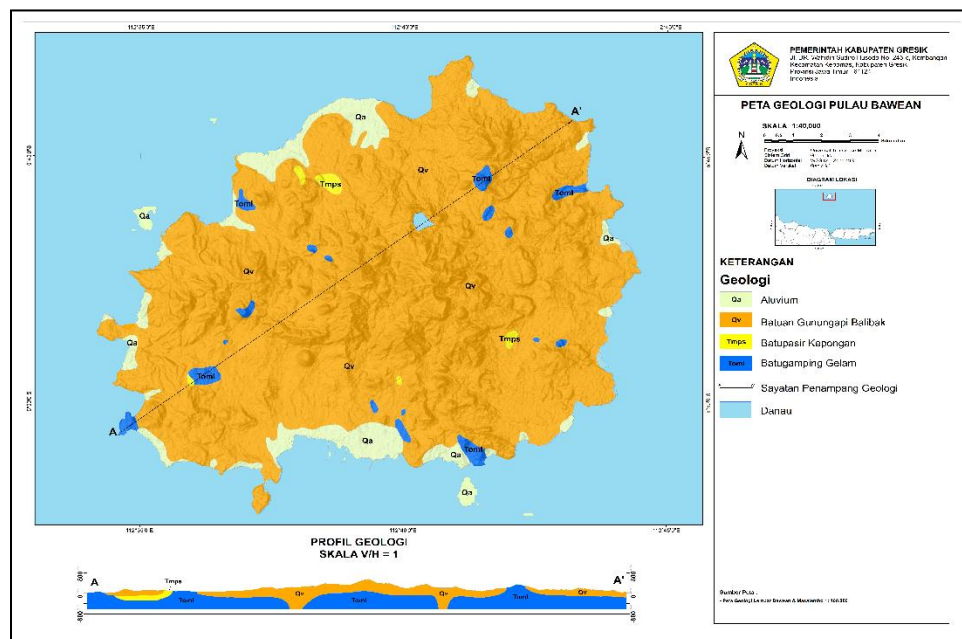
Figure 1. Geologi Map of Bawean Island (modified from Aziz, et al., 1993)

The Bawean earthquake measuring magnitudes 5.9 and 6.5 on March 22 2024 was a type of shallow crust triggered by active fault activity with a depth of 10 km and was located 37 km west of Bawean Island. The Meteorology, Climatology, and Geophysics Agency recorded 608 earthquakes occurred from March 22 2024 to April 26 2024 at 06.00 WIB (Figure 2). Of these, the earthquake with the largest magnitude was 6.5 and the smallest magnitude was 2.1. The earthquake that rocked Bawean was a type of shallow crustal earthquake. The earthquake caused damage to buildings in some areas because of its destructive nature.
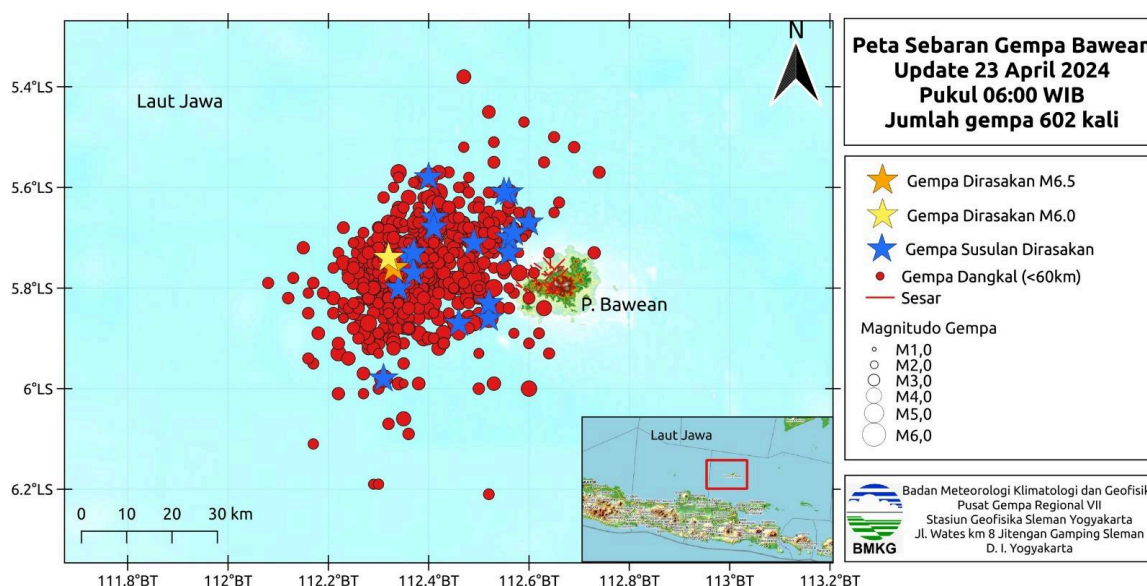
Figure 2. Location of Earthquakes in Bawean Island from March 22 to April 23, 2024

Even though Bawean Island is vulnerable to earthquakes, it also has geological heritage potential that can be developed as geotourism. In the initial stages of geotourism development on Bawean Island, 17 potential geosites were identified, including Gili Noko, Mount Teguh, hot springs, Kerrong Beach, Laccar waterfall, Kastoba Lake, Noko Selayar, and other geological heritage (Figure 3). Beaches, lakes, waterfalls, mountains, and small islands are just a few of the island's many natural features in Bawean Island, all of these features might be turned into tourist destinations (Nashihah, 2021). The development of geosites for geotourism requires identifying the potential and problems that exist in each geosite. Identification of weaknesses, strengths, potential and threats related to geotourism on geosites on Bawean Island is carried out based on the pillars regulated in the Regulation of the Minister of National

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Development Planning/Head of the National Development Planning Agency Number 15 of 2020 concerning the National Action Plan for the Development of Indonesian Geoparks, where the pillars which influence the development of geotourism, namely consisting of the functions of conservation, education, infrastructure development, disaster mitigation, economic development, tourism development towards geoheritage (geodiversity, biodiversity, cultural diversity). The Geoparks concept is an integrated system that offers education, conservation, geotourism, and community development concerning geology or geodiversity, including biological and cultural diversity in a region (Herrera-Franco, et al., 2021).
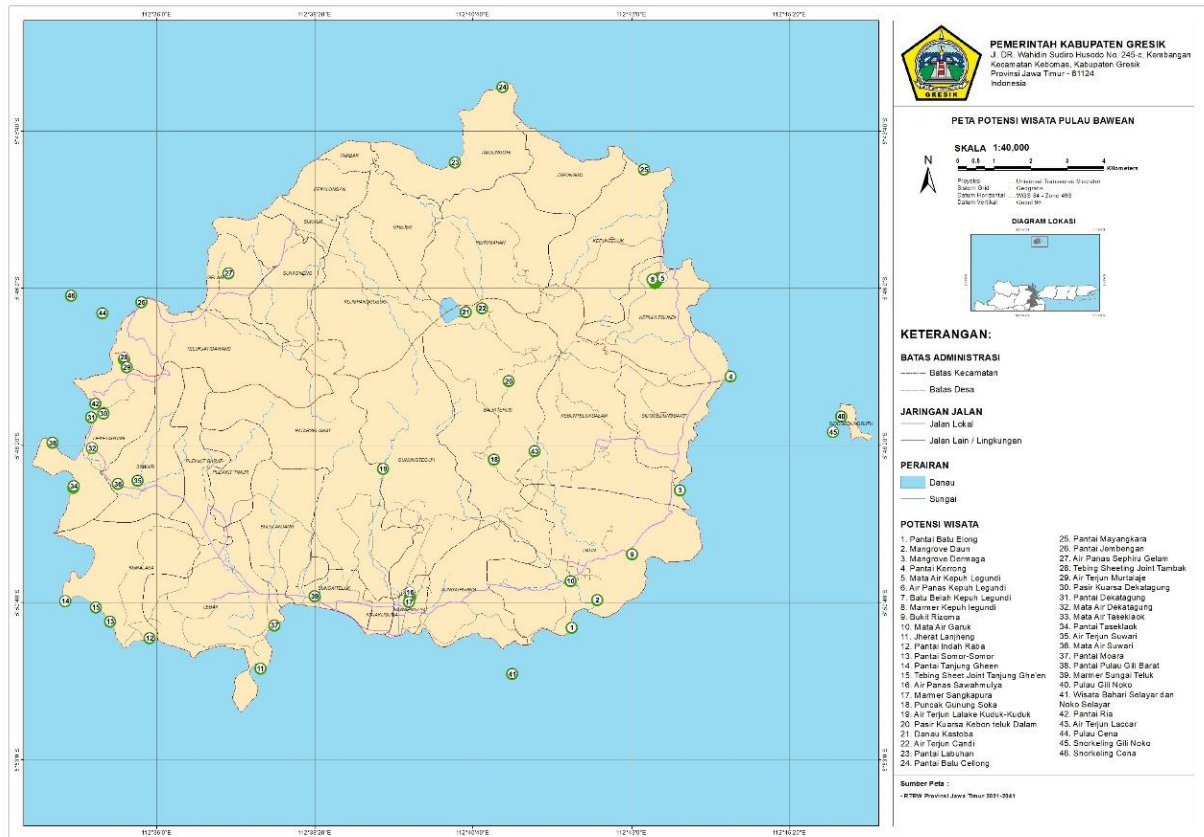
Figure 3. Location of Tourism Attraction include Geosite in Bawean Island

In collecting data to identify geoheritage conditions, field observations and surveys of geological conditions are carried out by a team of geologists and geophysicists to determine weaknesses, strengths, potential, and threats from geological conditions (Figure 4). Observations were also carried out to observe non-geological conditions, namely related to the tourist attraction of the geosite, the completeness of the tourism infrastructure on geosites, and other existing conditions of the geosite.

Data analysis to identify weaknesses, strengths, potential, and threats on the Bawean Island geosite using the SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat) method. The results of this assessment are the basis for determining strategies and strategic issues for developing the Bawean geopark.

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Figure 4. Observation of Geological Condition in Bawean Island
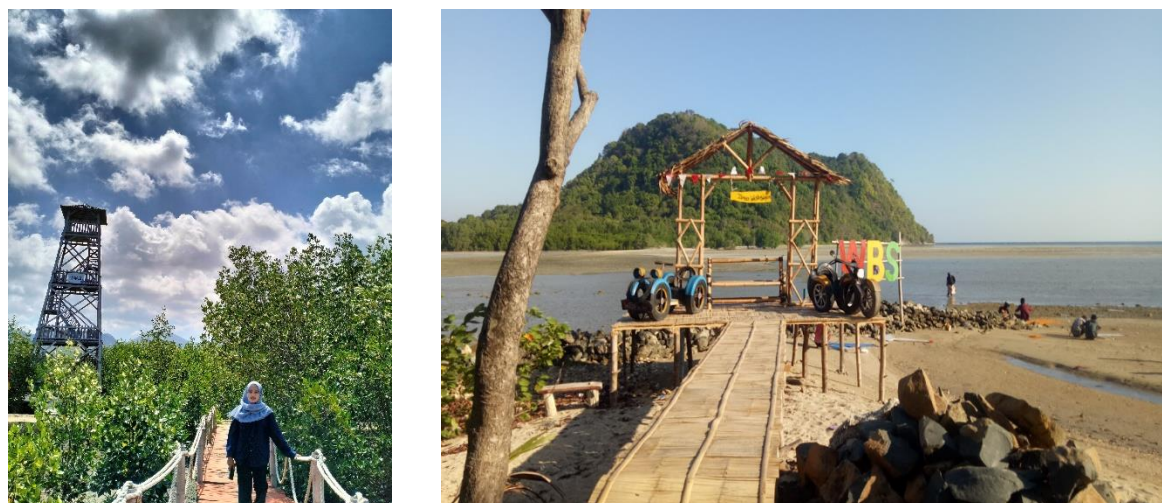
Figure 5. Observation and Field Survey of Geosite in Bawean Island

Figure 6. In-depth Interview with Local Government in Bawean Island
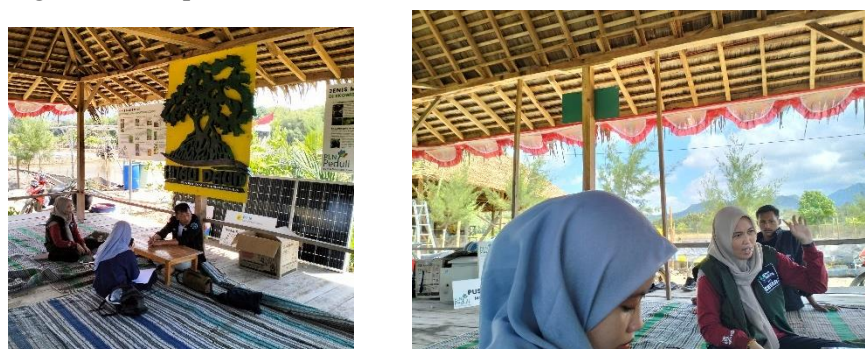
Figure 7. In-depth Interview with Community and Local People in Bawean Island

Tabel 1. Identify weaknesses, strengths, potential and threats to geotourism on geosites on Bawean Island

No.	Strength
1	High public awareness to maintain and preserve the geoheritage of Bawean Island
2	The diversity of biological resources on the Bawean Island geosite has economic selling value
3	The active contribution of Community Group (Pokdarwis) in several geosites has had an impact on increasing geosite development
4	The Bawean Island geosite has the potential for tourism development
5	The diversity of customs, traditions, culture, and spiritual values on Bawean Island is still maintained and preserved

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6	Biodiversity on Bawean Island can improve the local economy through its use by the community in local products
7	The infrastructure at several geosites is still quite good
8	There are efforts to increase community capacity in the tourism and economic pillars
No.	**Weakness**
1	Conversion of forest land into plantations (Sengon trees)
2	Threats of earthquakes, fires, floods, sea waves, sea abrasion and landslides
3	There are no preventive efforts to mitigate disasters
4	MSME profit levels are low due to less optimal marketing and sales
5	The role and function of Community Group (Pokdarwis) in tourism management is less than optimal
6	There are environmental and biodiversity degradation practices
7	Low awareness of the public and tourists to dispose of rubbish properly
8	Low accessibility and infrastructure services in the Bawean Island geosite area
9	Low awareness and community participation in geosite development
10	There are extinct flora and fauna
11	Low levels of environmental conservation, biodiversity conservation, and cultural preservation
12	Less than optimal tourism marketing efforts
13	Limited funds for managing regional development
No.	**Opportunity**
1	Collaboration in tourism development on the Bawean Island geosite
2	Research collaboration related to the development of the Bawean Island geosite
3	Geoheritage conservation collaboration on the Bawean Island geosite
No.	**Threat**
1	Lack of government role in Geosite development
2	Conflict over land ownership status in the geosite area

Data analysis was then carried out to determine strategic issues based on weaknesses, strengths, potential, and threats on the Bawean Island geosite. Data analysis was carried out using a quantitative method using a Likert scale, where a value of 1 means the potential/problem does not affect the related pillar, a value of 2 means the potential/problem has little effect on the related pillar, a value of 3 means the potential/problem affects the related pillar and a value of 4 means potential/problems greatly influence the related pillars. Interpretation of measurements between strengths/potentials and weaknesses/threats is carried out separately.

Tabel 2. Assessment of the Advantages and Potential of geosites on Bawean Island

No.	Advantages and Potential	Geotourism Development Pillars						Value
		Geodiversity	Biodiversity	Economics	Cultural Diversity	Tourism	Disaster Risks	
1	Research collaboration related to the development of geosites on the Bawean Island	4	4	4	3	2	2	**3,17**
2	Collaboration in tourism development of geosites on the Bawean Island	1	1	1	2	2	1	**1,33**
3	Geoheritage conservation collaboration on the Bawean Island	1	4	4	2	2	4	**2,83**
4	High public awareness to maintain and preserve the geoheritage of Bawean Island	1	4	3	2	2	1	**2,17**
5	The diversity of biological resources on the Bawean Island has economic selling value	2	4	4	4	4	4	**3,67**
6	The active contribution of community groups (Pokdarwis) in several geosites has an impact on increasing geosite development	3	4	4	4	4	1	**3,33**
7	The Bawean Island Geosite has the potential for tourism development	4	4	4	4	4	1	**3,50**
8	The diversity of customs, traditions, culture, and spiritual values on Bawean Island is still maintained and preserved	1	1	1	3	1	1	**1,33**
9	Biodiversity on Bawean Island can improve the local economy through its use by the community in geoproducts	1	4	4	3	3	2	**2,83**
10	The infrastructure at several geosites is quite good	1	2	2	1	1	1	**1,33**
11	There are efforts to increase community capacity in the tourism and economic pillars	1	4	4	2	4	1	**2,67**

The interpretation of the table above is that advantages/potentials that have a high value have a positive influence on the geotourism development pillar, so advantages/potentials that have a low value, namely those with a value below 1.5, require more intervention to support increased development of the geotourism pillar on Bawean Island. Stakeholder collaboration on geotourism development still needs attention, so that the potential that exists on Bawean Island can optimally attract visitors. Cultural diversity still needs to be developed, including traditions, customs, and culture, so that cultural heritage is not increasingly lost or abandoned by society. In geoparks, low-impact recreational, scientific, and educational activities are conducted in conjunction with sustainable economic development strategies to protect unique geoheritage areas with geomorphic landscapes and geological phenomena (Wadhawan, 2021). The provision of public infrastructure and facilities still needs to be improved, especially for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of buildings and public infrastructure damaged by the earthquake.

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Tabel 3. Assessment of Weaknesses and Threats at geosites on Bawean Island

No.	Weaknesses and Threats	Geotourism Development Pillars						Value
		Geodiversity	Biodiversity	Economics	Cultural Diversity	Tourism	Disaster Risk	
1	Conversion of forest land into plantations (sengon tree)	3	4	4	2	2	4	**3,17**
2	Threats of fire, flood, sea waves, sea abrasion and landslides	2	4	3	2	4	4	**3,17**
3	There are no preventive efforts to mitigate disasters	4	4	4	4	4	4	**4,00**
4	MSME profit levels are low due to less optimal marketing and sales	1	4	4	2	4	1	**2,67**
5	The role and function of Pokdarwis in tourism management are less than optimal	3	4	4	4	4	3	**3,67**
6	There are environmental and biodiversity degradation practices	4	4	4	1	4	4	**3,50**
7	Low awareness of the public and tourists to dispose of rubbish properly	1	1	1	3	4	4	**2,33**
8	Low accessibility and infrastructure services in the Bawean Island geosite area	3	4	4	1	4	4	**3,33**
9	Low awareness and community participation in geosite development	4	4	4	4	4	1	**3,50**
10	There are extinct flora and fauna	1	4	4	1	4	4	**3,00**
11	Low levels of environmental conservation, biodiversity conservation, and cultural preservation	1	1	2	1	1	4	**1,67**
12	Less than optimal tourism marketing efforts	3	4	4	3	4	1	**3,17**
13	Limited funds for managing regional development	4	4	4	4	4	3	**3,83**
14	Lack of government role in geosite development	4	4	4	4	4	3	**3,83**
15	Conflict over land ownership status in the geosite area	3	3	4	1	3	1	**2,50**

The interpretation of the table above is that weaknesses/threats that have a high value will have a negative influence on the geotourism development pillar, so weaknesses/threats that have a high value, namely those with a value above 3.5, require more intervention to support the development of the geotourism pillar on Bawean Island. Strategic issues originating from strengths/potentials require program planning with additional efforts to increase related strengths/potentials, while strategic issues originating from weaknesses/threats require program planning with additional efforts to reduce related weaknesses/threats.

1. Collaboration in tourism development on the Bawean Island geosite: collaboration carried out on Bawean Island regarding the tourism pillar is still minimal, where most collaboration is carried out in relation to the pillars of geodiversity, biodiversity, and the economy.

2. The diversity of customs, tradition, culture, and spiritual values on Bawean Island is still maintained and preserved: the potential for cultural diversity on Bawean Island is very diverse and is still maintained and carried out routinely, however, there has been no development towards tourism of the existing cultural diversity potential, even

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though it has the potential to be developed into a routine event activity.

3. The infrastructure at several geosites is quite good, even though some geosites already have good and complete infrastructure, not all of them can be utilized optimally due to the earthquake which damaged public infrastructure. So access to the geosite area is still hampered, as is tourism infrastructure.

4. There are no preventive efforts to mitigate disasters: Disaster mitigation efforts are important to maintaining the geosite area so that it remains sustainable and protected, so that apart from maintaining the geosite. It can also maintain safety and ensure the sustainability of tourism activities.

5. The role and function of Community Group (Pokdarwis) in tourism management are less than optimal: There are geosites with active community group (Pokdarwis) conditions, which have an impact on the sustainability of geosite management. However, there are also geosites with passive community group (Pokdarwis) conditions, which have an impact on the lack of development of the geosite.

6. Limited funds in managing regional development: Bawean Island is separated from Java Island by the sea, so planning and development costs will be more expensive than on Java Island, so budget income assistance has a significant impact on geotourism development.

7. Lack of government role in geosite development: The lack of government role lies in systematic and sustainable planning and management of geotourism development on Bawean Island. However, some geosites can develop even without government assistance, this is because local community institutions are active and have high community participation, and also collaborate with outside parties.

2. Conclusion

Strategic Issues are conditions or things that must be considered or prioritized in development planning because of their significant impact on the entity (region/community) in the future. Strategic issues originating from strengths/potentials require development program and planning with additional efforts to increase related strengths/potentials, while strategic issues originating from weaknesses/threats require development program and planning with additional efforts to reduce related weaknesses/threats. The formulation of strategic issues related to geotourism development on Bawean Island consists of positive issues and negative issues, namely there are 7 (seven) strategic issues consisting of:

1. Collaboration in tourism development on the Bawean Island geosite

2. The diversity of customs, traditions, culture, and spiritual values on Bawean Island is still maintained and preserved

3. The infrastructure at several geosites needs improvement after the earthquake

4. There are no preventive efforts to mitigate disasters

5. The role and function of community groups (Pokdarwis) in tourism management are less optimal

6. Limited funds for managing regional development

7. Lack of government role in geosite development

Low levels of environmental conservation efforts, preservation of geological heritage, biodiversity, and cultural preservation: in geodiversity conservation efforts, biodiversity still needs attention. Several rock sites have been damaged or have been used for community needs. The existing geodiversity potential should be a potential tourist attraction. Geoparks adopt a comprehensive strategy, offering a story for the region; in this framework, individual geosites are valued in a manner akin to other forms of natural and cultural heritage (Justice, 2018). However, an awareness of the relationships between geodiversity, conservation, and tourism development is essential to the management of sustainable geotourism, highlighting the vital role that research plays in determining the optimal ratio between these three key elements (Ólafsdóttir, & Dowling, 2014).

Research recommendations

Bawean Island currently still has the status of an aspiring geopark. To improve its status as a national geopark, there are still many efforts that must be made by various stakeholders. An emphasis on short-term economic value above protection can easily lead to the overdevelopment of the tourism industry in the absence of a master plan for sustainable expansion and protection (Xu, and Wu, 2022). The recommendations are proposed based on the findings of strategic issues in Bawean Island as follows:

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1. Encourage sustainable use of geological heritage and diversity, biodiversity and cultural diversity and their ecosystems;

2. Improve development areas as sustainable tourism destinations by paying attention to environmental carrying capacity, regional amenities, and infrastructure;

3. Strengthening community and institutional capacity for disaster and climate change mitigation.

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Peraturan Presiden No. 9 Tahun 2019 tentang Pengembangan Taman Bumi (Geopark)

Peraturan Menteri Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional/ Kepala Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional Nomor 15 Tahun 2020 Tentang Rencana Aksi Nasional engembangan Taman Bumi (Geopark) Indonesia.

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RELIGIOUS OVERTOURISM: A TALE OF TWO CITIES

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Abstract

This study explores the concept of over tourism and its associated sustainability challenges, with a specific focus on religious overtourism. Overtourism, or mass tourism, refers to the unsustainable practices arising from excessive tourist influx at a particular destination that leads to overcrowding, environmental degradation, and cultural erosion. In recent times multiple cases of overtourism have been reported from all over the world that have negatively affected local communities, forcing them to deal with an altered lifestyle and restricting their access to amenities. The rise of religious tourism, particularly in India is driven by the active promotion of the sector by the government coupled with the increasing mobility of the middle class. This study focusses on two religious cities, Varanasi and Ayodhya, to investigate the impacts of religious overtourism on ecological balance. Utilizing a case study methodology, the research draws on existing literature to highlight the urgent need for sustainable practices in the face of growing visitor numbers. Findings suggest that while pilgrimage experience holds personal significance, the unchecked influx of tourists poses substantial challenges. The study suggests the implementation of visitor management strategies, educational initiatives, and infrastructure improvements to mitigate the negative impacts. The research emphasizes the need for responsible tourism to preserve the cultural and spiritual integrity of these sacred sites, ensuring a harmonious coexistence between tourism and the true essence to pilgrimage.

Keywords: – Overtourism, Religious tourism, sustainability, Case study, Varanasi, Ayodhya

Introduction

The concept of 'overtourism" has emerged from the widespread, yet unsustainable practices in tourism. This has sparked reactions among academia, practitioners, and social activists who are against the detrimental use of urban, rural, and coastal space for tourism (Milano, Cheer, & Novelli (2019a). The Sydney Morning Herald claims to have coined the phrase "overtourism" in 2001 when discussing Pompei's tourism boom and how underfunding and overtourism impeded site management (Petersen, 2001). Overtourism is an outcome of a high influx of tourists at popular destinations exceeding the sustainable limits and resulting in overcrowding, environmental degradation, culture dilution, and a strain on the infrastructure (8 iconic tourist destinations, 2024). Several reasons have been attributed to overtourism. For example, revenge travel during and post pandemic (Singh & Srivastava, 2023), a growth in the number of tourists as a result of marketing efforts of tourist companies (Zemla, 2020), destination promotion on social media (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2019) and an alternative form of capital accumulation (Harvey, 2007)

The recent rise of urban overtourism is largely attributed to a growth in tourist numbers, resulting in overcrowding in local areas. This phenomenon has negatively impacted locals who are left to deal with the impact of seasonal and transient tourism peaks, forcing them to permanently alter their lifestyles and impeding their access to amenities and realisation of their maximum well-being (Milano, Cheer, & Novelli, 2019b). Over a decade in Barcelona, tourism friendly policies have invited foreign investment, infrastructure development, city branding policies and proliferation of housing for touristic use. However, these changes have contributed to social unrest and the decline in Barcelona residents' quality of life and liveability due to housing and living expenses, traffic jams, and other related issues (Milano, Novelli & Cheer, 2019c). They insist that a location that appeals to tourists should not be at the expense of being livable and safe for locals, nor should it be given up for the sake of profit. Overcrowding and construction at tourist places, especially in hilly areas, has resulted in immense pressure on the land infrastructure resulting in environmental catastrophes. For example, the annual pilgrimage to Kedarnath, a sacred ritual of Hindus, coincided with an unprecedented heavy rainfall that triggered landslides leading to deadly debris flows and floods in the Manadakani River catchment area. Although the official death toll from the floods was estimated at 15,000 individuals with 11,000 missing (Das et al. 2015), the actual fatalities exceeded 30,000 as suggested by local sources. It was found that the valley had lodgings to accommodate only 25,000 people while there were around 40, 000 people

on that ill-fated night. The unchecked and unplanned construction and promotion of tourist activities in the region could potentially lead to further disasters in the region (Sajwan, 2023).

Currently we are witnessing a rise in religious tourism across India which can be attributed to increasing mobility of burgeoning Indian middle class and the active promotion of the religious tourism industry (Singh, 2009). These developments have significantly impacted the local ecology, and the natural environment of the place. A study by Higgins-Desbiolleset al. (2019) emphasizes the need to give precedence to the rights of local communities and rebuild the social capacities of tourism over the rights of tourists and tourism corporates. This suggests an inverse relationship between religious overtourism and sustainable tourism and prompts an urgent enquiry into it.

Literature Review

One of the earliest academic mention of the term overtourism was made by Doxey (1975) in a conference paper where he talked about the negative impact of tourism on residents in the vicinity of Niagra Falls. It is only recently that widespread interest in the concept has arisen as a response towards the global climate change crisis. Goodwin (2021) defined overtourism as an excessive growth of visitors to places where residents suffer the consequences of temporary or seasonal peaks. Overtourism is not to be confused with overcrowding. (Zemla, 2020).The main difference lies in the negative impact that the crowding produces. Overtourism arises when there is an imbalance between the positive and negative impact of tourism for the local population and environment (Horlacher, 2024). It impacts the quality of life of the local residents as well as poses a serious threat to the environment and sustainability.

Doxey proposed an interesting an *Irritation Index*, also known as the *Irridex* or the *Doxey Index,* based on the residents' reaction to the tourists (Fig. 1). There is an initial euphoria with the obvious monetary benefits that follow any tourist activity. Over a period, the residents may become used to them displaying apathy or indifference to the tourist presence. Once the tourist numbers keep increasing, it may lead to irritation and the final stage is antagonism where the locals may exhibit resentment or dislike of the tourists (Hospers, 2019). ABC News reported instances in Europe where protest signs were put up by local residents in Barcelona saying, 'This isn't tourism, it's an invasion' or "why call it tourist season if we can't shoot them?" (Miller, 2017). Destinations are left to bear the social and cultural costs of tourism.

Fig 1: The Doxey Index
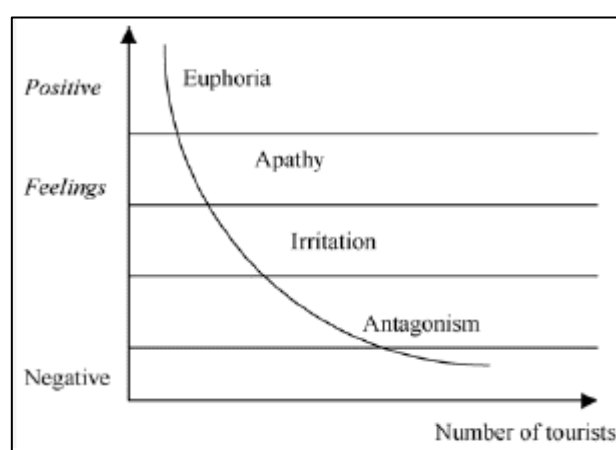
Source: Doxey (1975)

Causes of Overtourism

Several reasons for overtourism have been listed in literature. Social media has become a popular catalyst for overtourism. Destinations have grown in visibility (Dodds & Butler, 2019). Suddenly everyone wishes to share the 'undiscovered tourist gems.' Reels and vlogs by influencers act as credible sources of travel information (Gretzel, 2019; Alonso-Almeida, Borrajo-Millán, & Yi, 2019). Film-induced tourism also leads to enhanced tourist interest in new destinations. Destinations popularized in books or movies often become tourist hotspots. ABC News reported that due to the onslaught of tourists following the popularity of the movie 'The Beach' starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Maya Bay on Phi Phi Leh Island, Thailand, underwent a four-month closure for environmental rejuvenation.

Similarly, Dubrovnik, Croatia witnessed a spike in tourist numbers post the release of the popular series 'Game of Thrones' (Horlacher, 2024). A railway crossing in Kamakura, southwest Tokyo was inundated with fans of *Slam Dunk*, a popular manga comic and anime TV series (McCurry, 2024).

Singh and Srivastava (2023) mentioned *revenge tourism* as one of the factors leading overcrowding of hill stations and tourist spots following the pandemic lockdowns. Other factors that have been identified include ease of travel and low-cost airlines, rising sharing economies and growth-oriented tourism policies of governments (Żemła, 2020), and successful marketing campaigns by destination marketing organizations (DMOs) (Dodd & Butler, 2019). There are also reported instances of mega events leading to overtourism as was observed during the Tokyo 2020 Olympics which lead to several reported cases of touristophobia in Japan (Duignan, Everett, & McCabe, 2022).

Identification of a research gap

While there is a growing interest in the concept of overtourism, there remains a gap in academic literature exploring religious tourism as a potential leading contributory factor. This study explores the concept of religious overtourism through case studies of two holy cities of India –Varanasi and Ayodhya.

Religious Tourism as an important cause of overtourism

Religious tourism is defined as travel prompted by religious, or spiritual reasons or directed by faith. Religious tourism can include pilgrimage travel, where a devotee travels to perform certain religious rites, or it could involve visiting religious monuments for sightseeing. Unlike leisure tourism, religious tourism destinations cater primarily to travellers with a specific inclination toward spiritual experiences. India has a long history of attracting religious tourists from across the world. It boasts of abundant historic, cultural, and spiritual riches that draw millions of tourists every year. With its diverse tapestry of religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Sufism, India has been a hub of pilgrimage sites for centuries. Religious tourism is specially a huge draw for domestic tourists. It involves not only the restoration of existing shrines and holy places but also a complete overhauling of the city planning, infrastructure, hospitality needs, security, etc. Therefore, when developing religious tourism products, it became crucial to incorporate community participation at the destination.

The Government of India (GoI) launched several schemes in the past to promote tourism in general and religious tourism in particular. In 2014-15 the Ministry came out with its flagship scheme, *'Swadesh Darshan'*. The same scheme was revamped and relaunched as *'Swadesh Darshan 2.0'* or SD2.0, at the beginning of January 2023 with the government identifying 15 states to be promoted as part of India's new domestic tourism policy. In addition, the GoI also launched the PRASAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive) scheme, which was specifically targeted towards the promotion of pilgrimage and spiritual tourism. The scheme aimed to develop and promote pilgrimage destinations in a prioritized, planned, and sustainable manner to provide a complete religious tourism experience. Another tourism campaign was launched in 2023, called *'Dekho Apna Desh'* or 'visit your country.' The scheme aimed to promote domestic tourism, to push people, especially the middle-class citizens, to travel within India rather than flying abroad. Due to the active efforts undertaken by the GoI, religious tourist destinations have witnessed an exponential jump in popularity. Visiting pilgrimage sites, temples, and spiritual spaces is no longer restricted to older or more mature tourists. An increasing number of young people are being drawn to these sites as well. The concept of '*praycations*' is being explored by families where a visit to a place of religious importance is clubbed with a leisure vacation.

In general, cities welcome tourists since they provide employment, promote the city's image in national and international tourist circuits, and bring in the much-needed investments. However, this transformation comes at a cost. Places of religious significance are often visited by a multitude of pilgrims, especially during festivals and religious events, leading to overcrowding and overtourism. But are these cities equipped to handle the spike in tourist numbers? Striking the right balance between conservation of heritage while achieving growth of tourism remains a challenge for most of the popular religious destinations (Pati & Husain, 2023). We examine two cities as case studies - Varanasi, one of the oldest living cities in the world, and Ayodhya, one of the newest upcoming temple towns.

Objectives

The main aim of the study is to draw attention to religious tourism as a growing cause of overtourism and the challenges that it poses for a sustainable ecological balance. The methodology used is case-based where we have studied the impact of overtourism in two religious cities of India namely Varanasi and Ayodhya using available literature. The study also aims to propose practical suggestions to deal with the issue of mass tourism. By identifying effective strategies and best practices, the research seeks to provide stakeholders with actionable recommendations.

Research Methodology

The case study research methodology has been used to understand the implications of overtourism in the religious cities of Varanasi and Ayodhya in India. A case study as a research design helps to delve deep into the phenomenon of religious overtourism to uncover insights and patterns that is not possible by other approaches. It has involved a review of existing theoretical knowledge through published academic literature, news articles and government data.

Discussion and Conclusion

1. Discussion

1.2. The case of Varanasi

Varanasi, also referred to as Banaras or Kashi, is often referred to as the spiritual capital of India. It dates back to the 11th century B.C. and is one of the oldest living cities in the world.   Situated on the banks of the sacred river Ganges, it draws devotees from all over the globe. It is home to more than 2,000 small and large temples, including the Kashi Vishwanath temple dedicated to the Hindu God Shiva. It is believed that performing the last rites of a loved one at the *ghats* (banks) of the river Ganges at Varanasi leads to the salvation of the soul. A dip in the holy river by Hindus is believed to cleanse all sins and sets one on the path of salvation. While the city has always witnessed a strong pull for religious tourists, it is only in recent times that there has been exponential growth. According to the government tourism department data, the number of tourists has jumped from 6.68 million in 2017 to 84.2 million in 2023. This quantum increase can be attributed to a systematic effort at cultural re-awakening targeted towards Indian tourists. The Kashi Vishwanth Temple Corridor, built with a budget of 9.0 billion INR, is just one of the efforts that have been undertaken to improve the tourist experience, created to provide easy movement of pilgrims from the temple to the *ghats*.

With the number of tourists increasing there is an obvious strain on the city's infrastructure. While the newly constructed amenities cater to the visitors, the residents are forced to live with daily inconveniences like regular traffic jams, pollution, and lack of parking spaces. The residents also feel that the natural essence of the ancient temple is being lost in the efforts at beautification. Batabyal, et al. (2023) describe the experience of a tourist who was put off by the large-scale commercialization around the temple which, as per the tourist, 'tainted the spiritual purity of the temple'. Cases of unruly visitors who do not respect the local culture and indulge in alcohol and drug abuse have also been reported. The growing pollution of the river Ganges can directly be related to overtourism. The river has been reported as one of the most polluted rivers in the world. Millions of pilgrims throng the ghats to take a dip in the holy river leading to deterioration water quality. Pollution at the *ghats* due to festivals like Ganga Dusshera etc. is a cause for concern. Hindus believe that after cremating a dead body, immersing ashes in the Ganges at Varanasi leads to the liberation of the soul ending the cycle of reincarnation, allowing them to attain *Moksha*. The immersion of items related to various rituals into the river adds to the pollution. When the number of pilgrims reaches into million, it causes a serious threat to the already choking river.

1.2. The case of Ayodhya

January 2024 saw the consecration ceremony of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya, the birthplace of Lord Ram, before the temple was opened to the public. Since then, tourists have descended on the sleepy town of Ayodhya in hordes. 2.4 million tourists visited the city in the first 12 days and it is projected to draw 50 million annual visitors, easily surpassing other pilgrimage sites like the Vatican City and Mecca in terms of annual visitors (Verma, 2024). The advent of tourists also opened doors for large-scale development as well. Nearly all the popular hotel chains have signed deals for hotels in Ayodhya – Leela group of hotels, Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL), Marriott International, Sarovar Hotels & Resorts, and Wyndham Hotels & Resorts among other (Dethe, 2024). The residents have turned into homestay owners. With the hotels, banks are looking to set up branches. Real Estate is looking up. Government infrastructure projects include EV charging stations, aviation industry, roads, retail brands etc. So, in short, Ayodhya is awakening from being a small sleepy town to becoming one of the major tourist destinations on the world map (Singh & Kumar, 2020).

However, all of this has come at a cost, a cost that has been borne by the residents of the city. Massive relocation of the locals took place to pave the way for the broader roads, the temple premises, and hotels. Nearly 4000 homes and shops in the town had to be demolished and the residents resettled. Pollution of holy rivers, reduced green cover and solid waste management system, and decreased public conveniences are often the outcome of tourist influx (Sinha & Kamalapurkar, 2024). Already plans are under way to develop Ayodhya as a sustainable smart city. The focus in the first phase is going to be on the widening of roads, construction of over bridges, mass transportation

facilities, and parking lots. Emphasis on renewable energy resources has led to the setting up of solar plants and solar streetlights. The green cover of the city needs to be increased to compensate for the larger scale construction that is being done. Ensuring environmental sustainability is going to be a huge challenge.

Another challenge to sustainability would be the maintenance of the essence of the place, not turning it into just another tourist hotspot. Consuming meat and alcohol are prohibited in most Hindu religious places. However, with the big hotel chains opening, catering to guests may involve offering these amenities. There is concern that the entertainment and recreational aspect of the upcoming tourist spot would overtake its authenticity and spiritual significance (Sinha & Kamalapurkar, 2024).

1.3. General Discussion

Impacts of Overtourism

Pressure on the Infrastructure

While there is no denying that tourism improves the overall economies of a region, not all residents benefit directly from it. For most it is seen as an economic necessity (Dodd & Butler, 2019). When tourists flock to an area, it often drives up the prices of everyday goods and services creating an affordability challenge for residents. There exists an acute accommodation challenge as reported from Varanasi (Kaur, 2023) and Tokyo (McCurry, 2024). It pushes up real estate prices exponentially. Neighbour hoods get transformed into B&B properties with tourists taking up residence in rental flats. In Barcelona, this resulted in pushing up rentals, forcing locals out (ABC News, 2017). There is a strain on the infrastructure. Residents find themselves competing for road space leading to daily traffic congestion and longer commute times. In Varanasi, during peak tourist season, short travel distances can take three to four times the normal time.

Cultural Appropriation and Authenticity Concerns

Moreover, not all tourists respect the local culture and environment. Japan was left grappling with this double-edged sword as tourist numbers increased sixfold in 2022 (McCurry, 2024). Authorities in Kyoto banned photography on private roads in the city's Gion district after complaints of tourists harassing the *geiko* (female entertainers) for selfies. The complaints also included multiple instances of littering and trespassing (McCurry, 2019). Often the travellers did not make the effort to learn or respect the local customs, treating busy locations as their personal photo studio. Complaints of alcohol and drug-related disturbances increase. These factors collectively diminish the overall quality of life for residents, who may feel marginalized in their own communities due to the prioritization of tourism-related needs.

Environmental Degradation

The holy rivers see millions of people coming to take a dip to cleanse themselves, in turn adding to the river pollution. While this continues all year round, the number of devotees increases severalfold during the auspicious days of *Ganga Snan*, literally translating to 'bath in the sacred Ganges river'. Comparing water quality between pre and post-religious activities like the Kanwar Mela where millions of pilgrims take a dip in the holy rivers, shows the higher water pollution in the Ganga River water due to massive gathering of pilgrimages. Large scale deforestation is done for the construction of roads, houses, and hotels. Environmental concerns are often sidelined in front of developmental goals.

2. Conclusion

Overall, the paper explored the growing phenomenon of religious over tourism with special reference to two Indian destinations, Varanasi and Ayodhya. The problem of religious overtourism demands urgent and immediate attention. While the pilgrimage and spiritual journeys are deeply personal and profound experiences for many, the unchecked influx of tourists poses significant challenges. A balance needs to be created between promotion of sustainable tourism and preservation of the sacred shrines. The popularity of a tourist place does not guarantee benefits for local tourism livelihood (Petr, 2009) and overall destination image (Fernández, González, & Lopez, 2016). Initiatives such as visitor management strategies, educational programs on respectful behaviour, and infrastructure improvements can mitigate the negative impacts of overcrowding and enhance visitor experiences. By promoting responsible tourism and fostering a deeper appreciation for the cultural and spiritual significance of these sites, we can strive towards a harmonious coexistence between tourism and the sacred, preserving the essence of these places of worship and pilgrimage for all who seek solace and enlightenment.

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Transformative Trends Shaping
the Future of Sustainable Tourism

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This is one of the initial studies to investigate religious overtourism as an important cause of overtourism. It also suggests that religious overtourism impacts the sustainable eco-balance of the place by impacting its environment, native culture, and infrastructure. It uses case study as a research methodology and understand the implications of overtourism in the religious cities of Varanasi and Ayodhya in India.

The study posits several practical implications for the government, policy makers, and corporates. One of the most popular measures for controlling overtourism is regulating the number of visitors via a quota system or a reservation system (Singh & Srivastava, 2023). The tourist arrivals could be staggered over a period of time to prevent sudden influxes. Technology can be harnessed to provide real time information, helping to monitor visitor flow and manage crowds. Amsterdam is looking at *tourism demotion*. By this, they do not mean to discourage tourists but simply not actively promoting tourism. Visitors to Itsukushima Shrine, a UNESCO world heritage site in Japan, are charged admission fees while tourists heading to the Taketomi islands are charged to visit the pristine beaches there. The government can also explore the option of imposing social media curbs at ecologically sensitive areas.

Enhancing the infrastructural facilities like mass transport, parking, and public conveniences become imperative. Proposals for boosting the number of buses and taxis, raising public transport fares during peak hours, and opening new bus routes are some of the steps being adopted in Varanasi. Harnessing renewable sources of energy like solar power can also decrease overall pollution due to burning of fossil fuels. It reduces carbon emission as well as reduces the pressure on power generation.

Promoting responsible tourism through education and cultural programs encourages respectful behaviour and fosters an understanding of the sites' significance. Educating the tourists on the culturally acceptable behaviour and promoting awareness about the historical and spiritual significance of the shrines can reduce the number of unintentional disrespectful behaviour. This approach encourages visitors to engage with local customs respectfully, minimizing negative impacts on the environment and the community while enriching their own travel experiences with deeper cultural understanding. In a pilot project, a smartphone app was used to educate tourists on culturally acceptable norms in Japan. As soon as the visitor came withing 1 km of Gion, Kyoto (McCurry, 2019), the app delivered messages in Chinese and English.

Limitations and directions for future research

The geographical scope of the case studies might be one of the limitations as both the cities are from a single country hence governed by the same regulatory bodies, and the same tourist and cultural mindset. It would be interesting to explore it in a different culture/ geography to find out the variables that are common or different in cross-cultural context. This study only two case studies as a unit of analysis. Inclusion of more cities as a case study can further add to the robustness of this study.

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COGNITIVE APPRAISAL THEORY: A NEW LENS ON GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract

The rise of technology has dramatically transformed global education, especially with the extensive use of online learning platforms. However, this transformation presents challenges, particularly regarding student engagement. Previous studies have highlighted a decline in engagement at various public universities worldwide, revealing significant issues like poor attendance and high dropout rates in online classes. Additionally, gender disparities remain prevalent in learning technology, with females facing extra obstacles, as seen in their underrepresentation in STEM fields and related areas. This study explores the factors contributing to gender inequalities in learning technology, emphasizing the need for a thorough understanding to address these issues effectively. Conventional theories and practices often fail to fully capture the nuanced experiences and characteristics of women, perpetuating inequality. To tackle these challenges, this research advocates for a paradigm shift in gender equality studies, focusing on women's perspectives and agency. The study examines how gender differences in emotional responses may affect female students' acceptance of learning technology. By considering the intersection of gender and emotion in technology acceptance, this research aims to provide insights into strategies for creating more inclusive and emotionally engaging learning environments for all students.

Keywords: Cognitive Appraisal Theory, Emotion, Gender Equality, Student, Technology

Introduction

The education landscape all over the world has dramatically transformed recently with the use of technology. For example, online learning has become integral to higher education institutions. Thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning is gaining recognition as a viable pedagogy approach where education is now more accessible and flexible. However, these paradigm shifts also bring challenges, particularly student engagement in class. It was reported from the previous studies on the issue of poor student online learning engagement worldwide. For example, Baxter and Hainey (2020) from the University of West Scotland, United Kingdom, reported that 72% of students exhibit poor online learning attendance.

Previous studies showed a decline in student engagement in most public universities worldwide (Barrot et al., 2021). Arronsrimarakot et al. (2023) reported from two public universities in Thailand that only 26% of 465 students had excellent attendance in online classes, with a lot of dropouts at the end of the semester. Focusing on Malaysia, Sathe et al. (2023) reported that the majority of 1243 students in one public university highlighted that the online learning delivery method should be improved, while Chung et al. (2020) stated that 79% of students from one of the biggest public universities in Malaysia indicate that they do not want to continue online learning if they are given a choice.

Gender Equalities in Learning with Technology

Student engagement will be more challenging for female students, as Yu (2021) indicates that gender inequality is always present in learning technology. Globally, girls and women are underrepresented in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) (Stoet & Geary, 2018). Despite their current strong representation in the social and behavioural sciences (Su & Rounds, 2016), women are still underrepresented in disciplines that study inorganic phenomena, such as technology-related fields. The gender gap in STEM involvement has persisted for decades despite significant efforts to comprehend and alter this pattern (Domecq et al., 2020). A fresh viewpoint on the issue is required due to the persistence of these disparities and the ineffectiveness of the existing strategies to alter them.

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Several socioeconomic, cultural, and structural factors combine to cause gender disparities in learning technology. It is essential to comprehend these fundamental causes to address and correct the discrepancies. Deeply ingrained cultural biases and prejudices about gender roles are among those that have been highlighted by earlier studies as having an impact on the creation and application of learning technologies (Domecq et al., 2020). For instance, presumptions that some technology or academic subjects are better suited for boys or men may result in restricted access and possibilities for women and girls (e.g. Fischer et al., 2018). The chances and options accessible to people might be influenced by cultural norms and expectations surrounding gender roles. There might be more pressure on girls in some societies to choose traditional roles over getting an education in technology (Bai et al., 2020).

From literature reviews on gender equality in student learning with technology, this study identified that theories and practices may neglect or underrepresent the experiences and characteristics of women. Conventional theories of gender and equality frequently concentrate on larger societal processes and structures, which may leave out important details and highlight unique difficulties that women and girls experience. Furthermore, prior studies that primarily examined the use of technology in education focused only on theories and constructs that were based on technology, such as the well-known UTAUT by Venkatesh et al. (2003) and the Technology Acceptance Model by Davis (1989). There are no other noteworthy psychological characteristics in this, despite Allcoat (2021) and Buchener and Hoffman (2022) stressing the significance of studying students' emotions.

Prioritising women's perspectives and agency, critically analysing and challenging presumptions, and using intersectional approaches that acknowledge the diversity of women's experiences are all necessary to improve the relevance and efficacy of theories used to research gender inequality. Studies may progress more inclusively and equitably towards gender equality by putting women's characteristics and experiences at the forefront of research and policy. Most significantly, researchers and designers should consider the intricate interactions between emotions, user experience, and sociocultural contexts when examining women's technology adoption. Incorporating a user-centred methodology that prioritises women's emotional reactions might result in more effective, compassionate, and inclusive technology solutions that better fulfil the requirements and preferences of varied user groups.

Shifting Perspective

This study offers different efforts to comprehensively explore the role of different theory perspectives in studying female students' acceptance of technology in learning. It will not only highlight the potential benefit of integrating technologies to enhance the overall educational experience but also offer valuable insights into the role of technology in shaping female students' acceptance of technology in learning. As technology evolves, this research innovation will provide a better understanding of the potential to create positive emotional experiences for students, a crucial aspect of today's digital education age.

Allcoat (2021) and Buchener and Hoffman (2022) stressed the significance of studying students' emotions in learning with technology. This study provides a fresh perspective on the potential of technologies to transform the emotional landscape of education. It also adds to the growing body of literature that has underscored the significant aspect of emotional engagement in the online learning environment. most of all, this research innovation gives a new perspective from psychological behavioural theory on the advantage of technology in education.

Women are always related to having more emotion than men (Fisher et al., 2018). This study suggested using different theories, like the Cognitive Appraisal Theory by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), to understand better how female students could perceive and evaluate the technology. The stimulus of innovative learning methodology is important to be identified as it will substantially impact their emotional and behavioural responses to those stimuli. So, this new perspective is based on a concept envisioned by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia: integrating technology into higher learning curricula. It is also consistent with Education 4.0, which hopes to inspire and provide a better perspective of studying students' emotions by integrating mobile augmented reality technology into the online learning pedagogy.

Cognitive Appraisal Theory

The Cognitive Appraisal Theory developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explains how individuals perceive and evaluate (appraise) stimuli, such as a new event, scenario, or technology. This evaluation (cognitive process) will then substantially impact their emotional and behavioural responses to those events. Individuals analyse whether the situation or event is significant to their well-being. They evaluate if a given situation represents a threat or a challenge. The assessments define the initial emotional response, which is perceived as a threat and leads to negative emotions

such as fear and anxiety. Individuals are more likely to experience positive emotions and motivation if they perceive the situation as challenging. They will feel energised, determined, and happy, which will improve their behavioural responses.

The subjective aspect of emotions, as well as the important role of individual interpretation in generating emotional experiences, are highlighted by cognitive appraisal theory (Goetz et al., 2020). It also emphasises how different individuals perceive the same circumstance, resulting in varied emotional responses and behaviours. This hypothesis can be used to understand better how individuals react to new situations or events. It is commonly used in fields such as clinical psychology to assist individuals in acquiring more adaptive strategies for dealing with stress by modifying their cognitive appraisals of new events in their lives, and it is highly warranted to analyse educational features and students' appraisals (Thomas & Cassady, 2019). Goetz et al. (2020) stated that the proposed Cognitive Appraisal Theory directions to examine teaching methods and students' appraisals and emotions are necessary to understand how the stimulus should be evaluated.

Goetz et al. (2020) emphasised that cognitive appraisal theory has various practical applications in education. It includes educating students to recognise their emotional reactions to educational and academic contexts. Events or stimuli can influence a person's behaviour, and cognitive-affective is the individual's internal psychological and physiological condition, which includes personal qualities, effective learning experiences, and motives. The behavioural response is the observable behaviour or action resulting from the stimulus's interaction and the student's cognitive and affective part.

The Cognitive Appraisal Theory began with an early study on emotion in 1966, as Lazarus (1991) explained, which provided the groundwork for cognitive evaluation theory with the Cognitive Mediation Model. Lazarus' work acquired prominence and was widely explored in psychology, stress research, and emotion theory in the 1980s. The hypothesis has been extensively investigated to understand better how people react to pressures and emotional circumstances. Several studies discovered empirical evidence that individuals' subjective assessments of events are substantial determinants of their emotional responses (Thomas & Cassady, 2019). According to this research, when individuals perceive a situation as a challenge rather than a threat, they experience more positive emotions and perform better.

Respond to Global Sustainability Goals

This study take up two of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-4: Quality Education and SDG-5: Gender Equality) as it focuses on access to quality education for those who are vulnerable and marginalised. This particularly aims at female students and its impact by associating its target initiatives with national policies that include improving education and raising awareness about the importance of gender equality, particularly in the least developed countries. As the global hospitality and tourism education sector is increasingly introducing modern digital and technology resources to facilitate teaching and learning, support from all important agencies will benefit future studies combating this topic.

Theoretically, the study advances technology in education literature by introducing innovative technology and affective-oriented theory in tourism education. The study is a valuable reference for the education ministry to reform most higher education institutions' current teaching and learning methods to align with the education 4.0 paradigm. Furthermore, its focus is on strengthening education for sustainable technology development to ensure it promotes gender equality and economic growth globally.

Conclusion

As technology and environment-oriented fields are still mostly male-dominated today, researchers must identify women's perspectives, critically analyse and challenge presumptions, and use intersectional approaches that acknowledge the diversity of women to improve the relevance and efficacy of theories used to research gender inequality. This study will undoubtedly bridge the digital gender divide that commonly views women as "less technical."

The effective use of theory allows researchers to identify the barriers and challenges that hinder gender equality in learning technology. This includes understanding factors such as access to technology, stereotypes, biases in educational content, and systemic inequalities that affect different genders differently. All the studies will inform evidence-based policies and interventions to promote gender equality in learning technology. By studying the root

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causes of inequality, policymakers and educators can design targeted strategies to address these issues and create more inclusive learning environments.

Moreover, it also helps advance educational outcomes, as gender equality in learning technology is closely linked to overall educational outcomes and workforce participation. Studies help us understand how closing the gender gap in technology education can lead to better educational attainment, career opportunities, and economic empowerment for individuals and societies. It will not only identify new perspectives but will assist in evaluating the impact of interventions over time. This enables continuous improvement and adaptation of strategies based on emerging trends and challenges. By understanding the underlying factors and implications of gender disparities, future studies can work towards more equitable and empowering educational experiences for everyone.

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INNOVATION IN TOURISM FROM A RESOURCE-BASED APPROACH AT PHUOC TICH HERITAGE VILLAGE IN VIETNAM

Duong Giang, Nguyen[1]

Extended abstract

This paper aims to explore academic research on innovation in tourism using a resource-based approach. In business, innovation means improving existing products or developing new ones to boost performance and profits. These innovations may come in the form of upgrades or entirely new ideas that attract current and potential customers, setting the business apart from competitors, at least for a while.

Vietnam has around 500 heritage villages, however, the authors examine the innovative process through a case study of Phuoc Tich Heritage Village to uncover the secret to achieving sustainable innovation for a destination. A multiple methodology research was used to understand the current circumstances. In-depth interviews with various stakeholders involved in the tourism value chain in the village, including local and provincial government officials, experts from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), traveling companies as travel agents, tour operators, local entrepreneurs, and porters were conducted at their offices. The open-ended questionnaires were sent and collected from the whole community members. This primary data was gathered to determine the level and nature of local participation in the innovative process of developing the tourism destination.

The results show that progress has been made in addressing community-related challenges in connecting tourism and the traditional handicraft industry. The ability to stand out through innovation depends on two factors: creating innovations that are hard for competitors to copy and being able to learn from successful innovations. The case study demonstrates that sustainable innovation is built on strategically relevant, complex, and specific resources and competencies.

Keywords: *Innovation, Tourism, Heritage Village.*

Introduction

Innovation and new service development are crucial for ensuring the sustainable success of destinations in the tourism industry. From a business perspective, innovation involves modifying or creating new offerings to boost performance and profits. Innovations are improvements and novel concepts that are valuable to existing and new customers and facilitate differentiation, at least for a limited period (Brooker & Joppe, 2014; Cobanoglu, et al. 2021). Innovations in the tourism industry are more common in incremental advancements than radical changes (Peters & Pikkemaat, 2005; Souto, 2015). Because new services are developed more easily and quickly than goods and don't require high investments or complex prototypes. As a result, innovation processes are often ongoing and in response to changing customer needs or competitor offerings.

Objectives

The complexity of innovation processes in the service-dominated industry stems from the intangible nature of services, the customer's involvement in production and implementation, and the intricate composition of tourism products. Tourist products are a combination of elements that are often offered in packages, including transportation, accommodation, and leisure facilities. The final tourism product depends on the collaboration and interdependence of various actors involved in development and planning, such as small and medium-sized enterprises, multinationals, hotel chains, and tour operators. Furthermore, tourism services depend on the client's willingness to travel and the location factor, making it crucial for service providers to consider.

Tourism services are experience goods, they are intangible, produced, and consumed simultaneously (Zeithamel et al., 1985). Customer participation as co-producers is a significant characteristic of service provision that makes the process more complex and integrated (Gallouj & Weinstein, 1997). Moreover, tourism services are intangible, not storable or transportable, and often location-based (Maleri, 1973; Corsten, 1985; Engelhardt et al.,

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1994). The intangible nature of services makes it difficult to measure innovations and improvements using methods normally used for tangible products. Furthermore, this also causes customers challenged to compare different service offerings (Gallouj & Weinstein, 1997; Tsai et al., 2008).

However, innovation in tourism is still happening, but some businesses perform better than others. According to a study by Malerba (2002), the tourism industry is a system of innovation and production. It involves various products and agents who communicate, cooperate, or exchange with others. These agents can be individuals or organizations with specific resources, skills, learning processes, and structures. The system, its agents, and products are constantly evolving, leading to improvements in existing products and services and the development of innovations (Cobanoglu, et al. 2021). This definition highlights the importance of external factors and the resources and competencies of agents, as well as their interactions and combination efforts within the internal environment. Strategic management approaches should consider both factors, with a focus on differentiation from competitors and meeting customer needs (Pechlaner & Fischer, 2006). Therefore, innovations must be unique and difficult to imitate to maintain a competitive advantage.

In the body of the literature review, there are no thoughtful answers to the question of how tourism innovations are created, their development process, and whether they lead to competitive advantages depending highly on their owned available potential, resources, and competencies. This research aims to explore academic research on innovation in tourism using a resource-based approach. Then illustrating the innovation process by examining a case study of Phuoc Tich Heritage Village to uncover the secret to achieving sustainable innovation for a destination.

Literature Review

There are two paradigms in strategic management divided into two different perspectives: the market-based and resource-based view. The former focuses on external factors and market conditions, while the latter emphasizes internal resources and competencies. Combining strategically relevant resources, skills and competencies can lead to sustainable competitive advantages. The resource-based view has evolved to include a dynamic component that highlights the importance of adaptability in the resource base for innovation. Resource-based approaches link competitive differences and advantages to a company's strategic assets rather than external factors (Lado, Boyd, and Wright, 1992). It will lead to more economical production and better satisfy customer requirements. The model requires a deep understanding of how resources are applied and combined, what makes competitive advantage sustainable, and where company heterogeneity originates (Peteraf, 1993).
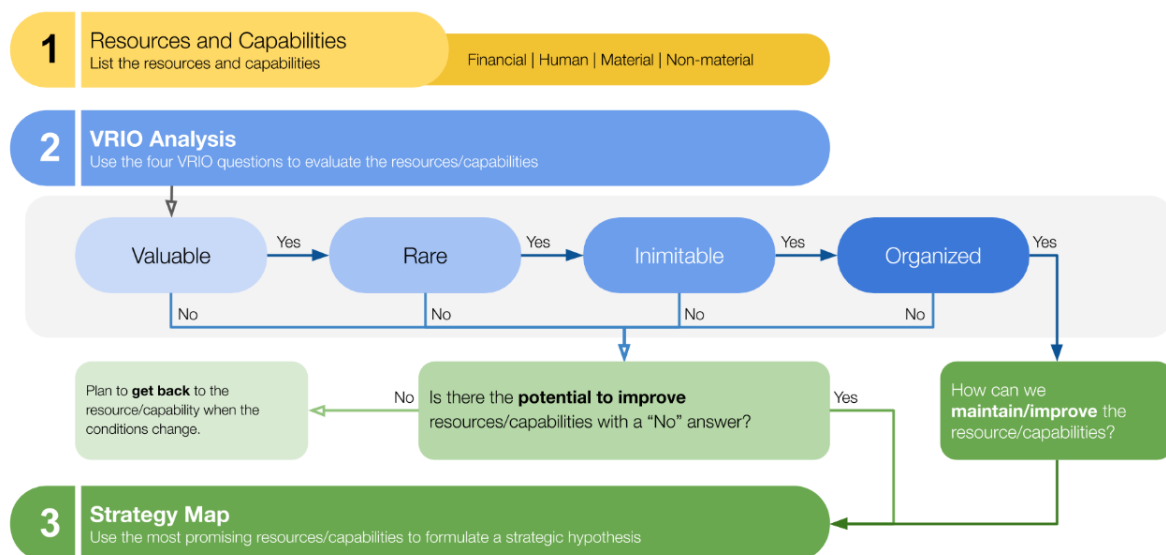
Figure 1: Innovations process from a resource-based approach

(Source: Adaption from Innerhofer, 2012)

Companies possess strategically relevant resources that are superior to those of their competitors. These resources can include skills or competencies, such as manufacturing, distribution, or customer relationship management. By combining these assets, resources, skills, and competencies, companies can create barriers that prevent competitors from gaining ground. However, to maintain sustainable competitive advantages, these superior resources must remain limited or be difficult to imitate. Barney (1991) defines strategically relevant resources and

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competencies as those that are valuable, rare, inimitable, or not substitutable. Tourism innovation integrates strategic resources, competencies, and the competitive market environment to achieve performance and gain a competitive advantage. Innovations result from reconfiguring resources and competencies to meet market needs and requirements (Innerhofer, 2012; Rasoolimanesh, et al, 2019)

The need for dynamic capabilities arises from the pressure to innovate and the turbulent conditions in which organizations must succeed. Those who are rapid and flexible in product innovation and can coordinate and redeploy internal and external competencies are the winners in the global marketplace. Dynamic capabilities emphasize the ability to integrate, adapt, coordinate, develop, renew, and reconfigure internal and external resources, assets, and competencies toward changing environments, enabling continuous improvement and organizational learning. The behaviour and learning patterns are closely tied to the company and its human resources and cannot be replicated or traded in the market. It is the foundation of the creation of isolating mechanisms that prevent imitation. The dynamic capabilities approach emphasizes company- or destination-specific resources and competencies to explain competitive advantage through innovation. Tourism and hospitality organizations need to develop, renew, and reconfigure resources to create new value throughout their value chain.

Research Methodology

This study examines the innovative process of the traditional handicrafts industry in Phuoc Tich heritage village transforming into a tourist destination, using an interpretive paradigm. The research employs a single-case study that uses qualitative methods to gain a deep understanding of multi-stakeholder involvement. An in-depth qualitative study method explores the level and nature of local participation in the innovative process. Qualitative research was used to holistically capture local knowledge, recognize contextual diversities of "truth" and provide thick and rich explanations, understanding participant context and addressing problems. To accurately gather this information, a quantitative method was used, an open-ended questionnaire was sent to their homes giving them the freedom to share their experiences without any preconceived notions. When collecting the questionnaires, if needed for clarity, the author can have direct conversations with the local communities.

Phuoc Tich Heritage Village, one of the only three Heritage Villages in Vietnam situated on the outskirts of Hue, is a well-known spot for its long-standing pottery crafts, historic houses, and unspoiled natural scenery that have been preserved for half a millennium. The community's goal is to enhance its local economy by promoting tourism and utilizing its traditional handicrafts. Phuoc Tich serves as an example of innovative tourism and is a representation of more than 500 heritage villages around Vietnam that are moving towards the tourism industry by integrating traditional values into tourism activities to generate income and employment.

Phuoc Tich Heritage Village, located in Phong Hoa Commune, Phong Dien District, Thua Thien Hue Province, is a National Cultural Heritage Site with 12 clans. The village has a population of 125 families and 117 traditional houses. One of the most notable features of Phuoc Tich is its pottery craft and ancient houses, which have been preserved for centuries in traditional style. The pottery, known for its natural beauty, is not glazed and is made from high-quality clay using traditional firing methods that date back to 1470. In 1975, the Phuoc Tich Pottery Cooperative was established to promote traditional handicrafts, but it was disbanded in 1989, leading to some deterioration of the kilns. During its prime, the pottery of Phuoc Tich was traded extensively across the central provinces. However, the villagers had to switch to other small-scale or day labouring jobs when the pottery industry ceased operating two decades ago.
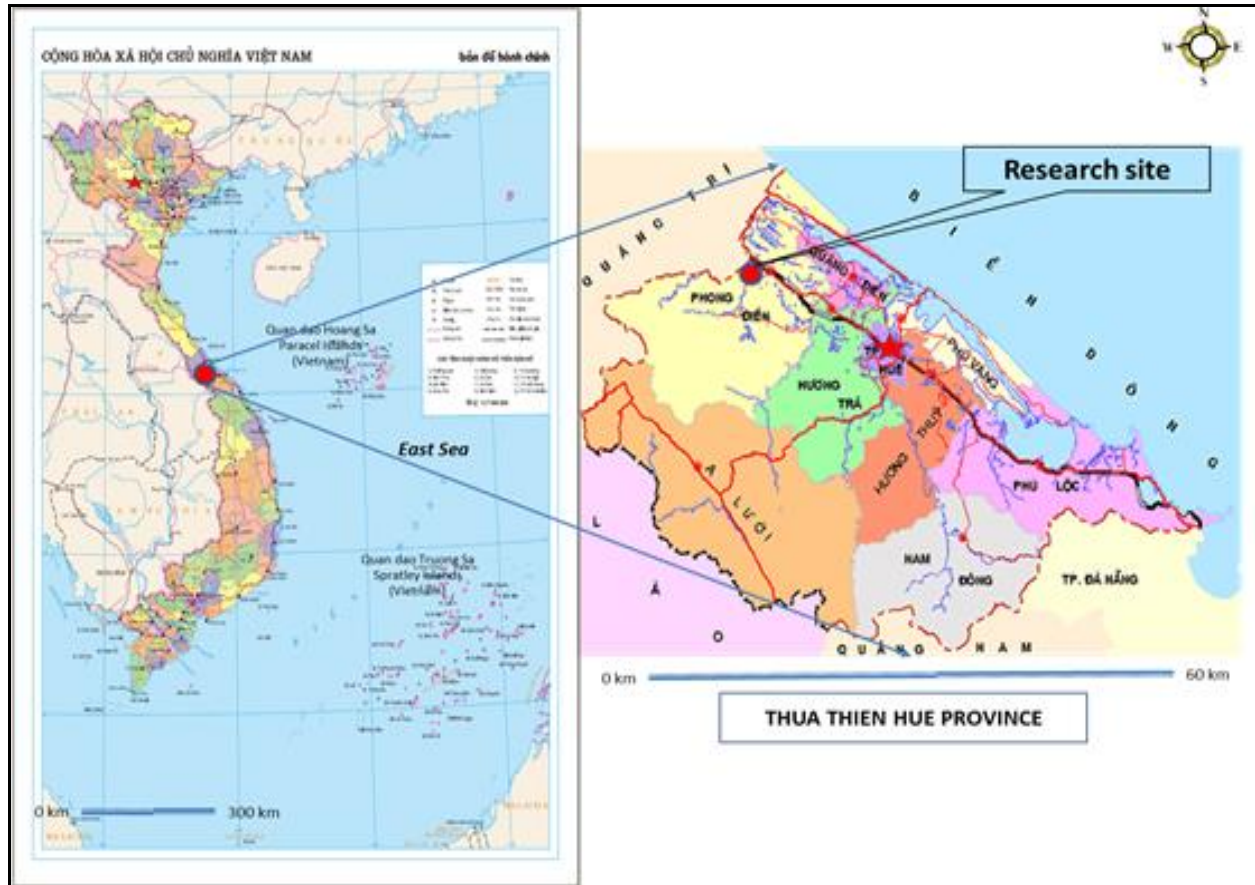
Figure 2: Location of Phuoc Tich Heritage Village, Thua Thien Hue, Vietnam

Two international organizations, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Wallonie-Bruxelles International Belgium (WBI), have initiated technical support projects. One such project involved building a traditional wood-fired kiln that can produce heat up to 1100°C-1200°C. The goal of this project was to preserve and enhance the craft. JICA experts guided local potters on pottery techniques. Additionally, volunteers were trained to teach residents how to decorate local dishes. They also advised on the development of tourism programs to attract visitors to the village. In 2006, the Phuoc Tich Village Management Board (PTMB) was established to accelerate the village's economic development. One of PTMB's primary responsibilities is to support the village in developing tourism activities.

Table 1: List of multi-local stakeholders included in the data collection.

Stakeholder types	Method	Number
Residents (excludes potters)	Observation & Open-ended questionnaires	112
Potters	Observation & Semi-structured interview	7
Pottery retailers	Semi-structured interview	4
Tour operators		3
4-5 five stars hotel managers		7
Key informants		9

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with various individuals involved in the tourism industry, including potters, and those working in the tourism value chain. The selection of interviewees was based on their

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expertise and background in the industry to ensure they represented the targeted groups. Open-ended questionnaires were used to encourage local residents to share their experiences, and their responses determined the order of additional questions. Interviews and questionnaires were conducted in both Vietnamese and English, mainly with hotel managers and NGO consultants serving as key informants.

Conclusion and Discussion

From the local strategically relevant resources

When developing tourism, local cultures, natural resources, and historical artifacts are valuable assets that can benefit the entire community (Hainsworth, 2009). For example, Phuoc Tich Heritage Village provides visitors with a distinct sense of place through its rich cultural heritage, attractions, and facilities. To ensure a memorable experience for tourists and maximize the village's benefits, all of these elements must work together seamlessly. The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism recognized Phuoc Tich Heritage Village as a National Cultural Heritage Site in 2009. The village is situated between two prominent provinces, Quang Binh and Thua Thien Hue, which are both parts of Vietnam's 'Heritage Route'. Quang Binh is known for the world's largest cave - Son Doong in Phong Nha-Kẻ Bàng National Park, while Thua Thien Hue boasts a Complex of Hue Imperial Citadel Monuments. Given its location, Phuoc Tich village is an ideal starting point for inter-linkage tours to other high-value cultural destinations in the province.

Figure 3: A tourist map at Phuoc Tich Village
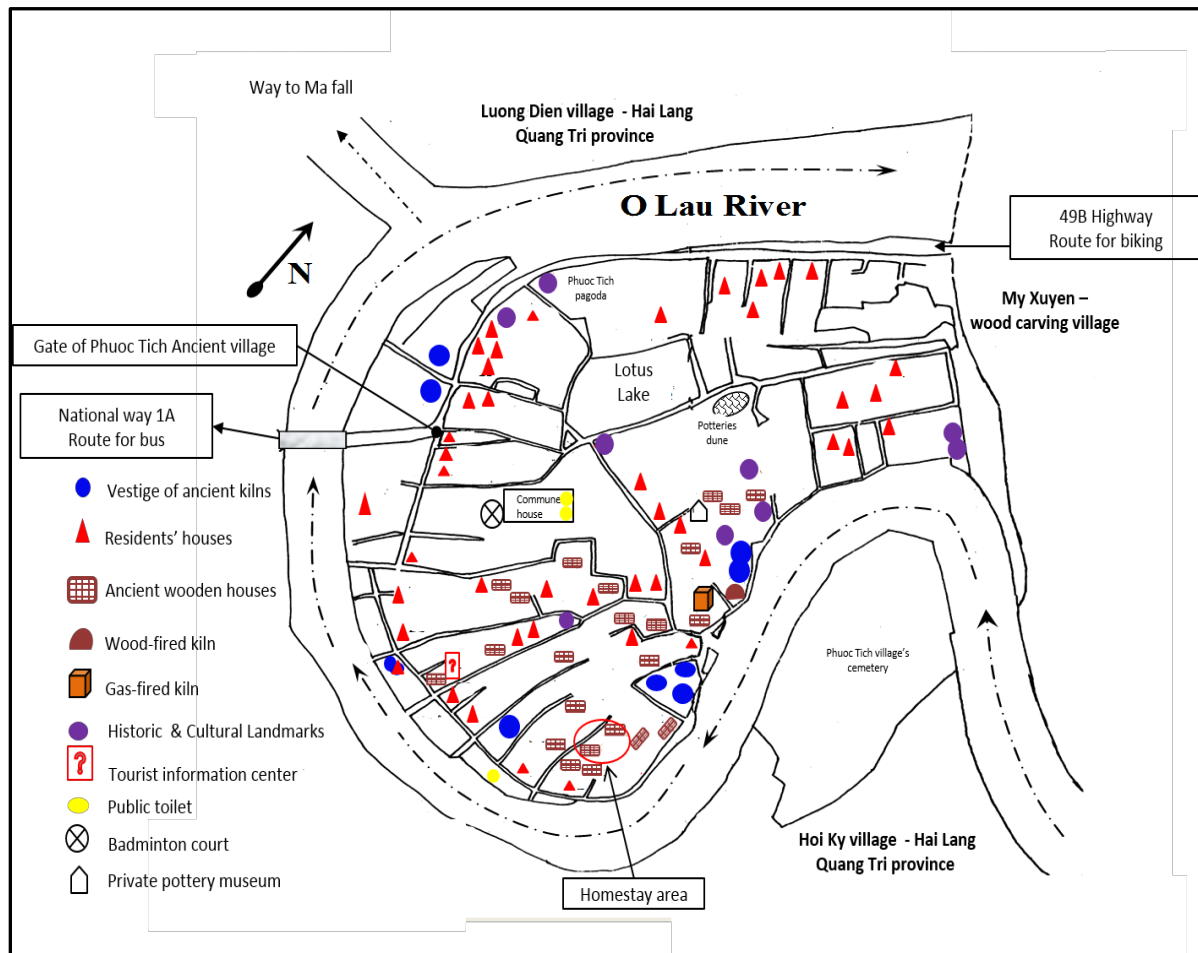
Source: (Nguyen, 2015)

Phuoc Tich is a charming village located in Thua Thien Hue province in Vietnam that has been designated a National Heritage site. Since 2008, it has become a popular tourist attraction due to its unique blend of preserved traditional houses, colorful folk festivals, locally crafted products, and stunning natural environment. Visitors can enjoy an authentic experience of daily life in the village by participating in various activities such as exploring ancient structures, trying their hand at pottery making, cycling, sampling local cuisine, taking a boat ride on the O Lau River, and even staying in one of the historic houses. The residents of Phuoc Tich take great pride in their community and

work diligently to keep their homes and surrounding areas clean and beautiful. They come together to prepare for cultural and tourist events by maintaining the lanes, decorating the main roads, and cleaning the area. The positive impact of tourism on the village's cleanliness has instilled an even greater sense of pride in the community.

Figure 4: Paths to an ancient house at Phuoc Tich Heritage Village

Phuoc Tich was a bustling centre for pottery production 500 years ago, supplying a variety of products to central provinces. Historical records reveal that in the 15th century, immigrants from Nghe An established a pottery village in Thua Thien Hue. Since then, the craft has thrived, and their handcrafted products are highly valued for their durability. The local villagers aspire to revive their ancestors' trade, and an elderly potter has amassed a private collection of antique pottery. These pieces are showcased in an ancient house that has been converted into a private museum with the assistance of JICA. Furthermore, tourists can now have a unique experience of making pottery in Phuoc Tich village with the guidance of local potters. According to Ek et al. (2008), tourists not only consume experiences but also contribute to the co-production, co-design, and co-exhibition of the pottery. The elder potters present pottery demonstrations, while the younger ones are in charge of production. Although the firing stage is not included due to its high cost, visitors can still participate in the initial stages of pottery production.

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Figure 5: Inside the private museum at Phuoc Tich

Figure 6: The traditional pottery-making craft in Phuoc Tich

In Phuoc Tich Heritage Village, residents utilize traditional techniques to create a variety of delectable treats, such as candies, flour cakes, and rice spaghetti. These goods are then sold in Hue city or nearby towns. When encountering tourists, the residents are happy to divulge the secrets behind their delicious creations, including the stories behind each dish and herb. The village's extensive history has passed down tales of local food, herbs, and ancient trees over many generations. These trees and herbs can also be incorporated into tourism products. Authentic cuisine is an exceptional method for experiencing a destination, and the local indigenous foods can significantly benefit the community by providing a valuable source of income.

Figure 7: A candy flower made by a resident

The tourism experiences developed by the Phuoc Tich village community incorporate their rich culture and history. Sharing local tales and traditional folk dances is crucial in enhancing the tourists' understanding of the village's development and conservation efforts. With careful planning and training, they can ensure that tourists seeking a deeper 'sense of place' have an optimal experience. Many tourists showed their appreciation by writing positive comments in the visitors' books and some even sent letters to their host thanking them for the precious experiences they had had during their time at the Heritage Village.
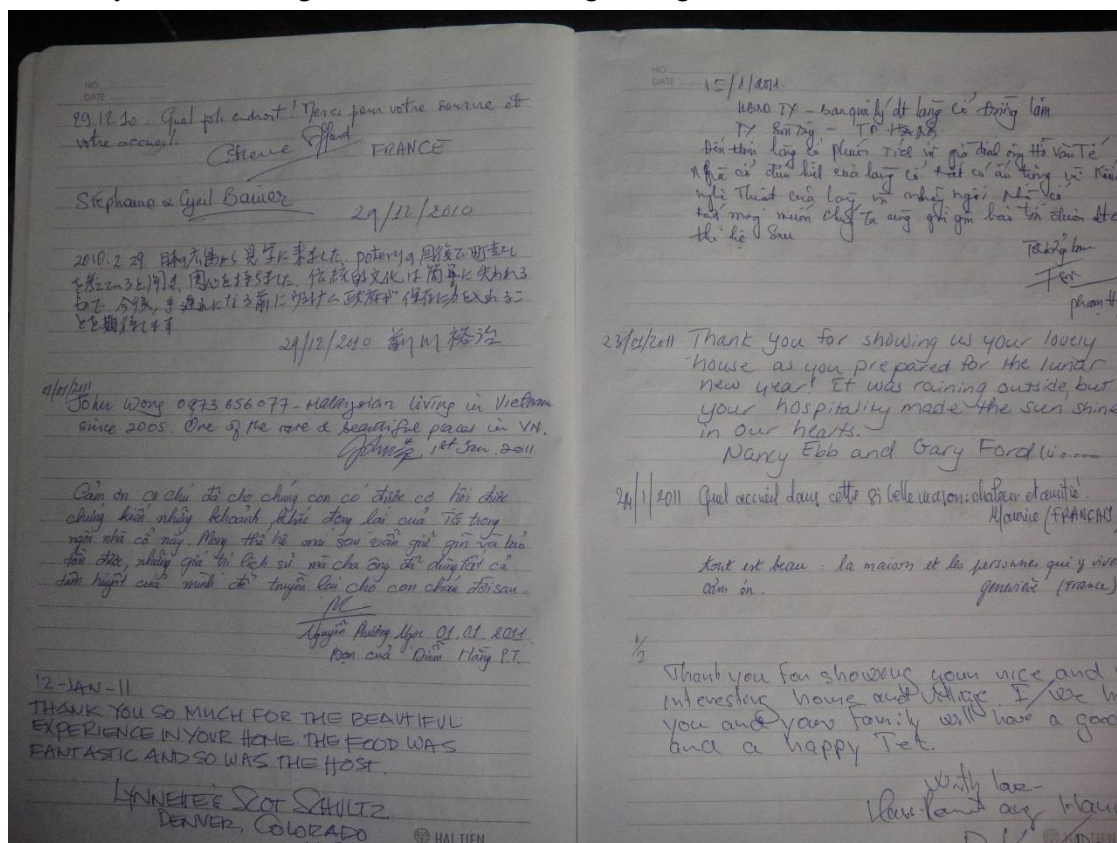
Figure 8: Positive comments on the visitors' books

Learning from successful innovation

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Like other heritage villages, the transition process could be done if they have sufficient capacities and abilities. Phuoc Tich Village in Vietnam is known for its plain brown or 'eel-skin' pottery but heavy craft. The potters traditionally did not use enamel or paint but have recently added simple colours and glazes made of natural ingredients, such as coal ashes and seashells, to their products. Traditional crafts are no longer suitable for the current tourism market. The young potters of Phuoc Tich have also been incorporating designs from Battrang, the most famous pottery centre in Vietnam, where four young potters from the village were sent to study in 2009. They returned with new techniques and built a gas-fired kiln. This allowed them to produce smaller, lighter, and more transportable pottery that is appealing to tourists. However, for sustainable innovation, the potters must also create unique models to meet the tourists' changing tastes and preferences while maintaining the traditional styles.

To ensure that the community is equipped with adequate tourism knowledge, Hue's Tourism College has arranged on-site basic tour-guiding classes in the Phuoc Tich Heritage Village. This is because most residents cannot afford to study outside the village due to time and financial constraints. Despite their enthusiasm, most locals have only completed lower levels of formal education and have busy daily lives, making it difficult for them to participate in formal tourism training programs outside the village. Therefore, specialized training programs need to be developed and tailored to meet the needs and capacities of the locals. However, some participants in the course were either day laborers or retired individuals, and they could not speak foreign languages to cater to international tourists.

Figure 9: A class about hygiene, food and bed preparation

To develop the tourism value chain

When visiting Phuoc Tich Heritage village, tourists have two options. They can either book a tour program with a travel agent or explore the village independently as a free and independent traveller (FIT). FITs can visit the pottery kiln and ancient houses, while booking through a travel agent/tour operator that offers additional services from local households, such as homestay accommodation, local meals, and the opportunity to watch pottery being made. In the past, travel agents/tour operators directly contacted households for services and paid them directly. However, with the establishment of PTMB in 2006, travel agents/tour operators now book local services through PTMB, which acts as a coordinator between them and local suppliers. For FITs, the roles of travel agents/tour operators and PTMB are absent. The innovative process can be illustrated by a process of tourism value chain development in the destination.

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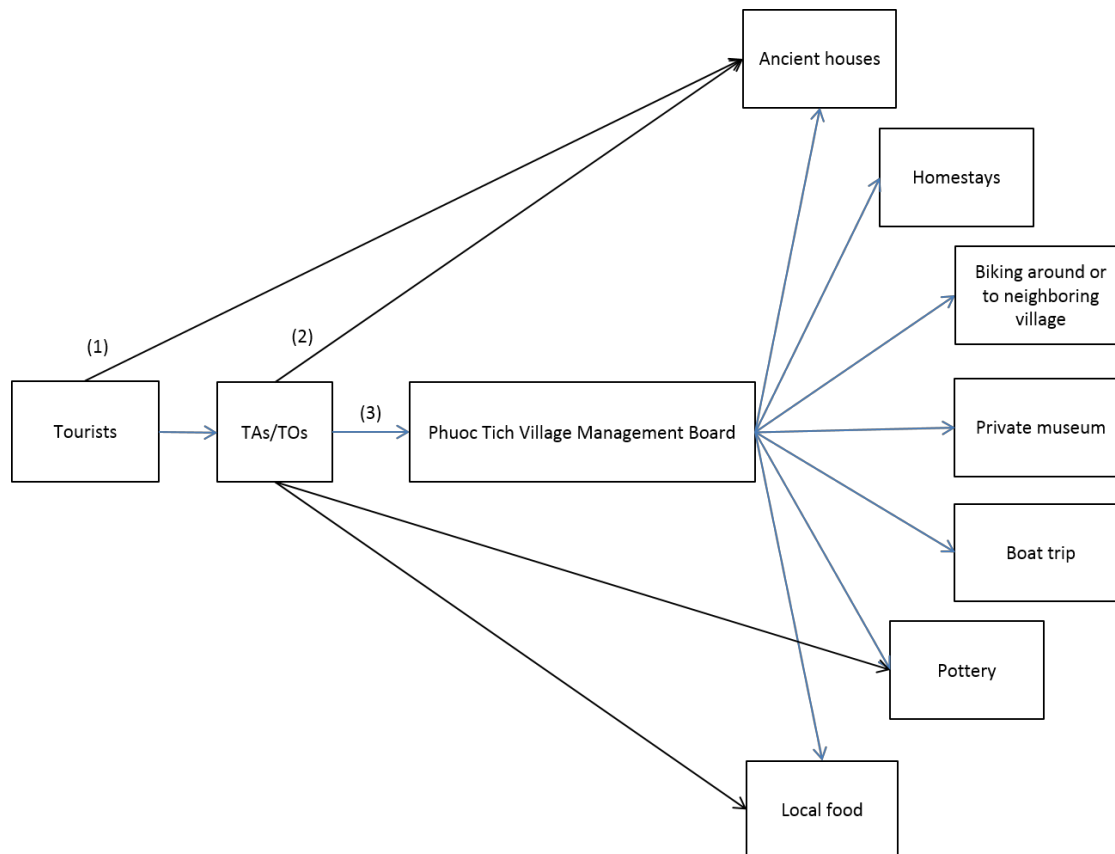
Figure 10: The current tourism value chain at Phuoc Tich Heritage village

Creating strong connections between tourism and local economic activities through the supply chain can ensure fair and sustainable socio-economic development (Tapper, 2001). Both the tourists and the local community are essential components of the tourism-pottery value chain. Phuoc Tich Heritage village offers a chance for tourists to experience a rural way of life that differs from city living. Many tourists want to participate directly in the daily activities of the residents, including handicraft (pottery) production. By taking part in the pottery chain and other local activities, tourists can have a more authentic experience of the village. Tourism isn't only about travelling, trying local foods, and wandering around. It's also a memorable experience in a tourist's life. With the rapid growth of the tourism industry, tourists' expectations are changing, along with their specific needs for their trips. As creative and expressive individuals, tourists plan their journeys, "do" things and share their experiences, making them active producers and consumers of experiences (Ek et al., 2008). As tourists explore the Phuoc Tich Heritage village, they often become emotionally invested and fully embrace the simple and slow lifestyle. They engage with the local food and cultural customs of the rural population in an environment that has existed for hundreds of years. By interacting with residents, tourists can also contribute to enhancing tourism products. This means that tourists not only participate passively in tours but also actively create their tourist activities. Therefore, a comprehensive study of the Phuoc Tich tourism value chain has been conducted to integrate traditional handicrafts into the tourism industry.
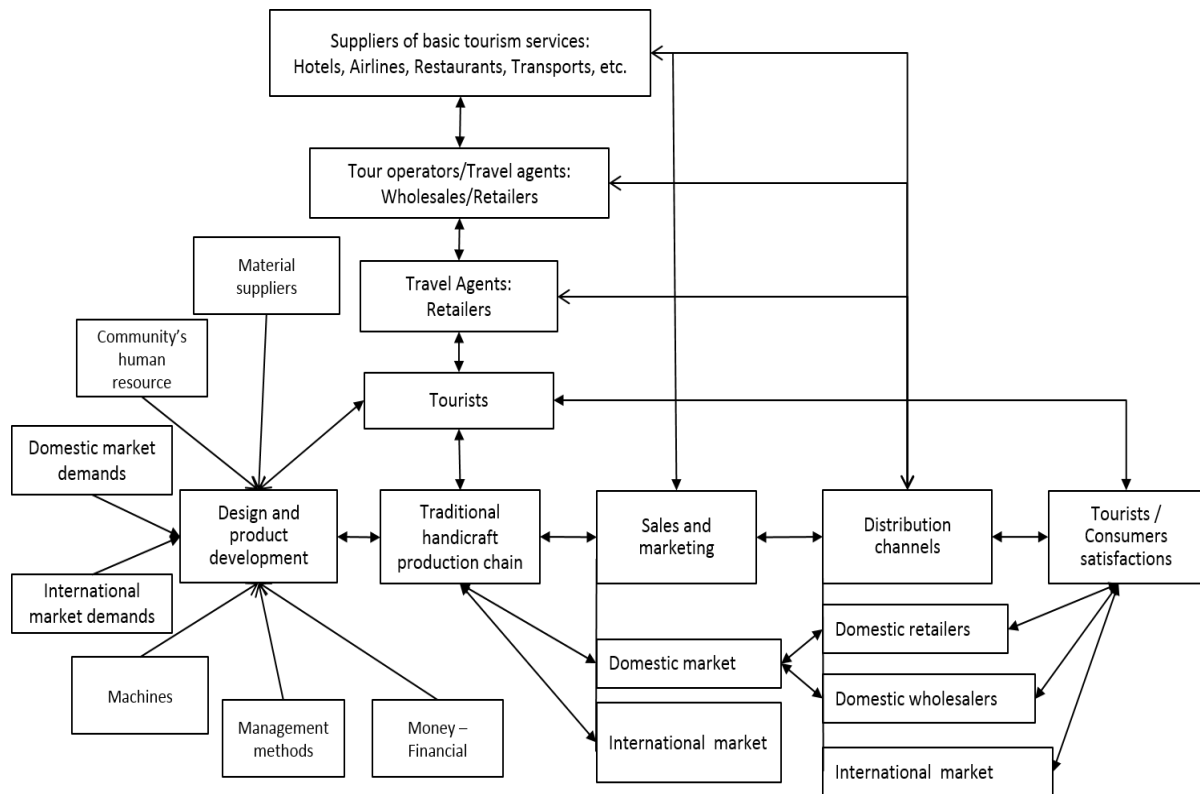
Figure 11: The integration of a traditional handicraft chain into a tourism value chain

This framework highlights the integration of traditional handicrafts, specifically pottery, into the tourism value chain. The tourist is at the centre of the framework, emphasizing their important role in this value chain. To ensure satisfaction, it is crucial to understand the demands and behaviours of tourists. They are the only output of the value chain, and without them, tourism activities cannot exist. The market is a fundamental element at the start of any tourism development process, and the local community is a key component from the supply side for ongoing development.

Solving multi-stakeholder conflict

In community economic development which aims to develop both traditional products and attractive tourism, such as in Phuoc Tich Heritage Village, there are often conflicts between conservationists who believe that heritage tourism compromises conservation goals for profit (Aas et al., 2005). However, conservation and development have reciprocal effects - by promoting tourism, local potters and residents can earn an income that allows them to pursue their conservation goals.

The stakeholders in the tourism development of Phuoc Tich Heritage Village had varying perspectives but shared a similar vision for its future. It is essential to prioritize sustainable tourism development in a way that increases monetary yield from tourists while preserving the authenticity of the heritage village and traditional handicrafts. While the local community needs a sufficient income, it should not come at the expense of the village's cultural integrity. A yield-driven approach that meets the needs of all stakeholders is crucial for sustainable outcomes, focusing on increasing economic impacts instead of merely increasing tourist numbers.

Despite the common vision among stakeholders, there is still a need to improve understanding and connections between Phuoc Tich Heritage Village residents, local government officials, and NGO experts. The residents are keen on hosting more tourists but lack the local knowledge to achieve this. JICA, an NGO expert in sustainable development, suggests that the village should target the niche market of tourists who appreciate cultural values and are willing to pay a higher premium for the experience.

Research findings indicate that all stakeholders want to strengthen the linkages between pottery production and tourism in Phuoc Tich Heritage Village. There is a shared understanding of the potential economic benefits of pottery and tourism, but the current linkages are inadequate and require improvement. The weak linkages reflect the limited involvement of traditional handicraft communities in tourism planning and management.

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Discussion

In this paper, we discuss the topic of innovation in tourism by utilizing the resource-based approach. Business innovation is a powerful tool that can enhance the performance and profits of an organization by either improving existing products or developing new ideas. The resource-based view emphasizes the importance of adaptability in a destination's resource base for innovation. It connects competitive advantages to strategic assets rather than external factors, which may help to produce more economic outcomes or better meet customer requirements. Additionally, this approach deepens our understanding of how resources are applied and combined, what makes competitive advantage sustainable, and where destination heterogeneity originates.

To examine the sustainable innovation of tourism, this research focuses on Phuoc Tich Heritage Village as a case study. We scrutinize the innovative process of achieving sustainable tourism by exploring the transition from traditional pottery to attractive tourism. The cultural resources and competencies of the village have a significant impact on its success. The study results indicate that sustainable innovation requires strategically relevant resources and competencies, and innovation success depends on unique creations and learning from successful models.

Research recommendations

From the local strategically relevant resources: In developing tourism, local cultures, natural resources, and historical artifacts are valuable assets that can benefit the entire community. Heritage villages serve as excellent starting points for tours to other significant cultural destinations in Asia. The heritage villages in Asia have a unique sense of place through their rich cultural heritage, attractions, and facilities. To ensure a memorable experience for tourists and maximize the village's benefits, all of these elements must work together seamlessly.

To learn from successful innovation: The transition process for heritage villages can be successful if they have sufficient capacities and abilities. Traditional and heritage crafts may no longer be suitable for the current tourism market. Despite their enthusiasm, most locals have only completed lower levels of formal education and have busy daily lives, making it difficult for them to participate in formal tourism training programs outside the village. Therefore, specialized training programs need to be developed and tailored to meet the needs and capacities of the locals. However, some participants in the course cannot speak foreign languages to cater to international tourists. To ensure that the community is equipped with adequate tourism knowledge, specialized training programs need to be developed and tailored to meet the needs and capacities of the locals.

To develop the tourism value chain: Many tourists want to participate directly in the daily activities of the residents, including the local handicraft production chain. By taking part in the chain and other local activities, tourists can have a more authentic experience of the heritage village. As tourists explore the Heritage Village, they often become emotionally invested and fully embrace the simple and slow lifestyle. They engage with the local food and cultural customs of the rural population in an environment that has existed for hundreds of years.

Solving multi-stakeholder conflicts in Heritage villages: Despite the common vision among stakeholders, there is still a need to improve understanding and connections between Heritage Village residents, local government officials, and NGO experts. The residents are keen on hosting more tourists but lack the local knowledge to achieve this. NGO experts in sustainable development suggest that the village should target the niche market of tourists who appreciate cultural values and are willing to pay a higher premium for the experience. Research findings indicate that all stakeholders want to strengthen the linkages between handcraft production and tourism in Heritage Village. There is a shared understanding of the potential economic benefits of pottery and tourism, but the current linkages are inadequate and require improvement.

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PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT OF ECO-CULTURAL TRAILS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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Goda Lukoseviciute[2]

Extended abstract

Trail development might cause negative environmental impacts on landscapes, which have a negative effect on trail visitors' experience. Moreover, eco-cultural trail destination governance necessitates coordinated development and management of all landscape elements, emphasizing and protecting cultural and natural assets. Participatory trail development and management facilitates policy integration, enables consensus-building and assists in resolving frequently occurring stakeholder conflicts. This research aims to provide a sustainable strategy for developing and managing eco-cultural trails, applying a qualitative approach and stakeholder participation. The "Seven Hanging Valleys" trail located in the Algarve region of Portugal was used as a case study to develop an eco-cultural trail development strategy. A multi-stage qualitative approach and a stakeholder analysis were used to define the strategic dimensions of the eco-cultural trail development and management. Focus groups were conducted involving stakeholders representing governmental agencies, private enterprises, academic experts, interested citizens, and environmental organizations. Quantitative survey data obtained from trail attribute performance measurement was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data from open-ended questioning of stakeholder's perception of trail development and management identified differentiated themes. This study proposes a new holistic four-dimensional strategy: natural and cultural landscapes, trail infrastructure, trail visitor experience, marketing and community collaboration. Based on stakeholders' visions, a destination development and management plan was established, aligning the environmental objectives to preserve natural and cultural assets, with improved overall experience for tourists and the local community.

Keywords: Recreational Trail; Stakeholder Approach; Tourism Destination; Trail Management

Introduction

Recreational trails are categorized based on the type of activity performed on a trail, landscape settings, and trail development stage (Oishi, 2013). Recently, trails have been implemented as an alternative visitor attraction with a growing recognition of the importance of preserving nature, cultural heritage, and promoting sustainable tourism practices (Lukoseviciute et al., 2023). Eco-cultural trails, which represent a specific type of trail that incorporates both ecological and cultural elements into the visitor experience (Tiberghien, 2019), can be described as a form of manifestation of trail related tourism to offer visitors engaging experiences and support destination sustainability, community development, and nature conservation (Wallace & Russell, 2004).

Trail development causes negative environmental impacts on landscapes, which have a negative effect on trail visitors' experiences (Lynn & Brown, 2003). The approach of participatory trail development is the most appropriate for sustainable trail destinations because enables consensus-building and assists in resolving frequently occurring stakeholder conflicts. The benefits of participatory development and management are sharing responsibility, negotiating benefits, incorporating professional knowledge, enhancing capacity for implementation, increasing trust between stakeholders, improving understanding and awareness, facilitating policy integration and increasing public commitment (Selman, 2007).

Objectives

The aim of this research is to form an eco-cultural trail development and management strategy that assists in providing high-quality visitor experiences, supports local communities, and provides sustainable destination trail development and management plans that protect the area's natural and cultural assets.

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Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

This study was performed in the Algarve, the southernmost region of continental Portugal. The trail "Seven Hanging Valleys", located in the municipality of Lagoa is one of the most popular hiking destinations in Portugal. It is a linear hiking path with a total length of 7 km, connecting two popular recreational beaches and eco-cultural attractions, namely Marinha beach, Benagil cave, spectacular cliffs "Heart" and "Leixão do Ladrão" and the chapel "Nossa Senhora da Rocha". Therefore, the cultural landscape of the trail is related to recreation activities. The trail is the most popular in the region, receiving more than 260 visitors a day during the high season and around 150 visitors a day during the low season.

2. Research Tools

Data were derived from two focus groups and a workshop involving four main stakeholder representative groups to develop a strategic eco-cultural trail development and management plan.

3. Data Collection

The first focus group was held on 27th of October 2021 with 15 stakeholders from governmental organizations (5 representatives from the regional development department, and the local municipality's environmental division), 3 representatives from travel agencies, 3 representatives from local guided tours and 4 representatives from local hotels. A second focus group was held on 4th of November 2021 with 28 stakeholders from academia and business consultation (7 professors and business consultants in tourism, environmental science, and economics, and 21 master's students in tourism). Both focus groups followed a three-stage nested focus group approach. On 9th of December 2021, an online interactive workshop was held with stakeholders from 3 governmental institutions, 5 representatives of nature-based tourism businesses, 4 representatives of environmental associations, and 4 local development NGOs, which lasted around 60 minutes. The workshop aimed to finalize the dimensions of the eco-cultural trail development and management strategy, which originated from the focus groups' content analyses.

4. Data Analysis

Quantitative survey data obtained from trail attribute performance measurement was analyzed using descriptive statistics applying SPSS. Qualitative data from open-ended questioning of each stakeholder perception of trail development and management was analyzed using software NVivo 12 (QSR International). A word frequency query was employed, choosing 100 words in varying font size. The final result of such a query is a table, indicating the highest frequency of a few selected words. The SWOT analysis was performed by stakeholders enabling the identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The data analysis was performed listing each aspect per the appropriate factor and prioritizing it based on the number of references given by each stakeholder as well as the significance for eco-cultural trail development and management. Audio files of focus groups were analyzed employing inductive content analysis to thoroughly examine gathered data. For this purpose, a qualitative data analysis approach and the software "NVivo 12" were used for iterative data organization, filtering, categorization and eventually coding in key sub-dimensions and dimensions (Sotiriadou et al., 2014).

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

This study is the first to introduce the concept of eco-cultural trails. This newly suggested definition reflects an interdisciplinary perspective of developing and managing eco-cultural trails and bridges the gap between environmental and cultural disciplines from a tourism perspective. This study suggests that adopting natural and cultural landscapes, trail infrastructure, trail visitor experience, and marketing and community collaboration dimensions into regional development helps to introduce a new niche of eco-cultural trail tourism and increase destination competitiveness thereby boost destination benefits.

This study proposes a new holistic four-dimensional strategy for eco-cultural trails that integrates stakeholder theories with eco-cultural tourism principles to develop sustainable eco-cultural trails. The strategy comprises of the following dimensions: natural and cultural landscapes, trail infrastructure, trail visitor experience, marketing and community collaboration. Based on stakeholders' visions, a destination development and management plan was established, aligning the environmental objectives to preserve natural and cultural assets, with improved overall experience for tourists and the local community.

2. Discussion

Understanding the importance of trail infrastructure and design with its specific sub-dimensions is crucial for eco-cultural trail managers to implement strategies that protect natural and cultural heritages and create a linkage for human-nature interactions via recreational trails, especially in places where sustainable tourism practices are neglected. Scholars who focus on nature-based recreation emphasize in the capacity of the infrastructure to support natural ecosystems and the quality of recreational experiences (Ferguson et al., 2023). Examples of this management include appropriate routing and threading, adequate maintenance, and visitor monitoring (Andersen et al., 2014). Marketing and community collaboration dimension is crucial for the eco cultural trail development strategy. The trail visitor experience dimension is closely related to the natural and cultural landscape, which creates a need for a variety of service and facility provisions. The study findings suggest that both the preservation of natural and cultural landscapes, shape the identify and sense of place for visitors and thus enhance visitor experiences. This implies that natural and cultural landscapes, which trail visitors explore, are places requiring informative signage, guided tours, exhibitions or events organized to enhance visitor experiences and awareness of eco-cultural trail value.

The present study has expanded the theoretical framework of trail development and management by presenting a novel eco-cultural trail concept, and suggesting a strategic management plan that improves the overall experience for visitors, upholds the interests of nearby communities, and safeguards the region's natural and cultural assets. The proposed strategy can serve as a blueprint for trail development and management. Trail managers can use the strategy as an indicating tool to better understand eco-cultural trail features and shift their development and management from general trails to eco-cultural trails (Lukoseviciute et al. 2024).

Research recommendations

1. It can be concluded that perceiving eco-cultural trails as a shared endeavor towards sustainable use for present and future generations is crucial.

2. Further research is needed to apply the methodological approach of eco-cultural trail development and management in different geographic, climatic, and political contexts, adding new dimension/sub-dimensions.

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EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY OF A CULTURAL HERITAGE SITE ON TOURISTS' MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE, EMOTIONAL SOLIDARITY AND DESTINATION LOYALTY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS APPROACH

Huynh Van Da[1]
Duong Hai Long[2*]

Abstract

This study aims to explore perceived authenticity and its impact on emotional solidarity, memorable experiences, and destination loyalty among tourists visiting a cultural heritage site. This research employed a quantitative method to examine the research phenomenon. Cai Rang floating market was selected as a research site for data collection which took place from May to December 2023. Using a convenient sampling method, both domestic and international tourists were recruited for the study. A structured questionnaire yielded 447 valid responses, comprising 222 from international tourists and 225 from domestic tourists. Smart PLS-SEM and multi-group analysis were employed to test hypotheses and compare models based on both data samples (i.e., international and domestic tourists). The findings indicate that perceived authenticity significantly influences emotional solidarity, memorable tourism experiences, and destination loyalty. Moreover, emotional solidarity notably enhances memorable heritage experiences and fosters tourists' loyalty to the cultural heritage site. Importantly, positive memorable tourism experiences directly contribute to tourists' destination loyalty. The comparative analysis highlights varying effects of perceived authenticity on emotional solidarity between the two markets. These findings provide significant theoretical and practical implications for heritage destination managers and tour operators aiming to enhance tourists' authentic experiences and promote destination loyalty.

Keywords: *Perceived authenticity, Emotional solidarity, Memorable experience, Destination loyalty, Intangible cultural heritage site*

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Authenticity, within the realm of tourism, encompasses a multifaceted concept that is subject to diverse interpretations. It reflects the essence of traditional culture and origins, imbued with qualities of realness, genuineness, and uniqueness, as per Sharpley (1994). Timothy and Boyd (2003) elaborate authenticity as the faithful presentation of the past, emphasizing accuracy. Wang (2003) identifies various approaches to understanding authenticity, including cognitive objectivism, constructivism, semiotics, criticism, and postmodernism, each contributing to a nuanced comprehension of the concept. The discourse surrounding authenticity in tourism is characterized by a lack of consensus due to the diverse philosophical backgrounds shaping its interpretation. Nguyen and Cheung (2014) highlight over a dozen types of authenticity cited in tourism studies, with objective authenticity and constructive authenticity being among the most prevalent. According to Wu et al. (2019), objective authenticity pertains to a cultural heritage-linked perspective, focusing on the purity, originality, and genuineness of objects and cultural values while constructive authenticity emerges from tourists' interpretations and social constructions. The perception of authenticity by tourists holds significant relevance in tourism planning and marketing efforts, as it influences preferences and experiences. Studies indicate that tourists exhibit varied preferences for authenticity and seek diverse authentic encounters (Taheri et al., 2020). However, disparities in authenticity perception between different genres of tourists (e.g., domestic and international tourists) highlight the subjective nature of authenticity, necessitating further research to deepen understanding in this domain.

Emotional solidarity, the sense of connection and shared identity between tourists and residents, is crucial for creating authentic and enriching experiences (Lan et al., 2021). Despite several studies defining the relationship between residents and tourists and predicting residents' attitudes toward tourism development, little research has addressed the closeness and intimacy of this relationship (Hasani et al., 2016; Woosnam, 2011). Chen et al. (2022) argue that perceived authenticity at a destination might have a significant impact on their emotional bond to a local

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destination and behavioral intentions. However, there remains limited research investigating the critical relationship between the perceived authenticity and emotional solidarity in the cultural heritage context. As such, further research is necessary to explore how heritage tourism, with its rich cultural and historical contexts, can facilitate these emotional connections and memorable tourism experience for tourists.

The global economy is shifting towards an experience-based model, with tourism being recognized as a key sector for memorable experiences (Pine et al., 1999). This shift has sparked extensive research into tourist experiences across sociology, phenomenology, anthropology, psychology, and consumer behavior (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016). In tourism field, the focus has evolved from quality and satisfaction to memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) and extraordinary experiences (Zhang et al., 2018). In this regard, MTEs play a pivotal role as they influence tourists' future decisions based on their previous memories of a tourism destination (Kim et al., 2010). Kim and Ritchie (2014) stress the importance of memorable tourism experience and its key components including hedonism, involvement, meaningfulness, refreshment, knowledge, novelty, and social interaction that significantly influence tourists' behavioral intentions. Despite growing scholarly interest in MTEs within cultural heritage research, further research is necessary to fully understand the complex nature of MTEs from different perspectives of tourist markets (e.g., domestic and international tourists). This helps to better enhance tourists' cultural heritage destination experiences.

Previous research suggests that tourists' experiences in a tourism destination might diverge due to variations in cultural background, familiarity, and personal relevance (Huang & Crotts, 2019). In this regard, both domestic and international tourists may perceive authenticity, emotional connection, memorable tourism experiences, and destination loyalty in varying ways. Domestic tourists, having a closer cultural and historical connection to the heritage site, might perceive authenticity through a lens of personal heritage and national pride. In contrast, international tourists may seek novelty and exoticism, interpreting authenticity through their encounters with different cultures, which may lead to different forms of memorable experiences and a varied sense of destination loyalty. These research gaps highlight the necessity of examining how perceived authenticity affects emotional solidarity, memorable tourism experiences, and tourists' loyalty to heritage sites across various tourist markets.

Objectives

Despite the increasing importance attributed to perceived authenticity within cultural heritage research, there exists a dearth of studies examining its influence on tourists' memorable tourism experiences, emotional solidarity, and destination loyalty, notably from the viewpoints of both domestic and international visitors. This study, therefore, endeavors to explore diverse dimensions of authenticity in cultural heritage while assessing its impact on tourists' memorable encounters, emotional connections, and allegiance to the heritage site. Furthermore, it aims to investigate potential disparities in cultural heritage experiences between domestic and international tourists.

Hypothesis

Relationship between perceived authenticity and emotional solidarity. Durkheim (1995) introduced the concept of emotional solidarity in "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life", proposing that emotional bonds form through shared beliefs and collective activities. Collins and Annett, (1975) later expanded on this idea, emphasizing that social interaction is also crucial for developing solidarity. Building on these foundations, (Woosnam et al., 2009) brought the concept of emotional solidarity into the travel and tourism literature, specifically between tourists and residents. Emotional solidarity in this context is measured across three dimensions: feeling welcomed, emotional closeness, and sympathetic understanding. Studies have shown that tourists who feel welcomed by residents and develop emotional closeness over time can form strong cross-cultural bonds and solidarity.

Given the nature of cultural heritage tourism, tourists are often more engaged in cultural activities and interactions with residents. This cultural immersion allows them to establish meaningful connections with local people. Thus, the emotional solidarity between residents and tourists may develop through emotional connections marked by a sense of emotional intimacy and frequent interaction (Hammarström, 2005). Some studies have found that the perceived authenticity of a tourist's experience significantly contributes to the emotional connections formed during interactions with residents (Chen et al., 2022; Woosnam et al., 2018). In this regard, unique activities fostering tourist-resident interaction enrich tourists' experiences of genuine cultural values and emotional connections to both the place and its people. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis (H1): Perceived authenticity may have a positive effect on the emotional solidarity (i.e., tourist-resident interaction) at a cultural heritage site (i.e., Can Tho floating market).

Relationship between perceived authenticity and memorable tourism experience. Previous studies indicate that when tourists perceive a site as authentic, they are more likely to feel a deep connection with the place, its history, and its culture (Chen & Lee, 2021; Yi et al., 2017). In other words, the more genuine the experiences tourists encounter at cultural tourism sites, the more emotionally connected they may feel (Zhao & Li, 2023). For example, tourists participating in local cultural performances during their visits are more likely to develop a strong connection to the places and remember their unique experiences over time. Prior literature highlights that authentic experiences with destinations promote tourists' emotional connection with tourism sites and sustains long-lasting memories (Ribeiro et al., 2022; Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2022). Additionally, several studies suggest that the perceived authenticity of a cultural heritage site allows for deeper cultural immersion for tourists (Nguyen & Cheung, 2016). In a similar vein, tourists who have positive memories of their authentic experiences are more likely to recall these experiences and share them with others (Wu et al., 2019). Therefore, perceived authenticity plays a pivotal role in creating unique impressions and memorable tourism experiences by fostering a genuine connection with the cultural heritage site. Therefore, the following hypothesis is suggested as follows:

Hypothesis (H2): Perceived authenticity of a cultural heritage site (i.e., Cai Rang floating market) has a significant effect on tourists' memorable experience.

Relationship between perceived authenticity and destination loyalty. Prior research emphasizes that perceived authenticity plays a significant role in influencing tourists' destination loyalty through various mechanisms (Yi et al., 2017; Zhao & Li, 2023). Authentic experiences instill a sense of trust and credibility, allowing tourists to feel they have genuinely immersed themselves in a destination's essence (Chen & Lee, 2021; Taheri et al., 2020). This emotional connection cultivates positive memories and a willingness to return or recommend the destination (Chen et al., 2020). Scholars suggest that authenticity also sets tourism destinations apart, particularly appealing to tourists in search of genuine cultural encounters (Nguyen & Cheung, 2016; Wu et al., 2019). Therefore, perceived authenticity establishes a solid basis of tourists' overall satisfaction, which is pivotal for cultivating enduring loyalty among tourists. The following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis (H3): The perceived authenticity has a significant direct impact on tourists' destination loyalty to a cultural heritage site (i.e., Can Tho floating market).

Relationship between emotional solidarity and memorable tourism experience. Recent studies in tourism underscore the importance of Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs) in guiding decisions for both prospective and returning tourists (Chen et al., 2020a, 2020b; Zhang et al., 2018). MTEs are pivotal because only recollected experiences can shape future tourist choices (Kim et al., 2010b). Tourists often draw on past experiences and memories when planning future trips (Lehto et al., 2004; Tiwari et al., 2022, 2023), contributing significantly to destination competitiveness (Akkuş & Güllüce, 2016; Suryaningsih et al., 2023). Jiang et al. (2022) highlighted a crucial link between tourists' emotional solidarity with destination residents and their memorable tourism experiences, suggesting that closer relationships foster more memorable shared experiences. Therefore, the following hypothesis is suggested:

Hypothesis (H4): Emotional solidarity has significant positive impact on tourists' memorable tourism experience with the cultural heritage site (i.e., Cai Rang floating market).

Relationship between perceived emotional solidarity and destination loyalty. Destination loyalty, extensively explored in marketing literature, has garnered increased attention in recent years within the travel and tourism realm (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Operationally, it refers to tourists' perceptions of a destination's recommendability or their likelihood to revisit it (Oppermann, 2000). This measure is crucial as it reflects the satisfaction and attachment tourists feel towards a destination, making it a key indicator of tourism success. To ensure a comprehensive understanding, scholars suggest assessing destination loyalty from both behavioral and attitudinal perspectives (Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

From the tourism industry's standpoint, considering both economic and non-economic factors enriches the understanding of how tourist behavior relates to their allegiance to a destination (Deng & Pierskalla, 2011). Recently, Woosnam and Aleshinloye (2013) highlighted the significance of exploring the connection between tourists' emotional solidarity and destination loyalty to illuminate their intentions to revisit. Ribeiro et al. (2022) demonstrated in their study that components like "feeling welcomed" and "sympathetic understanding," which constitute emotional solidarity, exhibit considerable variability in destination loyalty, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of this relationship. Therefore, the following hypothesis posits that the emotional solidarity of residents at a cultural heritage

site is intricately linked to tourists' destination loyalty as follows:

Hypothesis (H5): Emotional solidarity has significant positive impact on tourists' loyalty towards the cultural heritage site (i.e., Cai Rang floating market).

Relationship between memorable tourism experience and destination loyalty. Memorable experiences wield a profound and complex influence on tourists' loyalty to destinations (Aroeira et al., 2016). Studies suggest these experiences forge enduring impressions that deeply shape tourists' perceptions and emotional connections with a place (Tsai, 2016). Researchers have noted that such experiences foster strong emotional bonds and satisfaction among tourists, fostering positive memories that enhance the likelihood of return visits and recommendations to others (Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2022, 2022). Consequently, the cultivation of unforgettable tourism experiences plays a pivotal role in enhancing tourists' destination loyalty. As such, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis (H6): Tourists' memorable experience with cultural heritage site (i.e., Cai Rang floating market) has significant positive impact on their destination loyalty.
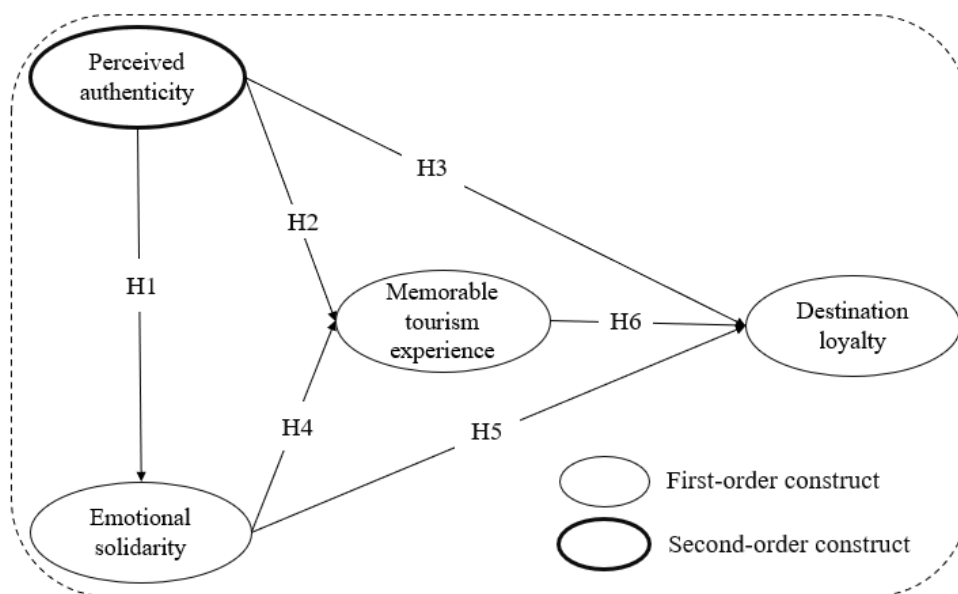
Figure 1. Research model

Research Methodology

This study selected the Cai Rang Floating Market as the research site for several significant reasons. Known as one of the most popular floating markets, Cai Rang offers unique experiences for tourists in the Mekong Delta region. Importantly, this intangible heritage site is one of the few destinations that still maintains its genuine daily operations rather than catering primarily to tourism business. Recognized as a prominent intangible cultural heritage destination, it attracts thousands of domestic and international tourists seeking uniquely authentic experiences (Figure 2).

This study employed a quantitative method to investigate the research phenomenon using a questionnaire survey. An original questionnaire was developed in English and then translated into Vietnamese for both international and Vietnamese respondents. Tourism researchers who were fluent in both Vietnamese and English translated the questionnaire from English into Vietnamese specifically for domestic tourists. To ensure accuracy, linguistic validation occurred with input from tourism lecturers, addressing grammar, spelling, and language consistency. Afterward, a pilot study involving 20 tourism students, who had prior experience with floating markets, was conducted to evaluate comprehension and response ease. This process resulted in minor adjustments to grammar and wording, enhancing the questionnaire. The study targeted tourists over 18 years of age who had experienced Cai Rang floating market, encompassing both domestic and international visitors. Data collection, employing convenience sampling, spanned from May to December 2023, with participants volunteering after being informed of the research information and purposes.

Different types of produce available at the market

Tourists having breakfast on boats

A busy corner of the market in the early morning

Tourists having a memorable photo with sellers.

Figure 2. Commercial activities at Cai Rang floating market

(Source adapted from https://canthotourism.vn)

The questionnaire comprised six sections aimed at gathering diverse facets of tourists' experiences and motivations. Initially, the first section endeavored to gather general data regarding tourists' incentives for visiting the floating market. Subsequently, the second section concentrated on assessing authenticity, drawing upon five items from the scale formulated by Nguyen and Chung (2016). In the following section, the Emotional Solidarity Scale (Woosnam & Norman, 2010) was utilized, incorporating ten items to evaluate tourists' connections with residents. The fifth section, adapted from An et al. (2024), gauged tourists' loyalty to the heritage destination (i.e., Cai Rang floating market) employing four items. All metrics measuring authenticity, emotional solidarity, memorable experience, and destination loyalty were presented on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Lastly, the final section encompassed demographic inquiries, such as age, gender, education level, and nationality, to furnish supplementary insights into respondents' profiles.

Data Analysis

Regarding the data analysis, this study used SPSS version 24 for demographic statistics and Smart PLS 4.0 for hypothesis testing, and multi-group analysis. The study obtained 447 valid responses, with 225 respondents from Vietnam and 222 from international tourists. Notable demographics revealed a higher representation of females (59.1%) compared to males (39.8%), along with 1.1% of respondents opting not to disclose their gender. Age distribution indicates a majority within the 18-24 and 25-34 brackets, accounting for 54.4% and 44.5%, respectively. Regarding educational background, the majority hold bachelor's degrees (49.9%), followed by 26.2% with graduate degrees, and the remaining 23.9% with high school diplomas or lower. In terms of nationality, there is a roughly equal distribution between domestic and international tourists participating in the study.

Data for this study were gathered via one method, potentially introducing common method bias (CBM) (Lee et al., 2021). To counter this, the Harman single factor test was administered prior to analyzing the measurement and structural models. The findings revealed that 48.1% of the variability could be attributed to a single factor, below the

50% threshold advised by Podsakoff et al. (2003). Hence, it's inferred that the CBM did not pose significant issues in this research.

This research also evaluated the normality of the data, a crucial step in PLS-SEM analysis. As per Table 1, data is deemed to adhere to a normal distribution if its skewness lies within the range of -2 to +2 (George, 2011; Hair et al., 2010), and its kurtosis falls between -7 to +7, which is considered normal (Garson, 2012; Hair et al., 2010). Moreover, evaluating the measurement model is a crucial step in PLS-SEM analysis to examine the relationships between each latent construct and its observed indicators.

Table 1.

Construct	Measurement item	Loading	Skew	Kurt	α	CR	Rho_A	AVE
Objective authenticity	Represent the past of the floating market	0.750	-0.802	-0.096	0.877	0.910	0.885	0.734
	Kept from the actual period	0.859	-0.852	0.037				
	True to its original	0.903	-0.713	-0.066				
	Verified by historians/ authorities	0.906	-0.768	-0.265				
Constructive authenticity	Present idea of local culture	0.749	0.130	-0.841	0.847	0.897	0.854	0.686
	Still in use for original purposes	0.854	-0.176	-0.518				
	Represent local ways of life	0.875	-0.350	-0.400				
	Represent local community	0.830	0.044	-0.461				
Memorable tourism experience	I really enjoyed the tourism experience at this floating market.	0.888	-0.568	-0.054	0.901	0.931	0.902	0.771
	I revitalized through the tourism experience at this floating market.	0.889	-0.695	-0.381				
	I had a chance to closely experience the local culture of the floating market.	0.892	-0.672	-0.218				
	I experienced something new (e.g., food, selling and buying activities) during my visit to the floating market.	0.843	-0.813	-0.096				
Emotional solidarity	I felt residents appreciate the contribution we (as visitors) make to the local economy.	0.764	-0.241	-0.322	0.908	0.946	0.909	0.609
	I was proud to be welcomed as a visitor to the region.	0.759	1.308	-1.021				
	I felt residents appreciate the benefits associated with us (as visitors) coming to the community.	0.800	0.562	-0.725				
	I was treated by residents fairly in the region.	0.784	0.024	-0.548				
	I felt close to some residents I have met in the region.	0.771	0.363	-0.690				
	I felt affection toward region residents	0.814	-0.154	-0.430				
	I identified with residents in the region	0.795	-0.255	-0.064				
	I had a lot in common with residents in the region	0.753	-0.512	-0.330				
Destination loyalty	I am willing to revisit there in future.	0.897	0.125	-0.511	0.924	0.946	0.924	0.815
	I am willing to recommend there to my family and friends.	0.914	-0.354	-0.341				
	I will come with more companions there.	0.919	0.232	-0.327				
	I have a wonderful image of this place as a tourist destination.	0.882	0.147	-0.367				

Convergent validity was evaluated by examining the strength of loadings, AVE, and measures of reliability. While most loadings in Table 1 met the criteria, items with loadings below 0.7 were eliminated (Hair et al., 2017). Notably, all AVEs surpassed the 0.50 threshold, indicating robust convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The reliability of constructs was then examined through internal consistency measures. As shown in Table 1, all factors

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exhibited satisfactory reliability, with Cronbach's alpha exceeding 0.70, CR values surpassing 0.8, and Dillon-Goldstein's rho values ranging from 0.854 to 0.924. Additionally, discriminant validity was confirmed by assessing the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) and cross-loadings in Table 2. All HTMT values fell below the 0.85 threshold (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), affirming the scales' validity and reliability in the study. Finally, the below Table indicated that all values were greater than zero (Q2>0), signifying the significant predictive ability of the model in this investigation.

Table 2. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ration of Correlations (HTMT)

Construct	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Objective authenticity (1)					
Constructive authenticity (2)	0.364				
Memorable tourism experience (3)	0.747	0.435			
Emotional solidarity (4)	0.698	0.376	0.728		
Destination loyalty (5)	0.835	0.429	0.834	0.795	
Effect size (Q^2)	*0.576*	*0.340*	*0.421*	*0.229*	*0.583*

Based on the hypothesized structural model with a sample size of 447, all six hypotheses were supported (Figure 3). Specifically, the results indicate that perceived authenticity had the most significant effects on emotional solidarity ($\beta = 0.622$, $p < 0.001$), memorable tourism experience ($\beta = 0.430$, $p < 0.001$), and destination loyalty ($\beta = 0.315$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, a memorable tourism experience showed a positive and direct influence on tourists' loyalty toward the floating market ($\beta = 0.345$, $p < 0.001$). Noticeably, there was a notable effect of emotional solidarity on memorable tourism experience ($\beta = 0.394$, $p < 0.001$) and tourists' destination loyalty ($\beta = 0.309$, $p < 0.001$).
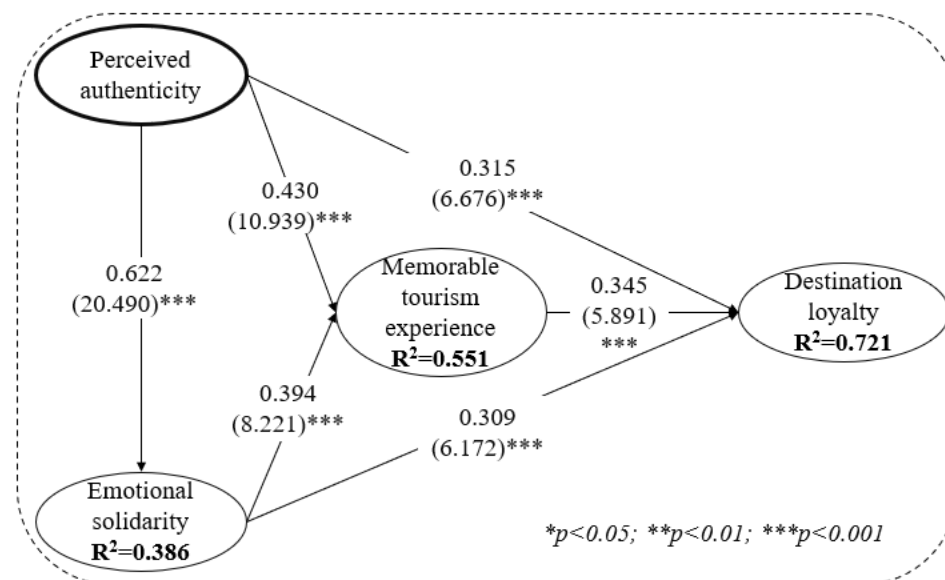
Figure 3. Structural model

According to Baguley (2009), an R^2 less than 0.20 indicates a low effect, an R^2 between 0.20 and 0.50 suggests a medium effect, and an R^2 greater than 0.50 implies a high effect. Based on these criteria, the findings indicate that perceived authenticity has a medium effect on explaining emotional solidarity (38.6%). In contrast, perceived authenticity and emotional solidarity have a high effect on explaining memorable tourism experiences (55.1%). Finally, perceived authenticity, emotional solidarity, and memorable tourism experiences together demonstrate a high effect in explaining destination loyalty.
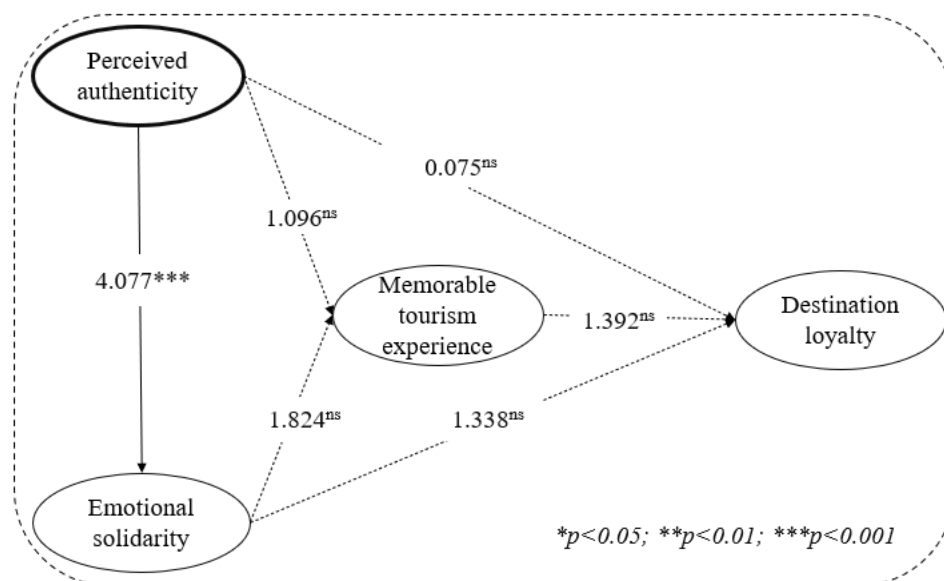
Figure 4. Multi-group analysis (The value on each path is the t-value of the difference between the path coefficients of the models for the international and Vietnamese data samples)

A multi-group analysis (Figure 4) showed no significant differences between international and domestic tourists in the effect of perceived authenticity on memorable tourism experiences ($t = 1.096$, $p > 0.05$) and destination loyalty ($t = 0.075$, $p > 0.05$). Additionally, there were no differences in the effect of memorable tourism experiences on destination loyalty ($t = 0.075$, $p > 0.05$) or in the effect of emotional solidarity on destination loyalty ($t = 1.338$, $p > 0.05$) between the two groups. However, there was a significant difference in the effect of perceived authenticity on emotional solidarity between the two markets ($t = 4.077$, $p < 0.001$).

Conclusion and Discussion

Despite numerous studies on perceived authenticity in cultural heritage research (Nguyen & Cheung, 2016; Wu et al., 2019, 2019), limited research examines its effects on memorable tourism experiences, emotional solidarity, and destination loyalty from a comparative perspective involving both domestic and international tourists. As hypothesized, this study confirms that both subjective and constructive authenticity are crucial in shaping tourists' experiences at cultural heritage sites. Additionally, it highlights the significant impact of perceived authenticity on emotional solidarity, memorable tourism experiences, and destination loyalty. Emotional solidarity, defined by a shared identity and connection with local culture and other tourists (An et al., 2024), enhances memorable tourism experiences and significantly boosts tourists' destination loyalty. Notably, the study shows that memorable experiences at cultural heritage sites play a critical role in influencing tourists' loyalty to the destination. Finally, multi-group analysis reveals that perceived authenticity affects emotional solidarity differently for international and domestic tourists.

Theoretically, this research provides a deeper understanding of perceived authenticity in the context of cultural heritage tourism. The findings confirm previous studies, highlighting the significance of objective authenticity and constructive authenticity (Nguyen & Cheung, 2016; Wu et al., 2019, 2019) Importantly, this study also reveals the critical link between perceived authenticity and emotional solidarity, expanding on previous (Chen et al., 2022). This deeper understanding of perceived authenticity enhances our knowledge of its impact on memorable tourism experiences. Objective authenticity offers a truthful representation of historical or cultural facts, while constructive authenticity allows tourists to derive personal meaning and relevance from their encounters, making the experience more enriching and memorable (Taheri et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Consequently, perceived authenticity significantly impacts destination loyalty, expanding findings from prior studies (Yi et al., 2017; Zhao & Li, 2023). This is understandable as tourists who perceive a genuine experience and personal connection to local heritage values are more likely to have higher satisfaction and loyalty (Chen & Lee, 2021). Furthermore, the research provides a better understanding of the critical relationship between emotional solidarity, memorable experiences, and destination loyalty. Although limited research exists on the connection between emotional solidarity and memorable experiences, this study's findings highlight that tourists establishing social connections with residents contribute to meaningful and long-lasting experiences (Jiang et al., 2022). Finally, this research deepens the understanding that

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memorable experiences with cultural heritage sites can foster tourists' loyalty to destinations, corroborating findings from previous studies (Ribeiro et al., 2022; Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2022).

Practically, this research provides valuable insights for heritage site managers and destination marketers aiming to tailor cultural heritage experiences to meet the expectations of both domestic and international visitors. The findings reveal that perceived authenticity significantly influences emotional solidarity. Therefore, it is recommended that destination managers and tour operators design heritage site experiences that promote social interactions between residents and tourists. This approach ensures that tourists feel welcomed, fairly treated, and emotionally connected to the local community (Lan et al., 2021). Moreover, the research underscores the importance of emotional solidarity and its impact on creating memorable tourism experiences and fostering destination loyalty. To attract more tourists to Cai Rang floating market, it is crucial to enhance the memorability of their experiences, thereby increasing their loyalty to the destination. The study's multi-group analysis shows that the effect of perceived authenticity on emotional solidarity differs between international and domestic tourists. This suggests that international tourists place greater importance on opportunities for resident-tourist interaction during their visits. Therefore, cultural heritage experiences should be tailored to promote more social connections between residents and international tourists.

Research recommendations

Despite its significant theoretical and practical implications, this study has some limitations. First, the sample size of both domestic and international respondents visiting the floating market was limited. Future research should increase the sample sizes to better represent the domestic and international markets. Additionally, this study employed a quantitative method, which may not fully capture the multiple facets of perceived authenticity. Therefore, future research should consider using different methods (e.g., mixed methods) to gain a deeper understanding of the complex nature of cultural heritage experiences. Lastly, this study focused on a single location, which may not be representative of all floating markets in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. Future studies should examine cultural heritage experiences in various floating markets.

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STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION IN MAI CHAU TOURIST DESTINATION: UNVEILING THE JOURNEY FROM TAI'S CULTURAL BACKGROUND TO ECONOMIC INTERDEPENDENCY

Achariya Choowonglert[1],
Pham Tran Thang Long[2]

Extended abstract

This research paper aims to shed light on the cultural economy of stakeholder inclusion and involvement in the development of the tourist market in Mai Chau district, located in Hoa Binh province, Vietnam. Over the past three decades, the focus on ethnic tourism in Southeast Asia has revolved around key concepts such as authenticity, commodification, power dynamics, globalization, and identity. Despite facing challenges in tourism development for more than twenty years, Mai Chau has emerged as a renowned destination for Tai ethnic tourism within the country. By utilizing ethnographic data collected continuously since 2007 (excluding 2012 and 2015) with 30 Tai villagers at Ban Lac 1, Ban Lac 2 and Ban Pom Coong (Mai Chau district), this paper explored the stakeholder's involvement in the Mai Chau tourist market within the framework of cultural economy.

It was found that Tai homestay owners in Mai Chau have overcome the situation of limited economic resources to demonstrated exceptional social cohesion in navigating this competitive landscape, viewing it as an opportunity for local employment rather than a threat. Consequently, their participation in the tourist market in Mai Chau is not an isolated endeavor, as social ties and exchanges are interconnected. There exists an economic interdependency between the Tai people and external investors, which is integral to the development of Tai culture and social cohesion. It is therefore argued to against the notion of exclusion, which is often presumed from a political economy perspective.

Keywords - *Mai Chau tourist village, Tourist Destination, Cultural Economy, Tai homestay, Stakeholder Participation*

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, Mai Châu, located in Hoa Binh Province, northwestern Vietnam, has emerged as a popular destination for cultural and ethnic tourism. Thai villagers in the area have played a crucial role in developing the homestay business, as well as selling cultural products as souvenirs. The tourism market in Mai Châu has experienced rapid growth, with facilities catering to modern tourists such as bicycle rentals, restaurants, traditional massage parlors, beauty salons, and electric train cars showcasing the local way of life. This industry has become the primary source of income for almost every household in the village, including popular homestay villages like Ban Lak (Bản Lác) and Ban Pom Kong (Pom Cọng). Furthermore, involvement in the tourism market has brought about significant changes in the villagers' lifestyle, including their eating, living, sleeping arrangements, toilet and bathroom usage, and concepts such as cleanliness and respect for the individuality of tourists (Choowonglert, 2012).

Mai Châu has undergone a transformation and is now recognized as a local Thai cultural and ethnic tourism destination. It has become famous in Vietnam for its cultural and ethnic heritage. Additionally, Mai Châu is considered a historical and cultural hub for the Thai people, thanks to the efforts of local government officials and intellectuals who have revived traditional rituals like Muang Mun (lễ xên mường Mùn). These stakeholders aim to negotiate the significance of Mai Chau as a site for Tai cultural and ethnic tourism, while also preserving the authenticity of Thai culture. However, it is important to note that tourism has transformed Mai Châu from its original cultural state into a contemporary Thai culture or modern Tai culture (Choowonglert, 2012).

Mai Châu's tourism is experiencing continuous expansion. It encompasses not only physical capital but also society and culture. With its rich historical background and long-standing reputation as a cultural hub, Mai Châu has been a sought-after tourist destination since ancient times. The development of tourism in Mai Châu is sustained by

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various factors and conditions, one of which is stakeholder participation. Unlike other places, the tourist market in Mai Châu can be seen as a complex web of social relations. Scholars have likened this phenomenon to the process of "the expansion of human cooperation" (Chalfin, 2004), (Sikor & Vi, 2005), (Yahui, 2006).

Tourism attractions in Mai Châu typically involve various parties with their own interests and advantages. According to several studies, the implementation of participatory tourism management, which focuses on cultural preservation and balanced progress (Maharjan & Punnoi, 2022), plays a crucial role in leveraging the potential of these stakeholders. Moreover, it contributes to the advancement of creative tourism, leading to an increase in economic value (Arunchot, 2022). Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that stakeholder participation in tourism planning and organization may differ based on perceived benefits. This inconsistency often presents challenges in achieving meaningful involvement. Consequently, there is an escalating demand for organizations to effectively oversee stakeholder networks (Arunchot, 2022). Given the significance of stakeholder relationships, much attention has been given to their analysis, particularly in relation to ethnicity (Nguyen, Diane & Newsome, 2020) and network management. The level of participation in decision-making within tourism networks is also a subject of investigation (Gračan, Zadel & Pavlovic, 2018). Accordingly, stakeholder participation analysis in tourism refers to the cooperation among various groups in problem definition, planning, and action. Several studies have highlighted the existence of such cooperation (e.g. (Punnoi, 2017), (Nguyen, Diane & Newsome, 2020)).

Nevertheless, in the context of this article, stakeholder participation extends beyond being integral to the planning and management process. Instead, it assumes the shape of a collaborative network devoid of a shared management structure. This is due to the need to fill the market gap and cater to the demands of tourists. The local community's sole traditional business, which is the villagers' homestay, is unable to attract tourists with high purchasing power seeking peace and relaxation. Consequently, local and outsider businessmen have invested in the creation of 3–5-star hotels and resorts. On the other hand, these hotels and resorts fail to embody Tai culture, which is what tourists visiting Mai Châu desire. Since the early 1990s, Mai Châu has been defined as a place of ethnic tourism and Thai culture. Therefore, in order to experience "Tainess", guests staying at 3–5-star hotels and resorts must avail the services provided by Tai entrepreneurs. These services include home-cooked Tai food, cultural performances, souvenir shops, as well as bicycle rental and electric car services (xe điện), among others. This cooperation is made possible due to the shared interest among the local people and tourism businessmen. The villager (e.g. the Tai entrepreneurs) do not perceive investment from outside the community as a threat, nor do they view investors as competitors. They are not even afraid of the outside capital altering the landscape of Mai Châu. As a result, the business operations of both the villagers and external businessmen have merged into a stakeholder participation in the development of Mai Châu tourism, despite some aspects of the development being unplanned (Rigg, 2012).

Research Objectives and Methodology

This article seeks to analyze the tourism significance of stakeholder participation in Mai Châu, a place of immense importance to the Tai ethnic group. A qualitative approach has been applied for the collecting of data. Through an ethnographic inquiry conducted from 2007 to 2023 (excluding the years of 2012, 2015. 2021 and 2022) with 30 Tai villagers at Ban Lac 1, Ban Lac 2 and Ban Pom Coong (Mai Chau district), the study explores how Tai villagers of Mai Chau tourism destination have effectively utilized their cultural capital as a form of soft power to promote tourism, safeguard their culture, and uphold their ethnic identity.

Data Analysis

Cultural Market Development: Mai Châu's Strategic Location for Ethnic and Cultural Tourism.

The strategic location of Mai Châu has contributed to its cultural market development for ethnic and cultural tourism. This is due to the cultural capital that has resulted from a history of ethnic and cultural integration. As a result, Mai Châu has been reconstructed as a destination of the Tai people, both within the tourism market and in terms of national and ethnic identity formation. Mai Châu holds a strategic position in the tourism market, as it is recognized as a prominent area in terms of physical geography. Additionally, the entire region is renowned for ethnic tourism and is a popular destination on the tourist map of North Vietnam. This makes Mai Châu an ideal location for studying and understanding various aspects of the cultural economy, such as the transformation of culture into marketable goods.

The construction of the tourism market in Mai Châu has played a significant role in transforming the place into a tourist destination, while also shaping local and ethnic identities. Achariya Choowonglert (Choowonglert, 2012)

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reveals that the transition to a free market system, known as Đổi Mới, allowed the Tai people in Mai Châu to contribute significantly to the national economy. This led to a shift in the community's production structure and way of life, transitioning from an agricultural economic base to a tourism market economy. In order to promote Mai Châu as a tourism product, tour operators and the government have played key roles in shaping the representation of the area. For example, in the 1990s, Mai Châu was established as a hub for showcasing Tai's weaving and woven culture. It was selected by the government for tourism development and promoted as a "village center of handicrafts" (Lan, 2000). Moreover, Mai Châu has always been a tourist-friendly destination since the socialist era, with its breathtaking natural landscape and unique tall stilt-shaped Thai houses, distinguishing it from Vietnamese traditional houses. These characteristics have made it an attraction for both local and foreign tourists, particularly in the main village of Mai Châu tourism, Bản Lác. Approximately half of the 120 villagers in Bản Lác opened their homes as homestays, providing accommodations and meals to tourists. This has led to Mai Châu being recognized as a significant destination for homestay tourism, marking a crucial milestone in cultural and ethnic tourism in northern Vietnam.

Since the 1990s, the tourism market in Mai Châu has played a pivotal role in shaping the livelihoods of villagers, as it has become their main source of income. Tai entrepreneurs of nearly 60 homestays in Bản Lác, more than 20 houses in Bản Pom Coọng, and 5-10 houses each in Bản Văn, Bản Bước, Bản Nà Phòn, and Bản Nà Tia have benefited from the influx of tourists. Additionally, selling souvenirs has become a lucrative source of income for households, surpassing the earnings of homestays that lack sufficient capital for development. Furthermore, it has generated income for cultural performance groups, hawkers, firewood sellers, motorbike and bicycle rental operators, and others. It is worth noting that the main tourism villages, Bản Lác and Bản Pom Coọng, have seen significant benefits from tourism, while others, such as Bản Nà Phòn and Bản Nà Tia, have accommodated the overflow of tourists from the crowded Bản Lác and Bản Pom Coọng.

Overall, the Mai Châu tourism market, prior to 2015, has primarily been in the hands of local entrepreneurs who own homestays and souvenir shops. While some homestays operate through partnerships with tour operators, it is estimated that even without the involvement of any tour companies, the tourism market in Mai Châu would continue to thrive. This is because the villagers do not rely on external middlemen, but rather, they have become local entrepreneurs, which has given them a new identity. This identity encompasses not only their ethnic background but also their connection to the place. It has been an effort to redefine Mai Châu's image, moving away from its historical association with the opium trade, which dates back to the colonial era.

Tourism does not only have implications for changing the community economic structure and community way of life. But it has also caused Mai Châu as an place to undergo cultural and ethnic clashes, that is, in building a tourism market. Locals have turned the social space of the tourism market into a space that is managed and decided by the locals. The tourism market has weaved together locals with businesses, middlemen, tour agencies. local government officials, other ethnic groups in the place and others in their involvement in the tourism market. Villagers do not consider themselves powerless in the face of the globalization of the tourism market. As a result, Tai culture is reproduced in the development of the tourism market. In the situation of Vietnam's entry into the market economy, socialist government officials have not yet been able to learn much about the market economy.

Therefore, the Tai people take great pride in their involvement in the tourism market. The authors assert that they possess a strong sense of confidence in conducting business, making it second only to their self-esteem as members of the Tai ethnic group. This phenomenon can be attributed to the implementation of an essentialistic ethnic strategy, known as "strategic essentialism" (Spivak, 1988). According to Spivak, tourists can be seen as consumers of ethnic essences, such as food, housing, farming, and other aspects of daily life, which are perceived as the "exotic other." Although the Tai people have not fully preserved all aspects of their traditions, such as traditional attire and reliance on modern conveniences in their daily lives, the image of the Tai in Mai Châu still embodies a sense of tranquility and simplicity compared to the bustling city life. Consequently, the identity of the Tai people has been solidified and established as a "true Tai identity," albeit seemingly lagging behind that of the Kinh (Viet) people.

However, in terms of marketing, the Tai people have successfully utilized this essence as a strategy to align their ethnicity and identity in relation to the Kinh people and appeal to tourists. A notable example is their warm and welcoming nature, not only in the market system but also in their daily lives. Another example is their lack of craftiness in marketing, as mentioned in the renowned travel book "Lonely Planet" in 2010, which has proven to be attractive to tourists. Thus, in the context of the tourism market, Homestay owners have reinvented themselves as ethical entrepreneurs, while souvenir shop owners are known for their honesty. Being outside the confines of the

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nation-state (in the realm of the free market and globalization) has played a significant role in shaping the Thai people's identity, which will be further discussed.

Mai Châu in Expansion of the Tourism Market: Capital Accumulation and Stakeholder Participation.

In light of the intensive investment and expansion of the tourism market, the region of Mai Châu has undergone substantial changes in both its economic structure and the lifestyle of its villagers. Notably, tourism has played a pivotal role in driving this transformation and has also influenced the reconfiguration of the relationship between the local populace and the land, as the land has been commodified. The purpose of this section is to provide insight into the historical perspective of the Tai people's deep-rooted connection to their homeland and examine how this bond has been affected by the competitive nature and growth of tourism marketing.

One key issue is the continuous influx of outside investors in the tourism industry, particularly evident from the early 2010s onwards. The authors visited Mai Châu multiple times and observed that homestays and local tourism businesses have been constantly evolving. These establishments have been beautified, expanded by adding rooms, and formed partnerships with neighbors or relatives. In some cases, homestays have been fully booked with tourists, prompting the development of 3–5-star hotels and resorts by the outside investors. Most of these investors are Kinh (Viet) people, with some Tai people from Mai Châu district also participating. There are various investment styles observed in the place. Firstly, there are businesses owned by Tai Mai Châu people who have been part of the tourism market since its early development in the mid-1990s to early 2000s. These individuals have been able to accumulate capital from tourism and expand their businesses. Some have utilized digital platforms like "booking.com" and "TripAdvisor" to expand their market reach. The authors found that almost every household operating this business has experienced some degree of development, whether it be expanding homestay branches, opening souvenir shops, or even constructing additional hotels adjacent to their homestays.

Secondly, there are joint investment ventures between Tai and Kinh people. Tai people rent houses and land while performing administrative duties in hospitality, such as being tour guides or running small travel companies in Hanoi. These ventures cater mainly to Western tourists and include houses like Hung-Minh's. Lastly, there are hotels and resorts, typically of 3-star rating or higher, belonging to the Kinh from Hanoi, Thanh Hoa, and Mai Châu who have invested in buying land in villages surrounding Bản Lác, Bản Pom Coọng, such as Bản Nà Phòn, Nà Tia, and Chiềng Châu. Examples of these establishments include Eco Lodge Resort (owned by the Kinh from Hanoi), Sunrise Resort (owned by the Kinh from Hanoi), Qua Thanh Hotel (owned by the Kinh from Sam Khoe Commune, Mai Châu), Mai Châu Mountain View Hotel (owned by a the Kinh from Chiềng Sại, Mai Châu Municipality), Bao Kuan Hotel and Karaoke (owned by the Kinh from Hanoi who has a Thai wife), Bản Văn Hotel (owned by a the Tai government official), Soi Bungalow Resort (owned by the Kinh from Hanoi), and Mai Châu Sky Resort (owned by the Tai who had leftover money from selling land in Bản Nà Tia and invested it in a resort).

Tai Customs and Sense of Place: Enhancing for Stakeholder Participation in Tourism

In late 2010, the residents of Bản Lác 1, a village located in the central area, found themselves compelled to establish an additional branch at Bản Lác 2, situated on the outskirts of the mountain. Prior to 2010, there were merely 2-3 homestays in the vicinity. This development has sparked divergent perspectives among the villagers. The first perspective, held by those involved in the tourism market, is one of unconcern regarding competition and market expansion. Despite the influx of tourism investors purchasing land, they believe that their business, ranging from 3-5-star-hotels and resorts, complements the provision of food services to resort guests. Moreover, the sale of souvenirs, food shops, cultural performances, and street vendors often garners the patronage of hotel and resort guests. Additionally, these visitors frequently express interest in exploring the villagers' way of life, as it aligns with the popular notion of "the tourist gaze" - the fascination with consuming the "exotic other."

The second perspective, held by those not directly involved in the tourism industry, includes government officials and local intellectuals who fear the potential loss of agricultural land, which holds ancestral significance, to capitalist entities. Many individuals who have voiced their concerns to the author worry about the potential threats posed to the homestay business and the villagers' way of life. A local government official, for instance, expressed, "I do not wish to witness Mai Châu tourism falling into the hands of outsiders - individuals with wealth and modern knowledge but lacking an understanding of our culture." Simultaneously, the government has been making efforts to assert its authority over natural resources, such as mountains, caves, forests, and so on, and to establish tourist villages in order to regulate the tourism market.

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Despite the ongoing Mai Châu tourism season, which occurs after the Tết festival (Vietnamese traditional New Year), the Tai people continue their traditional farming practices without any significant changes. They still engage in farming primarily for their own consumption and do not view the introduction of external capital as a threat to their cultural identity. On the contrary, the involvement of outside investment in the tourism market has been embraced by the villagers, as it has contributed to the economic development of the village. For instance, Mr. Học, the owner of a beverage and grocery store, states that 'the presence of hotels and resorts built by external investors has resulted in increased sales and a positive impact on the village's economy'.

According to the authors' summary, the villagers perceive the hotels and resorts as beneficial rather than as competitors. Ms. Xuân, the owner of a homestay frequently visited by the authors, mentions that most villagers do not view the 3-5-star hotels and resorts in Mai Châu as rivals, but rather as preferred options for tourists. Furthermore, the authors observe that the homestay business operated by the villagers and the hotel-resort business targeting foreign tourists belong to different market segments. While the homestay business caters primarily to Vietnamese (domestic) tourists, the hotels and resorts are designed to attract foreign tourists. Additionally, the influx of foreign tourists has led to increased support for services such as the electric train, cultural performances, and the purchase of local food and souvenirs from the villagers. These hotels and resorts can be seen as partners in promoting Mai Châu tourism to a wider audience. Overall, the villagers' involvement in the tourism market and their collaboration with external investors have brought positive outcomes for their economic development and cultural promotion.

However, the locals' relatively lower concern regarding the potential adverse effects of external investors on their economy and other facets can be attributed to the profound sense of place, or sense of belonging, that the Tai people have established. This sense of place is rooted in the historical and cultural background of the place. The place boasts a rich history of ethnic diversity and integration, fostering an environment where the Tai people have gained substantial experience in coexisting harmoniously with various ethnic groups. Furthermore, a key factor contributing to this mindset is the strong conviction held by the Tai people in displaying reverence and making offerings to the city spirits, irrespective of the outsider's origins or identity. For instance, during various rituals, such as prayers for healing, it is customary to pray in the Tai language and seek assistance from a Tai shaman (thầy cúng). Disregarding these practices can lead to unfavorable consequences, as illustrated by the story of Mr. Tiệp. The owner of a homestay, whose father is a traditional shaman in the village, shared the following with the authors:

"In recent years, three hotel owners who did not actively engage with the local Tai people or adhere to their traditions, such as praying in Vietnamese instead of Tai, have experienced premature deaths. Generally, those who embrace the local traditions are accepted. However, there is an exception for the downtown area (known as 'thị trấn' in Vietnamese), where the majority of the population consists of the Kinh ethnic group."

Additionally, the term "u din Tai, phai mo kham Tai" (literally meaning that "living in Tai's land, must pray Tai language") is used metaphorically to signify that the area is no longer available for unrestricted settlement. The inhabitants of this region prioritize the preservation of their customs and are not apprehensive about outsiders disrupting their way of life. Failure to adhere to Tai customs, such as reciting chants in Vietnamese instead of Tai language, can lead to misunderstandings with the Tai spirits, resulting in detrimental consequences and even mortality.

However, many government officials and local intellectuals who are not involved in the tourism industry express concerns about the influx of outside investors and their potential clash with Tai society and culture. Furthermore, it is emphasized that tourism significantly impacts the dynamics between villagers and local authorities. This is evident as the power balance shifts from the local authority of the local communities in managing their economic sustenance, society, and culture to being controlled by external forces - the tourist market, which is now in the hands of local entrepreneurs in cooperation with outside investors, further exacerbates this shift in power. This power shift raises apprehension among local government officials (Choowonglert, 2012). Therefore, they strive to utilize cultural mechanisms that have been promoted through policies aimed at reviving the cultural heritage of various ethnic groups. One notable policy is the "về nguồn" (return to the roots) campaign, which, in practice, refers to Mai Châu's city spirit worship mentioned previously. By seizing this policy opportunity, local government officials and intellectuals have devised new city rituals to foster a sense of Tai culture, place, and belonging. These rituals also serve to convey to outsiders that the land belongs to the Tai people, who have deep-rooted Tai society and culture.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

Tourism management in Mai Châu is a social construct that resembles a complex network of social relationships. The process of globalization and integration into the global market has significantly impacted the cultural economy of this place. It is important to note that the Tai villagers in Mai Châu are not passive victims of the market system, but active participants who are enthusiastic about developing markets in collaboration with relevant stakeholders. The market system not only helps in the construction of ethnic identities but also contributes to the creation of a unique sense of place known as "Mai Châu". Therefore, ethnic tourism in this context is not solely about preserving ethnic identity or culture, but also encompasses the idea of a distinctive place. The strong connection between the Tai people and their cultural heritage and traditions in Mai Châu reinforces the notion that as long as they inhabit this land, they will continue to adhere to their cultural norms and practices, despite the presence of external investors.

2. Discussion

The establishment of 3 to 5-star hotels and resorts in Mai Châu has attracted a greater number of tourists. In terms of the economy, these tourists, who are interested in experiencing the Tai culture, have become patrons of Tai restaurants and shops selling local souvenirs. They engage in several activities, such as renting bicycles and using public transportation owned by the Tai people. This level of involvement does not solely rely on planned collaborative efforts, but also operates within the mechanisms of the market and the deep-rooted sense of place held by the Tai people. Therefore, reinventing Mai Châu as a tourist destination is as crucial as reinventing modern independence. The interplay between places and communities is mutually constitutive. One might question, "What does it mean to be Tai?" Without the concept of Mai Châu, which encapsulates both ethnic culture and landscape, the existence of both Mai Châu and the Tai people would be jeopardized.

This is why the initial Tai settlers in Mai Châu did not view external investments as a threat. As they observed the increasing influx of tourists due to the presence of 3 to 5-star hotels and resorts, they recognized the economic benefits. The management and operation of these hotels and resorts, along with the specific characteristics of tourists seeking to immerse themselves in the Tai culture, have transformed them into customers of Tai restaurants, souvenir shops, and cultural performances, for instance. Additionally, they rent out electric car (xe điện) and bicycles, which are owned by the Tai people. This level of participation does not solely rely on planned collaborative efforts but is driven by market mechanisms and particularly the deep sense of place that the Tai people hold. Consequently, this has allowed for the integration of diverse social and cultural backgrounds into this place. Moreover, the growing reputation of Mai Châu has led to cultural capital accumulation, contributing to the establishment of a renowned destination. On a social level, this has fostered the expansion of networks and partnerships, as the hospitality of the Tai people extends not only to tourists but also to external investors. Hence, the stakeholder participation of Tai entrepreneurs in Mai Châu represents a form of economic interdependency within the context of unplanned development. This has transformed Mai Châu into a space that embraces cultural and ethnic diversity, ultimately leading to sustainable tourism management.

Research recommendations

1. By examining the intricate relationships among various stakeholders engaged in tourism activities, particularly the integration of ethnic and culture-based tourism and the involvement of external parties, the article underscores the significance of unplanned development (Rigg, 2012) and stakeholder participation in ensuring the continuous and sustainable growth of the Mai Chau tourist market.

2. The strong connection between the Tai people and their cultural heritage and traditions in Mai Chau reinforces the notion that as long as they inhabit this land, they will continue to adhere to their cultural norms and practices, despite the presence of external investors. Accordingly, the situation of Mai Chau provides considerable lesson learnt for developers of ethnic and cultural tourism to exercise sustainable cultural economy of tourism.

3. Tourism in Mai Châu is not solely centered around the creation of ethnic or cultural identity or the pursuit of business ventures. It also encompasses the concept of place. The strategic essentialism of Mai Châu as a destination holds as much importance as the construction of ethnic identity. These two aspects are interdependent and mutually reinforce each other. Besides, it is suggested for sustainable tourism management that individuals from outside the community must exercise caution when engaging with the local Tai spirits and respecting their customs.

4. Further quantitative studies on measuring level of participation of stakeholders in Mai Chau tourism is applausive to support in clarification of economic interdependency between the Tai people and external investors at the area.

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EXPLORING THE IMPACTS OF CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY ON VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND TOURIST SATISFACTION IN COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF HMONG INDIGENOUS VILLAGES IN HA GIANG

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Yi-Ju, Lee [2]

Extended abstract

Cultural tourism has long been an interesting and popular research topic as a formal leisure activity to meet special social status and cultural interests. Our research explores the attractiveness and big potential of community-based tourism development in Ha Giang province, as this mountainous region is home to 19 ethnic minority groups and is currently an emerging destination for both domestic and international tourists coming to northern Vietnam. With an approach of interdisciplinary studies about anthropology, indigenous tourism, cultural-heritage tourism, culturology, and sociology aspects of the tourism industry, this paper will examine the differences in terms of objective and existence dimensions of authenticity perceived by tourists who visit the Hmong indigenous villages in Ha Giang province, Vietnam to experience their traditions and customs through the cultural tourism products. Using a mixed method of qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, this research aims to clarify the significant role and positive impacts of cultural identity on community-based tourism products and tourist satisfaction as well as their quality experience. This paper's objective also aims to clarify the role of place identity and cognitive image in the process of cultural production and consumption of the typical case of ethnic tourism, then it may contribute to cultural heritage management and strategic planning for the local tourism sector, especially the Hmong ethnic community and suggest further discussions about the interpretations of authenticity, subjectivity and objectivity in its cognitive meanings.

Keywords: cultural authenticity, community-based tourism, ethnicity, tourist satisfaction, visitor experience.

Introduction

Initially, Trilling (1972) indicated that the original use of "authenticity" was to test whether works of art were real or were what they claimed to be so that people could judge the value and price based on authenticity. Later, Cohen (1979) introduced the two key concepts of "centre" and "outside centre" regarding the travel motivation in the modern society. Facing affairs consciousness and high tension, tourists want to leave their daily life to experience the culture of the interpretation for the meaning of life, which include the pursuit of personal happiness, and escaping the boring life, looking for a different way of life, obtaining aesthetic enjoyment, and contacting with other different culture. Stebbins (1996) proved that cultural tourism activities are based on the cultural motivation of tourists to pursuit "formal leisure", or "literary interests" while Lee & Crompton (1992) stated, people often seek exciting and amazing experience in the travel, and get various intangible cultural experience in the cultural tourism. Cultural tourism involves visiting historical and archeological sites, participating in the festivals of local communities, observing traditional dances and rituals, and the transaction of local and traditional goods (Okuyucu & state Somuncu, 2012). At this point, cultural tourism activities in Vietnam are commonly known as pilgrimage trips intentionally to visit popular historical and religious sites (temples, pagodas, shrines or palaces), but not really appreciate the lifestyles or cultural heritages of indigenous communities. Whereas, international visitors would mostly find it more interesting to discover the rural villages of the ethnic groups to explore their cultural identity and diverse traditions. Then, this travel trend would match the concept of ethnicity which is largely dependent on the assumptions of identity,

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uniformity, universal discourses, fixed centers, established authority and order (Bredin, 1993).

Boorstin (1961, 1964, 1992) argued that tourists, by demanding rare products, images, replicas, and staged attractions that have been commodified, they desire what is authentic, which in turn makes the concept of authenticity problematic. According to Trilling (1972:93), the word authenticity reflects testing a work's value as it is exhibited in places such as museums and whether it intrinsically has that value or deserves such appreciation. McKercher and Cros (2002:73) believed that the word authenticity has etymologically Greco-Roman roots, and was historically used to mean true, sincere, or original. For Cohen (1988), authenticity emphasizes a quality of objects belonging to premodern life and cultures that do not have the influence of Western civilization for curators and ethnographers, as well as being made from natural materials and crafted by hand.

In the context of contemporary tourism, globalization, modernization, urbanization and digitalization or commodification, Vietnamese travelers nowadays tend to be more fascinated by large-scaled amusement parks, luxury and comfortable resorts and spa lodgings, or public events which are widely promoted on social media channels. Despite the fact that Vietnam is a country rich in natural resources, quintessential national cultural values, along with the diversity and complexity of 54 ethnic groups, current issues to be discussed seriously should also address the challenges of sustainable development, safeguarding the cultural heritages and national traditions, especially the equity of social groups, economic development, social welfare and infrastructure investments, and especially, a comprehensive human development condition.

Objectives

Taking an interdisciplinary approach of cultural anthropology, tourism management, and sociology, this research paper aims to discuss and explain the significant roles and impacts of cultural authenticity in the case of community-based tourism. The main objectives of this study are to answer these following research questions with a mixed method:

1. Does the cultural authenticity in CBT products positively enhance the visitors' experience in Hmong tourist villages?

2. What are the main influential factors of tourist's satisfaction in the case of cultural tourism activities in Ha Giang province?

Hypothesis

This research paper shows the tentative model of the interactive relationship between objective and subjective authenticity with the visitor experience quality and overall satisfaction. These two hypotheses have been confirmed: (1) Tourists with a higher level of authenticity orientation and a clearer perception of indigenous cultural authenticity tend to have a better experience and satisfaction; (2) The authentic destination image (both cognitive and effective domains) of the CBT attractions will enhance the travel motivation and tourist's loyalty or revisitation to the research site (indigenous villages).

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

Write clearly about the population and sample data that used in this research. whether quantitatively or qualitatively, who, how many populations that used in this research. Including the sampling method used in this research. To be used to interpret the results to determine the appropriate population for further analysis.

Ha Giang is a mountainous province located in the northeast of Vietnam, with a total land area of 7,884 km^2 and a topography that ranges from 800 to 1200m. Recently, Ha Giang has become a leading tourist attraction in Vietnam thanks to its spectacular landscapes, and has been well-known for its unique title "Dong Van Karst Plateau Geopark" recognized by UNESCO in 2010. Its tourism industry achieved noticeable awards, to name a few: the Leading emerging destination in Asia-Pacific region (by World Travel Awards 2023), ranking 25/52 best destinations in the world (by the New York Times), top 10 most beautiful destinations in Vietnam (by Canadian Travel magazine), and it was also a leading key word for searching on Google by Vietnamese travelers in 2023. Besides, Ha Giang is home to 19 ethnicities, among which are the majority of Hmong, Tay and Dao indigenous groups, contributing the population of nearly 700,000 residents. The local tourism authority claimed that this province received 3 million arrivals last year, among which is more than 2.7 million domestic visitors. According to the municipal tourism department, Ha Giang has 35 community-based tourism villages, including 16 indigenous tourism villages to be preserved and promoted in the strategic planning project, in the term 2020-2025. Because of the limited time and

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budget set for this research, the authors only choose a small scale for conducting 18 qualitative in-depth interviews and questionnaire-based survey for quantitative analysis. Three research sites are selected to examine the authenticity in Hmong cultural tourism products and activities: Pa Vi village in Meo Vac district, Lung Cam cultural hub in Dong Van district, and Du Gia village in Yen Minh district.

2. Research Tools

The tools used in this qualitative research are observation and in-depth interview forms. Researchers can delve deeper into participants' experiences by using open-ended questions and probing techniques. This exploration measure uncovers richer, more nuanced information than simple yes/no answers. The interview form acts as a roadmap and guideline for this qualitative analysis and contains a list of semi-structured questions and topics the researchers want to cover and allowing interviewees to respond in their own words and elaborate on their experiences.

Interviewees Stakeholders	Quantity	Location	Variable Domains	Question content
Village leaders	3	Pa Vi, Dong Van, Lung Cam	Tourism strategic planning and policy	How government and local tourism authority integrate and promote ethnic cultures in tourism products/ activities?
Host families	6	Du Gia homestay, Meo Vac Clay House; Mun Chi Ethnic homestay	Cultural heritages and ethnic traditions/ customs	Which symbolic cultural traditions and heritages do locals wants to introduce to visitors?
Tour guides/ Tour operators	3	Pai Adventure, MaMa Hagiang Loops, Phon Tooc Tourist, Jasmine Bike Tours	CBT ethnic activities, Tour program, Service quality	- Which itinerary and CBT activities are the most popular to visitors? - To what extent are tourists interested in cultural trips?
Tourists	6	Meo Vac, Dong Van, Quan Ba, Yen Minh	Authenticity perceptions and Travel Experience, Visitor's satisfaction	- How do local traditional performances and festivals or public events impress visitors? - Why do most tourists enjoy the experience of authentic foods, lodging, costumes or traditions?

Secondly, in terms of quantitative approach, the researchers will also conduct an online survey targeted to examine the perceptions and evaluation of visitors towards the authentic cultural tourism products provided in these community-based Hmong villages. The method of quantitative analysis using the technology of statistical analysis is to collect and analyze the data which are reflected by objective things, in order to more clearly describe the variation rule of data; meanwhile study causal relationship of objective things, and process regression analysis among variables, to grasp the intrinsic variation between variables. 200 convenient sampling respondents were reached in a questionnaire-based Google form with the following constructs:

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Variable	Dimension	Item measurement	Scale type	Reference
Authenticity	Objective (epistemological)	Historical sites, cultural artifacts, architecture, traditions	More-less original (Likert 5 pt)	Wang (1999)
	Existential (subjective)	Personal background, cultural beliefs and values, previous experience, motivation	nominal	Reisinger & Steiner (2006)
	Constructive	Presentation and explanation of exhibits/performances	Clear/unclear (Likert 5 pt)	Kolar & Zabkar (2010)
Visitor experience	Hedonism	Enjoyment and fun at the CBT destination	More-less pleasured	Pine & Gilmore (1999)
	Novelty	New/unique aspects of the experience	nominal	Kim et al. (2010, 2012)
	Meaningfulness/ Happiness	A sense of personal connection and purpose	Strong/weak joy or sense	Bruner (1991) Wilson & Harris (2006)
Tourist satisfaction	Tour program	Authentic attraction and local experiences	More-less Satisfied/ impressed (Likert 5 pt)	Huang et al. (2010)
	Service quality	Authentic lodging, meals, traditions and customs/rituals		Pizam et al. (1978); Alegre & Garau (2010)

3. Data Collection

As a mixed method has been applied in this research, the authors conducted a field trip in one week to the research site, Ha Giang province for the data collection. 18 in-depth interviews with four stakeholders' categories: Village leaders, Host families, Tour guides/operators, Domestic and international visitors were recorded. Interview forms have been prepared beforehand and the consent form was given to the interviewees to ensure research ethic principles. The authors also recruit 3 assistants to form a research team for a better and more efficient field trip with participant observation and questionnaire surveys at the chosen research sites (Meo Vac, Dong Van and Yen Minh districts). Each interview section took place within 30-45 minutes at a convenient place such as the local homestay site, village's community house office or a quite authentic café shop. After the field trip, all recordings have been kept confidentially and were decoded by the research team into valid documents (transcripts of statements). During the interview process, the researcher would use such techniques as: Rapport building, Open-ended prompts; Active listening; Reflective listening; and Encourage details in the follow-up questions.

For the survey distribution, this quantitative data collection was conducted online from June 20 to July 10 via Google form. A targeted number of 200 respondents was approached by different channels of communication, however, due to the complicated of the survey topic and the limited time of the research, 49 questionnaires were excluded from the sample because of incomplete responses or ignorance. Thus, a sample amount of 151 respondents remained for the final analysis, which constitutes a 75.5% usable response rate. Social demographic indicators were included in the survey, with categories of: gender (male: n = 88, female: n = 63), age group (18-30 yrs: 49%, 31-49 yrs: 30%, >50: 21%); origin (domestic: n = 99, foreigner: n = 52); travel type (solo: n=24, family/small group: n=57, tour group/packaged tour: n=30). Noticeably, a majority of nearly 70% of visitors to Ha Giang are young solo/couple travelers from Ha Noi and European countries, among which are office employees and college students.

4. Data Analysis (Front Size Time New Romans (Bold) 12 pts.)

According to MacCannell (1973), the authenticity of a destination can be defined as a global assessment of 'genuineness of a tourist destination'. In other words, he viewed cultural authenticity as the expression of the characteristics belonging to the local culture to tourists with a view to creating an attractive experience for visitors.

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Trilling (1972) claimed the original use of this concept emerged in museum studies, where experts were interested in differentiating authentic works of art from those that looked to be unauthentic, especially with regard to economic valuation. Later studies by Kolar & Zabakar (2010); Lee et al., (2016); Shen et al., (2012); Reisinger & Steiner (2005); Wang (1999) further explained the construct of two dimensions of cultural authenticity: Objective authenticity is an inherent feature of objects and can be interpreted as the authenticity of objects that are original or as the authenticity projected onto objects by tourists; whereas Existential authenticity refers to a potential state of personal connection with destiny driven by participation in activities. Authenticity is thus a projection of tourists own beliefs, expectations, preferences, stereotyped images, and consciousness onto toured objects, particularly onto toured others (Adams 1984; Bruner 1991; Duncan 1978; Laxson 1991; Silver 1993).

The potent mix of politics, culture, and questions of social identity raises critical issues for tourism, which can be seen as a set of cultural, economic, and political phenomena with meanings and applications loaded with ambiguities and uncertainties (Franklin & Crang, 2001). Said (1978) mentioned that perceptions of race, nation, and ethnicity can engender a simplistic view of Others, creating a global problem of new forms of discrimination, racism, and exclusion. Boissevain (1996) explained that the private and local backstage space sought after by tourists in their search for authenticity is violated by their presence, which is called "contested culture". Palmer et al. (2013) concluded that cognitive identity results in stronger advocacy behaviors and can be encouraged by greater involvement of residents with tourism activities, while affective components of identity had no significant effect on advocacy.

Cultural tourism is an activity based on the cultural motivation of tourists to pursue "formal leisure" or "literary interests" (Stebbins, 1996). Robert A. Stebbins (1992) pointed to cultural tourism as a formal leisure activity, compared with mass tourism as a form of random leisure, which has many differences, the most important of which is to meet special social status and cultural interests. Besides, Lee & Crompton (1992) believed that people often seek exciting and amazing experiences in travel and get various intangible cultural experiences in cultural tourism.
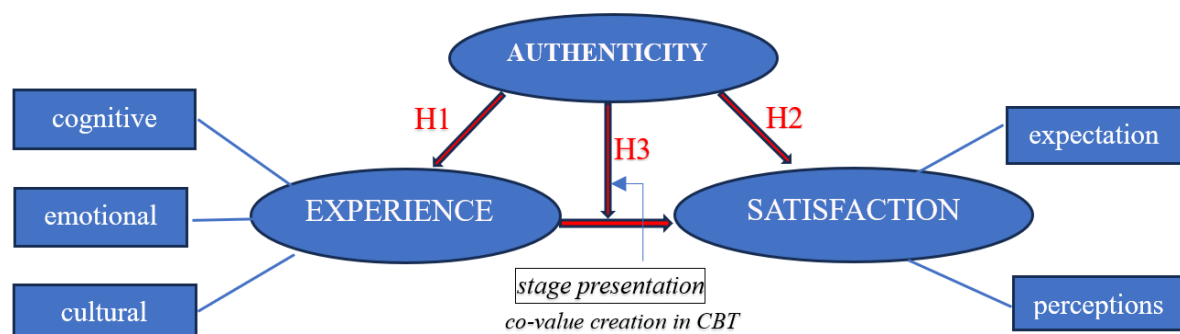
Figure 1. The proposed conceptual framework for this research

From the perspective of constructivism, authentic experiences provide opportunities for visitors to learn about the culture firsthand. Such engagement as interacting with locals, participating in traditional activities, or witnessing historical practices fosters a more meaningful experience than a staged performance. When a cultural experience feels genuine, it allows visitors to feel immersive, more connected to the place and its traditions, which can lead to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the culture. When a place feels true to its roots, it allows visitors to feel like they are experiencing something unique and special. This sense of discovery can lead to a more positive and memorable experience (MacCannell, 1973; Pearce & Moscardo, 1986; Cohen, 1979).

Hypothesis 1. The visitor's experience quality will be increased or decreased due to the high or low presentation of authenticity in ethnic tourism products or activities.

From the perspective of objectivism, authentic experiences often evoke strong emotions like wonder, curiosity, and respect the traditional or original artifacts and tangible heritages. This emotional engagement enhances the overall experience and leaves a lasting impression. When a cultural experience feels genuine, it aligns with tourists' expectations of what a place or tradition should be like. On meeting the visitor's expectations, this fulfillment leads to greater satisfaction. Experiencing something authentic can feel like a personal accomplishment for tourists; then, they are gone beyond the typical tourist experience and gained a deeper understanding of the culture. For example, a museum that showcases historical artifacts in context and explains their significance is likely to be more satisfying than one simply displaying objects. Attending a traditional festival with local participants and customs is likely to be

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more satisfying than a generic, tourist-focused event (Duncan, 1978; Stebbins, 1996; Wang, 1999; Reisinger & Steiner, 2005). *Hypothesis 2.* The more authenticity displayed or presented in tourism products/activities, the higher level of satisfaction tourists may perceive.

It can be inferred from the statistics that the tourism and hospitality in Ha Giang province have changed dramatically within 10 years now. This place has been promoted nationwide and globally as soon as it received the honorable tittle "Dong Van Karst Plateau" as a UNESCO Global Geopark in 2010. The protected land area is 2,356 km^2 and includes 4 large districts: Dong Van, Quan Ba, Meo Vac and Yen Minh. In this context, many more investment projects have been implemented, in terms of transportation infrastructure, lodging and catering services, diversified tourism products and significant cultural heritage management. There are more and more visitors coming to this destination to experience various tourism attractions and attend recreational activities such as: the rice terrace landscapes in Hoang Su Phi, Nho Que river and Tu San Canyon, Lung Cu National Flag Tower, Dragon Peak and Ma Pi Leng Mountain Pass, etc. The local tourism administration bureau claimed that the total number of visitors and tourism revenue has rapidly increased over the years, as described in the following table:

Objects	Unit	2014	2017	2019	2020	2023
Visitors	person	650,000	913,000	1,402,366	1,501,360	2,832,558
International		80,000	170,000	225,131	70,391	304,558
Domestic		530,000	743,000	1,177,235	1,430,969	2,528,000
Revenue	Billion VND	600	913	1,500	2,477	7,100
Tourism workforce	person	1,314	2,637	5,872	7,044	9,000

Table 1. The summary report of statistics of local tourism industry

(Source: Ha Giang Tourism Administration Department)

After collecting the database from selected stakeholders (by semi-structured in-depth interviews and questionnaire-based survey, the result was processed by SPSS 14.0 and nVivo software with the illustration as follows:

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R.Sq	Std.Error Est.	Durbin-Watson
Aut-CBT	.594[a]	.369	.345	.856	1.689

a. Predictors (constants): Material culture (MC), Artifacts & Heritages (AH), Language & Social Norms (SC), Traditions & Lifestyle (TL).

b. Dependent Variable: Authenticity in CBT products (AC)

Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1. Regression	119.763	5	23.953	32.468	.000[b]
Residual	216.890	294	.738		
Total	336.652	299			

Physical objects such as clothing styles or food preferences, architectural designs reflect customary preferences in lifestyle; at times natural landscapes too are symbolic factors defining certain cultures. The language spoken by members within a culture can greatly influence its perception as authentic; moreover, communication styles such as non-verbal cues may also play significant role in defining cultural norms or tradition. The 'tradition' construct refers to the preservation and continuation of customs, rituals, beliefs, and practices that have been passed down through generations within a particular culture or community. Whereas, 'heritage' encompasses the tangible and intangible aspects of a culture's historical legacy, including artifacts, monuments, language, stories, music, art forms, and other elements that reflect the cultural identity and roots of a community. Creative practices such as music, dance, literature as well as visual arts serve as mediums for expressing cultural narratives while also symbolizing authentic forms of self-expression for individuals who identify with those traditions. Besides, noticeably, the values held by a culture are integral to its authenticity. These may include ethical principles, social norms, moral codes, belief systems or philosophies that underpin the behaviors and decision-making processes within the cultural group.

Scale	Variable observed	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average variance Extracted (AVE)
Material culture (MC)	8	0.793	0.756	0.468
Artifacts & Heritages (AH)	6	0.755	0.793	0.489
Language & Social Norms (SC)	4	0.751	0.752	0.431
Traditions & Lifestyle (TL)	4	0.778	0.779	0.436

Table 2. The report of reliability of 4 main constructs

Many Vietnamese anthropologists and scholars in cultural studies proclaimed that the culture of a nation, people or a community is usually composed of two categories: material and spiritual. As mention earlier in the 2004 Yamato Declaration by UNESCO, 'tangible culture' refers to things that we can store or physically touch, for example: traditional clothing, tools, buildings, artwork, monuments, and modes of transportation. 'Tangible cultural heritage' refers to physical artefacts which are produced, maintained and transmitted intergenerationally in a society and considered worthy of preservation for the future. Whereas, cultural intangible heritages include traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.

Therefore, the tourists' perceptions of authenticity in their cultural tourism activities are much related to the material culture and traditional lifestyle, which all showcase the cultural identity of local residents.

Material culture (MC)	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Traditional costume (MC1)	12,06	9,091	,595	,759	,787
Food specialty (MC2)	11,92	8,180	,568	,637	,718
Accessories (MC3)	11,82	8,792	,359	,449	,706
House architecture (MC4)	12,21	8,022	,495	,518	,720
Musical instruments (MC5)	6,39	7,920	,454	,644	,453
Farming tools (MC6)	6,25	7,665	,402	,624	,431
Traditional handicrafts (MC7)	6,22	7,821	,392	,361	,487
Market place 'chợ phiên' (MC8)	6,15	7,349	,321	,338	,529

Table 3. The summary report of 8 items in Material Culture

Result of the reliability test for 22 items of 8 main constructs in the questionnaires shows that all the Corrected Item Total Correlation are higher than 0.3, which confirms the strong and significant relations with the characteristics of local cultural identity of the Hmong ethnic group. The two most important items to be easily figured out are Traditional costume (MC1) and Food specialty (MC2), with the correlation rate of ,595 and ,568 respectively, showing that tourists usually recognize the indigenous people through their perceptions of daily appearance and meals.

Interviews with the local community explained that more than 80% of the population in Dong Van, Meo Vac and 70% of the population in Yen Minh and Quan Ba districts are the Hmong people, who are recognized by their traditional costume (vay xoe hoa) made by 'lanh' natural fabrics. However, there are 4 different groups of Hmong people in Vietnam: 'Mông Lềnh' (colorful), 'Mông Đu' (white), 'Mông Dú' (black) and 'Mông Chúa' (green). Most of them would express their cultural identity by the colors and patterns of their costume, their accents and dialects in communication, as well as their names and kindships. In this case, the visitors or strangers from outside their family or village could not tell the differences among these 4 groups. Hmong women are known for their ornate silver jewelry, including necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and hairpins. These pieces are often intricately crafted with symbolic designs and motifs. They usually wear elaborately embroidered headdresses as part of their traditional attire. The designs and colors of the embroidery can vary by region or subgroup within the Hmong community.

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Women often carry beautifully embroidered bags with them as part of their everyday ensemble, showcasing skilled needlework and vibrant colors. The Hmong people are known for their indigo-dyed clothing, particularly indigo batik fabrics used to make skirts, jackets, and other garments. The rich blue hues are a signature feature of Hmong attire in the northern mountainous regions in Vietnam. Both men and women wear leg wraps made from colorful fabric as a practical accessory for protection during agricultural work or as a decorative element in traditional dress. Traditional silver belts with intricate patterns and embellishments are an important accessory worn by both men and women as part of formal attire.

Secondly, the interviews of stakeholders in these cases of community-based tourism villages in Ha Giang insisted that culinary arts or food culture was one of the first and foremost distinctions of the local Hmong ethnic groups to be presented to tourists. The top three most well-known dished to be experienced in Dong Van and Meo Vac districts are 'thắng cố' (horse meat and inners cooked in a hotpot with vegies), 'gà bản' (black chicken raised in the Hmong villages), and 'thịt gác bếp' (salted pork or buffalo meat and fumigated in the Hmong's kitchen stove). Additionally, "mèn mén" which is known as corn powder and "rượu ngô men lá" (corn wine fermented by wild herbs) are the other two special agricultural products consumed in the Hmong daily life. 87% of the interviewees mentioned these authentic foods of the Hmong indigenous and would recommend it as the specialties for culinary tourism or F&B services in Ha Giang.

Figure 2. Thắng cố hotpot of Hmong people
(source: https://paoquan.vn)

Figure 3. Gà bản chicken soup in Meo Vac
(source: https://luhanhvietnam.com.vn)

Thirdly, a high percentage of international visitors (91% respondents) would prefer to stay in local authentic houses in the Hmong villages for a better experience of cross-cultural understanding. Their perceptions of a traditional indigenous architecture are the wooden houses built on stilts, which is more popular among the Tay-Nung groups in the mountainous regions of northern Vietnam. At that point, the traditional houses of Hmong people are actually the 'nha trinh tuong' which are clay-built walls and roofs covered by 'ying-yang' earth-tiles. Originally, this kind of house has 3 sections (gian), with the two big wooden pillars considered as their most holly place of Hmong people; together with an extended roof called 'chai'. In addition, there is an attic above the living room (middle section) which is commonly used as a store-room for farming tools, household products and seasonal grains. Hence, it is to say that most visitors or non-tribal people can recognize the differences among the living architecture of the 19 ethnic groups in Ha Giang. In other words, their perceptions of authenticity in judging the homestay venues during their trips could be totally false in the perspective of the Hmong cultural identity.

On the other hand, this research investigated the 6 items of Artifacts and Heritages (AH) which can be representative for the cultural community-based tourism activities in Ha Giang province. The below table explains the levels of experience quality (appreciation of Hmong cultural heritages) at some popular tourist attractions in Ha Giang, using the Likert scale for satisfaction (from 1 to 5, from lowest to highest attitude towards Hmong cultural authenticity):

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AH items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.Deviation
Dinh thu ho Vuong (Hmong King Palace) in Sa Phin Town, Dong Van district	151	1.80	4.70	3.2333	.63252
Nha cua Pao, Lung Cam cultural village (Pao's House)	151	2.40	5.00	4.6493	.74609
Lung Tam handicraft village (Quan Ba district)	151	1.50	4.48	4.3907	.62518
Art Gallery of Hmong culture in Dong Van Ancient Town	151	1.40	4.20	3.4120	.56730
Pa Vi Community House in Meo Vac district (Mong cultural commune)	151	2.40	4.60	3.7483	.56738
Hanh Phuc Road Museum	151	1.20	4.25	3.3483	.52435

Table 4. The summary report of 6 Artifacts and Heritages items

The above statistics show that Lung Tam handicraft village in Quan Ba district and Pao's House in Lung Cam cultural village (Meo Vac district) are the two most popular tourist attractions with highest authenticity perceived by visitors (Mean = 4.6493 and 4.3907 respectively). Further discussions through in-depth interviews with stakeholders explain that Lung Tam commune is an authentic destination showing the daily cultural life and Hmong's traditional weaving craft from natural materials and using original sketchy looms. On the other hand, Pao's House, which was once the shooting scene of a famous awarded Vietnamese movie in 2006, is now home to typical upland architectures, ethnic minority people's simple way of life, and humble locals. The entire house consists of three U-shaped rows with earth-walled construction. The main row is located at the furthest corner of the house, which has two floors divided into many rooms: guest room, living room, kitchen, warehouse, cattle sheds, etc. The main yard is considered the 'gieng troi' (sky well), giving the house a spacious airy space that brings nature and sunlight into the house. Other exhibitions, galleries or museums in the research sites only display several artifacts or items of the Hmong community, without the surrounding settings or further explanation of their usages in daily life. Therefore, the object-presentation could not perform a high authenticity and representativeness of the indigenous Hmong people in Ha Giang.
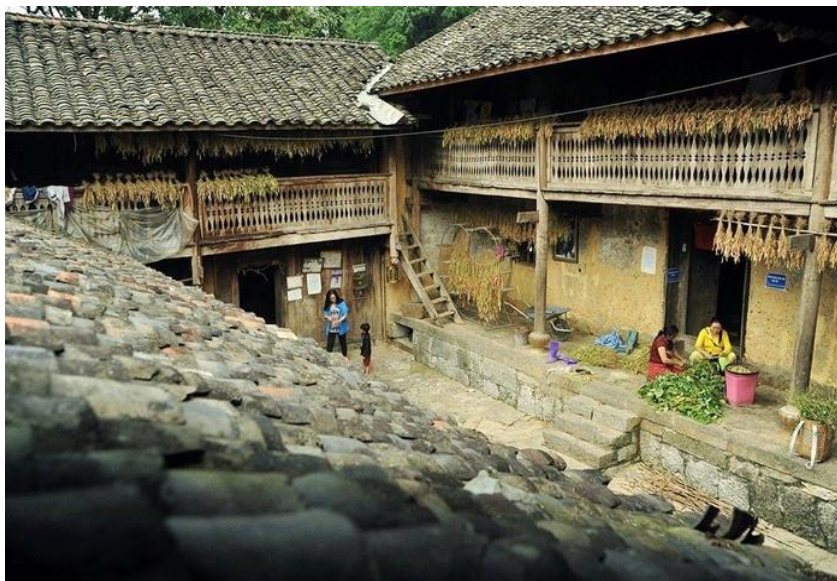
Figure 2. Pao's House in Lung Cam cultural village

(source: https://vietnamtimes.org.vn)

Last but not least, cultural tourism activities promoted in the popular tours in Ha Giang usually include visits to traditional handicrafts villages for visitors to experience the authentic cultural lifestyle of the indigenous Hmong

people. Especially, brocade weaving is the most well-known genuine craft tradition of the Hmong people all around the northern mountainous region of Vietnam. The Hmong people, in Ha Giang in particular, are known for their vibrant and intricate linen weaving. Visiting the Lung Tam village in Quang Ba district, tourists can experience local women sitting in front of the loom to make beautiful fabrics and unique brocade products. The handmade colorful patterns are one of the unique characteristics of Lung Tam's brocade products. These patterns depict the life of the people here, reflecting the desire for a prosperous and happy life. Besides, blacksmithing and silver-carving are quite common in the three districts Vi Xuyen, Xin Man, and Meo Vac of Ha Giang province. The blacksmiths use a combination of heat and hand tools to shape and mold metal into various objects, such as knives, plowshares, sickles, and household items. Local people there have been practicing the craft for generations and have developed unique techniques and designs. From rough scraps of silver, highland artisans have skillfully shaped and carved many delicate patterns showing the national cultural identity. It is the shapes, designs, and sophisticated patterns that make the silver carvings of the Hmong people different and stands out from those of other ethnic groups.

CBT activities	Meaning and values in local authenticity	Mean	Std. Deviation
Culinary arts	Most visitors would try one of typical/ authentic dishes of Hmong ethnic group	4.42	.893
Accommodation	Most visitors would experience the homestay in local villages to fully feel the authentic lifestyle and architecture	4.33	.885
Tourist attractions	More than 90% visitors appreciate the visit to museums, historical sites and cultural villages of Hmong people.	4.25	.867
Traditional music and dances	Half of visitors are excited to listen to or watch performances of Hmong people.	4.16	.855
Traditional costumes	60% visitors are interested in taking photos with local Hmong in their costumes or to try putting on these.	4.09	.833
Traditional handicraft	Half of visitors are excited to observe or try the craft activities of Hmong people.	3.73	.842
Shopping at local market 'chợ phiên'	More than 90% visitors would experience the local lively marketplace.	3.47	.802
Attending traditional rituals and games	40% visitors are interested in observing or participating in Hmong cultural rituals	3.30	.785

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

Ha Giang province has various and potential resources to develop community-based tourism or cultural ethnic tourism. Most of visitors (mainly international tourists) would prefer to visit traditional villages of the Hmong aboriginals and to experience their typical lifestyle and authentic heritages (both tangible and intangible). In general, the food culture (culinary arts), traditional costumes and local housing architecture are the three most well-known signatures of the Hmong community in Ha Giang and other mountainous provinces in Northern Vietnam. Besides, cultural tourists are usually attracted by the authenticity in Hmong's spiritual life, such as the public events of 'chợ phiên' (weekend flea-markets), 'Hội tết Gầu Tàu' (new year festival), "chợ tình Khâu Vai" (Khau Vai Lovers' Gatherings), etc.

In that regard, the cultural identity or traditional construct of Hmong ethnic community are reflected in their tourism products and services, such as the special taste and ingredients of their indigenous dishes (thang co, men men, ga ban, thit treo bep, ruou ngo…), their traditional costumes (vay xoe hoa), housing architecture (nha trinh tuong), authentic music and dances (Khen Tang Quay), traditional handicrafts of silver-carving and brocade weaving, etc.

The result of statistics analysis (in both qualitative and quantitative approaches) demonstrates that there is a significant relationship and positive correlation among the three main constructs of this studies, which are: cultural

authenticity, visitor's experience quality and tourist's overall satisfaction. Then, the three hypotheses were also clarified and confirmed: (H1) The visitor's experience quality will be increased or decreased due to the high or low presentation of authenticity in ethnic tourism products or activities; (H2) The more authenticity displayed or presented in tourism products/ activities, the higher level of satisfaction tourists may perceive; (H3) Tourists with a higher level of authenticity orientation and a clearer perception of indigenous cultural authenticity tend to have a better experience and satisfaction.

2. Discussion

2.1 Theoretical contributions

First, the findings of this research in some ways can clarify the constructs of cultural authenticity in tourism activities, which confirmed that the two popular aspects: objective authenticity and existential authenticity may have different impacts on visitor's experience and tourist's satisfaction during a cultural tour. Secondly, from the objectivism perspective, Hmong's material culture has a stronger influence on the experience of visitors while the spiritual lifestyle of local people in Ha Giang are usually performed in an in-authentic way (staged-authenticity). Thirdly, the hypotheses of this research also confirmed the fact that cultural authenticity plays an important role in creating memorable experience of visitors and therefore, it has positive impacts on the enhancement of tourist's overall satisfaction in the case of CBT tourism.

2.2 Practical implementations

Participating observation and quantitative data surveys in this paper proved that cultural tourists are really fascinated by authentic tourism products and interacting activities with local ethnic community in the mountainous regions of northern Vietnam. In that regard, this research would suggest the local authority in Ha Giang province to have a comprehensive management of tourism promotion as well as safeguarding the cultural heritages.

2.3 Limitations

As this research was conducted in a short time at several tourist sites (Meo Vac, Dong Van and Quan Ba districts) at the authors' convenience and ability, the in-depth interviews and questionnaire-based survey limited in small scale of respondents. Hence, there would be some bias in the qualitative and quantitative analysis process. Besides, the authors had many difficulties in communication with the elder Hmong people, who should be the key persons to explain their real traditions and authentic lifestyle.

Research recommendations

1. Tour agencies and host families should collaborate with academic scholars, experts in historical and cultural studies to figure out which is the genuine traditions and authentic heritages or typical characteristics of local Hmong culture so that the tourism stakeholders can present or perform them in an appropriate way in CBT tourism.

2. There should be more publications and exhibitions of authentic and original Hmong cultural traditions and heritages to be provided to visitors so that they can have a deeper and accurate understanding of the local community.

3. Augmented technology, for example the virtual reality, digitalization of database or documentaries about Hmong ethnic group and other advanced software in cultural tourism should be invested and operated in Ha Giang to help visitors have a better quality of experience, and therefore enhance the tourist's satisfaction as well as the local destination image.

4. Future research should do more observations and explore the visitor's experience and tourist's satisfaction in various interactive activities such as festivals, flea-markets, traditional rituals of local Hmong, in the approach of existential authenticity, with a longitudinal method.

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS AND THE DEMAND FOR WATER TOURISM IN THE MEKONG RIVER BASIN, LUANG PRABANG PROVINCE, LAO PDR

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Extended abstract

The objective of this research article is to study the relationship between demographic factors and the demand for water tourism in the Mekong River Basin among foreign tourists in Luang Prabang Province, Lao PDR. The sample group consisted of 250 Thai and foreign tourists who used boat trips on the Mekong River in Luang Prabang Province, Lao PDR. The sample size was determined from the population using the method of infinite population, using questionnaires to collect data. There are both Thai and English versions, consisting of 1) the demographic information of the respondents 2) the level of opinions regarding the factors that determine the demand for water tourism. Data were analyzed by descriptive analysis. The relationship between demographic factors and the demand for water tourism was employed by Chi-square (x^2) statistics. The research results revealed that the main demographic factors related to water tourism demand are continent (of origin) and average monthly income, followed by age, education, and occupation.

Keywords: Tourism Management, Water Tourism, Destination Development, Tourist Demographics.

The Mekong River is one of the most important international rivers in Asia, with a length of 4,350 km. It is the 12th longest in the world and flows through six countries: Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and China (World Tourism Organization, 2016) As a result, the Mekong River has become a point of attraction for tourism, one of which is water tourism activities, which are still popular today (Nonthapot et al., 2024). Water tourism, especially in the Mekong River, is a form of tourism activity that has the potential to be important for the economy of each member country and also affects the way of life of those living along the Mekong River, especially in Luang Prabang (Lao PDR), which was formerly the center of water transportation in the Mekong Subregion. For this reason, a variety of water tourism activities have been organized in the Mekong River Basin in Luang Prabang, such as rafting, long-tail boat trips, cruise ship services, or speed boats, etc. (Figure 1), and there are many service providers who come to serve both domestic and international tourists.

Figure 1 Types of boats for cruising the Mekong River in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR (Photography by the researcher)

Luang Prabang is connected to many tributaries linked to the Mekong River and has thus become one of the important centers of water tourism in the Mekong Subregion. As a result, large numbers of domestic and foreign tourists have visited Luang Prabang since it was certified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995. More over one million visitors visited Luang Prabang in 2023, up 491,979 or 91.49 percent from the previous year. The province received

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265,102 domestic tourists in 2023, a 5.60 percent decline from 2022, while international tourists increased by 197.63 percent (Vientiane Times, 2024). Luang Prabang officials expect more than 1.7 million people to visit the province during the Visit to Laos year 2024 and expect tourist spending of at least US$900 million (Vientiane Times, 2024).

In addition, under the Lao PDR's transportation development plan (2022), the Lao-China high-speed rail service will be launched, which will create a large number of tourist trips to Luang Prabang with the Lao-China high-speed rail services. High-speed rail travel has grown in popularity since it is faster than driving and less expensive than airline travel. Lao PDR's tourism industry could benefit greatly from an increase in demand for passenger rail traffic. Luang Prabang is one of the important stations of the Lao PDR-China railway line and there is also a boat route along the Mekong River. For centuries, the Mekong River has served as a vital highway in this region, transporting products, people, and ideas up through Laos. Even now, boat traveling is a major feature of the Mekong.

For these reasons, it will inevitably create demand for travel to the Mekong River in Luang Prabang Province and nearby areas as well. The growing number of tourists visiting Luang Prabang has an impact on various types of tourism demand as each tourist is different. The important demographic characteristics related to international tourists interested in Luang Prabang's water tourism activities may also be related to the local water tourism demand. Previously, study into the relationship between demographic characteristics and water tourism has been limited. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between demographic characteristics and the demand for water tourism among foreign visitors in Luang Prabang Province, Lao PDR, in order provide guidance for planning and supporting marketing development strategies. This can include areas with a similar tourism context in the Mekong Basin, such as Thailand or Cambodia, etc., and may lead to the expansion of the water tourism industry and the region's economy in the future.

Objectives

The objective of this research article is to study the relationship between demographic factors and the demand for water tourism in the Mekong River Basin among foreign tourists in Luang Prabang Province, Lao PDR in order provide guidance for planning and supporting marketing development strategies.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this study is the tourist demographic factors would influence demand for water tourism in the Mekong River Basin among foreign tourists in Luang Prabang Province, Lao PDR.

| Demographic factors | → | Demand for water tourism |
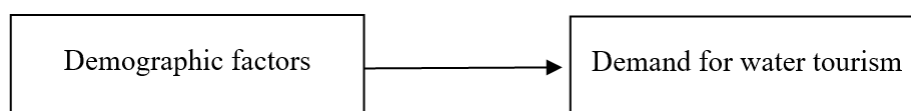
Figure 2 Conceptual framework

Research Methodology (Topic Font: Time New Romans (Bold) 12 pts.)

1. Populations and Sample

The population in this study includes international tourists (excluding Lao tourists) who used the cruise service on the Mekong River in Luang Prabang Province, Lao PDR.

The sample was calculated from international tourists (not including Lao tourists) who used boat trips on the Mekong River in Luang Prabang Province, Lao PDR, along the Huai Sai-Luang Prabang route. Since the exact population size is unknown, the sample size was calculated using the formula for calculating an unknown population at a confidence level of 95% by choosing to apply W.G. Cochran's technique for calculating sample size (Cochran, 1977) by setting the probability ratio at 0.2, resulting in a sample size of 246. However, the researchers collected data from 250 samples, which is consistent with the studies of Sihabutr and Nonthapot (2021).

2. Research Tools

This research is quantitative research using questionnaires to collect data from a research sample. The population was foreign tourists who used boat trips on the Mekong River in Luang Prabang Province, Lao PDR. A questionnaire was used to collect data with both Thai and English versions. The questionnaire was divided into two parts, consisting of eight questions, with details as follows.

Part 1: General information of the respondents

Part 2: Level of opinions on factors that determine demand for water tourism

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Research tools experimentation

Before collecting data, the researcher tested the content validity of the research instrument, Content Validity Index = CVI, which had a value of 0.95 > 0.8 (Davis, 1992; Grant & Davis, 1997; Polit & Beck, 2006) from five experts. After that, an experiment was conducted with 30 quantitative research samples in the Nakhon Phanom province area to check the reliability of the questionnaire by considering the Cronbach value, with a value greater than 0.7 showing that the questionnaire was reliable. (Cronbach,1990: 204). The tool was then improved and used to collect data from real samples in Luang Prabang Province, Lao PDR.

3. Data Collection

Once the sample size had been determined, the next step was to divide the area to collect research data by identifying the ports that serve tourists and calculating the proportions based on the number of ports in the Luang Prabang area. The sample size was then classified according to the proportion of tourist numbers from the Navigation office of Luang Prabang (Table 1) using convenience sampling. Approval was requested verbally from the port supervisor at Luang Prabang Province in advance of data collection, and the questionnaire administrator then distributed the questionnaires to volunteers in the port area by informing the volunteer respondents of the interview concerns.

Table 1 The proportions for determining sample size according to port area

Port at Luang Prabang	Proportion of number of tourists (percentage)	Number of samples
Ban Don Port	10	25
Wat Xiang Thong Port	40	100
Wat Nong Port	30	75
The old port	20	50
Total	100	250

Source: Calculated from inquiries summarizing reports of the Navigation office of Luang Prabang.

4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive analysis, divided into 2 parts as follows.

4.1 Questionnaire Part 1 Data analysis of demographic factors includes: origin (continent), gender, age, education level, occupation, and average monthly income by analyzing with frequency and percentage

4.2 Questionnaire Part 2 Analysis of the relationship between demographic factors and water tourism demand. This section is analyzed with Chi-square (x^2) statistics.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

From the data collection, it was found that majority of international tourists came from Europe (130 people, 52.0 percent), most of whom were female (129 people, 51.6 percent), aged between 21-30 years (110 people, 44.0 percent), the education level was at the associate/bachelor's degree level (98 people, 39.2 percent), the average monthly income was more than 100,000 baht/month (60 people, 24.0 percent), most respondents have the purpose of tourism for relaxation (172 people, 68.8 percent), most of whom had previous experience in water tourism (204 people, 81.6 percent), and the type of water tourism activity that tourists were especially interested in was slow boat/tour boats (182 people , 72.8%).

The results of the analysis of the relationship between demographic factors and the demand for water tourism, and the study of the factors that determine demand for water tourism, and re-visits of tourists in Luang Prabang are presented below.

The relationship between origin (continent) and water tourism demand analyzed from Chi-square statistics (x^2) revealed that tourists' origin (continent) is related to behavior to recommend activities or water tourism to family and others. In addition, tourists' origin (continents) is related to their behavioral intentions to review and rate water tourism, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 The relationship between tourists' origin (continent) and tourist demand for water tourism on the Mekong River in Luang Prabang.

List	Tourist demands	Value	df	Asymp.sig. (2-sided)
1	I have a desire to do water tourism activities on the Mekong River.	13.675	20	0.847
2	I plan on going back to water tourism in the future, even though the service fee changes according to the economic situation.	10.186	20	0.965
3	I intend to recommend tourist activities or water tours to families and others.	46.607***	16	0.000
4	I intend to review and rate water travel on the Mekong River.	30.736*	20	0.059
5	I intend to share information about water tourism activities and news through online community channels such as Facebook Fan page, etc.	25.106	20	0.197

The relationship between gender and the demand for water tourism was analyzed by employing Chi-square (x^2) statistics. It was found that gender was not related to demand for water tourism as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 The relationship between gender and water tourism demand on the Mekong River in Luang Prabang.

List	Tourist demands	Value	df	Asymp.sig. (2-sided)
1	I have a desire to do water tourism activities on the Mekong River.	5.394	10	0.863
2	I plan on going back to water tourism in the future, even though the service fee changes according to the economic situation.	8.896	10	0.542
3	I intend to recommend tourist activities or water tours to families and others.	4.539	8	0.806
4	I intend to review and rate water travel on the Mekong River.	7.527	10	0.675
5	I intend to share information about water tourism activities and news through online community channels such as Facebook Fan page, etc.	9.719	10	0.465

The relationship between age range and the demand for water tourism was analyzed by employing Chi-square (x^2) statistics. It was found that age range was related to behavioral intentions to review and rate water tourism as shown in Table 5.

Table 5 The relationship between age group and the demand for water tourism on the Mekong River in Luang Prabang.

List	Tourist demands	Value	df	Asymp.sig. (2-sided)
1	I have a desire to do water tourism activities on the Mekong River.	18.331	25	0.828
2	I plan on going back to water tourism in the future, even though the service fee changes according to the economic situation.	30.345	25	0.212
3	I intend to recommend tourist activities or water tours to	28.340	20	0.102

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List	Tourist demands	Value	df	Asymp.sig. (2-sided)
	families and others.			
4	I intend to review and rate water travel on the Mekong River.	42.654**	25	0.015
5	I intend to share information about water tourism activities and news through online community channels such as Facebook Fan page, etc.	31.774	25	0.165

The relationship between education level and the demand for water tourism was analyzed by employing Chi-square (x^2) statistics. It was found that education level was related to the intention to review and rate water tourism as shown in Table 6.

Table 6 The relationship between education and the demand for water tourism on the Mekong River in Luang Prabang.

List	Tourist demands	Value	df	Asymp.sig. (2-sided)
1	I have a desire to do water tourism activities on the Mekong River.	16.783	15	0.332
2	I plan on going back to water tourism in the future, even though the service fee changes according to the economic situation.	15.433	15	0.421
3	I intend to recommend tourist activities or water tours to families and others.	17.907	12	0.119
4	I intend to review and rate water travel on the Mekong River.	22.658*	15	0.092
5	I intend to share information about water tourism activities and news through online community channels such as Facebook Fan page, etc.	16.777	15	0.332

The relationship between occupation and the demand for water tourism was analyzed by employing Chi-square (x^2) statistics. It was found that occupation was related to behavioral intention to share information about activities and news regarding water tourism through online community channels, such as Facebook Fan page, etc. as shown in Table 7.

Table 7 The relationship between occupation and water tourism demand on the Mekong River in Luang Prabang.

List	Tourist demands	Value	df	Asymp.sig. (2-sided)
1	I have a desire to do water tourism activities on the Mekong River.	19.413	25	0.777
2	I plan on going back to water tourism in the future, even though the service fee changes according to the economic situation.	23.391	25	0.555
3	I intend to recommend tourist activities or water tours to families and others.	23.375	20	0.271
4	I intend to review and rate water travel on the Mekong River.	24.765	25	0.476
5	I intend to share information about water tourism activities and news through online community channels	36.661*	25	0.062

List	Tourist demands	Value	df	Asymp.sig. (2-sided)
	such as Facebook Fan page, etc.			

The relationship between average monthly income and the demand for water tourism was analyzed by employing Chi-square (x^2) statistics. It was found that average monthly income was related to behavior and intention to review and rate water tourism. In addition, average monthly income was also related to the behavioral intention to share information about water tourism activities and news through online community channels such as Facebook Fan pages, etc. as shown in Table 8.

Table 8 The relationship between average monthly income and the demand for water tourism.

List	Tourist demands	Value	df	Asymp.sig. (2-sided)
1	I have a desire to do water tourism activities on the Mekong River.	21.747	30	0.863
2	I plan on going back to water tourism in the future, even though the service fee changes according to the economic situation.	19.684	30	0.925
3	I intend to recommend tourist activities or water tours to families and others.	28.476	24	0.240
4	I intend to review and rate water travel on the Mekong River.	40.418*	30	0.097
5	I intend to share information about water tourism activities and news through online community channels such as Facebook Fan page, etc.	43.329*	30	0.055

When the data obtained were synthesized, it showed the relationships between tourist demographic factors and the demand for water tourism as shown in Figure 3. Overall, it was found that the demographic factors most related to water tourism demand were origin (continent) and average monthly income, and the next most important factors were age range, education level, and occupation.
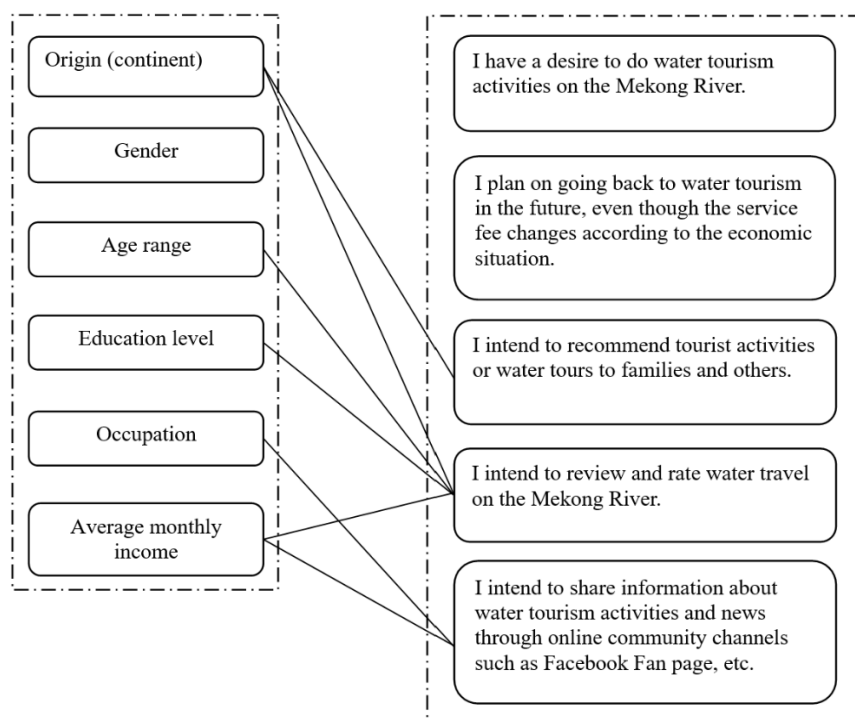
Figure 3 Diagram summarizing the relationships between demographic factors and water tourism demand.

2. Discussion

Existing research clearly shows that consumer attitudes and behaviors differ depending on their demographic characteristics (Amalia et al., 2020; Patterson & Balderas, 2020; Wang et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2020). In addition, the evaluating tourist destinations in terms of tourist demands is an expanding study topic (Buckley, 2018; Calero & Turner, 2020; Gunter et al., 2019; Song et al., 2019). This study therefore places importance on the relationship between the demographic characteristics and the demand of tourists, especially international tourists.

From the results of the study, the relationships between tourist demographic factors and the demand for water tourism, overall, it was found that the demographic factors most related to water tourism demand were origin (continent) and average monthly income, and the next most important factors were age range, education level, and occupation.

Song et al. (2023) state that the most important individual and travel-related characteristics are variables such as age (including generation and senior dummies), income, travel companion (travel party size and children), previous visits (first or repeat visit), price, and seasonality (including time trend, weekend, and holiday effects). Which is consistent with Gidebo (2021) stating that international tourist flows are primarily driven by demand variables in originating countries and supply factors in destination countries. Income, leisure time, travel costs, comparable destination prices, relative exchange rates, and marketing all have an impact on international tourist demand.

Since demographic considerations are known to influence water tourism demand and affect the different tourism needs of tourists, water tourism operators must offer diverse services to tourists. In addition, tourists also intended to share information about water tourism activities and news through online community media channels, in order to promote and present water tourism activities to other tourism target groups who follow online community media. Therefore, water tourism operators should be aware and give importance to water transportation services and related services. Operators should pay attention to the types of boats providing services, which must be diverse according to travel purposes, and ensure they have good security measures regarding water tourism services, and a clear service schedule so that tourists can plan and manage their time to travel appropriately.

Theoretical implications – This study proposed a theoretical framework for the relationship between the demographic factors of international tourists and the demand for water tourism in the Mekong River Basin, Luang Prabang Province, Lao PDR. It consists of two important structures: firstly, tourist demographics and general information; secondly, tourism demand in term of tourist behavior intentions. Previous study has indicated that people from various geographic regions perceive visual images and experiences differently depending on their country of origin (Britton, 1979; Thurot & Thurot, 1983). Therefore, tour operators should take into account the demographic factors of tourists and take care of their preferences as well (Cho, 2010). Institutional quality influences a tourist's choice of destination; hence, it should be a crucial component in a theoretical basis of tourism demand (Mushtaq et al., 2021).

Practical implications – This study supports the notion that understanding differences among tourists is critical for understanding the demands of water tourism's target market. In order to encourage continued development in the number of international tourists. Water tourism stakeholders, ship owners, port facilities provider, water tour operators and government sectors are able to apply the findings of the study to establish effective water tourism in the Mekong River Basin, Luang Prabang Province, Lao PDR., react to the needs of tourists. In addition, communication technology should be used in tourism promotion because it can help tourists access information about tourist attractions.

Social implications (Policy contribution) – While tourism has positive social impacts on destinations, it also has some negative consequences. Rivers are a natural resource that is equally vital to all others. Tourism that is not properly handled has a harmful influence on the surrounding environment. The government and related private sectors should formulate policies and improve water tourism plans as a framework for future development, which should take into account the impact on the way of life of people along the Mekong River, including pollution that will occur from tourism. In addition, water tourism should be promoted concretely in order to expand the tourism market widely.

Research recommendations

1. This study focuses only on one destination. The applicability of these findings may therefore be limited to regional destinations where water transport plays an important role. Future research should include more types of destinations, such as island destinations or areas characterized by water transport in different landscapes.

2. This study mainly examined international tourists. Future research should include domestic tourists or focus only on the tourists from the country that delivers the most visitors to the destination.

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3. This study used chi-square to find relationships between variables. Future studies may use other statistical or analytical programs to add diversity to the research process.

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FACTORS INFLUENCING THE STUDENTS' CHOICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE DEEP SOUTH OF THAILAND IN THE POST-COVID-19 OUTBREAK

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Abstract

This study investigated factors influencing Deep South Thai university students' choice preferences, as well as their relative relevance. In total, 351 first-year students aged 18 and older who studied management-, business- and tourism-related programs participated in this research. Using best-worst-scaling (BWS) surveys in a pilot study, researchers can establish relative relevance of factors influencing respondents' faculty higher education decisions. The demographic data showed that most participants were female, had no more than two siblings, and had parents to pay for their education expenses. The research findings indicate that job opportunities, teaching quality, financial aid such as scholarships, registration fee discounts, acceptable tuition and expenditures, and program and course content influence university choices. This research has implications for universities and educators gaining insights into students' preferences in higher education selection in the post COVID-19 era.

Keywords: Higher education choices, students' higher education preferences, the Deep South of Thailand

Introduction

The process of choosing a university refers to how students decide whether or not to attend a higher education institution and where (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Since higher education has a unique context, the decision-making process for choosing an educational institution is shared between students and parents, but the use of educational services is utilized by learners (Garcia, & Mireles-Rios, 2020). Thailand, as reported by World Health Organization (2023), is one of the fastest-aging societies, with a declining birth rate from 11.95 per thousand people in 2011 to 9.00 in 2021 (Satista, 2024). Because the number of students has been declining, it is crucial for educational institutions to adapt to changing educational needs. At the same time, technological development and the availability of the Internet allow Thai students who want to pursue higher education to have access to a wide range of educational resources. Accordingly, students are able to search and compare the information to make an informed decision when choosing admission to higher education institutions.

There is a paucity of literature determining factors that influence the decisions to choose higher educational institutions in Thailand. Only Agrey and Lampadan's (2014) research investigated university choice factors among high school students and first-year students in universities in the central region and found that educational support, facilities, learning environment, and employment opportunities were dominant factors in students' decision-making. Similarly, Sankham and Hamra (2016) showed that the service marketing mix, including physical factors (facilities), products (courses), processes (services), prices (tuition fees), and locations, significantly affects the student's choices. A recent systematic literature review of factors influencing Thai students' university choices by Ditta-Apichai and Phairot (2022) illustrated three pillars: internal (e.g., personal interests and motivation), external (e.g., university image and reputation, study programs, facilities and supporting system), and interpersonal factors (e.g., parents' needs and recommendations from teachers, friends and acquaintances) that are considered critical for students' choice decisions. However, there is little knowledge about how students prioritize different factors in their higher education selection in their decision-making process.

Importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in changes in socio-economic conditions, particularly the loss of income and job security of parents, as well as the different levels of learning ability of vulnerable students (Jitsuchon, 2021). This situation may have an impact on the factors that influence students' decision-making processes

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when selecting higher education institutions. Therefore, this research investigates the factors that influence university education choices, particularly in Thailand's Deep South, a popular tourist destination where the COVID-19 pandemic has directly impacted tourism as one of the main industries (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2020).

Objectives

1. To study the factors influencing the higher education selection of university students in the Deep South region of Thailand,

2. To rank the relative importance of factors influencing university students' choice of higher education in the Deep South region of Thailand.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

First-year university students are directly within the demographic of interest for understanding factors influencing higher education selection. Their recent experience with the decision-making process offers fresh and relevant insights on the key elements that influenced their choice of university and their study program. In this study, first-year students aged 18 years or older pursuing courses in Management, business administration, and tourism and hospitality at the Thai universities located in Songkhla, Satun, and Yala provinces in the Deep South region of Thailand. The sample comprised 351 individuals, selected utilizing the sample table developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a widely recognized and extensively employed resource in quantitative research, as noted by Rahi (2017). This research used purposive or judgmental sampling technique, followed by convenience sampling to participate in answering the questionnaire. The participants were first-year student volunteers aged 18 years and older who had provided consent and expressed willingness to partake in completing the questionnaire at each respective higher education institution.

2. Research Tools

This research uses the Best-Worst Scaling (BWS) survey to explore factors influencing higher education choices. The BWS questionnaire reflects the selection criteria (i.e., factors) by allowing a decision maker to choose the best (i.e., most desirable, most important) and worst (i.e., least desirable, least important) criteria, and then the decision maker compares and selects the best and worst criteria from a variety of other factors listed (Rezaei, 2015). As a result, the BWS method enables the researchers to understand the interrelationships among various factors that influence decision-making. Importantly, the BSW survey was designed by following the five-step instruction provided by Razaei (2015: 51-52). The BWS questionnaire is divided into three parts: demographic information, determinant factors of criteria in 16 best-worst selections (each of them represents 6 of the 16 influencing factors retrieved from the literature review), and finally comments or suggestions. An example of the BWS questions is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: An example of the BWS questions translated in English

Most wanted	Factors	Least wanted
	The student admission system has a quota system or direct admission.	
	Attending a university/faculty promotes self-esteem and family pride.	
	There are job opportunities while studying.	
	There are job opportunities after graduation.	
	The university is close to home.	
	The university is highly recognized by public.	

Three experts checked the content validity of the questionnaire, assigned 1 point to corresponding questions, 0 point to the unsure question, and -1 point to inconsistency questions. The questions with Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) values ranging from 0.67 to 1.00 were selected. In addition, all questions in the survey are in Thai and thus, there are no language barriers in understanding and answering the survey.

3. Data Collection

Before the data collection process, the researchers sent an invitation letter to public higher education institutions in the Deep South region requesting first-year student volunteers aged 18 and older who were enrolled in programs related to management, business administration, and tourism and hospitality to participate in the research.

During the data collection, the volunteer respondents were required to answer either paper-based or online questionnaire. The students have the option to indicate their willingness to participate in the research project either by providing a signature on the consent form or by selecting the option to complete the online questionnaire. It takes about 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The researchers collected data for two months, from January 15 to March 15, 2023, and then combined the online and paper-based data for statistical analysis. In total, there were 351 respondents completed surveys in this study.

4. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data and the findings were presented in tabular forms which are accompanied by explanations.

1) Demographic information about respondents determined by frequency and percentage is presented in the table.

2) Determinants of students' choices for higher education were presented in statistical forms such as frequency, best-worst choice differences, standardized value (Z-score), and rank tests for analysis and summary of research results.

Results

1. Demographic Information

This study included 351 first-year students aged 18 and older who provided the following demographic data: gender, the individual responsible for covering education expenses, levels of education of parents, and the number of siblings. The findings presented in Table 2 indicate that the majority of respondents were female, accounting for 67.14 percent, with 94 females constituting 26.86 percent. Additionally, there were 19 LGBTQ+ respondents (5.43%) and three non-respondents (0.57%).

Table 2: Number and percentage of respondents by gender

Gender	Number of respondents	Percentage
Male	94	26.86
Female	235	67.14
LGBTQ+	19	5.43
Don't want to answer	3	0.57
Total	**351**	**100.00**

Table 3 shows that parents were responsible for education expenses of 56.70 percent of the respondents, while the remaining respondents were only supported by mothers (16.24 percent) and only by fathers (10.83 percent). Interestingly, 10.54 percent of the respondents indicated that other people covered their education expenses, while the remaining 5.69 percent chose not to provide the information.

Table 3: Number and percentage of person(s) responsible for the cost of education of the respondents

Person(s) responsible for the cost of education	Number of respondents	Percentage
Parents	199	56.70
Father only	38	10.83
Mother only	57	16.24
Others	37	10.54
Don't want to answer	20	5.69
Total	**351**	**100.00**

The demographic results shown in Table 4 further reveal that 52.42 percent of respondents had parents who did not complete their higher education, 16.24 percent of respondents had parents who held an undergraduate degree, and only 1.71 percent of respondents had parents who held a graduate degree. At last, 29.63 percent of the participants chose not to disclose the educational background of their parents.

Table 4: Number and percentage of parents' highest education levels of the respondents

Parents' highest education levels	Number of respondents	Percentage
Secondary school/vocational school certificates	184	52.42
Undergraduate	57	16.24
Graduate	6	1.71
Don't want to answer	104	29.63
Total	**351**	**100.00**

Finally, the demographic data shows that over 61 percent of the respondents had either one or two siblings in a family, while 22.79 percent of the respondents had three or more siblings. Only 9.40 percent of the respondents were the family's only child. Additionally, 6.27 percent of the respondents did not reveal the number of siblings in a family.

Table 5: Number and percentage of the respondents' number of siblings in a family

Number of siblings	Number of respondents	Percentage
None	33	9.40
One sibling	108	30.77
Two siblings	108	30.77
Three siblings or more	80	22.79
Don't want to answer	22	6.27
Total	**351**	**100.00**

2. Factors influencing the students' choice in higher education

The researchers examined various factors that influenced undergraduate students' decision to pursue higher education. The participants of this research were first-year university students aged 18 and older who chose to study in the program related to business administration, management, tourism, and hospitality at higher education institutions in the Deep South region of Thailand. In total, 351 respondents made the best-worst choice 5,616 times (351 respondents x 16 times). The data are presented in the forms of frequency of choice selections, standardized value (Z-score), and ranking.

The findings presented in Table 6 indicate the relative importance of influencing factors on the respondents' higher education selection criteria when choosing higher education. A standardized value (Z-score) is the ratio between the deviation of the score from the mean and the standard deviation of the difference between the number of times selecting the most desired (best) and least desired (worst) factors are selected. The findings suggest that among the sixteen factors, job opportunities after graduation (788 times, z-score of 2.07) was the most important criterion. Teaching quality was ranked as the second most important factor influencing their higher education choice (433 times, z-score of 1.14), followed by financial support (362 times, z-score of 0.95), reasonable tuition and expenses (276 times, z-score of 0.72), and program or course content that met students' needs (187 times, z-score of 0.49). Interestingly, attending a university or faculty that can promote their self-esteem and family pride was in the

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sixth rank (181 times, z-score of 0.48), followed by good university facilities (180 times, z-score of 0.47), and the appropriate duration of the study program (181 times, z-score of 0.26).

Finally, the adverse score of the best-worst difference indicate that students placed less importance on factors related to the admission system, faculty or program advertisements, job opportunities during their studies, recommendations from teachers, relatives, friends, and parents, public recognition of the university, and the university's proximity to their home when making higher education decisions.

Table 6: The relative importance of the factors influencing the students' choice in higher education

Influencing factors	Difference (Best-Worst regarding the number of selections)	Z scores (Best-Worst)	Rank
There are job opportunities after graduation.	788	2.07	1
Teaching quality	433	1.14	2
Financial support is available (e.g. scholarships, registration fee discounts).	362	0.95	3
Reasonable tuition and expenses	276	0.72	4
Program/course content meets students' needs	187	0.49	5
Attending a university/faculty promotes self-esteem and family pride.	181	0.48	6
The university has good facilities.	180	0.47	7
The duration of the study program is appropriate.	97	0.26	8
The student admission system has a quota system or direct admission.	-16	-0.04	9
Direct faculty/program advertisement/events such as school visits and university-world opening events, etc.	-78	-0.20	10
There are job opportunities while studying.	-202	-0.53	11
Faculty/program advisement through various media (e.g., flyers, social media, and posters).	-374	-0.98	12
Recommendations from teachers/ relatives/ friends	-382	-1.0	13
The university is highly recognized by public.	-398	-1.04	14
Recommendations from parents	-417	-1.23	15
The university is close to home.	-587	-1.54	16

Discussion

The results of this study confirm previous research that choosing a university to study a course is a complex process that requires consideration of several factors that influence learners' decisions before entering higher education (e.g., Hussin et al., 2019). Accordingly, universities face more complex challenges due to changes in prospective students' requirements (Simões & Soares, 2010); as a result, the process of choosing courses and universities becomes increasingly complex for students in the face of many choices and uncertainty in their future

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careers.

In line with the previous literature (e.g., Dessy et al., 2019; Ditta-Apichai & Phairot, 2022), the research findings highlight that university programs with potential job opportunities after graduation and meeting the needs of the labor market are significantly important factors in students' choice of further higher education, especially after the COVID-19 crisis when undergraduate students are worried about their studies and future careers (Aristovnik et al., 2020). The results of this study also support Yaacob et al.'s (2020) findings that the quality of teaching and learning affects Malaysian students' choice to study at the university. In addition, this research shows that financial support (e.g., scholarships, registration fee discounts) and reasonable tuition and expenses are important in choosing places to study for the students because this support can reduce the burden on their parents to spend on education.

This research, in contrast to previous literature (e.g., Ditta-Apichai & Phairot, 2022; Hussin et al., 2019), demonstrates that factors such as the admission system, direct and indirect faculty or program promotion, job opportunities during their studies, recommendations from teachers, relatives, friends, and parents, public recognition of the university, and the university's proximity to their home, have less influence on students' decisions. Possibly, students may be concerned about their future career in the post-COVID-19 crisis (Aristovnik et al., 2020), and as a result, factors that are irrelevant to their career focus are less prioritized when making a higher education choice decision.

Importantly, the study contributes theoretically by advancing the understanding of the complex decision-making process in the context of higher education selection by exploring multifaceted factors that influence the students' choices ranging from academic offerings to personal aspirations and socioeconomic background. This can enrich existing theories in consumer behavior and provide new insights into how decisions are made in the context of higher education.

Conclusion and Research Recommendations

1. Conclusion

This research aims to investigate the factors influencing university students' higher education choice in the Deep South and their relative importance in the choice decision. The demographic data indicates that the majority of respondents were female, with no more than two siblings, and their parents did not complete higher education. Parents were responsible for covering the cost of education. When considering the importance of factors influencing the choice of higher education, the top five priorities were job opportunities after graduation, teaching quality, financial support, reasonable tuition and expenses, and program or course content that met students' needs. In contrast, the top five least important factors included the university's proximity to the students' home, recommendations from parents, public recognition of the university, recommendations from teachers/ relatives/ friends, and faculty/program advisement through various types of media (e.g., flyers, social media, and posters)

2. Research Recommendations

The practical contribution of the study lies in providing actionable insights for policymakers, educational institutions, and stakeholders involved in higher education. By understanding the factors that influence students' choices, institutions can tailor their marketing strategies, program offerings, and support services to better meet the needs and expectations of prospective students. According to the research findings, universities should focus on developing programs that are in demand in the labor market and offer quality education tailored to the needs of learners. To enhance program development, it is important that the universities work together with public and private organizations, or future graduate users, to characterize the desirable characteristics and personalities of graduates from establishments. Furthermore, universities should make short- and long-term plans to consider the cost of education in relation to parents' economic circumstances and increase students' access to financial assistance.

Finally, this research solely focuses on Thailand's Deep South region. Further research is suggested to investigate the factors that influence students' decisions to pursue higher education in other areas or countries for comparison.

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THE IMPACT OF DESTINATION IMAGE ON TOURISTS' RETURN INTENTION AND SOCIAL WORD-OF-MOUTH BEHAVIOUR TOWARD THE DESTINATION TRAVEL TO NHA TRANG

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Extended abstract

To evaluate the impact of destination image on visitors' intention to return and social word-of-mouth contribution behavior towards Nha Trang tourism destination, the authors conducted the above research Using expert interviews, target group discussions, and quantitative PLS - SEM structural modeling methods. Research results show that destination image directly and in the same direction affects tourist satisfaction, satisfaction directly and in the same direction affects visitors' intention to return, satisfaction affects social word-of-mouth, and social word-of-mouth positively influences return intention. From the research results, the authors propose management implications (1) to build the image of Nha Trang destination in a modern - civilized - friendly direction, (2) to increase satisfaction and intention to return. Social word-of-mouth among visitors can be improved by improving tourism infrastructure and service quality, strengthening environmental protection, and developing sustainable tourism. At the same time, the Nha Trang tourist destination should be promoted through modern media and social networks.

Keywords: Destination image, Nha Trang, satisfaction, social word of mouth, return intention.

1. Introduction

Tourism research has long recognized the importance of destination image in shaping tourists' behaviors and perceptions. A favorable destination image enhances tourists' overall experience, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. Numerous studies have explored the correlation between destination image and visitor satisfaction (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Prayag, 2009). Research by Prayag (2009), Chiu & Cheng (2016), and Chen & Tsai (2007) confirms that satisfaction fosters tourist loyalty, influencing return behaviors and positive word-of-mouth. Empirical research by Kandampully & Suhartanto (2000) and Mohammad et al. (2011) demonstrates a positive correlation between destination image and satisfaction.

An attractive destination image can draw tourists, but their satisfaction during the visit determines their likelihood of returning. Tourists' return intentions, a measure of satisfaction, play a crucial role in the socio-economic growth of the destination, increasing tourism earnings and stimulating related industries. Customer satisfaction is critical in marketing efforts to attract tourists and maintain a loyal customer base.

While many recent studies have explored the relationship between satisfaction and destination image, a comprehensive examination of the interrelationships among destination image, satisfaction, word-of-mouth, and revisit intention is lacking. This study aims to (i) identify the relationships between destination image, satisfaction, social word-of-mouth, and tourists' revisit intentions and (ii) develop a quantitative model of these relationships.

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Using quota and snowball sampling methods, a survey of 700 domestic and international tourists visiting Nha Trang was conducted for analysis. Structural equation modeling was applied to examine the relationships among the constructs and test the eight proposed hypotheses. In the context of Nha Trang, a renowned coastal city in Vietnam, understanding the impact of destination image on tourists' return intention and social word-of-mouth behavior is particularly relevant.

2. Literature review

2.1. Concept of Destination Image

Destination image is a collection of beliefs, ideas, and perceptions about a destination's attributes and activities (Dadgostar & Isotalo, 1992; Crompton, 1979). It involves synthesizing individual viewpoints, convictions, and impressions. Destination image includes perceptions of the destination's unique attributes and the overall impressions it imparts. It comprises functional factors related to physical and tangible aspects and psychological factors related to intangible elements (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991).

2.2. Concept of Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is the degree of fit between the provided services and the customers' expectations and desires. According to Oliver (1980), customer satisfaction has been defined and evaluated through various methods. Furthermore, Oliver (1999) asserts that customer satisfaction is a personal perception of the degree to which consumer needs, expectations, and goals are met pleasantly and attractively.

Tourism satisfaction is a crucial determinant (Chen & Tsai, 2007). It profoundly influences the selection of tourist destinations, the assessment and reconsideration of destination-related decisions (Chen & Phou (2013), and, notably, recommendations to others (Smith & Colgate, 2007). Consequently, enhancing tourist satisfaction improves the quality of experiences and plays a pivotal role in augmenting revenue and profits for businesses within the tourism industry.

2.3. Concept of Intention to Return to the Tourist Destination

In the tourism industry, the intention to return is an essential indicator of tourist loyalty to a specific destination. Evaluating the intention to return is expected due to its close relationship with the concept of repeat loyalty to the destination. This indicates that the sustainability and development of a tourism destination depends on its ability to attract returning tourists, not just first-time visitors (Meleddu et al., 2015). According to Tosun, Dedeoğlu, and Fyall (2015), the intention to return is an individual's willingness or voluntary desire to make repeat visits to the same destination, reflecting their positive evaluation and satisfactory experiences.

2.4. Concept of social word of mouth

Word of mouth (WOM) is defined as "oral communication between a receiver and a communicator perceived as non-commercial, concerning a brand, product, or service" (Arndt, 1967). WOM has evolved into electronic word of mouth (eWOM), a new communication form that may update marketing theories and frameworks (Whiting et al., 2019). Communication technology allows consumers to share their consumption experiences with a broader online community quickly (Kim et al., 2015a, b). eWOM involves any positive or negative statements about a product or company made available online (Henning-Thurau et al., 2004) and typically includes reviews, photos, and videos on social media platforms (Alhidari et al., 2015).

The rise of social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram has transformed communication (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). SNS, defined as applications enabling users to create profiles, invite friends, and send messages (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), have gained scholarly attention due to their extensive reach (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). SNS allows consumers to interact, share product information, and offer advice within their social network (Patterson, 2012).

The growth of SNS enables customers to act as market leaders, reaching others anytime and anywhere (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Social word of mouth (sWOM), a form of eWOM, is convenient and more reliable as contributors are identifiable and accountable (Balaji et al., 2016). Consequently, sWOM can be a low-cost advertising tool, making it a critical subject in online marketing studies.

2.5. Related Theories

2.5.1. Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), developed by Ajzen and Fishbein in 1967 and refined over time, posits

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that attitude and subjective norms influence an individual's behavioral intention, affecting behavior (Sudin et al., 2009). According to TRA, an individual's intention is based on two fundamental factors: (1) the consumer's attitude toward performing the behavior and (2) the consumer's subjective norms (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

An individual's attitude is measured by their beliefs and evaluations of the behavior's outcomes. Customer beliefs are antecedents for developing a positive attitude that drives behavior and intention to use a product. Subjective norms are assessed through the influence of relevant people's attitudes toward purchasing the product and the consumer's motivation to comply with these people's desires. The stronger the attitudes and closer the relationship with these relevant parties, the greater the impact on the consumer's purchase intention (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Applying TRA as a methodological framework helps explore how tourists' perceptions of destination image impact their satisfaction and revisit intention

2.5.2. Theory of Interpersonal Behavior

The Theory of Interpersonal Behavior (TIB), introduced by Triandis in 1977, offers an alternative to the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Triandis (1977) argued that TRA and TPB have specific weaknesses that TIB addresses. While TRA and TPB focus on predicting behaviors based on intentions, which are influenced by individual beliefs and subjective norms (Ajzen, 1985), TIB extends this by considering habitual responses, situational constraints, and social factors. Triandis (1977) posited that behavior is partly intentional and influenced by rational considerations and emotional factors, with moral beliefs moderated by cognitive limitations.

The authors propose that TIB is particularly suited to studying individuals' use of social media for travel destinations, a highly learned social behavior in the information age. By incorporating these additional constructs, the extension of TIB to customers' use of social media for travel destination communication offers a more comprehensive theoretical framework. This extension of TIB is ideal for testing the antecedents of tourists' use of social media for word of mouth about travel destinations.

2.6. Research Hypothesis & Research Model

2.6.1. The relationship between destination image and satisfaction

In tourism activities, destination image is positively related to customer satisfaction, and this correlation, in turn, positively affects the customer's intention to return (Santoso, 2019; Nguyen Vu Hieu Trung & Gamal, 2019). Tourists' behavior is reflected through experience evaluation, feedback on the visit, and the decision to revisit (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Additionally, tourists' satisfaction and intention to return depend mainly on their perception of the specific destination image rather than their desires and needs (Khuong & Ha, 2014).

Research by Prayag (2009), Lu et al. (2015), and Asiku et al. (2020) have confirmed that destination image positively affects tourist satisfaction. A good destination image leads to higher satisfaction levels. Creating a good destination image will generate positive perceptions among tourists because their expectations have been met. This means that establishing a positive attitude towards the destination will result in higher tourist satisfaction (Lee et al., 2005; Wang & Hsu, 2010). Based on the above analyses and arguments, the authors propose the following hypothesis H1.

H1: Destination image has a direct and positive impact on tourist satisfaction

2.6.2. The relationship between satisfaction and visitors' intention to return

Customer satisfaction is a crucial antecedent influencing tourists' behavioral intentions and loyalty (Ekinci et al., 2008). Satisfaction positively affects loyalty through intentions to return and willingness to recommend the destination (Bigné et al., 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Prayag, 2009). Chen and Tsai (2007) confirm that satisfied tourists are more likely to return and recommend the destination. Lee (2009) also states that tourist satisfaction directly impacts future behaviors, including return intentions and word-of-mouth.

Research indicates that satisfaction with travel experiences is essential for tourism (Chi & Qu, 2008). Satisfaction positively influences tourists' intention to return and engage in positive word-of-mouth. When tourists enjoy their trip, which meets their expectations, they will likely return (Hasan et al., 2017; Cong, 2016). Previous studies show that satisfied tourists exhibit positive behavioral intentions (Bang et al., 2020; Nouri et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2017; Hasan et al., 2017; Cong, 2016). Based on these analyses, the authors propose the following hypothesis H2.

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H2: Tourist satisfaction directly and positively impacts tourists' intention to return.

2.6.3. The relationship between satisfaction and social word of mouth

Previous research has shown that customer satisfaction is a crucial antecedent for subsequent behaviors (Dichter, 1996; Westbrook, 1987). Studies by Zeng et al. (2009) and Yang (2017) confirm a positive relationship between satisfaction and behavioral intentions, including repurchasing, recommending products/services, loyalty, increased spending, and positive word of mouth.

Tourist satisfaction is essential for promoting revisit behavior and recommending destinations (Qu et al., 2011). Satisfaction mediates the formation of word of mouth (Shafiee et al., 2016; Mai Ngoc Khuong & Nguyen Thanh Phuong, 2017; Asiku, 2020). Word of mouth significantly impacts customers' decisions to repurchase products/services, influencing customer retention (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2020; Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Empirical studies (Shafiee et al., 2016; Huete-Alcocer, 2017; Nguyen Vu Hieu Trung & Gamal, 2019; Asiku, 2020) affirm that word of mouth influences repurchase intentions. Based on these analyses, the authors propose the following hypothesis H3.

H3: Tourist satisfaction has a direct and positive impact on social word-of-mouth

2.6.4. The relationship between social word of mouth and intention to return

In tourism, promoting destinations through word of mouth (WOM) is a crucial information-seeking method for travelers (Razzaq et al., 2016). WOM is indispensable in tourism marketing due to its reliability and significance as an information source for potential tourists (Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015; Jalilvand & Heidari, 2017). With the development of electronic communication, the influence of WOM has grown, significantly impacting market outcomes (Day, 1971).

Empirical research indicates that WOM positively affects the intention to repurchase products and revisit destinations (Shafiee et al., 2016; Huete-Alcocer, 2017; Nguyen Vu Hieu Trung & Gamal, 2019; Asiku, 2020). Unlike traditional WOM, social word of mouth (sWOM) allows users to share information conveniently, making them more comfortable sharing experiences and opinions (Sun et al., 2006). sWOM is typically broadcasted one-to-many within an individual's social network, often among family, friends, classmates, and acquaintances (Okazaki, 2008), thus reaching a larger audience. Based on these analyses, the authors propose the following hypothesis H4.

H4: Social word of mouth has a direct and positive impact on tourists' intention to return

Inheriting from previous studies, the authors propose the following research model:

Figure 1: Proposed Research Model
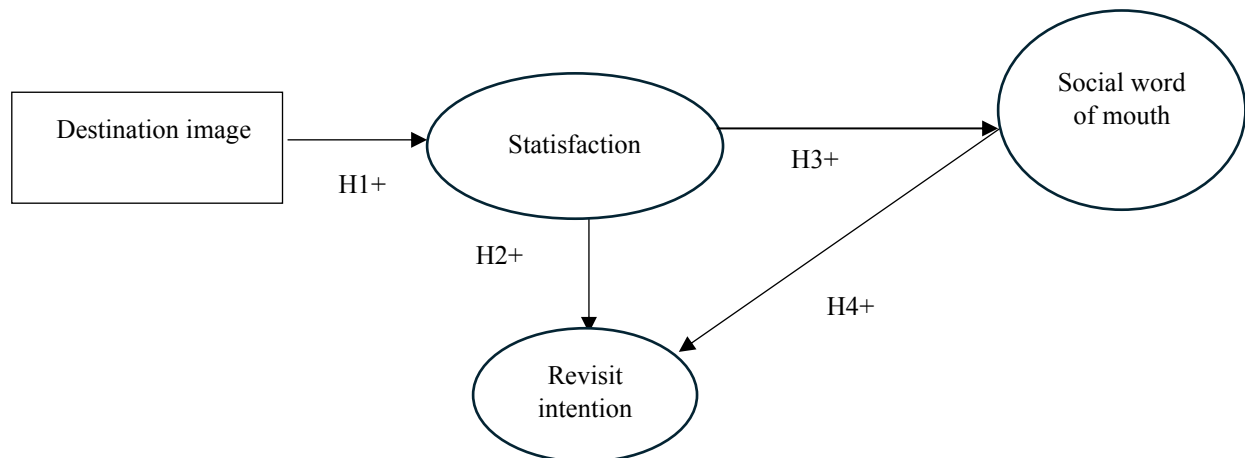
(Source: Proposed by the authors, 2024)

H1: Destination image has a direct and positive impact on tourist satisfaction

H2: Tourist satisfaction directly and positively impacts tourists' intention to return

H3: Tourist satisfaction has a direct and positive impact on social word-of-mouth

H4: Social word of mouth has a direct and positive impact on tourists' intention to return

3. Research Methods

3.1. Sample data collection

The authors designed the survey with specific questions to select suitable subjects for the study. Data was collected from 700 international and domestic tourists visiting Nha Trang using quota and snowball sampling methods.

For quota sampling, 500 tourists were surveyed at six key destinations in Nha Trang: Nha Trang Station (10%, 50 visitors), Institute of Oceanography (20%, 100 visitors), Ponagar Tower (20%, 100 visitors), Tram Huong Tower (20%, 100 visitors), VinPearl Land Nha Trang (10%, 48 visitors), and Hon Chong (20%, 100 visitors). The quota sampling method was chosen for its time and cost efficiency, ease of execution, flexibility, quick data collection, and high representativeness.

Following Baltar and Brunet (2012), the authors utilized virtual snowballs to enhance snowball sampling efficiency. The survey environment was a social network community focused on Nha Trang tourism. Initially, active participants were selected and asked to forward the questionnaire to 10 friends in their group. These initial participants were further instructed to refer the questionnaire to their network. An online questionnaire with a link to complete the survey was sent via private message. Instructions were provided for answering the questions.

The survey was conducted from February 15 to February 29, 2024. Out of 700 distributed questionnaires, 672 were collected, and 657 were deemed valid for further analysis.

3.2. Measurements

The authors used well-established scales to assess the constructs (Appendix A). Participants rated all items on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The destination image scale comprised 31 items from Chi and Qu (2018) and qualitative research. The satisfaction scale included 4 items from Banki et al. (2014). The return intention scale comprised 5 items based on Tosun et al. (2015). The social word-of-mouth scale included 6 items, drawing from Yang (2017) and Gvili and Levy (2018).

3.3. Data analysis

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to assess the research model using SmartPLS 4.0. PLS-SEM is suitable for this study due to its ability to handle complex models with multiple constructs and indicators and its robustness in dealing with non-normal data distributions.

The data analysis followed a two-step approach. First, the measurement model was evaluated to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs. This involved examining factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criterion (Hair et al., 2017). Second, the structural model was assessed to test the hypothesized relationships, involving the evaluation of path coefficients, their significance levels through bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples, and the coefficient of determination (R^2) for the endogenous variables.

4. Results

Table 1. Reliability Assessment Results of Research Scales

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
HADD	0.900	0.903	0.918	0.556
HL	0.837	0.838	0.891	0.671
YDTL	0.880	0.880	0.912	0.675
sWOM	0.888	0.889	0.915	0.642

(Source: Data collected and processed by the authors, 2024)

The results in Table 1 indicate that the second-order latent variables Destination Image (HADD) and Satisfaction (HL), Intention to return (YDTL), and social word of mouth (sWOM) have Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients greater than 0.7 and AVE greater than 50%, ensuring the necessary reliability.

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Table 2. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	HADD	HL	YDTL	sWOM
HADD	0.746			
HL	0.733	0.819		
YDTL	0.755	0.715	0.821	
sWOM	0.740	0.685	0.791	0.801

(Source: Data collected and processed by the authors, 2024)

Table 2 The AVE square root, indicated in bold, is greater than the correlation between the construct and other constructs. Thus, it can be inferred that the measurements/research variables have demonstrated discriminant value. Besides that, Heterotrait – Monotrait ratio (HTMT) values are < 1.0. Therefore, it can be concluded that the measurement scales for the concepts achieve discriminant validity.

4.2. Structural model assessment

Before testing the hypotheses, the R^2 value for each exogenous variable must be examined to determine the coefficient of determination (Henseler et al., 2015). The R^2 values for all variables surpassed the recommended threshold of 0.1 (Hair et al., 2017). Destination image explained 53.6% of the variance in satisfaction; satisfaction explained 68.1% of the variance in intention to return; and satisfaction explained 46.9% of the variance in the social word of mouth, and social word of mouth explained 68.1% of the variance in intention to return (Fig. 2).

The R^2 coefficient measures the overall variance explained to understand the intrinsic structure. Table 3 shows that the intrinsic variable satisfaction (HL) has a moderate predictive level with an R^2 coefficient of 53.7%, extrinsic variables explain the variable intention return (YDTL) at an R^2 level of 68.2%, and extrinsic variables explain the variable social word of mouth (sWOM) at an R^2 level of 46.9%.
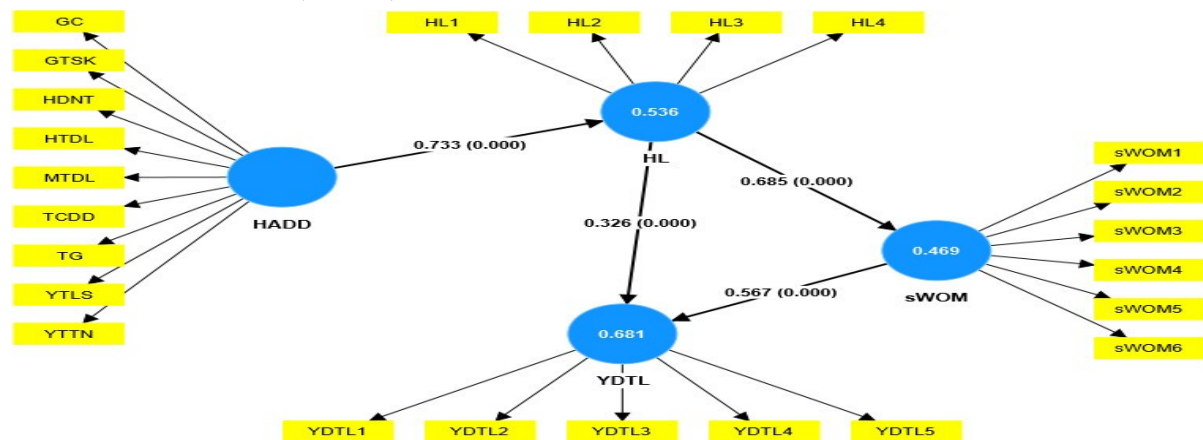
Fig. 2. PLS bootstrapping

(Source: Data collected and processed by the authors, 2024)

Table 3. Results of Path Coefficient Testing

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
HADD -> HL	0.733	0.734	0.023	32.474	0.000
HL -> YDTL	0.326	0.326	0.051	6.350	0.000
HL -> sWOM	0.685	0.686	0.030	23.068	0.000
sWOM -> YDTL	0.567	0.568	0.052	10.952	0.000

(Source: Data collected and processed by the authors, 2024)

A bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples was conducted to test the hypotheses. Table 3 presents the path coefficients, beta values, t-values, and p-values. The analysis revealed that destination image significantly and positively impacts satisfaction (β = 0.733, t = 32.474, p < 0.01), supporting H1. Additionally, satisfaction significantly enhances the intention to return (β = 0.326, t = 6.350, p < 0.01), confirming H2. Satisfaction also significantly boosts

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social word-of-mouth (β = 0.685, t = 23.068, p < 0.01), supporting H3. Furthermore, social word-of-mouth significantly influences the intention to return (β = 0.567, t = 10.952, p < 0.01), confirming H4.

5. Discussion of Research Results

The research aimed to examine the impact of destination image on the intention to return, revealing several key relationships:

The first is destination Image and Satisfaction: The destination image directly and positively impacts tourist satisfaction, consistent with previous studies such as Stylidis et al. (2021), which found that destination image significantly enhances tourist satisfaction.

The second is satisfaction and Intention to Return: Satisfaction directly and positively affects tourists' intention to return. This finding aligns with research by Nguyen Viet Bang and Lu Ba Van (2020), Nouri et al. (2018), Chen et al. (2017), Hasan et al. (2017), and Cong (2016) indicating that enjoyable and expectation-meeting trips encourage tourists to revisit the destination.

The third is satisfaction and Social Word of Mouth: Satisfaction also directly and positively impacts social word of mouth (some). This result supports the findings of Ahn et al. (2020) and Eggert and Ulaga (2002), which showed that tourist satisfaction significantly contributes to word-of-mouth intentions. However, this contrasts with Tsao & Hsieh (2012) and Yang (2017), whose contexts differ as they did not explicitly focus on tourism destinations or evaluate eWOM in restaurant settings.

The fourth is social Word of Mouth and Intention to Return: Social word of mouth positively influences tourists' intention to return, consistent with Rosid (2021). Positive word of mouth about a destination encourages tourists to revisit it.

Based on these findings, the authors propose that destination image, satisfaction, and social word of mouth significantly influence tourists' intention to return to a destination.

6. Conclusion, Implications Limitations, and Future Research

This study analyzed the impact of destination image on tourists' intention to return and social word-of-mouth behavior regarding the Nha Trang tourism destination, based on survey data from 657 domestic and international tourists. Descriptive statistics were performed before conducting structural equation modeling analysis. The research model includes destination image, satisfaction, intention to return, and social word-of-mouth. The destination image is a second-order variable measured by nine factors: Natural factors, Tourism environment, Entertainment and events, Historical factors, Tourism infrastructure, Destination accessibility, Price, Outdoor activities, and Relaxation.

The results show that destination image directly and positively affects satisfaction, satisfaction directly and positively affects intention to return and social word-of-mouth. Social word-of-mouth directly and positively influences the intention to return.

Management Implications:

Develop Tourism Infrastructure: Upgrade and expand accommodation facilities, improve domestic transportation infrastructure, and enhance services like buses, trams, and tourist boats to cater to diverse tourist needs.

Build and Promote the Destination Brand: Develop unique selling propositions (USPs) such as coral reef exploration, fishing experiences, kayaking, and water sports. Promote wellness tourism with spa, yoga, and meditation services. Implement an effective digital marketing strategy using social media platforms and an official website.

Protect and Sustainably Develop the Environment: Implement marine resource protection programs, effective waste management, and environmental sanitation. Raise environmental awareness among residents and tourists, encourage renewable energy use, and organize eco-friendly tours.

Develop Culture and Community: Organize cultural events and traditional festivals, involve the local community in tourism activities, create traditional handicrafts and culinary products, and provide job opportunities and vocational training.

Enhance Tourist Satisfaction: Improve infrastructure and service quality in service businesses, diversify accommodation options, and enhance service quality with friendly and professional staff. Travel companies should diversify their offerings with new products such as food tours, local cultural exploration tours, specialty culinary tours, eco-tourism, and outdoor recreational activities.

The city government should also implement marine waste collection campaigns, reduce plastic waste, and promote green tourism. Businesses should enhance promotion and marketing efforts on digital platforms to portray Nha Trang as an attractive, safe, and friendly destination.

Future Research:

While this study provides valuable insights, it has limitations. The cross-sectional design captures relationships at a single point in time; future research could adopt a longitudinal approach to investigate dynamic interactions over time. Additionally, exploring other factors such as travel motivations, experiences, and the moderating role of demographic variables like age and gender could provide a more comprehensive understanding of these relationships.

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Appendix A. Measurements

Construct	Notation	Item	Source
Destination image	**HADD**		
Natural attractions	YTTN1	Breathtaking scenery and natural attraction	Chi & Qu (2008)
	YTTN2	The land has fascinating wildlife.	
	YTTN3	Diverse terrain (from the sea, islands, plains, and hills…)	
Travel environment	MTDL1	Safe and secure environment	Chi & Qu (2008)
	MTDL2	Clean and tidy environment	
	MTDL3	Friendly and helpful local people	
	MTDL4	Tranquil and restful atmosphere	
	MTDL5	Pleasant weather	
Entertainment and events	GTSK1	Tempting cultural events and festival	Chi & Qu (2008)
	GTSK2	Excellent quality and fun country	
	GTSK3	Wide variety of entertainment	
Historic attractions	YTLS1	Distinctive history and heritage	Chi & Qu (2008)
	YTLS2	Distinctive cultural and heritage	
	YTLS3	Vintage buildings	
Infrastructure	HTDL1	Wide selection of restaurants/ cuisine	Chi & Qu (2008)
	HTDL2	Wide variety of shop facilities	
	HTDL3	Wide choice of accommodation	
Accessibility	TCDD1	Well-communicated traffic flow and parking information.	Chi & Qu (2008)
	TCDD2	Available parking downtown	
	TCDD3	Easy access to the area	
	TCDD4	There are a variety of transportation options to get to your destination.	
Price	GC1	Reasonable costs for food services	Chi & Qu (2008)
	GC2	Reasonable price for food and accommodation	
	GC3	Reasonable prices for attractions and activities	
	GC4	Good bargain shopping	
Outdoor activities	HDNT1	Exciting water sports/ activities: paragliding, surfing, canoeing...	Chi & Qu (2008)
	HDNT2	Terrific place for hiking/ picnicking/ camping/ hunting	
	HDNT3	There are a variety of outdoor activities at night (kite flying, walking, beach walking...)	
Relaxation	TG1	Relaxing day spa and healing getaway	Chi & Qu (2008)
	TG2	Great place for soothing the mind and refreshing the body	
	TG3	There are many suitable places for relaxation activities.	
Satisfaction	HL1	Delighted about the destination	Banki et al (2014)
	HL2	Satisfied with the hotel service	
	HL3	I am pleased that I decided to visit this tourist destination	
	HL4	Visit to the tourist destination exceeded expectations.	
Revisit intention	YDTL1	I would like to revisit Nha Trang in the near future	Tosun Banki et al
	YDTL2	If I had to decide again, I would choose Nha Trang again.	

Construct	Notation	Item	Source
	YDTL3	I would come back to Nha Trang in the future.	(2015)
	YDTL4	I would more frequently visit Nha Trang.	
	YDTL5	Nha Trang would be my first choice over other destinations.	
Social word of mouth	sWOM1	If I have a similar experience, I will feel happy to be able to tell others about my wonderful experience with Nha Trang destination through social platforms (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) in the future.	Yang (2017)
	sWOM2	If I have a similar experience, I plan to share my experience with other members via social platforms (Facebook, Instagram, ...) in the future	
	sWOM3	I tend to share my travel experiences with friends on social platforms (Facebook, Instagram, ...) after arriving at the travel destination Nha Trang	
	sWOM4	When I receive valuable information about the Nha Trang travel destination on social platforms (Facebook, Instagram, etc.), I often forward it to others.	Gvili & Levy (2018)
	sWOM5	I tend to express my opinion when I receive information about Nha Trang tourist destinations on social platforms (Facebook, Instagram, etc.).	
	sWOM6	After traveling to Nha Trang, I share my travel experiences with friends on social platforms (Facebook, Instagram...).	

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MOSQUITO BITES PREVENTION BEHAVIOR DURING TRAVELING: A STUDY OF BIOLOGY TEACHERS AS ROLE MODELS AND LEARNING RESOURCES

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Extended abstract

International tourist visits to Indonesia are increasing every year, reaching 1.07 million tourists by 2024. Indonesia as one of the endemic tourist destinations with an increase in tourist visits will increase the risk of health problems through mosquito bites, such as mosquito-borne diseases (MBD). Teachers' knowledge and behavior in protecting themselves from mosquito bites can serve as examples and learning resources for students. This study aims to describe the knowledge and behavior of teacher respondents in protecting themselves from mosquito bites during traveling. This research design is cross sectional observational. Data collection using closed questionnaires. Respondents were high school biology teachers in Sidoarjo with a total of 32 teachers. Data analysis procedures are data collection, data qualification, data presentation with descriptive statistics, and conclusion drawing. The results obtained from the percentage of teachers who are traveling enthusiasts (91%), with natural nuances lodging enthusiasts (91%), and have felt upset when bitten by mosquitoes (100%), but who prepare mosquito repellent when traveling (53%), so regret not bringing mosquito repellent and worry about getting sick with dengue fever or other diseases (81%). Most of the products they prepare are lotions (such as autan) (72%). This data can serve as a basic reference for further research on the link between increased tourist arrivals and the risk of health problems through mosquito bites.

Keywords: mosquito, prevention, traveling, role model, learning resources

Introduction

Mosquito-borne diseases (MBDs), such as dengue fever, Zika, malaria, West Nile fever, yellow fever, and chikungunya, pose a significant danger to public health globally (AL-Eitan et al., 2024). Mosquito-borne diseases are the common serious diseases people get from mosquitoes while traveling to tropical countries. Malaria and dengue fever are prevalent diseases among travelers to areas with endemic cases (Alang et al., 2016). The vectors of these mosquito-borne viruses are the *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* species, for dengue fever, chikungunya, yellow fever, west nile fever, and zika, and the *Anopheles* genus for malaria. The tremendous surge in worldwide travel is raising the potential of MBDs spreading to countries that do not necessarily have a prior history of MBDs (AL-Eitan et al., 2024). Prevention efforts are hampered by the lack of vaccinations and the inadequacy of long-term mosquito vector control for certain MBDs. Thus, personal protective behaviors (PPBs) may be the most promising and effective form of prevention. Previous studies reported that US travelers are significantly more concerned about zika, chikungunya, and dengue than malaria and west nile. Respondents were also more likely to report following the PPBs of wearing protective clothing and applying mosquito repellent spray (Omodior et al., 2018).

Foreign tourist visits to Indonesia play an important role in the economic growth of the tourism sector. Tourism is employed as a driving industry and the main source of boosting a country's foreign exchange (Permana & Puspitaningsih, 1970). Indonesia's foreign exchange earnings from the tourism sector were ranked fourth as the largest contributor of foreign exchange in 2015, below oil and gas, coal and palm oil (Permana & Puspitaningsih, 1970). International tourist visits to Indonesia are increasing every year, reaching 1.07 million tourists in March 2024 (BPS Statistics Indonesia, 2024). on the other hand, Indonesia as one of the endemic tourist destinations with an increase in tourist visits will increase the risk of health problems through mosquito bites, such as mosquito-borne

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diseases (MBD) (Damayanti & Yanti, 2020). Indonesia is highly endemic for dengue, making it a high-risk destination for visitors (Masyeni et al., 2018). However, many travellers are ignorant of the health risks associated with mosquito bites (Yoshikawa et al., 2020).

Prevention of mosquito bites should be self-awareness from an early age because all humans will travel in their holiday agenda. Prevention of mosquito bites has been implemented in schools through a program of monitoring larvae, 3M (draining, covering, and burying), and how to maintain the cleanliness of the surrounding environment (Hafidz et al., 2022). The involvement of school children as mosquito larvae monitors plays a strategic role in reducing cases of Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever (DHF) through mosquito nest eradication (PSN) behavior in their residential environment (Susanna et al., 2019). Previous studies reported that elementary school teachers must actively participate in DHF control to educate their children. Elementary school teachers can provide DHF content to pupils through modules, increasing their awareness and participation in lowering dengue hemorrhagic fever cases (Hermansyah et al., 2023). Teachers, as role models in the application of Clean and Healthy Life Behavior (PHBS), have multiple functions, not only as 'teachers' who transfer knowledge, but also as role models for students who can display a personality that can become a role model for students (Jimung, 2019). Teachers as a role model is necessary to give a good example to students. Previous studies reported that when teachers' knowledge and role increased, PHBS students had a positive attitude. Conversely, when teachers' knowledge and role declined, PHBS students' attitude toward understanding decreased (Kurniyanti & Resubun, 2020). Previous studies in Junior High School Feater Parepare reported that the teacher's influence as a role model and awareness of mimicking students toward the motivation of the application of PHBS in the Junior High School Feater Parepare is still low (Jimung, 2019). Due to the gap between expectations and reality in the field, research on teachers' knowledge and behavior in preventing mosquito bites while traveling is deemed necessary. The hope for the future is that teachers will teach and apply this knowledge and behavior to students in everyday life, thereby instilling the habit of living a healthy lifestyle. This study was conducted in the Senior High School of Biology Teachers Community in Sidoarjo district, East Java, Indonesia because they have students who are mature age and actively travel.

Objectives

This study aims to describe the knowledge and behavior of teacher respondents in protecting themselves from mosquito bites during traveling.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

The population in this study was all biology teachers who are members of the Senior High School of Biology Teachers Community in Sidoarjo district, East Java, Indonesia. The sample was high school biology teachers in Sidoarjo district and willing to be respondents.

2. Research Tools

The research instrument to collect data used the google form application. The data collection method used a closed questionnaire. A closed questionnaire is a type of questionnaire in which respondents only choose predetermined answer options. Respondents only need to choose one of the answers that best suits their opinion or situation. The questionnaire is presented in the form of 6 questions.

3. Data Collection

The questionnaire used the Google Form application. The Google Form link was distributed in the Senior High School of Biology Teachers Community WhatsApp group. The distribution of questionnaires has received approval from the chairman of the Senior High School of Biology Teachers Community. The retrieval stage is research that provides Google form links to respondents. Respondents opened the Google form link that the researcher had given and then filled in each of the six questions. After all the questions are filled in, the respondent sends it back to the researcher as a sign of completion of participating in filling out the questionnaire. Completing the questionnaire is given 24 hours. The data entered into the Google form is then pulled and stored in Excel format.

4. Data Analysis

The number of respondents who participated in filling out the questionnaire for this study was 32 Senior High School of biology teachers in Sidoarjo district, who are members of the Biology Subject Teachers who are members of the Senior High School of Biology Teachers Community. In general, the results obtained by high school biology teachers and Madrasah Aliyah (MA) in Sidoarjo are dominant (91%) like traveling in natural nuances. The

experiences that occur when traveling is annoyed by mosquito bites, preparing mosquito repellent, and worrying when not carrying mosquito repellent. During traveling, most respondents prepare lotion-type mosquito repellent.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

The number of respondents who participated in filling out the questionnaire for this study was 32 high school / MA biology teachers in Sidoarjo district, who are members of the Biology Teachers who are members of the Senior High School of Biology Teachers Community. In general, the results obtained by high school biology teachers and Madrasah Aliyah (MA) in Sidoarjo are dominant (91%) like traveling in natural nuances. The experiences that occur when traveling are annoyed by mosquito bites, preparing mosquito repellent, and worrying when not carrying mosquito repellent. During traveling, most respondents prepare lotion-type mosquito repellent.

Table 1. Respondents' interest in traveling

No	Question	Total (%)	
		Yes	No
1	Are you a fan of traveling?	29 (91%)	3 (9%)
2	Are you a fan of nature accommodation?	29 (91%)	3 (9%)

The results of the questionnaire analysis showed that all respondents (100%) admitted to having the experience of being annoyed by being bitten by mosquitoes when traveling. All respondents who answered that they were annoyed because they were bitten by mosquitoes then prepared mosquito repellent when traveling (53%). When respondents did not bring mosquito repellent, they were worried about getting sick from mosquito bites (81%).

Table 2. Experience of being bitten by mosquitoes while traveling

No	Question	Total (%)	
		Yes	No
1	Have you ever been bitten by a mosquito?	32 (100%)	0 (0%)
2	Do you always prepare mosquito repellent when traveling?	17 (53%)	15 (47%)
3	Do you ever think about regretting not bringing mosquito repellent and worrying about getting dengue fever or other diseases after being bitten by a mosquito?	26 (81%)	16 (19%)

To anticipate mosquito bites, respondents prepare mosquito repellent. Most respondents (72%) carry lotion-type mosquito repellent while traveling.

Table 3. Mosquito prevention techniques. prepared by respondents during traveling

No	Types of mosquito repellent	Total (%)
1	Lotion	23 (72%)
2	Baby oil	6 (19%)
3	Spray	2 (6%)
4	Elektrik	1 (3%)

2. Discussion

Mosquitoes are the most common disease vectors worldwide (Rajini et al., 2021). Mosquitoes are vectors of several contagious and have been revealed as a big threat to public health and potentially fatal diseases, such as protozoan (Malaria), viral (Chikungunya, West Nile virus, yellow fever, and Japanese encephalitis), or helminthic (Filariasis) infections (Hazarika & Sadhukhan, 2024). These results are similar to previous findings in the municipal area of Tezpur, Sonitpur district, Assam, India reported that the majority of respondents are aware that mosquitos are

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transmitters of infectious diseases such as malaria and dengue (Hazarika & Sadhukhan, 2024). While assessing participants' perceptions of mosquito bites, it was observed that 157 (60.9%) participants believe they are at danger of mosquito-borne diseases (Chandrachood et al., 2024). When respondents did not bring mosquito repellent, they were worried about getting sick from mosquito bites (81%). Malaria, dengue, chikungunya, Japanese encephalitis (JE) and lymphatic filariasis are endemic diseases in Indonesia (Masyeni et al., 2018). Dengue and malaria are the two most common arthropod-borne illnesses in tropical country (Gunawan et al., 2024). Knowledge and information about this disease is obtained from television, newspapers and magazines (Hazarika & Sadhukhan, 2024). An evidence-based review has been conducted on several repellents and bite-avoidance methods for travelers (Goodyer & Song, 2014).

There are variations in the types of mosquito prevention techniques used by respondents in this study. Most respondents brought lotion (repellent) when they traveled. Previous studies reported that the study participants' socioeconomic position and literacy rate could explain the variation in mosquito repellent use (Hazarika & Sadhukhan, 2024). Almost 97% of study participants were using personal protective measures against mosquito bite. The commercial product like coil, repellent and mat were used more among respondents (Rajini et al., 2021). Health in traveling and reducing the incidence of mosquito-borne diseases during traveling depends on public awareness and knowledge of diseases and their prevention. A previous retrospective cohort study of UK travelers reported that thirteen (9.8%) travelers reported receiving many bites while away, 63 (47.7%) a few bites, and 55 (41.7%) no bites. Forty (30.3%) said they used more bite-avoidance measures if bitten (Goodyer & Song, 2014). A previous cross-sectional study was carried out among undergraduate students of a medical college run under public-private partnership in Western Gujarat found that mosquito repellant creams 149 (57.7%) were the most commonly used measure to prevent mosquito bites followed by full sleeve dress 145 (56.2%) and liquid vaporizers 120 (46.5%) (Chandrachood et al., 2024). From this study, all respondents were aware of mosquitoes, diseases transmitted by mosquitoes, and personal protective equipment against mosquito bites. Knowledge about mosquitoes and protecting yourself from mosquito bites can be included as a learning resource in the classroom, especially in biology lessons. The previous findings of this study revealed that there was a significant difference in academic achievement between students taught using an experiential learning approach and those taught using a conventional approach. The experiential learning process gives students hands-on experience constructing and applying new knowledge and skills. (Gisoi et al., 2023). Sharing teachers' experiences protecting health during tourism can be a model for students. Knowledge of health applications will be useful when students go through their life processes in the future.

Research recommendations

1. Teachers and students should always prepare strategies to prevent mosquito bites when they travel to a place, such as wearing long-sleeved clothing, applying lotion or repellent to the skin, and installing mosquito nets before going to bed to prevent mosquito bites.

2. High school biology teachers need sufficient knowledge about mosquito bite prevention. High school students need experiential learning like this research because they will also travel and experience similar experiences. Good student knowledge will indirectly help reduce the incidence of mosquito-related illnesses. Teachers and students need to know the types of mosquitoes, diseases transmitted by mosquitoes, and areas that have the potential to transmit mosquito-related diseases.

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EMBARK TOGETHER ON MEMORABLE TOURISM EXPERIENCE: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF TRAVEL COMPANIONSHIP FROM SENIOR TOURISTS' PERSPECTIVES

1st Sien-Leong Liew[1]
2nd Jo-Ann Ho[2]
3rd Bee-Lia Chua[3]

Extended abstract

Senior tourists perceive their time diminishing, they tend to let go of less important relationships and focus on important ones, such as close family and friends. The primary concern for senior tourists is not destination itself but the travel companionship they have during their journey. However, the nature of interactions between senior tourists and their travel companions remains largely unexplored in Southeast Asian countries. This study sought to contribute to this extant knowledge gap by enhancing our understanding of the role of travel companionship for senior tourists and illustrates how it could contribute to their memorable tourism experiences (MTEs). Through in-depth interviews with 25 domestic senior tourists (aged 55 years old and above) in Malaysia, 15 roles of travel companionship were identified and categorized into four main themes based on the phenomenological study approach: intimate togetherness, support, mutual exchange and communication, and comfort and no role. The findings of this study contribute to ongoing efforts to understand the essence of travel companionship, particularly within the context of senior tourists' MTEs. The theoretical and practical implications of these results are discussed, and several avenues for future research are proposed.

Keywords: travel companionship, interaction, memorable tourism experience, senior tourists, phenomenology

Introduction

"Seniors are invaluable sources of knowledge and experience and have much to contribute towards peace, sustainable development, and protecting our planet", stated UN Secretary-General António Guterres. Beyond their wisdom and lived experiences, seniors continue to play vital roles in society through their ongoing contributions to communities and global development. In the context of travel, seniors represent a valuable market segment, enjoying ample leisure time and fewer social and family obligations compared to younger generations (Patterson & Pegg, 2009; Qian & Lin, 2022). The senior travel market has also been on the rise globally (Patterson et al., 2021; Sie et al., 2021), with predictions that the global population aged 65 and above will rise from 761 million in 2021 to 1.6 billion by 2050, comprising over 16% of the global population (United Nations, 2023). As the number of seniors grow exponentially in the coming decade, transitioning into retirement, it is crucial for the tourism and travel industry to understand their unique needs and preferences.

Malaysia, like other developed nations, has seen a significant rise in its senior population, positioning it as one of the ageing nations globally (New Straits Times, 2022). This demographic shift presents opportunities for the Malaysian travel industry, with the growth of the senior segment potentially revitalizing the tourism sector (Abooali et al., 2015; Mohamed et al., 2016; Musa & Sim, 2010). According to the Domestic Tourism Survey 2022, domestic senior tourists aged 55 and above increased to 16.1%, totalling 27,628,083 in 2022, up from 14.1% or 9,302,616 in 2021 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). Alongside these demographic changes, shifts in socioeconomic status have spurred greater interest in seniors' welfare and psychological well-being, particularly through travel experiences (Hwang & Lee, 2018; Wei & Milman, 2002). With a growing trend of seniors placing travel tourism high on their list of priorities upon retirement (Patterson et al., 2021), an expanding body of literature has recognized travel as a potent catalyst for promoting longevity, facilitating healthy aging, and enhancing well-being in later life (Gu et al., 2016; Moal, 2021; Morgan et al., 2015; Qiao et al., 2022). Despite substantial evidence linking tourism

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activities with senior well-being (Zhang, 2023), there remains a limited understanding of the memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) of senior tourists (Huang et al., 2022). While prior studies have emphasized the significance of travel companionship in shaping tourists' memorable experiences (Choo & Petrick, 2015; Coelho et al., 2018; Vada et al., 2022), however, there has been insufficient attention given to the intricate psychological processes that senior tourists experience when travelling with companions (Qian & Lin, 2022). For seniors, who prioritize meaningful interactions and the creation of lasting memories (Tung & Ritchie, 2011; J. J. Zhang, 2023), understanding these processes is crucial to fully grasping their overall travel experience.

Individuals in Eastern cultures tend to be collectivistic, as reflected in their strong family and kinship systems (Wei et al., 2019). Previous studies (e.g., Moal, 2021; Nyaupane et al., 2008) highlight a key constraint among senior tourists, namely a reluctance to travel alone and a preference for travel companionship. Engaging in group travel becomes a meaningful avenue for senior tourists to deepen their understanding of others (Tung & Ritchie, 2011), addressing the evolving social dynamics that often accompany advanced age (Moal-Ulvoas & Taylor, 2014). Travel companionship has been identified as a key relational element influencing memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) (Coelho et al., 2018; Vada et al., 2022). It significantly shapes tourists' behaviour, activity preferences and destination choices, which emphasizes the role of interpersonal relationships in decision-making processes within social contexts (Zhang et al., 2020). As people age, there is a tendency to refine social circles, with quality interactions profoundly impacting well-being (Ross, 2005). Despite the extensive discussion in the literature on how travel companionship shapes leisure preferences and participation (Choo & Petrick, 2015; Chung & Lee, 2019; Vada et al., 2022), there remains a noticeable gap concerning its exploration specifically in relation to MTEs. MTEs encapsulate moments that leave a lasting impression on tourists, contributing significantly to their overall satisfaction and likelihood of revisiting or recommending a destination (Coelho et al., 2018). While exiting studies have examined how the presence of travel companionship influence activity preferences (Chen et al. 2016), emotional responses to tourist-to-tourist interactions (Zhou et al., 2023), travel behaviour (Tan & Lu, 2021), decision-making (Arroyo et al., 2020) as well as significant impact overall tourism experiences and subsequent behavioural intentions (Choo & Petrick, 2015; Vada et al., 2022), the specific dynamics between travel companionship and MTEs have not been sufficiently explored. Addressing this gap could significantly advance knowledge in the field of tourism and companionship experiences. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the major roles that travel companionships may play in influencing a senior tourist's MTEs. Finding suitable travel companionship can be challenging (Liu et al., 2024; Vada et al., 2022), and understanding how the role of travel companionship enhances MTEs of senior tourists could provide valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners in the tourism industry.

Impact of Travel Companionship on MTEs of Senior Tourists

MTEs have become a focal point in tourism research (Sie et al., 2021, 2018; Vada et al., 2022), particularly concerning how these memorable experiences contribute to overall travel satisfaction and well-being. MTEs are characterized by their emotional impact, vividness, and long-lasting nature, often resulting from meaningful interactions, unique experiences, and a deep connection with the destination or people (Coelho et al., 2018). The presence of travel companions can influence tourist behaviour and decision-making by providing information and mental support (Liu et al., 2021), which in turn, can enhance tourists' MTEs (Coelho et al., 2018; Vada et al., 2022). Travel companionship, as a form of social interaction that between senior tourists and their companion might be friends or peers, family members, and colleagues, etc (Coelho et al., 2018). It can be viewed as internal factor related to personal thoughts, emotions, and attitudes that influence tourists' perception during their trip (Iso-Ahola, 1983) and has been conceptualized in terms of pleasurable social interaction (Rook & Ituarte, 1999). However, few studies have delved into the interaction between senior tourists and their travel companions, particularly in relation to the tourist experience. For example, Wang et al. (2023) explored how intergenerational interactions with adult children shape the travel experiences of senior tourists. Their findings, based on in-depth interviews with senior tourists, identified three forms of support provided by adult children: instrumental, emotional, and economic. They also demonstrated that intergenerational interactions, such as joint activity participation, mutual assistance, shared memories, evaluations, and both implicit and explicit conflicts between generations, are integral to these experiences. Additionally, Qian and Lin's (2022) study used autoethnography to explore a senior woman international tour accompanied by a young son, identifying six sources of conflict: the mother's role, physical ability, mental preparation, face-saving, life routine, and travel enjoyment. They confirmed that harmony is an important feature in such international tours. Fan et al. (2023) highlighted that senior tourists often travel with family or friends, considering spending time with them a major element of tourism activities. In their study, they identified travel companions as contributing to both functional and social aspects, including company, a sense of belonging, catching

up with friends, socialization and networking, enjoyment, and sharing. While there is evidence that the presence of travel companions impacts MTEs (Vada et al., 2022), there is a lack of knowledge about the general categories of how travel companionship influences MTEs, particularly in the context of senior travel. Although Hao et al. (2023) explicitly noted that not all travel is beneficial to a companion's relationship, there is a need for more in-depth investigations into how intricate interactions within contextual factors (e.g., tourist-companion relationships) and the synergies among diverse theoretical frameworks influence the outcomes of companionship.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a constructivist paradigm, which posits that multiple realities exist as people might construct their own meaning in various ways (Saunders et al., 2016). A common theoretical perspective linked to constructivist epistemology is interpretivism, which involves interpreting knowledge to reveal a deeper understanding (Ataro, 2020). Owning to this, interpretivism typically employs qualitative research designs, such as personal interviews and focus group discussions, to gather data from participants (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). The aim of this study is to gain a rich and in-depth understanding of the role of travel companionship on senior travel, rather than to determine causal relationships between variables. Therefore, an interpretive paradigm of qualitative research was used, allowing researchers to gather detailed inductive personal accounts of the experiences by directly interacting with participants (Szarycz, 2008; Yoo et al., 2016). MTEs are complex and unique phenomena that are influenced by the tourist's emotional state, stimuli, and other factors (Sie et al., 2018). To capture these intricate and subjective experiences, a phenomenological approach, inspired by Moustakas (1994), was employed. This approach enables a deep exploration of the meanings behind the lived experiences of senior tourists when traveling with companions, allowing researchers to identify the essences of these experiences through careful description (Szarycz, 2008).

1. Data collection

A combination of face-to-face and online semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect information-rich data. The key information sought in the interviews included (1) basic information about the respondent's travel profile, and (2) the role of travel companionship in creating MTEs. During the interviews, each senior tourist was briefed on the study's objectives, with specific attention directed towards how they interacted with their travel companions throughout the trip. Three open-ended questions were used:

i. Who is/are your usual travel companion(s)?

ii. Can you describe your best experiences during your recent trip where you interacted with your companion(s)? What happened? What made it memorable?

iii. Can you discuss what makes your travel companion(s) important to you during your recent trip?

Participants were approached through purposive and snowball sampling from March to May of 2024 in Malaysia. These participants were then contacted and invited to participate in the study. A total of 32 participants were approached; however, only 25 agreed to participate. According to social construction theory (Kelly, 1963), repetition and saturation of responses typically occur with approximately 15-25 respondents. In this study, data saturation was achieved after interviewing 19 participants, as the last six interviews did not provide any new insights into the phenomenon. All participants were senior tourists aged 55 and above who had extensive travel experiences and had travelled to any tourism destination in Malaysia within the past 12 months. To better understand the role of travel companionship, only senior tourists who travelled with travel companions were included. This ensured that they had interactions with their travel companions during the trip, which contributed to creating MTEs. Table 1 presents the profile of the participants. Each interview, conducted by the first author, lasted nearly 40 minutes to one hour and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The interview questions, originally in English, were translated into Malay and Mandarin by the first author, who is proficient in all three languages. This translation was necessary because some of the elderly participants were not fluent in English, making it essential to conduct the interviews in their preferred languages, either Malay or Mandarin. This approach ensured that all participants could fully understand the questions and provide accurate responses, thereby enhancing the reliability and inclusivity of the data collected. Seven Mandarin recordings, five Malay recordings and thirteen English recordings were transcribed verbatim by the first author. The interview texts in Mandarin and Malay were then translated into English by the first author. These translations were reviewed and discussed by the author team to eliminate any sentence deviation. Prior to the start of data collection, ethical clearance (JKEUPM-2024-195) was obtained from the Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (JKEUPM); all participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity.

Table 1. Profile of the participants (*N* = 25)

Participant	Gender	Age	Race	Current of residence (State)	Educational level	Marital status	Household income (RM)	Health status	Travel companions
P1	Male	57	Chinese	Selangor	University/College and above	Single	3,001-5,000	Fair	Friends
P2	Female	58	Chinese	Selangor	Secondary school	Married	5,001-10,000	Good	Family
P3	Male	69	Chinese	Selangor	Secondary school	Married	5,001-10,000	Good	Friends and family
P4	Female	71	Chinese	Selangor	Secondary school	Widowed	1,000-3,000	Very good	Friends
P5	Female	57	Chinese	Perak	Secondary school	Married	Less than 1,000	Fair	Spouse and friends
P6	Female	71	Chinese	Selangor	Secondary school	Married	3,001-5,000	Good	Family
P7	Female	55	Indian	Negeri Sembilan	Secondary school	Married	Less than 1,000	Fair	Family
P8	Female	63	Malay	Selangor	Secondary school	Married	5,001-10,000	Very good	Family and friends
P9	Female	60	Chinese	Kuala Lumpur	University/College and above	Married	5,001-10,000	Good	Spouse
P10	Female	68	Chinese	Kuala Lumpur	Secondary school	Single	3,001-5,000	Good	Friends
P11	Male	61	Chinese	Kuala Lumpur	University/College and above	Married	Above 10,001	Fair	Spouse
P12	Male	63	Malay	Putrajaya	University/College and above	Married	Above 10,001	Very good	Family and elder brother
P13	Female	56	Indian	Selangor	University/College and above	Married	5,001-10,000	Very good	Family
P14	Female	71	Malay	Selangor	Secondary school	Widowed	5,001-10,000	Good	Daughter
P15	Female	55	Malay	Kedah	Secondary school	Widowed	1,001-3000	Fair	Children
P16	Female	60	Indian	Sarawak	Secondary school	Married	1,001-3,000	Good	Son's girlfriend
P17	Male	78	Chinese	Kuala Lumpur	University/College and above	Married	5,001-10,000	Good	Family
P18	Male	66	Malay	Putrajaya	University/College and above	Married	Above 10,001	Good	Family
P19	Female	73	Malay	Kuala Lumpur	Secondary school	Widowed	5,001-10,000	Good	Son
P20	Male	76	Indian	Kuala Lumpur	University/College and above	Married	5,001-10,000	Good	Spouse
P21	Male	71	Indian	Selangor	Secondary school	Separated/divorced	Above 10,001	Very good	Former wife and friends
P22	Male	75	Indian	Kuala Lumpur	University/College and above	Married	Above 10,001	Good	Spouse and family
P23	Female	69	Indian	Kuala Lumpur	University/College and above	Married	Above 10,001	Good	Spouse and family
P24	Male	65	Malay	Selangor	University/College and above	Married	5,001-10,000	Good	Spouse and old colleagues
P25	Female	63	Malay	Kuala Lumpur	University/College and above	Married	5,001-10,000	Very good	Spouse

Note: Median age = 65 years old.

2. Data Analysis

A thematic analysis of the transcripts was conducted following Thomas's (2006) procedures, using inductive coding techniques, which are effective for exploring meanings relevant to the present research objective. First, the key phrases or sentences from the transcripts were identified, labelled and coded. Next, the codes were grouped to create categories and subcategories. Similar role of companionship identified were grouped in the same category. At this stage, the common patterns between the categories were also identified. Lastly, the codes were reviewed to reduce overlap and redundancy among the identified roles of travel companionship. To facilitate the data analysis process, the Quirkos Analytical Software (version 2.5.3) was used for its functionality in managing and analysing qualitative data. Quikos is a helpful tool for organizing large amounts of textual data and is often employed in social sciences to perform thematic analysis (e.g., Petrescu-Mag et al., 2022, 2023). The trustworthiness of the analysis and interpretations was fostered in this study by adhering the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Discussion and Conclusion

Using semi-structured interviews, this study contributes to the existing knowledge on senior travel by emphasizing the role of travel companionship and detailing senior tourists' recollections of their interactions with travel companions. For the senior participants in this study, travel companionship was perceived as a positive, beneficial, and rewarding experience, offering opportunities for relationship development and meaningful interaction. Figure 1 presents a model of the role of travel companionship based on the findings of this study. This study identified 15 roles of travel companionship, grouped into four key themes: intimate togetherness, support, mutual exchange and communication, and dynamics and compatibility. Firstly, intimate togetherness emerged as a central theme, encompassing four roles: quality time and enjoyment, bonding through food, shared activities, and reminiscing about and cherishing shared moments. These roles illustrate how senior tourists highly value the emotional and social aspects of travel companionship. Secondly, the theme of support in travel companionship involves various forms of support role, including being a local guidance, travel planning, physical assistance, emotional support, and financial assistance. Thirdly, mutual exchange and communication emerged as a theme, highlighting roles such as chit-chat and information sharing, which are integral to the companionship experience. Finally, the theme of dynamics and compatibility captures roles like adaptability and flexibility, shared interests and like-mindedness, respect and understanding, and the comfort and no role. The development of this model addresses a gap in the literature by offering insights into senior tourists' perspectives on the role of travel companionship. It also provides valuable insights for tourism practitioners to adjust and design tourism products and services, fostering harmonious interaction and compatibility among senior tourists and their travel companions.

In comparing the findings of this present study on the MTEs of senior tourists and their interactions with companions with prior studies, several parallels and distinctions emerge. These insights offer a richer understanding of how senior tourists' MTEs are shaped by their travel companions and the dynamics of their interactions. Firstly, intimate togetherness emerged as a central theme in this study, reflecting the deep value senior tourists place on spending quality time and enjoyment with loved ones during trips. This finding resonates with the work of Zhang (2023), Daniels et al. (2019) and Tung and Ritchie (2011) who observed that senior tourists often prioritize relationship development with significant others (e.g., family and friends). Tung and Ritchie's (2011) concluded that MTEs involve forming intimate personal relationships with travel companions. This study expands this understanding by including not just family members but also friends, emphasizing that the emotional closeness and shared enjoyment with any beloved companion significantly enhance memorable experiences (Choo & Petrick, 2015; Vada et al., 2022). The role of bonding through food, which highlighted in this study as a key element of intimate togetherness, supports the findings of Stone et al. (2017). Their work similarly identified shared meals as a crucial aspect of social bonding, yet this study adds a layer of nuance by showing how, for senior tourists, these food experiences often become central to their travel memories and relationships. Furthermore, this study provides deeper insights by emphasizing the shared activities together as a role of travel companionship in various activities such as sightseeing, taking photos, eating local food, shopping, and camping, showing that the presence of travel companions not only enhances the enjoyment of these activities but also reinforces the emotional bonds among senior tourists, aligns with Wang et al. (2023), who noted that joint activity participation, such as discussing travel arrangements and itineraries, taking photos together, and engaging in activities together, is significant in the interactions between senior tourists and their adult children. The act of reminiscing and cherishing shared moments, a crucial role of intimate togetherness, reveals that senior tourists are more likely to recall recent memories and recount specific details of their

experiences (Dijkstra & Kaup, 2005). During the trip, senior tourists often enjoy recounting past experiences with their companions, reflecting the idea that many seniors travel to relive and share these memories, consistent with Tung and Ritchie's (2011) observations. While Kim and Chen (2018) also recognized the significance of shared memories in enhancing connectedness, this present study uniquely demonstrates that for senior tourists, the process of reminiscing often begins during the trip itself, not just afterward. This continuous reinforcement of their relationships makes the travel experience more memorable.

Secondly, the various support identified by this study are supported by Wang et al. (2023) who observed the support from adult children shape the senior tourists' travel experience, such as economic, emotional, and instrumental support in the pre-travel and on-site stages. Another similar study by Xiong et al. (2023), they found that five specific types of support desired by the senior tourists from their children such as attitudinal, caring, support, companionship and timing support. This study goes beyond these observations by offering a more comprehensive view of how travel companionship influences the MTEs of senior tourists. For instance, the role of travel companionship as being a local guidance not only provides practical assistance but also enhances the spontaneity and enjoyment of travel, which is consistent with Wang et al. (2023). Similarly, the involvement of travel companions in travel planning role, while reducing stress as Kazeminia et al. (2015) observed, also fosters a sense of inclusion and strengthens social bonds between senior tourists and their companions. Physical assistance, especially in the context of age-related limitations, is another critical role of support. Interviews with participants illustrate how travel companions play a critical role in carrying bags, managing medications, and offering physical support by holding hands. This support is crucial for seniors who may face age-related challenges, ensuring their comfort and safety during travel. The presence of travel companions who offer physical assistance significantly enhances the travel experience, making it more memorable for senior tourists. Emotional support, which Wang et al. (2023) and Xiong et al. (2023) also highlighted, is shown in this study to be deeply intertwined with the travel experience, influencing not just well-being but also the satisfaction and memorability of the trip. Moreover, financial assistance, as discussed in this finding, goes beyond merely covering costs. It fosters a sense of care and reduces financial stress, thus contributing to a more relaxed and enjoyable travel experience, which consistent with the findings of Wang et al. (2023) and Xiong et al. (2023).

Thirdly, the theme of mutual exchange and communication is central to understanding how senior tourists create and share meaningful experiences when travelling with their travel companions. This study's findings on chit-chat emphasize its importance in fostering social bonds, a notion supported by Moal-Ulvoas and Taylor (2014), who also found that travel meets senior tourists' needs resulting for longing for contact, communication and companionship. Chit-chat provides interaction between senior tourists with their travel companions a stage for listening and being listened to, mutual support and helps others grow (Zhang et al., 2024). The findings of this study provide a more specific perspective by showing how these casual conversations play a vital role in alleviating fatigue and boredom, particularly during long journey to a destination, thereby enhancing the overall experience. Information sharing, another key role of the travel companionship of this theme, aligns with the observations of Choo and Petrick (2015), who noted that sharing knowledge among travel companions enriches the experience. This present study extends this understanding by highlighting how information sharing among senior tourists with their travel companions often includes health-related advice and technological updates, making it a crucial role in ensuring a satisfying and well-informed travel experience of senior tourists.

Lastly, the theme of dynamics and compatibility captures the intricate interplay of personalities, interests, and behaviours among travel companions that shape MTEs for senior tourists. This study highlights the crucial role of adaptability and flexibility in travel companionship, which is essential for mitigating conflicts and fostering positive experiences. This finding aligns with Wang et al. (2023) and Qian and Lin (2022), who noted that conflicts often arise between children and senior tourists during trips due to differing perceptions and opinions, leading to tension. In this context, the role of adaptability and flexibility helps maintain harmony within travel groups, reduce stress, and enhance group cohesion. This study contributes further by showing how the role of adaptability and flexibility is particularly vital in senior travel, where companions must often accommodate the physical limitations and diverse interests of senior tourists. This aligns with Matteucci et al. (2022), who observed that when a group, such as friends, works together to overcome challenges, they experience a sense of satisfaction or gratification from successfully navigating those challenges as a team. Shared interests and like-mindedness, identified as essential role for a harmonious travel experience, echoes past studies that have emphasized the significance of compatible companions (e.g., Qian & Lin, 2022; Su et al., 2021, 2021). This study adds depth to this understanding by demonstrating that shared interests and like-mindedness not only enhance the enjoyment of the trip but also help prevent conflicts, leading to a more cohesive and satisfying travel experience (Matteucci et al., 2022). This finding is similar with Su et al. (2021), who noted that familiar companions mitigate the effect of group

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size and keep tourists satisfied. However, this study suggests that while the role of shared interests and like-mindedness is crucial, differing preferences can significantly disrupt the travel experience, particularly for senior tourists who may have less tolerance for such disparities. Respect and understanding among travel companions also emerged as critical role of dynamics and compatibility. This role is central to maintaining harmonious travel relationships, particularly in acknowledging the preferences and boundaries of senior tourists. This aligns with Qian and Lin (2022), who found that understanding each other's purposes and expectations during a trip can please senior tourists and help avoid conflicts. This study provides a more detailed account of how respect and understanding manifest in travel situations, such as accommodating personal habits and preferences and understanding the likes and dislikes of senior tourists (Wang et al., 2023). Additionally, the role of comfort and no role (such as absence of the responsibility of being a father or mother) in travel companionship highlights the ease and relaxation that come with travelling with travel companions. This finding resonates with Qian and Lin (2022), who observed that seniors can hold back their emotions to remain harmonious care about their image in the eyes of their travel companions, This study suggests the importance of comfort and relaxation with no role in enhancing travel satisfaction, what is particularly noteworthy in the current findings is the emphasis on the freedom to be oneself when traveling with friends, as opposed to the structured responsibilities of family travel. This adds a new layer to the understanding of travel companionship, emphasizing that the absence of rigid roles can enhance the quality of MTEs by allowing for a more relaxed, stress-free, and to engage more fully in the travel experience.
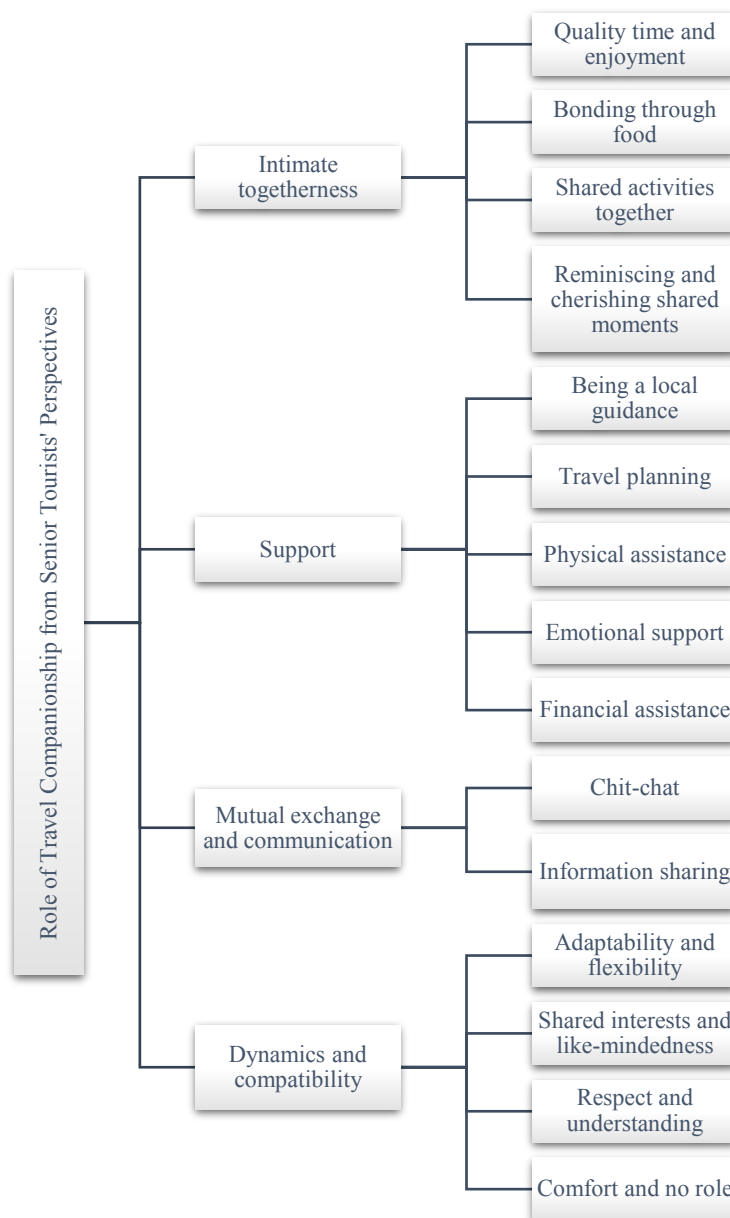

Figure 1. The role of travel companionship from senior tourists' perspectives.

Theoretical Implication

Overall, the findings of this study contribute to the theoretical understanding of how travel companionship influences MTEs of senior tourists, affirming the observations made by Vada et al. (2022)'s study. Firstly, while previous studies such as those by Qian and Lin (2022) and Wang et al. (2023), have primarily focused on the dynamics of intergenerational interaction between senior tourists and their children during travel, they have not fully explored the broader role of travel companionship. These studies have provided valuable insights into specific aspects of interaction, such as conflicts, support, and joint activities, but they often overlook the comprehensive and multifaceted nature of travel companionship in shaping MTEs. In contrast, this study introduces a more nuanced and in-depth view of travel companionship, revealing its complex role in influencing MTEs of senior tourists through intimate togetherness, support, mutual exchange and communication, and dynamics and compatibility. This approach not only expands the scope of understanding beyond mere interaction but also highlights the intricate ways in which travel companionship contributes to the overall travel experience, addressing a critical gap in the existing literature. By focusing on the holistic impact of travel companionship on MTEs, this study offers a more complete framework for understanding how senior tourists experience and derive satisfaction from their travels, paving the way for future research to explore these dynamics further.

Secondly, the findings of this study can be further substantiated by Social Facilitation Theory, which suggests that the presence of others can enhance an individual's emotions and behaviours (de Castro, 1994). According to this theory, it explains that when individuals are in the company of others, their task performance can be either facilitated or inhibited (Su et al., 2020). This perspective is particularly relevant in understanding how travel companionship influences the MTEs of senior tourists in this context, who often travel with companions and make collaborative decisions during trips (Liu et al., 2021). For instance, the increased engagement in activities such as sightseeing and dining, as observed in this study, can be interpreted through the lens of social facilitation. The presence of companions may motivate seniors to participate more actively, thereby enriching their travel experiences (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Moreover, the various forms of support such as being a local guidance, travel planning, emotional, physical, and financial that highlighted in this study align with Social Facilitation Theory, as companions can reduce anxiety and enhance performance in challenging situations (Wang et al., 2023; Xiong et al., 2023), leading to a more positive and memorable experience. Furthermore, the role of mutual exchange and communication, particularly through chit-chat and information sharing, is enhanced by the presence of companions, who facilitate more meaningful interactions and contribute to the memorability of the trip (Choo & Petrick, 2015). Additionally, the dynamics and compatibility among companions, as discussed in this study, is crucial in determining how social facilitation occurs. Compatible companions amplify the positive effects of social facilitation, leading to a more harmonious and enjoyable travel experience, while incompatibility can diminish these effects (Qian & Lin, 2022). Therefore, this study relies on social facilitation theory, as the essence of travel companionship will do well to facilitate positive MTE among senior tourists in this study.

Practical implication

From a practical standpoint, understanding the role of travel companionship in shaping senior tourists' MTE is essential for identifying new opportunities in tourism product development. The findings of this study offer valuable insights for tourism and travel practitioners such as Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), marketers, and government bodies. It is crucial for tourism and travel practitioners to recognize that different tourists may experience the same situation in varied ways depending on their form of companionship (e.g., family, friends, or traveling alone), even when equivalent services, events, and activities are offered at a destination. Although MTE cannot be directly offered to tourists due to the experiential nature of tourism products (Tung & Ritchie, 2011), the tourism and travel practitioners can still tailor their products and services to create an environment that enhances interaction between senior tourists and their companions, fostering the development or reliving of memorable experiences through bonding activities and services.

For DMOs, there is a clear opportunity to enhance senior tourists' experiences by creating environments that promote intimate togetherness and mutual support. This can be achieved by developing senior-friendly infrastructures, such as accessible transportation and guided tours that cater specifically to the needs of senior tourists. By offering spaces and activities designed to foster social interaction and bonding such as group-oriented food experiences or senior-friendly communal spaces. DMOs can ensure that senior tourists enjoy meaningful and enjoyable time with their companions. Additionally, promoting diverse and customizable travel options allows for

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flexibility, ensuring that senior tourists with varying interests and abilities can find experiences that are both compatible and enjoyable. For instance, the concept like Genting Highlands, a popular destination in Malaysia that can cater to a wide range of interests: while a father might enjoy gaming, the mother could indulge in shopping, and the children could explore the theme park. By providing opportunities for each person to pursue their own interests without interfering with one another, DMOs can help create a harmonious and fulfilling travel experience for senior tourists and their companions.

Marketers also play a vital role in enhancing MTEs for senior tourists by focusing on promoting travel experiences that emphasize quality time with loved ones, along with the availability of support services that cater to this demographic. Marketing campaigns should highlight destinations and activities that encourage bonding and social interaction, using testimonials and stories to showcase the emotional benefits of travelling with family and friends. Additionally, marketers should emphasize the availability of support services, such as personalized travel planning and on-call medical assistance, reassuring senior tourists and their companions that their needs will be met throughout their journey. By tailoring marketing messages to address the diverse preferences and travel styles of senior tourists, marketers can create targeted campaigns that enhance the sense of community and compatibility among tourists, ensuring a harmonious and MTEs.

Government bodies or state local authorities have a significant role to play in supporting the tourism industry's efforts to cater to senior tourists. By investing in senior-friendly tourism infrastructure and policies, governments can ensure that destinations are accessible and welcoming to senior tourists. This includes developing accessible public transportation, ensuring that tourist sites have the necessary facilities for senior tourists, and supporting initiatives that encourage multi-generational travel. Governments can also facilitate communication and information exchange among senior tourists by promoting the development of senior-specific tourism apps and educational programs that keep seniors informed and engaged. Furthermore, by funding research and establishing certification programs for senior-friendly travel options, governments can support the creation of diverse and customizable travel experiences that cater to the unique needs and preferences of senior tourists, enhancing their overall travel satisfaction and well-being.

Limitation and Future Studies

Despite its strengths, the study acknowledges several limitations. First, all participants had extensive travel experience and travelled with companions, which may not reflect the experiences of senior tourists who had no prior travel experience or travelling alone. The differences between seniors' previous travel experiences or prefer solo travel, and their views on travel companionship, should be captured and discussed in the future. Secondly, this study focused only on domestic tourism, and the findings may differ for international destinations. Future research should explore how senior tourists' preferences for travel companionship vary between domestic and international tourism settings, aiding in the development of tailored tourism products for senior tourists in Malaysia. Thirdly, while the study highlighted the positive aspects of travel companionship, it did not address potential challenges or stresses. Exploring negative perceptions of travel companionship could uncover new issues among senior tourists. Finally, as the study is based on qualitative research, the findings should be viewed as illustrative of Malaysian senior tourists' perspectives. Future research could use quantitative methods to test the generalizability of the 15 identified roles of travel companionship.

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FACTORS IN RISK PERCEPTION AFFECT THE DECISION TO PURCHASE FOREIGN TRAVEL INSURANCE FOR THAI TOURISTS IN BANGKOK

1st Pattarapong Noommahan[1]
2nd Watsida Boonyanmethaporn[2]

Extended abstract

This research aimed to study risk perception factors that affect the decision to purchase foreign travel insurance for Thai tourists in Bangkok. This research used a quantitative research method. The sample group is Thai tourists living in Bangkok. And have purchased travel insurance to travel abroad at least once, a total of 160 people. Non-probability sampling with convenience sampling was used. The tool used to collect data was a questionnaire, which was found to have a reliability value of 0.972, and statistics used in data analysis include frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and multiple regression analysis.

The results of the study found that respondents' opinions on risk perception affecting the decision to purchase travel insurance policies for Thai tourists were overall at a high level. When considering each aspect, it was found that the areas with the highest average values were function risks, followed by health risks, cultural risks, political risks, environmental risks, satisfaction risks, and the lowest is social risks, respectively. The results of the hypothesis testing found that function risks influence Thai tourists' decision to purchase foreign travel insurance in Bangkok with statistical significance at the .05 level.

Keywords: *Risk Perception; Purchasing Decision; Travel Insurance*

Introduction

Currently, health concerns remain a significant factor when considering travel. Although worries about COVID-19 have decreased, Thais still choose to travel cautiously and avoid certain countries. However, the level of caution has significantly decreased compared to 2021, and when thinking about future travels, Thais still feel concerned about health-related issues, albeit less than last year. The desire to travel abroad has been a significant motivator for getting vaccinated as concerns related to COVID-19 diminish, making city tourism attractive to travelers once again. COVID-19 has influenced travel insurance purchasing due to an increased need for protection. Travel insurance appears to be essential in nearly every surveyed country, exceptionally high in the Asia-Pacific region (Thailand 75%, Australia 54%), in the United Kingdom (49%), and in Southern Europe (Spain 50%, Italy and Portugal 45%). Almost every type of insurance tends to grow due to the economic recovery and government transitions, increased sales of electric vehicles, and the resurgence of both domestic and international tourism, all of which positively affect insurance (Thai Life Insurance Association, 2023).

However, currently Thailand has entered a digital economy society. Insurance development plan no. 4 (2021 - 2025) that aims to develop the insurance system to be stable, sustainable and competitive in the digital economy and society through government innovation and technology. The private sector and citizens have access to insurance and the benefits of risk assurance. Especially in strategy no.1, develop and encourage the insurance business to adjust its business model to be in line with the new environment by promoting the development of channels, formats, methods, and products so that each group of people can access insurance easily, conveniently, at all times. By developing insurance products that are consistent with the needs of the people and their specific risks. (Office of Insurance Commission, 2021) Therefore, when the forms of insurance products are diverse and the channels for accessing insurance products are more easily accessible, it will cause higher competition in the insurance business. (Chuekham, Yohamhad, & Duangmanee, 2021) Therefore, it can be said that the perception of risk in purchasing insurance products is related to the perception of uncertainty that consumers have in purchasing insurance products. Insurance products require a longer decision-making process than other types of products, which consumers must consider purchasing a product

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and may have questions about insurance products that are more detailed than other products. (Syah, Munthe, Dewanto & Roespinoedji, 2021)

From the above, the researcher is interested in studying the risk perception factors influencing the decision to purchase international travel insurance among tourists in Bangkok. This study aims to provide insurance companies with insights that can be utilized to improve, plan, and strategize their offerings and manage potential risks to align with consumer needs best. Additionally, it helps promote and support travelers' awareness of the importance of travel accident insurance.

Objectives

To study the risk perception factors that influence the decision-making process of Thai tourists in Bangkok when purchasing international travel insurance.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1 Risk perception factors influence the decision-making process of Thai tourists in Bangkok when purchasing international travel insurance.

Hypothesis 1.1 Cultural risks influence the decision-making process of Thai tourists in Bangkok when purchasing international travel insurance.

Hypothesis 1.2 Health risk influences the decision-making process of Thai tourists in Bangkok when purchasing international travel insurance.

Hypothesis 1.3 Political risk influences the decision-making process of Thai tourists in Bangkok when purchasing international travel insurance.

Hypothesis 1.4 Environmental risk influences the decision-making process of Thai tourists in Bangkok when purchasing international travel insurance.

Hypothesis 1.5 Function risk influences the decision-making process of Thai tourists in Bangkok when purchasing international travel insurance.

Hypothesis 1.6 Satisfaction risk influences the decision-making process of Thai tourists in Bangkok when purchasing international travel insurance.

Hypothesis 1.7 Social risk influences the decision-making process of Thai tourists in Bangkok when purchasing international travel insurance.

Literature Review

The Concepts and Theories Related to Consumer Behavior

Analyzing consumer behavior is an approach to studying and analyzing behaviors related to the decision-making process when purchasing goods or services. Schiffman and Kanuk (2005) proposed seeking answers to such questions by asking seven questions related to consumption behaviors, which consist of questions based on the principle of 6Ws and 1H to seek answers to the 7O's, which are used to explain consumer behavior and to adapt to determine marketing strategies. Consumer behavior is a method of study where each individual decides how to allocate resources, such as time, personnel, and others, to the consumption of goods. Marketers must study the proposed product to understand who the consumers are (Who), what the consumers buy (What), why they buy it (Why), how they buy it (How), when they buy it (When), where they buy it (Where), and how often they purchase and use it (How often), as well as studying who influences the buying to find the seven answers related to consumer behavior.

The Concept and Theory Related to Risk Perception

Kotler et al. (2001) stated that perceived risk is the ability of consumers to assess the risks they face in deciding to purchase goods and services. This ability, varying among consumers, has an impact on differing consumer behaviors. Moreover, in defining perceived risk, emphasis is also placed on subjective feelings, which depend on the consumer's emotional state (Anotip, 2013). Risk influences consumers in their decision-making process when purchasing goods and services, regardless of whether the risk materializes after the purchase. However, if the risk could potentially cause severe harm to consumers, and if consumers cannot perceive this risk, it does not influence their decision to purchase goods and services. Furthermore, the intangible nature of tourism services means that

tourists can only assess the quality of the service once they experience it. Therefore, deciding to use tourism services carries risks, meaning the uncertainty of the outcomes obtained from using the service could differ from what the tourists expect. The types of perceived risks (Anuwitchanon, 2011) include Function risk, financial risk, physical risk, psychological risk, social risk, temporal risk, and sensory risk.

The Concepts and Theories Related to Purchasing Decisions

Solomon (2015) defined the purchasing decision as an essential part of studying consumer behavior, where the method each consumer uses to evaluate and choose a particular product varies depending on their perspective and the importance they place on each type of product. This leads to different purchasing decision processes. As stated by Siriwat (2017), it is a process of choosing to act on one thing from the various available options. Consumers often must make decisions among different product and service options based on information and the constraints of the situation. Therefore, decision-making is an essential process in the consumer's mind.

The purchasing decision process consists of five stages: problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior (Kotler, 1997). In summary, the factors affecting the consumer's decision to purchase a product or service, or consumer behavior, consist of these five stages: the need recognition stage, the information search stage, the alternative evaluation stage, the decision stage, and the post-purchase behavior stage. From studying various definitions, the researcher can conclude that the decision is a process of choosing one path from several options that have been considered or evaluated. Decisions must be made under different circumstances, and the decision-maker should have access to information to guide purchasing decisions.

Conceptual Framework
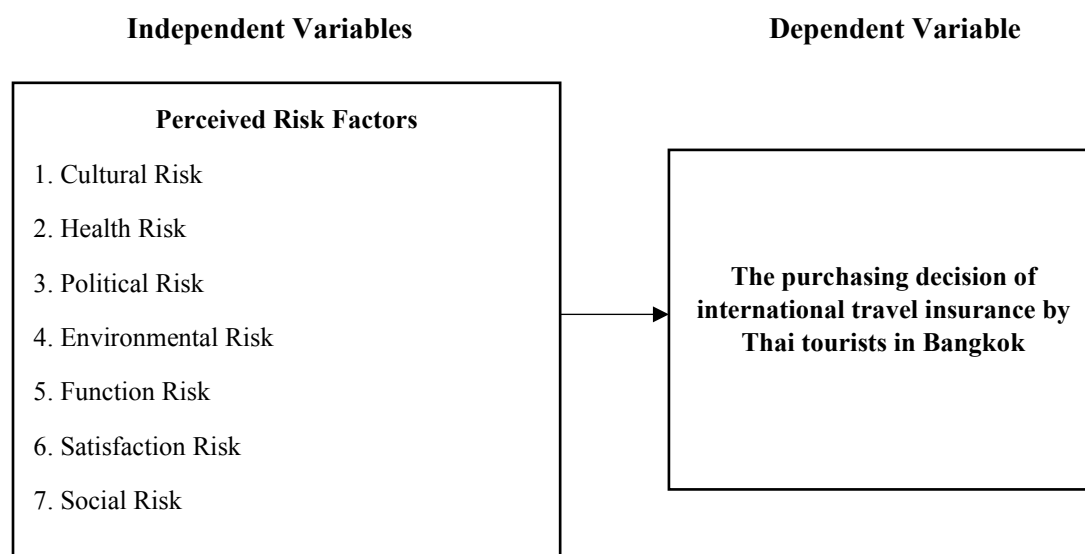
Independent Variables   **Dependent Variable**

Perceived Risk Factors
1. Cultural Risk
2. Health Risk
3. Political Risk
4. Environmental Risk
5. Function Risk
6. Satisfaction Risk
7. Social Risk

→ **The purchasing decision of international travel insurance by Thai tourists in Bangkok**

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

The population used in this study consists of Thai tourists residing in Bangkok who have purchased international travel insurance at least once, with the exact number of this population unknown. Due to the researcher's lack of precise population data, the sample size was calculated using the formula based on the concept of Cohen (1988), resulting in a sample size of 153 individuals. An additional 7 individuals were included, totaling 160 respondents to account for potential data inaccuracies. The sampling method employed was convenience sampling, considering the Thai tourists living in Bangkok who have purchased international travel insurance at least once and were available and willing to complete the questionnaire until the number reached 160.

2. Research Tools

The instrument used for data collection in this study is a questionnaire comprising close-ended questions totaling 160 sets. The questions in the questionnaire are divided into 5 parts, each aligned with the objectives and

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hypotheses of the research, as follows:

Part 1: Screening questions for respondents−These are designed as multiple-choice questions to filter respondents according to specific criteria relevant to the study.

Part 2: Questions about general information of the respondents. This section also uses multiple-choice questions to collect demographic data and other general information about the respondents.

Part 3: Questions related to the behavior of Thai tourists purchasing travel insurance policies−These are multiple-choice questions designed to gather data on the purchasing behaviors of the respondents.

Part 4: Questions about perceived risks that affect the decision to purchase travel insurance−This section uses a rating scale based on the Likert scale to measure the respondents' perceptions of various risks.

Part 5: Questions about the decision to purchase international travel insurance. Similar to Part 4, this uses a rating scale based on the Likert scale to understand the factors influencing the purchasing decision.

Research Quality Assessment

To assess the quality of the research instrument, the researcher must conduct a reliability test of the questionnaire to check the internal consistency of the items within it. This involves administering the research questionnaire to a sample group of 30 respondents and then calculating the reliability coefficient, Cronbach's Alpha, using computer software. The predetermined threshold for acceptable reliability is at least.70, as Khuttiya and Suwajittanon (2011) suggested. In this case, the researcher found the reliability coefficient to be .972, indicating a very high level of internal consistency among the questionnaire items and thus suggesting that the instrument is highly reliable for this research.

3. Data Collection

3.1 Primary Data

The study collected primary data using a self-administered questionnaire distributed to Thai tourists residing in Bangkok who have purchased international travel insurance at least once. After completion, the collected questionnaires were returned for data analysis and results compilation according to the predefined research procedures.

3.2 Secondary data

Secondary data were gathered from various sources to provide comprehensive, reliable, and accurate information for the study. This included reviewing relevant literature such as books, journals, internet resources, academic dissertations, research articles, and lecture notes related to the topic of study. This approach ensured a thorough understanding of the context and supported the findings derived from the primary data.

4. Data Analysis

In the research, data analysis was conducted using both descriptive and inferential statistics to examine the general characteristics of respondents and the risk perception factors affecting their decision to purchase international travel insurance by Thai tourists residing in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region. The analytical process is detailed below:

1) Data analysis using descriptive statistics for the general information of the respondents and risk perception factors that affect the decision to purchase foreign travel insurance for Thai tourists in Bangkok using questionnaire analysis as follows:

1.1) General information of the respondents, displayed as frequency distributions and percentages

1.2) Data on risk perception factors that influence the decision to purchase international travel insurance by Thai tourists in Bangkok are presented as mean values and standard deviations.

2) Inferential Statistics Analysis to demonstrate the relationships between independent variables and the dependent variable as follows:

2.1) Multiple Regression Analysis to test hypotheses and identify the relationships of risk perception factors that influence the decision-making process of Thai tourists in Bangkok when purchasing international travel insurance.

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Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

Results of General Information from Respondents

Most of the respondents are female, aged between 36 and 45, married, hold a bachelor's degree, are employed by private companies, and have a monthly income exceeding 50,000 THB.

Results on the Purchasing Behavior of Travel Insurance by Thai Tourists

Most respondents have purchased travel insurance more than three times, typically opting for single-trip travel insurance policies. They generally hold one travel insurance policy at a time and choose to buy insurance from New Hampshire Insurance. The policies usually cover amounts exceeding 1,000,000 THB. Most policies are purchased for periods not exceeding six months through insurance agents or sales personnel. Decisions to buy travel insurance are made independently, with information about travel insurance primarily obtained from friends and online media. The main reason for purchasing travel insurance is for peace of mind.

Results on Risk Perception Influencing the Decision to Purchase Travel Insurance by Thai Tourists

Overall, respondents perceive the risks affecting their decision to purchase travel insurance to be significant, with an average rating of 3.96. Breaking down by categories, the highest average rating is for function risk, rated significantly high at 4.15. This is followed by health risks ($\bar{x}$ = 4.00), cultural risks ($\bar{x}$ = 3.96), political risks and environmental risks ($\bar{x}$ =3.92 each), satisfaction-related risks ($\bar{x}$ = 3.90), and the lowest being social risks ($\bar{x}$ =3.88), respectively, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 The mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation (S.D.) of the perceived risks affecting Thai tourists' decision to purchase travel insurance is overall significant.

Perceived Risk Factors	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Opinion Level	Rank
1. Cultural Risk	3.96	.350	High	3
2. Health Risk	4.00	.433	High	2
3. Political Risk	3.92	.313	High	4
4. Environmental Risk	3.92	.262	High	5
5. Function Risk	4.15	.324	High	1
6. Satisfaction Risk	3.90	.214	High	6
7. Social Risk	3.88	.284	High	7
Overall Average	**3.96**	**.272**	**High**	**-**

Results on the Decision to Purchase International Travel Insurance by Thai Tourists in Bangkok

Respondents' overall opinions on purchasing international travel insurance in Bangkok are highly favorable, with an average rating of 3.98. When examined by category, the highest mean score is for recommending to others, which is considered highly favorable, with a mean of 4.19. This is followed by the social aspect, with a high rating of 3.92, and the security aspect, which is also rated highly at 3.87. The lowest rated aspect is the physical aspect, still considered high, with a mean of 3.85. These findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 The mean (x̄) and standard deviation (S.D.) for the decision to purchase international travel insurance by Thai tourists in Bangkok

Decision Aspects to Purchase International Travel Insurance	x̄	S.D.	Opinion Level	Rank
1. Physical	3.85	.413	High	4
2. Security and Safety	3.87	.297	High	3
3. Social	3.92	.268	High	2
4. Recommending to Others	4.19	.568	High	1
Overall Average	**3.98**	**.293**	**High**	**-**

Analysis of the Relationship between Perceived Risk Factors and the Decision to Purchase International Travel Insurance

Table 3 Multiple Regression Analysis of Perceived Risk Factors Affecting the Decision to Purchase International Travel Insurance by Thai Tourists in Bangkok

Perceived Risk	The decision to Purchase International Travel Insurance				
	B	S.E.	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant (α)	.761	.356		2.136	.034
Cultural Risk (X_1)	-.087	.076	-.104	-1.143	.255
Health Risk (X_2)	.022	.077	.033	.288	.774
Political Risk (X_3)	.012	.101	.013	.119	.906
Environmental Risk (X_4)	.096	.106	.086	.904	.368
Function Risk (X_5)	.649	.102	.630	6.370	.000**
Satisfaction Risk (X_6)	.133	.116	.097	1.143	.255
Social Risk (X_7)	.003	.054	.003	.057	.954
R = .729, R^2 = .531, Adjusted R^2 = .509, S.E. = .205, F = 24.567, Sig. = .000					

* p value = .05

From the multiple regression analysis presented in Table 3, the variable that can be statistically significantly used to predict the decision to purchase international travel insurance by Thai tourists in Bangkok at a significance level of .05 is Function Risk (X_5). Other risk factors did not show statistical significance in influencing the decision to purchase travel insurance.

Given the significant impact of Function Risk (X_5) on the decision-making process, it can be included as a critical predictor in the forecasting model. The model's coefficient of determination (R^2) is .531, indicating that approximately 53.1% of the variance in the decision to purchase travel insurance can be explained by the model that includes Function Risk as a predictor. The predictive equation based on this analysis can be structured as follows:

$$Y_1 = .761 + .649 (X_5)$$

2. Discussion

From the study of risk perception factors affecting the decision to purchase international travel insurance by Thai tourists in Bangkok, the results can be discussed as follows:

1) Cultural risks do not significantly influence the decision of Thai tourists in Bangkok to purchase international travel insurance. This might be due to several factors, such as the diversity of cultures, unfamiliarity with the local customs, varying travel experiences, forced purchases of goods or services, and the perception that prices for services such as transportation and accommodation are uniformly high across different destinations. As a result, travelers may not see travel insurance as necessary to cover these aspects. This finding aligns with the study by Chawkaewwong (2020), which explored the perceived risk factors of Chinese tourists in Chiang Mai. The study concluded that cultural risks did not significantly influence the perceptions of these tourists about risk. Similarly, the research by Keawsod and Udomthanavong (2023) investigated the relationship between risk perception and trust in purchasing decisions for pre-order products such as licensed toys from Japan in Bangkok and its suburbs. It was

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found that cultural risks did not significantly impact the purchasing decisions for these products.

2) Health risks do not significantly influence the decision of Thai tourists in Bangkok to purchase international travel insurance. This may be due to tourists' need for more concern about potential health issues that could arise while traveling abroad. Tourists can seek treatment independently or rely on existing protections, which could diminish the perceived need for travel insurance during international trips. This observation is consistent with the findings of Likhitkitwoerakul (2020), who investigated factors influencing the behavior of working-age individuals in Bangkok regarding the purchase of international travel insurance. The study revealed that health risk factors did not significantly impact their purchasing behavior. Similarly, research by Srepirote et al. (2023) on the influence of risk perception and trust on the decision to purchase herbal products through digital marketing platforms found that health risks did not affect the purchasing decisions for these products.

3) Political risks do not significantly influence the decision of Thai tourists in Bangkok to purchase international travel insurance. This may be due to tourists needing to be more concerned with the political situation in their travel destinations, as their primary objective is leisure rather than political involvement. Tourists likely avoid areas perceived as risky due to political instability, thus reducing the perceived need for insurance that covers political risks. This observation aligns with research by Netprasit (2021), who studied the risk perceptions of elderly tourists traveling in Chiang Rai Province. The study found that political risk factors did not significantly affect their risk perception, suggesting that older tourists do not consider political instability a crucial factor affecting travel safety. Similarly, the study by Cho-paka (2017) on the influence of risk perception and marketing mix on consumer decisions to purchase products via TV home shopping in Bangkok also found that political risks did not significantly impact purchasing decisions, indicating a general trend that political factors are not a major concern for consumers and tourists alike in the region.

4) Environmental risks do not significantly affect the decision of Thai tourists in Bangkok to purchase international travel insurance. This lack of impact may be attributed to the perception that environmental changes, such as weather conditions, the physical environment of tourist paths, local facilities, service atmospheres, and natural disasters at destination countries, must be more severe to necessitate additional travel insurance. Tourists might assess that these environmental elements, although relevant, do not pose a serious enough threat to their safety or comfort that would require the safeguard of insurance. This observation aligns with the findings of Likhitkitwoerakul (2020), who investigated the factors influencing the behavioral trends of purchasing international travel insurance among working-age individuals in Bangkok. The study concluded that environmental risk did not significantly affect their purchasing behavior. Similarly, the research conducted by Noopetch (2016) examined the impact of risk perception on consumers' intention to purchase cosmetics online in Hat Yai, Songkhla. It was found that environmental risks did not affect their purchasing intentions, suggesting a general trend where environmental factors are not considered critical in the decision-making process for purchasing products and services, including travel insurance.

5) Function risk significantly influences the decision to purchase international travel insurance among Thai tourists in Bangkok. This influence is attributed to concerns regarding flight cancellations, airline delays, luggage damage, and the loss of personal property, which must occur within the specified travel period or during the entire duration of the overseas trip. Consequently, tourists place a heightened emphasis on purchasing travel insurance for international travel. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Netprasit (2021), who studied the perception of risk among elderly tourists traveling in Chiang Rai Province. The study concluded that function risks substantially impact the risk perception of these tourists, with statistical significance at the .05 level. Similarly, Chawkaewwong (2020) investigated the risk perception factors of Chinese tourists in Chiang Mai Province and found that function risks significantly influence their risk perception, corroborated by statistical significance at the .05 level. These findings are consistent with Somrit Likhitkitwoerakul (2020) research, which examined the factors influencing the behavioral tendencies of working-age individuals in Bangkok to purchase international travel insurance, revealing that function risks significantly impact this tendency at the .05 level.

6) The risk of satisfaction does not significantly influence the decision of Thai tourists in Bangkok to purchase international travel insurance. This observation suggests that tourist satisfaction does not necessitate having insurance for overseas travel. Instead, tourists may seek services that cater extensively to their travel needs, indicating that the availability of travel insurance does not directly impact their overall satisfaction. This finding is corroborated by Netprasit's (2021) research on the risk perception of elderly tourists traveling in Chiang Rai Province, which showed that satisfaction-related risk factors do not alter the risk perception of these tourists. Furthermore, this is consistent

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with Sompong's (2021) study on the determinants affecting online purchasing decisions among consumers in Nakhon Pathom Province. The research concluded that satisfaction does not significantly affect the decision to purchase online, underscoring that satisfaction risks may not be a primary concern in the decision-making process regarding travel insurance purchases.

7) The influence of social risks does not impact Thai tourists' decision to purchase international travel insurance in Bangkok. This lack of impact may be attributed to the general perception that social dangers at the destination are manageable through cautious behavior, reducing the perceived need for insurance coverage. Tourists often assume that careful travel can mitigate such risks sufficiently, diminishing the relevance of insurance against social risks. This conclusion aligns with Chawkaewwong's (2020) research on Chinese tourists in Chiang Mai, which found that social risks do not significantly affect their risk perception. Furthermore, this finding is consistent with Supina (2017) study on the impact of risk perception on the purchasing intentions of new e-commerce customers, demonstrating that awareness of social risks does not influence the purchasing decisions of customers new to high-involvement online products.

Research Recommendations

Study Recommendations

1. For cultural risks, insurance businesses should prioritize the risk associated with the experience of purchasing goods and services, ensuring equality and familiarity for tourists traveling internationally.

2. Regarding health risks, insurance companies should focus on potential risks in the accommodation environment, contagious diseases, and infections, as well as food and beverage safety and illnesses that tourists may encounter at the destination.

3. For political risks, it is crucial for insurance providers to consider the political situation, policy changes or legislative developments, international conflicts, and economic conditions in the destination countries.

4. Concerning environmental risk, insurance businesses should address risks associated with local traffic conditions/driving behaviors, and natural disasters that may occur in the destination countries.

5. Concerning function risks, insurers should focus on health issues, accidents, property damage during travel, and sudden flight cancellations or delays due to airline errors, which can delay travelers' journeys.

6. For satisfaction risks, insurance companies should ensure that travel insurance services can maximize customer satisfaction.

7. Regarding social risks, insurance providers should consider risks related to being deceived into purchasing goods or services, physical harm from individuals, theft from social dangers, and diseases that could cause severe health issues and affect the community in the destination country.

Policy Recommendations

1. This study can serve as a guideline for the Thai Insurance Association and related businesses in travel insurance in formulating suggestions and policies to manage travel insurance that can best meet the needs of travelers.

2. The Thai Insurance Association and businesses involved in travel insurance can utilize these research findings to plan travel insurance policies that align with the requirements of Thai tourists.

3. The study indicates that travel insurance businesses must focus on the risk perception factors that influence Thai tourists' decision-making when purchasing international travel insurance. This will enhance awareness and enable tourists to effectively mitigate potential risks and place greater importance on purchasing travel insurance.

Recommendations for Future Studies

1. Future studies should explore other factors that influence Thai tourists' decision to purchase international travel insurance in Bangkok, as human behavior is becoming increasingly diverse, leading to more complex decision-making. Thus, studying additional factors can provide broader insights and facilitate maximal developmental benefits.

2. Future research should expand the demographic scope to study a more diverse population and enable comparisons of relationships and differences across various regions.

3. This research was quantitative; hence, future studies should include qualitative research methods to gain deeper insights and a variety of data.

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IMPACT OF DESTINATION ATTRACTIVENESS ON TOURIST SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY: A CASE STUDY OF KOREAN TOURISTS IN KHANH HOA PROVINCE.

Dinh Thi Nga[1]

Dinh Thi Thu Ha

Nguyen Dang Bac

Le Huu Tuan

Dinh Thanh Huy

This research focuses on identifying the factors influencing the attractiveness of tourism in Khanh Hoa province and their relationship with the satisfaction and loyalty of Korean tourists. The research findings reveal a total of 7 factors that influence the attractiveness of the tourism destination in Khanh Hoa, ranked in order of importance from high to low: security-safety, natural factors, infrastructure-accommodation, shopping-entertainment, human resources, accessibility, and socio-cultural factors.

Furthermore, the study also demonstrates that the attractiveness of the destination significantly impacts the satisfaction and loyalty of tourists. At the same time, tourist satisfaction also has a significant influence on their loyalty. This indicates that tourist satisfaction is an important mediating factor in the relationship between the attractiveness of the destination and tourist loyalty.

Based on these findings, the research proposes several solutions and recommendations to enhance the satisfaction and loyalty of Korean tourists towards Khanh Hoa as a tourism destination. These solutions include improving security-safety, preserving and developing natural resources, investing in infrastructure and accommodation, enhancing shopping and entertainment activities, training and developing human resources, creating convenient and friendly accessibility, and preserving and developing socio-cultural factors.

Overall, this research emphasizes the important role of attractiveness, satisfaction, and loyalty of tourists in promoting sustainable tourism and tourism development in Khanh Hoa.

Keywords: influencing factors, Korean tourists, Khanh Hoa, satisfaction, loyalty.

Introduction

South Korea is currently the largest source market for Vietnam's tourism industry in the first 10 months of 2023, with 2.9 million visitors. Several direct flights have been opened to connect the two countries. Recently, many Korean airlines have announced plans to open additional direct flights from Seoul to famous resorts in Vietnam, including Cam Ranh International Airport in Khanh Hoa.

According to statistics from the Khanh Hoa tourism industry, local accommodation establishments served nearly 1.25 million visitors out of a total of 2.4 million visitors in 2023, accounting for 51.9%. In the first three months of 2024, local accommodation establishments served approximately 500,000 Korean visitors out of a total of 1.2 million international visitors. Korean visitors have seen significant growth in Khanh Hoa and have become the largest international market for the province. In 2022, Khanh Hoa welcomed just over 166,000 Korean visitors, but in 2023, the number rose to over 1.2 million, an increase of 7.5 times.

To put it in perspective, the number of Korean visitors served by Khanh Hoa's accommodation establishments in 2023 exceeded the combined total of other Asian countries, accounting for 65.3% of Asian visitors. It was 4.4 times the number of Chinese visitors and 124 times the number of Japanese visitors.

Furthermore, Nha Trang - Khanh Hoa has also welcomed Korean artists and celebrities for sightseeing and relaxation, contributing to the promotion of the coastal city's tourism to Korean and international tourists in general.

This demonstrates that Khanh Hoa is an extremely attractive destination preferred by Korean tourists. However, the province has yet to fully utilize and maximize its strengths in terms of natural conditions, socio-cultural

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aspects, infrastructure, accommodation, and human resources to retain Korean tourists and increase their loyalty to tourism in Khanh Hoa. Additionally, there have been no specific research projects conducted to understand the relationship between destination attractiveness, satisfaction, and loyalty of Korean tourists in Khanh Hoa. Therefore, the author has chosen the topic "The Influence of Destination Attractiveness on Satisfaction and Loyalty of Tourists: A Case Study of Korean Tourists in Khanh Hoa Province" to support tourism managers and businesses in the region in understanding the needs and desires of Korean tourists. From there, suitable tourism development strategies can be proposed to enhance satisfaction and maintain the loyalty of Korean tourists to Khanh Hoa.

Objectives

General objective:

To propose solutions to attract and enhance the satisfaction and loyalty of Korean tourists visiting Khanh Hoa.

Specific objectives:

- Identify the attractive factors of a destination and evaluate their impact on the overall attractiveness of Khanh Hoa as a destination for Korean tourists.

- Assess the influence of destination attractiveness on the satisfaction and loyalty of Korean tourists towards Khanh Hoa as a destination.

- Provide recommendations to enhance the attractiveness of Khanh Hoa as a destination and improve the satisfaction and loyalty of Korean tourists.

Hypothesis (if any)

Overview of research works on destination attractiveness

According to Hu and Ritchie (1993), a model consisting of five factors contributes to the attractiveness of a tourist destination, including: (1) Natural factors, (2) Social factors, (3) Historical factors, (4) Entertainment and shopping conditions, and (5) Infrastructure, cuisine, and accommodation. Similarly, Azlizam Aziz (2002) proposed a model consisting of five main factors that influence the attractiveness of a destination, including: (1) Geographic factors, (2) Socio-cultural factors, (3) Supporting characteristics, (4) Natural characteristics, and (5) Physical characteristics.

Grearing's work to determine the attractiveness of Turkish destinations includes groups of attributes that have been built to determine the attractiveness of Turkish destinations including: (1) natural factors; (2) social factors; (3) historical factors; (4) entertainment and shopping facilities; (5) infrastructure, food and accommodation

Furthermore, the attractiveness of a destination refers to tourists' perceptions of destination-related factors that meet their needs and goals (Ariya, Wishitemi, & Sitati, 2017). Similarly, destination factors refer to three important elements, including cultural attractions (cultural performances and historical buildings), natural attractions (beaches, hills, and caves), and human-made attractions (theme parks and infrastructure). Additionally, Nasir, Mohamad, Ghani, and Afthanorhan (2020) propose that the attractiveness of a destination is defined by tourists' emotions, beliefs, and sentiments regarding the cultural attractiveness, natural attractiveness, and infrastructure of a destination, which cater to their specific vacation needs, depending on availability, budget allocation, and time constraints.

The attractiveness of a destination can be expressed through two dimensions: human characteristics and physical environment (Akroush, Jraisat, Kurdieh, Al-Faouri & Qatu, 2016). Human characteristics refer to the friendliness of locals and their level of hospitality towards tourists, while the physical environment includes historical and touristic sites, ease of access, good transportation systems, architectural design, and environmental attractiveness.

Based on Hu and Ritchie's (1993) model of destination attractiveness, Bui Thi Tam and Mai Le Quyen (2012) added the attribute of "destination safety." Specifically, they included social factors, historical factors, entertainment and shopping conditions, infrastructure, cuisine, accommodation, and destination safety.

Furthermore, there is a study by Le Thai Phuong et al. (2021) on the attractiveness attributes of Da Nang as a tourist destination in the context of Covid-19. The research findings indicate that the attractiveness of Da Nang as a destination during the Covid-19 pandemic is influenced by eight components (26 attributes), including: natural factors, cultural and historical factors, activities, festivals, events, tourism infrastructure, safety and security, product and service prices, tourists' perception of the Covid-19 context, and stimulus policies.

Based on empirical evidence, the research article constructs the attractiveness of a tourist destination with seven constituent factors: Accessibility (AC); Natural factors (NF); Socio-cultural factors (SCF); Infrastructure and

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Accommodation (IA); Entertainment and Shopping activities (ESA); Human resources (HR); Destination safety and security (DSS). The hypotheses developed are as follows:

H1a: Accessibility significantly influences the attractiveness of a destination.

H1b: Natural factors significantly influence the attractiveness of a destination.

H1c: Socio-cultural factors significantly influence the attractiveness of a destination.

H1d: Infrastructure and Accommodation significantly influence the attractiveness of a destination.

H1e: Entertainment and Shopping activities significantly influence the attractiveness of a destination.

H1f: Human resources significantly influence the attractiveness of a destination.

H1g: Destination safety and security significantly influence the attractiveness of a destination.

The relationship between destination attractiveness and tourist satisfaction

The satisfaction of tourists has gained significant attention from researchers in the field of tourism. Satisfaction can be considered as an evaluation after tourists have experienced a destination (Ryan, 1995). Hunt (1983) argued that satisfaction is not only related to the pleasure derived from the travel experience but also indicates that tourists have achieved a better-than-expected experience. Therefore, satisfaction is reflected when consumers compare their initial expectations with their actual experiences. When the actual experience exceeds expectations, consumers become satisfied (Yüksel and Yüksel, 2001; Aliman et al., 2016). This positive satisfaction leads to positive impacts. Satisfied tourists are more likely to return and recommend the destination to others. Conversely, dissatisfied tourists tend not to engage in similar behaviors, resulting in negative consequences. For the tourism industry, tourist satisfaction is essential for attracting more visitors and increasing foreign exchange revenue. The tourism industry needs to consider tourist satisfaction as it affects destination loyalty.

H2. The attractiveness of a destination significantly influences tourist satisfaction.

The relationship between destination attractiveness and tourist loyalty

According to the definition by Oliver (1999, p. 34), tourist loyalty is "a strong commitment to repurchase or continuously use a preferred product/service in the future that leads to repeated purchases of the same brand, regardless of situational influences and marketing efforts capable of causing switching behavior." Therefore, satisfaction leads to repeated purchases and positive recommendations through word-of-mouth, which are important indicators of loyalty. Satisfaction with a destination is a necessary step in developing tourist loyalty (Oliver, 1999).

H3. The attractiveness of the destination significantly influences tourist loyalty.

The relationship between tourist satisfaction and loyalty

Some studies have shown a significant positive relationship between tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008; Lee et al., 2011; Prayag, 2009; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Huang et al., 2015; Allameh et al., 2015; Akroush et al., 2016; Song et al., 2017; Yu & Hwang, 2019).

Yoon and Uysal (2005) conducted a study on 500 tourists in Northern Cyprus, located on the Mediterranean coast, which provided support for the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty to the destination at a significance level of 0.05. Therefore, tourist loyalty to a destination is positively influenced by their satisfaction with the experience.

H4. Tourist satisfaction significantly influences tourist loyalty.

Satisfaction has a significant mediating role in the relationship between destination attractiveness and tourist loyalty.

Prayag (2009) investigated the relationship between destination image, satisfaction, and future behavioral intentions of tourists visiting Mauritius. A theoretical model was tested on a sample of 705 international tourists using structural equation modeling. The results showed that destination image directly and indirectly influenced future behavior. Satisfaction and overall image played an intermediary role between destination image and future behavior. Therefore, the article suggests important theoretical and practical implications for destination image research and marketing.

Chiu et al. (2016) studied Chinese tourists traveling to South Korea to investigate the impacts of destination image and tourist satisfaction on tourist loyalty. The results showed that both perceived image and emotional image had positive effects on satisfaction, while satisfaction predicted tourist loyalty.

H5: Satisfaction plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between destination attractiveness and tourist loyalty.

Proposed research model

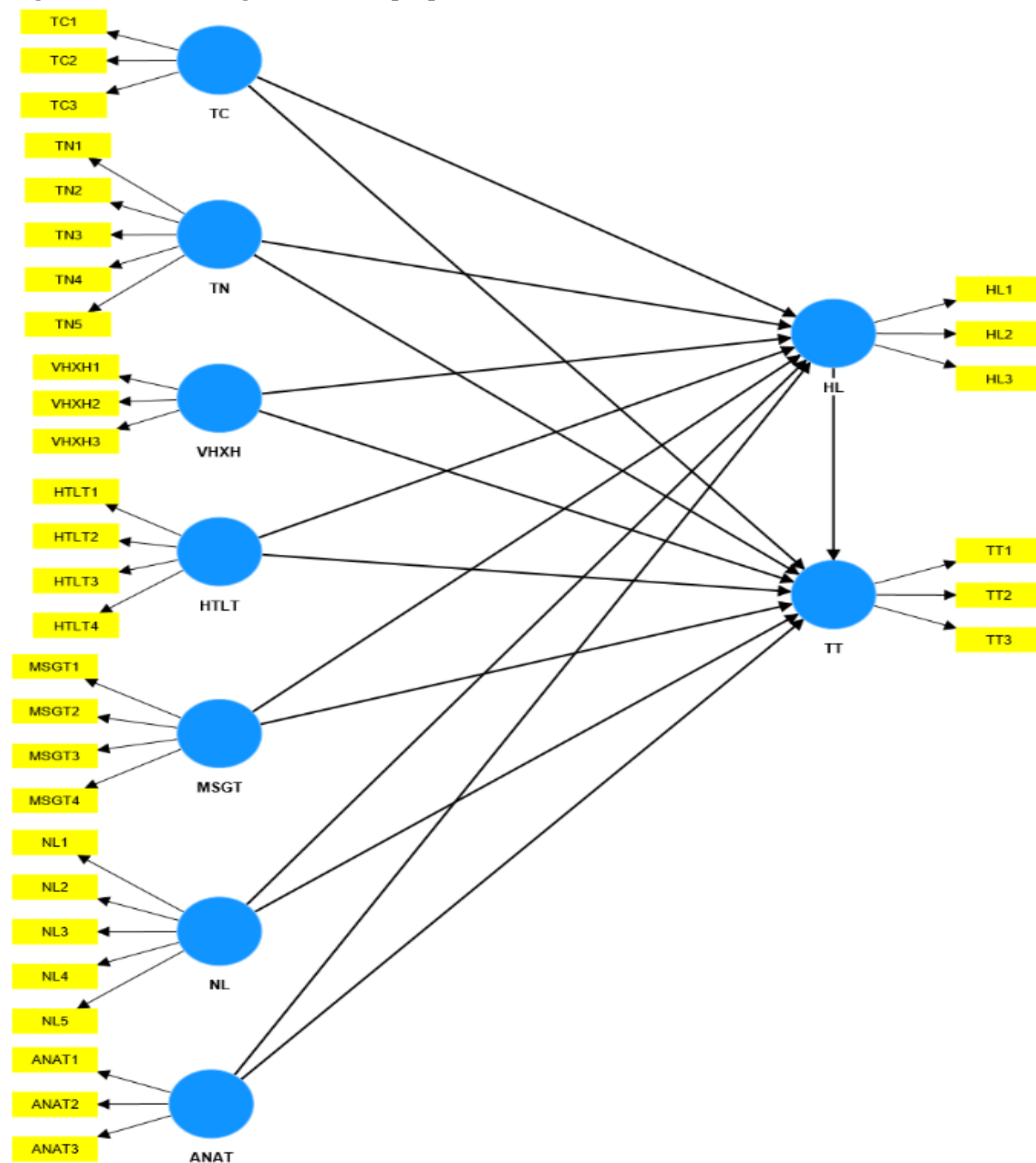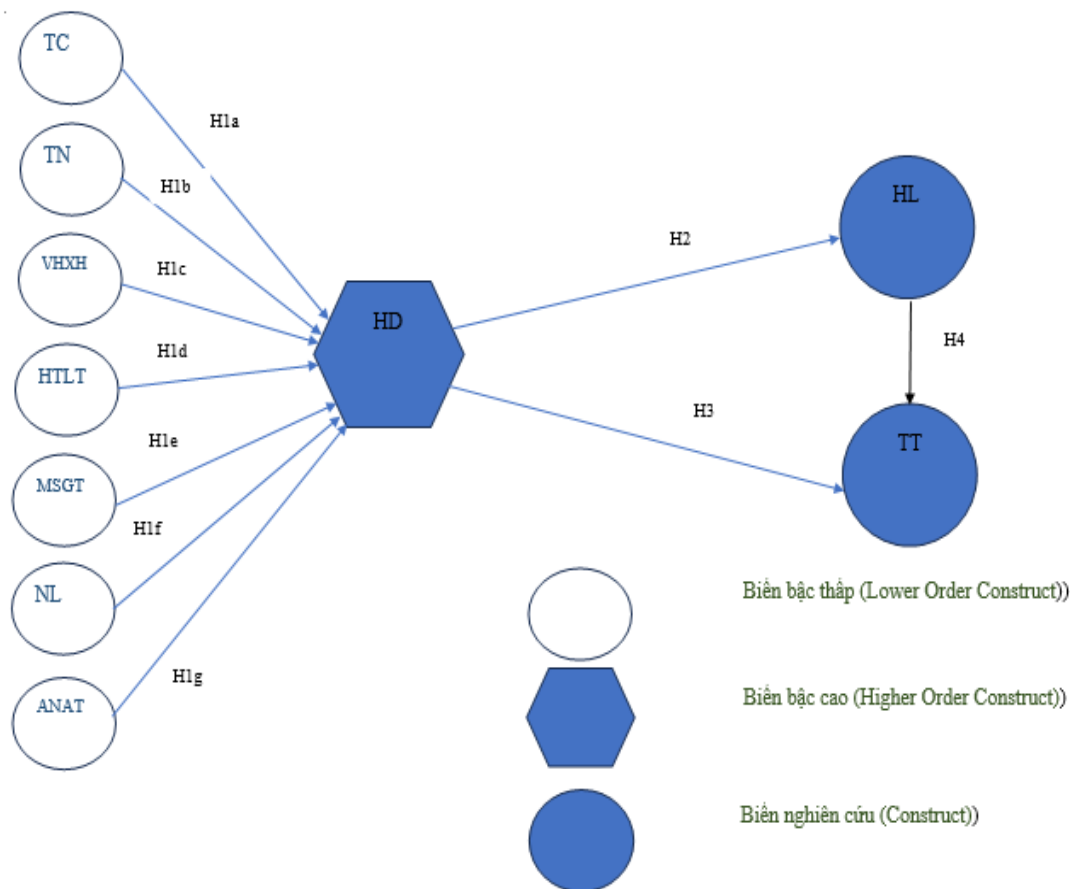**Figure 1: Author's original research proposal model**

Figure 2: Proposed final research model

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Biến bậc thấp (Lower Order Construct))

Biến bậc cao (Higher Order Construct))

Biến nghiên cứu (Construct))

Research Methodology

This study was conducted in two main stages: preliminary research and formal research. In the preliminary stage, the authors used qualitative methods and conducted expert surveys from the Khanh Hoa Provincial Department of Tourism, tourism businesses, and universities in Khanh Hoa province. This helped evaluate the important factors related to the attractiveness of Khanh Hoa to Korean tourists. In the formal research stage, the authors used quantitative methods by conducting a questionnaire survey with 200 Korean tourists in Khanh Hoa province.

The results obtained 192 valid questionnaires. To measure the parameters in the research model, the study used a 5-point Likert scale. The authors used observation criteria and variables to measure the attractiveness of the destination, loyalty, and satisfaction. Subsequently, the PLS-SEM model was used to perform regression and analyze the relationships between the factors, aiming to better understand their impact on the attractiveness of Khanh Hoa province to Korean tourists.

Conclusion and Discussion

First, assess the internal consistency reliability.

The results for both Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability are presented in Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha ranges from 0.707 to 0.889, while composite reliability ranges from 0.837 to 0.931. Both reliability measures exceed the threshold requirement of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2011). Therefore, the reliability of the structure is established.

Table 1: Evaluation of reliability after removing variables TN2 and NL1

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
ANAT	0.819	0.892	0.734
HL	0.707	0.837	0.631
HTLT	0.894	0.927	0.761
MSGT	0.840	0.891	0.672
NL	0.847	0.891	0.624
TC	0.889	0.931	0.819
TN	0.856	0.903	0.699
TT	0.833	0.900	0.749
VHXH	0.841	0.904	0.758

Source: Survey author group

The results from Table 1 indicate that the true reliability of the latent variables falls within the range between Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability. Therefore, we conclude that the measurement model achieves the true value of reliability.

Secondly, assess the convergent validity.

Table 1 shows that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all indicators and variables are higher than the minimum requirement of 0.50. Thus, both the variables and indicators exhibit high levels of convergent validity.

Thirdly, evaluate the discriminant validity.

From Tables 2 and 3, the results of the discriminant validity assessment accurately distinguish between pairs of measurement scales (variables).

Table 2: Measuring discriminant validity: Fornell-Larcker criteria

	ANAT	HL	HTLT	MSGT	NL	TC	TN	TT	VHXH
ANAT	0.857								
HL	0.635	0.794							
HTLT	0.486	0.604	0.872						
MSGT	0.415	0.434	0.355	0.82					
NL	0.351	0.505	0.174	0.217	0.79				
TC	0.498	0.578	0.377	0.277	0.251	0.905			
TN	0.235	0.443	0.33	0.049	0.044	0.228	0.836		
TT	0.49	0.628	0.451	0.28	0.406	0.444	0.423	0.866	
VHXH	0.255	0.333	0.248	0.072	0.247	0.224	0.26	0.36	0.87

Source: Author analysis team

Table 3: Measuring discriminant validity: HTMT correlation index

Discrimininant validity - HTMT									
	ANAT	HL	HTLT	MSGT	NL	TC	TN	TT	VHXH
ANAT									
HL	0.829								
HTLT	0.568	0.758							
MSGT	0.49	0.544	0.407						
NL	0.429	0.642	0.208	0.251					
TC	0.582	0.729	0.422	0.317	0.281				

TN	0.277	0.563	0.372	0.115	0.09	0.255		
TT	0.591	0.816	0.522	0.324	0.474	0.515	0.494	
VHXH	0.307	0.422	0.287	0.093	0.29	0.256	0.295	0.429

Source: Author analysis team

Conducting the HTMT ratio test through the Bootstrap process, we observed that all the results in Table 4 are <1. This indicates that the measurement model achieves a high level of accuracy in terms of discriminant validity.

Table 4: Testing the HTMT index

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	2.50%	97.50%
HL <-> ANAT	0.829	0.832	0.744	0.916
HTLT <-> ANAT	0.568	0.569	0.457	0.677
HTLT <-> HL	0.758	0.758	0.63	0.869
MSGT <-> ANAT	0.49	0.49	0.355	0.613
MSGT <-> HL	0.544	0.544	0.372	0.701
MSGT <-> HTLT	0.407	0.406	0.24	0.565
NL <-> ANAT	0.429	0.43	0.283	0.574
NL <-> HL	0.642	0.642	0.521	0.755
NL <-> HTLT	0.208	0.22	0.115	0.348
NL <-> MSGT	0.251	0.263	0.16	0.386
TC <-> ANAT	0.582	0.584	0.445	0.706
TC <-> HL	0.729	0.732	0.608	0.843
TC <-> HTLT	0.422	0.423	0.277	0.554
TC <-> MSGT	0.317	0.316	0.151	0.475
TC <-> NL	0.281	0.284	0.173	0.398
TN <-> ANAT	0.277	0.283	0.147	0.433
TN <-> HL	0.563	0.562	0.396	0.708
TN <-> HTLT	0.372	0.373	0.226	0.510
TN <-> MSGT	0.115	0.16	0.101	0.253
TN <-> NL	0.09	0.134	0.077	0.222
TN <-> TC	0.255	0.262	0.112	0.434
TT <-> ANAT	0.591	0.593	0.431	0.741
TT <-> HL	0.816	0.818	0.688	0.943
TT <-> HTLT	0.522	0.521	0.37	0.662
TT <-> MSGT	0.324	0.325	0.156	0.499
TT <-> NL	0.474	0.474	0.352	0.592
TT <-> TC	0.515	0.516	0.364	0.658
TT <-> TN	0.494	0.494	0.333	0.645
VHXH <-> ANAT	0.307	0.307	0.163	0.444
VHXH <-> HL	0.422	0.426	0.285	0.572
VHXH <-> HTLT	0.287	0.286	0.099	0.471
VHXH <-> MSGT	0.093	0.127	0.059	0.244
VHXH <-> NL	0.29	0.292	0.162	0.427

VHXH <-> TC	0.256	0.258	0.107	0.413
VHXH <-> TN	0.295	0.299	0.162	0.441
VHXH <-> TT	0.429	0.429	0.272	0.571

Source: Author analysis team

Fourth, evaluate the measurement model for the high-level latent variable.

The results in Table 5 show that the measurement coefficient of 0.85 falls within a 95% confidence interval of [0.807, 0.882]. Furthermore, the VIF values for the 7 indicators range from 1.182 to 1.765, indicating no multicollinearity among the indicators. Lastly, all 7 indicators significantly impact the attractiveness of the destination. Therefore, the authors conclude that the formed measurement scale for destination attractiveness is valid.

Table 5: Accuracy analysis of reflective components/constructs

Phase 1 evaluated the lower-order construct measurement model.						
Research constructs/ components	**No. of scale**					
	Original	**Final**	**Cronbach's alpha**	**CR**	**AVE**	**Item loadings**
Security - Safety of Destination	3	3	0.819	0.892	0.734	0.877/0.852/0.841
Natural elements	5	4	0.856	0.903	0.699	0.835/0.860/0.871/ 0.775
Infrastructure - accommodation	4	4	0.894	0.927	0.761	0.923/0.871/0.882/ 0.810
Shopping and entertainment activities	4	4	0.840	0.891	0.672	0.858/0.788/0.799/ 0.833
Human resources	5	5	0.844	0.895	0.681	0.686/0.840/0.846/ 0.707/0.852
Accessibility	3	3	0.889	0.931	0.819	0.918/0.897/0.900
Socio-cultural factors (Socio-cultural)	3	3	0.841	0.904	0.758	0.888/0.860/0.862
Satisfied	3	3	0.707	0.837	0.631	0.794/0.779/0.809
Loyal	3	3	0.833	0.900	0.749	0.884/0.848/0.864
Stage 2: Evaluate the measurement model for the higher order latent variable						
Formative construct	*Single-item measurement*	*VIF*	*Coefficient*	*Bootstrap*		*P values*
Attractive	ĐG	1.000	0.854	[0.807; 0.882]		0.000
2. Significance and relevance of formative measurement						
Formative construct	*Indicators*	*VIF*	*Weight*	*Bootstrap*	*P values*	*Hypothesis*	*Conclude*
Attractive	Accessibility	1.409	0.149	[0.516; 0.717]	0.000	H1a	Support
	Natural elements	1.198	0.260	[0.413; 0.638]	0.000	H1b	Support

Socio-cultural factors	1.182	0.231	[0.364; 0.693]	0.000	H1c	Support
Infrastructure - accommodation	1.509	0.211	[0.534; 0.803]	0.000	H1d	Support
Shopping and entertainment activities	1.289	0.148	0.334; 0.641]	0.000	H1e	Support
Human resources	1.202	0.218	[0.412; 0.636]	0.000	H1f	Support
Human resources	1.765	0.381	[0.762; 0.869]	0.000	H1g	Support

Fifth, evaluate the structural model and test the hypotheses.

The results from Table 6 show that the VIF coefficients have values less than 5.0, ranging from 1.0 to 3.469. This indicates that multicollinearity among the research variables is not a significant issue in this study (Hair et al., 2016).

Table 6: structural model testing

Paths	*Hypothesis*	VIF	Std. β	*t*-values	**Bootstrap**	*Conclude*
HD → HL	H2	1	0.020	41.315***	0.796; 0.878]	Support
HD → TT	H3	3.469	0.106	1.746*	[0.007; 0.427]	Support
HL → TT	H4	3.469	0.106	4.983***	[0.274; 0.695]	Support
HD → HL→TT	H5		0.089	1.741*	[0.005; 0.363]	Support
R^2 (%)	HL: 71.2 TT: 47.4					
Effect size (f^2)	$f^2_{HD \to TT} = 0.152$; $f^2_{HD \to HL} = 2.469$; $f^2_{HL \to TT} = 0.019$					

Note: *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.1

The path coefficients were all found to be statistically significant, supporting all the research hypotheses. Additionally, the Bootstrap intervals for the interlinked variables did not contain the value 0, indicating reliable results. Therefore:

H2: Destination attractiveness significantly influences tourist satisfaction at a statistically significant level of 1%.

H3: Destination attractiveness significantly influences tourist loyalty at a statistically significant level of 10%.

H4: Tourist satisfaction significantly influences tourist loyalty at a statistically significant level of 1%.

H5: Tourist satisfaction plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between destination attractiveness and tourist loyalty at a statistically significant level of 10%.

Sixth, evaluate the predictive power of the model.

The results from Table 7 show that Q²predict > 0, indicating the model has predictive value. Moreover, the PLS-SEM_RMSE values are smaller compared to the LM_RMSE values, suggesting that the model has better predictive capabilities compared to other methods.

Table 7: Evaluation of the model's predictive power

	Q²predict	PLS-SEM_RMSE	PLS-SEM_MAE	LM_RMSE	LM_MAE
HL1	0.497	0.466	0.371	0.477	0.377
HL2	0.365	0.459	0.371	0.458	0.369
HL3	0.441	0.513	0.417	0.525	0.426
TT1	0.378	0.633	0.487	0.649	0.501
TT2	0.287	0.628	0.495	0.64	0.512
TT3	0.32	0.579	0.441	0.59	0.456

Source: Author analysis team

Research recommendations

The research findings indicate that all seven factors significantly influence the attractiveness of tourist destinations in Khanh Hoa province. The study also reveals that the attractiveness of the destination significantly affects tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Additionally, tourist satisfaction significantly influences tourist loyalty, and it serves as a significant mediating factor in the relationship between destination attractiveness and tourist loyalty. This demonstrates that an attractive destination brings satisfaction to tourists, and if tourists are satisfied with the destination, they are likely to return and positively recommend it to friends and family.

Based on the research results, it is crucial to propose solutions to address and enhance the seven factors that contribute to the attractiveness of Khanh Hoa as a tourist destination in order to improve tourist satisfaction and loyalty, particularly among Korean tourists. Therefore, the research team suggests the following specific solutions:

(1) Regarding the security and safety of the destination:

Enhancing security and safety at the tourism destination of Khanh Hoa province is an important objective. The solutions include: publicizing the hotline phone number, investigating and addressing beggars, deploying security forces, establishing a tourist support center, and increasing awareness of security. At the same time, creating opportunities for stable livelihoods and maintaining local security and order. These efforts ensure peace of mind for tourists and the sustainable development of the tourism industry.

(2) Regarding the enhancement of natural factors:

Strengthening natural factors in Khanh Hoa tourism includes: protecting the marine environment and addressing pollution, relocating pollution-causing projects, inspecting the drainage system, and promoting the beauty of the province's islands, bays, and lakes. These measures help preserve the environment and attract tourists who are interested in exploring the unique nature of the region.

(3) Regarding infrastructure and accommodation:

Convenient transportation infrastructure, free from traffic congestion, is necessary. Investments should be made to improve roads and build a high-quality road system, develop public transportation, encourage the use of space vehicles, and apply information technology to improve traffic management and provide information to tourists.

Factors such as a good Wi-Fi system, adequate public services, investment in and improvement of services at the airport, enhancing the quality of communication systems, expanding public phone booths, designing multilingual signboards, constructing and improving public rest areas, developing websites and mobile applications that provide detailed travel information, and developing mobile applications specifically for Korean tourists are important.

Hotels, restaurants, and resorts should meet high-quality standards and fulfill the needs of tourists. Upgrading infrastructure and equipment, ensuring quality and standards, constructing and upgrading resorts, adding services for families with small children, investing in and developing resorts with a full range of additional services, diversifying menus to suit the taste of Korean tourists, and providing unique experiences through entertainment activities, local culture, and special services.

(4) Regarding shopping and entertainment activities:

To attract Korean tourists, Khanh Hoa province can build shopping and entertainment centers in Nha Trang, upgrade existing shops, and expand them. Developing shopping areas in resorts, organizing regular events and entertainment programs. Additionally, improving service quality, training staff, and creating special promotional programs specifically for Korean tourists are crucial. Providing information and support for Korean tourists, creating

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a comfortable shopping and entertainment environment, and collaborating with Korean brands are also important. Continuous improvement and listening to feedback to enhance the travel experience for Korean tourists are necessary.

(5) Regarding the human resources aspect:

To develop tourism in Khanh Hoa, it is necessary to enhance the quality of human resources, including:

From the perspective of local residents: Educate and raise awareness of tourism culture among local residents, while encouraging positive cooperation and communication between Korean tourists and locals through cultural exchanges. Additionally, create a friendly and safe environment for Korean tourists by improving infrastructure, cleanliness, security, and providing quality support services.

From the perspective of staff at tourist sites: Provide training in communication, the Korean language, knowledge about the destination, and the tourism culture of Korean tourists. Create a positive and motivating work environment, encourage career advancement, and solicit feedback from employees. Establish support systems and problem-solving mechanisms for employees to ensure they feel cared for and supported.

From the perspective of tour guides: To improve the quality of tour guides, it is necessary to provide training in professional skills, soft skills, and foreign languages. Tour guides should have an understanding of local culture and history, and there should be a team that speaks Korean or utilizes Korean interpreters. The Khanh Hoa Tourism Department should collaborate with schools that offer Korean tour guide training and attract human resources from other provinces. Cooperation between local authorities, tourism businesses, and organizations is necessary to create a professional and friendly tourism environment. Focusing on improving human resources will increase satisfaction and attract Korean tourists to Khanh Hoa.

(6) Regarding destination accessibility:

It is important to facilitate entry procedures and improve air connectivity. Simplify the visa application process and encourage the use of electronic visas. Expand the number of direct flights from South Korea to Cam Ranh International Airport. Additionally, upgrade and maintain modern equipment in transportation vehicles to provide a good experience for tourists. These measures will enhance the attractiveness of Khanh Hoa as a tourism destination.

(7) Regarding the cultural and social aspect:

Historical relics: Create green spaces and amenities around historical relics to provide a comfortable experience for tourists. Furthermore, preserve and restore the relics carefully to maintain their beauty and safety. Additionally, establish partnerships with the local community to attract support and participation. Finally, utilize technology to provide information and interactive experiences for tourists.

Festivals and events: Develop specialized tours that combine traditional festivals and folk games. Korean tourists will have the opportunity to experience, interact, and participate in activities such as the Whale Worshipping Festival, the Thap Ba Festival, the Swallow Nest Festival, the Light Festival, the Sea Festival, the Raglai People's Ancestral Worship Festival, the Am Chua Festival, and the Khanh Son Fruit Festival. This helps tourists explore and gain a deeper understanding of the local culture.

Local cuisine: Organize food festivals, develop culinary tourism tours, establish traditional food areas, and establish connections with Korean restaurants to create a unique experience for Korean tourists.

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THE ROLE OF INDIAN CUSTOMER AWARENESS IN FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN VIETNAM: A CASE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS

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Abstract

Tourism is the most effective means to strengthen the economy and for financial stability, tourism is the backbone for developing countries like India, and Pakistan. Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Sustainable tourism provides equal opportunity to every stakeholder to contribute to the economic development of the country by actively participating in the tourism sector. Religious tourism refers to the pattern of travel to sacred and holy places for spirituality, peace of mind, and satisfaction. Cultural tourism refers to geographical areas of a region that attract visitors based on art, architecture, and religion to the specific country. This research effort attempts to address the research gap in determining the intention of sustainable tourism through religious and cultural tourism, wellness of tourism, and community empowerment through the mediating role of personal norms. The study was conducted in India and data was collected cross-sectionally by applying simple random sampling. The study revealed that religious and cultural tourism is not significantly influential in establishing personal norms and sustainable tourism, but the wellness of tourism and community empowerment predict personal norms and sustainable tourism development. The mediating effect of personal norms is evident between exogenous and endogenous constructs. The limitations and future research avenues are given at the end of the study.

Keywords: *Religious and cultural tourism, wellness of tourism, community empowerment, sustainable tourism development, Indian tourism development*

Introduction and Background

The researchers have stressed the environmental tourism sector as it is considered as the key to wealth, employment, and social benefits creation in developing and developed countries. The initiatives must be taken into consideration to ensure the environmental perspective for the tourism sector that proceeds to economic and social benefits at large. The governance by policymakers requires devising a tourism strategy for acquiring the goals and objectives for ensuring sustainable tourism that relates to the environmental, social, and economic perspectives (Garg & Pandey, 2021). The researchers have examined the transformational process of tourism for the achievement of strategic objectives for operational reality in the tourism industry. The environmental concerns have been focused on addressing the burning issue of pollution and other endangered species. The tourism sector is focused in sustainable development that claims to meet the present needs without compromising the needs of future generations (Cottrell et al., 2013).

The four basic principles derive the concept of sustainable development including environmental sustainability, social sustainability, economic sustainability, the maintenance of ecological process and biological diversity, and resource utilization depict environmental concerns. Whereas the traditional values of any community that strengthen the identity relate to social sustainability, the cultural values of the human community that impact the social identity are also embedded with the social perspective of sustainability. Moreover, the cost-effective processes; and the optimal utilization of resources to manage business operations without sacrificing the needs of future generations that contribute to economic development relate to economic sustainability (Angelevska-Najdeska & Rakicevik, 2012).

The tourism sector has evolved over decades and the rapidly changing environment has encouraged to take initiatives for sustainability. The tourism industry plays a vital role in fostering amplified benefits for the community and country. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) emphasizes the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural perspectives of sustainable tourism that significantly contribute to economic strength and generate a huge portion of the world's GDP (Goel et al., 2024). The tourism sector effectively strengthens the economic, financial, and behavioral angles of society and is considered the backbone of poverty reduction at tourist destinations while creating various opportunities for employment at local and global markets. The tourism industry encourages residents to get involved in cultural events to promote social values to attract tourists and enhance tourism activities at specific spots.

Prior studies have been conducted on the tourism industry to assess tourist satisfaction and predictors (Jasrotia et al., 2023). Further, the research effort has been made to determine the quality of life influenced by the diversity of tourism that supports in sustains tourism (Sadraddin Eslami et al., 2019).

Religious tourism has been identified as a distinguished sector from other tourism attractions, as a large number of tourists travel around the world for religious worship and visits. According to a very careful guess, more than 100,000 visits per year have been made for religious purposes in Europe from a national to an international scale. The researchers have highlighted that secular tourists also visit the Church and similar visitors have been observed around the world in different religious places such as Church, Shrines, or other sacred places. The literature has coined the term religious heritage market provided statistics that iconic Christian sites attract large numbers of tourists such as 4.5 million at Lourdes, 4.2 million in Loreto, 2 million in the Vatican, and 1.3 million visitors in Santiago De Compostela (Shinde, 2022). It is reported that religious tourists are found to be more motivated, keen, and possess strong beliefs towards the religious spot. The Indian region is an attractive destination for religious and cultural events that attract large numbers of tourists that are enriched by the sacred places, historical buildings religiously linked, and cultural, religious, and environmental dimensions of the spots. It has been reported that little is known about the impact of religious-based tourism and researchers must focus on assessing the role of religious tourism in attracting tourists (Terzidou et al., 2017; Shinde, 2022).

However, Indian religious tourism is largely based on Hindu religious, cultural, and background that was found to be consistent while carrying out a higher volume of visitors. The iconic Tirumala-Tirupati temple attracts 27.3 million visitors every year, another state Uttar Pradesh also nominated among the 16 top domestic tourism destinations and religious sites. Allahabad attracted 41.76 million, Ayodhya attracted 17.54 million, Vrindavan attracted 13.78 million, Mathura 7.22 million, and Varanasi 5.94 million visitors annually based on religious background. Utar Pradesh is the highest visitor attraction as compared to any domestic site, Varanasi was found to be the most attractive site attracting foreign visitors approximately 334, 708 but it's not even 5% of visitors at Uttar Pradesh. According to the Indian Tourism Ministry foreign arrivals at Uttar Pradesh were recorded as 10.18 million as compared to 1613.55 million domestic tourists. This shows the strong religious ties of tourist and their intention towards tourism based on religious perspective. Similarly, Indian tourists prefer to visit with the intention of visiting religious sites for spirituality and cultural characteristics.

The research studies have reported that a massive scale of tourists from diverse religious backgrounds including Hindu, Islamic, and Buddhist sites in the region perform religious practices that increase the religious activities with tourism (Shinde, 2022).

The first International Conference on Spiritual Tourism was held in Vietnam to shed light on assessing the potential of Vietnam to pull religious and spiritual tourism. It has been highlighted that spiritual tourism has the potential to play a significant role in developing tourism activities and sustainable tourism development (To, 2023). Spiritual tourism is closely related to religious terms, and cultural tourism is also placed in the same category, these tourism sections have contributed to economic development. Tourism firms and tourism operators exploit this category of tourism and encourage travelers for sightseeing and pilgrimage obligations as well (Buzinde, 2020). It has been reported that Vietnam has the capacity and potential to enhance spiritual tourism and cultural tourism for sustainable tourism development according to the Tourism Organization and Ministry of Culture, and Sports. The conference explored the potential for tourism development through spiritual and cultural initiatives related to tourism and arrangements of socio-cultural events (To, 2023).

In Vietnam's Mekong Delta, the province of An Giang is popular for its unique communal houses and architecture having rich history and culture. An Giang is a stunning tourist spot having the potential to be capitalized for spiritual tourism and cultural tourism attraction. The tourists visit the sight for predominantly pilgrims combined with sightseeing at Nui Sam Tourist area (Chau Doc City), and another spot namely Nui Cam Tourist area (Tinh Bien District), further the Tuc Dup Hill tourist area (Tri Ton District) and tourism place President Ton Duc Thang's memorial site (Long Xuyen City). This province contributes in socio-economic development based on tourism development. Similarly, other provinces and cities have the same potential for religious, spiritual, and cultural tourist attractions and have played a vital role in the development of spiritual tourism in recent years (Chau, 2022). The government has adopted an aggressive policy to promote spiritual tourism and attract tourists around the world to this area due to its unique importance and infrastructure. The government wants to achieve a 10% annual growth rate

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of visitors to contribute in economic strength, as 10.1 million visitors are expected to increase with an average stay of 2.5 days. This increase is planned on the base of spiritual and cultural tourism for which hotels of three and four stars are being built, and more entertainment opportunities are expanded for gaining the attract tourists. The planning also entails the utilization of the latest technological equipment and telecommunication infrastructure to exploit the need to connect globally and cross-border areas (Huong et al., 2020).

The island areas in Vietnam have grabbed the attention of tourists such as Vam Nao Lake, rivers, and streams have the potential to develop tourism due to ecofriendly environment and specific spiritual perspective. Since this is the birthplace of Hoa Hao Buddhism in Vietnam the major reason for popularity among religious tourists as compared to the Mekong Delta, the Vam Nao reservoir area is popular from ecological and cultural perspectives. The island grabs the attention for its ecological landscape of sightseeing and tourism is sustained due to the river and faithful to Hoa Hao Buddhism. The challenge of the environment has emerged and now sustainable tourism is required while protecting the ecological resources as local farmers influence the quality of tourism that causes satisfaction for tourists through reputation and positive word-of-mouth. Reportedly, in previous years, An Gian province has enjoyed a huge amount of tourists in the year 2015 over 17.3 million tourists visited the place; and spent over 6000 billion Vietnam Dong with 2500 direct employees in the tourism sector. The enormous job creation was observed, and several facilities were added to the sector by the local people. In the year 2010, approximately 4.7 million tourists visited An Giang, of which more than 43,000 were international tourists. In the year 2015, 6.3 million tourists arrived including 70,000 international tourists. During this era hotels, facilities, restaurants, and rooms were built to meet the increasing demand. This contributed significantly to the gross domestic product (GDP) and increased the revenue for the tourism sector by 2,997 billion VND according to the An Giang Provincial Party. The increase has been reported in recent years as well after the three years of covid-19 time period. The prior study reported results that the majority of the tourists visited the place for religious, spiritual, cultural, and sighting purposes (Huong et al., 2020).

The previous research study has explained the phenomenon of revisiting intention for tourist destinations based on rational attitude, travel satisfaction, and emotional attitude. Religious involvement plays a major role in determining the revising intention that is expected to increase the revising intention of tourists supported by rational attitude, travel satisfaction, and emotional attitude. Results revealed that rational and emotional attitudes significantly affect the revisit intention of tourists. Importantly, religious perspective increases the revisit intention by moderating the influence of rational and emotional attitudes to predict the revisit intention of tourists. It has been established that religious perspectives increase the intention of tourists in the presence of other influential variables, that means religious inclination towards a tourist destination; or religious attachment to a tourism spot or destination increases the number of tourists as well as enhances the intention to revisit (Liao et al., 2021).

Vietnam has become popular in India and attracts large-scale tourists from India due to various reasons. Vietnam is located 1990 miles away from India and requires a short flight to reach the destinations, the low travel cost, ease of travel, rich history and culture, breathtaking greenery, natural beauty of the landscape, irresistible cuisine, and religious attachment. The single trip provides diverse opportunities to explore the different aspects of Vietnam including architecture, scenic views, cuisine, beaches, tunnels, and greenery. Furthermore, the iconic Mekong Delta attracts religious tourists as well with beautiful sights, so, therefore, there are diverse types of travellers that engage in a single trip. Beyond sightseeing, the travellers get a chance to explore culture; and spiritual perspective, pagodas and temples reflect Buddhist, Hinduism, and Chinese religious sites that are influenced by different places such as Hoi An, which is rich and diverse in nature (Duong, 2024). According to the General Statistics Office of Vietnam, Indian travelers are observed to be higher in number among all visitors, in the year 2023, approximately 390,000 tourists traveled from India to Vietnam with an average growth rate of 45% per month (Infinite Journey, 2024).

The globally accepted form of travel has been coined, understood, and initiated for meeting religious visits to various places in the world depending upon the beliefs of individuals. The religious factor was found to be a motivating aspect that encourages individuals to facilitate religious tourism. The emergence of religious tourism relates to the traditional pilgrimage, the various research studies have depicted early theoretical development on religious travel and tourism (Stausberg, 2012; Suntikul & Butler, 2018; Shinde, 2022). Similarly, the composite terms of religious tourism including pilgrimage tourism, spiritual tourism, religious heritage tourism, and Ashram tourism have emerged as a unique kind of expression. The religious needs derive the movement for motivation in the modern world to underpin the concept of tourism and a huge amount of tourists travel to meet religious goals (Di Giovine & Choe, 2020).

The government of Vietnam took various initiatives to enhance the tourism around the country to meet the sustainable development goals and the higher the tourism activity the higher the contribution to the economic strength. The government devised policies for cultural preservation to attract tourists who prefer to visit traditional and historical places and older cultural sites. Vietnam is considered as a multi-ethnic, and multi-religious country while having distinct features that categorize the groups on ethnic bases. Special attention and coverage has been given to the religious beliefs of the Vietnamese public. Various beliefs exist in the country that lead towards the worship of distinctive beliefs and encourage travel and tourism to visit the holy places in different religions (Van, 2021).

The prior literature has stressed-upon research on tourism that attracts local as well as international tourists plays a vital role in the economic strength of the local population and contributes to the gross domestic product (GDP) of the nation. Tourism activities contribute to the growth of areas and it has been argued that local communities aim to maintain a higher degree of control and generate significant economic benefits. The local communities and tourist operators are significantly influential in developing appropriate and needed environmental conditions that increase tourism growth, and provide the accommodation, transport, information, and other services required for tourism perspective (Barajas et al., 2014; Salgado Barandela et al., 2023). Tourism activities increase the economic advantages, increase the quality of life of the local community, and enhance the growth and engagement at the government level (Bond et al., 2015; Fan et al., 2024).

Religious tourism is instigated by religious beliefs to visit such religious sites and have cultural or religious backgrounds that generate spiritual incentives, so therefore, the individuals intend to travel for religious obligation around the world to visit religious tourist places during a specific time of the year. The Muslim community travels to Makkah, and Madina for Hajj, Christian pilgrims to the baptism in Jordan, the Kingdom of Saudia Arabia, the Vatican, Jordan, and Palestine are being visited by different religiously associated people. It is considered an important traditional source of tourism, in addition to visits the tourist strive to get blessed, purify their consciences, and spiritual attachment leads them to mental peace (Qurashi, 2017). The spending on tourism also increases the business activities at the tourist spots by introducing related goods, food, and other accessories that play a role in boosting the national economy. The prior literature has examined the influence of environmental impacts, economic impacts, and social impacts on sustainability issues with a moderating effect on income. The study developed the argument that environmental, economic, and social impacts influence sustainability issues. The results revealed that sustainability can only be achieved by meeting and ensuring the environmental perspective, economic impact, and social impact with the moderation effect of income (Jawabreh et al., 2022).

The wellness tourism encounter plays a significant role in enhancing the wellness of tourists, and well-being stands as a primary outcome measure. Tourist well-being changes in accordance with alterations in their tourism encounters (Uslu et al., 2020). During healthcare tourism, a serene and enjoyable atmosphere, positive emotional and social connections, along with a focus on wellness, can foster the generation of positive feelings and diminish negative ones. Consequently, this enhances visitor satisfaction and well-being. With the help of wellness tourism people work on their self-improvement, and the self-improvement provides better behavior in the society (Liu et al., 2023).

Sustainable tourism campaigns have been launched for poverty elimination by uplifting the economic conditions of the community at tourism destinations and overall. The prior literature has recognized that community-based tourism tends to improve the economic status of the community. It has been observed that locally associated people are found to be conscious of traditional culture and society which leads to an inclination in tourist interest toward local culture (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019). The number of issues and problems has led to taking initiatives for the conservation of natural resources to provide a beautiful tourism experience, the environmental concerns have been focused at the local level to increase the awareness about importance of environmental perspective among residents of tourism spots (Lee & Jan, 2019). The non-governmental organizations and governments initiated various steps towards the improvement of community-based tourism that contributes to the economic factor of the nation. The community's failure to control and support the implementation of such policies that pull back tourism activities and ensures sustainable tourism development. The involvement of the local community in tourism development is expressed as the empowerment of residents that assists in strengthening wellbeing (Boley et al., 2014; Kapoor & Jain, 2024).

The prior literature has highlighted community power and empowerment as the critical and crucial issues that is necessary for community-based tourism. The studies that have been conducted previously are qualitative and conceptual that demonstrate the resident's empowerment, the empirical evidence is lacking in determining the relationship between community empowerment and tourism-related perspective (Khalid et al., 2019). Therefore; it is a dire need to investigate and empirically explain the association between community-based initiatives and community empowerment to predict sustainable tourism development.

Research scholars have explained different factors that predict the sustainability of tourism; similarly, the value-belief-norm has been developed to assess the diverse context and geographical setting that also relates to pro-environmental behavior. Moral values and beliefs predict the actions of individuals and make them aware of potential threats to value and enhance the sense of responsibility. The research scholars have coined the term personal norms and also occurred in literature as internalized moral beliefs towards the specific phenomenon such as a sense of responsibility for being responsive to tourism. The literature also explains sufficiently personal norms in accordance with pro-environmental intention (Wynveen & Sutton, 2017). It has been suggested to adopt community-based tourism to ensure sustainable tourism in the context of developing and developed countries. The creative approach has been suggested to encourage the participation of citizens in community-based tourism that predicts sustainable tourism development. The involvement of the community in tourism increases the economic benefits through adopting successful tourism policies; however, the important factors have been overlooked in prior research (Garg & Pandey, 2021).

This researcher intends to explain the phenomenon of intention for sustainable tourism development by taking unique initiatives, this research pinpoints religious and cultural tourism as a potential tourism category that grabs a large number of sustainable tourist visits. Therefore, religious and cultural tourism, wellness tourism, and community empowerment as predictors for personal norms and further lead to the inclined intention to sustainability of tourism. This research is novel in expressing the relationship between religious and cultural tourism in predicting sustainable tourism by mediating the effect of personal norms. Furthermore, customer awareness and community empowerment were observed to be striking predictors of sustainable tourism development through the mediation role of personal norms.

Literature Review

This section of the study demonstrates the literature review and explains the hypothesized relationships between variables.

Religious and Cultural Tourism, Influences Personal Norms and Intention for Sustainable Tourism

The tourism sector has taken initiatives for a sustainable tourism perspective due to an inclined interest for environmental aspects, and the concern of tourists and marketers towards environmental issues due to increased tourism activities. In the recent decade, the tourism sector has been under-focused of researchers due to its wide range contributions in the implication of sustainability. The transformation of practices has grabbed the attention of researchers to assess the potential changes that occurred in the tourism sector for the achievement of sustainable development of the sector and related associated industries. Sustainable tourism has been addressed in a social context that contributes in literature and explains the phenomenon of sustainable tourism development influenced by various diverse factors (Ruhanen et al., 2015).

The oldest, most important, and most common type of tourism is religiousness from ancient times and people used to travel to holy places to practice rituals according to religious beliefs. Every religion has specific protocols, times, and instructions to visit holy places such as Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Budha etc. religious tourism is made to satisfy religious passion by performing the duties to heal psychological and spiritual concerns through blessings (Jawabreh, 2021). The research scholars have expressed the sustainability issues that depict the environmental, economic, and social impacts significantly based on religious tourism (Jawabreh et al., 2022). Vietnam promotes cultural tourism according to the local values through cultural programs that utilize the Vietnamese culture. Cultural tourism plays an important role in preserving values, and cultural heritage to attract tourists and promote cultural values among the most attractive destinations. The numerous potential advantages can be harvested at the tourists' end and local community through the promotion of tourism development in Vietnam (Tung, 2020).

Tourism is developed through the exploitation and utilization of cultural resources for developing new and unique tourism for the achievement of rewards, experiences, and discovery needs for tourists in specific locations

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and times. The needs of travelers is being satisfied through effective cultural tourism that relates to the experience of diverse activities such as cultural heritage, festivals, beliefs, religion ad cuisine. The experience of travelers while traveling towards the cultural heritages, and historical sites during festivals, customs, beliefs, religions, and cuisine causes satisfaction among visitors that protect cultural and religious tourism. The cultural programs attract tourists that exploit cultural values to promote tourism based on cultural events and festivals, these programs grab the attention of tourists to experience the cultural values and heritages. This phenomenon contributes in the well-being of local residents as they demonstrate the local culture and initiate such programs that attract visitors through their behavior and communication (Mai & Smith, 2018).

Religious tourism is evident all over the world, interestingly, there are 6,150 shrines related to Christianity in Western Europe and also classified as major and minor holy places in terms of catchment of visitors, these places play an important role in attracting visitors through organizations of various religious festivals. It has been reported that more than 100,000 religious visits have been made every year from national and international areas. It is believed that a church may attract secular or non-Christian visitors due to historical background and view, as it is also reported that major churches are not popular only for religious activities or pilgrimage but due to view, building structure, and historical perspective. The churches were found in trouble in maintaining and keeping the religious tourism, as in Europe the religious practices are not significant but the religious heritage market attracts the attention of visitors to visit the iconic Christian sites, as per statistics 4.5 million at Lourdes, 4.2 million in Loreto, 2 million in Vatican have been reported related to religious activities and approximately 1.3 million visitors in Santiago De Compostela were estimated for site-seeing (Rodriguez et al., 2018).

Prior literature has expressed the significant relationship between sociocultural sustainability, institutional sustainability, and environmental sustainability to predict tourist satisfaction. The results revealed that economic sustainability does not correlate with the satisfaction of tourists among the diverse visitors in India (Jasrotia et al., 2023). Furthermore, it has been depicted in the literature that 58% of people have specific intentions for religious visits to pray, and 48% of people do religious tourism for a unique spiritual experience (Rosak-Szyrocka et al., 2023). Cultural tourism development has been focused that is influenced by the geographical location, resources of tourism, infrastructure for tourism, policy development tourism, human resources for tourism, and tourism products among visitors of Vietnam. The results revealed that all relations were found to be statistically significant (Nguyen, 2022). The revisit intention has been determined by the festival experience of tourists with predictors including education, entertainment, esthetics, escapism, spirituality, communitas, authenticity, and crowding. The study reported that entertainment and crowding do not correlate with revisit intention but the remaining variables were found to be significantly related to revisit intention as religious reasons have a highly influential relation among Indian tourists (Piramanayagam & Seal, 2021).

The above literature has shown that there is little research has been conducted on the religious and cultural perspective of tourism for its sustainability, there is a dire need to conduct empirical research to determine the intention for sustainable tourism based on religious and cultural grounds. So, therefore, the following hypothesis is devised:

H1: *Religious and cultural tourism has influence the Personal Norms among the tourists of India*

Wellness Tourism Influences the Personal Norms and Intention for Sustainable Tourism

Wellness tourism, a rapidly expanding sector within the tourism industry, represents a sub-branch of health tourism. Within this paradigm, individuals embark on journeys aimed at alleviating the stresses of their daily lives and rejuvenating themselves without necessitating medical intervention or supervision. The contemporary landscape, characterized by technological advancements, rapid industrialization, and urbanization, has engendered numerous challenges, particularly in developing countries. the current century, rooted in technology and industry and dubbed the "century of anxiety, stress, and nervous disorders," has yielded adverse effects on human health, thereby introducing novel social, health, and medical challenge (Charak, 2019).

Wellness tourism, wherein wellness represents a continuous spectrum ranging from the alleviation of diseases to the attainment of the anticipated state of health, assures comprehensive physical, mental, and social well-being for individuals. It is noteworthy that in this variant of tourism, tourists do not exhibit specific physical illnesses but rather express a keen interest in reveling in the rejuvenating aspects of health-promoting locales. In the wellness of tourism, a harmonious equilibrium is sought between the mind, body, soul, and all over the biological health. Particularly, wellness services leveraging distinctive features of hydrotherapy and promoting healthy lifestyles encompassing

physical exercise, relaxation, high-quality nutrition, and an appreciation of nature, landscapes, and local cultures have garnered substantial attention in recent years. This emerging sector within the tourism market presents promising opportunities for the advancement of rural areas (Hoang et al., 2020). Where there is huge potential for appealing to these types of travelers (Esfandiari & Choobchian, 2020).

The concept of wellness tourism aligns with the proactive engagement in activities, choices, and lifestyles conducive to achieving a state of comprehensive health, consistent with the World Health Organization's definition related to health as complete physical, mental, and social wellness (Amara, 2022). There are a lot of scholarly articles about the wellness tourism sector. However, there aren't many studies that focus on a particular generational cohort, whose enormous size, spending power, and travel expenses make up for this gap in the literature. It is intended that this thesis will give important players in the wellness sector and marketing experts insightful knowledge about millennials' perceptions of wellness travel. Therefore, important factors in wellness tourism, such as tour operators, tourist national boards, and hotel managers, might more effectively target this market by better understanding the cognitive connections, emotional experiences, and behavioral patterns of this age cohort in the context of wellness travel. More specifically, by acquiring a thorough understanding, wellness travel specialists and marketing experts might choose communication channels and advertising tactics that complement the distinct demands and preferences of millennials, in addition to creating customized wellness offers (Liberato et al., 2021).

Based on the above literature review, it has been observed that wellness tourism has the tendency to influence the personal norms that further predict sustainable tourism intention. Therefore, the following hypothesis is derived:

H2: Wellness of tourism tends to influence the Personal Norms among the tourists of India

Community Empowerment and Personal Norms and Intention for Sustainable Tourism

Empowerment is an important factor that plays a crucial role in taking initiatives and decisions in specific workplace settings. The power exercised by an individual for making decisions by utilizing the capacities and resources for the betterment of the organization. In the tourism sector, the assets of local communities collectively is being used for activities to attract tourists, from where community empowerment arises. Community empowerment needs the engagement of community members collectively to execute the action plan, the individual participation also plays an important role in the community for playing role in local tourism activities that further increases tourism activities by grabbing the attention of tourists (Ahmad & Abu Talib, 2015).

The community empowerment is considered as a vital element that ensures the implementation of such progressive tourism development. The prior literature has embarked on the correlation between community empowerment and the well-being of the local community through inclined tourism (Dodds et al., 2018). The prior literature has focused on the participation of community and general power, however overlooked the impact and influence of community empowerment and its contribution to sustainable tourism, the empowerment of residents is considered as the prerequisite for sustainable tourism development (Bello et al., 2018). The phenomenon of community empowerment enables individuals to exert power and raise their voice for groups and local communities, it is also argued that collective action has a larger impact than individual initiatives (Strzelecka, Boley, & Strzelecka, 2017).

The needs of the community must be recognized and that is possible only with the involvement of a community empowerment process that enables better utilization of resources, management of local firms related to tourism, and social aspect of protecting the environment that contributes in the development of the capacity of the community. Conflicts have been observed between tourism planners and rural communities that hinder tourism activities and tourism development. It has been well established that tourism activities cannot be sustained without the involvement and understanding of the local community, therefore the involvement of the community is crucial for tourism success (Sood et al., 2017). The top-down approach enables the government to keep control and engage the stakeholders to retain power and decision-making while keeping the local communities away from such decisions that may hinder tourism (Strzelecka, Boley, & Woosnam, 2017).

The economic development receives input from the tourism sector, as it creates jobs for the rural community and by establishing medium-sized tourism businesses. The goodwill, and cooperation of the local community, and reliant on such factors as tourism is a service industry that contributes to economic strength. Local communities are found to be contributive in efforts for the promotion of tourism, the destination, and the fundamental source of tourism image. Empowerment crucially contributes to the development of local communities according to previous research, referred to as shifting power to locals, centered on cooperative work through the involvement of community

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members. The community-based tourism has emerged that promotes the self-sufficiency of the community and financial independence and empowerment (Kline et al., 2019; Wani et al., 2024).

Previously, research studies have been conducted on determining sustainable tourism development, the community empowerment has been coined to predict sustainable tourism development through the mediating effect of community support. The study revealed that community empowerment enables the community to play a significant role in successful sustainable tourism. The study also reported that community support significantly mediates the relationship between community empowerment and sustainable tourism development (Khalid et al., 2019). Another, research effort has been made to determine the sustainable tourism development influenced by community empowerment by the mediating role of local support. The results of the study reported that community empowerment predicts sustainable tourism development, community empowerment predicts local support and local support also predicts sustainable tourism development. Furthermore, local support mediates the relationship between community empowerment and sustainable tourism development. The study reported a significant relationship between variables of the framework (Wani et al., 2024).

However, the prior studies have overlooked the relationship between community empowerment and personal norms that further predict the intention for sustainable tourism. So, therefore the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3: *Community Empowerment tends to influence the Personal Norms among the tourists of India*

Personal Norms and Intention for Sustainable Tourism as a Mediator

This study incorporated the factor of personal norms that relates to the personal approach towards different aspects of the activities related to tourism. Personal norms are considered to be important norms in the norm activation model as it also differ from the social norms that are referred as the ethical standards of individuals rather than social groups (Han et al., 2018). The difference has been reported between social norms and personal norms as it has been referred to the ethical standards of individuals (De Groot et al., 2021). Personal norms are defined as moral obligations to perform or refrain from specific actions. Personal norms are important to incorporate in the study due to its cognitive structure as it has been referred as the organized body of information that connects knowledge in the framework (Th⊘ gersen, 2009). The researchers have reported that personal norms were found to be prominent in the norms activation model. Personal norms are a direct predictor of behavior, this condition occurs when personal norms got affected by the higher level of ascription of responsibilities, which also predicts and influences the higher level of awareness. Prior studies have reported a positive correlation of personal norms and the intention of tourists to keep the environment clean. Further, the study conducted on the higher education sector in the United States that faculty members are inclined towards environmental concerns due to personal norms (Choi et al., 2015). A positive and significant correlation has been reported among Malaysian consumers for personal norms and intention for selecting eco-friendly hotels. It has been reported that personal norms exert a positive influence on intention (Yan & Chai, 2021).

Previously, the researchers have explained the relationship between consumer knowledge personal norms, and intention to adopt sustainable tourism. The study also incorporated the relationship between perceived consumer effectiveness and personal norms, and between perceived consumer effectiveness and intention to adopt sustainable tourism. The results of the study revealed that consumer knowledge is significantly related to and associated to personal norms, and intention to adopt sustainable tourism. Similarly, the perceived consumer effectiveness influences personal norms and intention to adopt sustainable tourism. The mediating role of personal norms is evident significantly (Garg & Pandey, 2021). Another research study examined the phenomenon of environmentally responsible behavior influenced by personal norms, whereas the awareness of consequences, and ascribed responsibility predicts the personal norms. The results revealed that all relationships are significant, and personal norms mediate the relationship between exogenous and endogenous constructs (Wu et al., 2022).

The researchers have explained the intention to choose an eco-friendly hotel is influenced by personal norms and injunctive social norms, furthermore, the ascription of responsibility influences personal norms and is also influenced by awareness of consequences. The mediating role of personal norms has been investigated results have revealed that the intention to choose eco-friendly hotels is influenced by all independent variables. Moreover, personal norms mediate the relationship between independent and dependent variables (D'Arco et al., 2023). Behavioral intention grabbed the attention of researchers due to its importance; the research effort has been made to explain the relationship between injunctive social norms, and behavioral intentions. Further, the relationship between personal norms and behavioral intention, with the mediating effect of personal norms between injunctive social norms

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and behavioral intention. The results revealed that injunctive social norms significantly predict behavioral intention and personal norms significantly mediate the relationship between injunctive social norms and behavioral intention (Doran & Larsen, 2016). Based on the above literature review the researcher argues that personal norms predict the intention for the sustainability of tourism and play a mediation effect between exogenous and endogenous constructs of the framework. Thus, the following hypotheses are derived:

H4: *Personal Norms tend to influence the Intention for sustainable tourism among the tourists in India*

H5: *Personal norms mediate the relationship between religious and cultural tourism and the intention for sustainable tourism among Indian tourists*

H6: *Personal norms mediate the relationship between the Wellness of tourism and the intention for sustainable tourism among Indian tourists*

H7: *Personal norms mediate the relationship between Community empowerment and intention to sustainable tourism among Indian tourists*
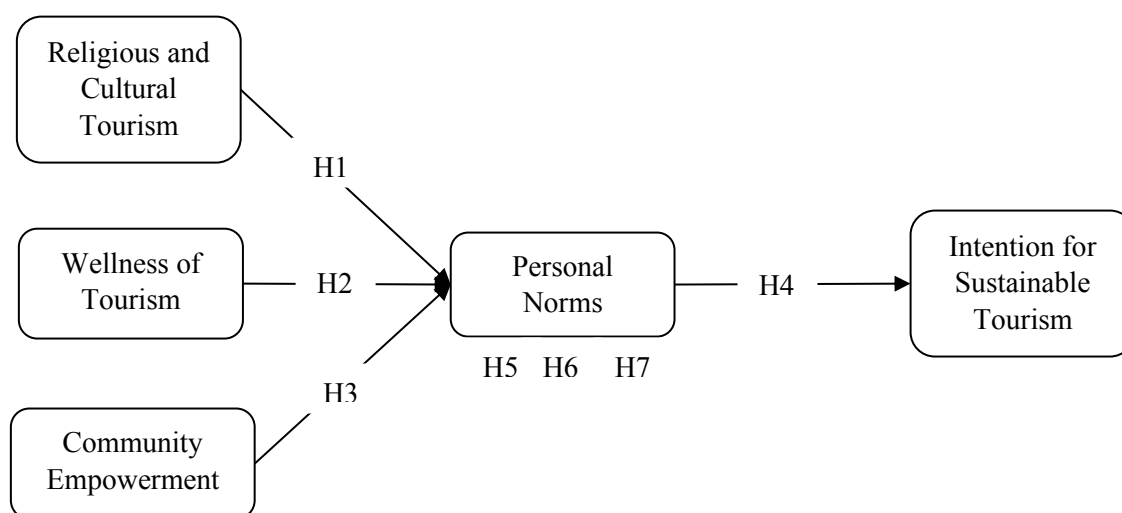
Research Framework

Figure 1: Research Framework

The above figure 1 demonstrates the research framework of the current study. The dependent variable is the intention for sustainable tourism, the independent variables include religious and cultural tourism, wellness of tourism, and community empowerment, whereas personal norms are the mediating variable. There are four direct and three indirect hypothesized relationships.

Research Methodology

This section of the research paper entails the methodology, nature of the study, population and sample, and sampling technique; further, the measurement scales are discussed in this section. This study is quantitative as data is collected cross-sectionally through the utilization of an adopted questionnaire. The targeted population for this study is those tourists who travel to Vietnam via some travel consultants and self-booked trips.

The data collection from Indian tourists presented significant challenges for the research team. To address these, we employed a combination of simple random sampling and the snowball technique. Initial efforts involved distributing questionnaires to Indian travel consultants, leveraging their extensive databases of tourists who either visited Vietnam or planned to do so. Additionally, the snowball technique was utilized by requesting our Indian friends and colleagues to refer individuals who had travelled to Vietnam in the past four to five years. This multifaceted approach ensured a comprehensive and representative sample, enhancing the robustness and reliability of our data.

According to statistics General of Vietnam and tour and travel guides approximately 390,000 Indian tourists visited Vietnam with a 45% growth per month. The province of An Gian is famous for religious-based tourism, the birthplace of Hoa Hao Buddhism in Vietnam is a popular and famous destination that is closely linked with tourists from India based on religious ties. The tourists were approached from different sites including Vam Nao Lake, Mekong Delta, Da Nang, Hoi An, Mariamman Temple, Thien Mu Pagoda, Ho Chi Minh City, Temple of Literature, and Ponagar Temple.

For data collection, 600 questionnaires were distributed to ensure a higher number of responses; however, 373 responses were received but incomplete and un-useable responses were discarded and 319 useable responses were considered for data analysis as the response rate was 53% and acceptable for analysis. Hence, 384 responses were targeted for data collection by applying simple random sampling along with snowball technique and the unit of analysis was individual as tourists were targeted for data collection to assess the relationship (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). However, the majority of responses were gathered by the travel consultants.

Measurement Scales

Measurement scales were adopted for this study from previous studies, each item was measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 as strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 is neutral, 4 agree and 5 strongly agree. A five-item measurement scale of intention to sustainable tourism was adopted from a previous study (Garg & Pandey, 2021). The sample items of dependent variables are, 'I will prefer sustainable tourism even if it is more expensive than normal tourism', 'I choose to prefer tourism activities that are sustainable', 'I intend to adopt sustainable tourism next time because of its positive environmental contribution'. The measurement scale for the wellness of tourism was taken from the study of (Liu et al., 2023). The eight items include the following statements. "the wellness tourism experience helps me to learn", "wellness tourism experience increased my knowledge", "wellness tourism stimulates my curiosity to learn", "wellness tourism is real learning", "wellness tourism makes me feel happy", "wellness of tourism refreshes me", "wellness tourism is enjoyable". A three-items scale of personal norms was taken from the research of (Landon et al., 2018), items include "I feel guilty if I damage the environment as a tourist", "I am obligated to reduce the impact on the environment", and "as a tourist, I try to minimize the environmental impact". The study of Khalid et al., (2019) depicted three items including accountability, capacity building and leader support to measure community empowerment. Biswas et al., (2021) highlighted the three statements including "I prefer to visit historical, scenic and natural attractions", "religious sites and temples are preferred to visit", and "the festival and concern related to culture and religion attract to visit". The measurement scales are given in Appendix 1 at the end of the document.

Analysis and Discussion

Measurement Model Assessment

The analysis section entails two phases, the phase 1 is measurement mode assessment that assess the reliability and validity of the variables based on collected data. The reliability is assessed based on the Cronbach alpha, and convergent validity is determined by the average variance extracted (AVE). The Cronbach alpha must remain higher than 0.70 for acceptability and AVE must remain higher than 0.50 for achievement of convergent validity (Hair Jr et al., 2014).

Table 1 below presents the construct reliability and validity, and Figure 2 below demonstrates the measurement model assessment.

Table 1: Reliability and Validity

S#	Constructs	Alpha	AVE
1	INT_ST	0.792	0.566
2	PN	0.810	0.730
3	RCT	0.937	0.888
4	WT	0.899	0.585
5	CE	0.936	0.886

Note: INT_ST (Intention to Sustainable Tourism), PN (Personal Norms), RCT (Religious and Cultural Tourism), WT (Wellness of Tourism), CE (Community empowerment)

The above table 1 shows that all constructs meet the criteria of acceptable reliability and convergent validity. The values for Cronbach alpha (α) found to be higher than cutoff point and convergent validity is achieved as all values found to be higher than 0.50 cutoff point. So, therefore, it has been established that collected data fulfills the requirement of the measurement model by achieving the reliability and validity of the constructs. The values for reliability and validity are also depicted in figure 2 extracted from PLS4 executed by PLS-algorithm.
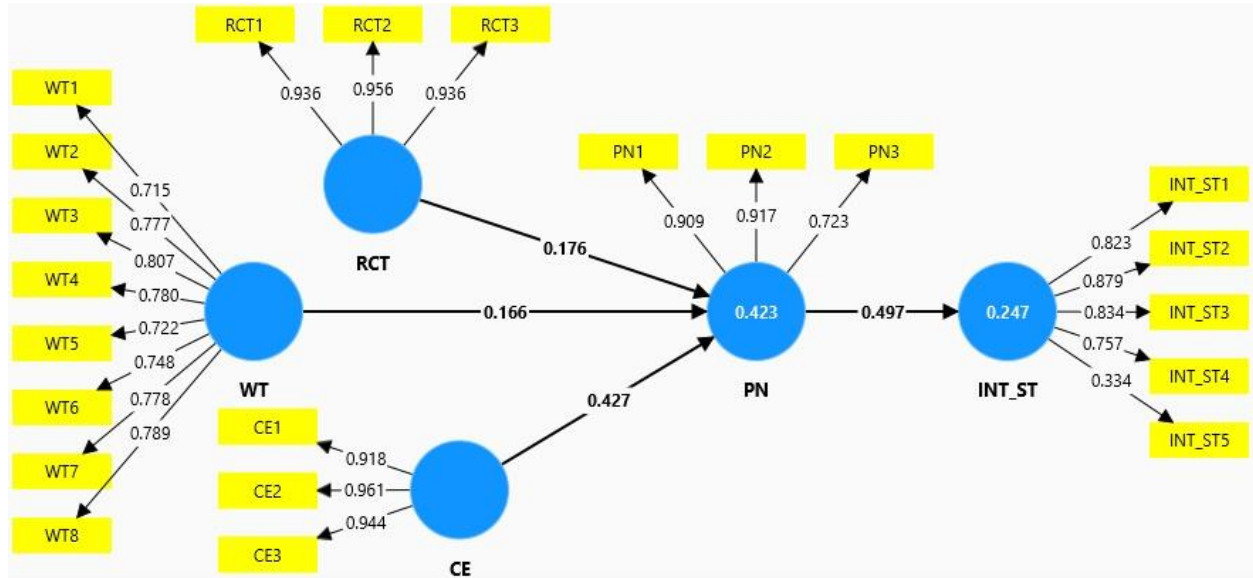

Figure 2: Measurement Model Assessment

Note: INT_ST (Intention to Sustainable Tourism), PN (Personal Norms), RCT (Religious and Cultural Tourism), WT (Wellness of Tourism), CE (Community empowerment)

Discriminant Validity

This section presents the assessment of discriminant validity, which is assessed on the criteria of (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The criteria argue that the square root of AVE is compared to the correlational values with other variables, the square root of AVE must remain higher than the correlational values with other variables. Table 2 below presents the discriminant validity.

Table 2 Discriminant validity

Constructs	INT_ST	PN	RCT	WT	CE
INT_ST	**0.941**				
PN	0.494	**0.752**			
RCT	0.611	0.497	**0.854**		
WT	0.685	0.460	0.540	**0.943**	
CE	0.379	0.363	0.404	0.430	**0.765**

Note: INT_ST (Intention to Sustainable Tourism), PN (Personal Norms), RCT (Religious and Cultural Tourism), WT (Wellness of Tourism), CE (Community empowerment)

The diagonal values in the above table show the higher square root of AVE that is reported to be higher than other correlational values. This shows that discriminant validity is achieved.

Structural Equation Model (SEM)

This section of the research paper investigates the hypothesized relationship between various variables of the framework. There are four direct and three indirect hypothesized relationships. The bootstrapping method is utilized for investigating the relationships, based on the values of β value, t-value and p-value. The value of β shows the strength and direction of the relationship, the t-value presents the significance of the relationship and it must be higher than 1.96 with 5% confidence interval, so the value of the p-value must be lower than 0.05 for acceptable significance. Figure 3 also presents the structural equation model (SEM) and demonstrates the hypothesized relationships.

Table 3 below presents the direct hypothesized relationships.

Table 3 Direct Relationships

Relationships	Path coefficient	t-value	p-value	Remarks
RCT➔PN	0.176	1.951	0.051	Rejected
WT➔PN	0.166	2.222	0.026	Accepted
CE➔PN	0.427	5.402	0.000	Accepted
PN➔INT-ST	0.497	8.248	0.000	Accepted

Note: INT_ST (Intention to Sustainable Tourism), PN (Personal Norms), RCT (Religious and Cultural Tourism), WT (Wellness of Tourism), CE (Community empowerment)

The above table demonstrates the result of the direct hypothesized relationship, it is evident from the table that hypotheses are statistically significant. Hypothesis H1 was found to be rejected based on the results, hypothesis H2 was reported as statistically significant and accepted that wellness tourism influences personal norms. Further, hypothesis H3 results in significant that community empowerment predicts personal norms. Hypothesis H4 investigated the relationship between personal norms and intention to sustainable tourism, the results revealed that the relationship between personal norms and intention to sustainable tourism is statistically significant.
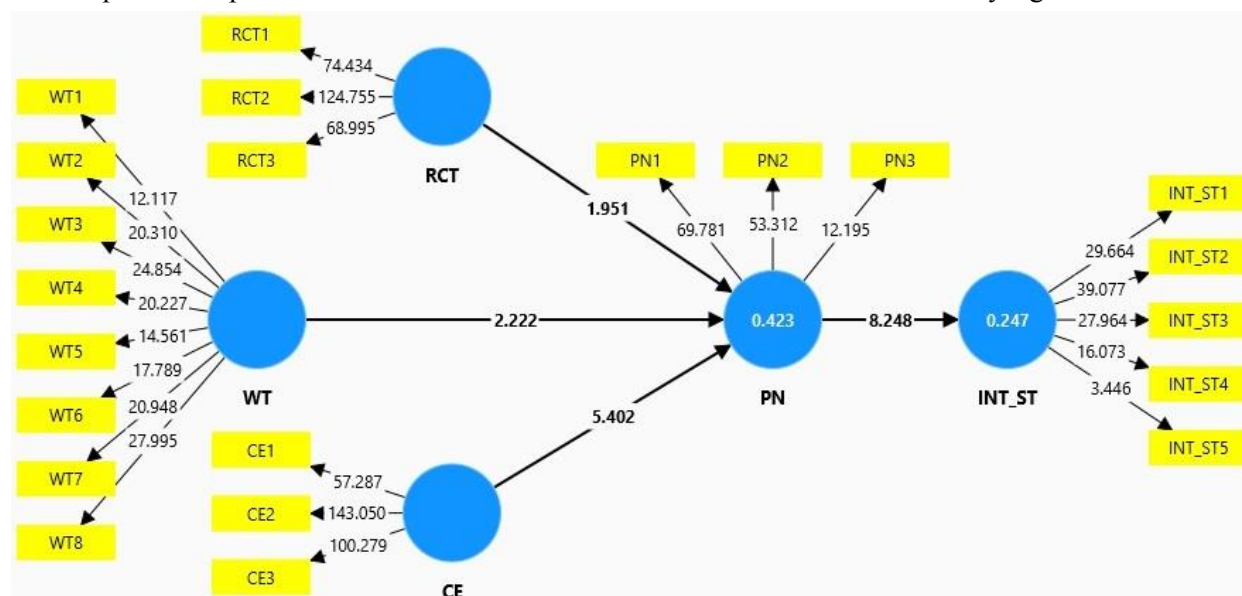

Figure 3: Structural Equation Model (SEM)

Note: INT_ST (Intention to Sustainable Tourism), PN (Personal Norms), RCT (Religious and Cultural Tourism), WT (Wellness of Tourism), CE (Community empowerment)

The hypothesis H1 empricially found to be rejected that religion and cultural tourism has no impact on personal norms towards the adoption of sustainable tourism, which means majority of the tourists don't visit for religious purposes but to enjoy and for site-sighting. The findings of the current study is contradictory with the claims of previous studies that the majority of the visitors and tourists come for religious purpose (Lin et al., 2021; Biswas et al., 2021).

Hypothesis H2 reported a significant relationship between the wellness of tourism and personal norms, which further predicts sustainable tourism. The results revealed that wellness is one of the major causes of sustainable tourism and establishes personal norms, which means if the visitors receive a satisfactory visit-related experience leads to wellness and it establishes the personal norms that increase sustainable tourism.

Hypothesis H3 is also significant which means community empowerment tends to increase and establish the norms that further ensure sustainable tourism. The results of the relationship demonstrate that community empowerment is necessary for establishing personal norms and sustainable tourism intentions. The community receives the positive impact of tourism and their empowerment plays a vital role in initiating various tourism activities.

Hypothesis H4 investigated the direct relationship between personal norms and intention to sustainable tourism. The results of the analysis reported a statistically significant relationship between personal norms and intention to sustainable tourism. The study is aligned with the result of prior literature that depicted similar significant relationship (Garg & Pandey, 2021).

Indirect Mediating Effect

The study also investigated the mediation role of personal norms between independent and dependent variables. Table 4 presents the three indirect mediating relationships.

Table 4: Mediating relationships

Relationships	Path coefficient	t-value	p-value	Remarks
RCT➔PN➔ INT-ST	0.087	1.843	0.065	Rejected
WT➔PN➔ INT-ST	0.083	2.069	0.039	Accepted
CE➔PN➔ INT-ST	0.213	4.249	0.000	Accepted

Note: INT_ST (Intention to Sustainable Tourism), PN (Personal Norms), RCT (Religious and Cultural Tourism), WT (Wellness of Tourism), CE (Community empowerment)

The results in the above table present the mediating hypotheses and values show that there are significant mediating relationships between variables and the effect of personal norms between the wellness of tourism and intention to sustainable tourism and between community empowerment and intention to sustainable tourism in the Indian region. However, there is no mediation effect between religious and cultural tourism to predict the intention of sustainable tourism. The study finds based on results that there is a dire need to establish personal norms among visitors by ensuring their concern for the environment and tourism; further, the study finds that religious and cultural aspects only are not necessary for attracting a large number of visitors. The wellness of tourism can be achieved and linked to the spiritual perspective that may stem out from religious practices leading to establishing personal norms and ensuring the intention to sustainable tourism. The significant mediating role of personal norms was found to be aligned with prior literature (Garg & Pandey, 2021).

Limitations and Future Research Avenues

There are several limitations in every study; similarly, this research paper has faced limitations including reach to respondents, cost of data collection, difficulties in travel, limited time frame and insufficient sample. Another limitation relates to the classification of visitors; and the time horizon of the study. Specifically, this study is limited in the classification of visitors; one of the focuses of the study was to determine the religious-based visitors, but the data collection included both types of visitors. There must be classification and data must be collected from religious tourists; however, it is tough because general visitors also visit holy places to see the sites for architecture and ancient building views.

In the future, researchers may consider various approaches. Firstly, the research should incorporate the diverse types of tourists and the purpose of tourism must be classified to determine the influence of religious and cultural tourism and its role in sustainable tourism. Future research may consider conducting a longitudinal study to determine the consistent role of different factors in sustainable tourism. The comparative study can also be taken into consideration that carry out the comparison between religious and general tourists and their role in sustainable tourism.

Conclusion

Religious tourism presents the spiritual aspect of visiting holy places that spread peace of mind, improve the happiness level, and enhance the quality of life. It is evident that the hospitality sector strives to attract visitors on a religious basis as well, but there is little evidence that spots only religious tourism motivation. This study addressed the research gap of intention to sustainable tourism by empirically examining the effect of religious and cultural tourism, wellness of tourism, and community empowerment. The study also incorporated the mediating effect of personal norms between exogenous and endogenous constructs. The study revealed that religious and cultural tourism is not only the factor that attracts visitors to the sites but other interesting hidden factors that attract visitors to holy places. It has been observed that religious and cultural tourism is insignificant to establishing the personal norms and insignificant mediation effect of personal norms between religious, and cultural tourism and intention to sustainable tourism. The wellness or tourism and community empowerment predicts significantly personal norms and further

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impact the intention for sustainable tourism. The study establishes the fact that religious perspective and cultural aspects has the tendency to attract visitors and future studies must focus on the research design to assess the point of view of different groups of visitors to visiting religious or cultural sites.

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Appendix 1

Measurement Scales

Intention to sustainable tourism

Adopted from a previous study (Garg & Pandey, 2021).

The sample items of dependent variables are as under:

1- I will prefer sustainable tourism even if it is more expensive than normal tourism

2- I choose to prefer tourism activities that are sustainable

3- I intend to adopt sustainable tourism next time because of its positive environmental contribution

Wellness of tourism

Taken from the study of (Liu et al., 2023).

The eight items include the following statements.

1- The wellness tourism experience helps me to learn

2- Wellness tourism experience increased my knowledge

3- Wellness tourism stimulates my curiosity to learn

4- Wellness tourism is real learning

5- Wellness tourism makes me feel happy

6- Wellness of tourism refreshes me

7- Wellness tourism is enjoyable

8- Wellness tourism is needed for revisit intention

Personal norms

The scale was taken from the research of (Landon et al., 2018),

The following items are included

1- I feel guilty if I damage the environment as a tourist

2- I am obligated to reduce the impact on the environment and

3- As a tourist, I try to minimize the environmental impact

Religious/cultural tourism

Biswas et al., (2021) highlighted the three statements including

1- I prefer to visit historical, scenic and natural attractions

2- Religious sites and temples are preferred to visit and

3- The festival and concern related to culture and religion attract to visit

Community Empowerment

The study of Khalid et al., (2019) depicted three items including

1- Accountability,

2- Capacity building and

3- Leader's support

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BALANCING GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY: THE IMPACT OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ON MEMORABLE TOURISM EXPERIENCES AND ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOURS

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Extended Abstract

Tourism is vital for global economies, providing jobs and promoting growth. However, its rapid expansion raises concerns about environmental damage, cultural exploitation, and social inequalities. Sustainable tourism seeks to balance economic growth with environmental preservation, cultural heritage, and community well-being. This study examines how destination sustainability (economic, socio-cultural, and environmental) influences tourists' memorable experiences and environmentally responsible behaviors. Using quantitative methods, 215 questionnaires were analyzed with SmartPLS 4 for structural modeling and SPSS 26 for data analysis. The findings show that economic and socio-cultural sustainability enhances memorable tourism experiences, while environmental sustainability does not. Additionally, memorable tourism experiences significantly correlate with environmentally responsible behavior and mediate the effects of economic and socio-cultural sustainability on such behavior. However, the mediating role of memorable tourism experiences between environmental sustainability and environmentally responsible behavior was not significant. These insights help tourism managers and policymakers promote sustainable practices that enhance tourist experiences and foster environmental stewardship.

Keywords: Destination Sustainability, Memorable Tourism Experiences, Environmental Responsible Behaviour

Introduction

In the context of the global economy, tourism is important because it fosters economic growth, cultural exchange, and job creation (Khan et al., 2020; Vicente et al., 2021). However, the rapid expansion of tourism has created tensions about the consequences on destinations, such as environmental deterioration, cultural commodification, and social inequities (Khan et al., 2021). As a result, the idea of sustainable tourism has gained popularity, highlighting the necessity of striking a balance between economic expansion and the preservation of the environment, socio-cultural heritage, and community well-being (Alvin, 2020). Destination sustainability includes economic, sociocultural, and environmental factors, with a focus on creating economically profitable, socially equitable, and environmentally responsible destinations.

Even though destination sustainability is becoming more and more important, further investigation is still required on how sustainable practices affect tourist behaviour, especially when it comes to performing activities in an environmentally responsible behaviour (Gomes & Lopes, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Although the goal of destination sustainability programs is to reduce negative impacts and encourage sustainable activities, it is still being determined how directly these initiatives affect the attitudes, actions, and behaviours of tourists (Wang et al., 2024). Furthermore, not much research has been done on how memorable tourism experiences, which include distinctive and profound contacts with sustainable development initiatives at destinations shape tourist's environmentally responsible behaviour (Breiby et al., 2020). This disparity makes it more difficult to create policies that can effectively promote sustainable tourism and encourage tourists to travel responsibly.

The aim of this research is to look at the relationships between destination sustainability (economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects), memorable tourism experiences, and environmentally responsible behaviour among tourists. The purpose of this research is to investigate how tourists' perceptions, experiences, and behaviours are influenced by destination sustainability initiatives, such as eco-friendly practices, community participation, cultural preservation, and sustainable resource management. Furthermore, the study aims to comprehend the mediating role of memorable tourism experiences in the relationship between destination sustainability and environmentally responsible behaviour.

Literature Review

Economic Sustainability

Sustainability involves policies that foster long-term economic growth while mitigating adverse effects on social, environmental, and cultural values (Basheer et al., 2022). It focuses on the efficient use of resources, the creation of long-term employment, and fair wealth distribution (Yao et al., 2023). Research highlights the need for a balance between economic development, environmental conservation, and social equality (Malinoshevska, 2022). For instance, sustainable business strategies such as investing in renewable energy and minimizing waste not only enhance profitability but also boost competitiveness (Lopes et al., 2022). In the context of tourism, economic sustainability aims to sustain the financial health of destinations while ensuring that tourism benefits local communities (Dembovska & Zvaigzne, 2021). This involves supporting local entrepreneurship, and ensuring that tourist spending contributes to the community. Effective laws and regulations are crucial for promoting sustainable economic activities (Lyu et al., 2022). Well-designed legislation can encourage businesses to adopt sustainable practices, foster innovation, and support the transition to a green economy (Ahmad et al., 2021).

Socio-cultural Sustainability

Socio-cultural sustainability involves preserving and enhancing the social and cultural aspects of communities while promoting long-term development (Kurniati & Shifa, 2023). This includes protecting cultural heritage, promoting social equity, and improving community well-being (Sonuç, 2020). The literature emphasizes the importance of inclusive development that respects local traditions and values (Zubiaga et al., 2024; Üzülmez, 2021). According to Zubiaga et al. (2024), sustainable tourism should reduce negative impacts on local cultures and actively promote cultural heritage. This can be achieved through cultural heritage tourism (Hoang, 2021), which provides economic benefits to local communities while preserving their unique cultural identities (Kim et al., 2019). Socio-cultural sustainability also focuses on social inclusion and equity, ensuring all community members benefit from development (Saunders et al., 2020). This involves addressing issues like gender equality, social justice, and community involvement in decision-making (Ly & Cope, 2023). Effective governance and community engagement are vital, as policies that promote participation and empower minority groups help build resilient communities.

Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability focuses on managing natural resources responsibly to protect them for future generations and minimize harm. This involves balancing human activities with environmental preservation, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions, managing waste, conserving biodiversity, and promoting renewable resources (Singh, 2023). Sustainable practices like using renewable energy, recycling, and sustainable agriculture help lessen environmental impacts and support economic growth. Sustainable urban planning and green building designs are crucial for reducing energy use and enhancing urban living (Asarpota & Nadin, 2020). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) plays a key role, with companies increasingly focusing on environmental issues and reporting on sustainability (Lu et al., 2019). Effective policies, regulations, and incentives also drive environmental sustainability by setting standards and ensuring compliance (Kazancoglu et al., 2020). Public awareness and education are essential, as informed individuals are more likely to adopt sustainable practices and support environmental policies (Almulhim & Abubakar, 2021). Achieving environmental sustainability requires a combined effort of technology, policy, corporate responsibility, and public engagement.

Memorable Tourism Experience

A memorable tourism experience significantly impacts tourist satisfaction, destination loyalty, and the overall success of tourist destinations (Hu & Shen, 2021; Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2021). These experiences are characterized by deep engagement, emotional impact, and personal relevance (Juliana et al., 2024). Key elements include the uniqueness of the destination, quality interactions with locals, authenticity in cultural exchanges, and the emotional connection tourists feel (Cho, 2022). Research highlights those personalized activities, such as local cultural events, hands-on workshops, and immersive outdoor experiences, are particularly memorable (Juliana et al., 2024; Sthapit et al., 2024). Personalization caters to individual interests while engaging activities enhance emotional impact and relevance. Local events offer cultural insights, workshops facilitate interactive learning, and outdoor experiences connect tourists with nature (Hu & Shen, 2021; Cho, 2022). Understanding tourist motivations and expectations is crucial for creating impactful and lasting experiences, making memorable tourism a vital factor in influencing tourist behaviour and destination appeal.

Environmental Responsible Behaviour

Environmental responsible behavior (ERB) is key to achieving sustainability, involving actions by individuals and organizations to minimize environmental impact. Research highlights the importance of awareness, attitudes, and social norms in promoting ERB (Wang et al., 2024). People who are more knowledgeable about environmental issues and hold pro-environmental attitudes are more likely to engage in recycling, energy conservation, and sustainable consumption (Kim et al., 2018; Liobikienė & Poškus, 2019). Education and awareness campaigns are effective in enhancing environmental knowledge and fostering positive attitudes. Social influence also plays a crucial role, as people are more likely to adopt sustainable practices when they see others in their community doing the same (Cheng et al., 2017). Policies and incentives, such as regulations, subsidies, and penalties, are also important for encouraging ERB (Zhang et al., 2021). To promote ERB effectively, a comprehensive approach is needed, combining education, community engagement, regulatory measures, and corporate initiatives focused on sustainability (Ramísio et al., 2019; Kohl et al., 2021; Pizzutilo & Venezia, 2021).

Hypotheses Development

This section discusses the relationship between destination sustainability (economic, sociocultural, and environmental), memorable tourism experience, and environmentally responsible behaviour as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Proposed conceptual framework
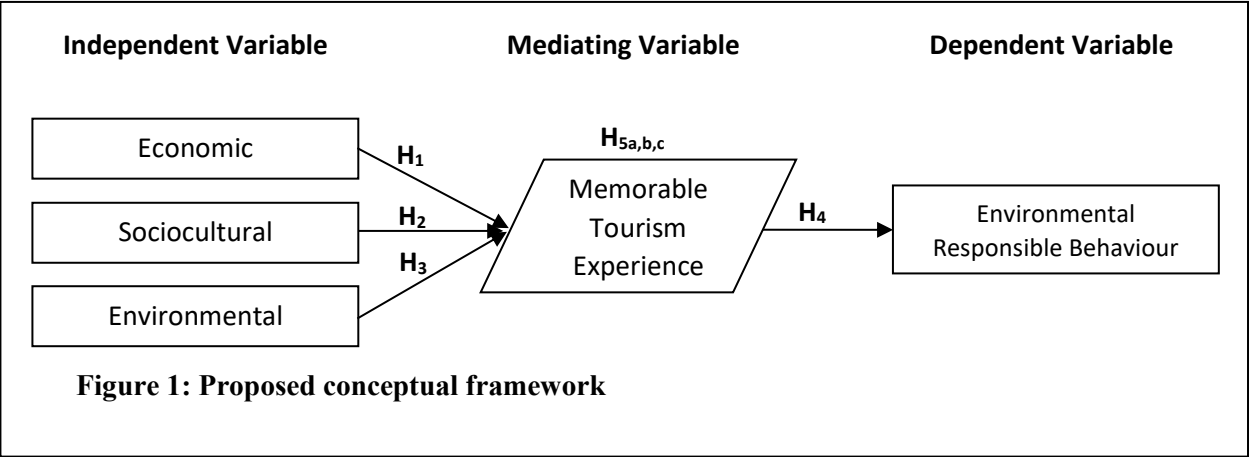
Economic sustainability in tourism aims to create long-term benefits for local communities while maintaining the destination's viability. Research shows that economically sustainable tourism enhances service quality and infrastructure, leading to higher tourist satisfaction and memorable experiences. Kusumah (2023) noted that sustainable practices protect cultural assets, traditions, and Indigenous knowledge, boosting a destination's cultural reputation and attracting travellers seeking authentic experiences. Slocum et al. (2020) argue that sustainable tourism gives businesses a competitive edge by appealing to tourists who value authenticity. Slocum et al. (2020) claim that such practices diversify the local economy and strengthen community resilience, benefiting residents and enhancing the tourist experience. Therefore, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: *Economic sustainability has a significant relationship with memorable tourism experiences.*

While socio-cultural sustainability focuses on preserving local communities' cultural history, traditions, and social structures while ensuring tourism development does not harm these aspects. Engaging tourists in authentic cultural experiences strengthens bonds between travellers and hosts. Seyfi et al. (2019) argue that cultural and heritage experiences are crucial for memorable tourism, as they help travellers appreciate a destination's unique features. Tikhonova (2020) found that culturally immersive activities enhance enjoyment and foster stronger connections with destinations. Jamal et al. (2014) suggests that socio-cultural sustainability, such as community-based tourism, empowers local communities by involving them in tourism planning. Butler et al. (2021) show that sustainable practices preserve cultural heritage and promote social cohesion and community pride. Therefore, the following hypotheses were developed:

H2: *Sociocultural sustainability has a significant relationship with memorable tourism experiences.*

Environmental sustainability in tourism aims to protect natural resources and minimize impacts to ensure that tourism does not damage the habitats that attract visitors. Tourists increasingly seek eco-friendly destinations and

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activities to reconnect with nature. Research by Hughes et al. (2011) shows that environmental education and eco-friendly practices not only enhance tourism experiences but also promote environmental stewardship. Lee et al. (2021) found that these practices can increase tourist loyalty and encourage repeat visits. Backman and Munanura (2017) noted that sustainable tourism practices attract environmentally conscious travellers, giving destinations a competitive edge. Eshun and Tichaawa (2020) highlighted that eco-tourism supports both the environment and the well-being of local communities. Based on these findings, the following hypotheses were developed:

H3: *Environmental sustainability has a significant relationship with memorable tourism experiences.*

Besides that, Memorable tourism experiences significantly impact travellers' attitudes and behaviours, particularly their commitment to environmental responsibility. Trang et al. (2018) found that positive experiences focusing on environmental conservation, like wildlife tours or eco-friendly hotels, foster a sense of environmental responsibility among tourists. These experiences increase awareness and appreciation for natural environments, often leading to eco-friendly practices and advocacy for sustainability. Hughes et al. (2011) discovered that educational programs in wildlife tourism enhance tourists' understanding of environmental issues and encourage conservation actions through interactive and emotional connections. Similarly, Chen et al. (2023) highlighted that meaningful travel experiences, especially in natural settings, promote pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours. Ardoin et al. (2016) showed that immersive environmental education programs can inspire tourists to adopt sustainable practices and support conservation efforts. Therefore, the following hypotheses were developed:

H4: *Memorable tourism experiences has a significant relationship with environmentally responsible behaviour.*

In addition, Research shows that economic sustainability efforts can enhance tourists' environmental responsibility, encouraging them to engage in eco-friendly behaviors both during and after their trips (Zhou et al., 2020). Memorable tourism activities, such as visiting eco-friendly sites or participating in significant cultural experiences, strengthen tourists' connection to nature and commitment to environmental conservation (Zhang et al., 2022). These experiences boost satisfaction and emotional attachment to destinations, prompting tourists to support local conservation efforts and minimize their environmental impact (Tukamushaba, 2013). Additionally, sustainable tourism environments and eco-friendly tours encourage tourists to prioritize environmental conservation and adopt sustainable practices (Sharmin et al., 2020). Evidence also shows that eco-friendly encounters foster pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors, motivating tourists to advocate for conservation both while traveling and in their daily lives (Force et al., 2017). Based on these insights, the following hypotheses were developed.:

H5a: *Memorable tourism experience significantly mediates the relationship between economic sustainability and environmentally responsible behaviour.*

H5b: *Memorable tourism experience significantly mediates the relationship between sociocultural sustainability and environmentally responsible behaviour.*

H5c: *Memorable tourism experience significantly mediates the relationship between environmental sustainability and environmentally responsible behaviour.*

Research Methodology

This study adopts a positivist research paradigm using quantitative methods to establish empirical relationships between variables. Quantitative techniques are chosen to demonstrate causal relationships (Creswell, 2010), conducted in a non-interventionist setting under normal circumstances (Zulkurnain et al., 2023). Data collection was cross-sectional, gathered over days, weeks, and months due to resource and time constraints, employing purposive sampling to target adults (18 years and older) who visited nature-based destinations in Malaysia (Fikree & Zerihun, 2019). With no sampling frame, G*Power software was used to determine the sample size, which resulted in 215 responses, exceeding the minimum required for hypothesis testing (Hair et al., 2017. SPSS and SmartPLS 4.0: PLS-SEM were employed for data analysis, particularly suitable for exploring predictive relationships in smaller samples (Dash & Paul, 2021). The questionnaire, derived from literature reviews, used a Likert scale for clarity and simplicity, ensuring respondents' ease in understanding and answering the questions. Validity and reliability were ensured through expert assessment and Cronbach's Alpha testing, meeting recommended standards (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Data Analysis

Demographic Profile

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In this study, questionnaires were distributed via a Google survey to tourists who had visited nature-based destinations in Malaysia. A total of 215 respondents completed the survey without any missing responses. The sample had a balanced gender distribution, with slightly more females (52.6%) than males (47.4%). The largest age group was 21-30 years old (54.4%), followed by 31-40 years old (37.2%). Older age groups had minimal representation, with those aged 61 years and above making up only 1.9% of respondents. Most respondents were single (60.9%), with a significant portion being married (39.1%). In terms of education, the majority held a Bachelor's degree (71.2%), followed by those with a Master's degree (13.5%).

Regarding employment, a majority were employed (66.5%), while a notable portion were unemployed (24.2%), and students comprised a smaller segment (5.6%). Regarding income, most reported earning less than RM4,849 (85.1%), with a smaller group earning between RM4,850 and RM10,959 (14.9%). This demographic profile provides valuable insights into the typical tourists engaging in nature-based tourism in Malaysia: predominantly young, single, well-educated, and employed individuals with moderate to low incomes. These findings can help inform tourism strategies and policies tailored to this demographic.

Table 2: Demographic Profile

No.	Demographic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Gender		
1.	Male	102	47.4
	Female	113	52.6
	Age		
	18 – 20 years	-	-
	21 – 30 years	117	54.4
2.	31 – 40 years	80	37.2
	41 – 50 years	14	6.5
	51 – 60 years	-	-
	61 years and above	4	1.9
	Status		
3.	Single	131	60.9
	Married	84	39.1
	Others	-	-
	Level of Education		
	SPM	15	7.0
	Diploma	16	7.4
4.	Bachelor Degree	153	71.2
	Master	29	13.5
	PhD	2	0.9
	Occupation		
	Student	12	5.6
5.	Employed	143	66.5
	Unemployed	52	24.2
	Own Business	8	3.7
	Level of Income		
6.	Less than RM4,849	183	85.1
	RM4,850 – RM 10,959	32	14.9
	RM10,960 and above	-	-

Reliability and Validity

Model measurement was conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of the instruments. As shown in Table 3, all constructs achieved excellent Cronbach's alpha scores of 0.60 and above. Furthermore, the composite reliability of the constructs was also at an excellent level, with scores exceeding 0.70, indicating good reliability, and the average variance extracted (AVE) for all constructs was above 0.50, thus confirming convergent validity (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 3: Reliability Analysis

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Economic Sustainability	0.872	0.912	0.732
Socio-cultural Sustainability	0.871	0.912	0.721
Environmental Sustainability	0.930	0.950	0.827
Memorable Tourism Experience	0.789	0.856	0.546
Environmentally Responsible Behaviour	0.924	0.942	0.766

Hypotheses Testing

Figure 2 shows direct path hypothesis testing with 5,000 bootstraps and a 95% confidence interval. Hair et al. (2017) determined a statistically significant relationship based on p-values (below 0.05) and t-values (higher than 1.96 [two-tailed test]).
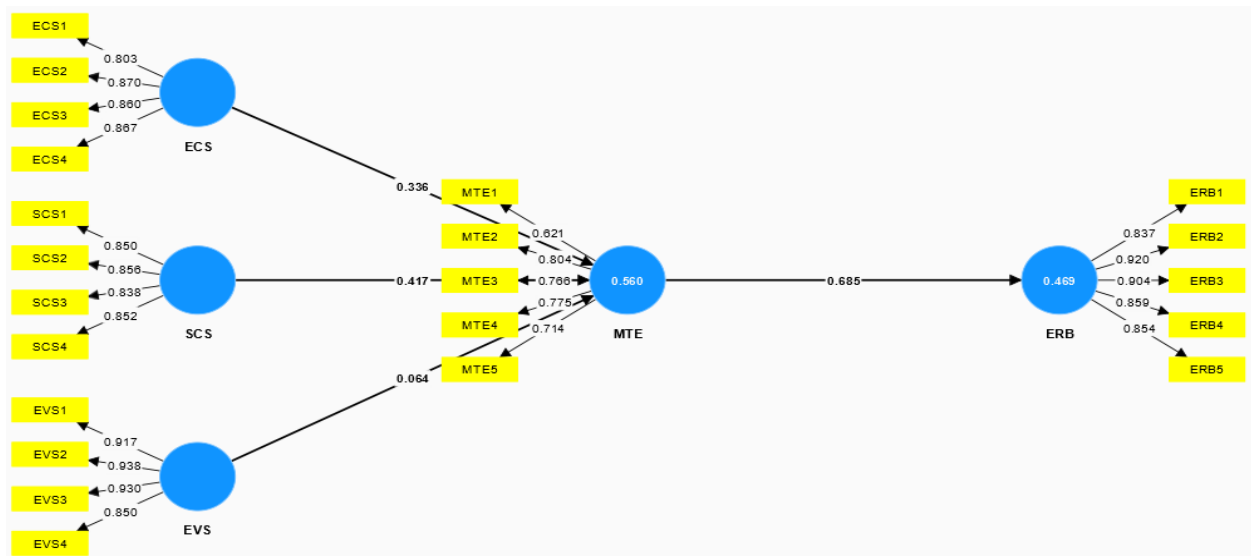

Figure 2: The Structural Equation Modelling Analysis

The analysis revealed that among the three hypotheses tested, only two showed significant results. Economic sustainability ($\beta = 0.336$, t = 4.095, p = 0.000) and socio-cultural sustainability ($\beta = 0.417$, t = 6.572, p = 0.000) had significant positive effects on memorable tourism experiences. Conversely, the relationship between environmental sustainability and memorable tourism experiences was non-significant ($\beta = 0.064$, t = 0.617, p = 0.537). Furthermore, the results indicate that out of four additional hypotheses, three were found to be significant. There is a strong positive relationship between memorable tourism experiences and environmentally responsible behavior ($\beta = 0.685$, t = 16.266, p = 0.000). Memorable tourism experiences also significantly mediate the relationship between economic sustainability and environmentally responsible behavior ($\beta = 0.230$, t = 4.213, p = 0.000), as well as between socio-cultural sustainability and environmentally responsible behavior ($\beta = 0.285$, t = 6.068, p = 0.000). However, the mediating role of memorable tourism experiences in the relationship between environmental sustainability and environmentally responsible behavior was found to be non-significant ($\beta = 0.044$, t = 0.591, p = 0.554).

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Table 4: Result of Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Path Coefficient	STDEV	*t*-value	*p*-value	R^2	Decision
H1	0.336	0.082	4.095	0.000		Supported
H2	0.417	0.063	6.572	0.000	0.467	Supported
H3	0.064	0.103	0.617	0.537		Not Supported
H4	0.685	0.042	16.266	0.000		Supported
H5a	0.230	0.055	4.213	0.000	0.553	Supported
H5b	0.285	0.047	6.068	0.000		Supported
H5c	0.044	0.074	0.591	0.554		Not Supported

Discussion and Conclusion

This research explores the connections between destination sustainability (economic, sociocultural, and environmental), memorable travel experiences, and environmentally responsible behaviour among tourists. It examines how sustainability initiatives influence tourists' perceptions, experiences, and behaviours and looks at the mediating role of memorable tourism experiences. The findings reveal a strong positive link between economic sustainability and memorable tourism experiences, showing that supporting local businesses and fair wages enhance tourists' satisfaction and engagement. Studies by Su et al. (2018), and Force et al. (2017) confirm that sustainable economic practices boost tourist satisfaction and pro-environmental actions, although these practices can be costly and require genuine commitment.

The study also finds that socio-cultural sustainability significantly enhances memorable tourism experiences by fostering genuine cultural interactions. Zhang et al. (2022) noted that meaningful cultural experiences deepen emotional ties to destinations and promote environmental conservation. Tikhonova (2020) highlighted that cultural immersion boosts tourist satisfaction and loyalty, often leading to return visits. McIntosh and Johnson (2004) suggested that engaging with local traditions provides fresh perspectives and deeper insights, improving overall satisfaction. However, careful management is needed to avoid cultural commodification and involve local communities in tourism planning to maintain authenticity.

Conversely, the study found no significant relationship between environmental sustainability practices and memorable tourism experiences. This suggests that while environmental sustainability is crucial for long-term development, its immediate effect on tourists may go unnoticed unless these practices are visibly integrated into their activities. Dwyer (2016) emphasize the importance of educating tourists about environmental initiatives to enhance their appreciation. Shimul et al. (2024) stress making sustainability experiential, such as through eco-tours, to effectively engage tourists. Overall, making sustainability more visible and using strong communication strategies are key to enhancing the impact and memorability of environmental efforts in tourism.

Memorable tourism experiences strongly influence tourists to engage in environmentally responsible behaviour. When tourists connect meaningfully with a destination, they often feel more accountable for its environmental conservation. Force et al. (2017) show that eco-friendly activities enhance tourists' attitudes and actions toward sustainability, deepening their bond with the destination. Similarly, Chen et al. (2023) argues that tourism activities focusing on environmental education positively shape tourists' behaviours, emphasizing interactive and educational experiences as pivotal in guiding tourists toward eco-friendly actions. Buffa (2015) adds that engaging with nature and sustainability initiatives during travel prompts tourists to adopt sustainable behaviours in their daily lives.

The study also found that supporting local economies and fair trade significantly enhances memorable tourism experiences, encouraging environmentally responsible behaviours. Force et al. (2017) support this, showing how economic initiatives benefiting communities shape tourists' sustainability actions. Memorable experiences also link socio-cultural sustainability, focusing on local culture preservation, to eco-friendly behaviours, as Lan et al. (2021) highlight. However, the study did not find memorable experiences to significantly mediate the impact of environmental sustainability on environmentally responsible behaviour, suggesting a need for better integration of environmental efforts into tourism. Future research could explore more direct engagement of tourists in sustainability education to improve outcomes.

The study's findings highlight the importance of economic and socio-cultural sustainability in enhancing the

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memorability of tourism experiences and encouraging environmentally responsible behaviour among tourists. Destinations that support local economies and preserve cultural heritage can leave a more enriching and lasting impact on tourists. These factors not only increase tourist enjoyment but also foster a sense of responsibility for environmental conservation. However, the study identifies a gap in integrating environmental sustainability into tourist experiences. For maximum impact, environmental programs need to be more visible and better integrated into tourism activities. These insights are crucial for tourism managers and policymakers aiming to promote sustainable tourism practices that provide memorable experiences and foster long-term environmental responsibility.

Implication, Limitations, and Recommendation

This research significantly contributes to sustainability theory in tourism by examining how efforts to improve destination sustainability impact tourists' perceptions, experiences, and behaviours. It highlights the importance of memorable travel experiences in promoting environmentally responsible behaviour among travellers. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for designing effective sustainability programs that incorporate memorable experiences to encourage sustainable tourism practices. By showing the connection between memorable experiences and eco-friendly behaviour, the study offers practical strategies to enhance destination sustainability. Policymakers can use these insights to create policies that support sustainable tourism, focusing on improving visitor experiences and encouraging behaviors that benefit both the environment and local communities. Ultimately, this approach aims to protect cultural heritage, engage communities, and ensure lasting social and environmental well-being in tourism destinations.

While the study's quantitative approach provides a strong basis for understanding the links between destination sustainability, travel experiences, and environmentally responsible behaviour, future research could benefit from adding qualitative methods. Techniques like focus groups, observational studies, and in-depth interviews can offer deeper insights into travellers' motivations, opinions, and experiences that quantitative data might miss. Combining both quantitative and qualitative data would broaden the scope of research. Quantitative data can show broad patterns, while qualitative insights can reveal individual perspectives and cultural contexts. This mixed-method approach would help validate hypotheses and uncover new insights, leading to more effective sustainability policies. By integrating the precision of quantitative data with the depth of qualitative insights, future research can better address the complexities of sustainable tourism and create more impactful sustainability programs worldwide.

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EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WELLNESS TOURISM PRODUCTS: A CASE STUDY OF KHANH HOA PROVINCE, VIETNAM

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Abstract

This study investigates the challenges and opportunities presented by wellness tourism products, focusing on Khanh Hoa Province as a case study. Wellness tourism, a rapidly growing sector globally (Smith & Puczkó, 2014), has faced significant hurdles due to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly impacting spas, thermal/mineral springs, and other wellness-related businesses. Vietnam is emphasizing wellness tourism alongside other forms of tourism to revive the tourism industry. Despite its growth potential, Vietnam faces stiff competition from other Asian destinations (Nhan Trong et al., 2020). Understanding the factors affecting competitiveness is crucial for Vietnam to establish a sustainable advantage in wellness tourism. Due to the limited popularity of wellness tourism products in Khanh Hoa, many travel companies have yet to fully exploit these offerings, with most tours focusing on existing attractions such as mud baths. The study will gather insights from tourism companies regarding their perspectives on wellness tourism and assess the demand for such products among tourists. Utilizing a case study design and qualitative research approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), the study delves into the multifaceted concept of wellness, distinguishing it from wellness and exploring its implications for tourism. By conducting semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the wellness tourism industry and analyzing relevant documents, the study aims to uncover nuanced insights into the dynamics of wellness tourism in Khanh Hoa Province. Specifically, the study examines tourism companies' perceptions, experiences, and behaviors regarding wellness tourism products. The findings of this study are expected to propose potential solutions or wellness tourism packages that travel companies can develop based on Khanh Hoa's natural conditions.

Keywords: wellness tourism, travel companies, challenges, opportunities, Khanh Hoa province

Introduction

Wellness is a holistic term popular in the modern world and has an ancient origin. It is primarily associated with health or illness-free well-being. According to the report of Global Wellness Economy, Asia-Pacific was the largest region for wellness spending in 2020, at

$1.5 trillion, followed by North America ($1.3 trillion) and Europe ($1.1 trillion); and also one of the fastest-growing wellness markets from 2017-2019 (8.1% growth) (Global Wellness Institute, 2022). Thus, the aging population is increasing in developed countries, and the health tourism market is booming due to the fast development of wealthy residents compared to the growth rates of health and wellness services available in many countries. Many countries and destinations (Estonia et al., etc.) see wellness tourism as a means of developing tourism and the general economy. In particular, in the United States and the United Kingdom, wellness spending is somewhat evenly distributed across many of the largest sectors (healthy eating, personal care and beauty, physical activity, prevention and public health, etc.). In Japan, personal care and beauty represent much more significant than the average share of overall wellness spending. In China, traditional and complementary medicine is a considerable portion of the market (due to the prevalence and long history of Traditional Chinese Medicine). In Germany, wellness tourism, spas, and thermal/mineral springs are much more significant players in the wellness economy.

Unfortunately, wellness tourism (-39.5%), spas (-38.6%), and thermal/mineral springs (- 38.9%) are the wellness sectors that were most adversely affected by Covid-19 due to travel restrictions, stay-at-home orders, and business shutdowns. Virtual offerings could be a better substitute for a physical presence and total immersion in these experiences. Notably, the COVID-19 incident has sparked significant shifts in how consumers understand, experience, and expect wellness. The $435.7 billion in 2020 by wellness travelers is distributed among many tourism industry segments, from food and lodging to activities, excursions, shopping, and other services (Yeung & Johnston,

2021). The hospitality industry – including wellness tourism, spas, and springs – is living in an exciting moment; for instance, all luxury brands like Six Senses, IHG, and Marriott opened wellness products in hideaways around Vietnam. To attract international tourists to Vietnam post-Covid 19, especially in the theme of "Vietnam tourism recovery: New orientation - New action," the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (TITC, 2022) mentioned that in addition to green tourism, eco- tourism, and community-based tourism products, Vietnam should renew effects of beach tourism, golf tourism, medical tourism, and wellness tourism. While wellness tourism is nothing new, its exponential growth has positioned it as a $639 billion industry as of 2018 (PerfectGym, 2020). Still, wellness tourism is a new tourism concept in Vietnam for recovering from the Covid 19. However, Vietnam's tourism lags behind competing destinations in Asia and the world (Nhan Trong et al., 2020).

According to Ritchie & Crouch (2003 cited in Nhan Trong, Vi Truc, and Phuong Viet-Le, 2020), every destination must verify its competitiveness to gain a sustainable competitive advantage. Vietnam's annual wellness tourism has grown significantly in recent years - spending is 51% higher than typical foreign travelers. Wellness travelers enjoy budget- friendly and Vietnamese spas. It is because millennials want a unique experience at their wellness destination. Some cities, such as Hanoi and Hoi An, have the potential for wellness tourism; most tourists seek yoga and meditation sessions, detox spas, and a mountain hideaway in Dalat. Investment in wellness resorts, hotels, and retreats attracts more travelers (Dr.Prem, 2022).

The burgeoning wellness industry allows individuals to explore various activities that claim to balance the body, mind, and soul (Smith & Puczkó, 2014). Therefore, not only do we need to escape stress. However, people are more likely to travel for happiness because they need time to discover and know themselves. Furthermore, industry consolidation may foster a research stream aiming to tackle the inconsistency of wellness tourism conceptualization (Smith & Puczkó, 2014) to help businesses and destinations improve their positioning (Summit, 2011 cited in Nhan Trong, Vi Truc and Phuong Viet-Le, 2020). Khanh Hoa Province, a region renowned for its natural beauty and resources, presents an intriguing case for developing wellness tourism products. Despite its potential, wellness tourism in Khanh Hoa remains underdeveloped, with limited popularity among tourists and local travel companies. From that, we came up with the idea of "Exploring the challenges and opportunities of wellness tourism products: A case study of Khanh Hoa province, Vietnam." This study seeks to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with wellness tourism in Khanh Hoa, providing insights that could aid in developing a sustainable and competitive wellness tourism market in the region.

Research questions:

This research aims to find out the answers to the following research questions

What are the key challenges facing developing and promoting wellness tourism products in Khanh Hoa Province, Vietnam?

What opportunities exist to enhance and expand wellness tourism in Khanh Hoa Province?

How do local travel companies understand and implement the concept of wellness tourism in their offerings?

What strategies can be employed to overcome the challenges and strengthen the competitiveness of wellness tourism in Khanh Hoa Province?

Literature Review

The concept of wellness

The concept of wellness dates back to the ancient period and has various meanings. The word "wellness," which was used in the 1950s, has the opposite meaning to the word "illness:" "the state of being healthy f(Oxford Disctionary, 2024)

Wellness is "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." This condition is thought to be more closely related to happiness than health. Wellness also refers to people's abilities to combine and perform family, work, and community roles.

There is a difference in meaning between health and wellness, as "health is a state of being, whereas wellness is a process of being." The author defines wellness as "a way of life and living in which one is always exploring, searching, finding new questions and discovering new answers, along with three primary dimensions of living: the physical, the mental and the social; a way of life designed to enable each of us to achieve, in each of the dimensions, the maximum potential that is realistically and rationally feasible for us at any given time in our lives." (Jonas, 2005)

Furthermore, wellness is "a way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being in which the individual integrates the body, mind, and spirit to live more fully within the human and natural community."(Myers et al., 2005). Wellness is related to holistic health, including different elements that should be harmonized. This definition appears to combine many ideas revealed by the authors in this issue.

"Wellness also plays an important role in protecting nature and cultural assets, supporting environmental protection, and promoting sustainable tourism." (Global Wellness Institute, 2024)

Wellness is a complicated concept encompassing the components of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being and one's relationship to oneself, others, and the environment.

Medical Tourism and Wellness Tourism

The Global Wellness Institute notes that wellness tourism is different from medical tourism. Medical tourism involves traveling to another place to receive surgery or dental treatment because it is more affordable, higher quality, or unavailable at home. On the other hand, wellness tourism refers to maintaining a healthy lifestyle, reducing stress, preventing disease, and improving our well-being.

According to Hall (2011), medical travel is "the international phenomenon of individuals traveling, often great distances, to access healthcare services that are otherwise not available

due to high costs, long waiting lists or limited healthcare capacity in the country of origin, and medical tourism refers specifically to the increasing of the tendency among people from developed countries to undertake medical travel in combination with visiting tourist attractions."

From this point of view, medicine can be understood as adding medical services to standard tourism. Thus, in the medical tourism sector, this travel motivation may include or not include a holiday or the consumption of tourism services (Connell, 2006).

The concept of wellness tourism

Based on the findings of "wellness," wellness tourism is considered a new idea for balancing and relaxing physical and mental health. Wellness tourism is defined as travel associated with maintaining or enhancing one's well-being, in which traveling is an occasion to support and strengthen our holistic health (Global Wellness Institute, 2024). By some means, the features of wellness tourism can be pointed out in terms of health tourism, as in the definition of the World Tourism Report.

Organization and European Travel Commission: "Health tourism encompasses tourism undertaken, with the main motivation being to contribute to physical, mental, and spiritual health through medical and wellness activities."

Thus, wellness tourism is a touristic journey of physical movement toward greater self- awareness and contentment (Smith & Kelly, 2006). The features of this definition can be seen in most tourist services based on customers' needs explored by tourist companies in terms of wellness tourism.

Wellness tourists

It is often thought that wellness tourism offers various services at spas, health resorts, yoga, and meditation retreats just for small, elite, and wealthy visitors. For the truth, wellness travelers may include a broad diversity of consumers with many motivations, interests, and values.

There are two types of wellness travelers (Global Wellness Institute, 2024):

Primary wellness traveler: A traveler whose trip or destination choice is primarily motivated by wellness.

Secondary wellness traveler: A traveler who seeks to maintain wellness while traveling or participates in wellness experiences while taking any trip for leisure or business.

As a note, a primary and secondary wellness vacation can be taken by the same person with different purposes and two types of wellness travel support together. For instance, a visitor who visits a day-use hot spring during a family vacation (secondary wellness travel) may later be motivated to plan a weekend getaway staying at a hot spring resort (primary wellness travel).

One trip can be primarily performed by wellness or in which wellness activities are included to enhance the tourist's experiences. Nowadays, people tend to pay attention to self-care and conduct their notion of wellness so they can incorporate the aspects of wellness travel into their daily lives or put themselves in deep enjoyment with primary wellness services.

The context of Vietnam's tourism after the spread of Covid-19

According to Google Destination Insights – a tourism trend analysis tool and international arrival results, a positive recovery of Vietnam's tourism is being performed after officially reopening all tourism on March 15, 2022. (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, July 2022)

Based on the General Statistics Office data, international visitors to Vietnam in June reached

236.7 thousand arrivals, up 36.8% over the previous month and 32.9 times higher than last year. Generally, in the first six months of 2022, international visitors to our country reached 602 thousand arrivals, 6.8 times higher than the same period last year but still down 92.9% compared to the same period in 2019- the period of no COVID-19 (GSO, 2022). Although the number of visitors is still small, the growth rate has positive signs of recovery in the coming time.

Furthermore, data from Google shows that the number of searches from abroad for Vietnamese tourism is rising monthly (Vietnam Tourism, 2022). Especially for tourist accommodation establishments in Vietnam, at the beginning of March 2022, the search volume only reached 25 points, but only after one month, it nearly doubled to 48 points. Search volume for tourist accommodation establishments in Vietnam grew in the following months. In May 2022, it reached 78 points, tripled compared to March 2022, and reached 98 points at the beginning of June. 2022 and 100 points at the beginning of July 2022, an increase of 4 times the time before opening to international tourism. A similar trend occurs for international aviation searches to Vietnam. By the beginning of July 2022, the search volume had tripled compared to the start of March 2022.

The latest report by the World Economic Forum released news that the development capacity index of Vietnam's tourism industry in 2021 ranked 52, up eight places compared to the previous year, 2019, among the three countries with the best improvement in the world.

In the context of the continuing complicated international situation, Vietnam is one of two countries in the Asia-Pacific region that have been upgraded since the beginning of the year. This is a significant effort by the government, the prime minister, and the business community, including businesses in the tourism sector, to bring our country's economy to a strong recovery.

Vietnam's tourism development strategy for 2030 has determined that tourism will genuinely become a spearhead economic sector, creating a driving force to promote the development of other industries and fields and making an essential contribution to the formation of a modern economic structure (Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, 2014).

The characteristics of Vietnam as a wellness tourism destination

Wellness tourism has become popular in Asian countries such as India, Japan, China, South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, and Singapore. According to the statistics of the GWI (2018), within five recent years, Asia has been the top destination for wellness travelers, with trips in Asia increasing by 33% between 2016 and 2017. Many services related to sports, spas, mineral springs, care of body and mind, nature and environment, and culture, … are the popular choices of visitors, which makes wellness tourism a significant share of the total wellness economy as well as represents the growth of wellness tourism in Asia.

Together, Vietnam – a country in Asia- has a coastline of over 3,000 km, with thousands of beautiful islands and sunny beaches. It also has favorable climate and terrain conditions and superior natural resources that are ideal for developing wellness services. The best beaches in Nha Trang, Da Nang, and Phu Quoc are appropriate for sustainable vacations, and beautiful wellness resorts such as Intercontinental Sun Peninsula Danang, The Anam, TIA Wellness Resort, Six senses Con Dao, Banyan Tre Lang Co, … offer a variety of services to re-connect, re-balance and restore during holidays. There are a few yoga and meditation classes in Hoi An, a full detox at a mountain retreat in Da Lat, and a more profound journey into mindfulness in the ancient city of Hue with peaceful pagodas, Zen houses, and uninterrupted tranquility. Moreover, in most of Vietnam's vibrant cities, professional massage and therapies are offered in numerous spas. Vietnam has also occupied an advantage in healthy eating with fresh ingredients from land and sea for delicious and nourishing meals.

According to the conference "Development of wellness tourism in Vietnam," organized by the Institute for Tourism Development Research, Vietnam is expected to focus on developing wellness and healthcare tourism in the coming time, as wellness tourism is essential in the national travel industry.

Truong Sy Vinh, Deputy Director of the Institute for Tourism Development Research (Hanoi Times, 2021), also emphasized the role of more efforts in researching and making policies on the development of wellness in Vietnam, suggesting, "We need to develop a variety of wellness tourism products, train an intensive workforce, and learn from the experiences of other countries with a developed wellness tourism for attractive products." As such, wellness appears to be one of Vietnam tourism's keys in the future.

The characteristics of Wellness Tourism in Khanh Hoa Province: a pilot study

Overview of Travel Companies in Khanh Hoa Province

New Life Travel, established in 2018, transitioned from domestic to international travel services, focusing on routes like Cam Ranh-Bangkok-Pattaya. **Hoàn Hảo Travel**, founded in 2017, primarily serves domestic and inbound international tourists, offering diverse island tours and expanding into restaurant and transport services since 2022. **AMACO Travel**, known initially as Elephant Tours, specializes in MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) and cruise tourism. Established in 2017, Hana Travel has become a key player in inbound tourism, offering various services, including event organization and transportation. **Khánh Hòa Xanh**, founded in 2022, focuses on domestic and international tourism, providing comprehensive services across multiple markets. **Long Phú**, operational since 2001, manages key destinations in Nha Phu Bay and has the potential to develop wellness tourism products at locations like the Orchid Stream.

Việt Promotion Travel Services Co., Ltd, established in 2016 in Ho Chi Minh City, with a branch in Nha Trang, originated from Anh Nguyên Tour. The company specializes in organizing daily tours in Nha Trang, Buôn Ma Thuột, and Saigon for both inbound and domestic tourists. **Pupu Trip**, headquartered in Phu Quoc, expanded to Nha Trang in 2022, employing nearly 100 staff specializing in retail and travel service partnerships, primarily operating through online sales. **HTS Travel**, a newly established company, is backed by three shareholders, with leadership from industry veterans who previously held key positions in major companies like Saigontourist. HTS Travel focuses heavily on inbound and outbound markets, including cruise passengers and international travel to destinations like Australia and the U.S. **CIAS Travel**, founded with capital from its parent company, Cam Ranh Airport Ground Services, provides ground services and organizes international tours to countries like South Korea and Japan. **Nhatrang Vacation** primarily caters to the domestic market and cruise passengers, organizing tours within Vietnam and welcoming international tourists to Nha Trang. **Viettrip Tourists** evolved from Dan Phat Travel, which initially focused on daily tours in Nha Trang and trips to islands like Bình Ba and Bình Hưng. After these islands were closed to tourism, Dan Phat was restructured and upgraded to Viettrip, which now caters to international tourists in Nha Trang and provides transportation services.

Among these companies, 9 (64.2%) are actively involved in offering wellness tourism products. The remaining companies either do not currently offer such products or are in the process of developing them.

2.7.2 Understanding of Wellness Tourism

The concept of wellness tourism among the interviewed companies is broadly understood as encompassing activities that promote physical and mental well-being. Key themes that emerged from the interviews include:

Relaxation and Healing: Many managers associate wellness tourism with activities that rejuvenate the body and mind. For instance, one manager described wellness tourism as a way for tourists to combine rest with therapeutic practices, highlighting the importance of relaxation and healing in their offerings.

Nature-Based Experiences: Many respondents link wellness tourism to nature, emphasizing Khanh Hoa's natural assets, such as beaches, mud baths, and scenic landscapes. These natural elements are integral to the wellness experience, underscoring the province's unique geographic and environmental advantages.

2.7.3. Current Wellness Tourism Offerings

The wellness tourism products in Khanh Hoa reflect the region's natural and cultural resources. The most common offerings include:

Mud Baths: Six of the nine companies involved in wellness tourism offer mud baths, leveraging the region's natural thermal springs. These baths are a significant attraction for both domestic and international tourists.

Nature Tours: Five companies provide nature-based tours that capitalize on Khanh Hoa's diverse and scenic landscapes. These tours are designed to offer a tranquil escape, aligning with the wellness tourism emphasis on relaxation and rejuvenation.

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Meditation Activities: Four companies offer meditation practices, such as drawing or sound meditation, catering to tourists seeking mental peace and spiritual well-being.

Customer feedback on these wellness tourism products has been predominantly positive, with most companies reporting high satisfaction levels. This suggests a strong market demand for well-being-oriented experiences in the region.

2.7.4. Wellness Tourism Revenue and Seasonality

Revenue from wellness tourism products varies among the companies. While some report stable, "normal" revenue levels, others have experienced significant success, indicating a positive reception in the market. However, the performance of these products is notably affected by seasonality:

Peak Season Performance: Four companies report that their wellness products perform exceptionally well during peak tourist seasons, attracting many visitors.

Off-Peak Challenges: Conversely, four companies note that their wellness offerings perform at "normal" levels during off-peak seasons, highlighting the challenges of sustaining interest outside the peak periods.

This seasonality indicates a potential area of focus for future research, particularly in developing strategies to mitigate the impact of seasonal fluctuations and maintain steady revenue streams throughout the year.

This pilot study offers valuable insights into the current characteristics of wellness tourism from the perspective of travel companies in Khanh Hoa Province. The findings reveal a growing recognition of wellness tourism's potential, underpinned by the region's natural assets and the industry's understanding of the importance of relaxation and nature-based experiences. However, challenges such as seasonality and developing new wellness products remain areas for further exploration. These insights lay the groundwork for a more comprehensive analysis of the opportunities and challenges facing wellness tourism in Khanh Hoa, contributing to the broader discourse on sustainable tourism development in the region.

Methodology

Utilizing a case study design and qualitative research approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), this study delves into the multifaceted concept of wellness tourism and distinguishes it from traditional tourism. To gather nuanced insights, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the wellness tourism industry and analysis of relevant documents are employed.

They were focusing on Khanh Hoa Province as a representative location for studying wellness tourism in Vietnam. The data collection process involved semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the wellness tourism industry, including 14 travel company managers with extensive experience ranging from 5 to over 15 years. Additionally, relevant documents and reports were analyzed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the region's current state and potential of wellness tourism.

The collected data provided quantitative insights into the operations, challenges, and opportunities perceived by these stakeholders. The analysis focused on understanding how these companies conceptualize wellness tourism, the types of wellness products currently offered, and customer feedback.

Findings & Discussion

Research Question 1: What are the key challenges facing developing and promoting wellness tourism products in Khanh Hoa Province, Vietnam?

The study revealed several challenges impacting the growth of wellness tourism (WT) in Khanh Hoa Province. One primary challenge is the need for more knowledge among staff. Many travel companies reported that their employees need a sufficient understanding of wellness tourism, which negatively affects service quality. As one manager expressed, "Our team's understanding of wellness tourism is still developing, which impacts the quality of service we provide."

Another significant challenge is the need for more differentiation in wellness tourism offerings. Most companies provide similar products, such as mud baths and nature tours, making it difficult to stand out in a competitive market. A respondent echoed this challenge, highlighting the need for innovation: "We need to innovate and personalize our services to stand out in a competitive market."

Additionally, regulatory uncertainty poses another challenge for wellness tourism in the region. Clear guidelines can lead to consistency in service quality and safety, which is critical for maintaining customer trust. A participant

emphasized the importance of government action: "The local government needs to establish guidelines for wellness tourism to ensure quality and safety for tourists."

These challenges align with the broader literature on wellness tourism, underscoring the importance of comprehensive staff training and establishing regulatory frameworks to ensure service quality and safety (Myers et al., 2005; Jonas, 2005). The issue of differentiation also reflects the complexities of the wellness tourism market, where providing unique and personalized experiences is crucial for success (Smith & Kelly, 2006).

Furthermore, addressing the need for more staff knowledge could involve integrating holistic wellness concepts into training programs. As Jonas (2005) suggested, wellness is a continuous process encompassing physical, mental, and social dimensions. Incorporating these elements into staff training would enable them to deliver a more comprehensive wellness experience.

Research Question 2: What opportunities exist for enhancing and expanding wellness tourism in Khanh Hoa Province?

Despite the challenges, several opportunities for expanding wellness tourism in Khanh Hoa were identified. The region's rich natural resources—including beautiful beaches, thermal springs, and scenic landscapes—present significant potential for developing unique wellness tourism products. One manager noted, "Our beautiful beaches and thermal springs are key to attracting tourists who seek nature-based wellness experiences."

Positive customer feedback on existing wellness tourism products also indicates a strong foundation for growth. With most companies reporting "good" to "very good" customer satisfaction, there is an opportunity to build brand loyalty and expand market share by offering incentives for customer feedback and improving service offerings.

The opportunities identified in Khanh Hoa are consistent with the broader trend of wellness tourism in Asia, where natural resources and holistic health experiences play a central role (Global Wellness Institute, 2018). The emphasis on leveraging natural assets aligns with wellness tourism as a journey towards greater self-awareness and contentment, as described by Smith and Kelly (2006).

Moreover, the positive customer feedback suggests that wellness tourism in Khanh Hoa can benefit from targeted marketing strategies highlighting the region's natural and cultural assets and holistic wellness experiences. This approach could help differentiate Khanh Hoa from other Asian wellness tourism destinations and attract more wellness tourists.

Research Question 3: How do local travel companies understand and implement the concept of wellness tourism in their offerings?

The companies well-understood the concept of wellness tourism, most associating it with activities promoting **physical and mental well-being**. These activities include relaxation, healing, and nature-based tourism, such as mud baths and meditation. For example, one respondent stated, *"Wellness tourism in Khanh Hoa often revolves around our natural assets— beaches, mud baths, and nature tours are all integral parts of the experience."*

The understanding of wellness tourism among the companies aligns with the definitions provided by the Global Wellness Institute (2022) and other scholars (Myers et al., 2005), who emphasize the integration of physical, mental, and social well-being in wellness tourism. The companies' focus on nature-based activities reflects the holistic approach to wellness, which considers the individual's relationship with the environment crucial to their overall well-being (GWI, 2018).

This holistic perspective is also consistent with the idea that wellness tourism is not merely a physical journey but a journey toward greater self-awareness and contentment (Smith & Kelly, 2006). By incorporating these concepts into their offerings, local companies in Khanh Hoa can provide their customers with more meaningful and transformative wellness experiences.

Research Question 4: What strategies can be employed to overcome the challenges and strengthen the competitiveness of wellness tourism in Khanh Hoa Province?

Several strategies were identified to overcome the challenges and enhance the competitiveness of wellness tourism in Khanh Hoa:

Investing in Staff Training: Companies should invest in comprehensive training programs focusing on wellness tourism principles and practices to address staff's limited knowledge. This will improve service quality and ensure customers receive a fulfilling wellness experience.

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Innovation and Product Differentiation: Companies should focus on differentiating their wellness tourism products by introducing innovative services and personalizing offerings based on customer preferences. For example, combining traditional therapies with modern wellness practices could attract a broader range of tourists.

Collaboration and Regulation: Local companies should collaborate with government bodies to advocate for clear regulations and standards for wellness tourism activities. Such regulations would ensure consistency in service quality and safety, which is crucial for building trust and attracting international tourists.

Mitigating Seasonality: To counteract the effects of seasonality, companies could develop and market special wellness tourism packages for the off-season, offering discounts or added-value services, such as complimentary wellness consultations or extended stays.

These strategies align with the broader literature on wellness tourism, emphasizing the need for continuous innovation and differentiation in a competitive market (Jonas, 2005; Smith & Kelly, 2006). Investing in staff training is also crucial for ensuring that the wellness experience is delivered effectively, as highlighted by Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer (2005).

Collaboration with government bodies to establish clear regulations is essential for ensuring that wellness tourism in Khanh Hoa meets international standards and attracts a global clientele. Additionally, mitigating seasonality through targeted marketing strategies could help sustain demand throughout the year, contributing to the overall sustainability of the wellness tourism sector in Khanh Hoa.

Research limitation & Conclusion

This study's limitations include its focus on a specific region of Vietnam and the qualitative nature of the research, which may limit generalizability. Additionally, the study relies on the perspectives of tourism companies and may only partially capture the views of some stakeholders involved in wellness tourism.

Wellness tourism in Khanh Hoa Province presents both challenges and opportunities. The region's natural assets provide a solid foundation for developing wellness tourism products, but the industry requires further development in product diversity, staff training, and regulatory support. By addressing these challenges, Khanh Hoa can establish itself as a competitive wellness tourism destination in the Asian market, contributing to the province's economic development and the overall sustainability of its tourism industry.

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DEVELOPING WELLNESS TOURISM IN HOA BINH PROVINCE

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Abstract

Wellness tourism has gradually become a global travel trend. However, in Vietnam, this type of tourism is just beginning to develop. Hoa Binh Province possesses many favorable conditions, blessed by nature with a natural environment suitable for the development of this type of tourism. This article aims to analyze and provide an assessment of the potential and current state of wellness tourism development in Hoa Binh Province. Using qualitative research methods combined with quantitative methods, the article identifies several criteria to evaluate the suitability for developing wellness tourism here and determines the factors influencing tourists' choices of wellness tourism in Hoa Binh Province. The study also proposes several solutions to build and develop wellness tourism in Hoa Binh Province. The research results show that Hoa Binh has many favorable factors for the development of wellness tourism; however, the development of wellness tourism products has not yet matched the existing potential.

Keywords: *Wellness tourism, health tourism, hot springs, Hoa Binh tourism.*

1. Introduction

Wellness tourism is an increasingly popular concept in the tourism industry, understood as a type of tourism that combines travel activities with health care to maintain or improve an individual's physical and mental health [1]. According to the Global Wellness Institute, the wellness tourism industry has witnessed significant growth, reaching a value of $639 billion in 2017 and continuing to develop strongly in recent years [2]. By 2024, this industry is estimated to surpass the $900 billion mark, with an average annual growth rate of 7.5%. This development is driven by increased health awareness and a growing demand for comprehensive wellness experiences [3].

Hoa Binh, a mountainous province in northern Vietnam, is renowned for its stunning natural landscapes and hot mineral water resources, emerging as an ideal destination for this type of tourism. This article aims to assess the suitability for the development of wellness tourism and the current state of wellness tourism development in Hoa Binh, as well as the factors influencing tourists' choices regarding wellness tourism. Based on these assessments, the article proposes effective development strategies to attract tourists and promote sustainable tourism development.

2. Objectives

- Analyze the current state of wellness tourism in Hoa Binh Province: This study will analyze the potential and identify the wellness products and services in Hoa Binh Province.

- Evaluate the suitability for the development of wellness tourism in Hoa Binh Province: This evaluation will cover different geographical areas of the province, including Mai Chau District, Kim Boi District, Da Bac District, and Luong Son District.

- Identify factors influencing tourists' choices regarding wellness tourism: Investigate the factors affecting tourists' destination choices, including service quality, infrastructure, and promotional strategies.

3. Hypotheses

- Hoa Binh is highly suitable for the development of wellness tourism and has the potential to become a leading destination for wellness tourism in Vietnam.

- Factors influencing tourists' choices regarding wellness tourism include tourism resources, wellness services, infrastructure, and promotional strategies.

4. Research Methodology

Research Sample

In this study, the authors selected a research sample consisting of tourists who have participated in wellness

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tourism activities in Hoa Binh. The sample is divided into two main groups: domestic tourists and international tourists. The sample includes a total of 150 tourists, with 100 domestic tourists and 50 international tourists. The sample was selected using a simple random sampling method to ensure the representativeness of the sample and minimize sampling errors. The survey was conducted from March 2024 to May 2024.

In addition, the authors conducted interviews with 10 experts in the tourism field to gather opinions during the development of criteria for evaluating the suitability for wellness tourism development and the construction of a tourist survey questionnaire.

Research Tools

This study uses two main types of tools: in-depth interview sheets and survey questionnaires. These tools are designed to collect qualitative and quantitative data on experts' opinions and tourists' evaluations.

- In-depth interview sheets: The in-depth interview sheets include open-ended questions to deeply explore the perspectives and opinions of experts on wellness tourism activities in Hoa Binh. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing researchers flexibility in gathering information.

- Survey questionnaires: The survey questionnaires are designed with both closed and open-ended questions, including questions about personal information, frequency of using wellness services, evaluation of the suitability for wellness tourism development, and factors influencing tourists' choices. The questionnaires were developed based on previous research and expert opinions before being used in the study.

Data Collection

- Secondary information collection: Gather research materials from domestic and international sources, statistics, reports, studies, and information from related websites about wellness tourism worldwide and in Hoa Binh specifically. The collected data and materials were selected, analyzed, and synthesized to meet the research content requirements.

- Field surveys: Field surveys are a mandatory method to conduct a comprehensive investigation of the natural conditions and tourism resources of the area and to supplement, correct, and update the collected data and information. The field surveys were planned and divided into different areas: Mai Chau, Da Bac, Kim Boi, and Luong Son.

- Sociological investigation: The survey questionnaires were distributed to tourists to collect updated data and information on the potential and current state of wellness tourism activities in the locality.

Data Analysis

- Qualitative data: In-depth interview sheets and some survey questions were analyzed using comprehensive evaluation methods.

- Quantitative data: The quantitative data analysis process is carried out in three steps: developing an evaluation scale, individual evaluation, and comprehensive evaluation. This evaluation process is applied to assessments across different geographical areas. The methods and results of the analysis are presented in the research findings through descriptive statistics, calculation of mean values, and percentage rates. Data were processed using SPSS 26.0 software.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Current State of Wellness Tourism Development in Hoa Binh Province

Hoa Binh is a province with rich and diverse tourism resources, including both natural and cultural resources, creating favorable conditions for the development of wellness tourism. Located in the Northwest region of Vietnam, the province boasts majestic mountainous terrain interspersed with rivers and streams, forming many beautiful caves and a year-round cool climate. The pristine, simple natural landscape, along with a rich flora and fauna system, provides a foundation for building modern resorts and specialized wellness tourism facilities. Additionally, Hoa Binh has a rich system of spiritual sites such as Hang Pagoda, Khanh Pagoda, Niem Tam Vi Chua Muong Temple, and Chua Thac Bo Temple. Furthermore, the local community, with many ethnic minorities, especially the Muong people, hosts many traditional festivals and unique cultural traits.

Natural Tourism Resources: Hoa Binh features a complexly dissected medium mountain terrain with steep slopes, running northwest to southeast, divided into two regions: the high mountainous area in the northwest and the low mountainous area in the southeast. The humid subtropical climate with a dry, cold winter and a hot, rainy summer

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creates an ideal environment for wellness tourism activities. The average annual temperature is over 23°C, with July being the hottest month, averaging 27-29°C, and January being the coldest month, averaging 15.5-16.5°C.

Cultural Tourism Resources: Hoa Binh is home to six ethnic groups, with the Muong people accounting for 63.3%, the Kinh people making up 27.73%, and other groups such as Thai, Dao, Tay, and Mong. It is one of the provinces where the Vietnamese (Kinh) do not form the majority and is considered the capital of the Muong people. The province has 60 ranked monuments, including 55 historical and cultural sites and five scenic spots. Prominent spiritual tourist destinations include Ba Chua Thac Bo Temple (Cao Phong District), Tien Pagoda - Dam Da (Lac Thuy District), Hang Pagoda (Yen Thuy District), and Phat Quang Pagoda (Hoa Binh City).

Accommodation: **The hotel, resort, guesthouse, and homestay system in Hoa Binh is gradually being upgraded and newly invested. The province has about 522 tourist accommodation facilities, with notable resorts such as Serena Resort Kim Boi Hoa Binh, Mai Chau Ecolodge, and Avana Retreat. Districts like Mai Chau, Luong Son, and Kim Boi have many accommodation facilities serving tourists.**

Table 5.1: Statistics of Accommodation Facilities in Hoa Binh Province

No.	Location	Number of accommodation establishments
1	Hoa Binh City	79
2	Da Bac District	23
3	Tan Lac District	32
4	Yen Thuy District	13
5	Mai Chau District	208
6	Cao Phong District	51
7	Luong Son District	61
8	Kim Boi District	35
9	Ky Son District	20

(Source: Authors' Collected Results, 2024*).*

Dining Facilities: **Hoa Binh has about 200 restaurants offering various dishes to meet tourists' needs, including several that serve vegetarian options. Cafés are located in beautiful spots, featuring a diverse drink menu and unique decorations that attract visitors for photo opportunities.**

Transportation: The transportation network in and to Hoa Binh is relatively good. Major roads leading to tourist spots and scenic areas have seen significant investment. Transportation services have improved in quality, with an increased number of vehicles and an upgraded public transport network.

Wellness Tourism Products and Services: Currently, tours and services related to wellness tourism in Hoa Binh are starting to emerge. Wellness tourism here mainly includes spa services, steam baths, hot spring soaking, and massages at resorts, hotels, and private establishments. Other sports and recreational services include golf courses, swimming pools, gyms, and tennis courts.

Wellness tourism in Hoa Binh Province is gradually establishing itself as an important sector in the local tourism development strategy. According to the Hoa Binh Department of Tourism, in 2023, the province welcomed 3.8 million visitors, including 450,000 international tourists, reflecting a strong recovery following the impact of COVID-19. Total revenue from tourism reached 4 trillion VND, a 10.7% increase compared to the previous year [4].

5.2. Overall Assessment of the Suitability for Developing Wellness Tourism in Hoa Binh Province

In this paper, the authors chose a weighted scoring system to evaluate the suitability for developing wellness tourism in Hoa Binh Province.

5.2.1. Evaluation Scale

The evaluation scale consists of a system of indicators and assessment criteria, evaluation levels, points for each evaluation level, and scoring coefficients. To clarify the suitability for developing wellness tourism in Hoa Binh

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Province, the authors selected five criteria based on research and expert consultations: (1) Tourism resources for wellness tourism, (2) Technical infrastructure, (3) Wellness products and services, (4) Tourism human resources, and (5) Service prices. Each criterion is assessed using a 5-point Likert scale: (5) Very Suitable; (4) Suitable; (3) Average; (2) Less Suitable; (1) Not Suitable. The points assigned to each evaluation level are as follows: Very Suitable = 5 points; Suitable = 4 points; Average = 3 points; Less Suitable = 2 points; Not Suitable = 1 point. To illustrate the evaluation process, consider the assessment of tourism resources for wellness tourism. Tourism resources are a decisive factor in the development of wellness tourism. This factor is reflected in favorable geographical location, easy accessibility, a clean and quiet environment, harmony with natural landscapes, and distinctive cultural values. The evaluation of tourism resources for wellness tourism is as follows:

Level 5: Very Suitable

+ Favorable geographical location, convenient connection distances to transportation routes, accessible by multiple means (bus, car, motorcycle...), with short travel time (2-3 hours).

+ Pristine and very clean, quiet environment.

+ Beautiful landscapes with rich natural tourism resources (caves, waterfalls, forests, herbal gardens, hot springs...) (more than 5 scenic spots).

+ Distinctive traditional cultural values of the local community (reflected through festivals, costumes, customs...).

+ Diverse and rich local cuisine, with natural food sources.

Level 4: Suitable

+ Favorable geographical location, reasonably convenient connection distances to transportation routes, accessible by various means (bus, car, motorcycle...), with fairly short travel time (3-4 hours).

+ Clean and quiet environment.

+ Beautiful landscapes with rich natural tourism resources (caves, waterfalls, forests, herbal gardens, hot springs...) (4-5 scenic spots).

+ Quite distinctive traditional cultural values of the local community (reflected through festivals, costumes, customs...).

+ Relatively rich local cuisine, with natural food sources.

Level 3: Average

+ Favorable geographical location, reasonably convenient connection distances to transportation routes, accessible by 1-2 means (car, motorcycle), with average travel time (4-5 hours).

+ Clean environment.

+ Fairly beautiful landscapes with rich natural tourism resources (caves, waterfalls, forests, herbal gardens, hot springs...) (2-3 scenic spots).

+ Retains some traditional cultural values of the local community (reflected through festivals, costumes, customs...).

+ Relatively rich local cuisine, but not particularly appealing.

Level 2: Less Suitable

+ Less favorable geographical location, relatively far connection distances to transportation routes, accessible by 1-2 means (car, motorcycle), with relatively long travel time (5-6 hours).

+ Fairly clean environment.

+ 1-2 beautiful scenic spots.

+ Retains some traditional cultural values of the local community (reflected through festivals, costumes, customs...).

+ Local cuisine is not particularly appealing.

Level 1: Not Suitable

+ Unfavorable geographical location, very far connection distances to transportation routes, accessible by 1-2 means (car, motorcycle), with long travel time (6-7 hours).

+ Environment is not particularly clean or quiet.

+ No beautiful scenic spots.

+ Does not reflect the traditional cultural values of the local community.

+ Local cuisine is not appealing.

Other criteria are also developed in the same way, but the divisions correspond to different indicators.

However, due to the varying importance of the criteria for wellness tourism activities, it is necessary to establish additional scoring coefficients (also known as importance coefficients or weights) to enhance the accuracy and objectivity of the evaluation results. The scoring coefficients are determined using the matrix method and expert consultation. Important indicators that appear frequently are assigned a weight of 3, less important indicators are assigned a weight of 2, and indicators deemed less important receive a weight of 1 (as shown in Table 5.2).

Table 5.2. Weighting of Evaluation Indicators for Wellness Tourism Activities

Evaluation Indicator	Weight
ourism resources for wellness tourism	3
Tourism technical infrastructure	3
Wellness products and services	3
Tourism human resources	2
Service pricing	1

(Source: Compilation by the authors, 2024).

5.2.2. Evaluation Score

The evaluation score consists of the individual scores for each specific criterion and the overall evaluation score. The individual score for each criterion is the specific score for the evaluation level multiplied by the weight of that criterion. The evaluation levels for each criterion are based on an analysis of the specific conditions of each geographical area and a comparison of the indicator rankings. Therefore, the overall evaluation score is the total score of all criteria multiplied by the weight of each criterion. Thus, with the selected criteria, the highest evaluation score is 60 points and the lowest score is 12 points. Based on the evaluation scores, the scale for assessing the suitability for developing wellness tourism in Hoa Binh province is presented in Table 5.3 as follows:

Table 5.3. Rating Scale for the Favorability of Developing Health Tourism in Hoa Binh Province

Rating Level	Percentage of Maximum Score	Points
Very Favorable	87-100	52-60
Favorable	71-86	42-51
Average	55-71	32-41
Less Favorable	38-54	22-31
Unfavorable	21-37	12-21

(Source: Compilation by the authors, 2024).

The specific results regarding the evaluation scores and the level of suitability for developing wellness tourism in key areas of Hoa Binh province are presented in Table 5.4 as follows:

Table 5.4. Assessment of Favorability for Developing Health Tourism in Hoa Binh Province

No.	Assessment Area	Total Score	Maximum Score	Percentage of Maximum Score	Rating Standard (%)	Favorability Assessment
1	Mai Chau District	50	60	83.3	71-86	Favorable
2	Kim Boi District	48	60	80.0	71-86	Favorable
3	Da Bac District	38	60	63.3	55-71	Average
4	Luong Son District	43	60	71.7	71-86	Favorable

(Source: Data processing by the authors, 2024).

Through the overall assessment of the favorable conditions for developing health tourism in Hoa Binh province, it shows that:

Mai Chau is the most favorable district for developing health tourism compared to other areas in the province, with the highest evaluation score being for tourism resources serving health tourism (5 points). Mai Chau has beautiful landscapes and fresh air, retaining many cultural values of the local community. Tourists can experience connections, exchanges, and learn about the community's culture while participating in health-beneficial activities such as cycling and walking. Additionally, they can receive health care through traditional remedies of the community (herbal baths, herbal foot soaks, etc.). The infrastructure and facilities are also highly rated (5 points) as tourists can choose from a variety of accommodation types. The tourism human resources in Mai Chau are rated at 4 points because the local community serving tourists is well-trained, always friendly, enthusiastic, and ready to assist visitors.

Kim Boi district is also rated favorable for developing health tourism. With rich resources, especially hot springs effectively utilized for health activities, the accessibility to destinations and the availability of accommodation and dining facilities are rated quite high (4 points), which is an important factor in developing health tourism. Moreover, some health services like meditation and yoga have started to appear in some resorts like An Lac Resort.

Luong Son district is rated favorable with a total score of 43 points for developing health tourism. It has a very advantageous geographical location as it is the gateway connecting Hoa Binh province and Hanoi city, with a short travel time. This area is one of the cultural centers of the Muong land, featuring beautiful natural scenery with many tourist spots such as Dong Chanh Lake, Da Bac Cave, and Man Nguyen Cave, along with ideal climate conditions suitable for tourists' health needs. Additionally, in Luong Son, there is Quat Lam Pagoda, which regularly organizes monthly retreats for people aged 13 to over 30, with about 100-150 participants in each session. This is also a good mental health care activity that attracts many participants.

Da Bac district is rated at an average level of favorability compared to other areas in Hoa Binh province. However, it is also a locality that can develop health services, such as the herbal bathing service offered by the Dao ethnic group in Suong village in Da Bac, selling health-beneficial dried herbal products, and exploring the local people's culture.

5.3. Factors Influencing Tourists' Choices for Health Tourism in Hoa Binh Province

The results of the tourist survey indicate that the most important factors influencing tourists' choices include service quality, reasonable pricing, and the uniqueness of health care experiences.

Firstly, Hoa Binh is a province with a favorable geographic location and rich natural resources, such as hot mineral springs, magnificent landscapes, and clean, quiet air, which attract tourists. Tourists tend to choose locations with a good natural environment to enjoy health services and relaxation.

Secondly, the quality of infrastructure and health care services is a crucial factor in tourists' choices. Resorts, spas, saunas, and modern medical centers offering diverse, high-quality health care treatments will attract more tourists.

Thirdly, the supportive policies and tourism development projects of Hoa Binh province are also significant. Policies that encourage investment in tourism infrastructure, develop new tourism products, and promote health

tourism will create favorable conditions for the growth of this type of tourism.

Fourthly, tourists are often drawn to the diversity and uniqueness of health tourism products. Hoa Binh needs to develop specialized health care products, such as herbal therapies, hot mineral baths, yoga, and meditation, combined with recreational activities and local cultural exploration.

Fifthly, reasonable pricing and service quality are essential factors affecting tourists' choices. Services should be priced appropriately for various customer segments, from mid-range to high-end, while ensuring good service quality.

Sixthly, a highly skilled workforce in health care and tourism will create a competitive edge. Spa, massage, and medical staff need professional training and skills to provide high-quality health care services.

Seventhly, tourists value comprehensive experiences and the integration of health care services. Tour packages should be designed to combine health care, relaxation, sports, and local cultural exploration, creating a seamless and rich experience.

Eighthly, promotional activities and tourism marketing play a crucial role in attracting tourists. Promoting the image of health tourism in Hoa Binh through media channels, tourism fairs, and events will enhance awareness and interest among potential visitors.

Ninthly, positive evaluations and feedback from previous tourists significantly influence the decisions of potential visitors. Hoa Binh needs to focus on collecting and processing tourist feedback to improve services and better meet their needs.

Finally, safety and security remain critical factors. Tourists feel more at ease visiting places with good security and strict health safety measures, especially in the post-COVID-19 context.

Understanding and improving these factors will help Hoa Binh strongly develop health tourism, attracting more domestic and international visitors.

5.4. Proposed Solutions for Developing Health Tourism in Hoa Binh Province

Despite its many potentials, health tourism in Hoa Binh needs more investment and attention from the government and businesses. It is essential to develop diverse products, strengthen connections with the local community, and improve management capacity to promote sustainable development in this field. Therefore, a series of coordinated and comprehensive solutions need to be implemented by various agencies, departments, localities, as well as the participation of service businesses. Specifically, as follows:

Solutions for Diversifying and Developing Health Tourism Products

- *Investing in facilities and infrastructure:* is a crucial factor for developing health tourism. It is necessary to build and upgrade specialized tourism areas, high-end resorts, spa centers, and yoga studios. In particular, focus on locations with significant hot spring resources, such as Kim Bôi, which have been effectively utilized and hold great potential for development.

- *Developing High-Quality Service Products:* It is necessary to develop health care products systematically, not just limited to hot mineral baths but also integrating health care treatments such as mud baths, spas, and therapy packages. Special attention should be given to beauty care for women, creating diverse and rich service packages.

- *Developing Specialized Tours:* Create wellness tourism tours that combine relaxation and health care, such as meditation and yoga tours in peaceful, pristine natural areas. These tours not only help visitors relax but also provide spiritual and health benefits.

- *Diversifying Supporting Products:* In addition to main products, it is essential to organize activities that guide health care and promote healthy eating. Combining these activities will enrich visitors' experiences when participating in health care services.

- *Meeting Market Demand:* It is necessary to design health care tourism products that meet the diverse needs of the market, catering to different customer groups. Products such as meditation and yoga tours, health care services, and healthy diet and weight loss programs will help mitigate risks from future fluctuations in customer sources.

- *Developing Key Tourism Models:* Position health care tourism as a key tourism model for Hòa Bình. Create specialized health care tours and replicate hotel and resort models that combine accommodation with health-related activities such as fitness, mindfulness, and healthy eating.

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- Establishing Health Care Programs at Each Tourist Site: Develop health care programs at each tourist destination in Hòa Bình. These activities can include relaxation experiences, healthy dining, skin care, and vegetarian cooking classes to create connections with visitors.

Solutions for Promoting Health Tourism

- Integrated Promotion Strategy: Develop promotion strategies that involve close collaboration among the community, government, and businesses. This will help create the best experience for health tourists.

- Quality Management of Products: Strengthen the management of the quality of health tourism services at service providers. Agencies such as the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Health Inspection, and Tourism Inspection need to work closely together to assess service quality.

- Support for Investment and Infrastructure Development: Local authorities should support investments in technical infrastructure and training human resources for health tourism development. Establishing collaboration plans among tourism facilities will enhance promotional effectiveness.

- Increase Budget for Promotion: The government needs to increase the budget for tourism promotion activities while encouraging social involvement in these activities to improve effectiveness.

Solutions for Developing Human Resources in Health Tourism

- *Research and Resource Assessment:* Comprehensive projects should be implemented to study and assess the resources needed for developing health tourism. Creating guidelines for health tourism development will help direct proper investments.

- *Raise Awareness of Workforce Training:* It is essential to enhance awareness of the importance of workforce training in the health tourism sector. The labor force must possess high skills and professional qualifications to meet market demands.

- *Regular Training Programs:* Frequent training sessions should be organized to improve the professional skills of staff at health service providers, such as spas, massage centers, and other support services.

- *International Training Partnerships:* Establish connections with countries experienced in developing health tourism to enhance the quality of workforce training. This will help create a highly qualified labor force that meets sustainable development requirements.*]*

In summary, to effectively develop health tourism in Hòa Bình, it is necessary to implement a comprehensive set of solutions ranging from product diversification to improving service quality and developing human resources. Close collaboration among the government, businesses, and the community will be crucial in making Hòa Bình an attractive destination for health tourism.

6. Discussion and Recommendations

6.1. Discussion

The research results indicate an increasing demand for health tourism, especially in the current context where awareness of health is rising.

Global and Vietnamese Trends: Services such as spas, yoga, and meditation are considered essential factors in attracting tourists. The study also shows that to maintain and develop this market, significant investment in infrastructure and human resource training is necessary.

Comparison with Previous Studies: The findings of this study are consistent with previous research, highlighting the importance of health services in modern tourism. However, this study also identifies the favorable conditions for developing health tourism and the factors influencing tourists' choices regarding health tourism in Hoa Binh province. Additionally, it proposes specific solutions for the development of health tourism in Hoa Binh.

6.2. Research Recommendations

Future research should encompass all aspects and needs to be clarified:

In-depth study of factors influencing tourists' choices regarding health care services: This research could help identify the decisive factors in tourists' selection of health care services.

Further analysis of the differences between domestic and international tourists in experiencing health care services: Understanding the different needs and expectations of these two groups will aid in developing more effective marketing strategies.

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Evaluation of the impact of marketing and promotional strategies on the development of health tourism in Hoa Binh: This research will help identify the most effective promotional methods to attract tourists to Hoa Binh.

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GREEN PATH: UNRAVELLING THE INFLUENCE OF TRUST AND SOCIAL NORMS IN PULAU TIGA NATIONAL PARK, SABAH

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Abstract

This study examines how visitors' perceptions of eco-friendly tourism affect their likelihood to revisit Pulau Tiga National Park in Sabah. Using SPSS and PLS-SEM, responses from 189 visitors, both domestic and international, were analyzed to understand the links between green tourism perceptions, trust, social norms, and the desire to re-visit, focusing on loyalty. The findings show mixed connections between these factors. Positive green tourism perceptions significantly boost visitors' intention to return to the park, indicating the importance of eco-friendly initiatives in building loyalty. However, green tourism perceptions do not always directly translate into re-visit intentions; in fact, there is a negative link between green tourism perceptions and re-visit intention. Moreover, social norms mediate the relationship between green perceptions and re-visit intention, highlighting the influence of peer opinions on tourists' decisions. This study deepens our understanding of how eco-friendly perceptions affect destination loyalty. Our study findings also indicated that nurturing positive social norms and bolstering green initiatives can enhance visitor satisfaction and loyalty, ensuring the park's long-term sustainability. For destination managers and policymakers, this study contributes to the importance of prioritizing eco-friendly practices and fostering supportive social environments to ensure the continued success of destinations like Pulau Tiga National Park.

Keywords: Green tourism perceptions; Re-visit intention; Trust; Social norms; Destination loyalty; Structural Equation Modelling

Introduction

Green tourism, which focuses on sustainability and reducing environmental impact, has garnered significant attention in recent years due to heightened ecological awareness and the growing demand for eco-friendly travel options. The perception of green tourism is largely positive, with an increasing number of visitors favoring destinations that adopt sustainable practices (Jones & Williams, 2020). Nevertheless, several issues have surfaced, including the difficulty of balancing economic benefits with environmental preservation and the risk of "greenwashing," where businesses falsely claim to be environmentally friendly to attract tourists (Smith et al., 2021). Moreover, the effectiveness of green tourism efforts is often compromised by a lack of standardization and clear guidelines (Brown & Harris, 2022). As the industry evolves, addressing these issues is essential to maintaining the long-term viability and credibility of green tourism.

Visitors trust is a vital component in the tourism industry, profoundly affecting travel choices and destination loyalty. Trust involves confidence in the safety, reliability, and authenticity of the services and experiences provided. Recent research emphasizes the importance of cultivating and sustaining trust to enhance visitors' satisfaction and encourage repeat visits (Lee & Chang, 2019). Nonetheless, several issues have arisen that undermine visitors trust, such as misinformation, fraudulent activities, and inconsistent service quality (Williams et al., 2020). Furthermore, the creation of online reviews and social media has magnified the consequences of negative experiences, highlighting the need for tourism providers to address complaints promptly and transparently (Brown & Smith, 2021). As the tourism industry continues to develop, maintaining and bolstering visitors trust is essential for ensuring long-term growth and a solid reputation.

Social norms, the unwritten rules that govern behavior within a society, are essential for shaping interactions and maintaining social order. These norms influence a broad spectrum of behaviors, from daily etiquette to overarching societal expectations. Smith and Johnson (2020) highlighted the importance of understanding social norms to effectively address contemporary issue. However, recent years have seen several issues arise, including the rapid pace of cultural change, increasing globalization, and the advent of digital communication, all of which can

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disrupt traditional norms and lead to conflicts (Brown et al., 2021). Furthermore, the enforcement of social norms can sometimes result in the exclusion or discrimination of non-conformists, adding complexity to social dynamics (Williams & Taylor, 2022). As societies continue to evolve, it is increasingly crucial to navigate these challenges and promote inclusive and adaptable social norms.

The intention to revisit a destination is a crucial aspect of the tourism industry, shaped by factors such as green tourism perceptions, trust, and social norms. In the realm of green tourism, especially in Asian countries like Malaysia, visitor decisions to return are significantly influenced by their perception of eco-friendly practices. Increasingly, visitors are attracted to destinations that implement sustainable practices, mirroring a global rise in environmental awareness (Lee & Chang, 2019). Trust in the genuineness and reliability of these green initiatives further strengthens this intention, as visitors are more likely to revisit places where their environmental values are sincerely acknowledged and supported (Williams et al., 2020). Moreover, social norms are influential; in many Asian cultures, collective behaviors and societal expectations strongly affect individual choices, including travel decisions (Brown & Taylor, 2021). Therefore, promoting positive perceptions of green tourism, maintaining trustworthy practices, and aligning with local social norms are vital strategies for enhancing revisit intentions in Malaysia. Notably, nestled in the heart of Borneo lies a gem: Pulau Tiga National Park, a testament to the allure of sustainable travel and ecological preservation.

Overview of Pulau Tiga National Park

Pulau Tiga National Park, located off the coast of Sabah, Malaysia, stands as a pristine haven boasting rich biodiversity and stunning natural landscapes. As the inaugural location for the hit reality TV show *"Survivor"* this park has captivated global attention, drawing adventurers and nature enthusiasts alike (Hain, 2020). Amidst Malaysia's booming tourism sector, the importance of eco-conscious travel cannot be emphasized enough, especially in destinations like Pulau Tiga. This discourse seeks to uncover the intricate dance between perceptions of green tourism, trust, social norms, and the desire to return, unveiling how these elements sculpt visitors' journeys and influence their sustainable travel practices. Grasping these dynamics is pivotal for policymakers and stakeholders alike, as they craft strategies to nurture eco-friendly tourism and safeguard the enduring splendor of natural gems such as Pulau Tiga National Park (Jones & Smith, 2023).

The park derives its name from its largest island, Pulau Tiga, christened for its distinct trio of undulating peaks visible from afar. Initially designated as a forest reserve in 1933, Pulau Tiga Park boasts a plethora of captivating flora and fauna, along with a vibrant marine ecosystem, offering exceptional opportunities for diving and snorkeling amidst the coral reefs (Smith, 2018). While the administrative hub of Pulau Tiga Park resides on Pulau Tiga itself, a satellite administrative office is situated in the bustling town of Kuala Penyu. As shown in Figure 1, the park entails of 3 islands, i.e., Pulau Tiga (Survivor Island) being the main island, Pulau Kalampunian Besar (Sands Spit Island) and Pulau Kalampunian Damit (Snake Island).

Figure 1: Pulau Tiga, the Survivor Island of Borneo

Source: MySabah.com

Objectives

1. To investigate the impact of green tourism perceptions on re-visit intention among visitors to Pulau Tiga National Park, Sabah.

2. To examine the relationships between green tourism perceptions, trust, social norms, and intention to re-visit, with a focus on destination loyalty.

3. To examine the mediating role of social norms and trust in shaping visitors' intentions.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

The notion of a green tourism encapsulates visitors' perceptions regarding a city's environmental commitments and concerns (Cassia et al., 2018; Chen, 2009). Described as the mental construct citizens form regarding a city's environmental attributes, the green tourism significantly shapes individuals' interactions with and perceptions of the city (Chrysostomou, 2022; Lindgreen et al., 2017). These perceptions, forged through experiences, memories, and mental associations, typically remain stable but can evolve due to shifting social dynamics and competitive strategies (Tapia et al., 2018). Tangible expressions of a city's green initiatives, such as sustainable transport options, recycling schemes, and improved air quality, bolster its green image (Acuti et al., 2018). The green tourism is expected to influence both visitors' confidence in a destination and their likelihood of revisiting (Namkung & Jang, 2013; Sitepu & Rismawati, 2021). Some scholars assert that the green tourism perceptions play a pivotal role in visitor trust, underscoring its significance in destination management (Chancellor & Cole, 2008; Melé et al., 2020). These assertions form the basis of our first and second research hypotheses:

H₁: Green tourism perceptions have a significant impact on re-visit intention among   visitors to Pulau Tiga National Park, Sabah.

H₂: Green tourism perceptions have a significant impact on trust among visitors to Pulau Tiga National Park, Sabah.

Green tourism perceptions also crucial in shaping social norms among visitors to their destination. Visitors' sentiments and experiences shared through social media posts serve as symbols reflecting their values and significant aspects of their visits (Hausmann et al., 2020). These perceptions are influenced by factors such as reactions to

environmental changes, community attachment, and eco-centric attitudes, collectively impacting visitors' views on tourism effects and behaviors supporting sustainable practices (Gößling et al., 2020). A study on cultural ecosystem services evaluation introduced a norm-neutralization model, emphasizing visitors' persistence in using cars despite environmental awareness. This highlights the importance of understanding and addressing such behaviors to promote sustainable development in national parks (Ibnou-Laaroussi et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). Understanding and managing green tourism perceptions are essential for fostering sustainable practices and shaping social norms among visitors to Pulau Tiga National Park in Sabah. Based on the literature, the following hypothesis were formulated:

H₃: Green tourism perceptions have a significant impact on social norms among visitors to Pulau Tiga National Park, Sabah.

Another component like trust is considered as a critical factor influencing visitors' intention to revisit their destination (Melé et al., 2020). Recent studies have emphasized the importance of trust in shaping re-visit intentions in various tourism settings. Lita and Meuthia (2018) stated the impact of online trust factors on website re-visit intentions, indicating that perceived ease of use, usefulness, enjoyment of technology, privacy, security, and company competence significantly affect re-visit intentions. Maulida et al. (2020) strongly emphasized there is a significance of brand image, tourist perception, and service quality in driving re-visit intentions in recreational parks, also suggesting that these factors play a vital role in encouraging individuals to return to the same destination. Besides, Ahsanah and Artanti (2021) proved that memorable tourism experiences, city image, and visitor engagement significantly influence re-visit intentions, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these factors in shaping visitors' decisions to revisit a destination. These findings collectively support the hypothesis that trust is a key determinant of re-visit intention among visitors to Pulau Tiga National Park, Sabah. This translates into our fourth work hypothesis:

H₄: Trust has a significant impact on re-visit intention among   visitors to Pulau Tiga National Park, Sabah.

Recent studies highlight the profound influence of social norms on tourists' re-visit intentions. Social norms, defined as the unwritten rules that govern behavior within a group, play a critical role in shaping individuals' actions and decisions (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). A study by Kim et al. (2019) found that positive word-of-mouth and social endorsement were strongly correlated with increased re-visit intentions among eco-tourists. Additionally, social media platforms amplify these norms, as shared experiences and positive reviews can create a bandwagon effect, encouraging others to follow suit (Goh et al., 2019). Furthermore, adherence to environmental norms, such as responsible tourism practices, enhances visitors' overall experience and satisfaction, thereby boosting their likelihood of returning (Dolnicar et al., 2020). This is particularly relevant in eco-tourism destinations like Pulau Tiga, where sustainable practices are valued and promoted. Social norms significantly shape re-visit intentions among visitors to Pulau Tiga National Park by influencing perceptions, behaviors, and satisfaction levels, ultimately fostering a culture of repeated visitation (Lee et al., 2021). This leads to propose the fifth hypothesis:

H₅: Social norms have a significant impact on re-visit intention among   visitors to Pulau Tiga National Park, Sabah.

According to Liu et al. (2019), trust is pivotal in shaping tourists' intentions to revisit natural attractions, as it reflects their confidence in the park's commitment to sustainable practices and environmental stewardship. This confidence stems from perceptions of transparency, reliability, and the park's efforts in preserving its ecological integrity (Seddighi et al., 2020; Melé et al., 2020). Moreover, recent studies underscore trust as a mediator that enhances the positive effects of green tourism perceptions on behavioral intentions (Kim et al., 2021). Visitors who perceive Pulau Tiga National Park as a responsible steward of its natural resources are more likely to develop trust in its management practices and subsequently express intentions to return for future visits (Isa et al., 2019). This leads to propose the sixth hypothesis:

H₆: Trust mediates the relationship between green tourism perceptions and visitors' intentions to re-visit Pulau Tiga National Park, Sabah.

Green tourism perceptions encompass visitors' attitudes towards environmentally responsible practices within the tourism context (Su et al., 2020). These perceptions influence visitors' evaluation of the park's sustainability efforts, which in turn impact their behavioral intentions such as revisiting. Social norms, defined as societal expectations regarding appropriate behavior in each situation (Schultz, 2006), are pivotal in this relationship. Research indicates that individuals are likely to conform to perceived norms when making decisions about environmentally responsible behaviors, including revisiting eco-friendly destinations (Shien et al., 2022). Thus, visitors who perceive strong social norms favoring green tourism are more likely to intend to revisit Pulau Tiga

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National Park due to the alignment of their behaviors with social expectations.

Moreover, empirical studies in environmental psychology highlight the significant influence of social norms on pro-environmental behaviors (Cialdini et al., 2016). This leads to propose the seventh hypothesis:

H_7: Social norms mediate the relationship between green tourism perceptions and visitors' intentions to revisit Pulau Tiga National Park, Sabah.
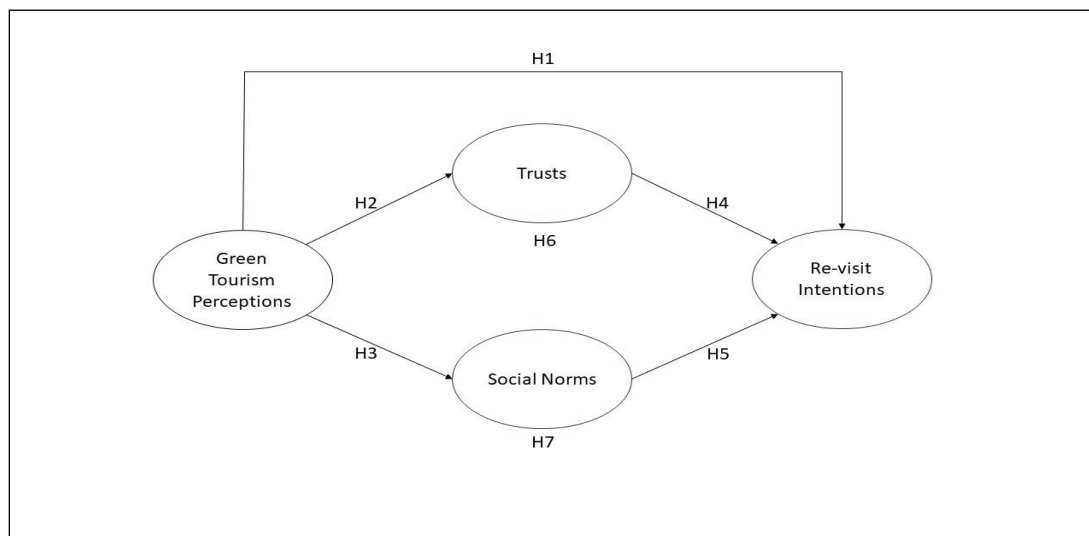
Research Framework

Figure 1: Research Framework

Source: Ibnou-Laaroussi et al. (2020), Melé et al. (2020)

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

The population for this study consisted of domestic and international visitors to Pulau Tiga National Park, Sabah, who had visited the park at least once. This research conducted was a quantitative study. The sample data used in this research comprised 189 respondents, including both domestic and international visitors to Pulau Tiga National Park, Sabah. The sampling method used in this research was likely to be convenience sampling or purposive sampling, where respondents were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. This method was common in studies involving survey questionnaires, particularly when access to the entire population was not feasible or practical.

2. Research Tools

In this quantitative research, two main tools were utilized: questionnaires and statistical analysis software. Questionnaire responses from 189 domestic and international visitors to Pulau Tiga National Park were collected and analyzed. These questionnaires likely included items designed to measure participants' perceptions of green tourism, trust in the destination, social norms, and intention to revisit the park. The questions may have been structured using Likert scales or other rating formats to gather quantitative data on these variables. Statistical analysis software such as SPSS was used to process and analyze the collected questionnaire data. SPSS is commonly employed in quantitative research to perform various statistical analyses, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. Additionally, Partial Least Structural Equation Modelling (PLSEM) was likely used to examine the relationships between green tourism perceptions, trust, social norms, and intention to revisit, with a focus on destination loyalty. PLSEM is a statistical technique commonly used to assess complex relationships among variables in structural equation modelling. These research tools allowed for the quantitative investigation of the relationships between variables and provided insights into tourists' perceptions of green tourism and its impact on destination loyalty at Pulau Tiga National Park.

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3. Data Collection

The research data for this study was collected through the administration of questionnaires to domestic and international visitors at Pulau Tiga National Park, Sabah. The data collection period spanned from December 2023 until the end of January 2024, with researchers stationed at Kuala Penyu jetty to intercept visitors before or after their trips to the park. During this time frame, researchers approached visitors arriving or departing from Pulau Tiga National Park and invited them to participate in the study by completing a questionnaire. The questionnaire likely included items related to green tourism perceptions, trust in the destination, adherence to social norms, and intention to revisit the park. Participants were asked to provide their responses to the questionnaire items, which may have been structured using Likert scales or other rating formats to gather quantitative data on their perceptions and intentions. By collecting data during this specific period and location, the study aimed to capture a representative sample of visitors to Pulau Tiga National Park and gain insights into their perceptions and behavioral intentions related to green tourism.

4. Data Analysis

After collecting the questionnaire responses, the researchers proceeded to analyze the data using two main statistical analysis techniques: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Partial Least Structural Equation Modelling (PLSEM). SPSS software was employed to conduct various statistical analyses to explore the relationships between the variables of interest. Descriptive statistics, such as means, standard deviations, and frequencies, were calculated to summarize the data and provide insights into the distribution and central tendencies of the variables. Additionally, inferential statistics, such as correlation analysis and regression analysis, were performed to examine the associations and predictive relationships between green tourism perceptions, trust, social norms, and intention to revisit the park.

SPSS allowed researchers to quantify and assess the strength and significance of these relationships, providing empirical evidence to support their hypotheses. PLSEM is a sophisticated statistical technique commonly used in structural equation modelling to analyze complex relationships among variables. In this study, PLSEM was employed to explore the direct and indirect effects of green tourism perceptions, trust, and social norms on intention to revisit the park, with destination loyalty as the focal point. PLSEM enabled researchers to model the causal pathways between the variables and assess the mediating effects of social norms on the relationship between green tourism perceptions and intention to revisit. By employing PLSEM, researchers could evaluate the overall fit of the model and test the significance of the proposed relationships, providing a comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanisms driving visitors' behavioural intentions. Through the combined use of SPSS and PLSEM, researchers were able to conduct rigorous statistical analyses to investigate the complex interplay between green tourism perceptions, trust, social norms, and intention to revisit the park, ultimately shedding light on the factors influencing destination loyalty among visitors to Pulau Tiga National Park.

4.1 Respondents

A total of 230 surveys were handed out, and 189 of them were filled out and returned, resulting in an overall response rate of 82%. The survey respondents' gender comprises 102 males (53.96%) and 87 females (46.04%). Most participants are aged between 18-29 years (36.50%) and 30-39 years (33.81%), with fewer participants in the older age groups. In terms of education, most have a Diploma (42.85%), followed by a Bachelor's Degree (28.57%), with fewer having a high school education (16.93%) or a Postgraduate Degree (11.65%). Employment status varies, with the highest number of participants working in government (31.74%), followed by businessmen (25.39%) and professionals (20.10%). Students (13.22%), housewives (5.95%), and retirees (3.6%) constitute the remainder of the sample.

Table 1. The sample's demographic characteristics.

|		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	102	53.96
	Female	87	46.04
Age	18-29 years	69	36.50
	30-39 years	64	33.81
	40-49 years	28	14.81
	50-59 years	22	11.64
	60 years and above	6	3.24
Level of Education	High school	32	16.93
	Diploma	81	42.85
	Bachelor Degree	54	28.57
	Postgraduate Degree	22	11.65
Employment Status	Professional	38	20.10
	Government	60	31.74
	Businessman	48	25.39
	Student	28	13.22
\	Housewife	8	5.95
	Retired	7	3.6
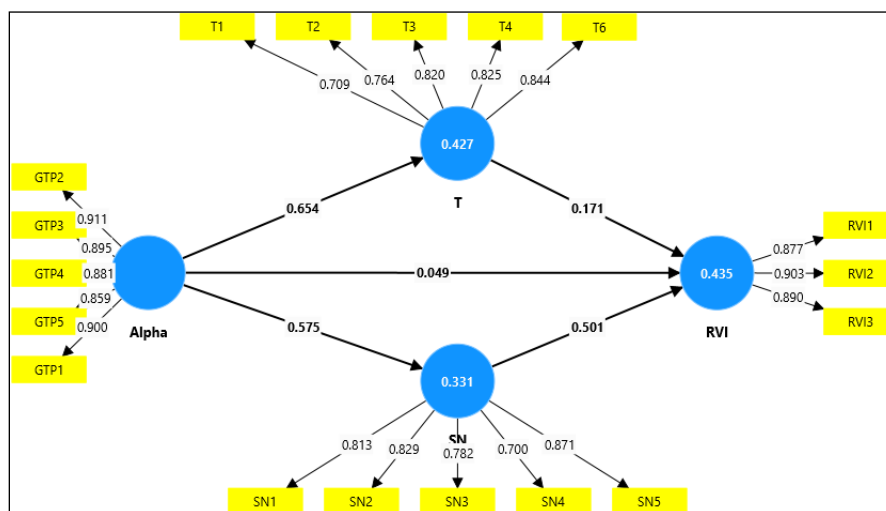
Figure 2: The Reflective Measurement Model

The assessment of the measurement model serves the purpose of confirming the validity and reliability of the items within the constructs. This involves determining four essential parameters: (i) the reliability of the indicators,

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(ii) the internal consistency reliability, (iii) the convergent validity, and (iv) the discriminant validity, all of which are crucial for evaluating a reflective measurement model. Figure 2 and Table 2 below provide a visual and tabular representation of the outer loading scores, composite reliability, convergent reliability, and Cronbach Alpha, which are used to assess the reflective measurement model.

Table 2. The Reflective Measurement Model

Construct	Items	Outer Loading	Composite reliability (rho_a)	AVE	Cronbach Alpha
Green Tourism Perceptions (GTP)	GTP 1	0.900	0.936	0.791	0.934
	GTP 2	0.911			
	GTP 3	0.895			
	GTP 4	0.881			
	GTP 5	0.859			
Trust	T 1	0.709	0.858	0.630	0.850
	T 2	0.764			
	T 3	0.820			
	T 4	0.825			
	T 6	0.844			
Social Norms (SN)	SN 1		0.877	0.641	0.869
	SN 2				
	SN 3				
	SN 4				
	SN 5				
Re-visit Intentions (RVI)	SMI 1	0.877	0.874	0.793	0.869
	SMI 2	0.903			
	SMI 3	0.890			

Table 2 demonstrates that the loading indicator scores fall within the range of 0.709 to 0.911, surpassing the recommended threshold. All loading indicators are deemed suitable and align with the desired level of reliability. The composite reliability values for the four constructs in this study range from 0.858 to 0.936, exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70. This signifies that the internal consistency of the items in each construct is adequate for this study. Additionally, the AVE values in this study are found to be between 0.630 and 0.793, which surpass the 0.5 threshold, indicating a satisfactory level of convergent validity.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

	GTP	RVI	SN	T
GTP	-			
RVI	0.492	-		
SN	0.624	0.731	-	
T	0.727	0.620	0.767	-

In Table 3, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) is utilized to verify the discriminant validity of the model. It is suggested that the threshold value should be set at a lower level, around 0.85 or 0.90, especially when constructs are conceptually distinct, to be more conservative (Henseler et al., 2014). Since the HTMT values in this study are below 0.90, there are no issues with collinearity among the latent constructs.

The SmartPLS algorithm output was employed to investigate the relationships between independent and dependent variables. The examination of the path link described in the framework was conducted through the assessment of the regression coefficient (β) value to ascertain its significance level. The pertinence of the regression coefficient (β) was established by considering t-values obtained via the PLS Bootstrapping procedure. The significance of each association was appraised using the t-statistics output. The resulting Table 4 presents the path coefficients, observed t-statistics, and significance levels for each hypothesized path.

Table 4. Path Coefficient

	Path Analysis	ß	T-Statistics	P-Values	f^2	R^2	Q^2	Results
H_1	GTP>RVI	0.009	0.519	0.604	0.002	0.435	0.673	**Insignificant**
H_2	GTP>T	0.004	7.467	0.000	0.747	0.427	0.258	Significant
H_3	GTP>SN	0.003	5.883	0.000	0.495	0.331	0.194	Significant
H_4	T>RVI		1.1979	0.048	0.023			Significant
H_5	SN>RVI	0.009	4.848	0.000	0.231	0.435	0.673	Significant
H_6	GTP>T>RVI		1.773	0.076	0.008			**Insignificant**
H_7	GTP>SN>RVI		3.454	0.001	0.684			Significant

Discussion and Conclusion

1. Discussion

The study's findings reveal that the relationship between green tourism perceptions and revisit intention at Pulau Tiga National Park, Sabah, is insignificant. This result is consistent with previous research indicating that green tourism perceptions alone do not significantly influence revisit intentions (Kim et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2018). Consequently, it is essential for park management to explore additional factors beyond green tourism perceptions to enhance revisit intentions (Zhang et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the relationship between trust mediating green tourism perception and revisit intentions at Pulau Tiga National Park was also found to be insignificant. These findings align with previous studies highlighting the complex and sometimes weak mediating role of trust in eco-tourism contexts. For instance, Kim et al. (2017) found that while green tourism perception positively influences trust, its effect on behavioral intentions like revisits may not be straightforward, often requiring stronger intervening variables or direct influences to be significant. Similarly, Chow et al. (2019) noted that in nature-based tourism, trust alone may not sufficiently drive revisit intentions without more robust or direct motivators. Thus, the data suggest that although trust is an essential component of the tourism experience, its mediating role between green tourism perception and revisit intentions at Pulau Tiga National Park is limited and statistically insignificant.

However, the study found a significant relationship between green tourism perception and trust at Pulau Tiga National Park. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that a positive perception of sustainable tourism practices enhances trust among visitors (Chiu et al., 2016; Palací et al., 2019). Green tourism perception in this context includes tourists' recognition and appreciation of eco-friendly initiatives and conservation efforts within the park. When visitors perceive that park management prioritizes environmental sustainability, their trust in the park's

operations and intentions is strengthened. This trust is crucial for fostering long-term visitor engagement and support for conservation initiatives (Lee, 2018). Hence, emphasizing green tourism practices can be a strategic approach for Pulau Tiga National Park to build and maintain trust with its visitors.

Social norms significantly influence individual perceptions and behaviors towards environmentally friendly practices in tourism contexts (Holden & Fennell, 2013; Pahrudin et al., 2022). This relationship underscores the importance of fostering supportive social norms that encourage sustainable behaviours among tourists and local communities, thereby promoting conservation efforts and enhancing the overall sustainability of tourism destinations. Studies have also shown that trust in the service quality, safety, and overall experience at a tourist site can significantly enhance visitors' likelihood of revisiting (Ramikissoon & Hristov, 2018; Huang & Hsu, 2009). Specifically, for Pulau Tiga National Park, the trust that tourists place in the park's management and the quality of their previous experiences drives their intention to revisit. As noted by Chi and Qu (2008), positive past experiences and trust in the destination's ability to provide enjoyable future experiences are strong predictors of revisit intentions. Therefore, fostering trust through reliable, high-quality tourism services is essential for encouraging repeat visits to Pulau Tiga National Park.

Social norms play a critical role in shaping tourists' attitudes and behaviors, subsequently influencing their intentions to revisit. According to Chen and Tung (2014), social norms significantly impact tourists' pro-environmental behavior, enhancing their overall green tourism experience. This enriched experience fosters a stronger intention to revisit, as tourists seek to re-engage with sustainable practices and environments that align with their values. The findings from Pulau Tiga National Park support this perspective, suggesting that effective promotion of social norms related to environmental stewardship can enhance tourists' satisfaction and loyalty (Cossío-Silva et al., 2019). Therefore, emphasizing social norms within green tourism strategies can be an effective approach to boost revisit intentions, ensuring the sustainability and economic viability of ecotourism destinations.

2. Conclusion

In a nutshell, this study highlights the pivotal roles of trust and social norms in fostering sustainable tourism practices. The findings reveal that trust in environmental policies and management significantly enhances tourists' engagement in green behaviors, thereby improving their overall experience and increasing the likelihood of revisiting. Additionally, social norms emerge as a critical mediator, reinforcing eco-friendly behaviors and shaping positive tourist attitudes towards sustainability. This dual influence underscores the necessity for policymakers and park managers to build robust trust through transparent and effective environmental initiatives while simultaneously promoting social norms that advocate for ecological responsibility. By doing so, Pulau Tiga National Park can not only enhance its appeal as a green tourism destination but also contribute to the broader goals of environmental conservation and sustainable tourism development.

Research recommendations

Future research should dig deeper into the multifaceted roles of trust and social norms in fostering sustainable tourism practices. Researchers should consider longitudinal studies to track changes in tourist behaviour and attitudes over time, providing a dynamic view of how trust and social norms evolve and influence each other. Additionally, comparative studies between different ecotourism sites could reveal unique factors or commonalities that enhance or hinder the effectiveness of trust and social norms in promoting green tourism.

Incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, can offer nuanced insights into the personal experiences and perceptions of tourists, enriching the quantitative data. It is also crucial to explore the impact of digital and social media campaigns in shaping social norms and building trust among potential visitors. Thus, we suggest that future research could provide comprehensive strategies for policymakers and tourism managers to cultivate a sustainable and eco-friendly tourism environment in Pulau Tiga National Park and similar destinations.

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A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP TO ENHANCE HOSPITALITY SERVICES OFFERED TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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Extended abstract

Tourism plays a major part in the growing global economy, and hospitality is an essential contributor to the sector. People with disabilities are often excluded from tourism activities, and training to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities is not part of many training curricula. A hotel group partnered with a training company with experience in training people with disabilities for the hospitality industry. The purpose of the partnership was to create fit-for-purpose training at each stage of the guest experience to fully understand and address any barriers that might have an impact on guests with disabilities. There are many different types of disabilities, both visible and invisible, and each presents with unique challenges. As people with hearing loss constitute a major group, this group was selected as the first to be investigated.

A mixed methods approach was applied, and the research was conducted in five phases. This paper describes the first phase, namely developing a framework for inclusion of people with hearing loss at all stages of the guest experience in a luxury South African hotel. Such a framework will enable the training company to provide a fit-for-purpose plan that can be used in this and other investigations; thus, contributing to training for sustainable tourism services.

Keywords: *training; hearing loss; guest experiences; sustainable tourism*

Introduction

Tourism plays a major part in the growing global economy, and hospitality is an essential contributor to the sector (Harwood, Scott & Reisman, 2022). Hotels are an important part of local and international tourism as they serve as temporary homes for guests, and should offer comfort, convenience, and a sense of welcome (Forlani, Dini & Pencarelli, 2022). They do not only fulfil their obligations as tourist destinations, but must also reflect their commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion in the hospitality industry.

Unfortunately, many tourism opportunities seem to be the preserve of the 'able-bodied' and mobile (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020). Even though people with disabilities constitute approximately 13% (1.3 billion people) of the world's population, they are often excluded from tourism activities and often experience challenges when visiting hotels. In fact, Stasell and Bathje (2021) claim that one of the most likely reasons people with disabilities travel less often than people without disabilities is that they have had unpleasant experiences during their stays in hotels. Some of these experiences have been related to unsatisfactory customer service, the physical environment and accessibility. Thus, it is imperative to investigate the accessibility of each stage of the guest experience to fully understand and address any barriers that might have a negative impact on the visit of guests with disabilities.

Nevertheless, many tourist hotels have introduced initiatives to enable people with disabilities to experience the joy of travel. There are ongoing attempts to encourage people with disabilities to visit tourist destinations, and access the services offered by the tourist industry. (Liu, et al., 2023). 'Inclusive' 'Accessible' and even 'Disabled' tourism are terms used to describe such initiatives (Biddulph & Scheyvens, 2018).

Disabilities are conditions that limit the everyday activities of people. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) defines disability as 'physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on

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an equal basis with others' (UNO, 2014: 17). The concept of disability conjures up images of a person in a wheelchair or with a white cane or guide dog, but the concept is more complicated than this. There are many disabilities that are not obvious. They are described as 'invisible' because they are usually neurological in nature; hearing loss, learning and intellectual impairments are examples of invisible disabilities.

Attitudes towards people with disabilities are changing as society becomes more inclusive. The focus is not on disabilities as 'conditions' that can be cured or rehabilitated, instead the focus is on the person first and the disability second. This means that hotels are also becoming more inclusive and are installing or creating accommodations that will encourage people with disabilities to choose their establishments as the preferred place to stay when they are travelling. People with disabilities are not unable to do things; they just do things in a different way.

There has been extensive research on the need for providers of training for the hotel industry to regard people with disabilities as a valuable market (Liu et al., 2023; Eusébio et al., 2023; Ferst & Coutinho, 2021, among others). Swanepoel, Spencer and Draper (2020) encourage disability awareness training to encourage compassionate treatment, Gillovic and McIntosh (2020) call for sensitivity training, while Ferst and Coutinho (2021) describe disability awareness training as being invaluable. Unfortunately, hospitality training to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities is not part of the curricula of many training institutions, and hotels need to bridge the training gap in-house.

The research discussed in this paper occurred as part of a partnership between one hotel of an international hotel group and a training company with experience in training people with disabilities for the hospitality industry. The purpose of the partnership was to create fit-for-purpose training at each stage of the guest experience to fully understand and address any barriers that might have an impact on guests with disabilities. The hotel group understands its customer base and provides ongoing training, evaluation, and development of its disability support services. This is usually undertaken as a result of feedback from guests, surveys, focus groups, and direct communication, but not with the input of experts in the field of disabilities. The training company has years of experience providing vocational and skills training in various areas of the hospitality industry to young people with disabilities, especially those with hearing loss. For this reason, it was decided to investigate the needs of guests with hearing loss first.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) deafness, or hearing loss, affects over 5% of the world's population (2024). Hearing loss is an invisible disability that occurs when a person is unable to identify sound. It can be mild, moderate, moderately severe, severe or profound, and can affect one or both ears. The onset of hearing loss plays an important part in the acquisition of a spoken language, literacy and cognition, and is usually classified as pre-lingual and post-lingual. Prelingual hearing loss occurs when an individual is born or before the person has begun to speak. In contrast, post-lingual refers to hearing loss that has occurred after the person has learned to speak (Janse van Rensburg-Welling, 2020). People who lose their hearing post-lingually often do not notice the deterioration of their hearing as it can occur slowly, and the effects can be disconcerting, and words can be confused. In a world that is oral-aurally oriented, people with hearing loss often feel like outsiders and are routinely left out in a hearing world (Jensen, Chambers & Wilson, 2023).

Hearing is measured in units called decibels (dB) and a person is characterized as having hearing loss when their ability to hear is below 20 dB in both ears. The level or degree of hearing loss is plotted on an audiogram, on which an audiologist records the hearing response of each ear (Humes, 2019). Table 1 depicts a classification system of degrees of hearing loss and its impact on communication using the decibel levels associated with varying degrees of hearing loss suggested by the World Health Organization (Janse van Rensburg-Welling, 2020).

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Table 1 Classification system of degrees of hearing loss and impact upon communication

Hearing Levels (DB HL)	Classification (Level / Degree)	Communication effect on people with hearing loss
10 to 10	Normal	None.
11 to 25	Minimal	The person has difficulty hearing quiet speech in the presence of noise. Communicating in busy restaurants might be challenging.
25 to 40	Mild	The person might wear hearing aids and will find hearing in noisy situations challenging. They understand most of what is said, but whispers and high-pitched sounds are not heard. They will probably ask a speaker to repeat what has been said.
40 to 55	Moderate	People with moderate hearing loss (40 dB) miss between 50 and 70 per cent of speech when there is no amplification. However, those with a loss of 50 dB miss between 80 to 90 percent. Hearing aids are probably worn, even though a limited amount of speech can be heard in normal conditions.
55 to 70	Moderately severe	A person with moderately severe hearing loss must have some type of amplification help to understand conversations from more than two meters away.
70 to 90	Severe	Without accommodations like hearing aids or cochlear implant(s), even loud voices will not be understood from more than half a meter away. People with severe hearing loss have difficulty understanding speech; they need to lip-read, watch facial expressions and other gestures to follow conversations.
>90	Profound	For people with profound hearing loss, hearing aids are regarded as being of very little or no benefit. Some people benefit from cochlear implants, but most depend on lip-reading, facial expressions and Sign Language to communicate. They might be able to hear loud noises such as airplane engines, traffic, or fire alarms. However, this cannot be taken for granted.

Some people with hearing loss can distinguish sound, but cannot understand speech; others might not be able to hear certain sounds. As a result, when they communicate with hearing people, people with hearing loss often do not get all the information from a conversation and might become confused and frustrated. The inability to communicate can affect their tourism experiences as they try to communicate their needs and navigate environments that are designed for sound.

Most people with hearing loss use visual and physical means to communicate effectively (Scott & Dostal, 2019). They use their hands, faces and bodies, finger spelling and Sign Language in their interactions. It must be remembered that Sign Language is not a system of gestures of a particular spoken language, like English. Sign Language has a grammar of its own (Scott & Dostal, 2019), and is as easy or difficult as it is to learn a foreign language. Additionally, there is no universal Sign Language as there are regional and country differences. Communication by means of any language is not as easy as people often think it is. Because of the complexity of learning a new language, it is essential that the culture of native speakers is understood, even if it is only on a basic level. Language can be a way of connecting people, but it can also be a barrier, the use of body language can be problematic as it is often based on cultural norms and can lead to misunderstanding. What is important for staff of hotels and other tourism establishments to know is that people with hearing loss often feel isolated and lonely. Thus, learning to communicate with people with hearing loss must be coupled with awareness training.

Jensen, Chambers and Wilson (2023: 2) remark that much research on disabilty tourism is 'managerial' because it aims to provide ways people in the tourism field can manage accessibility to their amenities for tourists with disabilities. However, there is little research that focuses on tourists with hearing loss who wish to have new experiences without the stigma of being labelled 'disabled'. While it can be said that the present research could also be 'managerial', the aim is to investigate every stage of a tourist's encounter with the staff of a hotel. The research

will investigate the experiences of tourists with disabilities from their first confrontation with the booking system to their departure from the hotel and post-stay interactions. In this way we will be able to make recommendations to ensure that all guest experiences are comfortable and accessible.

Hotel quality management is ongoing, and hoteliers routinely seek to enhance the quality and extent of their customer service. The physical appearance, cleanliness and comfort of the rooms, consistent and dependable services especially in the reservations system and competence, professionalism and efficiency of the staff in response to customer requests all come under scrutiny (Hansen, 2022). Therefore, hotels must invest in wide-ranging training programs for employees (GoAudits, 2023).

While the need for training is evident, the scope of the training that will be necessary as a result of this initial research cannot be planned immediately, as there are many unknown areas. We do not know what the experience of guests with hearing loss has been on their visits to the hotel. We also do not know which sections of a hotel's staff need to know how to interact directly with guests with hearing loss, nor which hotel staff will need to know some South African Sign Language, what vocabulary will be necessary, and indeed, how much knowledge of Sign Languages from other regions will be necessary. To answer these questions each stage of the hotel experience needs to be observed and analyzed to determine the needs of guests with hearing loss. It was decided to develop a framework to guide the initial investigation and to use it in the pilot project in which the experiences of guests with hearing loss were addressed.

We believe that designing a framework to guide the analysis of multiple disabilities in multiple stages of guest experiences was suitable because frameworks are flexible (Larson, 2023). They allow researchers to decide which aspects are important and which are not. An analysis of one hotel sector might not be applicable to another and the needs of people with one disability will be different from the needs of others. A framework allows for these differences to be acknowledged, and the most applicable features to be selected for further investigation. Thus, the framework that was developed will assist the researchers to understand the context of the hotel environment and make well-informed decisions. We agree with Partelow (2023) that a framework can be a valuable research tool that we could use to organize our immediate empirical inquiry, collect new data, and structure our entire research program, thus we will create a bridging tool that will help us to synthesis the knowledge gained and communicate our findings.

Objectives

The objective of the project was to investigate each stage of the guest experience offered by the hotel to fully understand and address any barriers that might have an impact on guests with both visible and invisible disabilities. The purpose of the partnership was to create fit-for-purpose training for the staff of one hotel that could then be rolled out to others. This research will add to the body of knowledge regarding the tourist experiences of people with disabilities. The research will also contribute to the day-to-day operations of one hotel so that other hotels, and the hotel industry at large, can benefit. Most importantly, the research will contribute to the quality of life of people with disabilities.

Research Methodology

1. Population and Sample

The population of research was one hotel in a tourist destination in South Africa. As the environment was the focus of this stage of the research no sample of participants was selected, instead one disability was the focus. The selection of hearing loss as the sample was purposive and non-probable. It was purposive because the researchers had knowledge and experience of working with people with hearing loss, and non-probable because the hotel was available.

Several workshops were designed and offered to staff members in various departments focusing on the individual needs of each department. Workshops included sensitivity training, hands-on training on the use of various assistive devices, and essential South African Sign Language.

A mixed methods approach was implemented to investigate the whole environment. The research was conducted in five phases:

Phase 1: Developing a framework for disability inclusion at all stages of the guest experience

Phase 2: Analyzing guest records and interviews with employees and past guests with disabilities

Phase 3: Compiling a unique fit-for-purpose audit tool

Phase 4: Implementing the audit tool

Phase 5: Reporting.

As mentioned above in this paper we describe the first phase as the research is a work in progress.

2. Research Tools

This paper describes research undertaken to develop a research tool. In this case the tools used were literature review and observation.

3. Findings

From the literature review and observation of the hotel environment the following hierarchical structure was observed:

Revenue center: Sells goods or services to guests, thereby generating revenue for the hotel.

Support centers: Cost centers that do not generate direct revenue but provide important support for the hotel's revenue centers.

Divisions: Consists of smaller organizational units, referred to as departments.

Departments: Smallest organizational units that include Sales and marketing, Human Resources, Accounting, Maintenance (sometimes called Engineering), Rooms division, Food and beverage, and Security.

The departments of standard Rooms Division are illustrated in Figure 1 below. Front Office and Housekeeping are the main departments, with the others offering support. While various permutations exist among hotels, these are the most common, and used at the hotel under investigation.
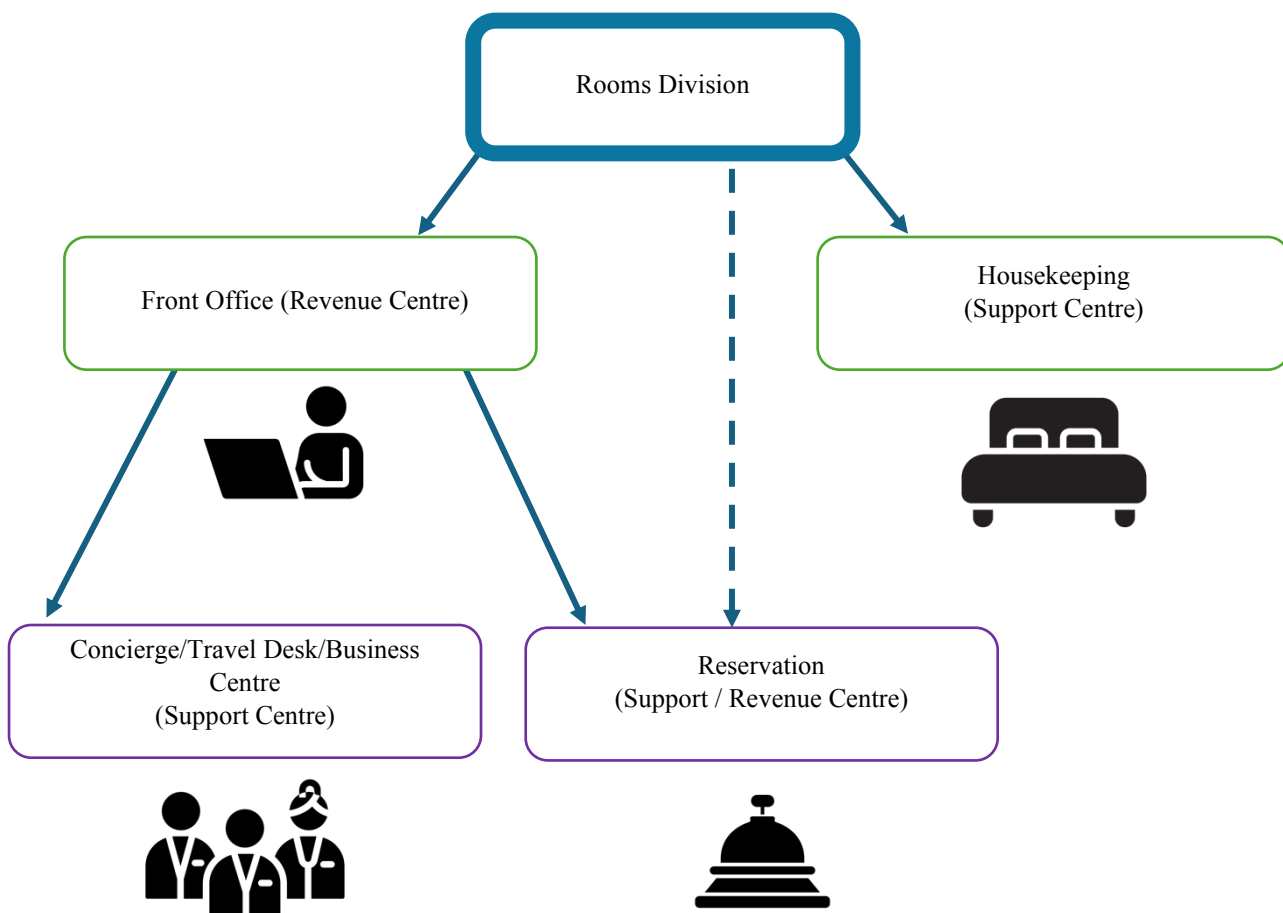

Figure 1: Standard Rooms Divisions

Each section described consists of members of staff who each have their own duties and obligations to ensure that guests enjoy a satisfactory stay. Some have direct contact and interactions with guests, while others work in the

'background' and do not. This is important to know as the awareness training will need to be tailored to suit the actual needs of employees.

As with most establishments, hotels have categorized structures that maintain a smooth running of the hotel's operations. Table 2 below presents a general view of the various departments and the typical titles that describe the duties of employees. The titles also suggest whether the employee would have direct interaction with guests. This, in turn, will determine decisions concerning the type of awareness training that would be necessary. For instance, the executive chef would probably have less direct interaction with guests than the reservation agent and would not need to learn Sign Language.

Table 2: Main hotel departments and employee titles

Front Office	Food and Beverage (Restaurant)	Housekeeping	Managers (depending on the hotel size)
• Receptionists • Concierge • Reservations agent • Assistant front office manager • Night auditor • Porter	• Assistant restaurant manger • Servers / waiters • Chefs / Cooks • Scullers	• Assistant cleaning manager • Floor supervisor • Public area supervisor • Linen supervisor • Laundry supervisor • Room attendant • Public area attendant • Linen room attendant • Laundry attendant	• Hotel general manager • Operations manager • Night duty manager • Front office manager • Food and Beverage Manager • Events or Conference Manager • Director of purchasing • Revenue manager • Sales manager • Director of marketing • Human resources manager • IT manager • Security manager • Facilities manager • Cleaning manager • Spa manager

Practical Application

By implementing disability inclusion features, hotels can ensure that all guests feel welcome and have a comfortable and enjoyable stay. Table 3 below acts as a guideline to map potential challenges experienced by guests with hearing loss during all the stages of the stay and also identify the departments and respective employees that should receive specific disability-related training.

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Table 3 Mapping of hotel experiences and potential challenges for people with hearing loss

Stages of the hotel experience	Hearing	Potential Challenges for guests with hearing loss	Departments, employees or managers that might need further training
Pre-Arrival Stage			
User-friendly online booking system	x	It is challenging for people with hearing loss to communicate when making reservations or inquiries over the phone due. Websites are not interactive and often lack detailed information about layout and accessibility features for guests with different stages of hearing loss.	**Front Office** Receptionist, Assistant front office manager, Reservations agent **General Manager** **Front Office Manager**
Compatibility with Screen reader			
Trained staff that can communicate effectively with people with disabilities	x	Although all guests expect prompt and polite feedback, it is not always provided after the first online enquiry was made.	**Front Office** Receptionist, Assistant front office manager, Reservations agent
Arrival Stage			
Disability parking			
Accessible entrance and exit			
Automatic doors			
Personal assistance	x	It may be challenging for people with hearing loss to communicate with the concierge or front desk staff if they do not use clear speech, or if they wear face masks (which prevents lip-reading), or if they cannot understand Sign Language.	**Front Office** Concierge, Receptionist, Assistant front office manager, Reservations agent, Porter
Special check-in desk with assistance	x	Language barriers exist when staff are not trained in methods to communicate effectively with people with hearing impairments. Hotel staff often address the hearing companion and ignore the person with hearing loss. Written materials might not contain sufficient detail, or staff might not be aware of the importance of written communication.	**Front Office** Concierge, Receptionist, Assistant front office manager, Reservations agent, Porter, night auditor
Service Animal accommodation	x	Service animals are not always associated with people with hearing loss. It might be difficult for hotel staff to accept that a service animal can be necessary for someone with an invisible disability.	**Front Office** Concierge, Receptionist, Assistant front office manager, Reservations agent, Porter **Housekeeping** Floor supervisor, Room attendant **Food and Beverage** Restaurant manager, Servers, Waiters
Wheelchair ramp / lift /elevator			
Wide doorways			

Stages of the hotel experience	Hearing	Potential Challenges for guests with hearing loss	Departments, employees or managers that might need further training
Elevators with braille or audio features			
Elevator buttons on a lower level			
Accessible restroom and sink			
Hearing devices / loop systems	x	The system eliminates most background noise and greatly improves understanding of speech and music.	**IT Manager**
Text to speech devices/ software			
Braille on elevator buttons or room number			
Stay Experience Stage			
Grab bars			
Roll-in showers			
Adjustable beds / chairs / tables			
Visual alerts	x	Visual indicators for emergencies, such as fire alarms, are not available or staff did not communicate the locations and availability of visual alerts to the person with hearing impairment. Rooms are not equipped with visual alerts for wake-up alarms, or door knocks. Persons with hearing loss might feel embarrassed about their impairment and may choose not to disclose; their privacy should be respected.	**Front Office** Receptionist **Housekeeping** Floor supervisor, Room attendant, Public area attendant **Facilities Manager**
Captioned televisions	x	Subtitles are not always available or are in a language that the person with hearing loss cannot understand.	**Operations Manager**
Hearing devices (loops / visual alarm)	x	Persons with hearing loss who attends a conference or in a restaurant may expect loop systems that send sound directly to the telecoil receiver in a user's hearing device.	**IT Manager**
Visual aid (large print documents) or illustrations	x	A pre-lingually hearing-impaired guest with low literacy levels might find it difficult to read and interpret complicated menus. Illustrations of menu items will provide information of what the guest might expect.	**Food and Beverage Manager** **Chef**
Special Seating arrangements	x	The person with hearing loss might need additional space in a dining room or at the conference table to use Sign Language or to be away from background noise.	**Food and Beverage Manager**
Mobile App for room service	x	It can be challenging to order room service that can only be done via telephonic communication with the front desk.	**Front Office** Receptionist **Housekeeping** Room attendant

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Stages of the hotel experience	Hearing	Potential Challenges for guests with hearing loss	Departments, employees or managers that might need further training
			Food and beverage
Voice controlled devices			
In room devices for lights / temperature			
Lower peephole in door			
Wider doorways			
Adjustable table / chair			
Departure Stage			
Billing procedures	x	It can be challenging to communicate the billing of services used in the absence of completed and confirmed (signed) written documents.	All food and beverage and housekeeping employees must be sensitized to keep written confirmation of services provided.
Post Stay Stage			
Follow-up communication, e.g. thank you note, survey to rate satisfaction, etc.	x	Services can only be improved if there is follow-up communication with hearing impaired guests who can report on areas that need improvements for specific accessibility.	**Front Office Manager** Reservations agent

Table 3 clarifies that the three main departments in the hotel (mentioned in Table 2) play a vital role in the hospitality experience of people with hearing loss.

The Front Office was identified as the first and most important contact point during all stages of the hotel experience for people with hearing loss. The following general areas for further training were identified during Phase 1 of this research:

(i)   Awareness training of different types of disabilities

(ii)   Appropriate communication techniques

(iii)   How to provide information about accessible features and services

(iv)   How to handle special requests related to accessibility.

The Housekeeping department was identified as the second most important contact point and applies mainly to the experiences of people with hearing loss at the stay-stage. The following general areas for training were identified:

(v)   Sensitivity training to respect the guest's privacy and personal hearing devices

(vi)   How to operate and check the functionality of accessible features, such as visual alarms, mobile apps to order room service, TV and/or LOOP settings.

The Food and beverage department was also identified as an important area of contact during the stay-stage experience of people with hearing loss. The following general areas for training were identified:

(vii)   How to assist guests with hearing loss to navigate dining areas and accommodate their seating preferences

(viii)   How to develop and present menus with user-friendly language and/or illustrations.

The IT Department was also identified as important because of its supporting role in all the stages of the experience of guests with hearing loss. The following general areas for further training were identified:

(ix)   Ensuring accessible online booking systems

(x)   How to provide assistance with in-room technology

(xi)   How to maintain accessible communication options.

Conclusion

Collaboration between hospitality entities and specialist training providers improves sustainable tourism

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services offered to people with disabilities to ensure that their expectations are met, and their needs satisfied. The system of investigation and implementation of fit-for-purpose training can be applied in all hotels in the group and beyond.

Research recommendations

As mentioned before, the discussion above describes the first phase of a larger, comprehensive research project that will include the investigation first of the hotel's capability of working with people with disabilities, and second, the training that each department will need to achieve the hotel's aim of improving the quality of the services it provides.

The framework and subsequent training will assist the hotel and others in the group to raise the awareness of their employees of what is required to make their place of work a highly regarded, accessible destination for tourists with disabilities.

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ASSESSING SAFETY AND RISK PERCEPTION AMONG EUROPEAN TOURISTS VISITING THE ALGARVE (PORTUGAL)

Maria[1]

Extended abstract

Safety in tourism is not only a moral responsibility but also critical for the industry's sustainability. A safe destination attracts more tourists, encourages repeat visits, and contributes to positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Therefore, understanding risk perception is pivotal, as it significantly influences tourists' decision-making process and destination choices.

This study investigates the perception of risk and safety among European tourists visiting the Algarve between March and June 2024, focusing on visitors from the UK, France, Ireland, Netherlands, and Germany. Employing a sample of 975 tourists, the research applies factor analysis to identify the primary factors influencing tourists' perceptions of risk. The analysis reveals seven key factors that significantly impact these perceptions. These factors include concerns about temporal constraints and overall satisfaction with the visit, physical safety and crime, political instability and terrorism, communication barriers, perceived safety and satisfaction, previous travel experiences, and the quality of services and infrastructure.

By elucidating these factors, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how various elements of the travel experience contribute to tourists' feelings of safety and satisfaction. Such insights are invaluable for informing targeted marketing strategies, refining risk communication, and enhancing overall tourist satisfaction. Ultimately, these measures are essential for maintaining the Algarve's reputation as a safe and attractive destination, thereby supporting its long-term appeal and competitiveness in the global tourism market.

Keywords: *Tourism, Safety, Risk Perception; Factors; Algarve*

Introduction

We currently live-in what Beck (2003) termed the "risk society," characterised by a "zero-risk culture" (Heiderich, 2005). This context underscores the importance of studying safety and risk perception, particularly for professionals in the tourism sector. In recent decades, especially following the events of 9/11, these variables have gained significant importance for both destinations and tourists, particularly in the decision-making process related to destination choice.

The mid-20th century marked the beginning of significant exploration into how individuals perceive and respond to risks. Slovic (2000; Slovic, Fischhoff, & Lichtenstein, 2000a, 2000b) and others (Sjöberg, 2000), through their pioneering work, developed the psychometric paradigm, which highlighted the subjective nature of risk perception and its profound implications for decision-making. The concept of risk has been extensively analyzed across various fields such as finance, economics, engineering, psychology, and behavioral sciences. For instance, in psychology, the seminal work of Slovic (1987, 2000) provides a comprehensive examination of the complexity of risk. In fact, the author emphasizes that risk is a socially constructed and psychologically oriented concept, underlining its subjective nature (Slovic, 2000), it includes aspects such as shock, threat, danger, control, and uncertainty (Althaus, 2005; Floyd & Pennington-Gray, 2004; Law, 2006; Sjöberg, 2000). These elements contribute to the multidimensionality of the concept, making it challenging to operationalize. Risk is a complex construct shaped by various psychological, cultural, and contextual factors, significantly impacting the tourism industry.

The major contributions to study risk perception have emerged from various fields, including economics, political science, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. In a simple way, risk perception can be understood as the ability to interpret a situation that poses potential harm to the health or life of an individual or others, based on past experiences and extrapolation to a future moment. This ability can range from a vague opinion to a firm conviction (Slovic, 2000). Psychologically, the definition has primarily focused on the process of cognition, individual characteristics, and their relationship to the decision-making process (Sjöberg, 2000; Slovic, 1987).

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Subjective factors, such as ethics, morality, and cultural specificity, influence individuals' choices and therefore must be considered in the perception and assessment of risk. According to Slovic (2000), real risk does not exist as an independent reality separate from our social and cultural background, as it can only be observed or measured within a specific context that produces it.

Studying risk perception should be a concern in tourism, particularly in understanding tourist behavior, as it allows for the comprehension of: (i) decision-making process regarding travel; (ii) travel motivation; (iii) choice of tourist destination (Mansfeld, 2006; Oltedal, Moen, Kemple & Rundmo, 2004; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005; Sharpley, 1994). In tourism we can defined risk perception as a negative event that may occur at the destination during the tourist's stay, classified based on different evaluation criteria such as transportation, public safety, and accommodation (Tsaur, Tzeng & Wang, 1997). Bettman (1973) identifies two types of risks, subsequently applied in tourism: (i) inherent risk and (ii) manageable risk. Inherent risk is the latent risk present in a particular product, while manageable risk refers to the risk that can be controlled by the individual or the tourism industry.

Studies on risk perception in tourism adopted specific dimensions, such as: physical, social, psychological, financial, temporal, health risk, political risk or political instability, terrorism, functional or equipment, satisfaction psychological, communication, environmental (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Bontempo, 1997; Cartwright, 2000; Cheron & Ritchie, 1982; Fatehi - Sedeh & Safizadeh, 1989; Fleischer & Buccola, 2006; Floyd, Gibdon, Pennington-Gray & Thapa, 2003; Floyd & Pennington-Gray, 2004; Han, 2005; Howard, 2009; Maditinos & Vassiliadis, 2008; Mawby, 2000; Mansfeld, 2006; Kobrin, 1979; Sethi & Luther, 1986, cit in Han 2005; Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992; Wang, 2021; Sonmez & Graefe, 1998; Sonmez, Apostolopoulos & Tarlow, 1999; Tarlow, 2002; Tsaur, Tzeng & Wang, 1997) (Table 1).

Just like risk perception, safety in tourism has become highly significant in understanding the destination choice process. When safety concerns are factored into travel decisions, they can significantly influence the choice of a destination. Safety is closely tied to a subjective interpretation that allow us to understand how we move through a space free from risks (Morales, 2002). Regardless of the specific characteristics of destinations, safety considerations have become crucial in decision-making process (Azim, 2010, López, 2003; Maditinos & Vassiliadis, 2008; Mansfeld, 2006; Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006a; Prideaux, 1996; Tarlow & Gui, 2002).

Table 1

Risks in literature

Risk	Author(s)	Brief description
Financial	Bontempo, 1997, Murphy & Enis, 1986, Han, 2005	Travel experience may not correspond to the value expended.
Social	Han, 2005, Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992, Wang, 2021	Impacts on the community and/or tourist.
Psychological	Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992	Potential negative impact on self-esteem.
Physical	Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992	Potential hazards or dangers at the destination.
Functional or Equipment	Tsaur, Tzeng & Wang, 1997	Possibility of operational, equipment or mechanical, problems.
Environmental	Cheron & Ritchie, 1982	Possibility of natural or human damage.
Temporal	Roehl & Fesenmaier (1992)	Possibility of being a waste of time.
Situacional	Priest, 1992	Unexpected events that can affect tourists or destinations.
Satisfaction	Sonmez & Graefe, 1998	Destination does not meet personal expectations…
Communication	Han, 2005	Language barriers, including cultural differences.
Health	Cartwright, 2000	Getting sick while travelling.

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Risk	Author(s)	Brief description
	Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992	
Political Instability	Fatehi - Sedeh & Safizadeh, 1989, Kobrin, 1979, Sethi & Luther, 1986, cit in Han 2005	Possibility of a political event negatively affecting a country, its economy and society.
Terrorismo	Fleischer & Buccola, 2006, Floyd, Gibdon, Pennington-Gray & Thapa, 2003, Mansfeld, 2006, Mawby, 2000, Pizam, Tarlow & Bloom, 1997, Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006, Tarlow, 2000	Possibility of a terrorist attack for any type of motivation (political, religious, social, economic).
Tourism	Beerli & Martin, 2004; Floyd & Pennington-Gray, 2004; Floyd, Gibson, Pennington-Gray & Thapa, 2003; Howard, 2009; Maditinos & Vassiliadis, 2008; Tsaur, Tzeng & Wang, 1997	Problems associated to travel (tours, hotel, whether, etc.).

Different studies have demonstrated the importance of safety measures in tourism, especially for "sale the image of safe destinations" (Guerreiro, Brás, Mendes, 2015). Hall (2016) argues that safety incidents can significantly impact the reputation of tourist destinations and influence tourists' decisions to visit them. Ritchie and Jiang (2019) discuss the importance of effective risk management strategies to address security threats, ranging from natural disasters to terrorist events. Law (2020) examines how different government policies and regulations affect tourist safety, emphasizing the need for collaboration between the public and private sectors.

In 2023, tourism revenues in Algarve reached €25.1 billion, with 60% of this amount coming from five key markets: the United Kingdom (15.3%), France (12.4%), Germany (11.2%), Spain (11.0%), and the USA (9.8%). These tourists choose the Algarve for a variety of reasons, but the main one is the presence of beautiful beaches with numerous "Blue Flag beaches" (mark of quality for beaches) and a Mediterranean climate, making it an ideal destination for beach holidays. Additionally, the Algarve has developed a robust infrastructure, including luxury resorts, golf courses, and entertainment options, further solidifying its status as a leading tourist destination in Europe (Turismo de Portugal, 2024).

Objectives

For this study, we delineated several objectives to serve as the guiding framework and to define the scope of our investigation (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008; Quivy & Campenhoudt, 1998). The objectives are as follows:

1. To identify the main perceived risks among tourists visiting the Algarve;
2. To examine the relationship between demographic characteristics and risk perception;
3. To understand the relationship between origin country and risk perception of Algarve;
4. To examine the relationship between destination experience and risk perception.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

This research included 975 tourists from different European countries, specifically those that contribute significantly to the tourism sector in the Algarve - United Kingdom, France, Germany, Netherlands, Ireland (Table 2).

The findings indicate that the majority of respondents were male (56.1%) and married or living with a partner (71.1%). A significant percentage also possessed a high level of education (58.4%). Regarding age, the largest group in the sample fell between 26 and 40 years old (38.9%), followed by those aged 41 to 64 years (34.3%) (mean = 39.4; SD = 13.4). A majority (63.1%) of respondents had previously visited the Algarve, while 36.9% were first-time visitors. The respondents' country of origin is divided between the maximum percentage values of the English (United

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Kingdom) with 34.4% of the total. The minimum percentage values are from the French, representing 11.4% of the entire sample.

The data indicates that the majority of tourists have a strong preference for family-oriented travel or as a couple (family - with children - 43.6%, couples 29.4%, friends 17.8%, alone 9.2%). The type of travel reveals a preference for the independent (46.8%), i.e., personalized and flexible travel arrangements. The substantial portion of tourists opting for flight and hotel packages (37.1%) suggests convenience and cost-effectiveness as important factors. When it comes to accommodation preferences, the data reveals a distinct preference for hotels (32.7%) and resorts (23.4%), clearly seeking comfort and amenities that hotels and resorts typically offer.

Table 2

Sample characteristics

Characteristic	Category	*n*	%
Gender	Male	547	56.1
	Female	428	43.9
Age group	18-25	170	17.4
	26-40	379	38.9
	41-60	334	34.3
	60 +	92	9.4
Education	Low+Medium	406	41.6
	High	569	58.4
Marital Status	Single	220	22.6
	Married/living with partner	693	71.1
	Divorced/separated	40	4.1
	Widowed	22	2.3
Country	United Kingdom	335	34.4
	Germany	238	24.4
	Ireland	178	18.3
	France	113	11.6
	Netherlands	111	11.4
Experience	First time	360	36.9
	Repeater	615	63.1
Traveled with	Family (with children)	425	43.6
	Partner	286	29.3
	Friends	174	17.8
	Alone	90	9.2
Travel tipology	Independent	456	46.8
	Hotel+flight	362	37.1
	All inclusive	157	16.1
Accommodation	Hotel	319	32.7
	Resort	228	23.4
	Friends/relatives	153	15.7
	Other	275	28.2

2. Research Tools

Given the defined objectives for the research, a quantitative methodology approach was considered the most suitable for conducting this empirical study. The data collection instrument consisted of a closed-ended questionnaire,

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structured into four sections aimed at gathering data on: 1) tourist and travel typology; 2) tourist motivations for visiting the Algarve; 3) risk perception; and 4) sociodemographic characteristics.

The section of the questionnaire that examines the types of risks comprises 46 items, on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 7. These risks have been investigated at different times by many different authors, and include: *crime risk* (Barker, Page & Meyer, 2002; Halcomb, 2004; Pizam, 1999); *physical risk* (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992); *health risk* (Carter, 1998; Cartwright, 2000; Cliff & Page, 1996); *political/political instability risk* (Caron-Malenfant, 2002 ; Clements & Georgiou, 1998; Hall & O'Sullivan, 1996); *terrorism risk* (Fleischer & Buccola, 2006; Floyd, et al., 2003; Mansfeld, 2006; Mawby, 2000; Pizam et al., 1997; Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998; Sonmez at al., 1999); *functional/equipment risk* (Tsaur, Tzeng & Wang, 1997); *communication risk* (Han, 2005; Libaert, 2002); *social risk* (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992; Sharpley, 1994); *psychological risk* (Madrigal, 1995; Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992); satisfaction (Lepp & Gibson, 2003; Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992); *time risk* (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998); *financial/economic risk* (Korstanje, 2009); *tourism risk* (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Floyd & Pennington-Gray, 2004; Floyd, Gibson, Pennington-Gray & Thapa, 2003; Howard, 2009; Maditinos & Vassiliadis, 2008; Tsaur, Tzeng & Wang, 1997).

A non-probabilistic sampling method was employed in collecting primary data, with respondents aged over 18. Following the development of the research instrument, a pre-test was conducted with 45 individuals. The pre-test aimed to identify: potential errors in the questionnaire's construction; detect any difficulties in its completion; estimate response time to better plan the application procedure, and gather feedback from respondents. Based on the pre-test results, four questions related to risk perception were reformulated for clarity, though their content remained unchanged.

3. Data Collection

Considering the heterogeneity of the sample, we determined that data collection should take place in public locations where tourists gather daily. In this way, survey was conducted in the exterior and public area of Faro International Airport and at tourist (hot) spots in Faro (leisure and entertainment areas). Data collection was carried out based on convenience or accessibility, and occurred from March to June 2024, on different days of the week to access a greater diversity of tourist typologies and motivations.

Tourists were approached and asked if they would like to participate in the study, with the purpose of the research clearly explained to them, ensuring that their consent would not interfere with their planned activities. The questionnaires were available in: English and French (analyzed and corrected by native speakers). The responses were recorded directly by the respondents or indirectly by the researcher.

5. Data Analysis

Based on data, the main reasons for visiting the Algarve are: the beach (38.6%), health (14.9%), visiting friends and relatives (11.9%), culture (9.8%), golf (9.5%). The most important images associated with the destination are the climate (68.7%), quality of beaches (51.9%), price-quality ratio (39.3%) and hospitality (37.1%).

The analysis between the motivation for visiting the Algarve and the tourists' countries of origin reveals that the beach is the most popular reason across all nationalities, with a significant percentage of German (43%) and British (35%). Tourism related with health are particularly important for all nationalities, special for Irish tourists (20%). Visiting friends and relatives is very important for British tourists (14%), and golf is particularly appealing to British and Irish tourists (18.4%).

Specifically, to analyze the items that measure risk perception (46 items), we employed exploratory factor analysis using Principal Component Analysis (PCA), along with an assessment of internal consistency via Cronbach's Alpha (α). This allowed us to reduce the initial number of variables or attributes to a smaller set of representative variables, referred to as dimensions.

The primary goal of this initial phase is to describe the covariance structure or interrelationships among all variables (Hair et al., 2000) that measure risk perception, thereby identifying a smaller number of variables compared to those originally presented. This analysis clarified the commonalities among the original variables.

The PCA initially identified 11 components with eigenvalues greater than 1, cumulatively explaining 50.379% of the total variance. The rotation of the components using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) normalization resulted in a more balanced distribution of variance across the components (0,907), and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (BTS) (χ^2=9649,708; p-value<0,001) improving interpretability (Sharma, 1996). Components with loadings below 0.40

were removed, refining the factor structure. Although we identified a robust 11-factor solution, we investigated the possibility of a more economical model that still retains a good explanatory variance.

A new analysis was conducted with a predefined number of factors, using the Varimax method to 6, 7, and 8 factors. The 7-factor solution emerged as the most appropriate, explaining 40.893% of the total variance, the dataset was subjected to KMO measure and BTS to assess its suitability for factor analysis. With a KMO value of 0.907, considered "marvelous" (Kaiser, 1974: 35), indicates a high level of shared variance and justifying the use of factor analysis on this dataset, also the significant result of BTS (χ^2= 9649.708, df = 1035, p < 0.001) confirms that the correlation matrix is not an identity, reinforcing the relevance of proceeding with factor analysis. Below, the items are grouped according to their highest loadings on the identified components. For each factor, the items are listed with their respective loadings (Table 3).

Table 3

Factors and denomination

Factor Number	Variance	(α)	Factor Designation
1	11,039	.907	Temporal and Satisfaction
2	8,323	.872	Physical and Crime
3	5,413	.850	Political and Terrorism
4	4,655	.889	Communication
5	4,494	.867	Safety and Satisfaction
6	3,554	.845	Travel Experience
7	3,415	.860	Services and Infrastructures

Factors resulting from the factor analysis were examined to understand the differences in risk perception among European tourists visiting the Algarve. To achieve this, t-tests or ANOVA were conducted, depending on the number of groups within each variable.

Initially, we aimed to determine whether there were differences in risk perception between genders and between tourists visiting the Algarve for the first time compared to those who had visited previously. It was found that there are no significant differences in risk and safety perception between genders. However, regarding familiarity with the destination (first-time visitors versus repeat visitors), notable differences were observed: repeat visitors exhibited a higher risk perception for Factor 1, while first-time visitors showed an elevated risk perception for Factor 4 (Table 4)[1].

Table 4

Factors *vs* gender and experience

Factor Number	Factors	Gender		Experience (first time/repeaters)	
		t	p-value	t	p-value
1	Temporal and Satisfaction	-,134	,894	-2,552	,011*
2	Physical and Crime	-,111	,912	-1,718	,086
3	Political and Terrorism	1,146	,247	,167	,867
4	Communication	-,351	,726	1,983	,048*

[1] *The hypotheses associated with the t-test are:*

$$\begin{cases} H_o: \mu_1 = \mu_2 \ (preception \ is \ equal \ between \ the \ two \ groups) \\ H_1: \mu_1 \neq \mu_2 (preception \ is \ different \ between \ the \ two \ groups) \end{cases}$$

The hypotheses associated with ANOVA are:

$$\begin{cases} H_o: \mu_1 = \mu_2 = \cdots = \mu_k \ (precpition \ is \ equal \ between \ k \ groups) \\ H_1: \exists \ \mu_i \neq \mu_j \ , i,j = 1, 2, \dots, k \ (there \ are \ at \ least \ two \ groups \ with \ different \ preception) \end{cases}$$

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5	Safety and Satisfaction	1,640	,101	-,431	,667
6	Travel Experience	1,067	,286	-,298	,766
7	Services and Infrastructures	1,171	,242	,310	,757

Regarding the country, significant differences were found in Factor 1 (F= 2.952; p=0.019); Factor 4 (F= 8.232; $p \leq 0.001$; Factor 5 (F=4.235; p=0.002); Factor 6 (F=3.783; p=0.005), and Factor 7 (F=5.645; $p<0.001$). Specifically, differences were observed between German and Dutch tourists in Factor 1, with Germans perceiving higher risk (p=0.022p). Furthermore, French tourists exhibited a higher perception of risk in Factor 4 compared to others. In Factor 5, differences were noted between French tourists and those from the UK (p= 0.002p) and the Netherlands (p=0.006). For Factor 7, differences were identified between German tourists and others, except for the Dutch (p=0.081), with Germany showing a lower perception in this factor.

Regarding the travel companions, significant differences were observed in Factor 1 (F= 5.063; p= 0.002). Tourists traveling with family exhibited a lower perception of risk compared to those traveling alone (p= 0.013) or with friends (p=0.015).

Additionally, differences were found in Factor 6, where tourists traveling with friends had a lower perception of risk compared to those traveling alone (p= 0.022), with family ($p <0.001$), or with friends (p=0.044).

Concerning the type of travel, significant differences were noted across several factors: Factors 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6. For "all-inclusive", a higher perception of risk was observed in Factor 1 ($p <0.001$). In Factor 2, "independent travelers" exhibited a lower perception of risk compared to other types ($p <0.001$). Conversely, "independent travelers" showed a higher perception of risk in Factor 3 ($p <0.001$) and Factor 5 ($p <0.001$). For Factor 6, "independent travelers" demonstrated a lower perception of risk compared to those who chose "flight+hotel packages" (p=0.003).

In the relationship between risk perception and accommodation, significant differences were observed across Factors 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6. In Factor 1, tourists staying in "other" types of accommodation reported a lower perception of risk compared to those staying in "hotels" or "resorts" ($p <0.001$). In Factor 2, the perception of risk was higher for those who chose to stay in "resorts" compared to those staying with "family or friends" (p=0.002) and those in "other" accommodations (p= 0.036). For Factor 3, individuals staying in "other" accommodations exhibited a higher perception of risk compared to those staying in "hotels" or "resorts" ($p< 0.001$). In Factor 5, there was a higher perception of risk among those staying with "friends or family" compared to those in "resorts" (p=0.001). Additionally, differences were found for those staying in "other" accommodations compared to those in "hotels" (p= 0.005) and "resorts" ($p< 0.001$). For Factor 6, tourists staying with "friends or family" had a higher perception of risk compared to those in "hotels" ($p< 0.001$) and "resorts" (p= 0.013p).

The analysis of risk perception among different age groups revealed significant differences in Factors 2 and 3. For Factor 2 (p= 0.028), the 41-60 age group exhibited a higher perception of risk compared to those over 60 (p= 0.046). In contrast, for Factor 3, individuals over 60 years old had a higher perception of risk compared to all other age groups.

Considering that we recently went through a global Pandemic and knowing the implications it had for tourism, we wanted to understand whether tourists felt a change in their risk perception before pandemic and today. 32.6% felt changes in the way they perceive risks when traveling today.

For Factor 1 and Factor 2, there is a heightened perception of risk, as evidenced by significant t-values (5.303 and 7.810, respectively, both p < 0.001). This increase suggests that tourists are now more concerned about time-related issues and physical safety, possibly due to heightened awareness of health risks and crime during their travels (Table 5).

Table 5

Risk Perception after Pandemic

Factor Number	Factors Designation	After Pandemic	
		t	*p-value*
1	Temporal and Satisfaction	5,303	<,001
2	Physical and Crime	7,810	<,001
3	Political and Terrorism	-2,126	,034
4	Communication	,960	,338
5	Safety and Satisfaction	-4,061	<,001
6	Travel Experience	-1,009	,314
7	Services and Infrastructures	,223	,823

The perception of risk associated with Factor 3 and Factor 5 has decreased (t = -2.126, p = 0.034 and t = -4.061, p < 0.001, respectively). This decrease may indicate a growing confidence in political stability and satisfaction with safety measures implemented by destinations. Factors 4, 6, and 7 did not show significant changes in risk perception, with p-values of 0.338, 0.314, and 0.823, respectively.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

For this investigation, several goals were previously outlined, which allowed us to understand the perception of risk and safety among tourists visiting the Algarve. Within a sample of 975 European tourists, especially from the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany, and France, we sought to find an answer to these objectives. The primary perceived risks among tourists visiting the Algarve were identified through exploratory factor analysis, which revealed seven key factors: Temporal and satisfaction (Factor 1), physical and crime (Factor 2), political and terrorism (Factor 3), communication (Factor 4), safety and satisfaction (Factor 5), travel experience (Factor 6), and services and infrastructures (Factor 7). These findings align with international studies, such as those by Yang et al. (2015), which emphasize the importance of multiple dimensions of risk in the context of tourism.

Regarding the first objective for the investigation (identify the main perceived risks among tourists visiting the Algarve), temporal and satisfaction risks (Factor 1) emerged as the most significant factor, suggesting that tourists are particularly concerned about the potential for their travel experiences to fall short of expectations. Physical and crime risks (Factor 2) were also prominently perceived, reflecting broader concerns about personal safety and crime that have been observed in other European tourist destinations. The heightened perception of physical and crime risks underscores the necessity for the Algarve to maintain robust safety measures to reassure tourists.

Political and terrorism risks (Factor 3), while present, were perceived to be less significant than other risk types. This could be attributed to the Algarve's reputation as a politically stable and low-risk destination for terrorism, contrasting with destinations that have faced significant political unrest or terrorist threats.

For goal 2 (examine the relationship between demographic characteristics and risk perception), our analysis revealed no significant differences in risk perception between genders. However, notable differences were observed between first-time and repeat visitors. Repeat visitors exhibited higher risk perceptions related to temporal and satisfaction (Factor 1), which could be due to their greater familiarity with the destination, leading to higher expectations and awareness of potential pitfalls.

Significant age-related differences were observed in the perception of physical and crime risks (Factor 2) and political and terrorism risks (Factor 3). Tourists aged 41-60 exhibited higher perceptions of Factor 2, possibly due to heightened concerns about personal safety in middle age. Conversely, tourists over 60 perceived greater political and terrorism risks, potentially reflecting a generational sensitivity to political stability and security issues.

In relation to goal 3 (understand the relationship between origin country and risk perception of Algarve), the study identified significant differences in risk perception based on tourists' countries of origin. German tourists, for instance, showed higher perceptions of Factor 1 compared to Dutch tourists. This variation could be reflective of differing cultural attitudes towards time and satisfaction in travel experiences.

French tourists exhibited higher perceptions of Factor 4, indicating potential language barriers or communication challenges that could affect their travel experiences. The differences observed between British and French tourists in Factor 5 further highlight the importance of tailoring safety communications and measures to meet the expectations and concerns of different nationalities.

Significant differences were also observed based on tourists' destination experience. First-time visitors perceived higher risks in Communication, which may be due to unfamiliarity with local customs and language. Repeat visitors, on the other hand, perceived higher risks in Temporal and Satisfaction, likely because of their increased awareness of potential issues and heightened expectations (Bianchi, Pike, & Lings, 2014).

For goal 4 (examine the relationship between destination experience and risk perception), the analysis revealed that travel companions influence risk perception. Tourists travelling with family exhibited lower risk perceptions compared to those travelling alone or with friends, suggesting that familial support may mitigate perceived risks. Additionally, significant differences were found in risk perceptions based on travel type and accommodation choice, with "all-inclusive" tourists perceiving higher Factor 1 and "independent travellers" showing varied risk perceptions across different factors.

Finally, the impact of pandemic on risk perception was evident, with increased perceptions of Factor 1 and 2, but decreased perceptions of Factor 3 and 5. This shift reflects broader changes in tourist behaviour and risk assessment in the post-pandemic.

2. Discussion

Our analysis revealed no significant differences in risk perception between genders, which aligns with studies that have found gender to be a non-significant factor in overall risk perception in tourism (Floyd et al., 2004, Fuchs, & Reichel, 2004, Qi et al., 2009, Kozak et al., 2007, Park et al., 2008).The predominance of beach-related motivations reflects the Algarve's established image as a leading seaside destination in Europe, corroborated by studies on coastal tourism's appeal, the high importance placed on climate, with 68.7% of respondents indicating it as a key factor, is consistent with the Algarve's sunny weather (Águas & Brás, 2006; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Correia, 2003; Kozac, 2002). For example, Kozak and Rimmington (2000) found that climate, beaches, and price-quality ratio are critical factors for tourists visiting southern European destinations.

Moreover, the significant percentage of tourists motivated by health (14.9%) and visits to friends and relatives (11.9%) suggests that the Algarve is also seen as a destination for wellness and social connections. The growing trend of health tourism is well-documented (Connell, 2006), and the Algarve's offerings in this sector appear to resonate with a substantial segment of tourists.

The relatively lower emphasis on safety compared to other factors is consistent with findings, suggesting that established tourist destinations in Europe tend to be perceived as inherently safe (Pizam and Mansfeld, 2006). This perception is likely reinforced by the Algarve's infrastructure and the quality of its tourist services.

Studies have shown that middle-aged individuals often perceive higher risks related to their physical safety and health due to their life stage responsibilities, such as career and family commitments (Cohn, 2017; Rohrmann, 2008). Conversely, older adults may have heightened risk perceptions due to increased vulnerability and health concerns, which is in line with our finding in Factor 3 (Reniers et al., 2016).

Our study found no significant gender differences in risk and safety perception, aligning with several previous studies that suggest gender differences in risk perception may be context-specific and not universally significant (Byrnes, Miller, & Schafer, 1999).

Regarding travel companions, tourists traveling with family exhibited lower risk perceptions (Factor 1) compared to those traveling alone or with friends. This aligns with previous findings indicating that familial support systems provide a sense of security, reducing perceived risks (Tsaur, Tzeng, & Wang, 1997). The lower risk perception among tourists traveling with friends in Factor 6 is also supported by the literature, suggesting that social support from friends can mitigate perceived threats (Kozak, Crotts, & Law, 2007).

The type of travel significantly influenced risk perception across several factors. "All-inclusive" travelers showed higher risk perception in Factor 1, which might be attributed to the perceived lack of control over their environment compared to independent travelers who tend to be more experienced and confident in managing travel-related risks (Larsen et al., 2009). Independent travelers exhibited both higher and lower risk perceptions depending on the specific factor, highlighting the complexity of this group's risk assessment, likely influenced by their

familiarity with self-directed travel and adaptability (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011).

The influence of age, travel companions, and type of trip on risk perception are consistent with existing research. The increased risk perception among older adults is well-documented (Reniers et al., 2016), as is the reduced risk perception among travelers with social support systems (Kozak et al., 2007). The type of travel influencing risk perception is also supported by literature indicating that structured travel arrangements, like all-inclusive packages, can impact travelers' sense of control and risk (Larsen et al., 2009).

The relatively high concern about falling ill and travel-related fears (air travel and getting lost) can be contextualized within the broader anxieties about health and safety in travel, particularly post-pandemic (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020). These concerns suggest a need for clear communication and assurance regarding health and safety measures.

Moreover, the relatively low concern about terrorism (18.2%) reflects similar trends observed in other European contexts, where despite media coverage, the perceived risk among tourists remains moderate (Hall et al., 2004).

Research recommendations

Future research can significantly contribute to a deeper understanding of risk perception and safety in tourism, ultimately leading to safer and more enjoyable travel experiences for tourists worldwide. These recommendations are designed to provide a roadmap for future investigations, encouraging a broader, more inclusive, and interdisciplinary approach to understanding risk perception in the tourism industry:

1. Interdisciplinary approach with a more holistic investigation can offer a greater understanding of the importance of risk perception in the decision-making process and in choosing a tourist destination and;

2. Mixed-methods approaches that combine quantitative and qualitative data can provide a richer and more comprehensive understanding of risk perceptions;

3. Environmental and climate risks, such as extreme weather events and natural disasters, can influence tourists' destination choices, and given the increasing concern over climate change, understanding its impact on tourism is crucial.

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THE STUDY OF PASTRY CHEF COMPETENCIES

Hsu-hua Lee

Peir-Yuan Patrick Li

Abstract

This research investigates core competencies essential to pastry chef. The research was conducted by Multi-Criteria Decision Making (MCDM) and the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to extract appropriate assessment criteria. The purpose of this study is to propose assessment criteria among various baking & pastry industry stakeholders' perspectives and illustrate how it can be applied empirically to management. Competencies are undoubtedly one of the most common studied subjects in scholarly hospitality research. Even though numerous scholars have attempted to identify competencies required in the hospitality industry, there is a need to further study and better understand competencies necessary for pastry chef. Pastry chef is pâtissier is a station chef who worked in a professional kitchen, skilled in the making of pastries, desserts, breads and other baked goods. They are employed in large hotels, bistros, restaurants, bakeries, by caterers and some cafés. This research develops assessment criteria for Pastry chef. An evaluation model for use in promotion and selection was created based on the results of this study. The result in this paper also proposes a reference for the competencies of Pastry Chef to provide The Craft Guild of Chefs, the main professional association for chefs a reference for training planning also the curriculum references for the pastry chef training courses and programs in college and university.

Keywords: *Multi- Criteria Decision Making (MCDM); AHP (analysis of hierarchy process); Pastry Chef; Competency;*

1. Introduction

Bread holds significant prominence in the realm of baked goods, serving as a foundational element for a variety of widely consumed food items such as hamburgers, sandwiches, and hotdogs. In the English language, numerous colloquial expressions center around bread, for instance, "The best thing since sliced bread," denoting a high regard for innovation or excellence, and "breadwinner," signifying the primary financial provider within a family unit. These linguistic expressions underscore bread's symbolic representation of sustenance and support. In doing so, they showcase not only its culinary importance but also its role in reflecting and communicating ideas and values in everyday discourse.

Bread has a rich historical lineage in the Western world, as evidenced by accounts from ancient Roman and Greek civilizations chronicling the production of cakes, which served as precursors to modern-day bread. The origins of bread-making can be traced back to Egypt circa 4000 B.C., where the enduring practice of incorporating natural yeast into flat dough and baking it in stone ovens began. During early Greek periods, bakers operated without individual ovens within their workshops. However, by the time of St. Louis, it had become customary for numerous bakers to forgo owning personal ovens and instead utilize rented ovens from monastic orders, signaling a significant evolution in baking methodologies during that era.

The Tokyo-based manga "BAKE KING (焼きたて!!シャはん)" has garnered significant attention, having been serialized for 19 episodes in Japan and honored with the 37th Kodakan Manga Award. The transition of "BAKE KING" from a manga to an animated series has been eagerly anticipated by fans. The animated adaptation, known as the "TV Champion" in print, is set for release during the upcoming winter vacation. Anticipation for "BAKE KING" is high, with expectations that it will captivate audiences much like its predecessors, such as "Black Jack," "Matthew," and "Nautical King" of Taito. It is anticipated that the debut of "BAKE KING" as an animated series will generate significant interest and further elevate its popularity in the new year.

In the realm of baking, France holds a prominent position. In 1994, French pastry chefs protested modern mass production methods that jeopardized the essence of traditional handmade French bread and the ethical framework of esteemed traditional bakers. Today, the bakery industry is swiftly evolving due to technological advancements.

Traditional bakeries are transitioning to mechanization in lieu of manual labor to achieve efficient, high-volume production and improved product quality while aiming to reduce production costs. This shift signifies a notable transformation within the industry.

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Certainly, the process of becoming a baker in France necessitates formal training and acquisition of the professional knowledge requisite to the trade. Training in bakery proficiency is integral, with esteemed institutions such as Le Cordon Bleu Culinary Arts Institute in France, The Culinary Institute of America (CIA), American Institute of Baking (AIB), and the Bakery Institute of France (BIS) offering relevant programs. Noteworthy educational establishments including the Culinary Institute of America (CIA), the American Institute of Baking (AIB), and the Department of Baking at Kaohsiung University of Hospitality and Tourism (KUHT) in Taiwan play a pivotal role in nurturing baking talent within the industry. This study is designed to serve as a benchmark for bakers to enhance their skills and training. Simultaneously, its objective is to furnish bakery education institutions and the industry with sound quantitative benchmarks to facilitate the enhancement of baker training programs in the future, thereby augmenting the competence and technological acumen of bakers.

To become a pastry chef in France, one must undergo comprehensive training that encompasses all fundamental aspects of baking. This includes mastering the art of preparing various types of bread and pastries, as well as gaining a deep understanding of the ingredients used in baking, their properties, and how they interact during the baking process. The training also emphasizes traditional French baking techniques, renowned worldwide for their precision and high-quality results.

McClelland (1973) began to use the term "competence" rather than "intelligence" to refer to an individual's capacity. Competence typically consists of the knowledge, skills and abilities/attitudes (KSAs) (Sandberg 2000, Le Deist and Winterton 2005) that were adopted frequently to conduct competence research by previous hospitality researchers(Phelan and Mills 2010, Cetin, Demirciftci et al. 2016). However, limited research exists pertaining to the competencies of pastry chefs, resulting in a dearth of comprehensive understanding within the field. Although professional bakers' schools and literature provide insights into baking expertise, the scope is primarily introductory in nature.

This study endeavors to delve into the fundamental competencies of pastry chefs. The objective is to establish a robust foundation for the potential establishment of a professional baker service within Taiwan's food and beverage industry. The discerned core competencies could serve as a benchmark for the selection and evaluation of pastry chefs, thus furthering the overall standardization and efficacy within the industry.

Specialized knowledge is essential for individuals seeking to excel in the French baking industry. This encompasses acquiring expertise in advanced pastry techniques, mastering the art of chocolate making, and comprehending the scientific principles underpinning the fermentation processes integral to the production of various types of bread. Within the French baking community, many practitioners opt to further specialize in areas such as viennoiseries (croissants, brioche, etc.) or regional bread specialties as a means of distinguishing themselves within the market. Prospective pastry chefs can pursue formal education through vocational schools offering the CAP (Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle) in baking, a widely recognized and respected qualification in the industry. Alternatively, apprenticeships provide valuable hands-on experience under the guidance of experienced professionals. Beyond technical skills, success in the French baking industry also requires a genuine passion for the craft, creativity, and a commitment to upholding high standards of quality.

The contemporary bakery industry is undergoing significant transformations due to rapid technological advancements. The shift towards mechanization, aiming for more efficient, quantitative, and rapid production methods, reflects a desire to enhance product quality while reducing production costs. This move signifies a departure from traditional baking methods, showcasing the industry's adaptability and commitment to embracing technological innovations to meet evolving demands and challenges in the sector. This study aims to function as a reference index for enhancing and training pastry chef. Additionally, it seeks to offer bakery education institutions and the bakery industry with practical quantitative benchmarks. These benchmarks can facilitate the enhancement of bakers' functional skills by providing guidance for potential adjustments to bakery training programs in the future.

2. Objectives

Insufficient research exists regarding the essential functions of pastry chefs, leading to a lack of comprehensive understanding within the industry. While professional cooking schools and literature offer insights into baking expertise, their focus remains primarily introductory. This study aims to explore the fundamental responsibilities of pastry chefs, seeking to establish a strong basis for potentially introducing a professional baker service within Taiwan's food and beverage sector. The identified core functions could serve as a standard for selecting and evaluating pastry chefs, consequently enhancing industry-wide standardization and efficiency.

The study was conducted based on an initial questionnaire distributed to key industry stakeholders, as well as experts and scholars specializing in hospitality industry research. A total of 20 questionnaires were hand-delivered, and 19 valid responses were received, resulting in a commendable response rate of 95%. The questionnaire was developed to facilitate surveys within five specific categories relevant to the baking industry:

1) Bakery operators and managers

2) Suppliers of bakery materials

3) Manufacturers of bakery equipment

4) Scholars specializing in tourism and baking education

5) Professional bakers and pastry chefs

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Populations and Sample

The survey targeted Taiwanese bakers as the population of interest. Out of the 150 questionnaires distributed, 118 were returned, resulting in a recovery rate of 79%. After deducting 12 incomplete responses, 106 valid questionnaires remained, yielding a valid questionnaire recovery rate of 71%.

3.2 Research Tools

The study integrates expert discussions and deploys the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to examine the "core competencies essential to pastry chef." This approach was solidified subsequent to extensive deliberations among professionals and academics in the field, leading to the formal development of a specialized questionnaire. To ensure comprehensive participation, the questionnaire was distributed via both physical and electronic means, thereby facilitating a diverse range of responses to effectively inform the study.

3.3 Data Collection

To gather insights on hospitality, our approach involves distributing questionnaires to institutions offering seminars and academic programs in hospitality, as well as to bakery operators. This method is designed to collect practical data from both educational settings and industry practitioners within the hospitality sector.

4. Data Analysis

The Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), developed by Saaty in 1980, has been studied extensively and used in almost all the applications related with Multi- Criteria Decision Making (MCDM) in the last 30 years. The AHP method can deal with those studies, which are hard to quantify, such as the strategies for new industrial operation and resource distribution priority faced by social sciences. The AHP analysis involves three basic steps: (1) the construction of a hierarchy; (2) comparative judgments or defining and executing data collection to obtain pairwise comparison data on elements of the hierarchical structure; and (3) a synthesis of priorities to construct an overall priority rating. The validity of the survey results was examined based on Saaty's consistency test. It is essential to measure a Consistency Index (CI) and Consistency Ratio (CR) in AHP. The consistency ratio measures how far a decision-maker's judgments are from perfect consistency. This ratio is calculated by dividing the CI for each matrix by the Random Index (RI). The values of the RI from matrices in order of 1–9, as suggested by Staay.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

5.1 Conclusion

The primary objective of this study is to examine the competencies of a pastry chef. Employing the AHP method, including questionnaire-based data collection and rigorous statistical analysis, the study revealed that the components at level 2, namely "content," "ability," "skill," and "knowledge," hold varying degrees of significance. Furthermore, at level 3, the 13 assessment factors were ranked in the following order of importance: "enthusiasm and honesty," "equipment operation and maintenance," "culinary culture," "ingenuity and imagination," "production and quality control," "purchasing and costing," "sensory and taste analysis," "market trend sensitivity," and "research and development." Additional categories include "food safety and hygiene," "bakery ingredient science and nutrition," "calculation of standard recipe formulas," and, lastly, "knowledge of baking with a basic comprehension of foreign languages."

5.2 Discussion

In the second tier of the ranking, all five stakeholders were unanimously rated highest in terms of content, with

enthusiasm and honesty emerging as the most significant factors in the third tier. In the realm of competence, all four stakeholders were ranked second, with the calculation of standardized recipe formulas being highlighted as paramount in the third tier. Furthermore, for the category of skills, all four stakeholders were positioned in the third tier, with the equipment operation and maintenance identified as the most critical. Knowledge occupied the fourth rank for all five stakeholders in the second tier, with culinary culture recognized as the most essential factor in the third tier.

6. Research recommendations

This study is centered on examining the competencies of pastry chefs and the interplay among these factors. Future research endeavors could explore the correlation between the performance of renowned bakeries or acclaimed pastry chefs and the key success factors. Furthermore, students could integrate this topic into internship programs to gain practical experience, which would enhance their understanding of necessary job functions and the training systems within the case company, thus offering a more comprehensive framework for subsequent research.

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A SKETCH FOR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE DATA PLATFORM FOR HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM INNOVATION

Yong Se KIM[1]

Extended abstract

Customer experiences are made by customers themselves and customers own their experiences. A customer-led experiences are made as customers iteratively experience, evaluate their experiences and engage with others and/or reflect themselves. These iterations, referred to as 3E experience iterations, are intrinsically critical in designing and managing smart customer experiences. With digital technology, more meaningful customer experience evaluation data can be acquired in real-time in a more context specific manner, and these will be provided to customers for their engagement and reflection. As customer experiences are made and owned by customers themselves, customer experience data should be owned by customers and utilized for personalized experience services under the control of customers. This would allow establishment of a platform for hospitality and tourism innovations so that many ecosystem stakeholders will collaborate, centered around guest experience data, in achieving guest experience services that are personalized to guests and customized to context varieties. This paper will present insights on constructing such a platform that could support many breakthrough innovations in hospitality and tourism industry.

Keywords: *Smart Experience Design, Experience Iterations, Customer Experience Data, Digital Transformation, Hospitality and Tourism Innovation*

Introduction

Values are elucidated through activities and experiences rather than physical artefacts themselves. Thus emphasis has been made on design that addresses human activities and experiences as direct objects of designing. Experience design and customer experience management (Schmitt, 2011; Teixeira et al., 2012; Klaus, 2014) are critical in the competitive advantages of businesses in these days ever since experience economy had been advocated by Pine and Gilmore (1998). Customer experiences are made as customers sense, feel, think, act and relate a company and its products and services (Schmitt, 1999). Customer experiences involve affective, emotional, cognitive, physical and social responses and encompass multiple touchpoints and channels (Verhoef et al., 2009). Customer experience is related to customer participation and customer experience process is iterative and dynamic (Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016) along the customer journey composed of *discovery, exploration, purchase, use, asking, and engagement*. Customer experiences and experience activities are influenced by contexts (Edvardsson et al., 2018). Note that contexts are diverse and far beyond time and space and contexts are dynamically changing (Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

In the field of hospitality and tourism, a dynamic framework of experiences has been proposed (Ek et al., 2015). While the roles of company or provider and tourist customer have been contrasted in different perspectives, a dynamic view on time and space was to be required for a dynamic view on experiences. The most static view would be such that controlled experience in fixed time and space is made by producers. On the other hand, the most dynamic view would be such that experience is constructed by tourist customer by herself in interaction with rather undefined environment and emotional value is realized in a flexible manner. Also the circular nature of experience with *before, during,* and *after* phases was discussed in that experience includes planning and anticipating in the before phase; enactment in the during phase; and telling tales and exhibiting memories in the after phase (Ek et al., 2015).

Experiences have been referred to ordinary and extraordinary experiences. Ordinary experiences are those that are common, frequent, and within the realm of everyday life while extraordinary experiences are uncommon and go beyond the realm of everyday life (Bhattacharjee and Mogilner, 2014). With digital technology customers can communicate easily with other consumers and with service providers (Verhoef et al., 2019). More customers are making their own participation and involvement in the era of digital transformation (Schwab, 2016).

Customer experiences evolve with previous experiences and their reflections (Verhoef et al., 2009). Customer experiences evolve as customers *experience, evaluate* their experiences and *engage* with others and themselves

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iteratively (Kim, 2023). Customer experiences are made as customers experience, evaluate their experiences and engage with others and/or reflect themselves iteratively. These *experience – evaluate – engage* iterations, referred to as *3E experience iterations*, should be utilized in designing and managing smart experiences exploiting digital technology including diverse experience data.

With the intrinsic iterative nature of experiences, this paper will present insights in realizing innovations in hospitality and tourism industry. This paper also discusses about how customer experience data should be utilized in achieving smart experiences. Note that customer experience data should be owned by customers and can be used in realizing smart experiences under the control of customers as experiences are made and owned by customers. This would open up opportunities for innovations in hospitality and tourism as well as future research challenges to support such innovation tasks.

Experience Iterations

Customers make their experiences through many iterations composed of *experience, evaluate*, and *engage*. With a specific activity involving artefacts, for example a hotel, the customer, or the active actor, makes an element-level *experience*. As this experience occurs, the customer would subjectively *evaluate* her experience with some experience values elucidated. Then this customer *engages*, that is, she may communicate about the experience and her evaluation with other stakeholders and/or reflect on her experience and evaluation by herself. With influence of this experience, she goes through her next experience followed by its evaluation and its reflection or engagement. That is, customer experience process is made as *experience – evaluate – engage – experience – evaluate – engage –* ... Note that the 3E experience iterations have been proposed (Kim, 2023) mimicking the *seeing – imagining – drawing* iterations on design thinking (Kim and Park, 2021). While it has been often said that experiences are co-created (Edvardsson et al., 2013), the customer herself makes the 3E iterations with her own subjective evaluation and her own engagement and reflection, The customer makes her own experiences while other stakeholders just support her to make her experiences. The owner of experiences is the customer herself as values elucidated from experiences are very individually specific to the customer (Vargo and Lusch, 2008).

Customer Experience Data

Note that as a customer makes experiences through 3E iterations, her customer experience data can be made and accumulated. First, experiences should be represented. This is done by representing activities of experiences. Aa a schema in representing experience activities, context-based activity modeling (CBAM), where rich and structured context information is provided, has been proposed (Kim and Lee, 2011; Kim et al., 2020). For example, the following specific activity of a hotel guest can be made: a hotel guest (*active actor*) reserves (*action verb*) a hotel (*object*) using a hotel reservation app (*tool*) with the goal to attend a business meeting (*goal context*), with the hotel address information and the meeting location information (*relevant structure contexts*), at his home office, with only two days in advance (*place and time of physical contexts*), with a lot of worries (with emotional value of worry at the level of high of a *psychological context*). Note that in CBAM not only physical contexts but also psychological contexts are systematically represented so that emotional and cognitive experience evaluations can be associated with experience activities. Goal contexts and relevant structure contexts are also represented so that experience activities can be described in detail. Note that CBAM is a data structure for activity modeling which can be hierarchical and contain many lower-level context information systematically. In the era of digital transformation, this kind of level of detail must be enabled to design and manage human experiences and activities.

While CBAM offers place holders for experience evaluation results, experience evaluations need to be acquired in real-time without hindering customer's experience. Experiences values are elucidated as experiences occur and thus after-the-fact survey cannot match the real experiences. Particularly emotional experience values are elucidated in subjective manners. Typical time gap between when the emotions are raised and when they are reported creates problems wherein there is a slippage between the emotions guests truly experienced and what they described (Kim and Fesenmaier, 2015). Thus real-time experience evaluation methods are desired. Real-time experience sampling method that are specific to contexts has been devised (Kim et al., 2011). Note also that this method acquires evaluation data as zero-party data (Forrester, 2020) that the guest provides herself with the intent that she would benefit better by providing this data. Furthermore, this method associates subjective evaluation data with diverse context data obtained from various sensors and smart devices (Kim, 2023).

Customer's own evaluation data can be provided to herself so that the guest can reflect on her experience and evaluation and engage in communication with other stakeholders. To encourage and promote reflection and engagement, a service unit can be designed so that the guest experience iterations can be supported. This service unit

also provide important digital service supports in realizing customer-led experience iterations. Note that this approach is novel in that customer experience data is provided to customer herself, not to data analysis unit, so that the customer is leading her experience iterations so that she makes and owns her own experiences noting that the most important recipient of customer experience data would be the guest herself (Kim, 2023). In this way, customer experience data are acquired and accumulated with experience iterations. Example smart experiences enabled by customer experience data include personalized experiences of product-service systems such as showering experience improvements using perfume shower capsules and LED lighting customization (Kim and Hong, 2019). As experiences are made and owned by customers, customer experience data should also be owned by customers.

Insights on Hospitality and Tourism Innovation

In this section, a guest-centered experience data platform is sketched to construct a foundation for smart experience design for hospitality and tourism innovations. A core service platform can be considered. Many hotel reservation platforms are actively used. These have hotels and hotel franchises as key ecosystem stakeholders although these provide only reservation services. For a guest, all transactional data of reservations and stays are stored in an accumulative manner, and many inquiries regarding high-level information on her hotel stays can be made using such data. Now a meta-level platform of guest experience data can be conceived beyond reservation systems such that, under the control of each guest, guest experience data can be acquired, accumulated and provided for hotels and hotel franchises which are equipped with smart systems like the lighting and the shower equipment systems. Then various inquiries regarding hotel experiences of guests can be made while the level of details can be controlled by guests themselves.

With customer experience data, that is based on rich and structured representation like CBAM, many of inquires of customer activities and experiences can be made using similarities where some of activity elements and context elements are used for constraints detailing relevant information of activities and experiences. Note that comprehensive similarity assessment techniques have been used in comparing and retrieving various product-service systems (Kim, 2020). This kind of digital technology capabilities would mimic the way customers find relevant information through a big pull of previous experiences including those in directly related experience iterations of the current interest and those from indirectly related experience iterations happened earlier with only partial relevance. Thus, together with a customer experience data platform, effective query and similarity assessment framework would be required.

In this way, smart hotel experiences can be designed and managed so that experiences services that are personalized and customized to diverse contexts can be provided. Note that with guest experience data owned by guests, diverse ecosystem stakeholders, including hotels and various related product and service providers, are integrated so that the whole hotel experience management system can satisfy the four requirements for smart systems of (1) context-awareness and specificity, (2) human-centeredness toward personalization, (3) reconfigurable product-elements and/or service elements, and (4) massive collaboration of diverse ecosystem stakeholders (Kim, 2023).

Conclusion and Discussion

In this brief paper, experience iterations composed of *experience – evaluate – engage* have been reviewed as the intrinsic process of experiences. Then customer experience data acquired and accumulated through experience iterations has been explained regarding what kind of information is obtained and how these are obtained. The paper then presents the concept of a customer experience data platform for hospitality and tourism innovations. As the guest customer owns her experience data, the guest can allow different hotels to share among those hotels the guest's experience data obtained in respective hotels so that more personalized experiences customized to contexts can be supported by utilizing more data with guest-specified intents. Also, an inquiry and retrieval system with similarity assessment capabilities for relevant customer experience data have been proposed.

A truly customer-centered approach in customer experience design and management should present huge opportunities for hospitality and tourism innovations. Digital technology would enable this when ecosystem stakeholders, i.e., hotels and their suppliers, support compatibilities of the customer experience data platform so that more personalized and context-customized customer experiences can be made by customers utilizing smart services based on such a platform. This could be imagined to be as if those payment platforms are supported by ecosystem stakeholders effectively and efficiently.

As future research to realize such a customer experience data platform and supporting digital capabilities, a grand exemplary research project can be devised and conducted with an ecosystem infrastructure where stakeholders including hotels and system suppliers participate in a massive collaborative effort. Ideally this kind of grand project can be devised with a joint effort of a few organizations representing hospitality and tourism sector, design research field and information technology area.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE CREATIVE TOURISM ACTIVITIES IN KHUNG BANG KACHAO, SAMUT PRAKARN PROVINCE

1st Nipaporn Sangsawang[1]

2nd Tabanporn Yipsumpoomipijit[2]

Extended abstract

The aim of this research is 1) to investigate the cultural resources that promote tourism in Khung Bang Kachao and 2) to propose the guidelines for development of sustainable creative tourism activities related to the cultural identities of local people in Khung Bang Kachao, Samut Prakarn Province. The research identified several cultural resources that promote tourism in the Khung Bang Kachao, including: 1) natural dyed fabric; 2) herbal compress; 3) a green cycling path; and 4) the Swan Parade and Centipede Flag Festival. Furthermore, this study used a qualitative approach by collecting data through focus groups and in-depth interviews. The samples were discovered by members of the local community to identify cultural resources suitable for promoting sustainable and creative tourism activities in Khung Bang Kachao. The data collected from these interviews was analyzed using the concepts of creative tourism to derive meaningful insights and recommendations.

Based on these findings, the study suggests designing sustainable creative tourism activities in the Khung Bang Kachao that involve the cultural identities of local people. These activities could encourage tourist participation and help them learn about the cultural identities within the community. Examples of such activities include visiting local workshops where community products like natural dyed fabric and herbal compresses are made, participating in the making of miniature centipede flags during the Centipede Flag Festival, and exploring the green cycling path. Additionally, these activities could enhance the relationships between hosts and visitors, thereby increasing social and relational capital for both tourists and local people. By utilizing existing resources to reinforce identity and distinctiveness, these activities also promote self-realization and educational opportunities for all participants. The recommendations can be implemented in order to enable the community to continuously develop and enhance creative tourism activities, creating unique identities for those activities that share cultural heritage with other regions, thereby providing novel experiences, attracting tourists, and encouraging them to choose the community as a travel destination.

Keywords: Creative tourism activities, Creative tourism, Khung Bang Kachao, Samut Prakarn Province

Introduction

Creative tourism has emerged as a dynamic approach to tourism that focuses on providing tourists with engaging and participatory experiences rooted in the local culture, traditions, and lifestyles of the community. This form of tourism not only enhances the tourist experience by offering unique and memorable activities but also supports the preservation and promotion of local cultural heritage (Richards, 2018). Culturally tourists in hands-on, culturally relevant activities, creative tourism fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of the host community, thereby strengthening the social and cultural ties between visitors and locals (Tan et al., 2017). Furthermore, creative tourism contributes to sustainable economic development by generating income and employment opportunities within the community, while also promoting cultural sustainability through the active engagement of tourists in preserving local traditions and practices (Duxbury, 2021).

Samut Prakan Province is a popular tourist destination due to its proximity to Bangkok and its distinctive tourism offerings. Notably, "Khung Bang Kachao" an ecological tourist spot, emphasizes environmental responsibility in line with global tourism trends. Bang Kachao, often referred to as the "Green Lung" of Bangkok, spans over 12,000 rai and is the largest green area, featuring a significant wetland formed from river sediment and

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surrounded by 15 kilometers of river. This area boasts a rich and diverse ecosystem with a well-structured social fabric of flora and fauna (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2020). Due to its abundant natural resources, renowned tourist attractions, and famous cultural traditions, Khung Bang Kachao has demonstrated significant potential for the development of creative tourism (Suksri, 2019).

The information above demonstrates the potential of the tourist attractions in Samut Prakan Province to support the development of creative tourism. However, preliminary research by the author indicates that the community lacks proper integration in conducting tourism activities based on available resources. Additionally, tourists often lack engagement and the opportunity to create meaningful travel experiences. Developing tourism models that encourage tourists to spend more time participating in community activities and learning through hands-on experiences in the area, facilitated by creative tourism, would create positive experiences and promote repeat visits (Chumnanchar, 2019). Nevertheless, the tourist attractions in Khung Bang Kachao still require the development of creative tourism models to offer tourists enriched experiences while fostering sustainability for the local community. Aligning creative tourism development with experiential learning will enhance knowledge, add social, cultural, and environmental value to the area, and build good relationships with the local people, who are the custodians of the culture (Phuriwat Dechum, 2013). However, there has been no development of creative tourism activities based on the existing cultural resources.

Hence, research into the development of creative tourism activities in Khung Bang Kachao, Samut Prakarn Province to foster knowledge creation and cater to the growing number of tourists. Creative tourism models serve as a transformative tool, blending diverse tourism facets such as wellness, gastronomy, and cultural experiences synergistically. It is imperative to delineate strategies for evolving creative tourism frameworks that can guide policy formulation for sustainable tourism development.

Objectives

1. To investigate the cultural resources that promote tourism in Khung Bang Kachao, Samut Prakarn Province.

2. To propose the guidelines for development of sustainable creative of creative tourism activities related to the cultural identities of local people in Khung Bang Kachao, Samut Prakarn Province.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

The research population consists of professionals and individuals involved in the tourism industry in Khung Bang Kachao, Samut Prakarn Province. The researchers employed a sampling plan to ascertain the most advantageous sample size for the focus group. The study sample comprised individuals closely associated with the creative tourism activities in Khung Bang Kachao, Samut Prakarn Province, and professionals specializing in sustainable community management. Participants were selected using non-probability sampling methods, notably purposive and snowball sampling. The composition of the focus group is 32 participants and in-depth interviews with 30 key informants residing in the Khung Bang Kachao, focusing specifically on areas with tourist attractions and active tourist engagement.

2. Research Tools

The researcher employed three primary research tools:

Firstly, the examination of relevant research and the review of existing literature. This study relies on the examination of relevant material about the research topic, encompassing theories, documents, books, and online resources. The present study is structured as a conceptual research framework and has been utilized to build a research design aimed at identifying the research issue about the sustainability of creative tourism activities. Qualitative research uses semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups to examine creative tourism activities.

Secondly, the focus group guideline was utilized to investigate the cultural resources that promote the tourism community for sustainable of creative tourism activities. The public sector, private sector, academic sector, and people sector are four distinct groups of supply sectors responsible for the development and management of creative tourism activities.

The triangulation method was utilized to evaluate the credibility of this study. Data triangulation was used to collect information from several sources, including people, as well as primary and secondary data sources. To ensure the credibility of each data source, a variety of data sources and data collection methods were used, such as document analysis and focus group interviews.

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Finally, the research instrument utilized in this study is a structured interview guide, specifically designed for qualitative research. The researcher employed this guide to collect data through in-depth interviews with 30 key informants residing in the Khung Bang Kachao area, selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevant and insightful contributions. Qualitative data analysis involves synthesizing information from three sources: interviews, documents, and observations. Content analysis was used to categorize and synthesize the data, identifying common themes and main points. The synthesized data were then analyzed descriptively to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research findings.

3. Data Collection

The researcher gathered the following information.

1. Researchers are important tools for gathering information by talking, observing, and interviewing.

2. Document collection, which is the first step in starting a research project, and detailed analysis of relevant results to be used for research.

3. Inquire about and take notes on information, conduct in-depth interviews with key informants who are knowledgeable about or have information on the subject that the researcher is researching that is the best or most relevant to the research scope. Purposive sampling was used for some of the respondents.

4. The data is recorded from the focus group with supply sectors in Khung Bang Kachao. The data was obtained from the online program records, which consist of a compilation of informational focus groups conducted by the online program. This methodology was utilized to guarantee the precision and thoroughness of the content, hence facilitating its further investigation and examination.

4. Data Analysis

Techniques for data analysis in this research project, the researcher used two techniques, which included 1) coding analysis of data interviews recorded from many concrete objects or phenomena that can be observed. The researcher employs a triangulation method, which allows unwanted information to be eliminated. Following that, 2) develop a conclusion to analyze the data by conducting a thematic analysis in accordance with the process consisting of collecting, categorizing, grading, summing up, and summarizing data from individual semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group interviews. In terms of analyzing documents, the researcher considers the context or environment of the data being analyzed, as well as how it has changed. Both data analysis methods are descriptive text, which does not have a fixed formula and is determined by the issue or problem to be analyzed as well as the researcher's preference. As a result, having multiple conceptual frameworks or theories is critical in assisting with in-depth data analysis and drawing solid conclusions.

Results of the research

The cultural resources that promote tourism in Khung Bang Kachao, Samut Prakan Province.

There are many cultural resources that could be promoted tourism in Khung Bang Kachao. These cultural resources are also able to present the cultural identity of the local people and attract more tourists to visit here every year. There are following resources;

1) Natural dyed fabric

Natural dyed fabric is a local product of Khung Bang Kachao that every village can create. This natural dyed tie-dye fabric represents local wisdom, where nearby materials are creatively used to craft beautiful patterns onto fabric. The patterns designed and dyed with natural colors are often praised as "one-of-a-kind masterpieces that are unique and unparalleled in the world."

Creating tie-dye fabric with natural colors sourced from local areas involves using materials like yellow from nipa palm seeds, curcuma, terminalia catappa, and marigolds, red/pink from sappan, and brown from coconut husk. This sustainable method uses natural dyes from plants and biological materials, promoting eco-friendly and non-toxic clothing. Natural tie-dye artists worldwide use vegetable and fruit dyes to produce healthy, safe, and highly decorated garments. The process focuses on quality and earthy colors, each derived from different plants. Key to making beautiful and long-lasting tie-dyed clothes is using sustainable or biodegradable fabrics and natural dyes.

For example, Natural dyed tie-dye fabric from Baan Luk Jak utilizes local materials to add value and develop products that emphasize the conservation of natural resources. This initiative began by observing the surroundings, as the family of the product's owner has long been selling palm fruit in syrup at the Bang Nam Phueng floating market. Inspired by this, they decided to repurpose the palm fruit shells for tie-dyeing. The process is chemical-free, non-irritating, and gentle on the skin, producing items such as scarves, shawls, casual wear, and gift sets. Additionally, they offer a service for dyeing old clothes, allowing customers to bring in their faded or old garments to be naturally dyed, transforming them into beautiful new pieces.

2) Herbal compress

The herbal compresses from Khung Bang Kachao are unique and stand out from those of other places. In local countries, compresses have been used to relax muscles and relieve aches and pains since ancient times. They are made from a variety of grains, including job's tears, mung beans, sticky rice, red beans, black beans, and soybeans, combined with fresh herbs such as lemongrass, turmeric, tamarind leaves, kaffir lime, plai, borneol, salt, and camphor. These compresses can help relieve muscle aches, relax tendons, and alleviate office syndrome symptoms, providing a sense of relaxation. The products are durable and convenient to use, with options available for the neck, abdomen, shoulders, scapula, and back. Fresh herbal compresses are more effective than dried ones as the active ingredients penetrate the skin better.

3) Green cycling path

Cycling through the natural beauty of Bang Kachao, the world's 7th largest producer of ozone, offers a unique experience. Shaped like a pig's stomach and surrounded by the Chao Phraya River, this lush green area is known as the "green lung" of Bangkok. In 2006, Time Asia magazine's Best of Asia issue recognized Bang Kachao as the best urban oasis in Asia. Located in Samut Prakan province, Bang Kachao is a green destination close to Bangkok, often called the "pig's stomach" due to its shape. The area is dubbed the "lung of Bangkok" because its abundant trees and natural surroundings purify the air coming from the sea before it reaches the city. A must-visit cycling spot is Sri Nakhon Khuean Khan Park, commonly known as Bang Kachao Park. Covering over 200 rai, this park was established to produce fresh air, serve as a recreational area, and provide exercise space for the public. Additionally, it offers opportunities to study the local ecosystem of plants and animals, making it an urban oasis for those seeking to connect with nature, experience local community life, and escape the city's hustle and bustle.
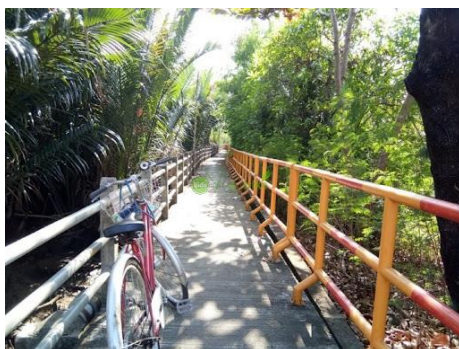
4) Swan Parade - Centipede Flag Festival

The tradition of the Swan and Centipede Flag Procession – The swan symbolizes the city of Hongsawadi, the original land of the Mon people. According to legend, eight years after the Buddha's enlightenment, he traveled to various regions. One day, he arrived at Mount Sudhatsarangsit, north of the city of Satum. He saw a pair of swans playing in the water on a mound in the middle of the sea. The Buddha prophesied that in the future, the mound where the golden swans played would become a great city called Hongsawadi, and his teachings would flourish there. A hundred years after the Buddha's passing, the great sea gradually receded, turning into vast land, and Hongsawadi city was established where the golden swans had played. Therefore, the Mon people of Hongsawadi have used the swan as the symbol of their country ever since.

The centipede is a long-bodied creature with venomous claws that can defend against enemies, symbolizing the Mon people who have never feared their foes. Every part of the centipede's body is interpreted by the Mon as a spiritual puzzle: the two antennae represent mindfulness and awareness; the two tails signify patience and perseverance; the two claws stand for moral shame and fear of wrongdoing; the two eyes represent parents and gratitude. The body, with its 22 segments, symbolizes the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Four Right Exertions, the Five Faculties, the Five Strengths, and the Four Bases of Power. This means that if the Mon nation can govern and take care of its people like the centipede, it will prosper and remain peaceful for a long time.

In the past, Mon villagers would place a post in the courtyard and erect the centipede flag at the ceremonial pavilion as the spot to invite monks for evening prayers. In the morning, they would offer food together, considered a way to dispel bad luck in the village with the power of the centipede flag bringing prosperity and happiness. In the afternoon, villagers would carry the centipede flag in a procession to the temple with eight men on each side and one man at the head (only men can do this), then raise the flag to the top of the swan pole. Devout believers would cut their hair and tie it to the centipede flag as an offering to the Buddha. This tradition continues to be practiced in the Mon village of Songkhanong in the district of Song Khanong.

Conclusion and Discussion

Creative tourism is a new form of tourism that emphasizes the engagement of tourists and hosts by providing opportunities for tourists to participate in various activities and learn from authentic, hands-on experiences within the local community. This approach allows tourists to gain a deep understanding of the cultural heritage in different communities. Moreover, creative tourism not only offers relaxation and excitement but also fosters personal pride, a bond with hosts, and memorable experiences from the places visited.

Creative tourism requires creativity in designing activities to create authentic experiences, following the concept of creative tourism. The specific characteristics of creative tourism, as presented by Richards et al., 2019, have been used to develop guidelines for creative tourism activities known as the 3S Principles. These principles consist of: 1) Storytelling, which involves researching art stories and creating artists; 2) Senses, where activities are designed to engage all five senses—seeing, smelling, hearing, touching, and tasting—ensuring tourists enjoy and experience aesthetic pleasure; and 3) Sophistication, which is presented through new marketing formats to further develop creative tourism activities, elevating them to both domestic and international markets, benefiting the community, and leading to sustainable tourism development. The details of the 3S Principles and Bang Krachao:

1) Storytelling as each activity features local wisdom or expertise shared by community elders or specialists,

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providing tourists with in-depth knowledge from those proficient in the area. For instance, visitors can learn about the lifestyle of the community residing in Bang Krachao, widely known as the "Green Lung of Bangkok," while listening to tales about the forest and the life-giving waters that sustain both the community and the local ecosystems. This aligns with the research of Photphaijit et al. (2018), which concluded that enhancing the potential of creative tourism activities should involve knowledge transfer from elders to the younger generation and skills training for the youth to achieve proficiency. Similarly, Luangchanthong, F. (2018) emphasized that local personnel and interpreters are crucial for the development of high-quality, sustainable creative tourism. Moreover, incorporating modern technology in storytelling can enhance engagement, comprehension, and retention of these narratives.

2. Senses: Each activity is designed to engage all five senses: seeing, smelling, hearing, touching, and tasting, providing tourists with a fun and aesthetic experience. This approach aligns with Amornphongmongkol, S. (2018) findings, which explain that encountering and experiencing local ways of life firsthand enhances tourists' understanding and enjoyment. Furthermore, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2017) highlights that creative tourism activities should be diverse and suitable for all target groups. Developing creative tourism activities aims to meet the needs of tourists seeking new forms of travel that offer immersive learning experiences and close interaction with local communities.

3. Sophistication: The unique charm of Bang Krachao lies in its sophisticated presentation, which creatively stimulates tourists through captivating family stories that highlight the preservation and conservation of natural resources. This includes activities centered around local products, traditions, and distinctive tourism experiences, continually promoted to maintain their appeal. This approach aligns with the study by Vichiranon, S., et al. (2019), which explains that using augmented reality (AR) technology to enhance tourism storytelling can significantly improve tourists' understanding and create a unique marketing edge for community-based tourism in the digital age. Similarly, Panya, N. (2021) found that modern businesses should leverage digital technology to offer innovative services, making them attractive and desirable to customers. Emphasizing accessibility and simplicity is crucial for customer satisfaction and expanding the customer base.

Research recommendations

The description of the future research study should cover all aspects and should be clarified.

1. The community should continuously develop and enhance creative tourism activities, creating unique identities for activities that share cultural heritage with other regions. This effort aims to provide novel experiences, attract tourists, and encourage them to choose the community as a travel destination.

2. Qualitative research should be conducted to study other tourist attractions in Khung Bang Kachao, Samut Prakarn Province. This will facilitate the creation of diverse creative tourism routes, ensuring a clear framework for tourism development. Such efforts aim to transform these sites into genuine creative tourism destinations.

3. It is essential to conduct quantitative research to segment tourists from various regions, such as Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, who are interested in creative tourism. This research will provide valuable insights for collecting data specific to each tourist group and for developing creative tourism models that align with the unique preferences and demands of these tourists.

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DEVELOPING CREATIVE TOURISM IN TERMS OF TOURIST ROUTES AND TOURISM ACTIVITIES IN SONGKHLA PROVINCE, THAILAND

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Abstract

Creative tourism is considered a new type of tourism that has the potential to change existing tourism models. This tourism gives tourists the opportunity to develop their potential through participation in activities and learning experiences and to absorb and understand the culture and way of life of people in the community. Creative tourism is the priority that the Thai government's policies have focused on. Songkhla province has the potential to develop creative tourism in terms of activities and tourist routes. There are many interesting tourist attractions and the city is full of historical, cultural, artistic, food, and fishing villages. The purpose of this paper is to study creative tourism activities and tourist routes in Songkhla province, Thailand, focusing on three areas: Songkhla Old Town, Khao Dang, and Yor Island. This research employs qualitative methods, with data collected from community leaders, tourists, entrepreneurs, and related government and private sector agencies. The results identify new tourism routes and activities: Songkhla Old Town can be developed into multicultural tourism routes and activities related to art and local food; Khao Dang into historical tourism routes and activities related to the study of archaeological sites and fishery; and Yor Island into textile and agro-tourism routes and the activities were related about handicraft and organic farm. These routes are expected to support the Songkhla community market and attract more tourists, thereby increasing local and international income for Songkhla province, Thailand.

Keywords: *Creative tourism, Tourist routes, Tourism Activities, Songkhla*

Introduction

Thai tourism industry plays an important role in the overall economy of the country, both in terms of creating foreign currency and balance of trade and services, including mass-income products for national development. Thailand's tourism has a variety of formats and emphasizes sustainability. A combination of culture, tradition, wisdom, and Thainess creates an experience for tourists traveling to various regions of Thailand. Most tourists know Thailand for its stunning beaches, rich cultural heritage, vibrant cities, delicious cuisine, and friendly people. It makes Thailand attracts millions of visitors worldwide each year (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2024). According to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand, the number of international tourists visiting Thailand in 2023 (from January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023) amounted to over 28 million. The top five nationalities were Malaysia, with approximately 4.5 million, followed by China with 3.5 million, South Korea with 1.7 million, India with 1.6 million, and Russia with 1.5 million. In 2024, the ministry has set a target to attract both domestic and international tourists through the promotion of lesser-known tourist attractions and the country as an all-season tourist destination in term of Tourism Activities are gastronomy tourism, maritime Tourism, medical and wellness tourism, community-based tourism and creative tourism (The Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2024). Thailand has many supporting factors in developing the tourism model towards creative tourism. Thus, studying to create knowledge will help manage tourism in a clearer and more well-known form. It also creates income for the country and leads to the development of a sustainable tourism industry.

Songkhla Province is located in southern Thailand. Its border region is connected to Malaysia. According to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2024), the total number of tourists in Songkhla in 2023 was approximately 4,522,095 people, divided into Thai tourists (2,278,430 people) and foreign tourists (2,243,665 people). Most foreign tourists visit Malaysia via the Sadao border near Bukit Kayu Himtam in Kedah. Truckers and car visitors cross the

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Sadao border, the South's largest and most important (Department of Foreign Trade, 2023). Thus, Thai and foreign tourists visit Songkhla province. It would be Thailand's tourism province.

The well-known destination attraction is Songkhla Lake, a coastal lagoon that is the only one in Thailand. It is a natural brackish water lagoon with a complex cultural and ecological system and is proposed as a World Heritage Site (UNESCO, 2023). Due to its various historical, cultural, artistic, culinary and tourist attractions, Songkhla Town can create creative tourism activities and routes for relaxation, adventure, and cultural immersion. (TAT, 2024).Therefore, this paper explores the potential of creative tourism activities and tourist routes in Songkhla Province. These routes are expected to support the Songkhla community market and attract more tourists, thereby increasing local and international income for Songkhla province, Thailand.

Objectives

To study the developing of creative tourism in activities and tourist routes in Songkhla province, Thailand

Literature Review

1. Concept of Creative Tourism

Creative tourism is considered a new type of tourism that has the potential to change existing tourism models. This tourism allows tourists to develop their potential through participation in activities and learning experiences and to absorb and understand the culture and way of life of people in the community (Al-Ababneh, 2019).

Consequently, creative tourism is a form of tourism that emphasizes the active participation of travelers in cultural and artistic activities that are located within a destination. Creative tourism promotes the engagement of visitors in workshops, classes, or experiences that incorporate local arts, crafts, music, dance, or other cultural expressions, rather than merely passively observing attractions. (Duxbury et al., 2020). The objective of this type of tourism, according to Remoaldo et al. (2019), is to foster genuine relationships between tourists and people in the area to encourage cross-cultural understanding and exchange. In addition to providing travelers with memorable experiences, travel also plays a vital role in preserving and promoting local handicrafts, cultural heritage, and customs (Bakas et al, 2020). The creative tourism activities include pottery classes in a traditional ceramics village, cooking workshops to learn local cuisine, or participating in a traditional dance performance. This is to create income for the community and will lead to the goal of sustainable tourism in the future.

2. Creative Tourism Destination and Characteristics

Creative tourism destinations refer to tourist attractions that have managed tourism formats and activities that are based on tourism resources, both of the cultural ways and nature that are unique and outstanding of the area to develop into tourism activities (Richards, 2020), providing tourism services that emphasize creating tourism value from the experiences of tourists. The important characteristic of tourism activities is that tourists can participate in taking action and becoming a part of people in society or community Tourism activities that emphasize participation and mutual interaction between tourists and the owner of the resource or host (McKercher & Du Cros, 2002). It is a tourism activity that can create learning and understanding through experiences (Ihamäki, 2012), such as learning about the lifestyle of fishermen. Local food learning activities or learning activities, farming, etc. In addition, the unique characteristics of creative tourism consist of six factors as follow:

1) It increases the skills of tourists.

2) It is a form of tourism whose main products are skills and cultural experiences that arise from participating in tourism activities.

3) It sells experiences.

4) Tourists can learn about and feel local and gain an understanding of local culture.

5) Tourists have the opportunity to participate in tourism activities together with the local community. Tourists will be able to experience the true lifestyle of the local people.

6) It is a form of tourism that is unique in terms of tourism resources. To create a unique identity for tourist attractions, this is because tourists want new experiences that are different (Richards, 2010).

3. Creative Tourists

Creative tourists were defined as people who enjoy novelty, are willing to learn new things, are conscious of the development of their travel companions, are concerned about environmental issues, and the relaxed and leisurely type. Creative tourists view creativity and creative experiences differently (Tan, Luh, & Kung, 2014). According to

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Chang, Backman & Chih Huang (2014), creative tourists seek the kind of immersive, unpackaged, real encounter that encourages tourists to actively comprehend a destination's unique cultural aspects. Moreover, Tan et al. (2016) identified creative tourists into three groups: sensation-seekers, relaxers, and existential types. Sensation-seekers focus on concerns relating to tutors, relaxers focus on the activity's features and the surrounding surroundings, and existential-type tourists focus on the activity itself.

4. Creative Tourism Activities in Thailand and Other Countries

Creative tourism activities for tourists must be profoundly based on the identity or reality of the area and focus on creating, learning, and understanding between tourists and owners (Srihirun & Sawant, 2019). This is an example of creative tourism activities in Thailand and other countries in Table 1 and Table 2 as follows:

Table 1: Example of Creative tourism in Thailand

Province	Tourism Resources	Activities Details
1. Muange Ranong District, Ranong	Mining history, Andaman sea	The history learning in Tin mining cultural heritage, the food culture of the miner baba culture, and the natural heritage of the Andaman Sea and the unique minibus of Ranong.
2. Dan Sai District, Loei	Phi Ta Khon Festival (Ghost Fastival)	Ghost Parade, International Mask Expo Phi Ta Khon Mask Contest Little Phi Ta Khon Contest Various community performances.
3. Mae On District, Chiangmai	Tin Tok Royal Project and Mae Kampong Tourism Community	Visit agricultural farms and products such as coffee cultivation white tea, mushroom production, crafting, vanilla production, production of potted plants, vegetables, and planting fruit trees.

Source: Department of Tourism, 2024

Table 2: Example of Creative tourism in other country

City/Country	Tourism Resources	Activities Details
1. Shirakawago, Japan	Japanese farmer's way	Experience the traditional farmer's house of the Shirakawago community, learn how to build a farmer's house, visit antique museums and ancient houses, and learn how to live together with nature and Japanese culture.
2. Malacca, Malaysia	Malacca's historical sites, the lifestyle of local people, and the buildings' architecture combine Chinese and Western	Sightseeing and boating in the historical city, learning and studying the history in various museums, tricycling around the city, and trying local food and products on shopping streets in the city.
3.Interlaken, Switzerland	Nature and the beauty of nature, food, lifestyle, and the way of life of the Swiss	Riding the high-altitude train to conquer the peak of Jungfrau mountain, creating a skiing experience (in the winter) and sports in the snow town, cooking with local people, eating together, and watching and participating in local performances.

Source: Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration, 2023

6. Songkhla City Area

Songkhla Province is located in Southern Thailand. Songkhla City offers an intriguing combination of historical, cultural, and natural features. Both things occur naturally and things that are created by humans. Therefore, the three parts of tourist attractions in Songkhla are as follows:

Songkhla Old Town Sites: is one of the cultural heritage sites that has been nominated is Songkhla Old Town. The distinct topology of Songkhla is a reflection of the different races of the local Thai, Thai-Chinese, and Thai-Muslims. (Suwannachart, 2010). Songkhla Old Town has three major roads, Nakhon Nok, Nakhon Nai, and Nang Ngam, which are lined with beautifully designed structures that retain the unique character of historic Sino-European-

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style buildings and commercial Chinese shophouses. There are many tourist attractions and local desserts (TAT, 2024).

Hua Khao Daeng Sites: This area has been the civilizational and historical center of Songkhla Province since the Ayutthaya period. It was formerly known as "Singora," or the city of Singkhon (Songkhla at present). This site was strategically situated amidst a small mountain range between the sea and the lagoon where Thalesap Songkla lies. In this area, most forts, city walls, and moats remain (UNESCO, 2024). The majority in this area is muslin, and most of them are fishermen.

Yor Island Sites: is a small island in the Songkhla Lake. It's about 15 kilometers from Songkhla City. One way to get there is via the Tinnasulanonda Bridge. The island became very popular after the bridge was built and opened for public use in 1984. It's a charming place because of its special natural resources. The soil on Yor Island is fertile. The coastal plain is suitable for agriculture, resulting in famous fruit-growing such as a special kind of jackfruit called jampadas, sapodillas, durians, coconuts etc. (TAT, 2024). The environment in the lake is suitable for fish and seaweed. Sea bass from Yor Island is special because they grow in three types of water; fresh, brackish, and sea water.

Research Methodology

This study is an exploratory study that used fieldwork to explore the potential of the area in terms of tourist attractions, interesting activities, and the products of the community. The researcher collected the data through maps, field trips, in-depth interviews, and focus groups, as well as by searching for papers, concepts, theories, and related research. The methodology is as follows:

1. Populations and Sample

The focus of this study is creative tourism in Songkhla Province, which encompasses community leaders, entrepreneurs, tourists, and relevant government and private sector organizations. The total sample size is 30 individuals.

2. Research Instrument

This study is qualitative research that focuses on explaining phenomena in an area, using in-depth interviews and observations to collect data. It contains questions regarding the development of creative tourism in the Songkhla Province.

3. Data Collection

The data collection was visited in the area and coordinated by the leader of the community to contact and request interviews with group representatives a total of six times, taking three months to collect data. During the interview, audio was recorded and notes were taken to provide the data for further analysis.

4. Data Analysis

Data from interviews and observations were categorized to match the issues studied, and various issues were summarized to find ways to develop creative tourism. They are grouped and presented using descriptive and analytical methods, and conclusions are drawn to match the objectives of the research study.

Result

The study result shows some detail, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: The summarized of tourist attractions, activities and local product

Songkhla Old Town	Hua Khao Daeng	Yor Island
Tourist Attractions	**Tourist Attractions**	**Tourist Attractions**
1) Songkhla Street Art	1) City wall and 13 ancient forts	1) Lamepho Temple
2) Ban Bon Mosque	2) The black and white stupa	2) Seabass in local cage
3) Machimawas Temple	3) Lob Suea Pavilion	3) Agriculture Farm
4) Red Rice Mill (Hub Ho Hin)	4) Bor Geng	4) Local fabric weaving group
5) Songkhla National Museum	5) Siriwannawat Temple	5) Thaksin Folklore Museum
	6) Phuphu Boek Temple	6) Khaobo Temple
	7) Local Fishing Villages	

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Activities	Activities	Activities
1) Take a tram to see the old town area 2) Taking pictures of Sino-Portuguese buildings	1) Activities to make tie-dye fabric from light mango sap 2) Egg Yolk or Khai Khrop 3) Take a tricycle 4) Local way of life of fisherman	1) Workshop on champada cakes in the garden 2) Made book from fabric weaving 3) Take a long-tail boat ride around the island 4) Workshop in local fishing methods
Local Product 1) Thai style dessert (Thong Ek, Khi Mot, Khanom Krabok, Khao Fang Kuan, Khanom Butu, Sampanni) 2) Local food (chicken curry rice, Southern Thai sweet salad, big Steamed Bun)	**Local Product** 1) Egg Yolk or Khai Khrop (GI: Geographical indication) 2) Light mango (GI: Geographical indication) 3) Dried seafood	**Local Product** 1) Jampadas, sapodillas, durians, coconuts 2) Local woven fabric 3) Seabass 4) Batik

From the uniqueness of destination attractions as above, a travel route and activities for a one-day trip can be determined as follows:

09.00–10.30 a.m. Meet at Songkhla Old Town and take a tram to explore the old town and tourist attractions

10.30–11.30 a.m. Discover the old Thai dessert in Songkhla Old Town. (Thong Ek, Khi Mot, Khanom Krabok, Khao Fang Kuan, Khanom Butu) and Sampanni)

11.30–12.00 a.m. Take a long-tail boat to the Hua Khao Daeng.

12.00–14.00 a.m. Lunch time with local food and local ingredients (Activities to make tie-dye fabric from light mango sap, egg yolk, or Khai Khrop)

14.00–15.00 a.m. Take a tricycle to visit Fort No. 9, Bor Gen Siriwannawat Temple, Phuphu Boek Temple

15.00–15.30 a.m. Go to Yor Island.

15.30–16.30 a.m. Visit the agricultural garden and make a workshop on champedak cakes in the garden

16.30–17.00 a.m. Visit woven fabric, seabass in the local cage, and Yor Island View Point.

17.00–17.30 a.m. Have a safe journey back home.

Therefore, the results identify new tourism routes and activities: Songkhla Old Town can be developed into multicultural tourism routes and activities related to art and local food; Khao Dang into historical tourism routes and activities related to the study of archaeological sites and fisheries; and Yor Island into textile and agro-tourism routes and activities related to handicrafts and organic farms.

Discussion

This study's findings illustrate that Songkhla Province has great potential to become a center for creative tourism, offering a variety of activities that meet the Thai government's strategy for the tourism industry. Based on the findings, new tourist routes and activities can be developed in Songkhla Old Town, Khao Dang, and Yor Island to promote sustainable development and increase the number of tourists.

Songkhla Old Town attracts tourists from all over the world because of its artistic, historical, and food traditions. It offers various platforms for visitors to actively participate in local culture. In addition to improving the travel experience for visitors, creating art-related and food-related events helps promote and preserve the local's rich cultural history. To create a collaborative atmosphere that is good for the community and the visitors, local artists and caterers should be invited to participate in these activities. This will make the more real and captivating experience.

Hua Khao Dang would be suitable for historical tourism because of its fishing tradition and various historical sites. To help visitors understand and value the cultural significance of the local history, we can create routes that promote the study of historical sites. Visitors can experience fishing traditional techniques by participating in fishing-

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related activities. This will make the visitors realize the importance of sustainability.

There is potential for growth in the agro-tourism and textile industries on Yor Island. The island's arts and organic farming techniques can be attained through participation in workshops or farm-to-table events. In addition, activities such as creating markets for organic food and handcrafted clothing can help to support the local economy. The growing trend of responsible and sustainable tourism is well-suited to this site.

The tourist routes and activities recommended in this study aim to promote Songkhla to be a creative tourist spot. Songkhla may stand out from other destinations and appeal to worldwide visitors seeking authentic culture by focusing on sustainable practices. There is the potential for the community to protect its environmental and heritage sites. Tourism is one of the methods that can support economic development. For these tourist plans to be successfully implemented, there must be collaboration between government agencies, business owners, and community leaders. The participation of the locals has the potential to increase the sense of enjoyment and working together.

Conclusion

According to the study, it was found that the creative tourism attractions in Songkhla Province, Thailand, had the potential for development, but there was a lack of tourism, traveling routes, and transportation, especially in Hua Khoa Dang sites and Yor Island. Therefore, this study introduced creative tourism as attractions, activities, and local products of three important areas: Songkhla Old Town, Hua Khoa Dang sites, Yor Island, and the conceptual idea of tourism routes for promoting tourism in Songkhla province, Thailand. These routes are expected to support the Songkhla community market and attract more tourists, thereby increasing local and international income to Songkhla province, Thailand.

Research recommendations

The relevant agencies, both public and private, should come and promote more creative tourism activities in the community, such as organizing events for tourists to participate in activities with people in the community. Organizing exhibitions to disseminate community wisdom and products, as well as publicizing the community to make it more widely known especially the foreign tourist market group.

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TASTING TRADITIONS: INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF MEMORABLE TOURISM EXPERIENCES ON CULTURAL TOURISM IN TERENGGANU

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Abstract

This narrative review investigates the connection between memorable tourism experiences and the intention to revisit, focusing on the challenges and opportunities presented by traditional food in Terengganu, Malaysia. The review synthesizes existing literature to emphasize how cultural and culinary elements enhance the overall memorability of a destination, thereby influencing tourists' decisions to return. Traditional food in Terengganu, renowned for its rich heritage and distinctive flavors, is identified as a crucial factor in creating memorable tourism experiences. However, challenges such as maintaining authenticity, ensuring food safety, and meeting the diverse expectations of international tourists are discussed. Furthermore, the review highlights opportunities to levera traditional cuisine to boost tourist engagement and loyalty through initiatives such as culinary tours, food festivals, and interactive cooking experiences. The findings underscore the importance of incorporating traditional food experiences into broader tourism strategies to promote repeat visitation and sustainable tourism development in Terengganu.

Keywords: Memorable tourism experiences, revisit intention, traditional food, Terengganu, cultural tourism, sustainable tourism, culinary tourism.

1 Introduction

In recent years, the tourism industry has increasingly recognized the pivotal role of memorable experiences in influencing tourists' decisions to revisit destinations. This narrative review investigates the intricate relationship between memorable tourism experiences and the intention to revisit, with a specific focus on traditional food in Terengganu, Malaysia. Terengganu, celebrated for its cultural richness and distinct culinary heritage, offers a compelling case study on how traditional food enhances destination memorability.

The synthesis of existing literature underscores that cultural and culinary elements significantly contributes to tourists' overall experiences and their likelihood to return. Traditional Terengganu cuisine, characterized by its authenticity and unique flavors, emerges as a pivotal factor in creating lasting impressions for visitors. However, this review also addresses issues and challenges such as maintaining authenticity, ensuring food safety standards, and meeting the diverse expectations of international tourists.

Moreover, the review identifies promising opportunities to leverage traditional cuisine as a strategic asset for enhancing tourist engagement and fostering loyalty. Initiatives such as culinary tours, food festivals, and interactive cooking experiences are highlighted as effective means to immerse visitors in Terengganu's rich culinary traditions.

The primary objective of this research is to investigates the connection between memorable tourism experiences and the intention to revisit, with a particular focus on the challenges and opportunities presented by traditional food in Terengganu, Malaysia. The review synthesizes existing literature to emphasize how food cultural and culinary elements enhance the overall memorability of a destination, thereby influencing tourists' decisions to return

2 Literature Review

By integrating traditional food experiences into broader tourism strategies, Terengganu shall not only enhance visitor satisfaction but also promote sustainable tourism development. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural and culinary dimensions intertwine to shape memorable tourism experiences, thereby forming strategies to foster repeat visitation and sustainable growth in Terengganu's tourism sector.

2.1 Memorable Tourism Experiences

Terengganu, located on the east coast of Malaysia, is renowned for its natural beauty, cultural heritage, and rich marine biodiversity. Memorable tourism experiences in Terengganu encompass a diverse range of attractions and activities that appeal to both domestic and international tourists. Tourism experiences are increasingly understood not merely as visits to destinations, but as transformative and memorable encounters that leave lasting impressions on travelers Pearce, P. L., & Lee, U. I. (2005). The concept of memorable tourism experiences has gained prominence in tourism research and practice, emphasizing the emotional, experiential, and psychological dimensions of travel (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

One of the defining features of memorable tourism experiences is observed on their ability to evoke strong emotional responses among travelers. Pine and Gilmore (1999) argue that emotionally engaging experiences are more likely to be remembered and shared, contributing to visitor satisfaction and loyalty. Emotional dimensions such as awe, excitement, and serenity play a crucial role in shaping the perceived value of travel experiences (Chen et al., 2019).

Authenticity is another critical dimension of memorable tourism experiences. Tourists seek genuine encounters with local cultures, traditions, and lifestyles (Kim et al., 2013). Authentic experiences not only provide insights into the host community but also foster a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity and heritage (McCabe & Diekmann, 2015). Destinations that successfully integrate authenticity into their tourism offerings enhance visitor satisfaction and contribute to the preservation of cultural identities (Fesenmaier, D. R., & Xiang, Z. 2017).

Novelty and uniqueness are key factors that contribute to the memorability of tourism experiences. Unique attractions, activities, and events distinguish destinations in the minds of travelers and create opportunities for exploration and discovery (Prebensen et al., 2013). Novel experiences stimulate curiosity and fascination, encouraging repeat visits and positive word-of- mouth recommendations Kim, S. S., Lee, C. K., & Klenosky, D. B. (2003).

2.2 Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism refers to travel experiences that focus on the culture, heritage, arts, and lifestyle of a destination's inhabitants. Unlike conventional tourism, which often emphasizes popular attractions and natural landscapes, cultural tourism immerses visitors in the local traditions, customs, history, and way of life.(Smith, John. "Cultural Tourism: Immersion in Local Traditions and History." *Journal of Tourism Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2020, pp. 45-60).

Cultural tourism in Terengganu, Malaysia, is characterized by its rich heritage, traditional practices, and unique cultural attractions that attract domestic and international tourists alike. (Yusof, N., & Ahmad, N. A. (2018). This literature review elaborates on various significant cultural sites, visitor motivations, and management strategies that contribute to the development and promotion of cultural tourism in Terengganu.

2.2.1 Cultural Heritage Sites and Attractions

Islamic Civilization Park and Crystal Mosque

The Islamic Civilization Park in Kuala Terengganu is a prominent cultural attraction that showcases Islamic architecture, art, and history. Central to the park is the Crystal Mosque, renowned for its crystalline appearance and stunning waterfront location (Abdullah et al., 2018). These landmarks not only serve as religious and cultural hubs but also as educational centers, offering insights into Islamic heritage and values to visitors.

Kampung Cina (Chinatown) in Kuala Terengganu

Kampung Cina is a historic neighborhood that reflects Terengganu's multicultural heritage and trading history. This vibrant area is characterized by traditional Malay wooden houses, Chinese temples, and bustling markets offering local handicrafts, textiles, and culinary delights (Abdullah & Salleh, 2019). Tourists visit Kampung Cina to experience its cultural diversity, explore its narrow alleys, and participate in traditional festivals and ceremonies.

Terengganu Batik and Songket

Terengganu is renowned for its traditional crafts, including batik and songket weaving. Batik workshops in Kuala Terengganu allow tourists to observe and participate in the intricate process of dyeing and designing batik fabrics, reflecting local motifs and cultural themes (Abdullah & Salleh, 2019). Songket, a hand-woven fabric embellished with gold or silver threads, is also celebrated for its craftsmanship and cultural significance, attracting

enthusiasts interested in textile heritage.

2.2.2 Cultural Visitor Motivations and Experiences Cultural Immersion and Authenticity

Tourists are motivated to visit Terengganu for its authentic cultural experiences, including interactions with local communities, participation in traditional ceremonies, and exploration of historical sites (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Cultural immersion allows visitors to gain insights into Terengganu's customs, rituals, and artisanal skills, fostering meaningful connections and appreciation for the region's cultural heritage.

2.3 Traditional food

Traditional food plays a pivotal role in defining cultural identity and heritage within communities worldwide. In Terengganu, Malaysia, traditional cuisine embodies centuries-old recipes, preparation techniques, and local ingredients that reflect the region's rich cultural tapestry. It also serves as a cultural symbol, deeply rooted in Malay traditions and customs. Dishes such as Nasi Dagang, a fragrant rice dish cooked in coconut milk with fish curry, exemplify the region's culinary heritage (Zainol Abidin et al., 2018). These foods are often prepared during festive occasions like Hari Raya and weddings, where they reinforce social bonds and transmit cultural values across generations (Ibrahim et al., 2019).

Beyond cultural symbolism, traditional Terengganuan foods foster social cohesion and community identity. The preparation and sharing of dishes like Keropok Lekor, a fish sausage snack, encourage communal gatherings and strengthen interpersonal relationships (Hussin et al., 2020). Such culinary traditions are integral to the fabric of daily life, promoting unity and a sense of belonging among Terengganu's residents.

Experimentally, Terengganu's traditional foods often emphasize local ingredients and sustainable practices. Seafood-based dishes like Gulai Tempoyak Patin, a catfish curry with fermented durian, provide a balance of protein and essential nutrients (Ridzwan et al., 2021). These foods reflect indigenous knowledge of regional resources and contribute to a diverse, nutrient-rich diet that supports community health and well-being.

Economically, traditional Terengganu foods contribute to local livelihoods through small- scale farming, artisanal production, and culinary tourism. Products like Satar, grilled fish cakes wrapped in banana leaves, attract visitors seeking authentic gastronomic experiences (Zulkifli et al., 2017). This culinary tourism not only supports local economies but also preserves traditional foodways as a valuable cultural asset.

Despite their cultural and economic benefits, Terengganu's traditional foods face challenges such as globalization, changing dietary preferences, and environmental pressures. Efforts to conserve these culinary traditions include promoting sustainable agriculture, documenting oral histories, and enhancing public awareness through educational initiatives (Ahmad & Hashim, 2016). These conservation efforts aim to safeguard Terengganu's culinary heritage for future generations while adapting to contemporary challenges.

2.4 Revisit Intention

Revisit intention, a critical component of destination loyalty and sustainable tourism development, reflects tourists' inclination to return to a destination for subsequent visits. In the context of Terengganu, Malaysia, known for its natural beauty, cultural heritage, and diverse tourism offerings, understanding the factors influencing revisit intention is essential for destination managers and stakeholders. It also known as repeat visitation, is a crucial aspect of sustainable tourism development and destination competitiveness. It reflects tourists' willingness and intention to return to a destination after their initial visit, influenced by various factors such as satisfaction, destination image, perceived value, and experiential quality. (Kim, S., Lee, H., & Klenosky, D. B. 2019)

Revisit intention in Terengganu tourism is influenced by a combination of factors, including tourist satisfaction, destination image, perceived value, service quality, cultural authenticity, and sustainability initiatives. By enhancing these dimensions and implementing effective management strategies, Terengganu can cultivate a loyal visitor base, stimulate economic growth through tourism revenues, and ensure the long-term sustainability of its tourism industry.

3 Methodology

Narrative reviews aim to offer a comprehensive and descriptive overview of a specific topic, such as the challenges encountered in memorable tourism experiences for traditional food in Terengganu. The first step involves an extensive literature search to identify pertinent sources related to "Memorable Tourism Experience toward traditional food in Terengganu." This search encompasses academic articles, books, reports, newspaper articles, and other materials discussing the topic and its associated issues. Online databases and library resources are typically

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utilized for this purpose.

The next step involves setting inclusion and exclusion criteria. The researcher defines criteria for including or excluding sources in the review. For this study, only academic articles published within a specific timeframe or sources directly addressing the challenges of smart technologies in adventure tourism in Sabah are considered. The researcher then extracts relevant information from the selected sources, identifying the issues faced by memorable tourism experiences in heritage food in Terengganu, their causes, impacts, and any proposed solutions or responses.

In narrative reviews, the research design is usually qualitative. The researcher identifies recurring themes and patterns in the challenges faced. This study involves content analysis to organize and categorize the information. The researcher synthesizes the findings from various sources to create a cohesive narrative that presents the issues related to memorable tourism experiences in Terengganu. The review may include historical context, cultural significance, and the broader implications of these challenges on adventure tourism and the local community.

4. Findings

4.1 Challenges

Terengganu, a state in Malaysia, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and traditional cuisine. Nonetheless, despite its potential, several challenges hinder the creation of memorable tourism experiences and the likelihood of tourists returning (Ahmad, 2014; Maguire & Holt, 2022). These challenges include the authenticity of food experiences, the quality of service, and the integration of cultural narratives.

Authenticity plays a critical role in the tourism experience, particularly in food tourism. Tourists seek genuine and unique local flavors that represent the cultural heritage of the destination (Hall, C. M., & Mitchell, R. (2008). However, maintaining authenticity while catering to diverse tourist preferences is challenging (Graham, 2021). The pressure to modernize or adapt traditional recipes to suit international tastes can dilute the authenticity of the food experience (Mak, A. H. N., Lumbers, M., Eves, A., & Chang, R. C. Y. (2012) This challenge is significant as studies indicate that tourists' perceived authenticity of local food significantly influences their satisfaction and intention to return (Fibri et al., 2022; Galstyan et al., 2019). When tourists perceive the food as authentic and reflective of the local culture, they are more likely to have a memorable experience and a higher likelihood of revisiting the destination (Feldman & Wunderlich, 2022).

The quality of service in food establishments is another crucial factor influencing tourists' experiences and their intention to revisit. Inconsistencies in service quality, such as long waiting times, unprofessional staff behaviour, and lack of hygiene, can negatively impact tourists' perceptions (Cai & Alaedini, 2018). High-quality service enhances the overall dining experience, making it memorable (Nielsen & Nielsen, 2024). Conversely, poor service can overshadow the taste and authenticity of the food, leading to dissatisfaction. Ensuring consistent and high-quality service is challenging due to factors like inadequate training, high staff turnover, and varying standards across different establishments (Anggara et al., 2023). A study on the influence of service quality on revisit intention emphasised that positive service interactions significantly contribute to tourists' overall satisfaction and their intention to return to the destination (Soleimani & Einolahzadeh, 2018; Tosun et al., 2015).

In above notion, the integration of cultural narratives into the food experience can enrich tourists' understanding and appreciation of the local heritage (Ishak et al., 2023). However, effectively conveying these narratives poses a challenge. Often, the cultural stories and traditions behind the dishes are not adequately communicated to the tourists (Goodbrand et al., 2021). This gap can be due to language barriers, lack of knowledgeable staff, or insufficient promotion of the cultural significance of the cuisine. Tourists value experiences that offer insight into the local culture, and when these narratives are well integrated into the dining experience, it enhances their satisfaction and fosters a deeper connection to the destination (Rickly & Vidon, 2018). Research suggests that tourists who gain cultural insights through food experiences are more likely to develop a positive destination image and express a desire to revisit (Zhu et al., 2024).

Addressing the challenges of authenticity, service quality, and cultural integration is essential for enhancing memorable tourism experiences and increasing revisit intentions in Terengganu, stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality sectors must collaborate to preserve the authenticity of traditional food, ensure high service standards, and effectively communicate cultural narratives. By doing so, Terengganu can strengthen its position as a desirable food tourism destination, offering tourists a rich and satisfying cultural experience that encourages them to return.

4.2 Future Directions

Future research could delve deeper into understanding the factors that influence emotional responses among travelers and their implications for tourism management and marketing strategies. Focus on developing frameworks or models that account for the complex interplay of factors influencing emotional engagement in tourism. This includes integrating insights from psychology, sociology, and consumer behavior to create a more comprehensive understanding of why certain emotional experiences resonate more strongly with segments of travelers.

Others should investigate how destinations can achieve a balance between novelty, authenticity, and sustainability by understanding visitor motivations across various market segments is crucial for developing strategies that maximize visitor satisfaction and long-term destination loyalty. Furthermore, examining the impacts of novelty on destination management and community well-being will help maintain a sustainable balance between tourism growth and local quality of life.

Comparative studies with other destinations could provide insights into the unique aspects of Terengganu that contribute to tourist satisfaction and revisit intentions. Conducting surveys or interviews with tourists in Terengganu to understand their satisfaction levels, the specific experiences they value most, and how these experiences influence their likelihood to revisit.

Promoting Sustainable Practices by ensuring the availability of traditional ingredients in an environmentally friendly manner by maintaining the authenticity and quality of its traditional dishes.

Terengganu government can navigate the challenges posed by globalization, changing dietary preferences, and environmental pressures while preserving and promoting its unique culinary heritage for future generations.

Table 1. Summary of Challenges and Future Directions of Memorable Tourism Experiences in Traditional Food in Terengganu.

Authors	Issues	Future Directions
(Chen et al., 2019)	The variability of emotional responses among travelers.	Focus on understanding factors influencing travelers' emotional responses and their impact on tourism management and marketing. Includes developing frameworks integrating psychology, sociology, and consumer behavior to better grasp why specific emotional experiences resonate strongly with traveler segments.
(Prebensen et al., 2013)	Novelty and uniqueness alone guarantee memorability and positive outcomes in tourism experiences.	Future research aims to balance novelty, authenticity, and sustainability in destinations by understanding visitor motivations and impacts on community well- being.
(Hassan et al., 2017; Abdullah & Salleh, 2019)	Lack of clarity or empirical evidence linking tourist satisfaction with specific types of experiences in Terengganu to revisit intentions.	Comparing Terengganu with other destinations can uncover unique factors influencing tourist satisfaction and revisit intentions. Surveys in Terengganu explore valued experiences and revisit likelihoods.
(Ahmad & Hashim, 2016).	Terengganu's traditional foods face challenges such as globalization, changing dietary preferences, and environmental pressures.	Promoting sustainability in Terengganu involves eco-friendly sourcing of traditional ingredients to preserve authenticity and quality in traditional cuisine. Terengganu government can navigate the challenges posed by globalization, changing dietary preferences, and environmental pressures while preserving and promoting its unique culinary heritage for future generations

5 Conclusions

In conclusion, the potential for memorable tourism experiences in Terengganu, particularly through its traditional food, is vast and multifaceted. The vibrant night markets, immersive activities in traditional fishing villages, and food festivals provide tourists with authentic and engaging experiences. These opportunities not only allow visitors to savour the unique flavours of local delicacies like "nasi dagang," "keropok lekor," and "sata," but also offer a deeper understanding of the cultural significance and preparation methods of these dishes. Such authentic

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interactions and participatory experiences are instrumental in fostering a strong emotional connection to the place, enhancing the likelihood of tourists revisiting.

Moreover, the success of these culinary tourism experiences in encouraging revisit intentions is contingent on the authenticity, educational value, and accessibility of the offerings. As tourists increasingly seek genuine and meaningful engagements, Terengganu's ability to provide such experiences, supported by effective marketing and infrastructure, is crucial. By maintaining high standards of authenticity and quality, integrating educational elements, and ensuring accessibility, Terengganu can attract tourists and cultivate long-term loyalty. Thus, the rich culinary heritage of Terengganu has the potential to significantly boost the region's tourism appeal, driving repeated visits and sustained interest in its traditional food.

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DESTINATION DISTRIBUTIONS AND MOTIVATIONS THAT INFLUENCE LOYALTY IN STUDYING MUAY THAI AMONG FOREIGN TOURISTS CASE STUDY OF TIGER MUAY THAI SCHOOL PHUKET, THAILAND

1st **Tattanaphich Channa**[1]
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Extended abstract

This research aims to: 1) compare demographics with dedication to learning Muay Thai among foreign tourists, a case study at Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket Province; 2) study the components influencing dedication to learning Muay Thai among foreign tourists, also at Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket Province; and 3) explore motivators influencing dedication to learning Muay Thai among foreign tourists, again at Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket Province. This study utilized quantitative research methods with a sample group of 138 foreign tourists attending Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket Province, selected through convenience sampling. Data collection tools included questionnaires, and statistical analysis involved frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, one-way ANOVA (F-test), and multiple regression analysis, conducted using SPSS software.

Results revealed that: 1) differences in gender and annual income among foreign tourists significantly impacted their dedication to learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket Province, at a significance level of 0.05; 2) components related to attractiveness (X1) and convenience (X4) significantly influenced dedication to learning Muay Thai among foreign tourists, also at a significance level of 0.05; and 3) factors related to physical health and well-being (X2) and self-confidence promotion (X4) significantly influenced dedication to learning Muay Thai among foreign tourists, again at a significance level of 0.05.

Keywords: Destination Attractiveness, Motivators, Dedication, Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket Province.

Introduction

Muay Thai is a martial art that originated in Thailand during the Ayutthaya period. It has a history of being used in warfare and military training, making Muay Thai unique and globally recognized both as a sport and a sophisticated and systematic martial art (Thawatchai, 2012; Benjamad, 2004). Training in Muay Thai not only promotes an understanding of Thailand but also fosters international relationships and cultural exchanges (Muay Thai Institute, n.d.). Studies and research on Muay Thai help build a scientific and technological foundation, leading to the development of effective techniques and training methods (Urairat, 2007). Muay Thai is accepted both nationally and internationally, not only as an intriguing sport but also as a martial art with cultural significance and value in Thailand (Muay Thai Institute, n.d.).

A literature review found that most past research focuses on the motivation to learn Muay Thai creatively, such as studies by A Popa, A Yusof, S Geok (2015), Nuchanart Poolsam (2020), Napapat Choosuwan (2022), and Theerapong Pongphatsakarn (2015). Other areas of study include health and exercise (Phanuwat Srimaka, 2021), marketing factors (Napapat Choosuwan, 2022; Phanuwat Srimaka, 2021; Uma Pornmuninam, 2021; Natthada Srimook, 2019), behavior (V Thongsuk, P Kusolwong, 2023), development destinations (Chaichana Teerasukittima, 2020), and stakeholders in the Muay Thai school business (Thanyalak Hongto, Theerawat Jantuk, 2021).

Research Objectives

1. To compare demographics with the loyalty of foreign tourists in learning Muay Thai, case study: Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket Province.

2. To study the destination components that influence the loyalty of foreign tourists in learning Muay Thai, case study: Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket Province.

3. To study the motivations that influence the loyalty of foreign tourists in learning Muay Thai, case study: Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket Province.

Expected Benefits

1. Provides a case study for Muay Thai school operators in business operations and educational management.

2. Promotes and preserves the culture of Muay Thai.

3. Creates a database and shares knowledge.

Scope of Study

1. **Content:** Study the destination components (attractions, ease of travel, activities, facilities, accommodation services) and motivations (travel, physical health and well-being, location and time, confidence building, new experiences, novelty) that influence loyalty in learning Muay Thai.

2. **Population:** Foreign tourists who come to learn Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket Province.

3. **Area:** Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket Province.

4. **Time:** Data collection between August 2023 and February 2024.

Definitions of Specific Terms

1. **Destination components:** The efforts to acquire knowledge and skills in Muay Thai.

2. **Motivation:** The enthusiasm and determination derived from a passion for Muay Thai.

3. **Loyalty:** The repeated visits for learning Muay Thai, the commitment to respect and maintain the institution, and adherence to the school's regulations.

Literature Review

General Information about Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket Province

History and Evolution of Tiger Muay Thai

Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket Province covers an area of over 9,600 square meters, featuring 12 boxing rings, a 1,000-square-meter mat area, and a full-sized MMA cage. The school includes indoor weight rooms and a yoga studio, with over 40 trainers. Tiger Muay Thai is ranked as one of the best Muay Thai, MMA, and fitness centers in Southeast Asia. The school began by assisting the head Muay Thai trainer in purchasing a small gym, Chalong Muay Thai, and attracting interest from people who saw the Thai boxers and the Thai flag painted on the building. Today, Tiger Muay Thai School and MMA training camp are solely owned and operated with dedication.

Muay Thai traditions and customs are essential parts of Thai culture, carrying significant meaning for both fighters and Thai people:

• **Mongkon:** A headband worn by Muay Thai fighters when entering the ring and before fighting. It symbolizes respect and belief in the fighter's confidence and strength.

• **Tradition and Belief:** Wearing the Mongkon shows respect to the Muay Thai teacher and Thailand. Muay Thai fighters often wear the Mongkon to inspire faith and good fortune.

• **Legend and Wonder:** Muay Thai is a sport with centuries-old legends, from King Mangra fighting against Burmese warriors to Nai Khanom Tom fighting and becoming a hero of the Thai people.

• **Muay Thai as the King's Sport:** King Suriyenthrathibodi of Thailand encouraged the development of Muay Thai and is beloved by Thais as the sport of the king.

• **McClelland's Achievement Motivation Theory (1961):** This theory explores how individuals with a high need for achievement are driven to work toward their goals. Sawatdeechan's (2013) study found a connection between learning Muay Thai and McClelland's theory, emphasizing that the sport stimulates skill development and success. Tourists learning Muay Thai are often motivated by cultural integration, self-improvement, and passion for the sport.

• **Push-and-Pull Theory (developed in the 1950s and 1960s):** Tourism scholars such as Crompton (1979) and Iso-Ahola (1982) explain the reasons tourists travel, distinguishing between:

o **Push Factors:** Internal motivations like the desire for fun, learning, and challenges.

o **Pull Factors:** External attractions like enjoying tourist activities, facilities, competition, and skill development.

Application of Push-and-Pull Theory to Muay Thai Tourism:

• **General Interest:** Tourists typically choose a destination they want to visit.

• **Mixed Interest:** Tourists consider both the destination and available activities.

• **Special Interest:** Tourists define their interests and desired activities before choosing a destination.

Tourist Motivations for Learning Muay Thai:

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- **Cultural and Social Integration:** Connecting with Thai culture and community.
- **Health and Fitness Benefits:** Enhancing physical health and well-being.
- **Rewards and Competition:** Engaging in rewarding and competitive experiences.
- **Skill Development Opportunities:** Seeking to improve skills.

The 5A Model of Tourist Decision-Making: Describes the process tourists use when choosing a travel destination, consisting of 5 steps:

1. **Attraction:**

o Uniqueness of Muay Thai schools: As a popular martial art in Thailand and worldwide.

o Interest and enthusiasm for Muay Thai.

o Suitable training facilities and locations.

2. **Accessibility:**

o Distance and travel routes.

o Transportation facilities.

3. **Accommodation:**

o Nearby lodging to training locations.

o Comprehensive lodging amenities.

4. **Activities:**

o Muay Thai training and learning activities.

o Additional experience-enhancing activities.

5. **Amenities:**

o Facilities at Muay Thai training locations.

o Amenities in the surrounding area.

Intrinsic Motivation Factors for Foreign Tourists Learning Muay Thai:

1. **Interest in Martial Arts:** Attracted to learning unique Muay Thai techniques and forms.
2. **Desire to Train and Improve Skills:** Seeking to train and enhance martial arts skills.
3. **Physical Health and Well-being:** Viewing Muay Thai as a way to improve health and strength.
4. **Desire to Learn and Develop Skills:** Keen on learning and mastering Muay Thai techniques.
5. **Identity and Professionalism:** Considering it a path to becoming a professional in martial arts.
6. **Enjoyment and Pleasure:** Finding joy and pleasure in tourism and martial arts learning.
7. **Cultural Interest:** Seeing it as an opportunity to experience Thai culture and daily life.

Extrinsic Motivation Factors for Foreign Tourists Learning Muay Thai:

1. **Tourism Atmosphere:** The beauty and charm of Thailand as an attractive destination.
2. **Facilities:** Quality and complete training facilities, such as gyms and martial arts centers.
3. **Marketing and Promotions:** Attractive Muay Thai learning promotions and travel packages for foreign tourists.

Impact of Sports Tourism:

1. **Health and Physical Readiness:** Providing opportunities for physical activity and promoting health and physical readiness of tourists (Gibson et al., 2012; Hallmann & Zehrer, 2012).

2. **Experience and Challenge:** Offering exciting experiences and challenges, such as learning martial arts like Muay Thai or engaging in nature activities like mountain climbing or diving (Berlin & Martin, 2004; Kondric et al., 2013).

3. **Skill and Ability Development:** Enhancing physical skills and other important abilities through training and learning martial arts like Muay Thai (Mohammad & Som, 2010).

4. **Social Skills and Relationships:** Creating opportunities for tourists to build new relationships and

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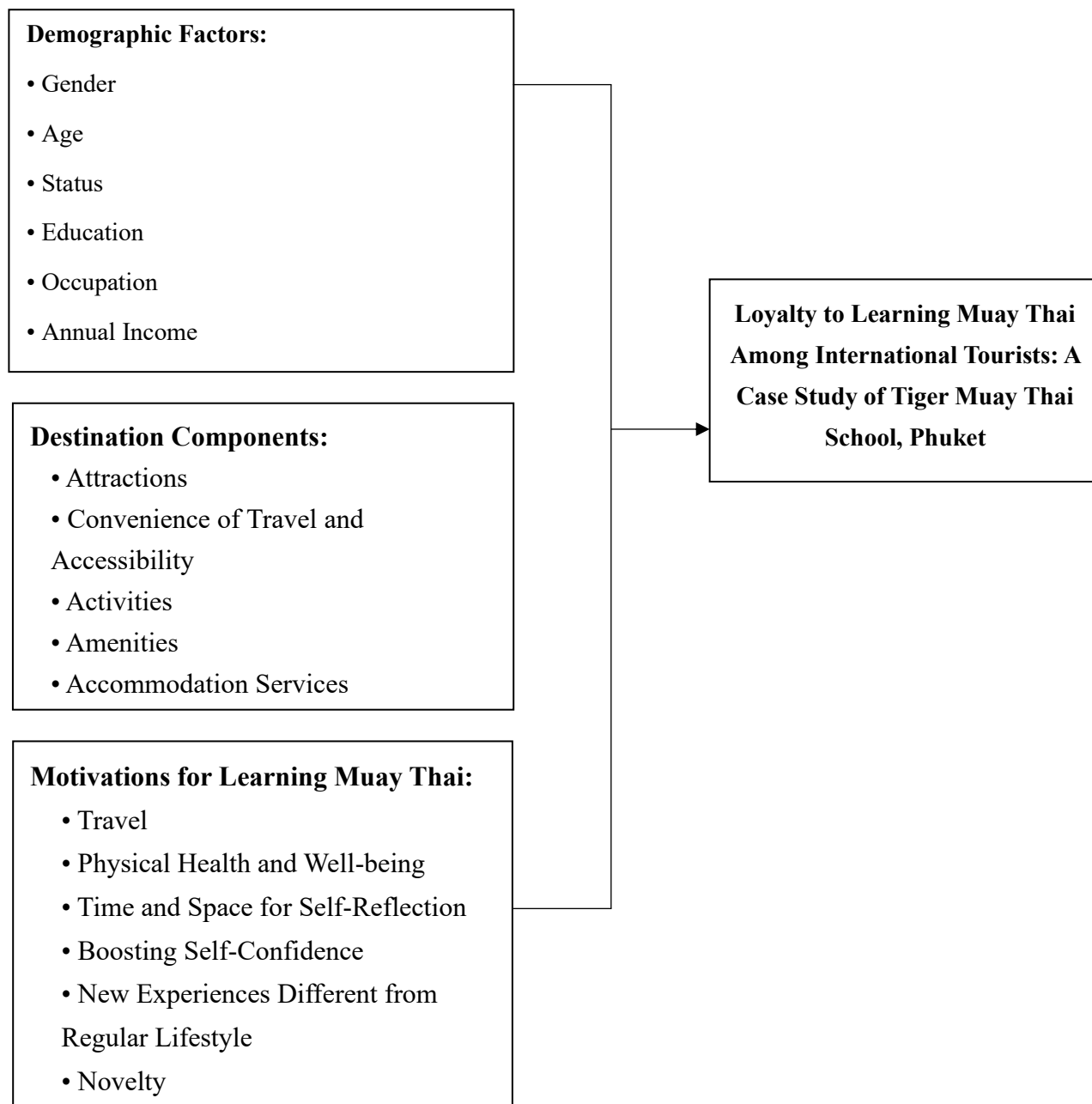Transformative Trends Shaping
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communicate through fun and challenging activities (Suni, 2018).

5. **Cultural and Area Awareness:** Helping tourists understand and discover local culture and traditions, such as learning Muay Thai, an integral part of the local culture (Twemlow et al., 1996).

Research Methodology

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

The study "Destination Attributes and Motivations Influencing Loyalty in Learning Muay Thai among Foreign Tourists: A Case Study of Tiger Muay Thai Gym, Phuket" is a quantitative research that outlines its conceptual framework and methodology as follows:

Demographic Factors:

• Gender

• Age

• Status

• Education

• Occupation

• Annual Income

Destination Components:

• Attractions
• Convenience of Travel and
Accessibility
• Activities
• Amenities
• Accommodation Services

Motivations for Learning Muay Thai:

• Travel
• Physical Health and Well-being
• Time and Space for Self-Reflection
• Boosting Self-Confidence
• New Experiences Different from
Regular Lifestyle
• Novelty

Loyalty to Learning Muay Thai Among International Tourists: A Case Study of Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Research Hypotheses

1. Foreign tourists with different demographic characteristics exhibit varying levels of loyalty to learning Muay Thai at the Tiger Muay Thai Gym, Phuket.

2. Destination attributes influence the loyalty of foreign tourists to learning Muay Thai at the Tiger Muay Thai Gym, Phuket.

3. Motivations influence the loyalty of foreign tourists to learning Muay Thai at the Tiger Muay Thai Gym, Phuket.
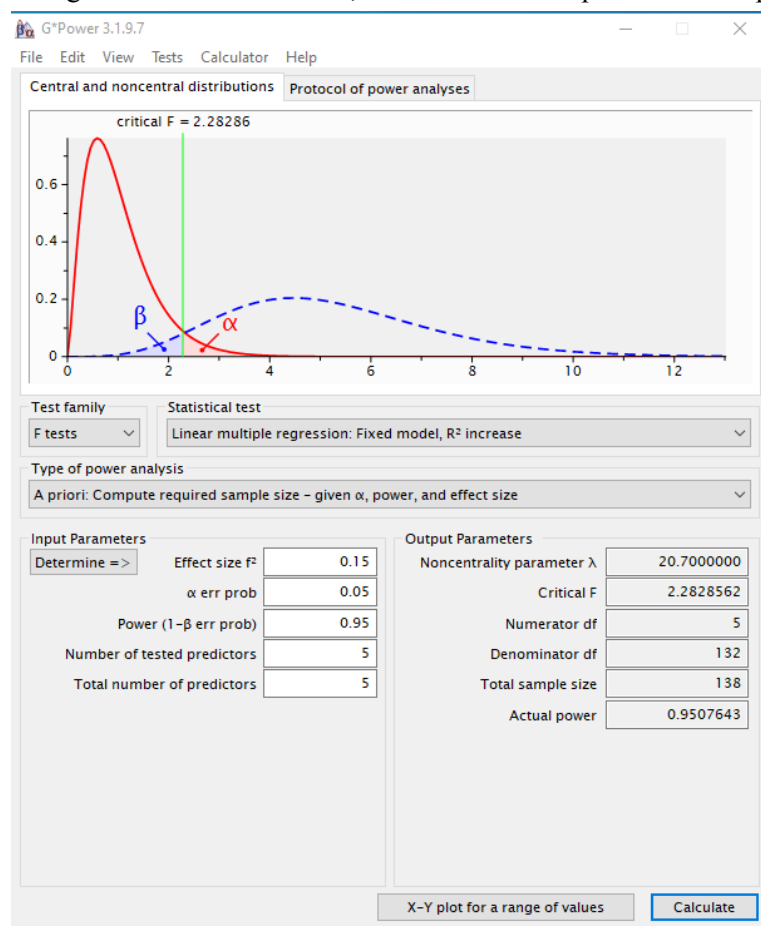
Population

The population includes foreign tourists learning Muay Thai at the Tiger Muay Thai Gym in Phuket.

Sample

The sample consists of foreign tourists learning Muay Thai at the Tiger Muay Thai Gym in Phuket. The sample size is determined using Cohen's (1998) formula for multiple regression analysis. The parameters are as follows:

- Test family: F-test
- Statistical test: Linear multiple regression: Fixed model, R^2 increase
- Effect size $f^2 = 0.15$
- α err prob = 0.05
- Power (1-β err prob) = 0.95
- Number of tested predictors = 5
- Total number of predictors = 5

Using the G*Power software, the calculated sample size is 138 participants.

Research Methods

The study employs the following methods to collect and analyze data:

1. Survey

Data collection through questionnaires or surveys targeting the sample population. The data will be analyzed to identify relationships or summarize interview results.

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2. Observation

Recording data through observing actions or behaviors of individuals or situations.

3. Literature Review

Reviewing existing literature relevant to the study to understand current knowledge and examine previous research.

Research Instruments

The instrument used in this study is a questionnaire designed to collect various data from the sample group. The questionnaire is divided into four parts as follows:

Part 1: Demographic Questionnaire This section comprises closed-ended questions (Checklist) with a total of six items, covering gender, age, status, education, occupation, and annual income.

- Question 1: Gender is measured using a Nominal Scale with multiple-choice questions.
- Question 2: Age is measured using an Ordinal Scale with multiple-choice questions.
- Question 3: Status is measured using a Nominal Scale with multiple-choice questions.
- Question 4: Education is measured using an Ordinal Scale with multiple-choice questions.
- Question 5: Occupation is measured using a Nominal Scale with multiple-choice questions.
- Question 6: Annual Income is measured using a Nominal Scale with multiple-choice questions.

Part 2: Questionnaire on Foreign Tourists' Opinions on Destination Components This section includes questions about various components of the destination, such as attractiveness, convenience of travel and accessibility, activities, amenities, and accommodation services.

Part 3: Questionnaire on Motivations for Learning Muay Thai among Foreign Tourists This section includes questions on travel motivations, physical health and well-being, space and time for self-reflection, confidence enhancement, new experiences differing from regular lifestyle, and novelty.

Part 4: Questionnaire on Loyalty to Learning Muay Thai among Foreign Tourists: A Case Study of Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket This section includes questions on the loyalty of foreign tourists to learning Muay Thai.

Questions in parts 2, 3, and 4 use a Likert 5-point scale for rating opinions, with the following point values:

- 5: Strongly agree
- 4: Agree
- 3: Neutral
- 2: Disagree
- 1: Strongly disagree

The interpretation of the average opinion scores is defined as follows:

- An average of 4.21 - 5.00 means the sample group has the highest level of opinion/loyalty.
- An average of 3.41 - 4.20 means the sample group has a high level of opinion/loyalty.
- An average of 2.61 - 3.40 means the sample group has a moderate level of opinion/loyalty.
- An average of 1.81 - 2.60 means the sample group has a low level of opinion/loyalty.
- An average of 1.00 - 1.80 means the sample group has the lowest level of opinion/loyalty.

The tools used for data collection include questionnaires and observation checklists designed to capture information on destination attributes, motivations, and loyalty in learning Muay Thai.

Variables and Measurement Criteria

The study will define and measure variables such as demographic factors, destination attributes, motivations, and loyalty using appropriate scales and criteria.

Instrument Validation

Ensuring the reliability and validity of the research instruments through pre-testing and expert reviews.

Data Analysis

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Analyzing the collected data using statistical methods to test the research hypotheses and draw conclusions.

Objective and Methodology

The study titled "Destination Attributes and Motivations Influencing Loyalty in Learning Muay Thai among Foreign Tourists: A Case Study of Tiger Muay Thai Gym, Phuket" aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To compare the demographic characteristics with the loyalty of foreign tourists in learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai Gym, Phuket.

2. To investigate the destination attributes that influence the loyalty of foreign tourists in learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai Gym, Phuket.

3. To study the motivations that influence the loyalty of foreign tourists in learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai Gym, Phuket.

This research adopts a quantitative methodology. The sample consists of 138 foreign tourists learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai Gym, Phuket. Convenience sampling is used to select the sample. Data collection is conducted using questionnaires.

Statistical Methods

The statistical tools used for data analysis include:

- Frequency
- Percentage
- Mean
- Standard Deviation
- One-Way ANOVA (F-test)
- Multiple Regression Analysis

SPSS software is employed for data analysis. The results of the data analysis are presented as follows:

Demographic Results of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are analyzed based on their number and percentage, covering gender, age, marital status, education, occupation, and annual income. The details are as follows:

1. **Gender**:
   - Male: 109 respondents (78.99%)
   - Female: 27 respondents (19.56%)
   - Non-binary: 2 respondents (1.45%)

2. **Age**:
   - 31-40 years: 86 respondents (62.32%)
   - 20-30 years: 36 respondents (26.09%)
   - 41-50 years: 14 respondents (10.14%)
   - 51-60 years: 2 respondents (1.45%)

3. **Marital Status**:
   - Single: 91 respondents (65.94%)
   - Married: 37 respondents (26.82%)
   - Divorced: 8 respondents (5.80%)
   - Widowed: 1 respondent (0.72%)
   - Other: 1 respondent (0.72%)

4. **Education**:
   - Bachelor's Degree: 106 respondents (76.81%)
   - Master's Degree: 16 respondents (11.59%)
   - High School or Equivalent: 12 respondents (8.71%)

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o Middle School or Lower: 3 respondents (2.17%)

o Doctorate: 1 respondent (0.72%)

5. **Occupation**:

o Employee: 50 respondents (36.23%)

o Business Owner: 45 respondents (32.61%)

o Student: 19 respondents (13.77%)

o Government Employee/Public Sector Worker: 10 respondents (7.24%)

o Trader/Stock Market Investor: 10 respondents (7.25%)

o Retired: 4 respondents (2.90%)

6. **Annual Income**:

o $25,001-$30,000: 44 respondents (31.88%)

o More than $30,000: 40 respondents (28.99%)

o $20,001-$25,000: 26 respondents (18.84%)

o $15,001-$20,000: 12 respondents (8.70%)

o Less than $10,000: 8 respondents (5.80%)

o $10,000-$15,000: 6 respondents (4.34%)

o No Income: 2 respondents (1.45%)

Study Results on Destination Attributes

From the analysis of the mean and standard deviation regarding the opinions of foreign tourists on destination attributes, both overall and specific aspects, it was found that the overall opinion was at the highest level with a mean score of 4.72. The mean scores for each aspect are as follows:

- **Convenience of Travel and Accessibility**: 4.74

- **Attractions**: 4.73

- **Activities**: 4.73

- **Accommodation Services**: 4.73

- **Facilities**: 4.69

Attractions

The overall opinion on the attractions aspect was at the highest level with a mean score of 4.73. The mean scores for each item are as follows:

- Unique identity of the Muay Thai school: 4.77

- Interesting and exciting experiences at the location: 4.75

- Expectations for the Muay Thai learning experience: 4.72

- Clean, safe, stress-relieving, and comforting environment: 4.71

- Charming and captivating components of the location: 4.70

Convenience of Travel and Accessibility

The overall opinion on convenience of travel and accessibility was at the highest level with a mean score of 4.74. The mean scores for each item are as follows:

- Clear signs to Tiger Muay Thai Gym: 4.76

- Convenient and easy access to Tiger Muay Thai Gym: 4.75

- Convenient public transportation options to Tiger Muay Thai Gym: 4.75

- Central location of Tiger Muay Thai Gym: 4.70

Activities

The overall opinion on activities was at the highest level with a mean score of 4.73. The mean scores for each item are as follows:

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- Variety of activities at Tiger Muay Thai Gym: 4.75

- International recognition and acclaim of Tiger Muay Thai Gym: 4.73

- Alignment of Muay Thai training activities with preferences and needs: 4.72

- Consistency of Muay Thai training activities throughout the year: 4.71

- Muay Thai activities organized for tourists and the local community: 4.71

Convenience Facilities

The overall opinion of foreign tourists regarding convenience facilities at Tiger Muay Thai Gym is at the highest level with a mean score of 4.69. The mean scores for each item are as follows:

- **Nearby Restaurants**: Adequate and suitable restaurants near Tiger Muay Thai Gym (4.73)

- **Information Points for Muay Thai Interested Individuals**: Information points available for those interested in learning Muay Thai (4.72)

- **Spacious Relaxation Areas within Tiger Muay Thai Gym**: Ample space for relaxation and unwinding within Tiger Muay Thai Gym premises (4.72)

- **Adequate Garbage Disposal Areas**: Sufficient garbage disposal areas (4.70)

- **Ample Parking Spaces**: Wide and sufficient parking spaces (4.68)

- **Souvenir Shops**: Souvenir shops selling memorabilia (4.64)

- **Adequate Restrooms**: Sufficient restroom facilities (4.64)

Accommodation Services

The overall opinion of foreign tourists regarding accommodation services at Tiger Muay Thai Gym is also at the highest level with a mean score of 4.73. The mean scores for each item are as follows:

- **Variety and Suitability of Accommodation**: Diverse and suitable accommodation options (4.76)

- **Reasonable Accommodation Prices during Muay Thai Training**: Reasonable accommodation prices during Muay Thai training (4.73)

- **Convenience and Safety of Accommodation**: Convenient and safe accommodation (4.71)

Motivation to Learn Muay Thai among Foreign Tourists at Tiger Muay Thai Gym, Phuket

The overall opinion of foreign tourists regarding their motivation to learn Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai Gym in Phuket is at the highest level with a mean score of 4.72. Here are the mean scores for each aspect, ranked in order:

Overall Motivation

- **Overall Motivation**: 4.72

Specific Aspects of Motivation:

1. **Travel Experience**: Motivation related to travel experiences is at the highest level (4.77).

o Feeling of escaping everyday life: 4.83

2. **Novelty**: Motivation derived from the novelty of the experience (4.74).

3. **Self-Confidence Promotion**: Motivation stemming from the promotion of self-confidence (4.73).

4. **Unique Experiences Different from Normal Lifestyle**: Motivation from new experiences different from normal lifestyle (4.70).

5. **Physical Health and Well-being**: Motivation related to physical health and well-being (4.70).

6. **Place, Time, and Space for Self-Reflection**: Motivation derived from the place, time, and space for self-reflection (4.69).

Specific Motivations by Category:

- **Travel**: Motivation related to travel experiences is at the highest level (4.77).

o Feeling of escaping everyday life: 4.83

- **Physical Health and Well-being**: Motivation related to physical health and well-being is at the highest level (4.70).

o My breathing improves when I practice Muay Thai here: 4.78

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○ I feel motivated when I practice Muay Thai here: 4.75

○ This place contributes to my physical and mental well-being: 4.75

○ I feel calm and relaxed when I practice Muay Thai here: 4.69

○ I feel refreshed when I practice Muay Thai here: 4.62

○ This place suits my developmental goals: 4.62

• **Place, Time, and Space for Self-Reflection**: Motivation related to place, time, and space for self-reflection is at the highest level (4.69).

○ This place allows me to explore myself: 4.76

○ Coming here helps me understand the purpose of living: 4.72

○ I feel like myself and know what I want when I'm here: 4.71

○ I feel that I can do something meaningful for myself here: 4.71

○ I succeed in everything I desire when I'm here: 4.62

○ And I feel free when I'm here: 4.61

Promotion of Self-Confidence:

• **Promotion of Self-Confidence**: Represents the relationship between the motivation to learn Muay Thai among foreign tourists related to the promotion of self-confidence, showing the highest average of 4.73. The order of averages from high to low is as follows:

1. I am more confident when I am here (average = 4.74)

2. I feel that this place will help me recover from unwanted experiences in life (average = 4.73)

3. I have a more positive self-perception after coming here (average = 4.72)

Motivation for Learning Muay Thai among Foreign Tourists at Tiger Muay Thai Gym, Phuket

Experience of New Experiences Different from Normal Lifestyle

The motivation related to experiencing new things different from normal lifestyle among foreign tourists learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai Gym in Phuket is at the highest level with an average score of 4.75. Here are the average scores, ranked from high to low:

1. **Learning About Different Cultures**: Learning how people live in different cultures when I come to learn Muay Thai here (average = 4.75).

2. **Discovery of New Experiences Different from Normal Lifestyle**: Discovering new experiences different from my normal lifestyle when visiting this place (average = 4.69).

3. **Fulfilling Curiosity and Desire to Witness Muay Thai Learning Activities**: I fulfill curiosity and desire to see Muay Thai learning activities when visiting this place (average = 4.67).

Motivation for Learning Muay Thai among Foreign Tourists at Tiger Muay Thai Gym, Phuket

Experience of Novelty and Uniqueness

The motivation related to experiencing novelty and uniqueness among foreign tourists learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai Gym in Phuket is at the highest level with an average score of 4.76. Here are the average scores, ranked from high to low:

1. **Novelty of This Place Helps Increase My Excitement and Sense of Exploration**: The novelty of this place helps increase my excitement and sense of exploration (average = 4.76).

2. **I Am Glad to Discover New Perspectives**: I am glad to discover new perspectives (average = 4.75).

3. **I Feel Excited to Be Here Because It Offers Experiences I've Never Had Before**: I feel excited to be here because it offers experiences I've never had before (average = 4.74).

4. **I Have the Opportunity to Experience Cultures and Traditions That Are Unfamiliar**: I have the opportunity to experience cultures and traditions that are unfamiliar (average = 4.71).

Study of Attitudes Towards Learning Muay Thai Among Foreign Tourists: A Case Study of Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket Province

__Mean and Standard Deviation of Affection for Learning Muay Thai Among Foreign Tourists: A Case Study of Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket Province__

From the study on affection for learning Muay Thai among foreign tourists at Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket Province, it was found that the highest mean score was 4.70, with the following ranking from highest to lowest:

1. **You have memorable stories or good experiences during your time at Tiger Muay Thai School** (Mean = 4.70)

2. **You feel connected to the Thai boxing trainers and related staff** (Mean = 4.70)

3. **You would consider returning to Tiger Muay Thai School to escape the cold weather in your country** (Mean = 4.68)

4. **You have had positive experiences during Muay Thai training at Tiger Muay Thai School** (Mean = 4.60)

5. **You expect to return to Tiger Muay Thai School in the future** (Mean = 4.60)

6. **You are considering visiting Tiger Muay Thai School every year** (Mean = 4.56)

__Hypothesis Testing Results__

Comparing demographics with affection for learning Muay Thai among foreign tourists at Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket Province, statistical tests used include One-Way ANOVA (F-test) for variance analysis and pairwise comparison using Least Significant Difference (LSD).

Hypothesis 1: Foreign tourists with different demographics have different levels of affection for learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket Province.

Sub-hypothesis 1.1:

• H0: Foreign tourists with different genders do not differ in their affection for learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket Province.

• H1: Foreign tourists with different genders differ in their affection for learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket Province.

To compare the differences in affection for learning Muay Thai among international tourists at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket, divided by gender

A One-Way ANOVA (F-test) revealed statistically significant differences at the 0.05 significance level. Therefore, we applied the Least Significant Difference (LSD) method to further examine which specific pairwise means differ significantly

To compare pairwise means of affection for learning Muay Thai among tourists at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket, categorized by gender:

The hypothesis tested reveals that there is a significant difference in affection for learning Muay Thai between male and female tourists.

Hypothesis 1.2

• H0: There is no difference in affection for learning Muay Thai among international tourists at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket with different ages.

• H1: There is a difference in affection for learning Muay Thai among international tourists at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket with different ages.

From the comparison of the differences in commitment to learning Muay Thai among international tourists at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket

Segmented by age, based on the F-test statistics, it was found that there is no significant difference in commitment to learning Muay Thai among tourists of different ages at the school.

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant difference in commitment to learning Muay Thai among international tourists with different statuses at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant difference in commitment to learning Muay Thai among international tourists with different statuses at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket.

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Comparing differences in commitment to learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket by status, based on the statistical F-test results, it was found that international tourists with different statuses do not significantly differ in their commitment to learning Muay Thai at the school.

Hypothesis 1.3

• H0: International tourists with different statuses do not differ significantly in their commitment to learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket.

• H1: International tourists with different statuses differ significantly in their commitment to learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket.

Comparing the differences in commitment to learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket by education level, based on the statistical F-test results, it was found that international tourists with different education levels do not significantly differ in their commitment to learning Muay Thai at the school.

Hypothesis 1.4

• H0: International tourists with different education levels do not differ significantly in their commitment to learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket.

• H1: International tourists with different education levels differ significantly in their commitment to learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket.

Based on the results of comparing the commitment to learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket by occupation, using the F-test statistic, it was found that international tourists with different occupations do not significantly differ in their commitment to learning Muay Thai at the school.

Hypothesis 1.5

• H0: International tourists with different annual incomes do not differ significantly in their commitment to learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket.

• H1: International tourists with different annual incomes differ significantly in their commitment to learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket.

The statistical comparison of commitment to learning Muay Thai among international tourists at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket,

Categorized by annual income, reveals a significant difference (p-value < 0.05). This indicates that tourists with different income levels have significantly different levels of commitment to learning Muay Thai.

Based on the findings from Table 4.23, it can be summarized that there are significant differences in commitment to learning Muay Thai among tourists categorized by annual income as follows:

• Tourists with an annual income less than $10,000 show significantly different commitment compared to those with incomes between $20,001 - $25,000 and those above $30,000.

• Tourists with incomes between $10,000 - $15,000 exhibit significantly different commitment compared to those with incomes between $20,001 - $25,000, above $30,000, and those with no income.

• Tourists with incomes between $20,001 - $25,000 show significantly different commitment compared to those with incomes between $25,001 - $30,000.

• Tourists with incomes between $25,001 - $30,000 show significantly different commitment compared to those with incomes above $30,000.

Summary of Hypothesis 1 Testing:

The study examined the influential factors of destination attributes and motivators affecting the commitment to learning Muay Thai among international tourists at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket.

The statistical method used for hypothesis testing was Multiple Regression Analysis, employing the Enter method for variable selection.

The analysis of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation between destination attributes and commitment to learning Muay Thai among international tourists at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket

Reveals statistically significant positive relationships at the 0.01 significance level as follows:

1. Attraction Component: R = 0.667

2. Convenience of Travel and Access: R = 0.596

3. Activity Component: R = 0.516

4. Convenience Facilities: R = 0.607

5. Accommodation Services: R = 0.516

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

This research reviewed literature on destination attributes and motivation theories of international tourists, including their influence on loyalty to traveling for learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai School, Phuket. The review included electronic databases from both domestic and international sources to identify indicators of destination attributes and motivations influencing tourists' loyalty to learning Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai School.The literature review revealed that destination attributes and motivations affect the decision to travel to Thailand. These can be divided into two types: push factors and pull factors. Push factors include escapism, relaxation, self-esteem, physical fitness, self-fulfillment, self-pride, and encountering new experiences. Pull factors include the attractions of the destination, travel convenience and accessibility, engaging activities, amenities around the destination, and a variety of accommodation services that influence tourists' satisfaction. These factors were used to create the conceptual framework for this study and form hypotheses: push factors influence tourists' satisfaction, pull factors influence tourists' motivation, and tourists' satisfaction influences repeat visitation.

2. Discussion

This study examined the components of destination attributes and motivational factors influencing the loyalty of international tourists to learn Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket. The analysis found that both attractiveness and accessibility factors were significantly positively correlated with tourists' loyalty to learning Muay Thai, with statistical significance at the 0.01 level. Specifically, the correlation coefficients (R) were 0.667 and 0.596 respectively. Similarly, activities, accommodation amenities, and services also showed significant positive correlations with tourists' loyalty to learning Muay Thai, with correlation coefficients (R) of 0.516 and 0.607 respectively, at the 0.01 significance level.

Regarding motivational factors, it was found that travel, physical well-being, experiences, novelty, and uniqueness all significantly positively correlated with tourists' loyalty to learning Muay Thai, with correlation coefficients (R) ranging from 0.323 to 0.616 at the 0.01 significance level.

In summary, attractiveness and accessibility, along with motivational factors related to travel, physical well-being, new experiences, and novelty, are critical influences on the loyalty of international tourists to learn Muay Thai. These findings are essential for the development and management of Muay Thai schools to meet the needs of international tourists in learning and practicing Muay Thai at these educational centers in the future.

Research recommendations

This study on the destination attributes and motivations influencing international tourists' loyalty to learn Muay Thai at Tiger Muay Thai School in Phuket highlights the development of sports tourism, specifically in Muay Thai. Recommendations include enhancing accommodation facilities and services, organizing engaging activities like training sessions and competitions, creating challenging experiences, fostering a conducive learning environment, and promoting local cultural understanding through Thai cultural activities. These efforts aim to enrich tourist experiences and enhance the school's reputation, setting a foundation for future research in this area.

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