

# ADVANCES IN HOSPITALITY & TOURISM MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT (AHTMM) CONFERENCE

*An International Hospitality and Tourism Research Conference*

## CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

**13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and  
Management (ATMM) Conference Proceedings  
June 22 – June 26, 2026**

**Macau University of Science and Technology – School of Liberal  
Arts & Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management  
Macau**

**ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9**

**Edited by  
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**Publisher: Hospitality and Tourism Management Academy**

*All papers and extended abstracts included in the 13<sup>th</sup> AHTMM Conference  
Proceedings were peer-reviewed using a double blind review process*

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ID 3

## RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION OF SMALL TOURISM ENTERPRISES TO FLOOD RISKS IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

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### ABSTRACT

Small tourism enterprises are vital to local economies yet remain highly vulnerable to climate-induced flooding. This study examined their resilience and adaptation to flood risks in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. A mixed-methods design was employed. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires from 184 small tourism enterprises, while qualitative data were obtained through 18 semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while interview data were analysed thematically. Findings revealed substantial revenue losses, booking cancellations, infrastructure damage, temporary closures and reputational impacts. Enterprises adopting proactive measures, including infrastructure reinforcement, service diversification, digital customer engagement, early-warning monitoring and collaborative networks, recovered faster than reactive enterprises. However, adaptation was constrained by limited finance, low insurance uptake and weak institutional support. Integrating enterprise resilience theory with the disaster management cycle, the study demonstrates how absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities shape recovery and highlights the importance of finance, insurance, capacity building and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

**Keywords:** small tourism enterprises; flood risk; climate change adaptation; enterprise resilience; disaster risk management; sustainable tourism.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, with small tourism enterprises (STEs) facing heightened exposure because of their limited financial, operational and institutional capacity. STEs, including guesthouses, bed-and-breakfast establishments, lodges, backpackers, tour operators, craft enterprises and small restaurants, constitute an important component of the tourism economy and contribute to employment creation, local procurement and income generation within destination communities. Enterprise resilience is therefore central to sustainable tourism development, as the ability of individual enterprises to withstand and recover from disruptions influences the productive capacity, service diversity and overall resilience of tourism destinations (Biggs, Hall, & Stoeckl, 2012). The consequences of enterprise failure extend beyond individual business owners to employees, suppliers, households and the broader destination economy. Among climate-related hazards, flooding presents a significant threat to tourism enterprises because it can simultaneously disrupt infrastructure, accessibility, business operations and visitor demand. Increasing exposure to heavy rainfall, sea-level rise, inadequate catchment management and development in flood-prone areas has intensified the risks associated with flooding. Dube et al. (2022) demonstrate that flooding can disrupt tourism infrastructure and transport networks while negatively affecting visitor confidence beyond the immediate period of physical damage. Similarly, Skouloudis et al. (2020) show that the consequences of flash floods for small and medium-sized enterprises extend beyond physical repair costs to include cash-flow disruption at precisely the time when financial resources are required for recovery. These challenges are particularly relevant in South Africa, where the April 2022 KwaZulu-Natal floods caused extensive damage to roads, bridges, water infrastructure and tourism-related facilities, particularly within eThekweni and surrounding coastal areas. Small tourism enterprises are particularly susceptible to such disruptions because they generally possess fewer financial and operational buffers than larger tourism organisations. Larger firms may benefit from diversified assets, formal insurance arrangements, dedicated risk-management capacity and the ability to redistribute operations across different locations. In contrast, small enterprises frequently depend on limited financial reserves and informal coping mechanisms. Mahembe and Mutezo (2025) observe that operational risk management among small tourism businesses in South Africa remains largely informal and reactive, with owners frequently relying on personal resources and social networks. Similarly, Perry, Gumede and Munien

(2024) found that limited working-capital reserves constrained the ability of small, medium and micro enterprises in Cape Town and Durban to withstand prolonged disruptions. This creates an important vulnerability: enterprises that contribute substantially to local livelihoods and destination economies may simultaneously possess limited capacity to absorb and recover from major shocks.

Resilience theory provides a useful framework for understanding this vulnerability. Holling (1973) conceptualised resilience as the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance while maintaining its essential functions, while Folke (2006) extended the concept to incorporate adaptation and transformation. Applied to enterprises, resilience encompasses the capacity to prepare for shocks, absorb their immediate effects, adapt operations during disruption and reorganise afterwards to reduce vulnerability to future events. Importantly, enterprise resilience cannot be understood solely as an internal organisational capability. Small tourism enterprises depend on shared infrastructure, collective destination marketing and governance arrangements that are often beyond their direct control (Luthe & Wyss, 2014). Filimonau and De Coteau (2020) similarly emphasise the importance of stakeholder collaboration in strengthening tourism resilience. Enterprise resilience should therefore be understood as an outcome of the interaction between firm-level adaptive capacity and the wider institutional, infrastructural and collaborative environment.

Despite growing scholarship on tourism resilience and climate adaptation, three important gaps remain. First, empirical research specifically examining tourism-enterprise adaptation to flooding remains comparatively limited, with much tourism crisis research focusing on pandemics, terrorism and economic disruptions rather than hydrometeorological hazards (Ntounis et al., 2022). Second, much of the empirical evidence on enterprise-level flood resilience originates from Europe and other developed-country contexts. For example, Skouloudis et al. (2023) provide important evidence on the preparedness and resilience of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in Greece; however, the financial, institutional and infrastructural conditions differ considerably from those experienced by enterprises in southern Africa. Third, African climate-vulnerability research has often focused on destinations or broader tourism systems rather than individual enterprises. Although Dube and Nhamo (2020) examine the vulnerability of nature-based tourism around Lake Kariba and Mushawemhuka, Fitchett and Hoogendoorn (2022) investigate climate adaptation among tourism operators in Zimbabwe, limited empirical attention has been given specifically to small tourism enterprises facing flood risks in the South African context.

Against this background, this study examines the resilience and adaptation of small tourism enterprises to flood risks in flood-prone areas of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Specifically, the study seeks to: (1) assess the vulnerability of small tourism enterprises to flood events; (2) examine the adaptation and resilience measures implemented before, during and after flooding; (3) analyse the operational and reputational impacts of flooding on enterprise performance and destination image; and (4) identify policy and practical interventions capable of strengthening enterprise adaptive capacity. The study contributes to tourism resilience scholarship by integrating enterprise resilience theory with the disaster management cycle and providing context-specific empirical evidence from small tourism enterprises operating in a flood-prone developing-country destination.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1 Climate Change, Flood Risk and Tourism Systems***

The relationship between tourism and climate change is characterised by both gradual environmental pressures and sudden climatic shocks. Gradual pressures include changing seasonality, rising temperatures, coastal erosion and shifts in the distribution of natural attractions, while sudden shocks include storms, wildfires and floods that can immediately disrupt tourism operations. Gössling and Scott (2024) suggest that the tourism sector has been relatively slow to translate climate awareness into enterprise-level action. This challenge is particularly relevant to small tourism enterprises, where climate risks may be perceived primarily as environmental concerns rather than as direct business risks. Such perceptions can influence investment decisions, as enterprises that recognise flooding as an operational and financial risk may be more likely to invest in preparedness and adaptation measures.

Flooding presents a particular challenge to tourism because its consequences extend beyond physical damage to infrastructure and business premises. Flood events may disrupt roads, water and electricity supply, restrict access to destinations, cause booking cancellations and influence visitor perceptions of destination safety. Consequently, reputational and demand-related impacts may continue after physical infrastructure has been restored. Dube, Nhamo and Chikodzi (2022) demonstrate how flooding can affect infrastructure, accessibility and communities in South Africa. Similarly, de Yta-Castillo, Córdoba Azcárate and Díaz Carrión (2025) highlight the importance of climate resilience within tourism destinations, particularly where perceptions of climate-related risk influence tourism activity. Flood resilience in tourism therefore requires attention not only to physical recovery but also to business continuity, market confidence and destination reputation.

### ***2.2 Resilience Theory and the Small Tourism Enterprise***

Resilience theory originated in ecological systems and has subsequently been extended to social, organisational and tourism contexts. Holling (1973) conceptualised resilience as the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance while maintaining its essential functions. Folke (2006) broadened this understanding by incorporating adaptability and transformability, thereby positioning resilience as more than simply returning to pre-disturbance conditions. From an organisational perspective, this understanding is complemented by the dynamic capabilities approach of Teece, Pisano and Shuen (1997), which emphasises the ability of organisations to sense changes, seize opportunities and reconfigure resources in response to turbulent environments.

Together, these perspectives suggest that enterprise resilience is a dynamic process rather than a fixed organisational characteristic. Resilience involves the capacity to prepare for disruption, absorb immediate impacts, adapt operations and learn from previous experiences in ways that strengthen future preparedness. Biggs, Hicks, Cinner and Hall (2015) demonstrate that resilience may differ between formal and informal tourism enterprises, with flexibility potentially providing adaptive advantages while limited asset protection increases vulnerability. This distinction is particularly relevant in contexts where small and less formalised enterprises constitute an important component of tourism activity.

Learning is also fundamental to enterprise resilience. Blackman and Ritchie (2008) argue that organisational learning following a crisis can determine whether an enterprise simply returns to its previous operating condition or improves its preparedness for future disruptions. Hall, Prayag and Amore (2017) similarly caution against conceptualising resilience solely as a return to a pre-crisis state, since such recovery may reproduce the vulnerabilities that existed before the disruption. For small tourism enterprises, resilience should therefore incorporate absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities that enable businesses not only to recover but also to reduce their vulnerability to future shocks.

### ***2.3 Adaptation Strategies in Flood Exposed Enterprises***

Flood adaptation involves physical, financial and organisational measures. Skouloudis et al. (2020) identify measures such as strengthening infrastructure, elevating equipment, maintaining insurance and contingency reserves, and implementing business continuity planning. Skouloudis et al. (2023) further found that adaptation among small enterprises is influenced by factors such as previous flood experience and access to resources. Similarly, Mushawemhuka, Fitchett and Hoogendoorn (2022) show that tourism operators adopt adaptation measures selectively, particularly where interventions provide benefits during both normal operations and periods of climate disruption.

Communication and collaboration also contribute to enterprise resilience. Effective communication enables tourism enterprises to provide customers with timely information during and after disruptions, while collaborative networks facilitate information sharing and coordinated responses. Van Niekerk (2025) highlights challenges in disaster-risk governance and institutional coordination in South Africa, while Filimonau and De Coteau (2020) emphasise stakeholder collaboration as an important component of integrated destination and disaster management.

### ***2.4 Institutional and Financial Constraints in Developing Destinations***

Financial and institutional constraints can significantly limit the capacity of small tourism enterprises to adopt flood adaptation measures. Mahembe and Mutezo (2025) highlight limited financial resources and challenges associated with formal risk management among small tourism businesses in South Africa. Limited financial reserves can also reduce the ability of small enterprises to withstand prolonged disruptions (Perry, Gumede, & Munien, 2024). Beyond financial constraints, weak institutional coordination may further restrict access to timely disaster support. Van Niekerk (2025) highlights challenges in disaster-risk governance and coordination across different levels of government in South Africa. These constraints indicate that enterprise resilience depends not only on individual preparedness but also on access to finance, insurance and effective institutional support.

### ***2.5 Measuring Enterprise Resilience***

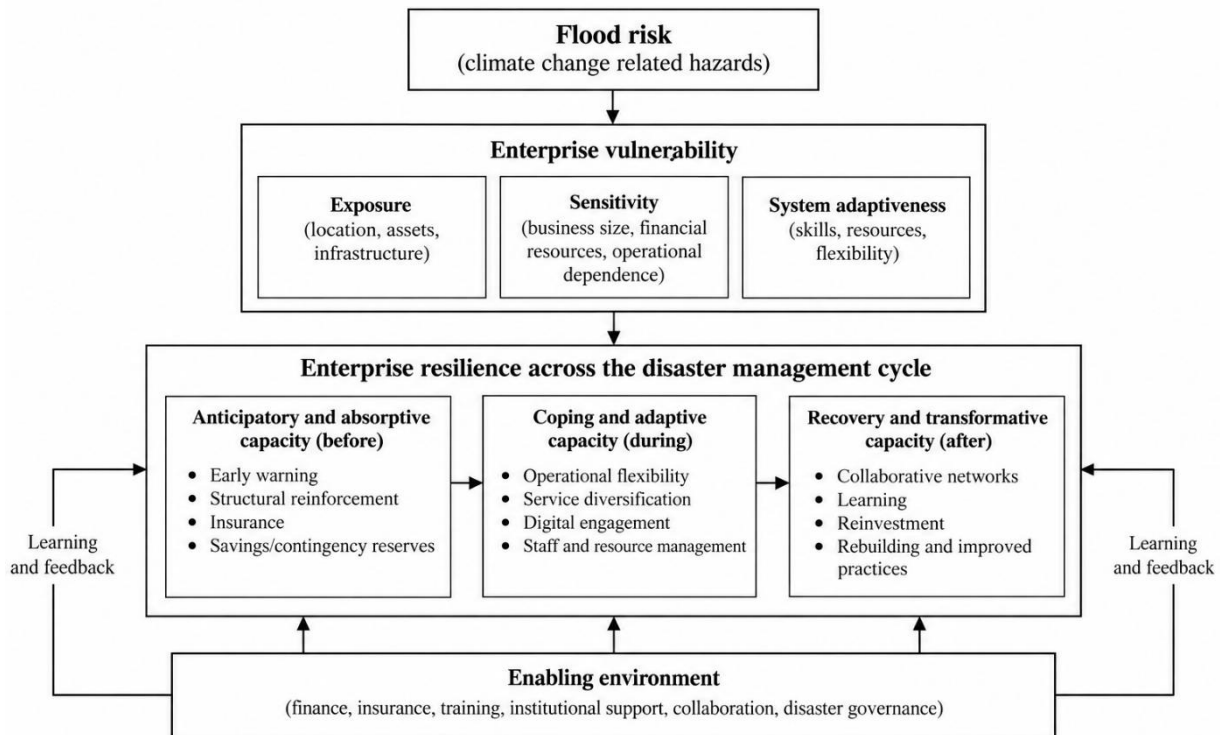
Measuring enterprise resilience remains challenging because it is a multidimensional concept that cannot be adequately captured by a single indicator. Resilience may be assessed through recovery time, preparedness and adaptation measures, and the capacity to maintain or restore business operations following disruption. Calgaro, Lloyd and Dominey-Howes (2014) emphasise that vulnerability and resilience are interconnected and may coexist within the same tourism system. Accordingly, this study assesses enterprise resilience using multiple indicators, including recovery duration, adaptation measures and qualitative accounts of enterprise responses to flood events.

### ***2.6 Conceptual Framework***

Drawing on the literature, this study adopts an integrative framework that views enterprise resilience as a dynamic process across the disaster management cycle. Flood risk represents external shock, while enterprise vulnerability is considered through exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity, drawing on Calgaro, Lloyd and Dominey-Howes (2014). Resilience is conceptualised through three temporal capacities: anticipatory and absorptive capacity before a flood, including early warning, structural reinforcement, insurance and savings; coping and adaptive capacity during disruption, including operational flexibility, service diversification and

digital engagement; and recovery and transformative capacity after the event, including learning, collaboration, reinvestment and rebuilding. These capacities are influenced by the enabling environment, particularly finance, insurance, training, institutional support and disaster governance, while learning from previous events feeds into future preparedness. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework.

**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Small Tourism Enterprise Resilience and Adaptation to Flood Risk**



**Source:** Authors own conceptualisation (2026).

### 3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### 3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, comprising a quantitative survey followed by qualitative semi-structured interviews. The quantitative phase assessed the extent of flood impacts and adaptation practices among small tourism enterprises, while the qualitative phase provided deeper insight into enterprise responses, adaptation decisions and experiences of flood-related disruption. The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence enabled enterprise resilience to be examined through both measurable recovery outcomes and the experiences underlying these patterns.

#### 3.2 Study Setting

The study was conducted in flood-prone tourism areas of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, including the eThekweni coastal corridor, the lower uMngeni and uMlazi river catchments, the South Coast between Amanzimtoti and Port Shepstone, and selected inland locations. These areas were selected because of their concentration of small tourism enterprises and their exposure to recurrent riverine and coastal flooding, including the severe April 2022 floods that disrupted transport, water infrastructure and tourism operations across the province.

#### 3.3 Population and Sampling

The target population comprised owners and managers of small tourism enterprises operating in the selected flood-prone areas of KwaZulu-Natal. For this study, small tourism enterprises were defined as businesses employing fewer than 50 employees and providing accommodation, food and beverage, tour operation, transport or attraction services. Purposive sampling was used to select enterprises that had operated for at least two years and had experienced flood exposure. Of the 220 questionnaires distributed, 184 were completed and returned, representing an 83.6% response rate. From these respondents, 18 participants were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews to reflect variation in enterprise type, location, trading history and adaptation practices.

### 3.4 Data Collection Instruments

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire captured enterprise characteristics, flood exposure and impacts, financial losses, recovery time, insurance access and adaptation strategies implemented before, during and after flood events. Adaptation and perception items were measured using a five-point Likert scale. Semi-structured interviews explored adaptation decisions, institutional support, barriers to insurance, lessons from previous flood events and reputation management. Interviews were conducted in English or isiZulu according to participant preference, audio-recorded with consent and subsequently transcribed.

### 3.5 Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was reviewed by three experts in tourism management and disaster risk reduction to establish content validity and was pre-tested with 12 enterprises excluded from the final sample. Minor revisions were made following the pre-test. The multi-item adaptation scale demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84. Qualitative trustworthiness was enhanced through member checking, an audit trail of coding decisions and independent coding of selected transcripts by a second researcher.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data was cleaned and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to summarise enterprise characteristics, flood impacts and adaptation strategies. Inferential analysis included chi-square tests of association and independent-samples comparisons to examine differences in recovery outcomes according to adaptation posture, insurance status and participation in collaborative networks. Statistical significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ . Qualitative interview data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach of familiarisation, coding, theme development, review, definition and reporting.

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Durban University of Technology Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Enterprise and participant identities were anonymised, and all research data were securely stored and accessible only to the research team.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Profile of Participating Enterprises

A total of 184 small tourism enterprises participated in the survey. Accommodation establishments constituted the largest group (42.4%), followed by food and beverage enterprises (22.3%) and tour operators and guides (15.8%). Most enterprises employed fewer than 10 people, while 55.4% had been operating for more than five years. The sample included enterprises from both coastal (52.2%) and riverine or inland areas (47.8%), providing representation across different flood-exposed tourism settings.

**Table 1** Profile of Participating Small Tourism Enterprises ( $N = 184$ )

| Characteristic           | Category                               | n  | %    |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------|----|------|
| Enterprise type          | Accommodation (guesthouse, B&B, lodge) | 78 | 42.4 |
|                          | Food and beverage serving visitors     | 41 | 22.3 |
|                          | Tour operation and guiding             | 29 | 15.8 |
|                          | Attractions and activity providers     | 21 | 11.4 |
|                          | Transport and transfer services        | 15 | 8.1  |
| Employees                | Fewer than 5                           | 69 | 37.5 |
|                          | 5 to 9                                 | 58 | 31.5 |
|                          | 10 to 19                               | 36 | 19.6 |
|                          | 20 to 49                               | 21 | 11.4 |
| Years trading            | 2 to 5 years                           | 82 | 44.6 |
|                          | 6 to 10 years                          | 61 | 33.2 |
|                          | More than 10 years                     | 41 | 22.2 |
| Location                 | Coastal corridor                       | 96 | 52.2 |
|                          | Riverine and inland                    | 88 | 47.8 |
| Flood events experienced | One event                              | 47 | 25.5 |
|                          | Two to three events                    | 86 | 46.7 |
|                          | More than three events                 | 51 | 27.8 |

*Note.* Percentages are rounded to one decimal place and may not sum to 100.

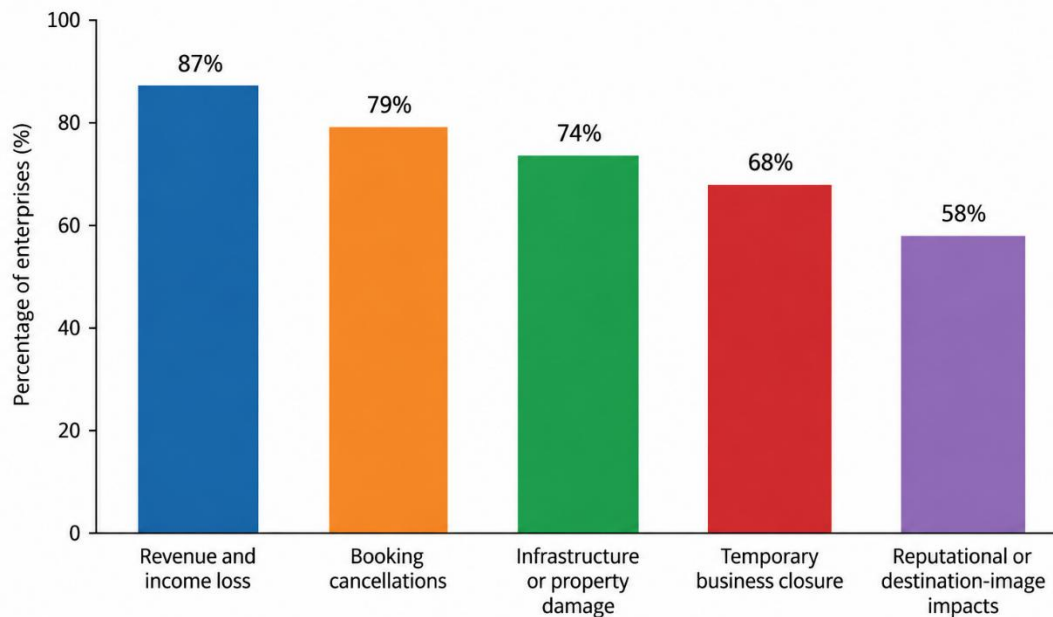
#### 4.2 Vulnerability and Exposure to Flood Risk

The findings indicate high and repeated exposure to flood risk among participating enterprises. Nearly three-quarters (74.2%) had experienced two or more flooding events, while 27.8% had experienced more than three. Vulnerability extended across both coastal and inland locations. Furthermore, 81% of respondents reported operating in known flood-prone areas, while 76% indicated that access roads and utility connections were affected before or alongside damage to their premises. These findings demonstrate that vulnerability is influenced by both enterprise location and dependence on shared infrastructure.

#### 4.3 Operational and Reputational Impacts

Flooding resulted in substantial operational and reputational impacts. Revenue and income loss was the most frequently reported impact (87%), followed by booking cancellations (79%) and infrastructure or property damage (74%). Temporary business closure was reported by 68% of enterprises, while 58% experienced reputational or destination-image impacts that continued beyond the immediate flood event. These findings indicate that recovery extends beyond physical restoration to the recovery of business activity and visitor demand.

**Figure 2. Operational and Reputational Impacts of Flood Events on Small Tourism Enterprises**



Source: Authors' own survey data (2026).

The findings show that flood impacts extended beyond immediate physical damage and business closure. Although enterprises were able to resume operations, recovery of turnover and booking demand often took considerably longer. This suggests that business recovery should be assessed not only in terms of physical reopening but also in terms of financial and market recovery. Table 2 provides further descriptive measures of the severity and duration of these impacts.

**Table 2** Descriptive Measures of Flood Impact Severity ( $N = 184$ )

| Impact measure                                            | Mean | SD   | Enterprises above sector median (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------|------|-------------------------------------|
| Estimated revenue loss per event (% of monthly turnover)  | 38.6 | 17.2 | 44.0                                |
| Days of full or partial closure                           | 16.4 | 11.8 | 41.3                                |
| Weeks to restore pre-flood occupancy or turnover          | 14.2 | 9.6  | 46.7                                |
| Weeks to restore pre-flood booking enquiries              | 11.7 | 8.1  | 43.5                                |
| Estimated cost of physical repairs (% of annual turnover) | 12.9 | 8.4  | 39.7                                |

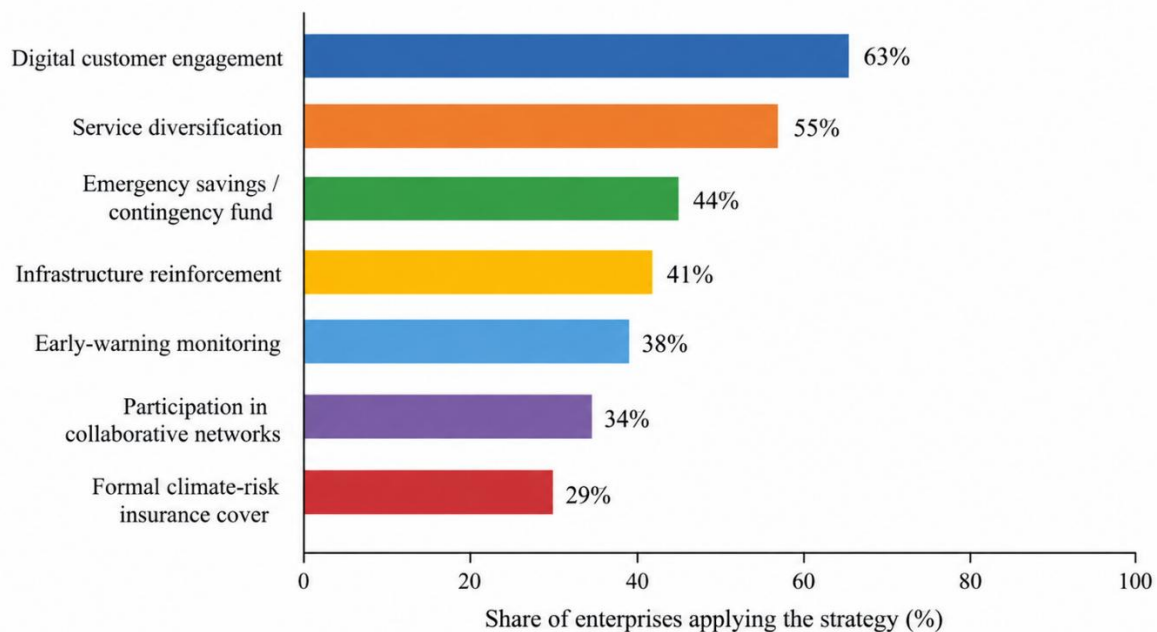
*Note.* SD = standard deviation. Values are self-reported estimates provided by owners and managers and should be interpreted as indicative rather than audited figures.

The results indicate that recovery extended considerably beyond the period of physical closure. Although enterprises experienced an average of 16.4 days of full or partial closure, restoring pre-flood occupancy or turnover took an average of 14.2 weeks, while booking enquiries took 11.7 weeks to recover. This suggests that operational reopening occurred substantially earlier than full financial and market recovery.

#### 4.4 Adaptation and Resilience Strategies

Enterprises adopted a range of strategies to strengthen their resilience to flood disruptions. Digital customer engagement was the most widely adopted strategy (63%), followed by service diversification (55%). In contrast, measures requiring greater financial investment showed lower uptake, with 41% of enterprises reporting infrastructure reinforcement and only 29% holding formal climate-risk insurance. Participation in collaborative networks was also relatively limited at 34%. Overall, the findings indicate greater adoption of accessible and lower-cost adaptation strategies than capital-intensive or formal financial measures.

**Figure 3. Adaptation and resilience strategies applied by participating in small tourism enterprises.**



**Source:** Authors' own survey data (2026).

The distribution is learning-by-experience. Those strategies that take time, attention and existing skills to implement, but do not involve any capital expenditure, have the greatest uptake, while those strategies that involve sustained capital expenditure or access to financial products have the lowest uptake. This finding aligns with the findings of Skouloudis et al. (2023), who found that liquidity constraints place much tighter limits on adaptation than do awareness constraints, for micro and small enterprises. The statement was confirmed by interview data. The overall picture of the respondents was that they were well informed about what measures would limit their exposure and that they were honest that cost was not the problem but affordability.

#### 4.5 Adaptation Posture and Recovery Performance

Enterprises were classified as proactive where they had implemented three or more adaptation measures before their most recent flood event. Based on this criterion, 61 enterprises (33.2%) were classified as proactive and 123 (66.8%) as reactive. Proactive enterprises demonstrated significantly better recovery outcomes, requiring an average of 8.9 weeks to restore pre-flood turnover compared with 16.8 weeks among reactive enterprises ( $p < 0.001$ ). They also experienced fewer days of closure and lower average revenue losses. These findings indicate a significant association between pre-flood preparedness and improved recovery performance.

**Table 3. Comparison of Recovery Performance by Adaptation Posture**

| Recovery indicator                                | Proactive (n = 61) | Reactive (n = 123) | p- value |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Weeks to restore pre-flood turnover (M)           | 8.9                | 16.8               | < .001   |
| Days of full or partial closure (M)               | 9.7                | 19.7               | < .001   |
| Revenue loss per event, % of monthly turnover (M) | 29.4               | 43.2               | < .01    |

| Recovery indicator                          | Proactive (n = 61) | Reactive (n = 123) | p- value |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Holds formal insurance cover (%)            | 54.1               | 16.3               | < .001   |
| Participates in a collaborative network (%) | 62.3               | 20.3               | < .001   |
| Received any external recovery support (%)  | 31.1               | 17.9               | < .05    |

Note: M = mean. Continuous measures were assessed using independent-samples comparisons, while categorical measures were assessed using chi-square tests of association.

This relationship between insurance holding and adaptation posture was particularly high. A higher percentage of proactive companies reported having formal cover, compared to less than one in six reactive companies. It is difficult to determine from the cross-sectional data whether insurance creates a pro-active orientation or vice versa, but it is most likely a bi-directional relationship. The finding is that formal risk transfer is not an alternative to preparedness behaviour but rather groups with a wider range of preparedness behaviour.

#### 4.6 Barriers to Adaptation

Financial constraints emerged as the most significant barrier to flood adaptation, with 78.3% of respondents reporting insufficient capital for preventive investment. Unaffordable flood-insurance premiums were reported by 64.1%, while 59.2% identified weak or unreliable institutional support. More than half (52.7%) also reported dependence on public infrastructure outside their control, and 40.8% indicated that insurance cover had been declined or flood-related risks excluded. These findings suggest that limited adaptation is influenced not only by enterprise-level resources but also by financial and institutional conditions.

**Table 4.** Reported Barriers to the Adoption of Adaptation Measures (N = 184)

| Barrier to adaptation                                          | n   | %    | Rank |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----|------|------|
| Insufficient capital to fund preventive investment             | 144 | 78.3 | 1    |
| Premiums for flood inclusive cover unaffordable                | 118 | 64.1 | 2    |
| Weak or unreliable institutional support                       | 109 | 59.2 | 3    |
| Dependence on public infrastructure outside enterprise control | 97  | 52.7 | 4    |
| Cover declined or flood perils excluded by insurers            | 75  | 40.8 | 5    |
| Uncertainty about which measures are effective                 | 61  | 33.2 | 6    |
| Premises leased, limiting structural alteration                | 54  | 29.3 | 7    |
| Insufficient time or staff capacity to plan                    | 43  | 23.4 | 8    |

Note. Respondents could select more than one barrier, so percentages exceed 100 in total.

#### 4.7 Qualitative Themes

The interview data were analysed thematically, and four themes emerged that provided further explanation of the quantitative findings.

**Living with a known risk.** Participants described flooding as a recurring feature of their operating environment. Some long-established operators had incorporated seasonal flood risk into maintenance, staffing and marketing decisions. Repeated exposure therefore strengthened practical preparedness but also contributed to the normalisation and acceptance of recurring flood-related losses.

**Improvisation under constraint.** Participants frequently relied on temporary measures such as sandbagging, relocating equipment to higher levels, digging temporary diversion channels and using family labour. Although some participants understood the permanent structural improvements required, these were often considered financially unaffordable. This supports the quantitative finding that insufficient capital was the leading adaptation barrier. Similar resource constraints have been reported by Skouloudis et al. (2023), who found that limited financial resources can restrict the capacity of MSMEs to prepare for and build resilience to flooding.

**Reputation as an asset to be defended.** Participants emphasised the use of social media, direct customer communication and photographic evidence to demonstrate that businesses remained accessible or had reopened following flooding. These strategies were used to counter generalised perceptions of destination-wide damage and maintain communication with existing and prospective customers. This finding complements the survey result showing that digital customer engagement was the most widely adopted adaptation strategy (63%).

**The absence of a waiting system.** Participants expressed limited confidence in receiving timely institutional assistance, citing delayed relief processes, documentation requirements, postponed site visits and inconsistent communication. Consequently, some enterprises prioritised self-recovery and continued trading rather than waiting for external assistance. This finding reinforces the importance of governance and institutional coordination in disaster preparedness, response and recovery, as emphasised by Van Niekerk (2025).

Collectively, the themes reveal enterprises that are highly aware of their exposure and resourceful in responding to recurrent flooding but constrained by financial and institutional conditions. The qualitative findings therefore help explain why adaptation gaps persist despite enterprise owners' awareness and experience of flood risk.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management

Conference. June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

### ***5.1 Vulnerability as a Structural Rather Than an Incidental Condition***

The results showed that the vulnerability to flooding of small tourism enterprises is not incidental. Exposure is caused by commercial decisions on where to locate, as being near rivers, estuaries and beaches is exactly what gives these businesses their amenity value. This capitalisation and undiversified revenues result in sensitivity, while limited access to credit and insurance limits adaptive capacity. This setup implies that even awareness campaigns are not enough to solve the flood vulnerability. Gössling and Scott (2024) state that the tourism sector has lagged in taking climate knowledge to enterprise-level action, and the current results indicated that for developing destinations, the challenge is not so much one of knowledge as it is one of lack of access to tools that can be used to respond to knowledge.

### ***5.2 The Temporal Structure of Resilience***

The empirical evidence of the performance gap between proactive and reactive enterprises reinforces the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 and provides empirical evidence of the theoretical difference between absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacity. Companies with minor investments prior to a disaster turned those investments into significantly reduced "closure" times and more rapid restoration of turnover. This is similar to Holling (1973) and Folke (2006) who state that resilience came from the properties of the system prior to the disturbance rather than intensity of response following the disturbance. It also fits the dynamic capabilities argument of Teece, Pisano and Shuen (1997), as the proactive group displayed a sensing and reconfiguring orientation whereas the reactive group did not. Blackman and Ritchie (2008) argue that post crisis learning is the determining factor between restoration and transformation, with the data presented here indicating that the majority of enterprises in the sample were restored, but not transformed, returning to a configuration that put them once again at risk for the next season.

### ***5.3 Reputation, Perception and the Extended Recovery Horizon***

Given the discovery that even after physical recovery, the reputation continued to suffer, its implications are important with respect to the way recovery is measured. In addition to physical loss and repair cost, standard damage assessments include loss of turnover, which is calculated as the mean loss of 14.2 weeks to restore turnover in the survey compared with 16.4 days of closure. In Western Cape, the same asymmetry was noticed by Dube, Nhamo and Chikodzi (2022), and de Yta-Castillo et al. (2025) reported it in Mexico. The potential impact is that the role of the Destination marketing organisations is as important as that of the infrastructure agencies and relief, based on physical damage alone, will systematically underestimate the losses suffered by the small operators.

### ***5.4 Digital Engagement as an Accessible Adaptive Resource***

Adopting digital customer engagement is a choice made by many companies compared to capital heavy options and this suggests that there is a resource that is truly available to resource limited companies. Operators utilized direct channels to prove that they were trading, to correct generalised damage stories, and to keep relationships with some previous visitors. This is a low-cost lever that can be shown to affect the reputational portion of loss. It is not, however, a replacement for physical and financial preparedness. Digital communication does not eliminate the need for a demand recovery period, but it does reduce the time required, and an excessive reliance on digital communication can lead to the restoration without structural change noted above.

### ***5.5 Collaboration and the Limits of Individual Preparedness***

The relational approach to resilience (Luthe & Wyss, 2014) and the argument on stakeholder collaboration (Filimonau & De Coteau, 2020) were strongly supported by participation in collaborative networks, as faster recovery was strongly associated with that participation. Networks shared the costs of early warning, assisted each other in closing and facilitated group communication with markets and authorities. This is one of the more manageable intervention points for policy, as only 34 per cent of enterprises were in such networks, and these do not require significant capital transfers but instead coordination and facilitation.

### ***5.6 Institutional Support and Governance***

The theme of waiting for a system that does not come is like that presented by van Niekerk (2025) in the governance analysis of disaster response in South Africa where they argue that the lack of clarity of responsibility between spheres of government causes uneven disaster response. A similar finding was made by Perry, Gumede and Munien (2024) who found that small businesses in Cape Town and Durban were not adequately supported during the long disruptions. The present results complement this literature by revealing the influence of the expectation of institutional absence as a factor that makes operators act in a self-reliant way, which is commendable in terms of resourcefulness but suboptimal in terms of the efficient use of resources, as each operator individually incurs costs that could be shared.

### ***5.7 Theoretical and Practical Contribution***

The study contributes to tourism resilience research by examining small tourism enterprises as the unit of analysis and operationalising resilience across different stages of flood disruption in a developing-country context. The findings provide empirical support for understanding resilience through anticipatory and absorptive capacity before a flood, coping and adaptive capacity during disruption, and recovery and transformative

capacity afterwards. Practically, the findings reveal a mismatch between awareness of flood risk and the capacity to implement more resource-intensive adaptation measures. Limited finance, insurance accessibility and institutional support appear to constrain adaptation despite substantial awareness and experience of flooding. Enterprise resilience should therefore be understood as an interaction between enterprise-level adaptive capacity and the wider financial, institutional and infrastructural enabling environment.

## 6 LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has several limitations. First, it was confined to KwaZulu-Natal, and the findings may not be generalisable to tourism enterprises operating under different climatic, institutional and economic conditions. Second, financial losses and recovery periods were self-reported and were not independently audited, creating the possibility of recall and estimation error. Third, the cross-sectional design identifies associations but cannot establish causality. Finally, purposive sampling strengthened the relevance of participating enterprises to the research problem but limits statistical generalisation to the wider population. Future research should employ longitudinal designs that follow enterprises across multiple flood events and compare flood-exposed tourism destinations across South Africa and southern Africa. Further research could also evaluate specific resilience interventions, including early-warning partnerships, collaborative business networks and appropriate climate-risk financing mechanisms.

## 7 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the vulnerability, resilience and adaptation of small tourism enterprises to flood risk in KwaZulu-Natal. The findings demonstrate that these enterprises experience repeated flood exposure to the consequences extending beyond physical damage to include revenue losses, booking cancellations, temporary closure and prolonged market recovery. Importantly, proactive enterprises reported shorter closure periods, lower revenue losses and faster recovery than reactive enterprises.

The findings further show that enterprises tend to adopt more accessible adaptation measures, particularly digital customer engagement and service diversification, while uptake of infrastructure reinforcement, collaborative networks and formal climate-risk insurance remains comparatively limited. Financial constraints, insurance affordability and weak institutional support emerged as major barriers. Resilience should therefore be understood as the outcome of an interaction between enterprise-level adaptive capacity and the wider financial, institutional and infrastructural enabling environment. Based on the findings, four recommendations are proposed:

Improve access to adaptation finance. Government and development finance institutions should consider accessible financing mechanisms for small tourism enterprises to invest in floodproofing, drainage improvements, equipment protection and other preventive measures.

Improve access to appropriate climate-risk insurance. Insurers, tourism industry bodies and relevant public institutions should explore affordable insurance arrangements appropriate to the financial and risk profiles of small tourism enterprises. Innovative approaches, including group-based or parametric products, could be investigated rather than presented as proven solutions from this study.

Strengthen enterprise preparedness and capacity building. Tourism authorities and training institutions should provide practical support in flood-risk assessment, business continuity planning, early-warning preparedness and digital communication for post-disaster market recovery.

Strengthen multi-stakeholder collaboration. Municipal disaster management structures, destination management organisations, tourism associations and small enterprises should establish stronger mechanisms for sharing early-warning information, coordinating post-flood destination communication and improving access to recovery information and support.

Overall, strengthening the resilience of small tourism enterprises requires moving beyond repeated post-disaster restoration towards anticipatory adaptation, learning and longer-term transformation. This aligns with Folke's (2006) conceptualisation of resilience as involving the capacity to absorb disturbance, adapt and reorganise in response to change. Folke (2006) – Resilience: The emergence of a perspective for social ecological systems analyses

Given the economic and livelihood importance of small tourism enterprises, strengthening their adaptive capacity should form an integral part of climate-resilient tourism development and disaster risk management in flood-exposed destinations.

## DECLARATIONS

### *Ethics approval*

The institutional research ethics committee (IREC) of the Durban University of Technology (DUT) granted ethical clearance and all participants signed informed consent forms.

### *Conflict of interest*

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management  
Conference. June 22 – June 26, 2026  
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ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

The author declares no conflict of interest.

### **Funding**

This research was not funded by any specific grant from the public, commercial or not for profit sectors.

### **Data availability**

Anonymised data supporting the findings of this study are available from the author on reasonable request.

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ID 10

# EMOTIONAL CONSTRUCTION IN MOTION: A STUDY ON THE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES AND INFLUENCING MECHANISMS OF TRAVELERS ALONG NATIONAL HIGHWAY 219

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the emotional experiences and influencing mechanisms of long-distance road travelers within the context of mobility in extreme geographical environments, using China's National Highway G219 as a case study. Adopting a multimodal analysis approach combining text and images, this study utilized Python web crawling techniques to collect 67 travelogues and 7,789 photographs. Regarding textual analysis, the TF-IDF algorithm was employed to extract high-frequency keywords, Gephi software was used to construct social semantic networks, and sentiment scores were calculated based on the Dalian University of Technology (DUTIR) Sentiment Lexicon Ontology. For visual analysis, the Apriori algorithm was applied to identify co-occurrence patterns of photo tags, and a Python-based Color Extraction and Analysis Tool (CEAT) was utilized in conjunction with Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions to map the relationship between color and sentiment. The findings indicate the following: First, emotional experiences on G219 are not generated at a single static moment but fluctuate continuously in response to changes in altitude, road conditions, and physical load. In this high-intensity environment, physical discomfort is not a purely negative experience; rather, the act of overcoming physical limits facilitates the generation of awe and a sense of achievement, thereby imbuing the journey with profound significance. Second, the visual experience presents a dual structure where "austerity" and "fervor" coexist. Natural landscapes dominated by neutral tones (black, white, and grey) create an atmosphere of austerity and awe, fostering traveler introspection; conversely, national symbols represented by the color red form a sharp contrast against the borderland backdrop, channeling individual emotions toward a collective sense of national identity. Third, emotion is the product of the interplay between the mobile subject, heterogeneous spaces, and social interactions. Private embodied emotions are transformed into socialized collective memories through social sharing, which subsequently consolidates self-identity, reinforces place attachment, and deepens national identity. Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by enriching the framework of emotion research from a mobilities perspective and extending the application of color-emotion analysis within tourism studies.

**Keywords:** Emotional Experience; Long-distance Road Trip; Content Analysis; Color-Emotion Analysis Influence Mechanism

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ID 11

**RESEARCH ON THE IMPACT OF TOURISTS' COLLECTIVE MEMORY AT THE ANTI-JAPANESE WAR MEMORIAL ON NATIONAL IDENTITY: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF MIXED EMOTIONS AND THE MODERATING ROLE OF CONSTRUAL LEVEL**

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**ABSTRACT**

Based on a literature review, this study employs theories such as social identity, construal level, and intergenerational differences to construct a process model of the influence of national identity among visitors to the Anti-Japanese War Memorial Hall. Currently, there are three main issues in the research on red tourism regarding the formation mechanism of national identity that deserve deep consideration: First, the process by which collective memory influences national identity in the context of tourism has not been adequately revealed. Second, there is a clear phenomenon of mixed emotions in the process of shaping national identity through red tourism, but current research is mostly limited to single positive or negative emotions, with insufficient exploration and attention to mixed emotions. Third, there are intergenerational differences in national identity, but whether these differences are significant or weakened in the context of tourism remains to be seen. Based on data collected from three offline surveys and questionnaires, and using software such as SPSS26.0, AMOS26.0, and STATA17.0, this study adopts a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to specifically analyze the influence of national identity among visitors to the Anti-Japanese War Memorial Hall. The findings reveal that visitors have distinct phenomena of collective memory perception, mixed emotion generation, and national identity reinforcement. Collective memory has a significant positive impact on national identity, and mixed emotions play a mediating role in this process, with a mediating effect of 28%. The construal level also plays a positive moderating role, and when the construal level is higher, the influence of collective memory on national identity and mixed emotions is relatively stronger. Therefore, it is suggested that the Anti-Japanese War Memorial Hall establish memory sharing, focus on emotional experience, optimize narrative methods, and reduce negative impacts. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its recognition that red tourism, as a non-pleasurable experience, is essentially a process of "memory retrieval". Directly examining the influence of visitors' collective memory can more effectively identify the national identity effect of red tourism. Additionally, it further explores the "U"-shaped relationship between mixed emotions and national identity, finding that in the context of the Anti-Japanese War Memorial Hall, the relationship between visitors' mixed emotions and national identity mainly shows a positive linear trend, presenting a slightly inverted "U"-shaped left branch form. Furthermore, it applies the construal level theory to red tourism.

**Keywords:** Anti-Japanese War Memorial Hall; National Identity; Collective Memory; Mixed Emotions; Intergenerational Differences

ID 13

**CAN ESG PERFORMANCE ENHANCE TOURISM COMPANIES' COMPETITIVENESS?**Jing Ma  
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and

Pan Wu  
NanKai University**ABSTRACT**

Harmonizing environmental protection and economic efficiency is crucial to the tourism industry's sustainable development. Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices constitute a key path through which tourism companies can build long-term competitiveness. This paper explores the impact of ESG performance on tourism companies' competitiveness and this role's underlying mechanisms using a sample of listed tourism companies in China from 2009 to 2023. Findings show that overall ESG performance promoted firms' competitiveness, with significant positive effects at the social (S) and corporate governance (G) levels and negative effects at the environmental (E) level. Internal control quality mediated enhancements in ESG performance and competitiveness; financial constraints positively moderated these outcomes. Heterogeneity analysis revealed ESG's competitiveness-enhancing effect to be more significant in state-owned enterprises, companies in eastern China, and smaller firms.

**Keywords:** ESG performance; corporate competitiveness; tourism companies; internal control; financial constraints

ID 17

# UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN AR/VR-ENABLED HOTELS: A DATA-DRIVEN EVALUATION OF IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE VALUE

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## ABSTRACT

The rapid development of immersive technologies has made Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) important tools for improving customer experiences in the hotel industry. However, even though AR/VR technologies have strong potential, there is still limited empirical evidence on how they influence actual customer satisfaction in real hotel operations. This study addresses this gap by examining how immersive, technology-supported hotel experiences affect satisfaction, and by identifying which dimensions of experiential value have the strongest impact. A mixed-method approach was used, combining theoretical insights from technology acceptance and customer experience research with large-scale empirical data from real guest feedback. A dataset of 1,063 Trip.com reviews from guests who interacted with AR/VR-enhanced hotel services was analyzed using sentiment analysis and multiple regression to evaluate how five experiential value dimensions—functional, economic, situational, emotional, and social—predict overall satisfaction.

The regression results show that all five dimensions make significant contributions to satisfaction at the  $p < 0.01$  level, but their effects differ in magnitude. Social value is the strongest predictor ( $\beta = 0.309$ ), followed by situational value ( $\beta = 0.251$ ), functional value ( $\beta = 0.203$ ), emotional value ( $\beta = 0.198$ ), and economic value ( $\beta = 0.151$ ). The high explanatory power of the model ( $R^2 = 0.941$ ) indicates that immersive technologies play an important role in shaping customer evaluations in hotel settings. These findings challenge the traditional focus on utilitarian factors that is common in technology adoption research, and instead highlight the importance of experiential elements that are hedonic, symbolic, and socially oriented. Therefore, the theoretical contributions include an extension of the Technology Acceptance Model, showing that enjoyment, immersion, and social interaction are more influential than perceived usefulness and ease of use in AR/VR environments, as well as a refinement of Customer Experience Theory by emphasizing the roles of emotional connection, atmospheric engagement, and digital-social behaviors.

From a managerial perspective, this study offers a staged set of recommendations for the effective implementation of AR/VR. In the short term, hotels should improve immersive previews and interactive features to reduce uncertainty during booking and increase guests' confidence in their decisions. In the medium term, investments should focus on enhancing social-sharing functions, staff training, and the design of experiences across multiple touchpoints. Looking ahead, the integration of artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, and personalized immersive content is expected to strengthen service seamlessness, emotional engagement, and long-term customer loyalty. Addressing cost concerns, technical readiness, and privacy issues remains essential for sustainable adoption.

Overall, this research provides one of the first empirical examinations of AR/VR-driven satisfaction based on real hotel guest experiences. It offers strong evidence that immersive technologies create value beyond novelty and can serve as strategic tools for reshaping service design, strengthening emotional and social connections, and driving competitive differentiation in an increasingly digital hospitality environment.

## ID 19

**A CO-CREATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR REGIONAL REVITALIZATION THROUGH INDUSTRY–  
ACADEMIA COLLABORATION: A CASE STUDY OF AN AIRLINE–UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP  
TO ATTRACT FOREIGN TOURISTS**

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## ABSTRACT

In Japan, regional airports and their surrounding areas face structural challenges such as population decline and industrial decline, highlighting the urgency of revitalizing the regional economy through inbound tourism. This research, conducted as an industry-academia collaboration project, examines the mechanisms for sustainable tourism product development and regional issue resolution. Qualitative multi-case studies in three regions identify three key factors for successful regional tourism innovation: asset reconfiguration, student-driven experiential cocreation, and intercultural translation. This study proposes a “regional cocreation tourism innovation framework” where industry, academia, and local communities collaborate organically and discusses its effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Regional Revitalization, Industry-Academia Collaboration, Tourism Innovation, Cocreation, Regional Airports

## INTRODUCTION

Regional airports are key nodes for passenger and cargo flows within the broader transportation network that also function as vital gateways that stimulate local economic circulation. However, many regional airport areas are facing a negative feedback loop involving their diminishing appeal as tourist destinations because of rapid population aging and decreasing birth rates, coupled with the decline of local industries. This has directly led to a reduction in airline passengers, ultimately threatening the viability of routes. The decline of local communities has directly diminished aviation demand. To address this structural challenge, the Tohoku branch of Japan Airlines (JAL), guided by the principle that “sustainable airline growth cannot exist without regional community development,” has partnered with local governments and tourism associations to promote regional products and tourism.

However, relying exclusively on traditional bilateral partnerships involving companies and local governments often generates a one-size-fits-all approach to entrenched problems, with innovation frequently failing to materialize. Hence, this research adopts a more multifaceted and multidimensional perspective to regional revitalization by integrating the educational and research functions of “universities” into these corporate initiatives. Its primary objective is to construct a “cocreative regional tourism innovation” model that integrates airlines’ extensive network and business infrastructure, the potential tourism resources of local

communities (municipalities, farmers, destination management organizations [DMOs]), and the academic expertise and student creativity of universities. It further examines the effectiveness of this model.

This study analyzes practical project cases in which region-specific challenges are addressed in the field areas surrounding airports served by JAL in the Tohoku region: Natori City (Miyagi Prefecture), Higashine City and Tendo City (Yamagata Prefecture), and Hachinohe City (Aomori Prefecture). Specifically, it examines students' interventions and attempts at redefining resources to address distinct challenges including "transit bypassing" at airport locations, "labor shortages" in agriculture, and "information dissemination gaps" in inbound tourism. Through these analyses, this study derives a "cocreative regional tourism innovation framework," a universal revitalization model independent of regional characteristics.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The advent of the knowledge-based society has led to strong expectations among universities to fulfill a "third mission" of social contribution alongside education and research (Etzkowitz, 2003). Particularly in Japan, where declining birthrates, aging populations, and depopulation are occurring simultaneously, universities are anticipated to serve as core hubs for regional economic revitalization. The government's regional revitalization policy highlights the tourism industry as a key driver of regional economies, but many regions face a shortage of specialized personnel within DMOs and a lack of strategic management, among other challenges. In this context, integrating universities' intellectual and human resources into regional tourism has become a critical policy issue for regional survival, extending beyond mere educational activities.

The classic framework for industry-academia collaboration is Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff's (2000) "triple helix" (industry-academia-government) model, which has primarily been used to analyze patents and technology transfer within the STEM fields. However, in Japan, despite the establishment of institutional frameworks (such as the TLO Act), many joint research projects are stuck at the basic research stage, failing to achieve commercialization. Studies continue to observe the persistent problem of the "valley of death" (Motohashi, 2005). Particularly in the tourism sector, where the design of historical culture and experiences is more crucial than physical technology, stakeholders are constrained in directly applying the traditional technology transfer model.

Recent years, primarily within European innovation research, have seen the proposal of the "quadruple helix" model, which incorporates citizens and users as the fourth actor (Carayannis & Campbell, 2009). This model views tourist destinations as "living labs" and defines innovation not as something developed in isolation by companies and universities but as something that emerges through social interactions among local residents and travelers. Goddard et al.'s (2016) concept of the "civic university" also posits that universities should commit not only to global competition but also to the resolution of local challenges (place-based approach).

The "S-D logic" (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), a paradigm shift in marketing research, has also significantly influenced tourism studies. This perspective argues that value is not unilaterally provided by the firm but is contextually "cocreated" by the customer (tourist) using local resources. Zatori et al. (2018) and Campos et al. (2018) demonstrated that tourists' active participation is the source of memorable tourism experiences. Therefore, the key to success for tourism developed through industry-academia collaboration lies not merely in "students creating tours" but also in how effectively the interaction between tourists and local residents can be designed.

Industry-academia collaboration within tourism has confronted unique barriers. Solnet et al. (2007) identified a fundamental expectation gap: although the tourism industry views students as "immediately employable" workers with a short-term perspective, academia prioritizes "critical thinking and theory." Furthermore, small and medium-sized tourism businesses in the region often view university research outcomes as "not practical for real-world application."

## RESEARCH SUBJECTS AND METHODOLOGY

The selection of survey subjects and cases focused on the areas surrounding major airports in the Tohoku region where JAL operates. Viewed as "hubs for regional revitalization activities," these airports aim to address common regional challenges faced by their surrounding areas, such as labor shortages, the mere passing through of tourists, and difficulties in attracting inbound tourists. This study also adopted a qualitative, multi-case study approach to capture phenomena from multiple viewpoints and deeply immerse in the context. The three cases selected for analysis were (1) Yamagata Airport (Higashine City, Tendo City), (2) Sendai Airport (Natori City), and (3) Aomori & Misawa Airport (Hachinohe City), which were chosen because JAL's Tohoku branch had already been engaged in regional revitalization activities there, and these airports served as comparable pioneering models of industry-academia collaboration. To prevent subjective interpretation bias and enhance the validity of findings, data were gathered via triangulation between semi-structured interviews, participant

observation, and the collection of relevant materials. The specific field survey and data collection processes are as follows:

1. Yamagata Airport (Higashine City, Tendo City): A total of 12 university students participated in a field survey from June 13 to 14, 2025. The current situation and challenges were described through interviews with cherry farmers. Participant observation, conducted during harvest experience activities, involved recording interactions between the student participants and local residents.

2. Aomori Airport and Misawa Airport (Hachinohe City): On September 8, 2025, semi-structured interviews were held with specialized staff from the DMO VISIT Hachinohe to collect data from a strategic perspective. Furthermore, from November 15 to 16, 2025, one Korean faculty member and two international students participated in an inspection to evaluate local resources from an inbound reception perspective.

3. Sendai Airport (Natori City): On November 12, 2025, the researchers and 26 university students visited Sendai Airport and the Kawamachi Terrace Yuriage regional exchange hub. The researchers were briefed on operations by local staff and conducted participant observation of the students' inspection activities.

The analysis focused on secondary data from the above surveys, including field notes, interview records, and activity-related materials such as pamphlets and achievement reports. It involved extracting concepts associated with success factors and comparing commonalities and differences across cases (cross-case analysis) to structure a regional revitalization model based on industry-academia collaboration.

## RESULTS

### Yamagata Airport (Higashine City and Tendo City): Integration of Regional Agricultural Solutions and Agritourism

Higashine City and Tendo City in Yamagata Prefecture, despite being two of Japan's leading cherry-producing regions, face chronic labor shortages to meet the extremely short-term, concentrated labor demand during the peak harvest season in June. To address this structural challenge, JAL's Tohoku branch traditionally provided harvest support by dispatching employees as part of its corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. However, the sole reliance on volunteer-based, one-off labor provision prevented the achievement of a fundamental solution, necessitating the development of a more sustainable support ecosystem. Therefore, this study conducted a proof-of-concept experiment by redefining the traditional "labor support" context as a "tourism and educational resource" and creating new value through industry-academia collaboration involving universities.

Field research was conducted in a residential fieldwork format from June 13 to 14, 2025. Its primary focus was not merely to supplement labor but to allow students to physically understand the essence of regional challenges through "real experience" on-site and generate solutions. On day 1, at the JA (Japan Agricultural cooperatives) Tendo Regional Center, students received a briefing from a representative of JAL's Tohoku branch. Discussions focused on the current state of cherry farming operations and the significance, from a "creating shared value" perspective, of airlines and travel agencies (such as JTB) entering the agriculture support sector despite being from different industries. Lengthy discussions between students and company representatives helped foster a sense of purpose (sense-making) for the next day's practical training. On day 2, students engaged in actual cherry harvesting and sorting work at five cherry orchards in Higashine City, adhering to the farmers' schedule (4:00 a.m. assembly, 5:00 a.m. start). This early morning work under demanding conditions provided students with an opportunity to experience the reality of the field, which cannot be gained through classroom learning alone.

A key outcome of this training was the students' reinterpretation of regional challenges through an "asset reconfiguration" perspective. In their subsequent strategic proposals to cherry farmers and JAL, the students transformed the compensatory, negative context of labor support (addressing labor shortages) into the creative, positive experiential value of agritourism. Proposals included "creating a nighttime economy utilizing cherry orchard nightscape resources" and "employment experience programs aimed at lowering barriers for young people to enter the field." This represents an attempt to rewrite the meaning of the existing "agricultural work" resource and elevate it to global tourism products and educational content. Furthermore, interviews with the participating students revealed high praise for the synergistic effect of prior theoretical input combined with hands-on practice, demonstrating that the scheme is a highly effective industry-academia collaboration model with strong educational benefits that can be sustainably continued in subsequent years.



Students who took part in cherry harvesting training and research in Yamagata

#### Sendai Airport (Natori City): Tourism Resource Development through Industry-Academia-Government Collaboration

Natori City in Miyagi Prefecture, the field location for this study, is home to Sendai Airport, the gateway to the Tohoku airspace. The airport faced a structural challenge in which many visitors who used the airport tended to immediately travel to the Sendai city center or major tourist destinations in other prefectures upon arrival, resulting in limited economic effects for Natori City. As a result, eliminating the “bypass” phenomenon within the region became an urgent priority. To address this challenge, the project shifted its focus from traditional mass tourism approaches to securing longer visitor stays by targeting the “gap time” before and after flights, as well as transit demand.

Data were collected via a field survey on November 12, 2025, through an industry-academia collaboration project between JAL and Tohoku Gakuin University. The survey’s primary objective was to rediscover the appeal potential of regional resources around Natori City, targeting tourists arriving at and departing from Sendai Airport. The survey emphasized multifaceted stakeholder dialogue beyond mere sightseeing. Specifically, it included a tour of normally restricted areas within Sendai Airport facilities and a chartered bus tour of Kawamachi Terrace Yuriage, Yuriage Community Center, and Kumano Nachi Shrine. During these visits, lectures and interviews with Natori City officials provided detailed insights into the region’s current state and the city’s administrative challenges (strengths and weaknesses). Drawing on the knowledge gained from these field visits, the students planned and designed a “Natori City mini tour” that passengers could experience in the short time before and after flights. Notably, the students themselves led the redefinition of local cuisine and scenery as “narrative experiences,” elevating these insights into a strategic proposal (presentation) for Natori City Hall.

The greatest achievement here was how the student-driven ideation approach functioned as a catalyst to reveal the region’s latent tourism resources. Through fieldwork, the students discovered a greater abundance of tourism resources than anticipated. By packaging these resources, they offered concrete solutions to extend visitors’ stay duration within the area. This project also adopted a participatory design approach, which included dialogue with local residents and administrative staff. This highlighted the potential to create emotional connections between visitors and the community, moving away from treating the destination merely as a consumption site. From an educational perspective, the collection of primary data in the field significantly boosted students’ motivation for regional studies. The proposed travel plans’ potential for adoption as administrative measures was evidence of the effectiveness of practice-based learning through industry-academia-government collaboration.



Students receiving a briefing at Sendai Airport

### Aomori and Misawa Airports (Hachinohe City): Resolving the Inbound Gap through “Cross-Cultural Translation” by International Students

Although Aomori Prefecture has direct flights from Seoul to Aomori Airport, providing good access from South Korea, visitor routes were confined to specific areas, creating a “spatial imbalance” where few Korean tourists traveled as far as Hachinohe City in the southern part of the prefecture. Interviews with staff from VISIT Hachinohe, a partner in this project, revealed the primary cause: While the organization had personnel who could communicate in English and Chinese, it lacked specialized Korean-speaking staff. This structural challenge (resource asymmetry) led to insufficient promotional activities targeting the Korean market. Consequently, from a foreigner’s perspective, information dissemination was lacking, highlighting an information gap where the appeal of the Hachinohe region failed to reach the target market.

To overcome this challenge, Korean professor and international students from Tohoku Gakuin University engaged in fieldwork. The survey was conducted for two days and comprehensively inspected Hachinohe City and its surrounding areas (Oirase Town, Sannohe Town, Misawa Airport, etc.). The survey sites ranged widely, including historical resources such as Kabushima Shrine and Kushihiki Hachimangu Shrine; food culture resources such as Hachinohe Shuzo Brewery, Yokochō alley, Tatehana Gampeki Morning Market, and the Hachinohe Food Center; and natural landscapes such as the Tanesashi Natural Turf Grassland. The focus of this activity was not merely sightseeing but rather rediscovering landscapes and phenomena that local Japanese residents overlook every day, which was done through the international students’ perspective (foreign perspective) to identify “content that resonates with Korean tourists.”

This activity’s academic and practical contribution lies in positioning the international students not merely as tourists but as “cultural mediators.” The international students themselves edited the collected images and video footage and released PR videos on VISIT Hachinohe and university websites. This represents the practical process of “intercultural translation,” where regional resources are reedited to align with the target market’s context, language, and sensibilities. By visualizing attractions overlooked in traditional PR efforts conducted solely by Japanese staff through the international students’ linguistic and cultural filters, this approach demonstrated a potential to effectively reduce cultural barriers. This case study proves that in regional DMOs with a shortage of specialized personnel, university international student resources can transcend a supplementary role in inbound strategies and become core contributors to value creation.



A promotional video for Hachinohe created by Korean international students.

## DISCUSSION

Based on insights from the three cases; Natori City (airport-area tourism), Higashine City and Tendo City (agritourism), and Hachinohe City (inbound information dissemination), this study proposes a “cocreative regional tourism innovation framework” as a theoretical model for the sustainable development of regional tourism. This framework serves as a guideline for overcoming the limitations of conventional isolated industry-academia collaborations or CSR activities and addressing structural regional challenges. It consists of five key components.

### Establishment of a Triple-Helix Collaboration

This involves the optimal allocation of resources from industry, academia, and community. In all three cases, JAL provided funding, networks, and credibility, universities contributed students’ flexible thinking and educational resources, and local entities (municipalities, farmers, DMOs) supplied unique tourism assets. This equal and complementary collaboration led to multifaceted solutions to challenges such as labor shortages and information dissemination gaps, which no single organization could resolve alone. This also suggests an ideal form of sustainable collaboration model from a resource dependence theory perspective.

### Promotion of Student-Driven Innovation

This component highlights the importance of positioning students, who possess Generation Z sensibilities and digital literacy, not merely as workers but as “agents of development” in tourism. In the Yamagata case, students reframed “labor” as “experience,” while in the Natori case, they transformed “spare time” into opportunities for “story consumption.” Unconstrained by conventions, students’ perspectives served as a source

of innovation that unearthed regional value, and granting students' consistent authority from planning to information dissemination is a key factor in increasing project success rates.

#### Implementation of Cultural Translation

This component refers to the function of “cross-cultural translation” in capturing inbound demand. As demonstrated by the Hachinohe case, even everyday scenes for Japanese people can be transformed into compelling content that resonates with the target market (Korea) when filtered through international students as “cultural mediators.” Rather than presenting regional resources as is, the process of incorporating multicultural perspectives to “translate” and reedit them is crucial for minimizing linguistic and cultural barriers to entry and making latent appeal explicit.

#### Airport-Centric Tourism Reconstruction

This component pertains to the redefinition of airport functions. In this study, the Sendai and Misawa/Aomori Airports were reimagined not merely as transit points but as strategic “hubs” for regional tourism. As observed in the “drive-by” issue in Natori City, designing pathways that encourage visitors to linger in airports' surrounding areas is critical for establishing these airports as starting points for broader tourism routes. Having an airline such as JAL as the core of regional collaboration is indispensable for seamlessly connecting air and land routes (regional resources).

#### Facilitation of Participatory Development

Finally, enhancing community engagement is crucial. Tourism development can avoid becoming an externally imposed initiative when local residents, farmers, and government officials participate from the project's initial stages. As seen in collaborations with Yamagata farmers and dialogues with Natori City officials, the very process of cocreating products reflecting local voices fosters a shift in mindset among hosts and strengthens the foundation for sustainable tourism destination management.

Integrating the five components, this framework can be a highly versatile model that demonstrates how industry, academia, and government can collaborate to create new tourism value in regional cities confronting population decline and resource shortages.

## CONCLUSION

This study proposed a “regional cocreation tourism innovation framework” that transforms region-specific challenges into tourism resources through industry-academia collaboration projects between JAL and universities in the Tohoku region. The common thread among the three case studies is that regional “weaknesses” (being bypassed, labor shortages, language barriers) were reconfigured into unique “strengths” through the intervention of an “external perspective” (students) and a “wide area network” (JAL). Overall, revitalizing regional airports and their surrounding areas requires more than just infrastructure development or advertising; implementing a “three-tiered collaborative structure” in which industry, academia, and local communities pool their resources is essential.

The current model is deemed versatile for application not only in the Tohoku region but also in other regional cities across Japan that are facing similar difficulties. Future challenges include ensuring this project's long-term sustainability and confirming its economic impact. The key is not to end with one-off events or pilot projects but to build an ecosystem driven by locals themselves. Furthermore, stakeholders must continuously measure not only qualitative shifts in awareness but also quantitative impacts such as increased tourism spending and visitor numbers. Guided by the principle that “airline growth cannot occur without community development,” this study aims to deepen industry-academia-government dialogue and pioneer new horizons for regional tourism through both theory and practice.

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ID 23

## THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATIONS ON TOURISTS' BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS: EVIDENCE FROM SMALL TOURISM DESTINATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines how social sustainability communications influence tourists' behavioral intentions toward small tourism destinations. Using survey data from 200 respondents, we investigate the mediating roles of perceived destination brand authenticity and brand value. Results demonstrate that social sustainability communications significantly enhance behavioral intentions ( $\beta = 0.91$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .556$ ) through increased perceptions of brand value (indirect effect  $\beta = 0.29$ , 95% CI [0.17, 0.42]). All correlations were significant ( $r = .40$  to  $.77$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Findings reveal tourists are more likely to visit, recommend, and pay premium prices for destinations effectively communicating social sustainability initiatives. This research contributes theoretical insights by integrating stimulus-organism-response theory with consumption value theory and provides actionable guidance for destination marketers crafting authentic sustainability narratives.

**Keywords:** Social sustainability, destination authenticity, brand value, behavioral intentions, small tourism destinations

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry faces increasing pressure to balance economic growth with social responsibility. While sustainability has become central to destination marketing, existing research predominantly emphasizes environmental dimensions, overlooking social sustainability communications (Rezaee, 2016). Social sustainability encompasses community well-being, cultural preservation, and local empowerment factors increasingly valued by conscious travelers (Eizenberg and Jabareen, 2017).

Small tourism destinations face unique challenges in competitive markets. Unlike large destinations with substantial marketing resources, small destinations must leverage authenticity and sustainability credentials as differentiators (Hanna et al., 2018). Recent evidence suggests destinations emphasizing social sustainability can enhance perceived authenticity and brand value, ultimately influencing tourist decisions (Can et al., 2024).

Despite growing academic interest, critical gaps remain. First, limited research examines small destinations' sustainability communications (Thelen and Kim, 2024). Second, while environmental appeals have been extensively studied (Japutra et al., 2024), mechanisms through which social sustainability messages influence behavior remain underexplored. Third, mediating roles of destination authenticity and brand value require empirical investigation.

This research addresses these gaps by examining: (1) How do social sustainability communications influence tourists' behavioral intentions? (2) Does perceived destination brand authenticity mediate this relationship? (3) Does perceived destination brand value mediate this relationship?

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

### 2.1 Social Sustainability and Behavioral Intentions

Social sustainability represents society's capacity to meet members' needs while maintaining well-being, equality, and cultural identity (Eizenberg and Jabareen, 2017). The stimulus-organism-response (SOR) framework provides theoretical grounding: social sustainability messages serve as stimuli triggering cognitive and affective responses, ultimately determining behavioral outcomes (García de los Salmones et al., 2024). Research demonstrates that consumer-cause congruence drives engagement more strongly than destination-cause congruence (Su and Swanson, 2017).

Consumption value theory further illuminates these mechanisms (Bigné et al., 2020). Tourists evaluate destinations based on functional drivers (perceived quality) and experiential factors (emotional satisfaction). Marketing communications emphasizing social sustainability enhance perceived destination quality while aligning with tourists' ethical preferences, particularly crucial for small destinations dependent on authentic images (Agapito et al., 2023).

Behavioral intentions represent tourists' likelihood to visit destinations, recommend them, and support them financially. Social sustainability communications foster these intentions by building trust and emotional connections (Su et al., 2020). When destinations promote community well-being and cultural preservation, tourists perceive greater authenticity, increasing their propensity to visit and advocate (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020). Therefore:

**H1:** Social sustainability communications positively influence tourists' behavioral intentions.

### 2.2 Mediating Role of Perceived Authenticity

Destination brand authenticity refers to tourists' perceptions of genuineness regarding a destination's culture and community (Kim and Kim, 2020). Authenticity manifests in three dimensions: indexical (objective aspects), iconic (alignment with expectations), and existential (personal connections) (Fritz et al., 2017). Small destinations benefit particularly from emphasizing social sustainability, as authentic communications enhance perceived genuineness (Can et al., 2024). This aligns with signaling theory, wherein authentic practices serve as quality signals fostering trust (Erdem et al., 2006). Thus:

**H2:** Perceived destination brand authenticity mediates the relationship between social sustainability communications and behavioral intentions.

### 2.3 Mediating Role of Perceived Brand Value

Perceived destination brand value (PDBV) represents tourists' assessments of benefits and economic considerations (Zeithaml, 1988). Expectation disconfirmation theory suggests satisfaction occurs when experiences meet expectations (Oliver, 1977). Social sustainability communications shape pre-visit expectations; when communications reflect genuine initiatives, tourists experience value confirmation (Kim and Hall, 2020). Evidence suggests tourists associate higher brand value with destinations effectively communicating social sustainability (Kim and Thapa, 2018). Therefore:

**H3:** Perceived destination brand value mediates the relationship between social sustainability communications and behavioral intentions.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design and Sample

This study employed a quantitative survey design using a structured questionnaire to examine the relationships among social sustainability communications, destination authenticity, brand value, and behavioral intentions. Random sampling ensured equal participation opportunity for all potential respondents, thereby reducing selection bias and enhancing generalizability (Lohr, 2021).

The target population comprised tourists who frequently visit small tourism destinations and have exposure to sustainability-related communications. Participants were recruited through online distribution channels, including social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram) and tourism-related forums. The final analytical sample included 200 complete responses after removing incomplete questionnaires. All participants provided informed consent, and data collection adhered to ethical research guidelines.

### 3.2 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the conceptual research model guiding this investigation. The model posits that social sustainability communications influence behavioral intentions through three pathways: (1) a direct effect (H1), (2) an indirect effect mediated by perceived destination brand authenticity (H2), and (3) an indirect effect mediated by perceived destination brand value (H3). This framework integrates stimulus-organism-response theory and consumption value theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of how sustainability communications shape tourist behavior.

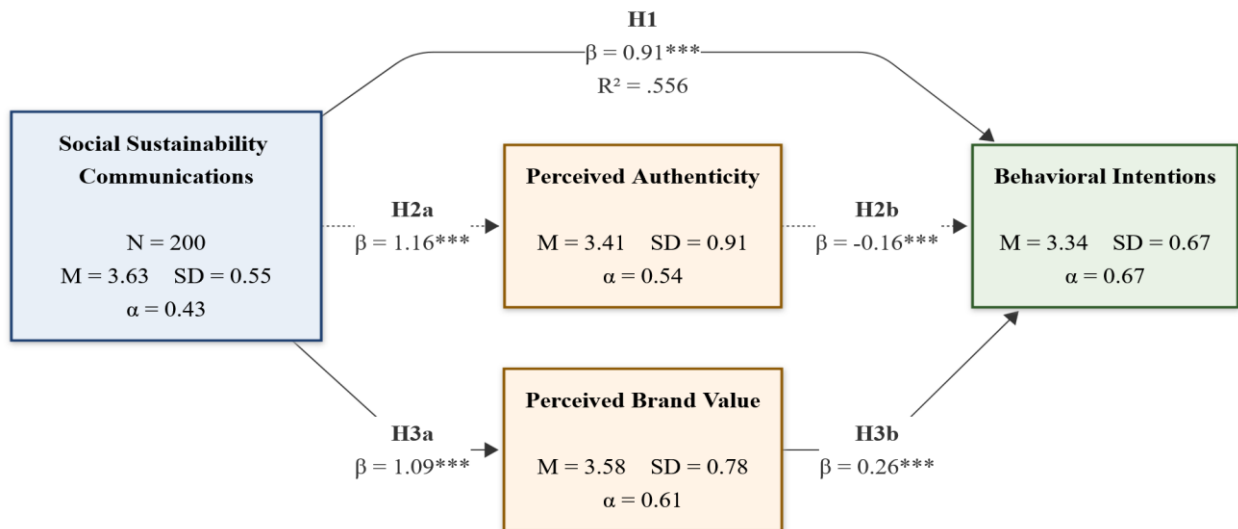


Figure 1: Conceptual Research Model Showing Hypothesized Relationships

*Note.* H1 = Direct effect hypothesis; H2 = Authenticity mediation hypothesis; H3 = Brand value mediation hypothesis. Arrows indicate hypothesized positive relationships between constructs.

### 3.3 Measures

All constructs were measured using established multi-item scales adapted from prior tourism and marketing research. Respondents indicated their agreement with each statement using five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

*Social Sustainability Communications* was measured using four items assessing respondents' exposure to and perceptions of destinations' community support, cultural preservation, and local engagement messages. The scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.43$ ). *Behavioral Intentions* was measured using five items capturing visit likelihood, recommendation intentions, and willingness to pay premium prices, adapted from Su et al. (2020) ( $\alpha = 0.67$ ). *Perceived Destination Brand Authenticity* assessed tourists' perceptions of destination genuineness and cultural integrity using two items adapted from Fritz et al. (2017) ( $\alpha = 0.54$ ). *Perceived Destination Brand Value* evaluated quality perceptions and ethical alignment using three items adapted from Zeithaml (1988) ( $\alpha = 0.61$ ).

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded in multiple stages using SPSS 28.0. First, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) and reliability analyses (Cronbach's alpha) assessed data quality and scale internal consistency. Second, Pearson correlation analyses examined bivariate relationships among all constructs. Third, hierarchical regression analysis tested the direct effect of social sustainability communications on behavioral intentions (H1).

Fourth, mediation analyses tested the indirect effects through authenticity (H2) and brand value (H3) following the Baron and Kenny approach. Specifically, we estimated (a) the effect of the independent variable on each mediator, (b) the effect of each mediator on the dependent variable while controlling for the independent variable, and (c) the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable while controlling for mediators. Bootstrap resampling with 5,000 iterations generated bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals for indirect effects. Mediation was confirmed when confidence intervals did not include zero, indicating statistical significance at the .05 level.

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics. All constructs showed moderate to high means ( $M = 3.34$  to  $3.63$ ), indicating positive attitudes. Table 2 displays correlations; all relationships were positive and significant ( $p < .001$ ), supporting hypothesized associations.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability (N = 200)

| Variable                             | M    | SD   | $\alpha$ | Items |
|--------------------------------------|------|------|----------|-------|
| Social Sustainability Communications | 3.63 | 0.55 | 0.43     | 4     |
| Behavioral Intentions                | 3.34 | 0.67 | 0.67     | 5     |
| Perceived Authenticity               | 3.41 | 0.91 | 0.54     | 2     |
| Perceived Brand Value                | 3.58 | 0.78 | 0.61     | 3     |

Table 2: Correlation Matrix (N = 200)

| Variable                 | M    | SD   | 1       | 2       | 3       | 4 |
|--------------------------|------|------|---------|---------|---------|---|
| 1. Social Sustainability | 3.63 | 0.55 | —       |         |         |   |
| 2. Behavioral Intentions | 3.34 | 0.67 | .746*** | —       |         |   |
| 3. Authenticity          | 3.41 | 0.91 | .694*** | .403*** | —       |   |
| 4. Brand Value           | 3.58 | 0.78 | .767*** | .699*** | .656*** | — |

Note. \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## 4.2 Hypothesis Testing

**H1: Direct Effect.** Regression analysis revealed social sustainability communications significantly predicted behavioral intentions ( $\beta = 0.91$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $t = 15.75$ ,  $p < .001$ ), explaining 55.6% of variance ( $R^2 = .556$ ). This large effect provides strong support for H1.

**H2: Authenticity Mediation.** Social sustainability positively predicted authenticity ( $\beta = 1.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .482$ ). However, the relationship pattern suggested suppression effects requiring cautious interpretation. The direct effect remained significant ( $\beta = 1.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating partial mediation. While H2 received technical support, the unexpected negative indirect path warrants further investigation.

**H3: Brand Value Mediation.** Social sustainability positively predicted brand value ( $\beta = 1.09$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $t = 16.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .589$ ). Brand value significantly predicted behavioral intentions ( $\beta = 0.26$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $t = 4.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The indirect effect was significant ( $\beta = 0.29$ , 95% CI [0.17, 0.42]), confirming mediation. The direct effect remained significant ( $\beta = 0.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating partial mediation. The model explained 59.5% of variance. H3 is strongly supported (see Table 3).

Table 3: Mediation Analysis Results

| Hypothesis      | Path                     | $\beta$        | SE    | t        | Result  |
|-----------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------|----------|---------|
|                 | SS $\rightarrow$ BV (a)  | 1.093          | 0.065 | 16.84*** |         |
|                 | BV $\rightarrow$ BI (b)  | 0.264          | 0.061 | 4.36***  |         |
|                 | SS $\rightarrow$ BI (c') | 0.623          | 0.086 | 7.20***  |         |
| H3: Brand Value | Indirect (ab)            | 0.289          | —     | —        | Partial |
|                 | 95% CI                   | [0.165, 0.423] |       |          |         |
|                 | R <sup>2</sup> (Model)   | 0.595          |       |          |         |

Note. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . SS = Social Sustainability, BV = Brand Value, BI = Behavioral Intentions. Bootstrap samples = 5,000.

## 5 DISCUSSION

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### 5.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study makes important theoretical contributions. First, it extends sustainability communications research by focusing on the social dimension. An area receiving limited attention (Rezaee, 2016). Results validate the importance of broadening research beyond environmental concerns. Second, the study demonstrates that brand value serves as a key mechanism linking sustainability communications to behavioral outcomes, supporting integration of SOR theory (García de los Salmones et al., 2024) and consumption value theory (Bigné et al., 2020). Third, the research provides context-specific insights for small destinations, showing authentic social sustainability communications serve as powerful differentiators.

The strong direct effect (55.6% variance explained) and significant brand value mediation (31.7% of total effect) indicate both direct persuasion and value-based mechanisms operate simultaneously. This dual pathway suggests effective communications must address both immediate persuasive appeals and deeper value perceptions.

## 5.2 Practical Implications

Findings offer actionable guidance for destination marketing organizations (DMOs). First, DMOs should prioritize social sustainability in marketing campaigns. Results show tourists respond strongly to community support ( $M = 4.32$ ) and cultural preservation messages. Second, authenticity is crucial. Personal stories from local community members enhance trust more than abstract data. DMOs should develop content showcasing real partnerships and measurable impacts through video testimonials and community profiles.

Third, DMOs should leverage social media strategically. Given limited budgets, social media offers cost-effective channels for sustainability communications (Chu and Kim, 2011). Fourth, premium pricing strategies should reflect sustainability value. Tourists demonstrate willingness to pay more ( $M = 4.11$ ) when communications effectively convey authentic commitments. Finally, collaborative partnerships between DMOs and local communities should be institutionalized to ensure genuine stakeholder involvement.

## 5.3 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations suggest future research opportunities. First, reliability coefficients were moderate, suggesting future research should refine measurement scales. Second, the unexpected authenticity path coefficient indicates potential suppression effects requiring investigation. Third, cross-sectional data prevent causal inference; longitudinal designs would strengthen claims. Fourth, this study focused exclusively on small destinations; comparative research examining large versus small destinations would clarify boundary conditions. Fifth, potential social desirability bias warrants consideration through experimental designs measuring actual behaviors. Finally, individual differences (sustainability consciousness, travel motivations) may moderate effects, requiring multi-level modeling.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This research examined how social sustainability communications influence tourists' behavioral intentions toward small tourism destinations. Results provide strong support for hypothesized relationships. Social sustainability communications directly enhance behavioral intentions while operating indirectly through brand value perceptions. These findings underscore the strategic importance of social sustainability in destination marketing.

For small destinations facing resource constraints, investing in genuine social sustainability practices and effectively communicating these commitments offers viable competitive advantage. The key lies in authenticity, tourists respond positively to genuine initiatives while remaining skeptical of superficial attempts. As sustainable tourism gains prominence globally, destinations effectively integrating social sustainability into brand identities will attract growing segments of conscious travelers. This research provides theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence supporting such strategic positioning, contributing to both academic understanding and practical advancement of sustainable tourism marketing.

## Acknowledgments

We thank all survey participants and reviewers for their valuable feedback.

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**PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES TO THE ADOPTION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND PRACTICES IN SMALL HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY IN GHANA, KENYA AND SOUTH AFRICA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Small hospitality businesses (SHBs) are crucial in the growth of economies and the tourism sector in most African countries, yet their capacity for adopting sustainable development practices is still a critical but under-researched area. This study investigates the adoption of sustainable development practices among SHBs in Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa, underlining both the prospects and challenges within diverse socio-economic and regulatory contexts. Employing a comparative case study approach, the study makes use of documentary analysis to investigate and collect data on how economic, social and environmental sustainability practices are incorporated within small-scale hospitality operations. Key findings from this study reveal that there is a growing trend towards eco-friendly practices, such as saving energy, water and environmental conservation. Furthermore, the other prospects include client loyalty, enhanced brand reputation, and increased community support. However, the challenges experienced by SHBs consist of inadequate financial resources, a lack of infrastructure, insufficient expertise and awareness, as well as inconsistent policies. Based on these findings, the recommendations from this study include financial support for SHBs that practice sustainable development initiatives, regular educational and capacity-building training programmes targeting SHBs, improving regulatory policies and frameworks to support SHBs, infrastructure upgrade and mutually beneficial collaboration between the government and SHBs to enhance sustainable development practices.

**Keywords:** Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, small hospitality businesses, sustainability, challenges, prospects.

ID 26

**THE INFLUENCE OF NATIONAL CULTURE ON LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE RELATIONS IN  
SMALL TOURISM ACCOMMODATION ENTERPRISES: EVIDENCE FROM SOUTH AFRICA,  
GHANA, AND KENYA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Leadership style is widely recognized as a critical determinant of employee relationship development, particularly within Western cultural contexts. Yet, limited research has examined how these dynamics vary across distinct national cultures. Given that leadership assumptions and practices are culturally embedded, understanding their applicability within diverse Sub-Saharan African contexts remains imperative. This study investigates the perceived influence of national culture on leadership style and employee relationship development within South Africa's small tourism accommodation sector, drawing comparative insights from prior studies in Kenya and Ghana.

The research employs Hofstede's cultural dimensions as an interpretive framework to explore how national cultural values shape leader-subordinate interactions. A qualitative multiple-case study design was adopted, focusing on four small, indigenous South African hotels. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with each hotel's leader and four employees, resulting in twenty participants. Thematic analysis was conducted using within- and cross-case comparisons supported by NVivo software.

Findings indicate that leadership behaviour in South African small tourism accommodation enterprises is predominantly influenced by national cultural values, notably paternalistic and humanistic orientations, which shape communication patterns, trust-building, and employee engagement. Comparative insights from Kenya and Ghana similarly demonstrate that national culture significantly conditions leadership approaches and relational dynamics within small tourism accommodation enterprises.

This study is expected to advance theoretical understanding of culture-contingent leadership by contextualizing leadership-employee relationship development within African value systems. Practically, the study is envisaged to underscore the importance of culturally congruent leadership practices in enhancing employee relations and organizational performance in the tourism accommodation sector. By situating leadership research within an African paradigm, the study contributes to the decolonization of management thought and provides a foundation for contextually grounded leadership models across non-Western environments.

**Keywords:** national culture, leadership style, small tourism accommodation, employees, paternalistic, humanistic.

ID 27

## CHARTING THE COURSE: REAL-WORLD APPLICATION OF SUSTAINABILITY AND INNOVATION PRINCIPLES IN THE PORTUGUESE BLUE ECONOMY FIRMS

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### ABSTRACT

*Problem Definition:* Although the blue economy is widely promoted as a strategic domain for sustainable development, empirical evidence on how firms operationalize sustainability-oriented innovation (SOI) in practice remains limited. Existing studies focus largely on conceptual models or macro-level policy frameworks, offering insufficient insight into firm-level strategies, institutional constraints, and the uneven integration of economic, environmental, and social objectives. This gap is particularly relevant in Portugal, where marine-based industries are central to national development but face regulatory complexity, financial constraints, and fragmented governance.

*Objectives:* This study aims to: (i) examine how Portuguese blue economy firms embed sustainability and innovation into their business strategies; (ii) identify key institutional, financial, and organizational enablers and barriers shaping SOI; and (iii) assess how sustainability outcomes differ across the triple bottom line (economic, environmental, and social dimensions).

*Methodology and Analysis:* The study follows a sequential mixed-methods design. It builds on a prior quantitative study based on a survey of 40 Portuguese blue economy firms, analyzed using PLS-SEM to examine the relationships between sustainability orientation, innovation, and triple bottom line performance. These results informed the qualitative phase by identifying firms with strong sustainability–innovation profiles. The qualitative stage adopts a multiple case-study approach involving five firms purposefully selected from the survey sample. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with owners/CEOs of the firms, complemented by analysis of corporate documents and public company information. Interview transcripts were analyzed using NVivo (v15) through a combination of theory-driven thematic coding and inductive content analysis. Cross-case comparison and qualitative comparative analysis were used to identify recurring strategic patterns, enabling conditions, and configurations of barriers shaping sustainability-oriented innovation.

*Findings:* The findings show that firms integrate sustainability primarily through technological innovation, circular economy practices, renewable energy adoption, and stakeholder collaboration, particularly with universities and research centers. Environmental and economic sustainability are strongly embedded in strategic decision-making and are associated with cost reductions, risk mitigation, and market differentiation. In contrast, social sustainability remains comparatively weak and is often addressed indirectly through community initiatives or employee-focused practices rather than systematic performance metrics. Major barriers include bureaucratic inefficiencies, delayed public funding reimbursements, limited access to finance, shortages of specialized human capital, and consumer price sensitivity.

*Theoretical Contribution:* The study contributes by integrating institutional theory, the resource-based view, and the triple bottom line framework to explain how SOI emerges from the interaction between firm capabilities and external institutional pressures. It empirically demonstrates persistent asymmetries between sustainability dimensions, even among high-performing firms, and conceptualizes SOI as a mediating mechanism linking governance structures to sustainability outcomes.

*Practical Contributions:* For policymakers, the results highlight the need to shift from reimbursement-based to upfront financing schemes, streamline regulatory procedures, and reform public procurement to prioritize certified sustainable solutions. For managers, the study provides evidence-based guidance on leveraging partnerships, incremental innovation pathways, and strategic communication of long-term value to overcome market resistance. These insights are transferable to other coastal and marine-based economies seeking to scale sustainability-driven innovation under resource and policy constraints.

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## DUAL-PATH CLIMATE COMMUNICATION AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ENGAGEMENT: AN ELM-INTEGRATED STUDY OF SHANGHAI'S URBAN TOURISM CONTEXT

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### ABSTRACT

As climate change accelerates, urban tourism destinations face growing pressure to promote sustainable practices and strengthen visitors' and residents' pro-environmental behavioral intentions (PEBI). While tourism research increasingly acknowledges the role of environmental attitudes, limited attention has been given to how climate communication, particularly the interplay of narrative framing and emotional-cognitive processing that shapes sustainable tourism engagement. This study aims to bridge communication science and tourism marketing by examining how climate-related narratives influence PEBI in Shanghai, a global metropolis experiencing rapid tourism growth alongside ecological challenges. Grounded in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) framework, this study examines how climate-related messages shape pro-environmental responses in tourism contexts. ELM distinguishes between central, cognition-based processing and peripheral, emotion-driven processing, while VBN links environmental values and beliefs to normative expectations and behavioral commitments. Integrating these perspectives, the proposed model posits that cognitive elaboration (e.g., understanding climate risks and tourism impacts) and emotional activation (e.g., empathy, moral responsibility, collective identity) jointly foster personal agency and sustainable tourism intentions. Rational narratives emphasizing the effects of climate change on travel comfort, destination quality, and the preservation of cultural and natural sites are expected to enhance cognitive engagement and self-efficacy, fostering thoughtful processing of sustainability information. On the other hand, emotion-based cues foster engagement by activating empathy, moral responsibility, and collective identity. Together, these cognitive and emotional pathways illustrate how sustainability messages can be internalized and translated into pro-environmental tourism behaviors. An experimental survey was conducted with domestic tourists who plan to visit Shanghai within the next year to examine the effects of three narrative conditions: (1) rational climate-impact framing (2) emotional storytelling framing, and (3) hybrid cognitive-emotional framing. Key dependent variables include environmental concern, perceived behavioral efficacy, pro-environmental attitudes toward tourism activities, and eco-tourism behavioral intentions. This design enables a systematic comparison of how different message strategies influence tourists' sustainable tourism intentions within Shanghai's urban context. Preliminary findings indicate that hybrid cognitive-emotional climate narratives produce the strongest influence on PEBI. Rational information enhances message credibility and personal relevance, while emotional cues strengthen environmental empathy and psychological connection to nature—two essential foundations for sustainable tourism engagement. Moderating effects of prior environmental involvement, age, and green consumption habits highlight the differentiated effectiveness of central versus peripheral routes, consistent with ELM predictions. Overall, this study contributes to hospitality and tourism marketing in three key ways: (1) demonstrating how climate communication mechanisms can be strategically integrated into destination sustainability planning; (2) showing why the synergy between rational climate information and emotional green nudges most effectively drives behavioral shifts toward sustainable tourism; and (3) investigating how urban destinations like Shanghai can utilize localized narrative communication to enhance the impact of eco-tourism. Findings can also offer recommendations for tourism managers and communication practitioners seeking to advance sustainable tourism in the era of global climate change.

ID 31

**CAN RED EDUCATION PROMOTE VISITORS' PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR?  
EVIDENCE FROM THE XIANGJIANG BATTLE MEMORIAL HALL, CHINA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Visitors' pro-environmental behaviour is a critical issue for the sustainable development of tourism destinations, yet empirical research focusing on red tourism sites remains limited. Based on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, this study examines the mechanisms through which red education influences visitors' pro-environmental behaviour. Visitors' red education experience and environmental knowledge were treated as stimulus variables (S), destination psychological ownership and cultural identity as organism variables (O), and pro-environmental behaviour as the response variable (R). The Xiangjiang Battle Memorial Hall in Guilin was selected as the case site, and 476 valid questionnaires were collected. PLS-SEM was utilised to verify the model and test the relationships amongst the constructs. Results indicate that red education experiences significantly enhance visitors' cultural identity and destination psychological ownership. Visitors' environmental knowledge also exerts a significant positive impact on pro-environmental behaviour. These findings suggest that red tourism destinations can promote visitors' pro-environmental behaviour through a dual pathway of rational education and emotional cultivation. Specifically, enriching red education content can strengthen visitors' psychological ownership and cultural identity, while enhancing ecological civilization education can effectively motivate visitors to protect irreplaceable red tourism resources.

**Keywords:** red tourism; red education; environmental knowledge; psychological ownership; cultural identity; SOR; PEB

ID 32

# BEYOND EFFICIENCY: GENERATIONAL COHORT MODERATION IN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-POWERED CHATBOT–CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing on Cognitive Appraisal Theory, this study investigates how information quality, social influence, and feeling understood shape perceived risk and emotional outcomes, which in turn influence continuance intention. Data were collected from individuals who interacted with a AI-powered chatbots and analyzed using structural equation modeling. The results reveal that information quality reduces perceived risk and enhances emotions, while social influence positively affects both outcomes. Feeling understood exhibits a dual effect: contrary to expectations, it heightens perceived risk but also enhances emotional responses. Furthermore, perceived risk exerts only a marginal effect on continuance intention, whereas emotions emerge as a strong positive driver. Importantly, the study demonstrates that these appraisal–outcome linkages vary across generational cohorts. For Generation Y, risk is positively associated with continuance, whereas older and younger cohorts emphasize clarity, reliability, and emotional engagement differently. These findings contribute theoretically by extending Cognitive Appraisal Theory to technology-mediated interactions and by highlighting the moderating role of generational cohorts. Practically, they underscore the need for segmented chatbot strategies that move beyond one-size-fits-all design, balancing efficiency with empathy to foster trust, satisfaction, and long-term engagement.

**Keywords:** AI-powered chatbots; Cognitive Appraisal Theory; Generational cohorts; Perceived risk; Emotions; Continuance intention; Customer experience

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## LEVERAGING LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS FOR VISUAL TOURISM ANALYTICS: INSIGHTS FROM INSTAGRAM TRAVEL POSTS

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### ABSTRACT

User-generated content (UGC) has become an essential data source for understanding tourist motivations, experiences, and behaviors. However, despite the visual dominance of social media platforms such as Instagram, tourism research has historically relied almost exclusively on text-based UGC (e.g., captions, reviews, comments). Recent methodological reviews (Zhu & Cheng, 2024) highlight that although images and videos represent the dominant form of social media expression, tourism scholars have yet to fully harness their analytical potential. This imbalance exists largely because large-scale visual analysis has been technically demanding, computationally expensive, and difficult to align with tourism theory. The result is a persistent methodological gap: while images are central to how tourists express themselves, tourism scholars have lacked feasible tools to systematically analyze visual content.

Whereas prior work has demonstrated the value of LLM-assisted qualitative analysis in tourism (Luong & Manthiou, 2025), such applications remained constrained to text-based UGC. In contrast, this study pioneers a purely image-driven analytical framework, leveraging multimodal large language models (LLMs) to decode tourism motivations and experiences directly from visual content. Our approach offers the first scalable, theory-driven protocol for automatic interpretation of tourism images without reliance on captions or metadata.

To demonstrate the potential of multimodal LLMs for tourism research, a dataset of 4,000 Instagram travel photos was processed using a unified vision-model classification pipeline. The system identifies 14 visual categories, 7 experience types, and 7 color-aesthetic patterns, guided by established frameworks in tourist motivation and experience design (Pearce & Lee, 2005; Tussyadiah, 2014) and informed by conceptual developments in slow tourism (Manthiou, Klaus, & Luong, 2022), solo tourism (Manthiou, Luong, & Klaus, 2023), and sustainable tourism (Breiby et al., 2020).

Findings reveal distinct visual signatures across four tourism types—conventional, solo, slow, and sustainable tourism. Conventional tourism is dominated by iconic landmarks, selfies, and vibrant color palettes associated with excitement and social recognition. Solo tourism imagery reflects self-exploration, personal growth, and autonomy, with balanced and introspective visual tones. Slow tourism exhibits the highest concentration of natural landscapes, quiet environments, and muted colors conveying mindfulness and deceleration. Sustainable tourism displays eco-conscious imagery featuring biodiversity, community encounters, and earthy aesthetic patterns suggestive of ethical and environmentally oriented values.

The study's primary contribution is methodological: it demonstrates that image-only multimodal LLM analysis can provide theoretically meaningful insights into tourist experiences, motivations, and behavioral expressions without relying on any textual cues. This advances tourism analytics beyond the long-standing text-centric paradigm and unlocks new possibilities for researching visual storytelling, destination perception, and embodied tourist experiences.

Theoretically, the study enriches tourism research by revealing how motivations and experiences manifest visually. Practically, the framework equips destinations and tourism businesses with a powerful tool for understanding real-time visitor behavior, designing visually resonant marketing strategies, and identifying emerging tourism segments. Overall, the study positions multimodal LLMs as a transformative frontier in hospitality and tourism research, offering a scalable and theoretically grounded approach to visual UGC analytics.

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## INTERNAL BRANDING AND BRAND CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOUR: HOTEL EMPLOYEES' PERSPECTIVES POST-REBRANDING

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose** - Services marketing literature converges that branding is a source of differentiation. Equally, it acknowledges the critical role of employees in the success of the branding strategy. Despite underlining the significance of internal branding as an enabler of the rebranding process, the research in this context is still sparse, particularly regarding the specific role of internal branding towards the success of rebranding processes and the creation of positive brand citizenship behaviour. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to evaluate the relationship between internal branding and brand citizenship behaviour of hotel employees post-rebranding to determine their alignment with the rebranded corporate identity.

**Method** - The survey data were collected from 414 frontline hotel employees from various rebranded hotels operating in metros across South Africa. Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was undertaken using SmartPLS 4 to examine the hypotheses.

**Findings** - Findings demonstrate that internal branding is a process comprising stimuli (internal brand management) and organism (internal brand equity). This process subsequently results in a favourable response (brand citizenship behaviour). The findings suggests that internal branding should be central to corporate rebranding endeavours.

**Originality** - This research highlights the critical role of internal branding towards the rebranding efforts. Specifically, it uses the Stimuli-Organism-Response framework to illustrate a chain-reactionary relationship from internal branding to brand citizenship behaviours.

**Key Words:** Corporate rebranding, internal branding, internal brand management, internal brand equity, PLS-SEM, brand citizenship behaviour, stimuli-organism-response.

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## TOO ICONIC TO TRIGGER DESTINATION CURIOSITY? DESTINATION BRAND AND NON-VISITORS' INTENTIONS

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### ABSTRACT

Curiosity-driven exploration is a universal behavioral tendency and has long been considered an intrinsic travel motive to travel (WTTC, 2023), yet tourism research has focused more on hedonic consumption and risk perception than on epistemic motives such as destination curiosity (DC)—introduced by Davari and Jang (2024), defined as the travel enthusiasm reflecting a curious behavior to explore and seek fulfillment in acquiring knowledge through meaningful travel experience at the destination. Although DC is recognized as a pivotal travel motive (e.g., Davari et al., 2025), little is known about the forces that restrain DC. This paper addresses this gap by drawing on Heise's (1987) Affect-Control Theory to examine the interplay among destination brand, DC, and visit intentions of non-visitors.

Destination brand often guides visit and revisit decisions, but its influence shifts when people have not experienced the place. In these cases, travelers rely on generalized perceptions. As an identifying mark, brand shapes symbolic meanings and image through destination personality (Ekinci et al., 2007), and prior experience can heighten positive evaluations of brand awareness (Kotsi et al., 2018). Iconic features further stabilize brand meanings (Woodside et al., 2007), yet most destinations rely on prominent attributes—such as nature, climate, dance, food, or price level (Baloglu et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2019). While these attributes contribute to identity, their influence typically falls short of symbols, leaving fewer destinations with truly iconic cues. Affect-Control Theory suggests that individuals strive to maintain stable affective meanings through their actions and interpretations (Heise, 1987). This research argues that when a potential traveler has strong brand persistence, they feel they already know the destination, which reduces epistemic tension, mitigates DC, and lowers the likelihood of travel motivated by exploration.

To examine this dynamic, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted to assess whether high brand persistence reduces DC, and how such impacts shape non-visitors' intentions to visit. The destination under study is Paris, a well-known and highly reputable tourist destination among those who have not been there. All interviewees are non-Europeans and include 10 female, 8 male, and 2 others.

Consistent with Affect-Control Theory, preliminary themes from the interviews support the argument that destination brand can inhibit DC and dampen visit intentions among non-visitors. Participants frequently described Paris as already known due to saturated brand cues—icons, media portrayals, and stereotyped attributes—which created affective certainty rather than epistemic tension. This felt familiarity was linked to lower DC, limited interest in knowledge seeking at the destination, and weaker intentions to visit for exploratory purposes. Conversely, when brand signals were ambiguous or pointed to less familiar, non-iconic facets—such as lesser-known neighborhoods or unexpected cultural practices—DC increased and visit intentions strengthened. Overall, the qualitative evidence indicates that strong, stable brand meanings, especially those dominated by iconic imagery, can suppress curiosity-driven motives and in turn hinder visit intention.

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# **TEACHING TOURISM WITHOUT PRACTICE? RE-EXAMINING PEDAGOGY, RESOURCES, AND SKILLS FORMATION IN TVET COLLEGES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines how teaching practices, institutional resources, and assessment cultures shape skills formation in National Certificate (Vocational) Tourism programmes, challenging dominant evaluations that prioritise graduate employability over pedagogy. Drawing on curriculum theory, the Didaktik tradition, and Bernstein's pedagogic device, skills formation is conceptualised as the outcome of interactions among enacted curriculum, lecturer professionalism, assessment regimes, and material resources. A qualitative, multiple-site case study was conducted across purposively selected TVET colleges, incorporating semi-structured interviews with lecturers and students, classroom observations, and analysis of curriculum and assessment artefacts. Thematic analysis combined deductive application of Bernstein's framework with inductive coding to identify context-specific dynamics. Findings reveal that resource scarcity, uneven pedagogical content knowledge, and assessment-driven teaching restrict pedagogical space, fragment conceptual coherence, and limit meaningful theory-practice integration. Weakly integrated work-based experiences further disrupt the sequence of skills acquisition, suggesting that perceived student deficits are products of systemic pedagogical conditions rather than individual or curricular failings. The study provides a process-oriented understanding of TVET tourism pedagogy, highlighting why technically aligned curricula may still produce shallow learning. Implications include the need to redesign assessment tasks, expand simulation and practice opportunities, and strengthen lecturer development to support cumulative and authentic skills formation.

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## FROM FILM TOURISM TO CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM: THE REAL-TIME TRANSFORMATION OF TOURIST INTERESTS AT FILM STUDIOS

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores how tourists' interests shift from film tourism to cultural heritage tourism at Hengdian World Studios, China's largest outdoor film studio. Using mixed methods, including 316 questionnaires and 130 travelogues, the research examines how visitors' motivations and experiences evolve through immersive cinematic environments and reconstructed historical settings. Findings show that both contextual factors and personal emotional engagement encourage tourists to move from film-oriented enjoyment toward deeper heritage appreciation. The study illustrates the dynamic process of motivational transformation and highlights how integrating film culture with heritage interpretation can enrich tourist experiences and broaden destination appeal.

**Key Words:** tourists' experience, cultural heritage tourism, film tourism, travel interests, cultural tourism.

### INTRODUCTION

Contemporary cultural tourism experiences increasingly transcend singular forms of tourism. Many destinations now integrate film culture, historical narratives, reconstructed architecture, and heritage interpretation within the same tourism space, giving rise to hybrid cultural destinations where tourists engage simultaneously with entertainment-oriented and heritage-oriented experiences (Richards, 2018). As cultural tourism expands beyond conventional distinctions between high culture and popular culture, film-related experiences have become progressively embedded within broader heritage and tourism contexts (Richards, 2011). Consequently, tourists are no longer confined to a single mode of cultural consumption but are instead exposed to multiple and overlapping forms of cultural meaning during the travel experience.

Previous studies have acknowledged the coexistence of film tourism and cultural heritage tourism within the same destination (Agarwal & Shaw, 2017; Bąkiewicz et al., 2022; Cui & Song, 2024). Film studios, reconstructed historical towns, and screen-related heritage attractions frequently combine cinematic representation with cultural and historical interpretation. However, existing research has largely approached film tourism and heritage tourism as parallel or overlapping forms of tourism, paying limited attention to how tourists' interests evolve between these domains throughout the travel experience. In particular, insufficient attention has been paid to the processes through which tourists initially motivated by film-related interests gradually develop heritage-oriented engagement through on-site experiences.

Tourists' travel interests are closely associated with their motivations and experiential processes. Tourism experiences are shaped through the interaction between pre-trip motivations, on-site activities, emotional responses, and post-visit reflections (Crouch et al., 2005). Although travel motivations are commonly understood as internal drivers of tourist behavior (Dann, 1977; Macionis, 2004), they may also be continuously reshaped through immersive and embodied experiences at destinations. Within hybrid cultural destinations, reconstructed historical environments, cinematic settings, and interpretive cultural narratives may encourage tourists to reinterpret film-related spaces through heritage-oriented perspectives. As a result, tourists may

gradually shift from entertainment-oriented film consumption towards more reflective forms of cultural and historical engagement.

This study investigates these issues through the case of Hengdian World Studios, the world's largest outdoor film studio and one of China's most representative hybrid cultural destinations. Combining film production facilities, reconstructed historical environments, live performances, and tourism consumption spaces, Hengdian provides a distinctive context in which film tourism and cultural heritage tourism intersect. Using a mixed-methods design that combines questionnaire surveys and tourist travelogues, this paper examines how tourists transform their interests from film-oriented engagement to heritage-oriented appreciation. The study contributes to the literature by conceptualizing tourists' interest transformation as a dynamic process of cultural re-orientation within hybrid tourism spaces.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Film Tourism

Film tourism has been conceptualized through a variety of terms, including 'screen tourism' (Connell & Meyer, 2009), 'film-induced tourism' (Macionis, 2004; Beeton, 2005), and 'media tourism' (Reijnders, 2011). Despite differences in terminology, these studies generally refer to tourism motivated by film-related elements, including screen narratives, filming locations, themed environments, and broader forms of film culture. In this study, film tourism refers to tourists' engagement with destinations where film-related settings, narratives, and experiences play significant roles in shaping travel motivations and on-site activities. Beeton (2005) distinguishes between on-location and off-location film tourism sites. While on-location film tourism involves visits to actual filming locations, off-location film tourism refers to purpose-built environments created for film production and tourism purposes, such as studio theme parks. Hengdian World Studios represents a typical off-location film tourism site, combining film production facilities with reconstructed historical environments and immersive tourism experiences. Existing research further suggests that film tourists are attracted not only by cinematic narratives and celebrity associations, but also by the cultural meanings, historical imagination, and emotional experiences embedded within film-related spaces (Reijnders, 2011; Roberts, 2016). Film tourism may therefore encourage tourists to pursue broader forms of cultural understanding beyond entertainment-oriented consumption. However, the processes through which film-related engagement evolves into heritage-oriented appreciation remain insufficiently explored.

### Cultural Heritage Tourism

Cultural heritage tourism generally refers to tourism motivated by tourists' desire to experience and engage with the heritage of a place (Poria et al., 2003; Timothy, 2014). Recent scholarship increasingly conceptualizes heritage not simply as a collection of physical remains, but as a cultural process involving memory, identity, emotion, and interpretation (Smith, 2006; Richards, 2018). From this perspective, heritage experiences are shaped not only through encounters with historical sites, but also through narratives, performances, and symbolic meanings. The interpretive nature of heritage becomes particularly significant within hybrid tourism settings where historical environments are reconstructed or mediated through film culture. In such contexts, tourists may engage with representations of history that are simultaneously cinematic and heritage-oriented. Reconstructed architecture, historical performances, and film narratives can all contribute to tourists' perceptions of heritage and authenticity. Consequently, heritage experiences may emerge through emotionally resonant and symbolically meaningful environments rather than solely through encounters with original historical remains.

### Cultural Tourism and the Transformation of Tourist Interests

Tourism experiences are often understood as a dynamic process involving expectation, on-site engagement, and retrospection (Crouch et al., 2005). Within this process, tourists' motivations and interests are not necessarily fixed prior to travel but may evolve through interactions with tourism environments, cultural narratives, and emotional experiences. Travel motivations are commonly regarded as the internal driving forces shaping tourists' destination choices and behaviors (Dann, 1977; Macionis, 2004), while also influencing how tourists perceive the image, identity, and cultural meanings of destinations. Dann's (1977) 'push' and 'pull' motivation framework remains influential in tourism studies. Pull factors refer to the tangible attributes and attractions of destinations, whereas push factors relate to tourists' internal desires and psychological needs. In film tourism studies, Macionis (2004) further develops pull factors into the '3P' framework of place, performance, and personality, highlighting the importance of filming locations, cinematic narratives, and film-related characters or

celebrities in attracting tourists. Push factors, including fantasy, escape, emotional identification, and self-construction, also shape tourists' engagement with film-related spaces (Macionis, 2004). Rather than functioning independently, push and pull factors interact dynamically throughout tourists' travel experiences. Reijnders (2011) conceptualizes media tourism as a circular process in which tourists seek material references capable of reconnecting imagination with physical reality. Tourists' engagement with film-related destinations is therefore shaped simultaneously by cinematic representations and personal desires for emotional and cultural experiences. Such interactions suggest that tourists' motivations and interests may shift during the travel process. The increasing hybridity of cultural tourism further complicates these motivational dynamics. Many destinations now integrate film culture with cultural heritage elements, enabling tourists to move between entertainment-oriented and heritage-oriented experiences within the same tourism space (Agarwal & Shaw, 2017). In destinations such as Hengdian World Studios, reconstructed historical architecture, film narratives, and simulated heritage environments collectively shape tourists' understandings of culture and history. From this perspective, heritage is understood less as a fixed material object and more as a cultural process of meaning-making and interpretation (Smith, 2006; Richards, 2018). Consequently, tourists initially motivated by film-related interests may gradually develop stronger interests in history, heritage, and cultural meaning through their on-site experiences. Although previous studies acknowledge the coexistence of film tourism and cultural heritage tourism, limited attention has been paid to how tourists transform their interests between these domains. Examining this transformation therefore contributes to broader discussions on cultural tourism hybridity and the dynamic evolution of tourist motivations and experiences.

## RESEARCH SETTING AND METHODS

Hengdian World Studios is located in Hengdian Town, Dongyang City, Zhejiang Province, eastern China, approximately 160 kilometres from Hangzhou and within the broader Yangtze River Delta region (Figure 1). Established in 1996, Hengdian World Studios has developed into the world's largest outdoor film studio and one of China's most influential film-related tourism destinations. Covering a vast area with multiple large-scale studio zones and themed scenic areas, the destination integrates film production, tourism, entertainment, and cultural consumption. It has served as a filming location for numerous Chinese films and television dramas, particularly historical and costume productions, while also attracting millions of tourists annually. A distinctive feature of Hengdian is its extensive reconstruction and simulation of Chinese historical environments. The destination includes large-scale replicas of imperial palaces, ancient streets, gardens, temples, and traditional urban landscapes inspired by different historical periods and heritage sites in China. Major scenic areas such as the "The Palace of Emperor Qin", "Qingming Shang He Tu", "Palace of Ming and Qing Dynasties", and "Guangzhou Street + Hong Kong Street" combine cinematic settings with heritage-themed tourism experiences. These reconstructed spaces function simultaneously as film sets and tourism attractions, enabling tourists to engage with both cinematic imagination and representations of Chinese history and culture. Unlike conventional heritage destinations grounded primarily in material authenticity, Hengdian represents a hybrid cultural tourism space where film culture, entertainment consumption, historical representation, and heritage interpretation coexist. Tourists are therefore able to experience film-related tourism and cultural heritage tourism within the same destination environment. Such hybrid characteristics make Hengdian a particularly suitable case for examining how tourists' motivations and experiences evolve from film-oriented engagement towards heritage-oriented appreciation, as well as how cinematic environments mediate tourists' understandings of history, authenticity, and cultural meaning.

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to examine tourists' motivational transformation from film-oriented engagement to heritage-oriented appreciation. Quantitative data were collected through an online questionnaire survey administered to tourists who had previously visited Hengdian. A total of 316 valid responses were obtained. The questionnaire included sections relating to tourists' demographic characteristics, pre-trip travel motivations, perceptions of film-related and heritage-related destination elements, on-site activities, and post-visit reflections. Drawing upon Dann's (1977) push-pull motivational framework and subsequent tourism motivation studies, the survey investigated both external destination attributes and tourists' internal psychological motivations.

The quantitative data were analysed using several statistical approaches. Descriptive statistics were first employed to identify general patterns in tourists' motivations and behaviors. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were then used to examine the underlying structure of tourists' film-oriented and heritage-oriented motivations. Cluster analysis further identified different tourist typologies, including film-oriented tourists, heritage-oriented tourists, and hybrid cultural tourists. In addition, structural equation modelling (SEM) was applied to examine the relationships between film-related motivations, heritage-oriented engagement, and tourists' evolving interests, thereby exploring how cinematic experiences may

function as pathways toward broader cultural and historical appreciation. To complement the quantitative findings, qualitative data were collected from 130 tourist travelogues published on Ctrip, one of China's largest online travel agency (OTA) and tourism service platforms. As a major digital tourism platform in China, Ctrip provides services including hotel reservations, transportation booking, destination information, and user-generated travel reviews and travelogues. The platform contains a large volume of publicly accessible tourist narratives documenting visitors' travel experiences, emotions, and reflections, making it an important source for tourism research in the Chinese context. The selected travelogues focused on tourists' experiences in Hengdian and were collected based on relevance to film-related activities, cultural heritage experiences, and detailed descriptions of on-site engagement. These travel narratives provided rich first-person accounts of tourists' emotional responses, interpretive processes, and embodied experiences during their visits to Hengdian. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes relating to cinematic immersion, historical imagination, emotional resonance, costume participation, and heritage appreciation. Co-occurrence analysis was also used to examine how film-related and heritage-related elements were connected within tourists' narratives. By integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, this study develops a more comprehensive understanding of the contextual and personal factors shaping tourists' dynamic cultural experiences within hybrid cultural tourism destinations.

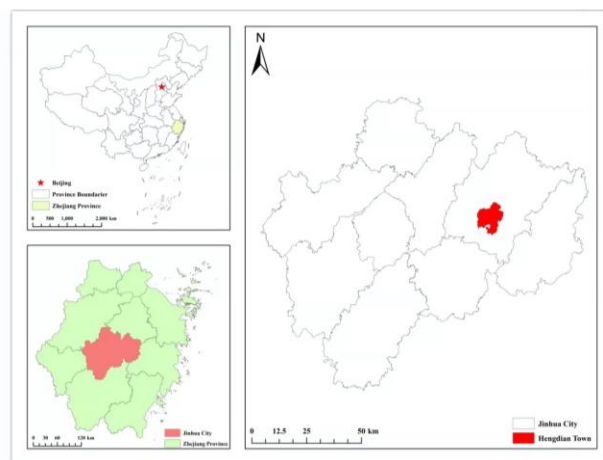


Figure 1: Localization of Hengdian Town (made by the authors).

## DISCUSSIONS

The questionnaire survey generated 316 valid responses from tourists who had previously visited Hengdian World Studios. Among the respondents, 74.1% were female and 25.9% were male, while 97.8% were domestic tourists. The sample was relatively young, with 51.6% aged between 18–25 and 39.6% aged between 26–40. In addition, 72.5% preferred self-organized travel rather than package tours, and 69.9% identified Hengdian as the primary destination of their trip. These findings suggest that Hengdian mainly attracts young, independent, and experience-oriented tourists with relatively strong interests in cultural and entertainment tourism.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) indicate that tourists' motivations can be broadly categorized into two interconnected dimensions: film-oriented motivations and heritage-oriented motivations. Film-oriented motivations were mainly associated with cinematic immersion, filming locations, emotional attachment to screen narratives, and entertainment experiences, whereas heritage-oriented motivations related to interests in Chinese history, reconstructed architecture, and cultural symbolism. The descriptive statistics further support this dual motivational structure. Regarding pull factors, 65.5% of respondents were attracted by Hengdian's convenient location and transportation, 57.9% by the diversity of cultural tourism activities, and 55.4% by the availability of intensive short-term travel experiences. In terms of push motivations, 67.1% of respondents expressed motivations related to experiencing cinematic scenes and emotions, while 59.8% were motivated by curiosity and novelty seeking. Importantly, 50.9% identified engagement with Chinese cultural heritage elements as a major travel motivation. These findings suggest that tourists' expectations already combined film-related entertainment with broader interests in culture and history before travel.

The survey also revealed relatively high levels of familiarity with Hengdian prior to travel. Approximately 47.2% of respondents stated that they were familiar with Hengdian's cultural and tourism industries before their

visit, whereas only 16.5% were unfamiliar. Social media emerged as the dominant information source, used by 79.2% of respondents, highlighting the important role of mediated cultural representations in shaping tourists' destination awareness and expectations. Cluster analysis further identified several overlapping tourist typologies, including film-oriented tourists, heritage-oriented tourists, and hybrid tourists who combined both forms of cultural engagement. Among these, the hybrid tourist group represented one of the most significant findings, reflecting the fluidity of tourists' motivations and experiences within hybrid cultural destinations.

Tourists' on-site activities further demonstrate the coexistence and interaction between film tourism and cultural heritage tourism. The most common activity was visiting reconstructed historical settings and simulated heritage sites, selected by 62.0% of respondents. This was closely followed by visiting filming locations (60.8%) and watching film-themed performances and entertainment activities (45.9%). Additional activities included participating in film-related entertainment experiences (29.4%) and engaging with themed tourism performances and services (26.9%). These findings indicate that tourists are simultaneously engaged with cinematic entertainment and heritage-oriented cultural experiences during their visits. Structural equation modelling (SEM) further demonstrates significant relationships between film-oriented motivations, heritage-oriented motivations, and tourists' evolving interests. Film-related motivations positively influenced tourists' engagement with heritage-oriented experiences, suggesting that cinematic attraction frequently functioned as an entry point to broader cultural and historical appreciation. Overall, the findings reveal that tourists' motivations and experiences at Hengdian were dynamic rather than fixed, with many tourists gradually shifting from film-oriented consumption towards deeper heritage-oriented engagement through immersive on-site experiences.

The travelogues reveal that film-oriented motivations function as the primary entry point for most visitors to Hengdian World Studios, with many tourists explicitly expressing a desire to visit locations associated with popular films and television dramas. One visitor noted that "a hit drama will make people curious about its filming location," highlighting the powerful role of screen narratives as pull factors in motivating travel. Tourists demonstrated varying levels of familiarity with film productions, ranging from general interests in "seeing where movies are made" to detailed references to productions such as *The Founding of a Republic*, *The Qin Empire*, and *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*. At the same time, push motivations such as fantasy, escape, emotional attachment, and imaginative immersion were equally evident. Visitors frequently described desires to "step into the screen" or "experience a sense of time travel," suggesting that film tourism at Hengdian was closely connected to emotional imagination and embodied participation rather than simple sightseeing.

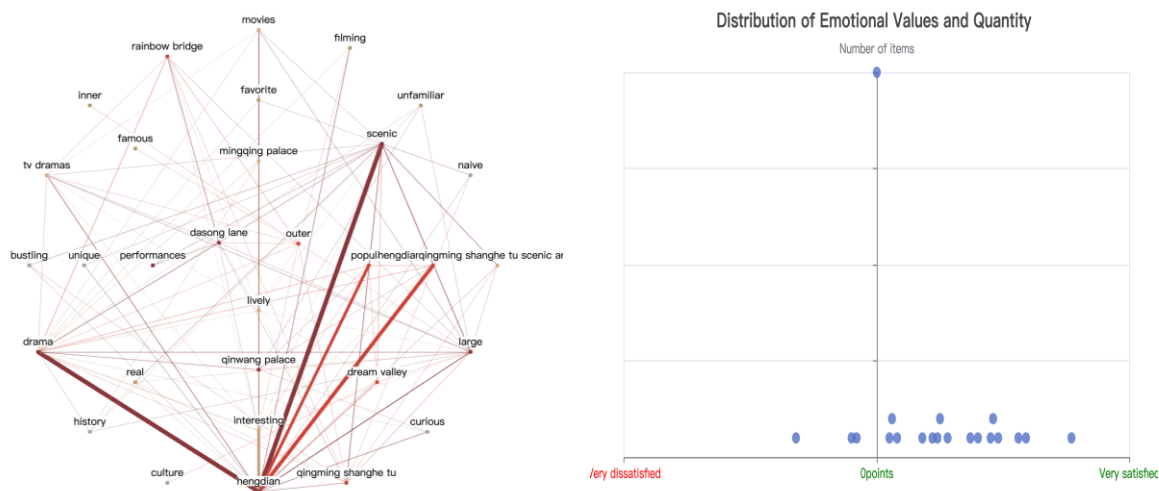
Importantly, the travelogues demonstrate that reconstructed historical environments operate as critical mediators between film tourism and cultural heritage tourism. Unlike conventional heritage sites grounded primarily in material authenticity, spaces such as "Qing Ming Shang He Tu" derive meaning simultaneously from cinematic representation and historical imagination. One tourist observed that the site was reconstructed based on Zhang Zeduan's famous painting, acknowledging that "the building proportions have been modified", yet adding that this "does not affect my imagination of the bustling scene of Bianjing at that time". Such narratives reveal an active process of cultural meaning-making in which acknowledged inauthenticity does not diminish tourists' engagement with history and culture. Instead, reconstructed environments facilitate interpretive and imaginative forms of heritage experience, supporting Smith's (2006) argument that heritage should be understood less as fixed material authenticity and more as an ongoing cultural process of interpretation, memory, and meaning production.

Emotional and embodied experiences emerged as particularly important catalysts in tourists' movement from film-oriented enjoyment towards heritage-oriented appreciation. Many visitors described strong affective responses to the spatial scale and aesthetic atmosphere of reconstructed historical settings. For example, tourists characterized "The Palace of Emperor Qin" as "majestic" and "shocking", while others reflected on how its grand architectural form and expansive spatial perspectives enhanced both cinematic immersion and appreciation of historical architectural culture. Embodied participation through costume consumption was especially significant. Numerous travelogues described renting Hanfu, Cheongsam, or other traditional clothing from local costume studios, with one tourist explaining that wearing historical clothing while travelling created "a more meaningful atmosphere of time travel". The combination of traditional dress, bodily movement, and immersion within simulated historical environments generated what may be understood as a form of embodied heritage consciousness. Through these experiences, heritage-oriented interests emerged naturally even among tourists whose initial motivations were primarily film-related.

The travelogues further reveal that tourists rarely experienced film tourism and heritage tourism as separate domains. Instead, they integrated cinematic narratives, historical imagination, emotional resonance, and cultural

learning into hybrid forms of cultural engagement. One visitor observed that “every place connects to stories”, illustrating how heritage knowledge and film narratives became mutually reinforcing during the travel experience. Tourists frequently described “recognition experiences”, in which identifying specific filming locations within historical settings generated emotional excitement while simultaneously deepening awareness of architectural and historical meanings. In some cases, tourists moved from noticing cinematic references to engaging in detailed historical observation, such as comparing reconstructed palaces with the authentic Forbidden City (Beijing) or identifying symbolic architectural details. At the same time, the travelogues also reveal uneven patterns of transformation. Some tourists remained primarily focused on entertainment-oriented experiences, particularly within attractions such as “Dream Valley”, emphasizing performances, rides, and spectacle rather than historical interpretation. Others expressed difficulty understanding the historical significance of the sites without prior knowledge or guided interpretation. These differences suggest that tourists’ transformation towards heritage appreciation was neither linear nor universal, but varied according to personal interests, emotional engagement, and interpretive capacity.

Further quantitative text analysis of the 130 travelogues, including high-frequency word collinearity analysis and sentiment analysis (Figures 2 and 3), reveals additional support for the dynamic transformation of tourist interests. The term “Hengdian” emerges as the most frequent word, and its high-collinearity associates comprise both film-related vocabulary and cultural-heritage-related vocabulary. This co-occurrence pattern empirically confirms that tourists’ on-site experiences simultaneously encompass film tourism and cultural heritage tourism dimensions. Moreover, sentiment analysis of the travelogue texts indicates that tourists express consistently high levels of acceptance and satisfaction regarding the coexistence of these two experiential domains. Rather than perceiving a tension between entertainment-oriented and heritage-oriented engagements, visitors demonstrate a positive affective response to the hybrid cultural environment, further supporting the proposition that immersive simulated settings can facilitate a harmonious integration of film-induced and heritage-driven interests.



Figures 2 & 3: High-frequency word collinearity analysis and content sentiment analysis of the 130 travelogues (made by the authors)

Taken together, the qualitative findings strongly support a dynamic process of motivational transformation. Film-oriented motivations initially function as accessible entry points that attract tourists to Hengdian through cinematic imagination and emotional attachment. Once immersed within reconstructed historical environments, tourists begin to engage simultaneously with cinematic memory, spatial experience, historical symbolism, and cultural interpretation. Emotional and embodied responses, including awe, fascination, pleasure, and imaginative immersion, further deepen this engagement, encouraging tourists to reinterpret film-related spaces through heritage-oriented perspectives. Consequently, heritage appreciation emerges not as a replacement for film tourism, but as an additional layer of cultural meaning produced through immersive on-site experiences. The findings therefore demonstrate that tourists continuously move between film-oriented and heritage-oriented engagement, reflecting the hybrid nature of contemporary cultural tourism experiences.

## FINDINGS

### Hybrid Motivations and the Coexistence of Film and Heritage Interests

The findings reveal that tourists visiting Hengdian World Studios were rarely motivated by a single form of cultural consumption. Instead, most respondents demonstrated hybrid motivations that combined film-oriented interests with broader forms of cultural and historical curiosity. Quantitative analysis indicates that film-related motivations remained the primary attraction for many visitors, particularly motivations associated with cinematic immersion, filming locations, emotional attachment to television dramas, and entertainment-oriented experiences. Many respondents were attracted by the opportunity to enter spaces associated with popular Chinese films and television productions, reflecting the importance of cinematic imagination in shaping destination choice. At the same time, heritage-oriented motivations were also highly visible within tourists' pre-trip expectations. More than half of the respondents expressed interests in Chinese history, reconstructed historical architecture, and cultural symbolism. The coexistence of these motivations suggests that tourists did not perceive film tourism and cultural heritage tourism as entirely separate experiential categories. Rather, film culture functioned as a gateway through which broader cultural interests could emerge. This finding is consistent with Couldry's (1998) discussion of media tourism, which argues that visitors often move beyond media consumption toward broader forms of cultural and spatial engagement. The travelogues further reinforce this hybridity of motivations. Many tourists initially described their visits in relation to famous television dramas or cinematic productions, yet simultaneously expressed expectations of experiencing "ancient China", "traditional culture", or "historical atmosphere". Visitors frequently associated film settings with broader historical imagination, demonstrating that cinematic narratives had already become intertwined with cultural and historical meanings prior to travel. This finding suggests that hybrid cultural destinations such as Hengdian attract tourists through the simultaneous circulation of entertainment-oriented and heritage-oriented imaginaries, reflecting the increasing hybridity of contemporary cultural tourism experiences (Richards, 2014).

### Reconstructed Historical Environments as Mediating Spaces

A major finding of this study is that reconstructed historical environments play a central mediating role in transforming tourists' interests from film-oriented engagement toward heritage-oriented appreciation. Unlike conventional heritage sites based primarily on material authenticity, Hengdian's reconstructed environments combine cinematic representation, simulated history, and experiential immersion within the same spatial setting. Spaces such as The Palace of Emperor Qin, Qing Ming Shang He Tu, and "Palace of Ming and Qing Dynasties" simultaneously function as film sets and heritage-themed tourism environments. Both quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that tourists actively engaged with these reconstructed settings as spaces of cultural interpretation rather than merely as entertainment attractions. Visiting reconstructed historical architecture emerged as one of the most common tourist activities, slightly exceeding participation in purely film-related experiences. Structural equation modelling further demonstrates that film-oriented motivations positively influenced tourists' engagement with heritage-oriented experiences, suggesting that cinematic attraction frequently encouraged deeper cultural exploration once tourists entered the destination environment. The travelogues reveal that tourists often acknowledged the simulated or reconstructed nature of these environments while nevertheless perceiving them as meaningful cultural spaces. Rather than diminishing tourists' experiences, the awareness of reconstruction frequently coexisted with imaginative immersion. Tourists used reconstructed environments to visualize historical narratives, imagine ancient lifestyles, and emotionally connect with representations of Chinese history. This finding supports Chronis's (2012) argument that tourism spaces function as imaginative arenas through which visitors actively construct historical meaning. Similarly, tourists' acceptance of reconstructed heritage environments resonates with Wang's (1999) concept of existential authenticity, where authenticity is generated through emotional and experiential engagement rather than objective historical originality. In this sense, reconstructed environments operated less as substitutes for authentic heritage and more as interpretive spaces through which tourists could experience cultural memory and historical imagination. These findings support contemporary heritage scholarship that conceptualizes heritage as a process of cultural meaning-making rather than solely as material authenticity (Smith, 2006; Richards, 2018).

### Emotional and Embodied Experiences in Motivational Transformation

The findings further demonstrate that emotional and embodied experiences played a critical role in facilitating tourists' transition from film-oriented enjoyment to heritage-oriented appreciation. Tourists' emotional responses to spatial atmosphere, architectural scale, aesthetic design, and immersive performance environments frequently deepened their engagement with cultural and historical meanings. This finding is consistent with Kim's (2012) argument that emotional immersion constitutes a central dimension of film tourism experiences. Some travelogues described feelings of awe, fascination, excitement, and emotional immersion when entering reconstructed palaces, historical streets, and large-scale cinematic settings. These emotional responses often extended beyond appreciation of film production itself and became connected to broader perceptions of Chinese history and cultural identity. For example, tourists frequently described "The Palace of Emperor Qin" as

“majestic” or “shocking”, emphasizing how the architectural environment stimulated both cinematic imagination and historical reflection simultaneously. Embodied participation emerged as another important mechanism of transformation. Costume consumption, particularly the wearing of Hanfu and other traditional clothing, appeared repeatedly throughout the travelogues. Tourists described how dressing in historical costumes while moving through reconstructed environments created a stronger sense of “time travel” and emotional immersion. These embodied experiences enabled visitors to temporarily perform imagined historical identities, thereby deepening their affective engagement with heritage-related meanings. Such findings correspond with Edensor’s (2001) argument that tourism experiences are actively produced through bodily performance, movement, and spatial interaction. Heritage appreciation at Hengdian was therefore not produced solely through formal historical interpretation or educational learning, but also through sensory immersion, bodily participation, emotional resonance, and imaginative interaction with cinematic-historical environments.

### Dynamic Transformation of Tourist Interests

Our findings suggest that tourists’ interests evolved dynamically throughout the travel experience rather than remaining fixed prior to visitation. Although film-oriented motivations initially functioned as the dominant pull factor attracting tourists to Hengdian, many visitors gradually developed broader interests in cultural heritage, historical symbolism, and traditional aesthetics during on-site experiences. This dynamic process aligns with Larsen’s (2007) understanding of tourist experiences as evolving psychological and emotional processes rather than static motivational categories. Cluster analysis identified several overlapping tourist groups, including film-oriented tourists, heritage-oriented tourists, and hybrid tourists who combined both forms of engagement. The hybrid group was particularly significant, reflecting the fluidity and interdependence of film and heritage experiences within contemporary cultural tourism spaces. Tourists frequently moved back and forth between cinematic enjoyment and historical appreciation during the same trip rather than following a simple linear progression from one form of tourism to another. The travelogues further reveal that tourists continuously integrated cinematic narratives, emotional memories, historical imagination, and cultural interpretation into interconnected experiential processes. Recognition experiences were especially important in this transformation. Visitors often described emotional excitement when identifying specific filming locations within reconstructed historical settings, and these moments of recognition frequently encouraged further curiosity about architecture, dynastic history, and cultural symbolism. Film narratives therefore became interpretive entry points into broader forms of heritage engagement. However, the findings also demonstrate that motivational transformation was uneven rather than universal. Some tourists remained primarily focused on entertainment-oriented experiences, particularly performances, spectacles, and recreational attractions, while others encountered difficulties interpreting historical meanings without prior cultural knowledge or guided explanation.

### Positive Reception of Hybrid Cultural Experiences

The quantitative text analysis provides additional evidence supporting the coexistence and integration of film tourism and cultural heritage tourism within tourists’ experiences. High-frequency word collinearity analysis demonstrates strong associations between film-related vocabulary and heritage-related vocabulary within tourists’ travel narratives. Terms associated with movies, television dramas, and cinematic experience frequently co-occurred with references to history, palaces, traditional culture, and architecture. This pattern indicates that tourists naturally integrated film-oriented and heritage-oriented meanings within their descriptions of Hengdian. Sentiment analysis further demonstrates consistently positive emotional responses toward this hybrid cultural environment. Tourists generally expressed high levels of satisfaction with the coexistence of cinematic entertainment and heritage-oriented cultural experiences. Rather than perceiving contradiction or tension between these domains, visitors appeared to appreciate the combination of entertainment, historical imagination, cultural learning, and immersive participation. This finding further supports Richards’ (2014) argument that contemporary cultural tourism increasingly operates through hybrid experiential spaces where creativity, entertainment, and cultural interpretation become closely interconnected.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored how tourists’ interests transform from film-oriented engagement to cultural heritage-oriented appreciation at Hengdian World Studios, one of China’s most representative hybrid cultural tourism destinations. The findings demonstrate that tourists’ motivations and experiences are dynamic and continuously shaped through immersive on-site interactions. Film-related attractions, cinematic narratives, and emotional attachment initially function as major motivations attracting tourists to Hengdian, while reconstructed historical environments, cultural symbolism, and embodied participation gradually encourage broader interests in history and heritage. Rather than experiencing film tourism and cultural heritage tourism as separate domains, tourists

frequently move between entertainment-oriented enjoyment and heritage-oriented reflection within the same tourism space. The study further highlights the role of reconstructed historical environments as important mediating spaces connecting cinematic imagination with cultural interpretation. Emotional immersion, imaginative participation, and embodied experiences such as costume consumption strengthen tourists' engagement with historical and cultural meanings, even within simulated environments. These findings contribute to existing discussions on cultural tourism hybridity by showing how film-induced tourism experiences may evolve into deeper forms of heritage appreciation. The research also suggests that integrating film culture, immersive storytelling, and heritage interpretation can enrich tourism experiences, broaden destination appeal, and create new possibilities for contemporary cultural tourism development.

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**UNDERSTANDING SECOND HOME SNOWBIRDS' COMMUNITY BEHAVIOUR, A CASE IN HAINAN, CHINA**Shan Lin  
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University of CanterburyMichael Hall  
Massey University

and

David Conradson  
University of Canterbury**INTRODUCTION**

Snowbirds, as seasonal retired migrants, have attracted increasing scholarly attention. Owning a property as second home allows snowbirds to reside seasonally away from primary living places during winter (Wu & Xu, 2018). Though owning a property, those who have second homes differ from permanent residents (Hall, 2014). As seasonal residents, second home owners alter residential landscape and community structure in a destination (Wu et al., 2015). The impact of snowbirds on second home communities has been noted by scholars. Zhang (2024) noted the significance of snowbirds' participation in community governance in the study in Hainan, a famous tropical wintering resort in China. Given the seasonal migratory and second home phenomenon, snowbirds' community behaviour is one of the key determinants for establishing a sustainable and inclusive community with seasonal mobile population but remains under researched. This study thus purposes to explore snowbirds' community behaviour during wintering, identifying the role of snowbirds in their second home communities. The research question is how snowbirds behave and interact during their wintering stay within the communities where their second homes locate.

**METHOD**

To explore snowbirds' community behaviour, semi-structured interviews have been conducted. Study area covered 7 communities and 5 cities in Hainan. Final number of interviews was identified at the point of saturation based on themes emerging from interview transcripts. Transcripts of interviews were used in open coding. Relationships among codes have been identified and structured as a framework for understanding the nature of snowbirds' community behaviours.

**RESULTS**

Snowbirds' community behaviour varies across levels of community receptivity and citizenship behaviour. With identifiable boundary of a community, increasing interaction and participation leads to a continuing bond, further enhancing community receptivity. Collective goals also stimulate their sense of citizenship, encouraging their proactive behaviour, an integration booster. In general, community behaviour of snowbirds embodies in the interaction between societal structure and individual agency.

**CONCLUSION**

This qualitative study identifies a structure-agency dynamic model of community behaviour of snowbirds complied with structuration theory and integration theory. It is expected to fill up the theoretical gap in integration between seasonal mobility and community behaviour by illustrating the protracted nature of behaviour of transient wintering residents. How snowbirds' community behaviours make their role in the housing system has been also discussed. It practically provides insights in policy making aimed at inclusive and sustainable communities experiencing seasonal migratory population.

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management  
Conference. June 22 – June 26, 2026  
Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau  
ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

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## SMART CULTURAL HEALING ECOLOGY: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR AI-ENHANCED ENTERTAINMENT DESIGN IN INTEGRATED RESORTS

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Macao University of Tourism

### ABSTRACT

#### ABSTRACT

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming tourism through intelligent services, immersive experiences, and adaptive visitor interaction. However, existing smart tourism research remains largely technology-oriented, while healing tourism, entertainment design, and cultural sustainability have evolved independently, leaving a lack of an integrated framework explaining how AI, culture, and human experience foster emotional well-being. To address this gap, this study proposes Smart Cultural Healing Ecology (SCHE), a new theoretical framework that reconceptualizes AI as an enabling mechanism for cultural participation. Integrating Smart Tourism, Healing Tourism, Emotional Design, Cultural Sustainability, and Affordance Theory, SCHE explains how emotional well-being emerges through the interaction of intelligent technologies, entertainment design, cultural narratives, multisensory experiences, spatial environments, and social participation. Using a conceptual theory-building approach illustrated through integrated resorts in Macao, the study introduces the concept of Healing Affordance and provides a theoretical foundation for AI-enhanced entertainment design and culturally meaningful tourism experiences.

**Keywords:** Smart Cultural Healing Ecology; AI-enhanced Entertainment Design; Smart Tourism; Artificial Intelligence; Healing Tourism; Cultural Sustainability.

### INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming tourism through intelligent recommendation systems, generative AI, digital humans, immersive media, and adaptive service platforms. As AI becomes increasingly embedded in tourism experiences, smart tourism has evolved beyond operational efficiency toward more interactive, personalized, and immersive forms of engagement. Meanwhile, post-pandemic travelers increasingly seek emotional well-being, cultural engagement, and meaningful experiences rather than purely hedonic consumption. Despite these developments, existing research remains fragmented, with smart tourism emphasizing technological innovation and cultural sustainability focusing on cultural continuity, while limited attention has been given to explaining how AI, culture, and human experience collectively contribute to emotional well-being (Sigala, 2020; Soini & Dessein, 2016).

To address this gap, this study proposes Smart Cultural Healing Ecology (SCHE) as a new conceptual framework that reconceptualizes AI as an enabling mechanism for culturally meaningful interaction rather than merely a technological tool. Drawing on Affordance Theory, SCHE explains how emotional well-being emerges through the interaction of intelligent technologies, entertainment design, cultural narratives, multisensory environments, and social participation. Using a conceptual theory-building approach, the study introduces the concept of Healing Affordance and provides a human-centered theoretical foundation for AI-enhanced entertainment design and culturally meaningful tourism experiences (Gibson, 1979).

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Smart Tourism: From Technological Intelligence to Human Experience

Smart tourism has emerged as one of the most influential paradigms in contemporary tourism research, driven by advances in information and communication technologies, artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and data analytics. Early studies viewed smart tourism as a technology-enabled system that enhances destination management and visitor experiences through intelligent services and data-driven decision-making. With the rapid development of generative AI and adaptive service systems, smart tourism has evolved toward increasingly interactive and personalized visitor experiences (Neuhofer et al., 2015).

Despite these developments, existing research remains predominantly technology-centered, focusing on automation and service optimization while providing limited explanation of how intelligent technologies foster emotional engagement, cultural understanding, and psychological well-being. Future research should therefore adopt a more human-centered perspective that explains how AI supports meaningful interaction between visitors and cultural environments (Stankov & Gretzel, 2021).

#### 2.2 Healing Tourism: Beyond Natural Restoration

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management  
Conference. June 22 – June 26, 2026  
Macao University of Science and Technology, Macau  
ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

Healing tourism has developed in response to growing concerns about psychological health and holistic well-being. Early research emphasized the restorative effects of natural environments, arguing that contact with nature reduces stress and restores emotional and cognitive resources. More recent studies have expanded healing tourism to include emotional resilience, self-reflection, and meaningful experiences, positioning healing as a multidimensional experiential process rather than merely physical restoration (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Kirillova et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, healing tourism research continues to associate restoration primarily with natural settings and wellness facilities, providing limited understanding of how intelligent technologies and culturally meaningful interaction may also facilitate emotional well-being. As tourism becomes increasingly digital and immersive, broader theoretical perspectives are required to explain healing within technology-mediated cultural experiences.

### 2.3 Cultural Sustainability: Culture as the Source of Meaning

Cultural sustainability emphasizes that culture is not only a heritage resource but also a foundation for identity, continuity, and social cohesion. Beyond preserving cultural heritage, contemporary tourism increasingly views visitors as active participants who construct meaning through storytelling, exhibitions, festivals, and interactive experiences, thereby strengthening destination identity and memorable tourism experiences (Throsby, 2001). However, existing studies generally regard artificial intelligence as a supporting tool for cultural interpretation rather than as a mechanism for facilitating meaningful cultural participation. Understanding how intelligent technologies enhance cultural engagement therefore remains an important challenge for future tourism research (Soini & Dessein, 2016).

### 2.4 Existing Design Theories and the Need for a New Framework

Existing design theories provide important insights into technology-mediated experience. Affordance Theory explains that technologies create possibilities for action through interaction between users and environments rather than through technological functions alone, while Emotional Design emphasizes that products, services, and environments shape emotions, memories, and behavior (Gibson, 1979; Norman, 2004).

Although these theories explain interaction and emotional experience, they do not integrate artificial intelligence, cultural participation, emotional restoration, and tourism experiences into a unified conceptual framework. This theoretical fragmentation highlights the need for a new interdisciplinary perspective that combines technology, culture, design, and human well-being, thereby providing the theoretical foundation for the Smart Cultural Healing Ecology framework proposed in the following chapter.

## 3. Smart Cultural Healing Ecology: A New Theoretical Framework

### 3.1 Philosophical Foundations

Smart Cultural Healing Ecology (SCHE) is grounded in a human-centered understanding of artificial intelligence, culture, and tourism. Rather than viewing AI as a technology for automation, SCHE conceptualizes intelligent systems as facilitators of meaningful interaction among people, culture, and place. From this perspective, tourism experiences are actively constructed through perception, participation, and interpretation rather than produced by technology alone, while culture provides the interpretive process through which visitors create emotional and cultural meaning (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Geertz, 1973).

Artificial intelligence expands opportunities for cultural participation, and emotional well-being emerges through the continuous interaction among intelligent technologies, cultural narratives, entertainment experiences, and human engagement. This human-centered perspective establishes the philosophical foundation of SCHE by positioning AI as an enabler of meaningful cultural interaction rather than merely an instrument of technological efficiency.

### 3.2 Smart Cultural Healing Ecology: a New Theoretical Framework

Smart Cultural Healing Ecology (SCHE) is proposed as a new theoretical framework explaining how AI-enhanced entertainment design supports emotional well-being through culturally meaningful interaction. Unlike existing smart tourism models that emphasize technological performance, SCHE conceptualizes tourism destinations as adaptive cultural ecosystems in which artificial intelligence functions as an enabling infrastructure, culture serves as the mediating mechanism, entertainment design provides the experiential pathway, and emotional well-being emerges through the continuous interaction of technology, people, and place (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Accordingly, SCHE explains intelligent tourism as an integrated ecological system rather than a collection of independent technological functions. By connecting artificial intelligence, cultural participation, entertainment design, and human well-being within a unified framework, SCHE provides a human-centered theoretical foundation for understanding AI-enhanced cultural experiences and future intelligent tourism research.

**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Smart Cultural Healing Ecology (SCHE)**

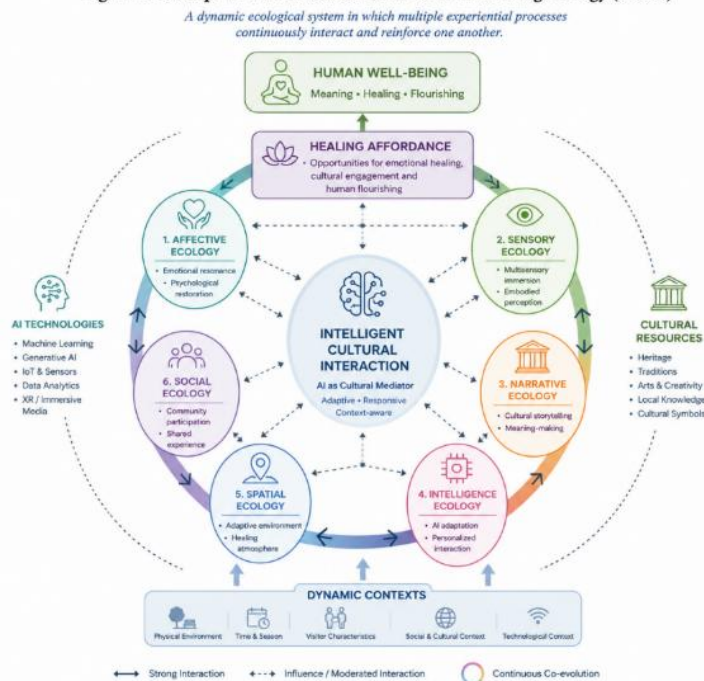


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Smart Cultural Healing Ecology (SCHE).

Note. Developed by the author. SCHE conceptualizes AI-enhanced tourism as an integrated ecological system in which six ecological dimensions collectively support Healing Affordance and emotional well-being.

### 3.3 Theoretical Mechanism of Smart Cultural Healing Ecology

SCHE explains emotional well-being as an ecological process rather than a direct consequence of intelligent technologies. Artificial intelligence creates adaptive opportunities for interaction, entertainment design shapes immersive experiences, and visitors actively construct meaning through cultural participation. Emotional healing therefore emerges through the continuous interaction of technology, culture, space, and human experience, where visitors continuously interpret and reconstruct meaning throughout the tourism experience (Dewey, 1934; Weick, 1995).

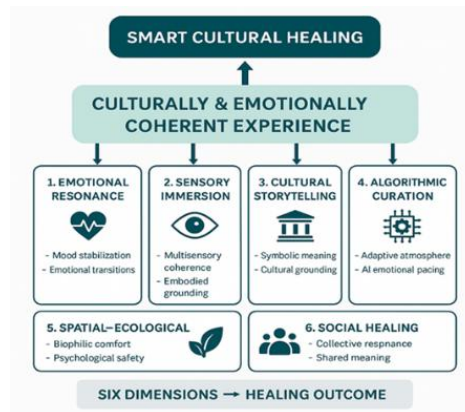
Within this mechanism, intelligent interaction dynamically adapts to visitors' responses, while cultural participation strengthens emotional engagement over time. Rather than improving service efficiency alone, SCHE explains emotional well-being as an emergent outcome of reciprocal interaction among intelligent technologies, cultural narratives, and human participation.

### 3.4 The Architecture of Smart Cultural Healing Ecology

The architecture of SCHE consists of six interrelated ecological dimensions that explain how AI-enhanced entertainment environments facilitate emotional well-being. Rather than functioning as independent constructs, the six ecologies operate simultaneously within an adaptive cultural ecosystem in which intelligent technologies, human experience, and environmental conditions continuously interact.

To clarify this structure, SCHE distinguishes between Internal Ecologies (Affective, Sensory, and Narrative Ecologies), which explain visitors' psychological construction of meaning, and External Ecologies (Intelligence, Spatial, and Social Ecologies), which provide the technological, environmental, and social conditions supporting these experiences. Together, these dimensions explain how emotional well-being emerges through intelligent cultural interaction within an integrated human-centered ecosystem (Manzini, 2015).

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of Smart Cultural Healing Ecology (SCHE)



Note. Developed by the author Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual framework of Smart Cultural Healing Ecology (SCHE). The six ecological dimensions interact to support emotionally meaningful and culturally engaging tourism experiences.

### 3.5 Internal Ecologies: Constructing Meaningful Cultural Experience

The Internal Ecologies describe the psychological processes through which visitors transform intelligent interaction into meaningful cultural experiences within Smart Cultural Healing Ecology (SCHE). Rather than functioning as separate dimensions, Affective Ecology, Sensory Ecology, and Narrative Ecology operate together to shape how visitors perceive, interpret, and emotionally engage with AI-enhanced cultural environments. Emotional well-being emerges through the continuous interaction of perception, emotion, and interpretation, enabling visitors to construct personal and cultural meaning throughout the tourism experience (Damasio, 1999).

Within this process, Affective Ecology establishes emotional resonance, Sensory Ecology supports multisensory perception, and Narrative Ecology connects cultural experiences with visitors' memories, identities, and values. Artificial intelligence enhances these processes by facilitating adaptive interaction and personalized cultural engagement, providing the experiential foundation through which meaningful cultural experiences contribute to long-term emotional well-being.

### 3.6 External Ecologies: Enabling Intelligent Cultural Interaction

The External Ecologies describe the environmental conditions that enable meaningful cultural interaction within Smart Cultural Healing Ecology (SCHE). Intelligence Ecology facilitates adaptive interaction, Spatial Ecology creates immersive environments, and Social Ecology encourages participation, collaboration, and shared cultural experiences. Together, these dimensions transform tourism environments into adaptive cultural ecosystems that support emotionally meaningful experiences (Wenger, 1998).

Rather than operating independently, the three External Ecologies continuously reinforce one another through reciprocal interaction with the Internal Ecologies. Intelligent technologies, spatial environments, and social participation collectively create the conditions through which visitors actively construct cultural meaning and emotional well-being.

### 3.7 Ecological Integration: Toward a Human-Centered Theory of AI-Enhanced Entertainment Design

Smart Cultural Healing Ecology (SCHE) conceptualizes AI-enhanced entertainment design as an integrated ecological system in which Internal Ecologies and External Ecologies continuously interact to shape meaningful tourism experiences. Rather than treating technology, culture, emotion, and space as independent dimensions, SCHE explains emotional well-being as an emergent outcome of reciprocal interaction among intelligent technologies, entertainment design, cultural participation, and human engagement (Ingold, 2011).

Within this ecological system, artificial intelligence functions as the enabling infrastructure for adaptive interaction, while culture serves as the mediating mechanism that transforms intelligent interaction into shared meaning. By integrating artificial intelligence, entertainment design, cultural participation, and human well-being within a unified ecological framework, SCHE provides a human-centered theoretical foundation for future research on AI-enhanced entertainment design and intelligent tourism.

## 4. Illustrating Smart Cultural Healing Ecology

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate how Smart Cultural Healing Ecology (SCHE) can be interpreted within contemporary tourism environments rather than to empirically validate the proposed framework. As a conceptual theory, SCHE explains the relationships among artificial intelligence, culture, entertainment design, and emotional well-being. Therefore, the following examples are presented as theoretical illustrations demonstrating how the framework can be applied to understand existing tourism practices and inspire future design possibilities rather than serving as empirical evidence (Gregor, 2006; Corley & Gioia, 2011).

Two complementary forms of illustration are employed. The first examines MGM Macau and Melco Resorts & Entertainment as examples of AI-enhanced cultural experiences in integrated resorts, while the second presents conceptual entertainment design scenarios informed by SCHE. Together, these illustrations demonstrate that

emotional well-being emerges not from intelligent technologies alone but from the continuous interaction of artificial intelligence, culture, entertainment design, spatial experience, and human participation, thereby connecting theoretical development with future empirical research and design practice (Brown, 2009).

**4.2 Illustration One: MGM Macau—A Culture-Led Pathway toward Smart Cultural Healing Ecology**  
MGM Macau illustrates a culture-led pathway toward Smart Cultural Healing Ecology (SCHE). Rather than treating culture as a supplementary attraction, MGM integrates heritage conservation, public art, exhibitions, educational programs, and creative industries into its destination strategy. This approach demonstrates how cultural resources become the foundation of intelligent tourism experiences, enabling visitors to engage with local history, artistic expression, and community participation within immersive cultural environments (Richards & Duif, 2019).

From the perspective of SCHE, emotional well-being emerges through the integration of culture, entertainment design, spatial experience, and intelligent services rather than technology alone. Interactive exhibitions, digital interpretation, artistic installations, and AI-supported visitor services encourage active cultural participation and co-creation, illustrating how culture-led entertainment design can transform an integrated resort into a human-centered cultural ecosystem that fosters meaningful visitor experiences and long-term well-being (Prahallad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

**4.3 Illustration Two: Melco Resorts & Entertainment—A Technology-Led Pathway toward Smart Cultural Healing Ecology**

Melco Resorts & Entertainment represents a technology-led pathway toward Smart Cultural Healing Ecology (SCHE). Through immersive entertainment, artificial intelligence, digital media, and intelligent visitor services, Melco extends technology beyond operational efficiency to create adaptive and engaging tourism experiences. Rather than functioning as an end in itself, intelligent technology serves as a medium connecting entertainment, creativity, and cultural participation, thereby enriching visitor experiences through interactive engagement (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014).

Viewed through the SCHE framework, Melco demonstrates that intelligent technologies contribute to emotional well-being only when integrated with entertainment design and cultural participation. AI-assisted services, immersive performances, interactive installations, and adaptive digital experiences encourage active engagement rather than passive consumption, illustrating that meaningful intelligent tourism depends on the integration of artificial intelligence, entertainment design, culture, and human participation (Jensen, 1999).

#### 4.4 Comparative Illustration

Rather than representing competing development models, MGM Macau and Melco Resorts & Entertainment illustrate two complementary pathways toward Smart Cultural Healing Ecology (SCHE). MGM adopts a culture-led pathway that emphasizes heritage, public art, and community participation, whereas Melco follows a technology-led pathway integrating immersive media, intelligent interaction, and digital entertainment.

Together, the two cases demonstrate that emotional well-being emerges not from technology or culture alone but from the continuous interaction of intelligent technologies, cultural participation, entertainment design, and human engagement.

This comparison further suggests that SCHE is applicable beyond integrated resorts as a human-centered theoretical framework for understanding AI-enhanced entertainment design across diverse tourism contexts. By integrating technology with meaningful cultural experiences, SCHE provides a new perspective for designing sustainable and emotionally engaging intelligent tourism environments (Papanek, 1971).

## DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study advances tourism theory by proposing Smart Cultural Healing Ecology (SCHE), a new framework for AI-enhanced entertainment design and emotional well-being. Integrating smart tourism, healing tourism, cultural sustainability, emotional design, and affordance theory, SCHE explains how emotional well-being emerges through the interaction of intelligent technologies, entertainment design, culture, and human participation. The framework also extends the concept of Healing Affordance, providing a theoretical foundation for future research on AI-enhanced entertainment design across tourism and cultural contexts (Dorst, 2015).

### 5.2 Practical Implications

The proposed framework offers practical guidance for the future development of intelligent tourism. Rather than applying artificial intelligence solely to improve operational efficiency, SCHE highlights the importance of integrating intelligent technologies with cultural participation, immersive entertainment, storytelling, and spatial experience to create emotionally meaningful visitor experiences. This human-centered approach provides practical guidance for integrated resorts, tourism destinations, cultural institutions, and experience designers seeking to strengthen visitor engagement, cultural sustainability, and community well-being through AI-enhanced entertainment design (Manzini, 2015).

### 5.3 Limitations and Future Research

This study is conceptual in nature and has not yet been empirically validated. Future research should employ qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method approaches to examine the relationships among the six ecological dimensions across different tourism contexts, including integrated resorts, museums, cultural heritage sites, and smart destinations. Such studies will help evaluate and further refine the applicability of SCHE as intelligent tourism continues to evolve.

## CONCLUSION

This study proposed Smart Cultural Healing Ecology (SCHE) as a new theoretical framework explaining how artificial intelligence enhances emotional well-being through entertainment design and culturally meaningful interaction. Integrating smart tourism, healing tourism, cultural sustainability, emotional design, and affordance theory, SCHE reconceptualizes AI as an enabling mechanism for cultural participation and explains how emotional well-being emerges through the interaction of intelligent technologies, entertainment design, culture, and human participation. Illustrations from integrated resorts in Macao demonstrate that both culture-led and technology-led pathways can foster meaningful tourism experiences. As intelligent tourism continues to evolve, SCHE provides a theoretical foundation for AI-enhanced entertainment design and future empirical research across diverse tourism and cultural contexts.

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## CONNECTING TOURISM AND MOBILITY: THE EMERGING ROLE OF INTERPRETER-DRIVER GUIDES AFTER DEREGULATION IN JAPAN

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### INTRODUCTION

In March 2024, Japan introduced a major institutional shift by permitting licensed interpreter-guides to provide paid guiding services while driving their own private vehicles. This administrative deregulation created a new hybrid profession—interpreter-driver guides—that links tourism and mobility at a time when Japan faces labor shortages, fragile rural transportation systems, and overtourism in major destinations. Although driver-guides have long operated under established frameworks in countries such as New Zealand and Australia, Japan’s system remains experimental, and little is known about how the new role is being practiced or perceived. This study therefore examines the early realities, challenges, and potential of interpreter-driver guides in Japan, conceptualizing them as a niche innovation within ongoing transitions in tourism labor and sustainable mobility.

### METHODS

A qualitative, exploratory design was adopted due to the recency of the deregulation and the limited number of guides currently working as driver-guides. Six licensed interpreter-guides with practical driver-guide experience were recruited from an online professional community. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom between December 2024 and January 2025, each lasting 30–60 minutes. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s thematic content analysis. Both deductive and inductive coding were used to identify barriers, motivations, benefits, and expectations, with themes refined through cross-case comparison.

### RESULTS

Findings reveal notable contrasts between rural and urban contexts. Rural guides emphasized the mobility function of driver-guides, describing themselves as “supplementing” weak public transport networks and enabling access to remote destinations. Urban guides highlighted differentiation and value-added services, integrating transport with linguistic and interpretive skills to provide premium, personalized experiences and mitigate overtourism pressures. Across all cases, three common challenges emerged: (1) institutional ambiguity—including unclear insurance coverage, pricing systems, and boundaries with illegal taxi operations; (2) limited and unstable demand, especially difficulty in attracting clients; and (3) infrastructural constraints such as congestion and parking difficulties in major destinations. Despite these challenges, participants identified multi-level benefits: improved flexibility and comfort for tourists (especially elderly travelers and families), expanded income and professional autonomy for guides, and positive effects on regional revitalization by drawing tourists to smaller cities and supporting local businesses.

### CONCLUSION

Japan’s newly formed driver-guide system holds significant potential to address persistent mobility gaps, offer high-value tourism experiences, and advance sustainable regional tourism. At the same time, the lack of institutional clarity threatens the legitimacy and long-term viability of the profession. Comparative insights from New Zealand and Australia highlight the need for Japan to develop its own regulatory framework, including

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management

Conference. June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

standardized insurance and fare systems, visible identification for licensed guides, integrated training programs, and enforcement against illegal operators. As a hybrid professional role that merges guiding and mobility, interpreter-driver guides may become key actors in Japan's future tourism policy—provided that supportive governance structures are established.

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# GENAI-INTEGRATED TOURISM EDUCATION THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING APPROACH

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## ABSTRACT

The advent of GenAI technology presents numerous opportunities for the tourism industry (Vongvisitsin & Tung, 2025). Specifically, text-to-image GenAI tools have demonstrated their potential to anticipate, experience, recollect, and reflect on tourism experiences across the pre-travel, on-site, and post-travel stages through digital artwork (Miao & Yang, 2023). Furthermore, the capabilities of these innovative tools have extended to experiential trials and designs, enabling tourism professionals to transform tourism spaces by illustrating a wide array of developmental possibilities (Xiong et al., 2024).

Urban tourism contexts exhibit highly intensive and dynamic tourist activities, offering a diverse range of products and services that cater to the varied motivations, preferences, and sociocultural needs of tourists (Edwards et al., 2008). In tourism education, experiential learning is employed to develop the necessary observational, analytical, and problem-solving skills for the future of work, particularly in real-world environments (İlhan et al., 2023). Drawing from Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (Kolb & Kolb, 2018; Leong et al., 2019; Morris, 2020; Wang, 2024), this study considers constructivism as a philosophical paradigm and adopts a participatory action research (PAR) methodology to engage participants in fieldwork, coupling their concrete experiences with the integration of text-to-image GenAI tools to facilitate reflection of their observations (Charmaz et al., 2018). Ultimately, the study aims (1) to bridge text-to-image GenAI with experiential learning in tourism and (2) to explore its potential for abstract conceptualization and pragmatic experimentation of the new urban tourism framework.

A total of 70 works—the creative illustrations generated by text-to-image GenAI and reflective essays—collected from undergraduate tourism students are qualitatively analyzed. Using visual and narrative analyses, the findings demonstrate how tourism educators can utilize text-to-image GenAI tools through experiential learning stages, including concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and pragmatic experimentation (Kolb & Kolb, 2018; Morris, 2020). Findings reveal that text-to-image GenAI serves as a visualization tool that enhances students' learning experiences and skills, enabling them to reflect, conceptualize, and experiment with tourism concepts in real-life scenarios.

This study makes both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it incorporates GenAI technology to explore the role of GenAI in experiential learning mode while maintaining positive learning outcomes. Despite ongoing adaptations of university policies regarding GenAI usage, the evolving notion of originality in the digital age necessitates a more nuanced and situated conceptualization, grounded in disciplinary context and learning outcomes (Luo, 2024). On a practical level, the study introduces a hybrid observational framework for experimenting with and designing urban tourism experiences. Through this approach, the study demonstrates how GenAI can be used to anticipate mutual gazes and meaningful interactions between tourists and residents, inspiring new avenues for urban tourism development (Maoz, 2006; Page & Duignan, 2023).

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# **RESEARCH ON THE IMPACT OF INDIGENOUS FAUNA LANDSCAPES ON RURAL TOURISM INTENTIONS-- AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS BASED ON MULTI-SCENARIO EXPERIMENTS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Rural tourism in China has experienced rapid development driven by policy support and market demand in recent years. However, the issue of product homogenization has become increasingly prominent, posing a significant constraint on the quality enhancement and sustainable growth of rural cultural tourism. Vernacular animal landscapes, as important carriers of rural ecological and cultural heritage, embody multiple values—ecological, educational, aesthetic, and cultural—and serve as critical cues in tourists’ destination selection and experience evaluation. Despite their potential, research and practical application in this area remain insufficient. Against this backdrop, this study adopts Expectation Confirmation Theory and Dual-Process Theory as its theoretical framework and employs a series of scenario-based experiments to investigate the mechanism and boundary conditions through which vernacular animal landscapes presented in rural tourism advertisements influence tourists’ travel intentions.

The main findings are as follows: First, vernacular animal landscapes significantly enhance tourists’ intention to visit rural destinations, a result consistently validated across different experimental materials. Second, experience expectation plays a mediating role in the relationship between vernacular animal landscapes and travel intention, meaning that such landscapes positively influence tourists’ anticipated experience, thereby increasing their travel willingness. Third, the “affective–rational” mindset moderates this relationship. Specifically, the positive effect of vernacular animal landscapes on experience expectation and travel intention is significant only when an affective mindset is activated, but not under a rational mindset.

Based on these conclusions, this study offers several practical implications: Rural tourism operators and relevant regions should systematically explore and innovatively utilize vernacular animal landscapes and other local resources to promote product differentiation and experience enhancement. In marketing communications, emotional storytelling and contextual design can be adopted to engage tourists’ affective mindset and strengthen their travel intention. Furthermore, governmental and planning institutions should recognize the role of vernacular animal landscapes in rural cultural continuity and identity construction. Through preservation and revitalization efforts, these landscapes can help reinforce rural cultural identity and contribute to the sustainable revitalization of rural tourism and the fostering of cultural confidence.

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**TECHNOLOGICAL PLATFORMS SUPPORTING HEALTH RESORT TREATMENT**

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**ABSTRACT**

Innovation ecosystems are currently a key success factor for health resorts, especially when supported by technology platforms. However, there is a lack of research on specialized digital platforms in the context of interorganizational collaboration strategies and value co-creation in health resorts. This concerns, on the one hand, the identification and scope of differentiation among existing specialized platforms of this type, as well as mechanisms for building critical mass that enable network effects, as well as the implementation of network business models and advanced models of collaboration strategies, including coopetition. Therefore, the aim of this study was to systematize the causes and effects of the differentiation in the use of advanced collaboration strategies among health resorts, including technology platforms. The following research questions were posed: What are the causes and effects of the differentiation in the use of advanced collaboration strategies among health resorts, including technology platforms? What are the opportunities and challenges related to knowledge exchange and the co-creation of innovation using advanced collaboration strategies among health resorts, including technology platforms? The research method was an exploratory and comparative case study. Theoretical justification based on literature research included models of digital platform advancement, models of the co-creation process in health resorts innovation ecosystems, and a 4E model (Establishment, Execution, Ending, and Endorsement). The case selection was purposeful and encompassed the most advanced technological platforms of health resorts networks related to the functioning of innovation ecosystems in Europe, especially in France, the Czech Republic, and Germany, representing health resorts with over 30,000 patients. A comparative analysis matrix was used in categories related to the aforementioned theoretical models, which was completed based on literature analysis, which led to the compilation of categories for the comparison matrix. This was used to systematize the health resorts networks according to the functional scope of their technological platforms and to explain this variation. Subsequently, a discussion of the results identified and explained the scope of functional variation within the health resorts networks' technological platforms.

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## DEVELOPMENT OF A TREATMENT INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM AS A HEALTH RESORT SUPPORT INSTRUMENT

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### ABSTRACT

Innovation ecosystems are a key factor in the success of health resorts. There is a lack of research in the area of health resorts treatment innovation ecosystem development and health resorts support instruments in the context of modernizing medical services. This concerns the identification and extent of diversity, including spatial diversity, in existing health resorts innovation ecosystems. Therefore, the aim of this work was to systematize the causes and effects of the diversification in the use of health resorts innovation ecosystems. The following research questions were posed: 1) What are the causes and effects of the diversification in the use of health resorts innovation ecosystems? 2) What are the opportunities and challenges related to knowledge exchange and co-creation of innovation using ecosystems encompassing balneological institutes? The research method was an exploratory and comparative case study. The theoretical justification, based on literature research, was provided by models of the co-creation process in health resorts innovation ecosystems and a 4E model (Establishment, Execution, Ending, and Endorsement). The selection of cases was purposeful and encompassed the most advanced health resorts innovation ecosystems related to the operation or design of balneological institutes in France, the Czech Republic, Germany, and Poland. A comparative analysis matrix was used in categories related to the aforementioned issues. Theoretical models were developed based on literature analysis, which led to the compilation of categories for a comparison matrix. Based on this, health resorts innovation ecosystems were systematized according to their functional scope and this diversity was explained. Subsequently, a discussion of the results identified and explained the scope of diversity in the functions of health resorts innovation ecosystems, creating a model of the advancement of health resorts innovation ecosystems. The health resorts support system, i.e., programs, institutions, and projects supporting the development of spa treatment, should focus on improving the therapeutic attractiveness, clinical standards, and effectiveness of spa treatment through: 1) Establishing research and R&D institutes that create innovative health resorts treatment products and services. 2) Creating scientific and treatment centers that provide a platform for collaboration between clinicians and scientists employed at medical universities and research institutes with health resorts treatment. 3) Creating specialized health resort scientific journals.

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**THE IMPACT OF THE WELLNESS STANDARD ON CONTEMPORARY HEALTH RESORTS**

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**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between wellness tourism, encompassing spa tourism, holistic tourism, alternative tourism, and New Age tourism, as well as spiritual tourism. This tourism is currently influencing standards in health resorts in Western, Central, and Southern Europe, and to a lesser extent in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The influence of wellness standards, which are specifically related to clinical health resort treatment standards, is evident in health resort policy and law, as well as in the practice of health resort management in countries such as Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, Italy, Austria, and Slovenia. This issue has received limited scholarly attention, and has been identified as a research gap. This paper therefore explores the relationship between wellness standards and clinical health resort services, and its impact on the functioning of contemporary health resorts. This is the aim of this paper. The following research question was posed: What is the significance of the relationship between the wellness standard and the clinical standard for the functioning of contemporary health resorts in the context of philosophical premises stemming from Romantic medicine?

To answer this question, qualitative research methodology was employed, including literature analysis and exploratory and comparative case studies of health resort legislation, policy, and management practices in selected European and Asian countries. Based on this, a comparative analysis matrix of the studied categories was constructed, completed, and generalizations were drawn from it. Three possibilities were considered: 1) dominance of the clinical standard over wellness; 2) equivalence of both standards; and 3) dominance of the wellness standard over the clinical standard. The expansion of the wellness standard is observable, with geographical patterns, namely, more advanced in Western, Central, and Southern Europe, and to a lesser extent in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. This results in a gradual shortening of health resort treatment duration and, consequently, a reduction in its effectiveness. Modern health resort managers face the dilemma of positioning their offerings on the spectrum between clinical and wellness standards. The same dilemma is faced by decision-makers designing international, national, regional, and local health resort development strategies.

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# SHORT-TERM TREND OR LONG-TERM STRATEGY? THE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FOR TOURISM ENTERPRISES

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## ABSTRACT

Digital transformation offers significant potential advantages to traditional service industries, promising to reshape their operational paradigms and competitive positioning. However, while previous research on the impact of digitization has predominantly focused on the manufacturing sector, little attention has examined its economic viability and heterogeneous effects within tourism and hospitality firms. This study addresses this gap by investigating whether digital transformation acts as a mere short-term trend or a substantive driver of long-term strategic development, while further exploring if these effects exhibit heterogeneity before and after the pandemic, or across sub-sectors such as hotels, scenic spots, and comprehensive services. The primary goal is to clarify the direction and significance of these impacts, reveal evolutionary patterns across different dimensions, and identify key firm traits to provide empirical evidence that supports high-quality industry development. Methodologically, this research utilizes Stata to employ a fixed-effects regression model using panel data from listed tourism and hospitality companies, comprising 295 valid observations. To overcome the difficulty of measuring intangible digital investments, this study quantified the proportion of digital intangible assets (obtained through annual reports), and verified its robustness by replacing the independent variables with the frequency of digital transformation keywords obtained through text analysis of annual reports (using the dictionary method). At the same time, it addressed potential endogeneity issues through the instrumental variable (IV) method to ensure the scientificity and credibility of the research. The empirical results reveal a robust positive correlation between digital transformation and firm value (Tobin's Q) as well as return on equity (ROE), supporting the hypothesis, which is also the core finding of this article: Digitization is a vital long-term strategy that enhances market valuation and shareholder returns. Conversely, the impact on Return on Assets (ROA) was found to be insignificant, suggesting that the asset-heavy nature of the industry may buffer immediate operational returns. Heterogeneity analysis highlights that the economic benefits are not uniform: non-state-owned enterprises (non-SOEs), hotels, large-scale companies, and asset-light firms derive significantly higher value from digital transformation compared to state-owned entities, scenic spot operators, or smaller firms. Theoretically, this study expands the application of economic modeling within the tourism field and enriches the empirical literature on digital transformation. Practically, These findings provide critical implications for policymakers and managers. It provides a strategic framework for firms of different ownership types and sub-sectors to formulate differentiated development strategies, offering a theoretical foundation for achieving precision in digital integration and scalable growth, suggesting that the "Eastern wisdom" of digital integration is most effective when aligned with flexible ownership structures and scalable business models.

**Keywords:** Digital transformation; Textual analysis; Listed Tourism Companies; Heterogeneity analysis; Firm value

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## **EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF CONSTRUAL LEVEL OF TRAVEL ONLINE REVIEWS ON PERCEIVED HELPFULNESS AND INFORMATION ADOPTION**

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### **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In today's digital era, consumer decision-making, especially for travelling, has been frequently made on online platforms, where user-generated content such as online reviews plays a crucial role in directing travel planning and behaviors. Websites such as Agoda, TripAdvisor, and Booking.com allow users to access peer sharing that serves as trusted alternatives to conventional marketing, offering a more personal, relatable, and transparent view of services (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). However, not all reviews are considered equally helpful or trustworthy; some reviews are perceived as more concrete and actionable, while others are dismissed due to abstractness or irrelevance. This divergence in perceived usefulness may be explained through the lens of Construal Level Theory (CLT), a psychological framework that explores how people mentally represent events based on their psychological distance from the information (Trope & Liberman, 2010).

In CLT, psychological distance is categorized into four dimensions: temporal (time-related), hypothetical (likelihood-related), spatial (geographic proximity), and social (interpersonal closeness). Events perceived as psychologically close are construed concretely with details, whereas those perceived as distant are considered more abstractly (Liberman & Trope, 2008). In the context of online reviews, a recent review (low temporal distance) is likely to be perceived as more relevant and a review from someone demographically similar (low social distance) might be seen as more trustworthy and relatable. A review describing a nearby destination (low spatial distance) may carry more weight. Reviews describing likely scenarios (low hypothetical distance) are perceived as more applicable than reviews indicating rare situations.

Despite the pertinence of CLT to online review effectiveness, limited research has explored how psychological distance as cognitive mechanisms underlying online review processing may influence perceived helpfulness and likelihood of information acceptance. Therefore, this research intends to fill this void by exploring how types of psychological distance affect perceived helpfulness of online reviews and travelers' subsequent information adoption.

#### **METHODS**

Using a 2(hypothetical)×2(temporal)×2(social)×2(spatial) between-subject experimental design, this study manipulated each type of distance with two levels into online review scenarios for priming perceptions of psychological distances, followed by a survey that measured perceived psychological distance, perceived helpfulness of online reviews and intention to adopt review information, using a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree).

Through purposive sampling from online travel communities, the study's participants comprised Thai travelers who frequently rely on online reviews when planning their trips. A total of 383 valid responses were obtained, consisted of 170 males (44.4%) and 213 females (55.6%).

#### **RESULTS**

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.  
June 22 – June 26, 2026  
Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau  
ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

Structural equation modelling technique was conducted through PLS-SEM utilizing SmartPLS version 4.0. The results showed that hypothetical, temporal, and social distances significantly decrease perceived helpfulness, implicating that reviews reporting incidents regarded as low occurrence likelihood, timing of reviews perceived as recent, or reviews from socially similar sources are rated as more useful. Conversely, spatial distances do not show significant effects. Finally, perceived helpfulness strongly increases the likelihood of information adoption.

## CONCLUSION

This research extends the application of CLT and Information Adoption Model (IAM) to travel online reviews, offering valuable insights for online referral marketing strategies in tourism industries.

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# AI-ASSISTED COPING IN THE FACE OF CUSTOMER MISTREATMENT: EVIDENCE FROM FRONTLINE HOSPITALITY EMPLOYEES

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## ABSTRACT

## INTRODUCTION

Customer mistreatment, which includes incivility, aggression, and unreasonable demands from customers, undermining employee well-being and service quality (Grandey et al., 2004; Harris & Reynolds, 2003). Drawing on the transactional theory of stress, stress arises from primary and secondary appraisals that shape coping responses (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Facing stress arisen from customer mistreatment, service employees may use AI tools (e.g., decision aids, chatbots), which can provide guidance and reframing (Huang & Rust, 2018; Jarrahi, 2018). We propose that AI-assisted proactive coping (e.g., positive reinterpretation and exerting control) and AI-assisted reactive coping (e.g., distress venting and distancing) (Carver et al., 1989; Pirkkalainen et al., 2019) both expected to enhance service performance. Further, we suggest that employee sensitivity to customer mistreatment, the dispositional tendency to perceive and react strongly to these interactions (Li et al., 2016), would amplify these effects. Thus, this paper aims to advance stress theory to AI-augmented service work and investigate dual coping pathways

## METHODS

We conducted a two-wave survey of frontline hospitality employees via Credamo. At Time 1, participants reported customer mistreatment, employee sensitivity, and demographics. Time 2 occurred two weeks later and assessed AI-assisted proactive coping, AI-assisted reactive coping, and service performance. All focal constructs were measured with multi-item Likert scales adapted to hospitality contexts. Temporal separation mitigated common method bias. Participation was voluntary and anonymous under ethical approval.

## RESULTS

The results demonstrate that customer mistreatment is positively related to both AI-assisted proactive coping and AI-assisted reactive coping, thereby supporting H1a and H1b. In addition, both AI-assisted proactive coping and AI-assisted reactive coping significantly mediate the relationship between customer mistreatment and service performance, providing support for H2a and H2b. Moreover, employee sensitivity significantly moderates the positive association between customer mistreatment and AI-assisted proactive coping, supporting H3a. In contrast, the moderating effect of employee sensitivity on the relationship between customer mistreatment and AI-assisted reactive coping is not significant, and thus H3b is not supported.

## Conclusion

This study advances hospitality research on customer mistreatment by introducing AI-assisted coping as a technology-enabled response mechanism, thereby extending the Transactional Theory of Stress within frontline service settings. The findings demonstrate that generative AI can function as a critical support resource for hospitality employees by facilitating both proactive problem-solving (e.g., generating service recovery strategies) and reactive emotional regulation (e.g., distress venting). Accordingly, hospitality organizations are encouraged to

embed generative AI tools into internal administrative and employee support systems to enhance service performance under stressful customer interactions.

Moreover, the moderating role of employee sensitivity refines the boundary conditions of technology-assisted coping, underscoring the importance of individual differences in AI utilization. The non-significant moderation observed for AI-assisted reactive coping suggests that highly sensitive employees may perceive AI-based emotional support as lacking human empathy. Therefore, hospitality firms should complement AI-driven systems with human-centered interventions, such as professional counseling services, to more effectively address employees' emotional well-being in mistreatment encounters.

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**MUAY THAI WELLNESS TOURISM AND CULTURAL HERITAGE: BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE,  
TOURISM-DRIVEN COMMUNITY ECONOMY IN PHUKET**

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**ABSTRACT**

Muay Thai, Thailand's national martial art and an important form of cultural heritage, is deeply embedded in the global wellness tourism industry. Phuket's Soi Ta-Ed is the most prominent hub for Muay Thai, attracting long-stay tourists who engage in structured fitness training programmes. Although Muay Thai has gained international visibility, limited research has examined how Muay Thai camps operate as anchor institutions capable of stimulating micro-business development and supporting disadvantaged groups. Traditional models of community-based tourism assume that communities initiate tourism activities. However, the case of Soi Ta-Ed demonstrates a reversed pattern where a single high-profile Muay Thai camp triggered the emergence of a diverse local service economy. This study investigates how heritage-based wellness tourism generates micro-enterprise opportunities and contributes to community uplift.

Adopting a multidisciplinary perspective grounded in tourism marketing, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development, this study examines the mechanisms linking Muay Thai camp operations to the formation of micro-business ecosystems. In particular, the research focuses on three objectives: (1) to examine how Muay Thai camps stimulate the emergence of complementary micro-enterprises; (2) to explore how economic opportunities generated by Muay Thai tourism benefit disadvantaged individuals, including retired fighters, informal workers, and small-scale vendors; and (3) to collaborate with stakeholders to develop strategies for sustaining the Muay Thai tourism ecosystem.

In-depth interviews were carried out with 30 key informants with links to Muay Thai including trainers, camp managers, local service providers, and micro-entrepreneurs. Preliminary analysis identifies four mechanisms that underpin the local micro-economy: reputation spillover from internationally recognised camps, the cultural appeal of authentic Muay Thai training, high tourist concentration along Soi Ta-Ed, and the skill transfer of retired fighters into new occupational roles. These mechanisms have encouraged the establishment of food outlets, massage services, equipment shops, laundries, accommodation options, and informal labour networks. Many individuals involved in these businesses come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, and the economic opportunities created by Muay Thai tourism provide new avenues for income generation and social mobility. Overall, findings provide an in-depth understanding of the socioeconomic transformations associated with the growth of Muay Thai tourism in Phuket.

This study advances our understanding of heritage-based wellness tourism as a mechanism for community uplift, offering an alternative perspective to conventional community-based tourism frameworks. Instead of tourism emerging from community initiatives, the Muay Thai case illustrates how a cultural service attraction can generate economic spillovers that reshape local livelihoods. Findings contribute to a deeper understanding of service-led tourism development and tourism-driven micro-entrepreneurship, offering practical implications for policymakers and tourism operators seeking inclusive and sustainable approaches to wellness tourism.

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# DEVELOPING A NEWCOMERS' CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT SCALE IN HOSPITALITY: AN EXPLORATION BASED ON SENSEMAKING THEORY

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## ABSTRACT

Organizational socialization research has long relied on content-based measurement tools to assess newcomer adjustment, yet these scales have consistently faced criticism regarding unstable factor structures and weak theoretical foundations. Although these scales have advanced our understanding of what newcomers learn, they predominantly adopt a passive, knowledge-acquisition-focused perspective, overlooking the active processes through which newcomers make sense of and interpret ambiguous organizational cues. Meanwhile, the hotel industry, as a labor-intensive sector, provides a unique research context for studying cultural adjustment, as hotel culture is publicly enacted through every guest interaction, making it difficult to capture and assess with existing measurement tools, which also lack systematic theoretical development. To better address the aforementioned research gaps, this study draws on sensemaking theory to revise and develop a measurement scale for assessing the newcomer cultural adaptation (NCA) of frontline hotel employees. To ensure the accuracy, reliability, and validity of the scale, this study followed the rigorous and widely recognized scale development procedures proposed by Churchill (1979) and DeVellis and Thorpe (2021). The scale development process began with a literature review and theoretical analysis to establish an operational definition of the construct. Employing a deductive research design, we first analyzed and adapted potential dimensions of NCA based on sensemaking theory. This was followed by a mixed-methods approach to item generation and validation: an inductive phase using semi-structured interviews with new hotel employees was combined with deductive insights from sensemaking theory to create an initial item pool of 45 items. After expert evaluations by five scholars and three industry managers, and a pilot study with 50 employees, the scale was refined and administered to a main sample of 463 frontline hotel employees in China. Through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses on split samples, we identified and validated a robust three-dimensional structure of NCA comprising cues identification and interpretation (noticing and decoding cultural signals), behavioral adjustment (modifying actions to align with interpreted norms), and dynamic cultural adaptation (updating understandings in response to new contexts), ultimately retaining 24 items. Cross-validation confirmed configural invariance. Confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated excellent model fit. Composite reliability for the three dimensions ranged from 0.875 to 0.939, and average variance extracted exceeded 0.50, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established via HTMT ratios. Furthermore, nomological network analysis revealed significant associations between NCA and organizational socialization tactics as well as job satisfaction, thereby embedding cultural adjustment within mainstream socialization theory. By revealing how newcomers actively construct meaning from cultural experiences—including their perceptions of organizational constraints and future-oriented concerns such as technological disruption—this sensemaking-based scale theoretically extends existing content-based measures. It provides researchers with a tool to empirically examine newcomers' sensemaking processes, while also offering hotel managers a diagnostic instrument to identify employee adaptation challenges, enabling targeted interventions to reduce turnover and enhance service quality in a dynamic labor market. This study responds to contemporary academic calls to understand newcomers' internalization processes and provides a new theoretical lens for studying employee adaptation.

ID 58

# NOT ALL CO-CREATION BEHAVIOURS ARE EQUAL: PARTICIPATION ORIENTATIONS, BRAND FIT, AND SPILLOVER IN HOSPITALITY CONTEXTS

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## ABSTRACT

Recent hospitality research increasingly highlights customer value co-creation as a key driver of brand-related outcomes. Within the service-dominant logic (SDL), co-creation behaviours are typically conceptualised as customer activities that enhance service experiences and brand evaluations. However, existing quantitative research has tended to treat co-creation behaviours as mechanistically homogeneous, often assuming that different forms of participation operate through similar pathways. Moreover, prior studies have largely focused on brand- or firm-initiated interactions, devoting limited attention to consumption settings in which value and meaning are primarily generated through customer-to-customer interaction with minimal brand orchestration.

This study examines a distinctive Generation Z phenomenon in which Mandopop fans of David Tao appropriate Haidilao hotpot restaurants as post-concert gathering spaces. In these unorganised events, previously unacquainted consumers mobilise through algorithmic social media platforms to converge on a standardised dining venue, temporarily transforming it into a subcultural sanctuary. Through this process, two otherwise unrelated categories—a music artist and a hotpot restaurant—become experientially linked, and the hospitality venue's role is reinterpreted from that of a service provider to that of a permissive infrastructural space that enables collective participation. Against this backdrop, the study investigates how different orientations of customer value co-creation behaviours operate through distinct mechanisms to generate brand spillover effects in a cross-brand hospitality context. Adopting a two-study research design, Study 1 employs autoethnographic observation and in-depth interviews to explore this setting and to identify qualitatively distinct participation orientations emerging from customer-driven interaction. The findings reveal three dominant forms of co-creation behaviour: social participation behaviours oriented toward seeking and coordinating with fellow consumers; affective participation behaviours centred on emotionally expressive and sharing-oriented engagement; and responsible participation behaviours reflecting customers' willingness to tolerate inconvenience and act in ways that protect the collective experience. Study 1 further suggests that brand-initiated orchestration is often perceived as counterproductive, with meaning and value instead emerging through customer-to-customer interaction.

Building on these insights, Study 2 quantitatively tests a mechanism-based model using survey data and structural equation modelling. The results demonstrate that co-creation behaviours are not mechanistically equivalent. Social and affective participation behaviours influence brand spillover primarily through perceived brand fit between the focal event and the hospitality venue, indicating that experiential congruence serves as a dominant mediating mechanism. In contrast, responsible participation behaviours exhibit both an indirect effect via brand fit and a direct effect on brand spillover, suggesting that responsibility-oriented participation can transfer positive brand evaluations even when perceived fit is weaker.

The study makes three contributions. First, it advances co-creation research by demonstrating that different participation orientations operate through distinct pathways rather than a single uniform mechanism. Second, it establishes brand fit as a central but conditional mediating mechanism linking co-created experiences to cross-brand spillover outcomes. Third, it repositions hospitality brands as facilitative infrastructures that enable customer-driven co-creation, highlighting the pivotal role of customer-to-customer interaction in contemporary hospitality settings. These findings offer important implications for hospitality branding and co-branding strategies in increasingly algorithmically mediated and customer-organised consumption environments.

Keywords: Service-Dominant Logic; Value Co-creation; Brand Fit; Brand Spillover; Gen Z; Fandom; Rituals.

ID 59

# **FULL-RANGE LEADERSHIP STYLES, ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR, AND TURNOVER INTENTION AMONG SAUDI NATIONAL HOTEL EMPLOYEES: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION**

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## **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Employee turnover continues to pose a significant challenge in the hospitality industry, especially within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where high labor mobility negatively affects service quality and organizational sustainability. Leadership is widely acknowledged as a crucial factor influencing employees' discretionary behaviors and retention; however, there is a scarcity of empirical research linking leadership styles, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and turnover intention in the context of Saudi hospitality. This study aims to investigate how transformational, transactional, and passive/avoidant leadership styles impact OCB and turnover intention among hotel employees in Saudi Arabia, while also testing the mediating role that OCB plays in this dynamic.

### **METHODS**

The research employs a quantitative, cross-sectional design utilizing a survey-based methodology. Data will be gathered from employees in hospitality establishments throughout Saudi Arabia through purposive sampling techniques. The hypotheses are formulated using a deductive approach rooted in Full-Range Leadership Theory and Social Exchange Theory. OCB is operationalized across three dimensions: individual-focused (OCB-I), organization-focused (OCB-O), and customer-focused behaviors (OCB-C). Data analysis will be performed using SPSS for initial assessments and SmartPLS for structural equation modeling.

### **EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

Based on Full-Range Leadership Theory, it is anticipated that transformational leadership will have a positive correlation with OCB and a negative correlation with turnover intention. By articulating a compelling vision, providing personalized support, and intellectually stimulating employees, transformational leaders are expected to inspire their followers to engage in discretionary, extra-role behaviors, while simultaneously reinforcing their commitment to the organization, thus diminishing their intentions to leave. Transactional leadership is expected to exert a more conditional effect on OCB and turnover intention, as contingent rewards and corrective actions may foster compliance-based citizenship behaviors and decrease turnover when exchanges are perceived as fair and consistent. In contrast, passive/avoidant leadership is likely to demonstrate weak or negative associations with OCB and heightened turnover intention, reflecting the lack of leadership engagement, guidance, and reinforcement that characterizes the lower end of the Full-Range Leadership spectrum.

From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, it is expected that OCB will partially mediate the relationships between leadership styles and turnover intention. Leaders who provide support, recognition, and clarity foster positive exchange relationships, encouraging employees to reciprocate through voluntary citizenship behaviors. Over time, these behaviors are anticipated to enhance psychological attachment and perceived obligation to the organization, thereby reducing turnover intention. Conversely, ineffective or absent leadership is likely to disrupt exchange processes, diminish OCB, and elevate employees' inclination to withdraw from the organization.

Conclusion: This study is expected to make a theoretical contribution by expanding the scope of leadership and OCB research within a culturally unique hospitality setting, a methodological contribution by offering empirical evidence from a previously underrepresented demographic, and a practical contribution by providing actionable insights for hotel managers and policymakers. The anticipated findings are expected to support the creation of culturally informed leadership development and employee retention strategies aimed at enhancing OCB and decreasing turnover within the hospitality industry of Saudi Arabia.

**Keywords:** Transformational leadership; Transactional leadership; Passive/avoidant leadership;  
Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

Organizational citizenship behavior; Turnover intention; Hospitality industry; Saudi Arabia; Hotel employees.

ID 60

## **CUSTOMER-BASED INNOVATION ADVANTAGE: LINKING PERCEIVED INNOVATIVENESS TO FIRM PERFORMANCE**

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### **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Service innovation has been receiving attention in hospitality and tourism management (So & Li, 2023; So et al., 2023; Keiningham et al., 2024; Peng et al., 2025). With the advancement of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies (Naeem et al., 2024), firms must continuously innovate to attract customers and enhance the value of their offerings (Sorescu & Schreier, 2021; Rubera & Kirca, 2012). Service innovation is defined as the improvement through new or enhanced services, delivery methods, or business models, which enhances customer satisfaction, firm performance, and competitiveness (Verma et al., 2008; Toivonen & Tuominen, 2009). Understanding the antecedents and outcomes of innovation is important for maintaining long-term success in this rapidly evolving industry.

As a human-centered field, customers' perceptions of firm innovativeness play a crucial role in shaping competitiveness. However, prior studies largely focus on organizational perspectives, limited research measures innovation effectiveness from the customer's perspective (Park et al., 2023; Shin & Perdue, 2022; So et al., 2023). Therefore, this study examines how customer perceived firm innovativeness influences marketing outcomes and firm performance, highlighting innovation's role in value creation and customer engagement.

#### **METHODS**

This study used a quantitative survey approach to collect customers' perceived firm innovativeness (CPFI) and customer-related marketing variables (e.g., customer perceived brand authenticity, emotional brand attachment, competitive advantage, etc.), and then linking them with secondary financial data. We selected 30 publicly listed hospitality and tourism firms through S&P Capital IQ, and used Return on Assets (ROA) as the dependent variable, firm performance.

The survey was collected through online platforms, MTurk and Prolific. 150 pilot tests and 900 formal responses were received. All the measurement scales were adapted from previous research. Data analysis was performed using SPSS and SmartPLS 4 for descriptive statistics, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), and regression analysis.

#### **RESULTS**

Reliability and validity of constructs were tested for the measurement model. Survey results validated CPFI as a higher-order construct based on five lower-order constructs: product, technology-based service, experiential, promotional, and social innovativeness. We then assessed  $R^2$ ,  $Q^2$ , and path significance. All  $R^2$  and  $Q^2$  values exceeded 0.8. Path coefficients and T values, estimated via bootstrapping (5,000 subsamples), confirmed predictive relevance. All hypothesized paths (H1–H5) were statistically significant. Regression analyses examined the relationship between consumer-related marketing variables and firm performance. Among the five consumer-related marketing variables, Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) was found to have a significant positive impact on firm performance.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.  
June 22 – June 26, 2026  
Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau  
ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

This study examined how customers' perceptions of firm innovativeness, formed in multiple dimensions, influence key marketing outcomes and firm performance. Findings suggested that the multiple dimensions form a higher-order construct of customer-perceived firm innovativeness, which enhances brand authenticity, emotional attachment, organizational resilience, marketing performance, and competitive advantage.

The study also bridges consumer-level perceptions and firm-level performance, offering a holistic view of innovativeness in hospitality and tourism. Emotional brand attachment showed a significant positive link to financial performance. Industry practitioners should prioritize innovations that strengthen these emotional connections when making strategic decisions.

ID 63

# CRISIS LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE JOB ENGAGEMENT: EXAMINING PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BEHAVIOURAL MECHANISMS IN HOSPITALITY

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## ABSTRACT

Crisis leadership has become a defining capability for hospitality organisations that must navigate increasingly volatile and uncertain environments. Although previous studies have primarily focused on organisational responses and recovery strategies, much less is known about how crisis leadership affects the psychological and behavioural reactions of frontline employees, who are essential for maintaining service continuity during disruptive events. This study examines the pathways through which crisis leadership promotes positive employee outcomes in crisis situations, drawing on insights from the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R), Conservation of Resources theory (COR), Social Exchange Theory (SET), and Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT). These perspectives collectively suggest that crisis leadership functions as a vital job resource that enables employees to conserve energy, reduce uncertainty, and sustain high performance under pressure.

A large-scale survey of 647 hotel employees provided the empirical foundation for this analysis. Data were collected from employees working in crisis contexts and analysed using SmartPLS 4. The structural model assessed how crisis leadership influences job engagement through three mediators: employee psychological resources, leader-member exchange (LMX), and voice behaviour. Ethical leadership was included as a moderator to test whether leaders' moral conduct strengthens the positive effects of crisis leadership.

The results demonstrate consistent and robust effects. Crisis leadership significantly enhances employees' psychological resources, voice behaviour, and the quality of LMX relationships. Mediation testing shows that psychological resources act as the primary pathway linking crisis leadership to employee engagement. Although voice behaviour and LMX also contribute to engagement, their indirect effects are weaker compared with the role of psychological resources. Employees who perceive their leaders as calm, communicative, and supportive experience stronger emotional and cognitive resilience, which enables them to remain engaged during crisis conditions. Ethical leadership further strengthens the effect of crisis leadership on psychological resources. Leaders who communicate openly, act with integrity, and demonstrate fairness create a climate of psychological safety that enhances employees' ability to manage uncertainty and maintain engagement. This finding highlights that ethical leadership is not only desirable in routine operations but is also essential in crisis contexts, where employees rely heavily on leaders for direction, reassurance, and moral clarity.

Overall, this study advances crisis leadership research by providing a comprehensive and employee-centred explanation of how crisis leadership fosters resilience and engagement within hospitality workplaces. The findings contribute to theoretical understanding by demonstrating how multiple psychological and relational mechanisms translate leadership behaviours into employee outcomes. They also offer practical implications for hospitality organisations. Investments in ethical decision-making, effective crisis communication, and employee resilience-building initiatives can significantly strengthen organisational readiness and recovery.

By integrating rigorous quantitative testing with established theories of leadership and employee well-being, this research provides a holistic account of how crisis leadership shapes workforce responses during crises. It shows that resilient organisations depend on resilient employees, and that effective crisis leadership plays a central role in enabling both.

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ID 64

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF CHINESE FOOD THERAPY FOR THE TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY**

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### **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The wellness tourism and hospitality industry is witnessing a growing shift towards food experiences that emphasise health, sustainability, and wellbeing. This trend is driven by the increasing demand for preventive health practices, alternative therapeutic approaches, and personalised consumption experiences, transforming food from a basic service element into a central wellbeing resource. Chinese Food Therapy (CFT), rooted in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), has gradually emerged as a culturally-grounded yet adaptive wellness practice with growing relevance in contemporary settings. It represents an intangible food culture and a holistic food system that encompasses physical, psychological, socio-cultural, and economic advantages. It is consistent with the rising demand for tourism experiences prioritising health and cultural immersion. Although existing research has predominantly examined CFT from nutritional, medicinal, or functional perspectives, its broader role and evolving significance within contemporary leisure settings remain underexplored. CFT is increasingly simplified into commodified products, including medicated diet restaurants, Chinese milk tea beverages, and seasonal menus. It benefits from its Food-Medicine Homology principle, which acknowledges that food and medicine are from the same sources. These innovative manifestations are raising critical questions about how its holistic wellbeing philosophy is applied, interpreted, and perceived in practice.

This research aims to discuss the role of CFT within the tourism and hospitality industry, with a particular focus on its transformative potential and how food wellbeing is co-created through the overarching lens of Transformative Service Research (TSR). The multi-level wellbeing perspective of TSR extends CFT beyond food intervention and cultural resources, and conceptualises it as a service shaped by interactions among multiple stakeholders.

#### **METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative and interpretive research design. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders involved in CFT-related leisure experiences, including service providers and consumers. An abductive analytical approach will be adopted to iteratively interpret empirical materials through TSR, allowing emerging insights to inform and refine conceptual understanding.

#### **RESULTS**

Findings are expected to highlight the transformative role of CFT in the tourism and hospitality field and its potential to generate holistic wellbeing. Specifically, the study anticipates revealing how CFT experiences are co-created through stakeholder interactions, cultural knowledge exchange, and experiential service, contributing to multidimensional food wellbeing outcomes. Furthermore, this study is also anticipated to reveal tensions between standardised service operations and the personalised, holistic principles of CFT, reflecting wider challenges in translating traditional wellbeing practices into modern service systems.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.  
June 22 – June 26, 2026  
Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau  
ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

This study contributes new theoretical insights to position CFT as a transformative wellbeing resource, and extends TSR into tourism and hospitality literature through culturally-grounded food practices. By addressing contemporary industry trends and globalised service contexts, it also provides practical insights for tourism and hospitality stakeholders seeking to design more meaningful, wellbeing-oriented food experiences. In addition, it establishes a broader understanding of CFT/TCM and promotes global recognition of this culture.

ID 70

# **DOES A TOURISM ACTIVITY BENEFIT US? EXPLORING THE IMPACTS OF BASIC NEED FULFILLMENT ON PLACE IDENTITY, WELL-BEING, AND BEHAVIORAL OUTCOME**

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## **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

How does the fulfillment of basic needs enhance our well-being? This question has been partially answered from the perspective of tourism activities. Tourism activity has been considered an effective strategy to improve experiential products. Previous studies have started capturing need fulfillment in the context of an Asian background and place-people interaction. Destinations consist of places where tourists can interact. Understanding place characteristics is important in capturing the connection between people and place.

Specifically, basic needs are significant factors in predicting well-being. Tourism activities and destinations produce the fulfillment of basic needs (i.e., autonomy, competence) affecting well-being. Despite the significance of the well-being framework, there has been limited insight into the role of basic need fulfillment and its relationships with place. Previous literature on need fulfillment has focused on a trip rather than its interaction with a tourist destination. Therefore, this research attempts to identify the role of need fulfillment experienced during a trip (e.g., autonomy and competence) in explaining well-being derived from a trip, place identity, and return intention.

To bridge existing gaps, this research project focuses on South Korean residents who have visited Japan by identifying the effects of autonomy and competence on well-being (i.e., well-being state while thinking of a trip) and place concepts, e.g., its identity and return intentions. Given the above discussion, this research aims to identify the effects of need fulfillment on well-being, place identity, and intention to return. Expected research findings contribute to adding research findings to tourism literature by achieving the research aim and tourism practice (e.g., tourism product).

### **METHODS**

To achieve the research aim, this research explores relationships between research variables by employing quantitative research methods. A survey is chosen as a research strategy, adapting validated scales from previous literature.

Data will be collected from South Korean residents who have revisited Japan. To test the relationships between the independent variable and dependent variables, this research will conduct a path analysis by adopting structural equation modelling via AMOS 29.0. The significant and positive relationships will be the criteria for the justification of research findings.

### **CONCLUSION**

This research assumes that there are significantly positive effects of need fulfillment on outcome variables. Specifically, this study will add research findings to existing literature, which includes the effect of autonomy and competence on well-being, place identity, and return intention. Also, the link between need fulfillment (i.e., autonomy, competence) and place identity helps tourism organizations make better decisions in managing destinations. The link between need fulfillment and return intention offers justification that explains how experience can be used for future behavior. Tourism organizations can use the findings to design tourism experiences by understanding psychological needs, which can be consistent with the characteristics of the place. Therefore, the expected findings will contribute to tourism literature and marketing.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

The author acknowledges the financial support of The Sumitomo Foundation (24803001).

ID 71

**CAIMAN REFUGE AND THE POWER OF STORYTELLING IN HOSPITALITY AND REGENERATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

In high-end travel, “storytelling” has become a fashionable term, often used to dress up experiences with sleek narratives that bear little connection to the people and places behind them. Yet when storytelling emerges organically, grounded in genuine hospitality and a deep commitment to regeneration, it becomes far more than a marketing tool. It transforms the travel experience into something lasting for both visitors and destinations. This study examines the case of Caiman Ecological Refuge, located in the Pantanal region of Brazil, to explore how storytelling functions as a foundational element in the development of high-end tourism products committed to environmental renewal, cultural preservation, and community engagement. Caiman presents a compelling model where the guest experience is not only immersive and comfortable but also embedded in the living narratives of the land, its wildlife, and its people.

Hosts invite guests into the living, evolving narrative of the land, its ecosystems, and the communities that call it home. The stories told there are not rehearsed or scripted. They come from guides, local Pantaneiro cowboys, conservation scientists, and staff members who share a personal connection with the region and its challenges. Rather than delivering pre-packaged interpretations or polished presentations, storytelling at Caiman unfolds naturally. It arises during early-morning wildlife tracking, while learning how conservation teams monitor jaguars, or over a shared meal made with regional ingredients and memories. These moments of dialogue create space for authenticity and exchange, encouraging guests to listen, ask, and reflect. In doing so, visitors are not merely observing—they are participating.

Every element of the Caiman experience is intentionally designed to draw guests deeper into place-based narratives. Traditional knowledge, ecological science, and local culture are seamlessly woven together, offering a multifaceted understanding of the Pantanal. What makes this approach particularly distinctive is the role of stakeholders, including community members, researchers, conservationists, and hospitality staff in shaping and sharing these stories. Their voices are central to the experience and ensure that storytelling remains rooted in local reality.

Hospitality there is not just about service, it is about stewardship. Guests are invited to take part in on-site conservation and community initiatives, blurring the line between leisure and purpose. This participatory model reflects the principles of hospitality and regeneration, where tourism contributes not only to personal renewal but to ecological, cultural and social revitalization.

The storytelling does not end with the guest’s departure. Through photography, film, social media, and collaborations with artists and thought leaders, Caiman helps amplify the voices of its local and scientific partners to a global audience. The result is a growing community that shares a commitment to the long-term well-being of the Pantanal.

Caiman illustrates the transformative potential of authentic, collaborative storytelling in high-end tourism. When developed through shared ownership and real connection, stories can build bridges among travelers, local communities and landscapes, turning a stay into an act of participation, and a journey into a contribution toward lasting change.

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

ID 72

**CONNECTING WITH LOCAL LIFE: AIRBNB MOTIVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES IN MARDIN**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study investigates tourists' motivations for choosing Airbnb accommodation and explores their lived experiences in Mardin, Türkiye, a culturally, historically, and religiously layered destination that remains underrepresented in tourism research. Situated within the broader context of the sharing economy and peer to peer accommodation, the study responds to calls for deeper qualitative insights into how global digital platforms such as Airbnb shape tourist experiences, perceptions of authenticity, and connections to place beyond mainstream urban tourism hubs.

Adopting a qualitative research design, semi structured interviews were conducted with 25 domestic and international tourists who stayed in Airbnb accommodation during their visit to Mardin. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, allowing for an in-depth exploration of participants' motivations, experiences, and behavioural intentions. The findings reveal complex and multi-layered factors influencing the preference for Airbnb over traditional hotel accommodation, alongside rich experiential narratives rooted in place, culture, and social interaction.

Seven overarching themes emerged from the analysis, including motivation, reliability, advantages, disadvantages, experience, intention to revisit, and recommendation to others, each comprising several interrelated sub themes. Key motivational drivers included opportunities for social interaction, a comfortable and homely environment, cleanliness, affordability, favourable locations, accessibility, pet friendliness, and a strong desire for authenticity. Participants consistently perceived Airbnb as offering greater flexibility and personalisation compared with conventional hotels, while also enabling closer contact with local lifestyles and host communities.

Experience related themes highlighted the immersive nature of Airbnb stays in Mardin, a city characterised by the coexistence of Turkish, Kurdish, Arab, Assyrian Syriac, and Armenian cultural influences. Participants frequently described a heightened sense of belonging and emotional connection to the destination, facilitated by staying in residential neighbourhoods and interacting with local hosts. This sense of embeddedness within everyday local life emerged as central to visitors' understanding of authenticity and played a significant role in shaping positive evaluations of their stay.

The findings further demonstrate that positive Airbnb experiences strongly influence tourists' intentions to revisit Mardin and to recommend both the destination and the accommodation platform to others. By foregrounding a lesser-known heritage city, this study contributes to the growing literature on Airbnb by extending understanding of peer-to-peer accommodation beyond dominant tourism destinations. It offers valuable insights into how digital platforms mediate place making, authenticity, and cultural engagement in culturally hybrid destinations, with implications for destination marketing, heritage tourism development, and the sustainable integration of sharing economy platforms within local contexts.

**Keywords:** Sharing Economy, Airbnb Motivations, Airbnb Experiences, Qualitative Research

ID 74

# A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON DESTINATION VISIT INTENTION: INSIGHTS FROM THE TCCM FRAMEWORK

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## ABSTRACT

The rapid proliferation of social media has transformed how travellers seek and evaluate information, positioning influencer marketing as a crucial tool in tourism promotion. Social media influencers (SMIs), through their perceived authenticity and persuasive communication, significantly shape tourists' attitudes and behavioural intentions. Despite the growing scholarly attention to influencer marketing, existing research on its role in influencing destination visit intention remains fragmented and theoretically underdeveloped. This study conducts a systematic literature review using the TCCM framework (Theory–Construct–Context–Methodology) to organise and synthesise current knowledge on how influencers affect visit intention. Guided by four research questions, the review examines the dominant theoretical foundations, research contexts, influencing mechanisms (including antecedents, moderators, and mediators), and methodological approaches across existing studies examining how influencers affect destination visit intention. The findings reveal key trends, theoretical limitations, and emerging research opportunities within this field. The analysis reveals several evolving trends: a shift from generalist to travel-focused niche influencers as subjects; an expansion from simple attitude-intention models to more complex frameworks incorporating mediators like perceived value, envy, and self-congruity; and a gradual methodological progression from cross-sectional surveys towards experimental designs and longitudinal studies. Simultaneously, the review identifies significant theoretical and empirical limitations, including a lack of cross-cultural comparative studies, insufficient exploration of neuroscientific or subconscious psychological mechanisms, and minimal investigation into the long-term effects of influencer campaigns on actual travel behaviour. In addition, this study innovatively divides antecedents into five main thematic themes. This study makes a substantive contribution to tourism and digital marketing literature by providing the first structured integration of this domain via the TCCM framework. It offers a clarified research landscape, pinpointing consistencies, contradictions, and knowledge gaps. For industry practitioners, the synthesis provides evidence-based insights for crafting more effective influencer collaboration strategies and evaluation metrics. Ultimately, the paper concludes by proposing a robust future research agenda aimed at advancing theoretical depth—through lenses like transformative service research or cultural analytics—and enhancing practical relevance in an increasingly dynamic digital marketing environment.

**Key words:** social media influencer; destination visit intention; destination marketing; tourism marketing; TCCM framework

ID 76

## FROM ICONS TO MINDS: LEVERAGING EMOJIS TO HUMANIZE HOSPITALITY SERVICE CHATBOT

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### ABSTRACT

The loss of humanity in chatbot application has been recognized as a crucial issue in customer service field. In hospitality industry where high-touch services are dominating, such loss may trigger customer resistance, frustration, and even lead to brand hate. Against this backdrop, how to humanize chatbots becomes particularly urgent. Thus, this study aims to explore whether emojis, an emerging paralinguistic element in technology-mediated communication, can serve as an effective tool for humanizing chatbots. Specifically, two questions are identified: 1) Can using emojis humanize chatbots, and how? 2) When chatbots employ different types of emojis, will the effects vary?

This research is grounded in mind perception theory, which suggests that people will attribute minds to any entities, including humans and nonhumans. They generally perceive mind through two dimensions: agency and experience. Based on the evidence that human adult is perceived both high in two dimensions while AI has moderate agency but extremely low experience, this research proposes that emojis can enhance perceived agency and experience of chatbots, thereby promoting their humanness and ultimately improving service outcomes (i.e., engagement, satisfaction, advocacy).

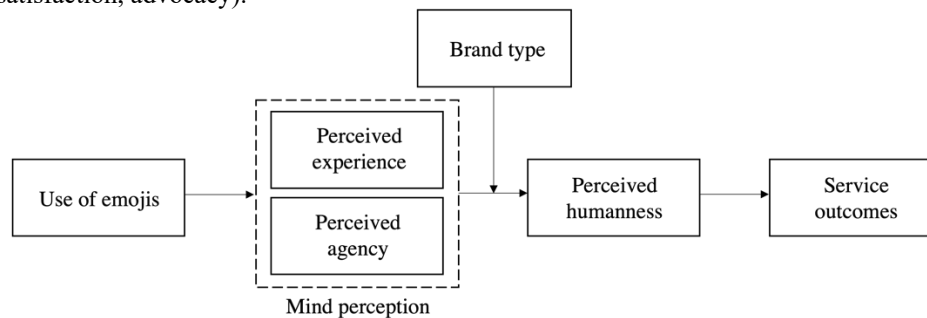


Figure 1 Theoretical model

We conducted three online experiments to examine the proposition. In each study, a set of real service chatbots were designed, and over 800 participants were recruited from Prolific to interact with them in various hospitality scenarios (i.e., hotel booking, coffee ordering, information consulting). To explore the heterogeneous effects of emojis, this research categorizes them into two types: semantic emoji (SE), represented by simple colors and outlines of objects to interpret textual content directly; and emotional emoji (EE), which conveys sender's emotion and personality, represented by facial expressions, body gestures, and some special icons with emotion. Building on this categorization, we controlled how each chatbot uses emojis, i.e., using non emojis, pure SEs, pure EEs, and mix of EEs & SEs, and documented the differences of participants' feelings when interacting with different chatbots.

The results show that when chatbots use pure EEs or mixed of EEs & SEs, customers can significantly perceive more humanness in them, thereby improving service outcomes; however, when chatbots use only SEs, such positive effect was not pronounced. The underlying mechanism is that the emotion and personality attributes of EEs are more closely linked to experience compared to SEs, which is regarded as one of the most fundamental characteristics distinguishing human from machine. Therefore, when EEs is included, customers will perceive both higher experience and agency in service chatbots, hence enhancing humanness; however, pure SEs can only improve agency, failing to produce further positive effect. Additionally, we found that brand type moderated the mechanism: compared with mass brand, the positive role of emojis was weakened in luxury brand.

Table 1 Research overview

| Study                | 1                                                    | 2                                                              | 3                                                              |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Purpose              | Testing the main and mediating effects               | Testing the parallel sequential mediating effects              | Testing the moderating effects                                 |
| Scenario             | Hotel booking                                        | Coffee ordering                                                | Information consulting                                         |
| Independent variable | Use of emojis (non vs. SE vs. EE)                    | Use of emojis (non vs. SE vs. EE vs. mixed)                    | Use of emojis (non vs. mixed)                                  |
| Dependent variable   | Service outcomes (customer engagement, satisfaction) | Service outcomes (customer engagement, satisfaction, advocacy) | Service outcomes (customer engagement, satisfaction, advocacy) |
| Mediator             | Perceived humanness                                  | Perceived agency, perceived experience, perceived humanness    | Perceived agency, perceived experience, perceived humanness    |
| Moderator            | —                                                    | —                                                              | Brand type (mass vs. luxury)                                   |

This research holds significant contributions. Theoretically, it is the first time to confirm the connection between paralinguistic and mind perception, and establish a bridge between emojis and AI humanization. Practically, this research demonstrates the effectiveness of emojis in humanizing chatbots and identifies the boundary conditions, offering a key solution for improving service outcomes in hospitality industry.

ID 77

**FUTURE SELF-CONTINUITY AND TOURISTS' PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR: THE  
MODERATING ROLES OF MORTALITY SALIENCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL REVERSIBILITY**

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**ABSTRACT**

Tourist pro-environmental behaviour (TPEB) is vital for ensuring the sustainable future of tourism destinations. While research on the psychological drivers of tourists' pro-environmental behaviour has predominantly focused on normative and situational influences, little attention has been paid to temporal psychological aspects. Drawing on the Norm Activation Model, this study adopts a temporal psychological perspective to examine how tourists' future self-continuity influences TPEB and how this relationship is moderated by situational cues in tourism contexts, including mortality salience induced by destination type and environmental reversibility information. Employing a multi-scenario experimental design, the findings indicate that tourists with higher levels of future self-continuity are more likely to engage in TPEB. This positive association is strengthened in high-mortality-salience destinations but weakened when environmental reversibility is emphasised in destination messaging. This study enhances understanding of how temporal psychological traits and tourism contextual cues jointly activate environmental responsibility norms, extends the application of the Norm Activation Model in tourism contexts, and provides practical implications for destinations seeking to encourage long-term environmentally responsible behaviour through destination type selection and strategic information design.

ID 79

## AI-GENERATED REVIEW SUMMARIES AND BOOKING INTENTIONS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF POSITIVE COGNITION

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### ABSTRACT

### INTRODUCTION

The hospitality and tourism landscape is currently navigating a paradigm shift precipitated by generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). While online consumer reviews have long served as the bedrock of trust and decision-making in the digital marketplace, the sheer volume of user-generated content has precipitated a crisis of “review overload”. To restore cognitive economy, Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) like Tripadvisor and Ctrip are increasingly deploying AI-generated summaries at the apex of the decision funnel, aggregating hundreds of individual sentiments into concise synopses. However, a critical gap remains in the literature: while we understand how consumers process human-written reviews, we possess limited empirical knowledge regarding whether—or how—these algorithmic abstractions influence the final booking click. Does the consumer perceive the AI summarizer as an unbiased efficiency tool or a potentially hallucinating “black box”?

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To deconstruct this phenomenon, this research integrates the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) of information processing in the context of Human-AI Interaction. We propose that AI summaries trigger dual processing routes. Systematically, consumers may scrutinize the summary for accuracy against raw reviews; heuristically, they may rely on the “authority” of the algorithm to save time. Central to this model is the mediating role of positive cognition, operationalized here through three distinct constructs: perceived credibility, decision confidence, and decision efficiency.

### METHODOLOGY

Adopting a sequential mixed-methods approach, this research investigates the interplay between algorithmic inputs and consumer behavioral outcomes across two studies. Study 1 (Qualitative): Utilizing 21 in-depth semi-structured interviews, we explore the phenomenological experience of travelers encountering AI summaries. This exploratory phase identifies the baseline attitudes—ranging from skepticism to reliance—and defines the specific heuristic cues consumers use when evaluating AI-generated text. Study 2 (Quantitative): Building on the qualitative insights, this study employs a rigorous survey methodology to test a structural model. 306 valid data points were analyzed using AMOS to perform Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). We examine the direct effects of AI summary quality on booking intentions and test the parallel mediation effects of credibility, confidence, and efficiency.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results elucidate the psychological mechanisms underpinning algorithmic persuasion. We find that HSM provides a robust framework for understanding AI adoption in travel planning. Specifically, AI summaries do not directly drive booking intention solely through their presence; rather, their influence is fully mediated by positive cognition. Systematic processing led to perceived credibility and decision confidence; heuristic processing led to perceived decision confidence and decision efficiency; all three cognitive factors positively affected consumption intention.

### IMPLICATIONS

Theoretically, this research extends the application of HSM into the realm of GenAI, offering a granular understanding of how algorithmic transparency influences cognitive processing modes. In practical terms, the

findings offer actionable insights for OTA interface designers and hospitality managers. To optimize conversion, platforms must design summaries that prioritize clarity and source attribution to bolster decision confidence, ensuring that the AI is perceived not merely as a text-reduction tool, but as a credible decision-support agent.

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## **PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL INTERACTION OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS FROM A CO-EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE**

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### **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

#### **OBJECTIVES & PROBLEM DEFINITION**

This study aims to reveal the interactive logic of Internet-celebrity destinations' virtual–physical systems in the digital era, rather than a single linear influence from social media to destination commercial activation. This study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How do virtual engagement and physical tourism commercial activation co-evolve over time in an internet-celebrity destination?

RQ2: How does the strength of virtual–physical interaction differ across empirically identifiable phases, such as latent, peak, and lasting periods?

RQ3: Is the relationship bidirectional in a causal sense, and do dominant directions of influence vary across phases?

RQ4: Following the viral shock, does tourism commercial activation reflect spatial reconstruction, or does it primarily intensify existing clusters, indicating path dependence?

RQ5: What governance implications follow from treating internet-celebrity destination development as an interactive virtual–physical system rather than a one-way translation from online attention to physical outcomes?

#### **METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS**

Using a representative internet-celebrity city Zibo (China) as the study case, this study collects high-frequency social media engagement data and enterprise registration records to operationalize virtual and physical vibrancy and develops a six-stage spatiotemporal research design employing multiple spatial and analytical methods. Python and ArcGIS software are used to analyse.

#### **FINDINGS**

From a co-evolutionary perspective, the findings indicate that the virtual and physical systems exhibit the interaction of phase-varying co-movement, bidirectional influence and spatial structuring consistent with path-dependent adjustment.

#### **THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION**

The findings contribute to the tourism management literature by responding to calls to move beyond perception- and marketing-oriented accounts of social media in tourism research, and by addressing critiques of technological determinism in technology–space relationships.

#### **PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

For DMOs and local governments, the study suggests normalising a phased governance approach tailored for latent, peak and lasting periods, which includes setting emergency plans and prioritising visitor experience management

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

during peak period. For municipal planners, it stresses that hotspot governance should be treated as routine capacity-building rather than crisis response. For local firms and associations, it recommends baseline service standards, flexible operations and performance indicators that match virtual promotion with physical carrying capacity to avoid unmanaged situations.

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ID 85

## **HOTEL INTELLIGENT SERVICES WITH ANTHROPOMORPHIC ROBOTS: EXPLORING KEY DETERMINANTS OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Anthropomorphism has been identified as an effective marketing and communication tool in the hospitality and tourism industry (Ding et al., 2022). Despite multiple ways in which we can make robots more human-like, anthropomorphism should not be a goal on its own (Złotowski et al., 2014). Therefore, the mismatch between the application of humanoid robots in intelligent hotel services and the core demands of customers for humanized experience has become the primary research issue.

This research aims to address a core practical contradiction in the process of intelligent service in the hotel industry, that is, how anthropomorphic robots can effectively meet customers' essential demands for humanized experiences. Most of the existing research focuses on the anthropomorphic technology of robots themselves, while relatively neglecting the structural limitations that prevent them from engaging in genuine emotional interaction in the hospitality service industry. This has led to an inconsistency between the application goals of the technology and the core of the service industry. For this reason, this paper proposes and explores the influence of the gender of anthropomorphic robots, service accuracy, and personalized services on customer satisfaction.

To achieve the core research objective of this study, a questionnaire survey will be conducted through the Credamo platform, with a plan to collect 400 valid questionnaires. During the data processing stage, regression analysis and analysis of variance (ANOVA) will be employed to conduct basic statistical tests and among the variables. Meanwhile, using SPSS, an ANOVA was constructed to fit, estimate, and empirically test a complex causal relationship model that includes potential and observed variables, in order to verify the theoretical hypotheses proposed in the research.

The potential contributions of this research are mainly reflected at the theoretical and practical levels: Theoretically, focusing on the core contradiction between technological personification and service humanization in hotel intelligent services, incorporating robot gender, service accuracy, and personalized services into the same analytical framework enriches the empirical research system of the relationship between service robots and customer satisfaction, and provides a new perspective for understanding the adaptation mechanism of technological variables and emotional needs in complex service scenarios. In practice, the research conclusions can help hotel enterprises optimize the configuration strategy of service robots, assist in resolving the practical predicament of the disconnection between technological application and core service demands, and promote the sustainable development of intelligent transformation in the hospitality industry.

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**THE DEVICE-TASK MISMATCH EFFECT IN ADOPTING GENAI TRAVEL RECOMMENDATIONS**

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**ABSTRACT**

As generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) becomes increasingly embedded in consumer travel planning, an important yet unresolved question concerns how the device through which GenAI is accessed shapes consumers' responses to AI-generated recommendations. Travel planning is a cognitively demanding task that requires integrating multiple attributes, comparing alternatives, and evaluating trade-offs (Dellaert et al., 2014). Building on cognitive fit theory (Vessey, 1991) and task-technology fit framework (Goodhue, 1995, 1998; Goodhue & Thompson, 1995), this research proposes a device-task mismatch effect: mobile-based (vs. PC-based) interactions with GenAI lead to lower adoption intention of AI-generated travel recommendations because mobile devices are less suited to the cognitive and interactional demands of GenAI-supported decision making.

Cognitive fit theory posits that decision outcomes improve when information presentation and interaction modes align with task requirements (Vessey, 1991). In terms of travel planning, which is an activity involving evaluation, comparison, and integration of complex information, mobile devices may impose structural constraints, such as smaller screens, fragmented usage sessions (Broadband Research, 2023), and reduced cognitive resources available for sustained processing (Ward et al., 2017). These constraints are likely to undermine perceived cognitive fit. The task-technology fit framework (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995) further suggests that technology adoption depends on users' perceptions of how well the technology supports task requirements across multiple dimensions (e.g., ease of use, information quality, and reliability), predicting lower utilization when such fit is lacking.

We report findings from a controlled laboratory experiment (N=108) in which participants were randomly assigned to interact with a GenAI system using either their own mobile device or their own PC. Participants engaged in real and self-directed interactions with GenAI to obtain recommendations for tourist attractions in Bangkok and subsequently evaluated the recommendation they received using a three-item adoption intention scale (e.g., "I intend to adopt the recommendations from this GenAI agent"; adapted from Venkatesh et al., 2003). To control for confounding factors, the experimental design held constant the task instructions and recommendation content, allowing for the isolation of the causal effect of device type.

Results show that participants in the mobile-based condition reported lower intention to adopt the GenAI-generated travel recommendation ( $M_{\text{mobile}} = 4.88$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ) than those in the PC-based condition ( $M_{\text{PC}} = 5.23$ ,  $SD = .85$ ;  $F(1, 106) = 3.59$ ,  $p = .06$ ). This effect emerged despite participants in both conditions receiving recommendations of comparable objective quality. In the next study, in addition to this main effect, we plan to test the perceived device-task fit as the underlying psychological mechanism.

This research contributes to the human-AI interaction and travel decision-making literature by extending cognitive fit and task-technology fit theories to the context of GenAI-generated recommendations. By demonstrating that device context, i.e., mobile versus PC, can systematically influence consumers' adoption of AI recommendations, the study challenges assumptions about the universal effectiveness of mobile-based GenAI and highlights device-task fit as a critical psychological explanation for device-based differences in AI adoption.

# WHEN DO PEOPLE FALL IN LOVE WITH GENERATIVE AI? A MIXED-METHODS INVESTIGATION

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## ABSTRACT

While business applications of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) have received widespread attention (Shao et al., 2025), the emerging phenomenon of users forming emotional attachments to GenAI remains largely underexplored (Chen et al., 2025; Smith et al., 2025). Existing studies primarily address business adoption (Chan & Choi, 2025; Kumar et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025), with little systematic examination of the origins, formation, and consequences of such emotional bonds.

Given its exploratory nature, this research adopts a mixed-methods design (see the detail in Fig. 1). Study 1 analyzes viewer reviews of two screen texts widely used to examine human–AI intimate relationships, *Black Mirror* and *Humans*, scraped from major platforms including Rotten Tomatoes, Douban, and IMDb (Hu et al., 2025), using semantic network analysis, BERTopic, and large language model (LLM)-assisted topic modeling to identify key emotional and cognitive factors in GenAI-based intimate relationships.

Building on these findings, we integrate the identified factors into a theoretical model of AI intimate relationship formation and test it quantitatively in Study 2. The results clarify the core components and formation pathways of human–AI intimate relationships in the GenAI era, providing theoretical support for understanding AI attachment and practical guidance for identifying risks in AI companionship and designing appropriate interventions and governance strategies.

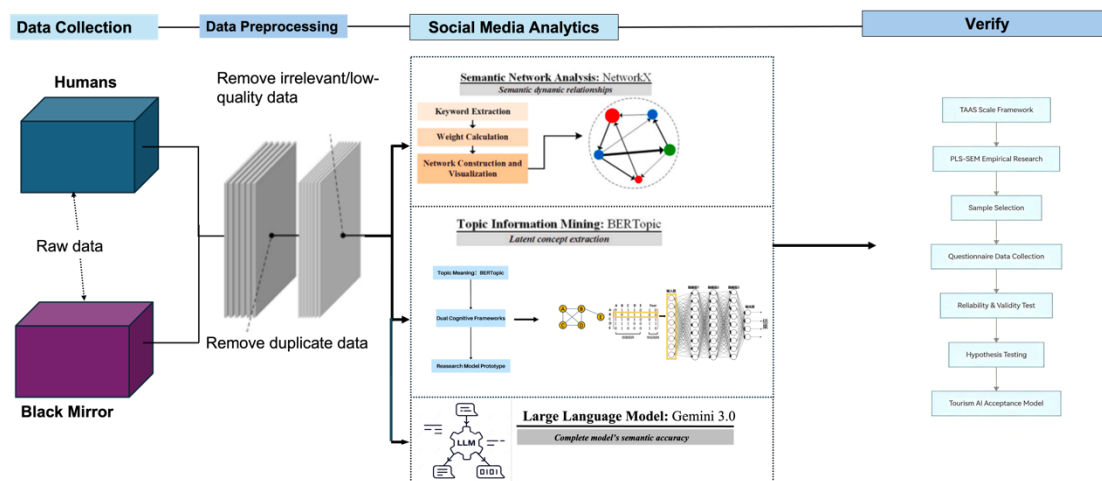


Fig. 1. Research processes.

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ID 93

# UNDERSTANDING THE PATHWAY FROM GAME EXPERIENCE TO TOURISM MOTIVATION: A STUDY OF AFFORDANCES IN BLACK MYTH: WUKONG

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of digital games in shaping destination image and travel intention. It applied affordance theory to explore the case of Black Myth: Wukong. This study constructs a framework showing how cultural, narrative, and social affordance influence destination image, and subsequent travel intention. Besides, the framework included game involvement as a moderator. For verifying hypotheses, this study carried out a questionnaire survey with 196 players. The results are presented as follows. First, cultural and narrative affordance significantly improve destination image, whereas social interaction affordance shows no effect. Second, destination image mediates the effect of cultural and narrative affordances on travel intention but not does not hold for social affordance. Furthermore, game involvement, implying the importance of player immersion, positively moderates the influence of cultural and narrative affordances on destination image. Therefore, the finding reaffirms the potential of video games as informal channels of cultural communication and tourism promotion, especially when affordances are deliberately aligned with local heritage and narratives. The contribution of this study lies in its clarification of the mechanisms linking digital games to tourist motivation, while it also has limitations on timing and scope. Future studies can explore a wider range of game genres and contexts.

**Keywords:** Affordance Theory; Gamification Affordance; Destination Image; Travel Intention; Black Myth: Wukong

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, cultural tourism destinations have faced a series of challenges, including a decline in tourists, marketing woes, reduce public attention, and economic instability (Pourtaheri et al., 2024). Traditional promotions applied by these tourism destinations often lack sufficient appeal to match the entertainment consumption habits of contemporary tourists. Along with advancements in gaming technologies, the intersection of digital entertainment and tourism behaviour have become an emerging research frontier. The video game has emerged to be one of the most influential digital media globally. According to Newzoo's latest report, the global game market revenue is expected to reach US\$187.7 billion in 2024 (Newzoo, 2024). This dramatic surge in gaming consumption shows that games are no longer merely an entertainment product but have gradually grown into an important vehicle for cultural dissemination and export. Games incorporating cultural narratives, aesthetic representations, and interactive mechanisms often provide players with opportunities to experience game scenes that extend beyond the virtual environment. This phenomenon has generated significant social attention on understanding how game experiences may translate into real-world tourism behaviours.

The global phenomenal success of “Black Myth: Wukong” is a perfect illustration of the transformative trend of “game + tourism”. Market data shows the game achieved remarkable success, with the first week of its release prompting a 320% rise in tourism inquiries at the relevant locations. This game is inspired by the classic Chinese novel Journey to the West, which has highly detailed environments, narrative depth, and culturally embedded symbols have attracted substantial attention from players (Fan, 2024). When players engage with the game world, they encounter depictions of landscapes, mythological figures, and heritage-inspired scenes that mirror real-world destinations. Recent work on video game-induced tourism argues that games emerge to function as experiential platforms that can trigger destination awareness, shape destination image, and stimulate travel intention in ways comparable to film and television (Nikolić & Leković, 2025). Therefore, this has led to widespread discussions regarding whether the illustration of game sites via digital gamification can stimulate interest in visiting the related physical destinations.

Although existing research has made some progress in understanding media-induced tourism patterns, its comprehension of ‘how digital games influence destination perceptions and behavioural intentions’ remains fragmented. Most studies primarily explore the connection between gaming environments and tourism behaviour through superficial factors such as game appeal, visual immersion, or narrative experiences. While such studies demonstrate that virtual scenarios can shape destination imagery and heighten travel motivation, they often treat games simplistically as static stimuli, overlooking the fundamental nature of the game space as a “dynamic interactive system”. Within this system, players’ perceptions and affections towards destinations are not passively received content but are progressively generated through continuous engagement with cultural cues, narrative structures, and forms of social interaction. More recent research drawing on the stimulus–organism–response (S–O–R) framework suggests that game-based virtual environments act as external stimuli that shape cognition and affective evaluations of destinations, which in turn mediate travel-related behavioral intentions (Yin et al., 2024). However, these studies still fail to explain how players actively interpret, utilise and transform the cultural, narrative and interactive information within games during their experiences.

Current literature rarely delves into these “functional mechanisms” – specifically, the affordances which are provided by the game environment, facilitate the formation of destination imagery and ultimately extend to real-world travel intentions. This lack of understanding of its mechanism reveals an important theoretical gap. Although gaming environments are highly interactive media systems, a few studies in the tourism and hospitality field have been conducted from the perspective of affordance theory, examining how players perceive and practically utilise the “action possibilities” within game environments to inform tourism decisions. Consequently, this research considers digital games not merely as media stimuli but as environments providing distinct functional affordances. Therefore, examining how cultural, narrative, and social interaction affordances embedded in *Black Myth: Wukong* influence players’ destination perceptions and behavioural intentions, and how game involvement conditions these effects. This study aims to offer profound insights into the emerging relationship between the digital game environment and tourist motivation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Game-Introduced Tourism

Video games are increasingly becoming a novel medium for promoting tourist destinations (Shen et al., 2020). Against this backdrop, game-induced tourism has emerged as a research focus in recent years, attracting significant scholarly attention (Dubois & Gibbs 2018; Jang, 2024; Sharma et al., 2023; Yin et al., 2024; Żemła & Bielak, 2024). A growing body of research suggests that video games can shape perceptions of destinations through their virtual environments and stimulate players’ real-world travel intentions (Yin et al., 2024). For instance, Nikolić and Leković (2025) note that technological advancements and heightened immersion in games enable virtual representations of destinations and attractions that are nearly indistinguishable from reality, thereby potentially motivating players to visit these locations in person. Rainoldi et al. (2022) observed that experiential elements within gaming—such as immersion, realism, and narrative engagement—can evoke players’ desire to travel to locations they have virtually explored, presenting novel opportunities for destination marketing. Xie (2025) validated the chained mediating mechanism of Game Experience → Destination Image → Travel Intention through structural equation modelling, demonstrating that virtual gaming experiences can indeed translate into real-world travel motivation. Yin et al. (2024) employed a SOR model to test how gaming experiences and character attachment influence players’ perceptions and imagery of travel destinations, thereby significantly enhancing their intention to visit real-world locations. This demonstrates that in-game locations can serve both as primary targets for destination marketing and, through gaming experiences, as landmarks that attract players to undertake actual visits (Żemła & Bielak, 2024).

However, existing research predominantly treats ‘gaming experience’ as a singular stimulus, with limited exploration of its internal structure. Addressing this ‘mechanism gap’, this study adopts an affordance perspective to investigate what specific functional aspects of gaming drive real-world tourism behaviour, thereby constructing a more explicit mechanism model.

### 2.2 Gamification Affordances

Recent research indicates that affordances are pivotal in influencing individuals’ psychological states and eliciting their behaviours (Hamari et al., 2014; Karahanna et al., 2018). The Affordance Theory was first proposed by Gibson (1979) and refers to ‘environmental cues or attributes that prompt individuals to take certain actions’ (Gibson, 1979). Within the field of gamification, Koivisto and Hamari (2019) note that Game Affordance stems from the multi-sensory perceptions provided by game design elements. When perceived by users, these affordances translate into motivation and participatory behaviour. This research effectively provides a systematic theoretical

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June 22 – June 26, 2026

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ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

foundation for the formation of ‘gamification affordances’. In this sense, gamification affordances can be understood as the interplay between technological design elements and users’ perceived possibilities for action (Evans et al., 2017). For instance, within specific gamified affordance environments, differentiated game design elements and functionalities can amplify consumers’ perceptual effects, thereby stimulating consumption behaviour (Xu et al., 2022). Gamification affordances amplify experience and dependency through customer engagement, fostering greater willingness to remain (Zhang et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2025). Within the tourism industry, when gamification systems incorporate design elements such as interaction, narrative, and social features, users’ perceptions of destination imagery and visitation intent are significantly improved. Thus, compared to traditional technology acceptance models or flow theory, the affordance perspective emphasises the ‘possibility of action’ provided by the game environment, offering a suitable framework for understanding game design mechanisms.

Guided by this perspective, the current study groups the design elements of Black Myth: Wukong with similar characteristics into a set of general affordances: cultural affordance, narrative affordance, and social interaction affordance — each hypothesised to differentially influence destination image via distinct mechanisms.

### 2.2.1 Cultural Affordance

The impact of gaming on cultural experience is constantly growing (Marques et al., 2023). Video games offer a unique platform for cultural presentation and dialogues (Ramstead et al., 2016). Cultural affordance provides cultural value for people’s perceptual behaviour when interacting with digital environments (Shi et al., 2019). Based on Weng et al. (2020), when cultural information is effectively presented and comprehensible to visitors, their perception of a destination’s cultural value significantly increases. For instance, cultural heritage games place cultural landscapes and landmarks within digital spaces and interactive environments to preserve cultural heritage and narrate local stories (Duarte et al., 2022). Que et al. (2025) systematically analysed the integration of Chinese intangible cultural heritage (such as traditional attire, architectural styles, and classical literature) into game design, enabling players to immerse themselves in these cultural elements. Wang et al. (2024) noted that incorporating cultural heritage into virtual game worlds provides audiences—including players from different cultural backgrounds—opportunities for deeper engagement and experiential understanding of these cultures. The tendency of cultural affordance plays a crucial role in predicting human emotional experiences and happiness (Kitayama et al., 2006). Destination cultures are effectively disseminated through games because the latter transform cultural elements into multi-layered cultural affordances. This constitutes the key mechanism for cross-cultural sense-making, transferring this constructed understanding to attitudes and behavioural intentions towards real-world destinations (Yu et al., 2025).

Base on this, we purpose:

*H1a: Cultural affordance positively influences destination image*

### 2.2.2 Narrative Affordance

Narrative function, as a contextual feature, serves not merely to convey information but also to provide specific environmental settings and story frameworks for gamification mechanisms (Zhang et al., 2025). It emphasises the degree to which users are drawn into, immersed by, or “carried along by” embedded plots. This immersive experience constitutes a vital component of gamified information systems (Dincelli & Chengalur-Smith, 2020; Sailer et al., 2017). This experience possesses strong emotional appeal, rendering content both entertaining and educational (Armstrong & Landers, 2018), while enhancing users’ cognitive retention of destination information and deepening experiential memory (Luo et al., 2023). Drawing upon the narrative transportation theory proposed by Green and Brock (2000), researchers widely acknowledge that game narratives play a pivotal role in destination image construction. This narrative-driven situational awareness facilitates the formation of more positive overall perceptions of relevant locations (Dubois et al., 2021).

Base on this, we purpose:

*H1b: Narrative affordance positively influences destination image*

### 2.2.3 Social Interactive Affordance

Building upon Treem and Leonardi’s (2013) framework of social affordances, the visibility and connectivity of social media platforms facilitate users’ ability to observe others and engage with them, significantly enhancing both the occurrence and quality of social interactions. The opportunities afforded to players for communication, sharing, and collaborative participation within games and their communities (Du et al., 2020), and can be sustained by enhancing players’ information exchange and communication (Weretecki et al., 2021). Encouraging players to engage in collaboration and share their perspectives helps members of online communities access destination information from diverse angles, deepening their understanding of the destination’s unique attributes (Kim et al., 2017). Existing research indicates that user-generated content (UGC), community interactions, and social media dissemination are crucial sources for users constructing destination cognition, significantly influencing destination image and visit intention (Aboalganam et al., 2025). Wang and Yan (2022) observed that sharing and discussing

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June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

social content can build travellers' prior knowledge, enhance destination appeal, and shape travellers' perceptions of the destination.

Base on this, we purpose:

*H1c: Social interactive affordance positively influences destination image*

### **2.3 Destination image & travel intention**

Gartner (1994) argued that destination image influences tourist's perception and their subsequent travel intention. His study identifies cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions as the core elements of destination image. Destination image is widely recognised as a crucial driver of tourists' intended behaviours. Empirical evidence shows that a strong destination image significantly boosts tourists' likelihood of choosing to visit. As highlighted by Woosnam et al. (2020) and Styliadis et al. (2017), the integration of cognitive, affective, and conative images fosters stronger and more reinforced tourist's visitant intentions.

Recent studies have adapted this framework by applying to virtual and gamification domains. By comparing video games with films and brochures, Dubois et al. (2021) demonstrated that even when violent content reduces affective responses, the representation of landscapes and cultural elements continues to reinforce destination image and subsequent guiding behavioural intentions. Meanwhile, Sharma et al. (2023) conducted research on Grand Theft Auto V and Los Angeles. They suggested that the engagement with non-player characters and fellow gamers shapes destination image throughout the gaming experience. Their finding indicated that such images are positive link to intention to visit real-world city.

Evidence from gamification studies underscores and consolidates this linkage as well. Lee et al. (2025) demonstrated that VR features and digital media literacy foster positive emotions, which in turn strongly predicts tourists' recommendation and visitation intention. Cha et al. (2024) likewise highlighted that gamification features embedded in the Metaverse cultivate perceived value and flow, ultimately driving greater engagement and willingness to engage in tourism experience. As Zhang et al. (2025) observed, gamified tourism applications incorporate aesthetic, narrative, achievement, and social affordances, heighten users' cognitive and emotional engagement with destinations, in turn positively influence their travel intentions.

These findings suggest that destination image, whether embedded in gaming or immersive technologies, influences tourists' perception, emotion, and behavioural tendencies, thereby reinforcing their travel intentions.

Base on this, we purpose:

*H2a: Destination image mediates the relationship between cultural affordance and travel intention.*

*H2b: Destination image mediates the relationship between narrative affordance and travel intention.*

*H2c: Destination image mediates the relationship between social interactive affordance and travel intention.*

### **2.4 Game Involvement**

Scholars have conceptualised game involvement as a multidimensional construct shaping how players interact with cultural, narrative, and social affordances within digital settings. Calleja's (2007) conceptual framework identifies six forms of involvement, namely tactical, performative, affective, narrative, spatial and shared involvement, each varying in intensity among players. The process of 'incorporation', as he emphasised, occurs when deeply involved players absorb game content more profoundly, making digital environments cognitively and emotionally part of their lived experience. Such incorporation implies that involvement serves as a moderator, amplifying the impact of affordances on overarching perceptions such as destination image.

First, Cultural affordances in games, including representation of heritage, landscapes, and local traditions, tend to exert greater influence on destination image for highly engaged players. Snodgrass et al. (2016) demonstrated that strong engagement among gamers leads to the formation of shared cultural models guiding experience interpretation. As players become more immersed, cultural cues exert stronger influence, consolidating positive destination associations.

Second, game involvement also moderate narrative affordance, such as storylines and quests. Snodgrass et al. (2016) argue that insider perspectives confirm narrative experience as salient and impactful. Calleja (2007) also underscores narrative involvement as a unique experiential dimension, wherein players' immersion in plotlines foster deeper meaning-making. As a result, higher involvement predisposes players to convert narrative immersion into positive destination image, as story-driven cultural scripts are internalised.

Third, guilds, cooperative play, and community belonging as social interaction affordance are highly contingent on player involvement. Snodgrass et al. (2016) revealed that alignment with gaming communities influence both pleasurable and distressing experiences. Calleja's (2007) framework of shared involvement stresses that collaborative play strengthens the experiential dimensions of gaming. Thus, players with stronger involvement derive stronger destination image from social affordance, since their connection to in-game communities reinforce the authenticity and attractiveness of cultural spaces.

Collectively, game involvement serves as a positive moderating force across cultural, narrative, and social

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domains, strengthening the affordance-destination image link via cognitive, affective, and social immersion in digital play.

Base on this, we purpose:

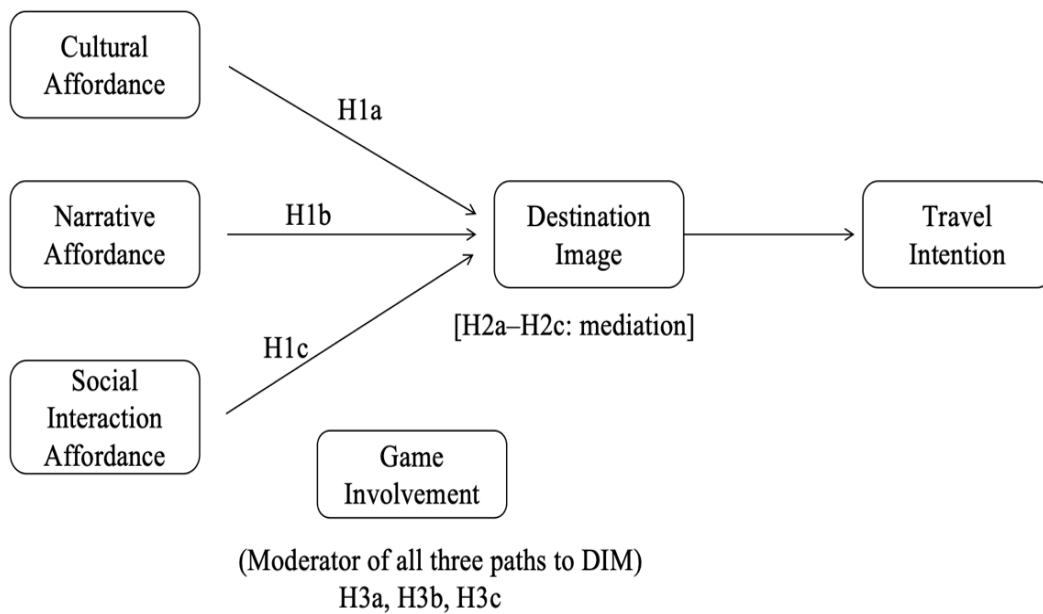
*H3a: Game involvement positively moderates the relationship between cultural affordance and destination image.*

*H3b: Game involvement positively moderates the relationship between narrative affordance and destination image.*

*H3c: Game involvement positively moderates the relationship between social interactive affordance and destination image.*

**Figure 2**

*Research framework*



## METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Variables and observation items

According to the literature review, the variables and observation items in this study include cultural affordance, narrative affordance, social interaction, destination image and travel intention.

Based on the mature research conducted by previous scholars, the paper refines the independent variable, the moderating variable and the mediating variable into different dimensions. (Table 1)

**Table 1**  
*Variables and observation items*

| Variables                     | Breakdown                                     | Source                                                                |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cultural Affordance           | Cultural elements                             | Weng et al. (2020), Perceived Cultural Heritage Value Scale (adapted) |
|                               | Cultural background                           |                                                                       |
|                               | Cultural appeal                               |                                                                       |
| Narrative Affordance          | Narrative story                               | Green & Brock (2000) Narrative Transportation Scale (adapted)         |
|                               | Narrative events                              |                                                                       |
|                               | Narrative immersive                           |                                                                       |
| Social Interaction Affordance | Social topics                                 | Treem & Leonardi (2013) Social Affordance Theory (adapted)            |
|                               | Social connection                             |                                                                       |
|                               | Social identity                               |                                                                       |
| Destination Image             | Perceived sightseeing emotions in destination | Kim & Chen (2016) Destination Image Scale (adapted)                   |
| Travel Intention              | Want to visit                                 | Lam & Hsu (2006) Travel Intention Scale (adapted)                     |
|                               | Consider to visit                             |                                                                       |
|                               | Intent to visit                               |                                                                       |

### 3.2 Questionnaire Design

Targeting at Black Myth: Wukong, the questionnaire is formulated with four parts and 18 observation items in view of measurement dimensions of the variables. A five-level Likert scale is employed for the measurement, covering nine questions about game affordance in Part 1, divided into three specific categories. Three questions about game involvement in Part 2, three questions about destination image in Part 3, three questions about travel intention in Part 4, and a demographic survey of players at the end. (see Appendix A for items and references).

### 3.3 Data source and descriptive analysis

#### 3.3.1 Data source

From November 1 to November 20, 2025, a total of 200 questionnaires were distributed in a paid manner in the game community of Black Myth: Wukong on A9VG Website and 196 copies were responded with a validity rate of 98%, Because four of the respondents who filled out the questionnaire had never played this game. A9VG is a well-established content-sharing website offering extensive gaming news and guides. Its dedicated discussion forum for Black Myth: Wukong has attracted a large following of fans for this title. Respondents generally took the survey seriously, with very few invalid responses.

#### 3.3.2 Descriptive analysis

A total of 196 valid questionnaires were collected in this study. The sample data have been descriptively analysed in terms of gender, age and game experience from game. Here are the respondents in detail (Table 2).

**Table 2**  
*Descriptive statistics of the sample*

| Characteristics | Level  | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|--------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender          | Male   | 120       | 61.2%          |
|                 | Female | 76        | 38.8%          |
| Age             | 0-18   | 17        | 8.7%           |
|                 | 19-35  | 127       | 64.8%          |
|                 | 36-50  | 52        | 26.5%          |
| Game experience | No     | 4         |                |
|                 | Yes    | 196       |                |

### 3.3.3 Measurement model analysis

This study evaluated the measurement model for reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity based on the recommendations of Hair et al. (2019). As shown in Table 3, the reliability test results showed that all variables' Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients ranging from 0.858 to 0.872, which were greater than 0.7. Composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.914 to 0.921, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating good-scale reliability. Moreover, Convergent validity was supported as all item factor loadings were greater than 0.7, which ranging from 0.855 and 0.907, and the average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.779 to 0.796 ( $>0.5$ ), indicating adequate convergent validity of the scale. As presented in Table 4, the square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its intervariable correlation coefficients, indicating good discriminant validity. In addition, this study use the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values to examine the multicollinearity. As reported in Table 5, all VIF values are below 3.3, suggesting no critical collinearity issues in this study (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2006). As shown in Table 6, the SRMR value of 0.060 fell below the 0.08 benchmark (Hu & Bentler, 1999), suggesting an acceptable model fit.

**Table 3**  
*Results of reliability and validity of measurements*

| Construct                           | Items | Factor loading | Cronbach's $\alpha$ | CR (rho-a) | CR (rho-c) | AVE   |
|-------------------------------------|-------|----------------|---------------------|------------|------------|-------|
| Cultural Affordance (CA)            | CA1   | 0.895          | 0.872               | 0.877      | 0.921      | 0.796 |
|                                     | CA2   | 0.907          |                     |            |            |       |
|                                     | CA3   | 0.873          |                     |            |            |       |
| Narrative Affordance (NA)           | NA1   | 0.91           | 0.861               | 0.865      | 0.915      | 0.783 |
|                                     | NA2   | 0.875          |                     |            |            |       |
|                                     | NA3   | 0.868          |                     |            |            |       |
| Social Interactive Affordance (SIA) | SIA1  | 0.875          | 0.866               | 0.876      | 0.918      | 0.788 |
|                                     | SIA2  | 0.89           |                     |            |            |       |
|                                     | SIA3  | 0.897          |                     |            |            |       |
| Game Involvement (GIV)              | GIV1  | 0.878          | 0.859               | 0.868      | 0.914      | 0.78  |
|                                     | GIV2  | 0.901          |                     |            |            |       |
|                                     | GIV3  | 0.869          |                     |            |            |       |
| Destination Image (DIM)             | DIM1  | 0.891          | 0.858               | 0.86       | 0.914      | 0.779 |
|                                     | DIM2  | 0.855          |                     |            |            |       |
|                                     | DIM3  | 0.902          |                     |            |            |       |
| Travel Intention (TIT)              | TIT1  | 0.887          | 0.863               | 0.869      | 0.916      | 0.784 |
|                                     | TIT2  | 0.886          |                     |            |            |       |
|                                     | TIT3  | 0.884          |                     |            |            |       |

**Table 4**  
*Discriminant validity*

| Constructs | CA             | NA             | SIA            | GIV            | DIM            | TIT            | GIV x CA | GIV x NA | GIV x SIA |
|------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| CA         | <b>【0.892】</b> |                |                |                |                |                |          |          |           |
| NA         | 0.413          | <b>【0.885】</b> |                |                |                |                |          |          |           |
| SIA        | 0.028          | 0.145          | <b>【0.888】</b> |                |                |                |          |          |           |
| GIV        | 0.306          | 0.227          | 0.095          | <b>【0.883】</b> |                |                |          |          |           |
| DIM        | 0.605          | 0.529          | 0.061          | 0.364          | <b>【0.883】</b> |                |          |          |           |
| TIT        | 0.3            | 0.321          | 0.069          | 0.308          | 0.482          | <b>【0.885】</b> |          |          |           |
| GIV x CA   | 0.071          | 0.025          | 0.075          | 0.065          | 0.251          | 0.073          |          |          |           |
| GIV x NA   | 0.023          | 0.048          | 0.034          | 0.042          | 0.204          | 0.044          | 0.347    |          |           |
| GIV x SIA  | 0.072          | 0.021          | 0.029          | 0.04           | 0.068          | 0.022          | 0.018    | 0.107    |           |

**【】** is the square root of the latent variable AVE.

**Table 5**  
*Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) Results*

| Path            | VIF   |
|-----------------|-------|
| CA → DIM        | 1.222 |
| NA → DIM        | 1.191 |
| SIA → DIM       | 1.032 |
| GIV → DIM       | 1.109 |
| DIM → TIT       | 1.000 |
| GIV x CA → DIM  | 1.155 |
| GIV x NA → DIM  | 1.158 |
| GIV x SIA → DIM | 1.022 |

**Table 6**  
*Model Fit Indices*

| Index      | Saturated Model | Estimated Model |
|------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| SRMR       | 0.051           | 0.060           |
| d_ULS      | 0.446           | 0.616           |
| d_G        | 0.295           | 0.304           |
| Chi-square | 372.965         | 381.739         |
| NFI        | 0.816           | 0.812           |

### 3.3.4 Structural model analysis

This study utilized SmartPLS 4 to examine the structural model, and the results are depicted in Figure 2. This study further examines the structural model by conducting Bootstrapping analysis to assess  $R^2$  values, path coefficients and their significance.

#### 3.3.4.1 Direct Effects

Cultural affordance had the highest influence on players' destination image ( $\beta = 0.363$ ,  $t=6.369$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and narrative affordance also has a significant positive influence on destination image ( $\beta = 0.292$ ,  $t=4.802$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Unfortunately, Social interaction affordance does not significantly affect destination image ( $\beta = -0.019$ ,  $t=0.293$ ,  $p > 0.10$ ), confirming hypotheses *H1a* and *H1b*, and rejecting hypothesis *H1c*.

#### 3.3.4.2 Mediation Effects

As shown in Table 7, Bootstrapping results confirmed the mediating role of destination image for two affordance–intention paths. Destination image significantly mediated the relationship between cultural affordance and travel intention ( $\beta = 0.151$ ,  $t = 4.735$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting *H2a*. It also mediated the effect of narrative affordance on travel intention ( $\beta = 0.122$ ,  $t = 3.899$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting *H2b*.

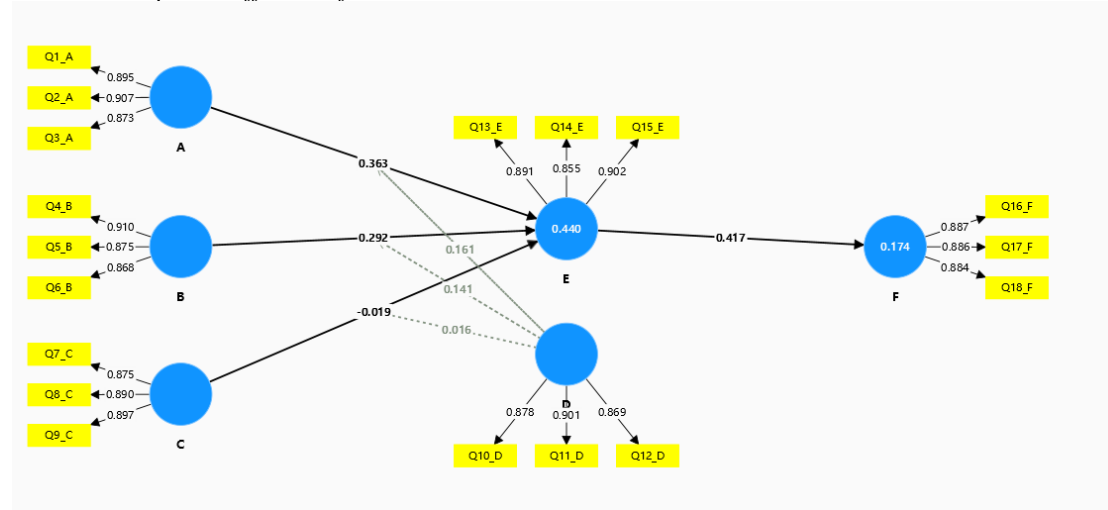
However, the indirect effect of social interactive affordance on travel intention through destination image was not significant ( $\beta = -0.008$ ,  $t = 0.289$ ,  $p = 0.774$ ); therefore,  $H2c$  was not supported.

### 3.3.4.3 Moderation Effects

Game involvement was tested as a pure moderator influencing the strength of the relationships between the three affordances and destination image. Results showed that game involvement significantly moderated the effect of cultural affordance on destination image ( $\beta = 0.161$ ,  $t = 2.603$ ,  $p = 0.009$ ), supporting  $H3a$ . The moderating effect on the narrative affordance–destination image relationship was also significant ( $\beta = 0.141$ ,  $t = 2.217$ ,  $p = 0.027$ ), supporting  $H3b$ . However, the interaction between game involvement and social interactive affordance was not significant ( $\beta = 0.016$ ,  $t = 0.275$ ,  $p = 0.784$ ), and thus  $H3c$  was not supported.

**Figure 2**

*Standardized path coefficient of the structural model*



**Table 7**

*Mediation Effects (Bootstrapping Results)*

| Mediation Path                          | Indirect Effect ( $\beta$ ) | t-value | p-value | Sig. |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------|---------|------|
| CA $\rightarrow$ DIM $\rightarrow$ TIT  | 0.151                       | 4.735   | 0       | ***  |
| NA $\rightarrow$ DIM $\rightarrow$ TIT  | 0.122                       | 3.899   | 0       | ***  |
| SIA $\rightarrow$ DIM $\rightarrow$ TIT | -0.008                      | 0.289   | 0.774   | n.s. |

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; n.s. = not significant.

**Table 8**

*Moderation Effects (Interaction Terms)*

| Interaction Term                   | Effect ( $\beta$ ) | t-value | p-value | Sig. |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------|---------|------|
| GIV $\times$ CA $\rightarrow$ DIM  | 0.161              | 2.603   | 0.009   | **   |
| GIV $\times$ NA $\rightarrow$ DIM  | 0.141              | 2.217   | 0.027   | *    |
| GIV $\times$ SIA $\rightarrow$ DIM | 0.016              | 0.275   | 0.784   | n.s. |

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; n.s. = not significant.

## CONCLUSION AND LIMITATION

### 4.1 Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of gamification on shaping player's perceptions of destination image and their travel intention. It adopts Black Myth: Wukong as its case example. This study, informed by affordance theory, employed game involvement as a moderator to explain variance in players' sensitivity to in-game cues. This research identified significant theoretical and practical insights concerning the influence of cultural, narrative, and social interactive affordance on destination image and subsequent travel intention, and highlighted the moderating effect of game involvement.

Findings indicate that cultural richness and narrative coherence strengthen players' cognitive and emotional perceptions of destination. In other words, cultural and narrative affordance functioned as the primary determinants of players' destination image. In contrast, general social communication features in game playing does not always extend to place-specific perceptions or destination-related interpretation. It revealed that cognitive social interactive affordance failed to account for destination image.

In regard to destination image, the study finds that player's travel intention towards game-related destination is not directly driven by the game playing experience. Through virtual engagement, players formed a positive and vivid destination image, and in subsequence increase their motivations to visit actual sites. However, while the model verified that destination image mediates the effects of cultural and narrative affordance on travel intention, the mediating role did not hold for the social interactive affordance-travel intention connection.

The moderating analysis revealed that players with greater involvement were more receptive to cultural and narrative affordance, amplifying their influence on destination image. Findings suggest that, as a moderator, game involvement enhances psychological immersion, and it strengthen the salience and perceived meaningfulness of affordance cues. Once again, game involvement did not moderate the social interactive affordance pathway and underscores its limited influence on shaping destination image.

In summary, the study demonstrates the mechanisms through which game-based cultural and narrative content shape destination image and travel intention. The findings highlight the increasing potential of AAA-level digital games as informal channels of cultural communication and tourism promotion, particularly when their affordances are deliberately designed to reflect local cultural negatives.

### 4.2 Limitation and Further Research

Despite the valuable insights of this study, it is necessary to recognise several limitations. The data was collected soon after Black Myth: Wukong was released, so players may have been influenced by the excitement of something new. Future studies could use a long-term design or collect data later, when the hype has faded and fixed impressions have formed, to see the lasting impact of affordances on how people think about destinations. Moreover, the study looked at only one culturally rich game. Although Black Myth: Wukong is a good example, future research should test whether the results also apply to other types of games or settings, such as open-world RPGs, historical games, or metaverse-style virtual worlds.

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ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

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June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

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## APPENDIX A QUESTIONNAIRE

| Constructs          | Item |                                                                                                            | Sources                                                               |
|---------------------|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cultural Affordance | CA1  | The cultural elements shown in the game make me feel that this destination has valuable cultural heritage. | Weng et al. (2020), Perceived Cultural Heritage Value Scale (adapted) |

|                               |      |                                                                                              |                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                               | CA2  | The game helps me better understand the history, traditions, or heritage of the destination. |                                                                                  |
|                               | CA3  | The cultural content in the game increases my interest in the destination's culture.         |                                                                                  |
| Narrative Affordance          | NA1  | The game's story draws me into its world.                                                    | Green & Brock (2000) Narrative Transportation Scale (adapted)                    |
|                               | NA2  | I feel emotionally involved in the game's narrative events.                                  |                                                                                  |
|                               | NA3  | The game's storytelling enhances my immersion in its environment.                            |                                                                                  |
| Social Interaction Affordance | SIA1 | This game gives me topics to discuss with others.                                            | Treem & Leonardi (2013) Social Affordance Theory (adapted)                       |
|                               | SIA2 | Playing or watching this game makes me feel connected to other fans.                         |                                                                                  |
|                               | SIA3 | The game allows me to express my identity or interests to others.                            |                                                                                  |
| Game Involvement              | GIV1 | I felt mentally engaged while experiencing the game.                                         | Witmer & Singer (1998), Presence Questionnaire – Involvement Subscale (adapted ) |
|                               | GIV2 | I was highly focused on what I was doing in the game.                                        |                                                                                  |
|                               | GIV3 | The game captured my attention and maintained my interest.                                   |                                                                                  |
| Destination Image             | DIM1 | The destination presented in the game seems to have rich and appealing heritage attractions. | Kim & Chen (2016) Destination Image Scale (adapted)                              |
|                               | DIM2 | The destination depicted in the game gives me a pleasant and positive feeling.               |                                                                                  |
|                               | DIM3 | Overall, the destination shown in the game leaves me with a favorable impression.            |                                                                                  |
| Travel Intention              | TIT1 | I would like to visit this destination in the future.                                        | Lam & Hsu (2006) Travel Intention Scale (adapted)                                |
|                               | TIT2 | I will consider this destination when planning a trip.                                       |                                                                                  |
|                               | TIT3 | I intend to learn more about visiting this destination.                                      |                                                                                  |
| Gender                        |      | Gender (0 = Female, 1 = Male)                                                                | Self-designed demographic item                                                   |
| Age                           |      | Age (open-ended)                                                                             |                                                                                  |
| Experience                    |      | Have you played Black Myth: Wukong? (0 = No, 1 = Yes)                                        |                                                                                  |

**Source(s):** Adapted from mature questionnaires

ID 95

# WHAT CAN AI DO TO DRIVE REAL ADOPTION? FROM SOCIAL CUES TO ACTUAL USAGE BEHAVIORS

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and

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## ABSTRACT

As artificial intelligence (AI)-powered voice assistants become increasingly embedded in everyday consumer life, their role has evolved from functional task facilitators to socially interactive agents. While prior research has predominantly examined AI through cognitive and utilitarian lenses, far less is known about how AI's socially expressive features shape users' psychological evaluations and long-term engagement. Addressing this gap, the present research adopts a social-interaction perspective to examine how vocal social cues emitted by voice assistants function as signals that influence users' social perceptions, evaluative judgments, and actual usage behavior over time.

Drawing on signaling theory, social presence theory, and social response theory, we conceptualize voice assistants as signal senders whose vocal communication styles convey unobservable social capabilities. We propose a process model in which specific vocal social cues—attentive communication style, friendly communication style, natural speech, and perceived intelligence—trigger users' perceptions of social performance, operationalized as social presence and artificial empathy. These social perceptions, in turn, shape users' cost-benefit evaluations of interacting with social AI, including perceived benefits (utilitarian and hedonic value) and perceived costs (privacy concerns and human identity threat), which ultimately influence both adoption intentions and long-term actual usage behavior.

We test the proposed framework using a multi-study research design that integrates large-scale textual analysis, cross-sectional surveys, and a longitudinal field study. Study 1 analyzes 5,566 Amazon Alexa reviews using linguistic inquiry and word count (LIWC) methods, revealing that users frequently frame their interactions with voice assistants in social and relational terms, and that such social framing is associated with both positive and negative evaluations. Building on these insights, Studies 2 and 3 employ independent survey samples of U.S. Alexa users to unpack the psychological mechanisms underlying social interaction. Results demonstrate that attentive, friendly, and natural communication styles reliably enhance perceptions of social presence and artificial empathy. These social perceptions significantly increase perceived utilitarian and hedonic benefits, while simultaneously exerting nuanced effects on perceived costs, highlighting the dual-edged nature of social AI. Notably, benefit perceptions emerge as the primary drivers of adoption intentions, outweighing privacy and identity-related concerns. Finally, Study 4 employs a time-lagged longitudinal design to validate the behavioral consequentiality of the model, demonstrating that intentions formed through social and evaluative processes significantly predict actual usage behavior over time.

This research contributes to the literature on AI and customer experience by shifting the focus from functional performance to socially grounded interaction processes. By integrating socio-psychological theories with a cost-benefit framework and validating outcomes using real behavioral data, the study advances understanding of how social AI creates value while simultaneously generating tension. The findings offer actionable insights for the design of voice assistants that balance social engagement with users' concerns, and underscore the importance of social signaling in fostering sustained human-AI relationships.

ID 101

# **APPLYING ARNSTEIN'S LADDER OF PARTICIPATION TO TOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF CLARENS, FREE STATE, SOUTH AFRICA**

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## **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

### **PROBLEM DEFINITION**

Tourism is increasingly regarded as a catalyst for local economic development (LED) in small towns in South Africa. However, despite its recognised importance for LED, a persistent lack of community participation remains evident. Moreover, the often-neglected duality of small towns in South Africa makes community participation in tourism particularly challenging, largely due to limited spatial awareness. This study argues that these challenges are closely linked to a failure to recognise spatial characteristics and to the marginalisation of community voices.

### **OBJECTIVES**

To address the knowledge gap regarding community participation in tourism within small towns, this study examines the central problem of tourism inclusion and participation, which constrains sustainable tourism growth, through the lens of Arnstein's Ladder (1969) of Citizen Participation. This analytical framework is applied to evaluate the actual level of community participation in tourism.

### **METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS**

A qualitative approach is employed to explore the extent of community participation in small-town tourism. The sample is purposefully drawn from the small town of Clarens as a case study. Data were collected through structured interviews with community members. Using the ATLAS.ti program, participants' views on community participation were analysed and interpreted through thematic analysis.

### **FINDINGS**

The results indicate that community participation in tourism is largely limited to tokenistic levels of consultation and placation. Although tourism benefits and opportunities are acknowledged by community members, these have not translated into meaningful empowerment. Furthermore, the application of Arnstein's model reveals a clear link between the lack of substantive participation and increasing community frustration.

### **THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION**

This paper contributes to the body of knowledge on leveraging tourism-led development to foster inclusion and empowerment for marginalised communities in small towns.

### **PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

The study offers actionable insights for destination managers and community members to move beyond tokenism toward partnership or citizen control, thereby ensuring that tourism benefits are equitably shared and locally driven.

**KEYWORDS:** attitude; community; participation; tourism; small town

### **REFERENCE**

Arnstein, S.R., 1969. A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), pp.216-224.

ID 103

## THE EFFECT OF EMPLOYEE SELECTION METHODS ON TEAMWORK: A RESEARCH IN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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### ABSTRACT

### ABSTRACT

Teamwork is becoming increasingly important in today's business world. Effective teamwork requires team members to have complementary skills and to work together harmoniously. Therefore, employee selection methods are critical for the success of teamwork. Businesses use a variety of selection methods to find employees with the required qualifications, depending on their size, industry, and labor market conditions. Employee selection methods are an important tool for the success of teamwork. They are a process that a business uses to find employees with the qualifications they need. This process typically includes stages such as resume review, interview, reference checking, and personality test. By using an effective employee selection method, businesses can create effective teams by evaluating the skills, personality, and motivations of their team members. Despite its importance, there is limited empirical research in the literature on the effect of employee selection methods on teamwork. This study aims to determine the effect of employee selection methods on teamwork. A survey was used as a data collection tool in this study. The survey was conducted with 406 valid survey data obtained from employees of 16 different hotel businesses operating in the hospitality industry using a simple random sampling method. Descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, and multiple regression analysis techniques were used in data analysis. The analysis results revealed that there was a positive and significant relationship between employee selection methods and teamwork. It was determined that test techniques are more decisive in solving problems in teams. The examinations, such as interviews and application form-based evaluations, are more decisive in the team's harmony and efficient use of resources. In other words, there is no single employee selection method that is valid for all conditions for effective teamwork. The findings of this study suggest that employee selection methods play an important role in the success of teamwork.

Keywords: employee selection methods, teamwork, hospitality industry, hotel businesses

### INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry is recognized for its labor-intensive nature and the critical role of human resources in achieving organizational performance. Effective employee selection methods are foundational to building a capable workforce that meets both service quality and operational demands. However, mismatched hires contribute to elevated turnover rates exceeding 50% in many establishments (Lan et al., 2021). Selection processes that identify individuals not only based on technical skills but also on teamwork capabilities can foster collaborative work environments (teamwork) and strengthen organizational performance (Ersoy & Ersoy, 2024).

In the dynamic hospitality sector, teamwork is crucial for organizational success, as various functions should seamlessly collaborate to deliver a cohesive and outstanding guest experience (Jung et al., 2023). The effectiveness of teamwork is shaped significantly by the composition of the team, which begins with the employee selection process. High team performance not only supports service excellence, but also strengthens job satisfaction, reduces turnover, and enhances organizational adaptability in the face of fluctuating market demands (Sisneros, 2024). Moreover, selection strategies that incorporate team-oriented criteria (e.g., peer interviewing, personality assessments) have been proposed to improve not only individual job fit but also interpersonal compatibility, a factor increasingly linked with effective teamwork outcomes.

While substantial research exists on selection methods (e.g., interviews, assessment centers, personality tests) and on teamwork separately, the intersection remains underexamined. Traditional selection practices are widely used to evaluate candidate fit, yet their direct effects on collaborative behavior within hospitality teams are underexplored (Jones & Erhart, 2025). This study investigates the relationship between employee selection methods and teamwork in the hospitality industry. By examining how different selection approaches impact team cohesion, communication,

and performance, this research aims to provide empirical insights that inform both HR practitioners and academic theory on human capital management in hospitality contexts.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Employee selection methods are a cornerstone of human resource management in the hospitality sector, given the industry's reliance on a well-suited workforce to deliver service quality and customer satisfaction (Kusluvan et al., 2010). Contemporary research highlights that structured, role-specific selection processes help align candidates' competencies with organizational needs, especially in a labor-intensive context like hotels and restaurants (Wilk & Cappelli, 2003). Commonly cited methods include structured interviews, skills tests, personality assessments, and assessment centers aimed at evaluating both technical competencies and soft skills relevant to customer interaction and teamwork dynamics (Anderson & Witvliet, 2008). Structured interviews continue to be vital due to their comparative fairness and repeatability in evaluating situational and behavioral competencies of applicants. Using personality assessments, organizations can better understand traits such as adaptability and stress resilience, which are central to hospitality roles and effective team interactions. Innovative recruitment practices are also emerging, including digital and social media-based candidate outreach and screening, which broaden the talent pool and influence organizational fit (Jung et al., 2023).

Two dominant theoretical perspectives explain how selection methods influence teamwork: the Composition-Emergence Framework (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000) and the Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) model (Schneider, 1987). The composition-emergence framework posits that individual-level attributes (e.g., personality, cognitive ability, emotional intelligence) selected through hiring processes combine and interact to produce team-level phenomena such as cooperation, conflict resolution, and shared mental models. In hospitality, where teams often form ad hoc (e.g., banquet servers or front desk shifts), the initial composition directly determines emergent team states like psychological safety and trust (Edmondson, 1999).

The ASA model adds a dynamic layer: organizations attract, select, and retain individuals with similar characteristics, creating homogeneous cultures over time. Applied to hospitality, if selection methods systematically favor individualistic over collectivist traits (e.g., competitive sales orientation vs. collaborative service orientation), the resulting team will struggle with interdependence (Schneider et al., 2013). Therefore, selection methods are not neutral tools; they are strategic levers that shape the latent potential for teamwork.

To conceptualize the links between employee selection methods and teamwork outcomes, the Person-Environment Fit Theory and the Social Exchange Perspective theories also need to be considered. Person-Environment (P-E) Fit Theory (Kristof, 1996) contends that the compatibility between an individual and the organizational environment predicts important outcomes like commitment, job satisfaction, and collaborative behaviors. Selection processes that evaluate person-job fit and person-organization fit help ensure that new hires share values and work styles conducive to teamwork, thereby enhancing team cohesion and reducing turnover.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) implies that employees evaluate their relationship with an employer based on perceived organizational support and reciprocity expectations (Blau, 2017). When selection processes are transparent, fair, and aligned with team expectations, new hires are more likely to develop trust in the organization, invest in collaborative efforts, and reciprocate through increased participation in team tasks.

### Core Employee Selection Methods in Hospitality

Employee selection practices directly impact organizational outcomes. Effective selection can mitigate issues such as high turnover and poor team compatibility, which are persistent challenges in hospitality. As academic research emphasizes, aligning selection criteria with both job requirements and organizational culture fosters person-job and person-organization fit, which in turn can improve long-term retention and collaborative performance.

(Hospitality.Institute) Hospitality firms historically rely on traditional selection methods: unstructured interviews, application forms, and reference checks (Tracey & Hinkin, 2005). However, contemporary practices increasingly incorporate structured interviews, situational judgment tests (SJTs), personality inventories (particularly Big Five), and assessment centers (Gatewood et al., 2015).

Unstructured interviews, where questions vary across candidates and are evaluated intuitively, remain prevalent in small-to-medium hospitality enterprises due to low cost and speed (Wilk & Cappelli, 2003). However, meta-analyses show unstructured interviews have low criterion validity for job performance and near-zero validity for predicting team-relevant behaviors like cooperation or helping (Huffcutt et al., 2013). The reason is that unstructured formats elicit spontaneous, non-comparable responses that rarely tap into teamwork competencies. Conversely, structured interviews using behavioral (e.g., "Tell me about a time you helped a struggling coworker") or situational (e.g., "What would you do if a colleague took credit for your work?") questions yield higher validity for teamwork (Levashina et al., 2014). In hospitality contexts, structured behavioral interviews have been shown to

predict service recovery collaboration, as they force candidates to articulate specific past team interactions (Chuang & Liao, 2010).

Among individual difference measures, personality has received the most attention regarding teamwork. The Big Five model (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) demonstrates moderate but consistent relationships with team processes. Meta-analytic findings indicate that agreeableness and conscientiousness are the strongest personality predictors of team citizenship behaviors and cooperation (Lan et al., 2021). In hospitality, agreeableness facilitates guest-focused collaboration by willingly assisting coworkers even when not directly rewarded. Emotional stability also predicts team resilience under service pressure (e.g., handling a sudden rush of guests). However, hospitality managers rarely use validated personality tests, preferring informal intuition, which leads to selection errors that impair teamwork (Jung et al., 2023).

Situational Judgment Tests (SJTs) present realistic workplace scenarios and ask candidates to choose the most effective response among alternatives. Their advantage for teamwork lies in capturing procedural knowledge about collaboration by knowing how to act in team dilemmas (Reddock et al., 2020). For example, an SJT item for hotel front desk might present: “A coworker is consistently late returning from breaks, leaving you alone at rush hour. What do you do?” Answers that reflect assertive but collaborative problem-solving (e.g., speaking privately with the coworker and then the supervisor if unresolved) score higher. SJTs designed specifically for team-oriented jobs (e.g., nursing, hospitality) had incremental validity over cognitive ability for predicting team performance. However, few off-the-shelf SJTs exist for hospitality teamwork, forcing firms to develop in-house versions with unknown psychometric quality (Jackson et al., 2018; Levashina et al., 2014).

Assessment centers (ACs) use multiple exercises (role plays, in-basket tasks, group discussions) with trained assessors to evaluate candidates on predefined competencies. ACs are among the most valid predictors of general managerial performance and are particularly suited for assessing teamwork competencies like coordination, conflict resolution, and information sharing (Bulger et al., 2025). In hospitality, ACs have been used for selecting food and beverage managers, where leaderless group discussions simulate a team of department heads allocating limited resources (e.g., banquet staff during overbooking). AC ratings for “collaboration” predicted later team effectiveness ratings by peers in hotel settings. However, ACs are expensive and time-intensive, limiting their use to managerial or high-stakes roles in large chains (e.g., Marriott, Hilton) (Kusluvan et al., 2010).

#### Teamwork in Hospitality Industry

Teamwork in the hospitality industry is an essential driver of operational effectiveness and service excellence. Recent empirical research shows that teamwork is significantly influenced by interpersonal dynamics such as empathy, communication, and shared understanding among employees who often work interdependently across departmental boundaries (Jung et al., 2023). For instance, studies indicate that empathy can enhance interpersonal relationships among team members, which positively affects team performance and cohesion. These interpersonal competencies support better coordination of complex service tasks, such as guest check-in/out procedures or synchronized food and beverage service (Kusluvan et al., 2010).

Teamwork is linked not only to performance but also to employee morale, satisfaction, and turnover intentions. High levels of collaborative engagement tend to enhance job fulfillment and decrease turnover intentions, whereas poor team communication can lead to conflict and operational inefficiencies. Research suggests that training programs in hospitality organizations that enhance employees’ teamwork skills through reflective practices, shared task execution, or scenario-based cooperation exercises can improve both individual and collective service outcomes (Ersoy & Ersoy, 2024).

Teamwork is not a unidimensional construct. Salas et al. (2015) synthesize teamwork into five core components: team leadership, mutual performance monitoring, backup behavior, adaptability, and team orientation. In hospitality, these components manifest uniquely: backup behavior occurs when a bartender helps a server run drinks; adaptability is a kitchen team reorganizing after a chef calls in sick; team orientation is a concierge sharing local knowledge with front desk agents to improve guest experience.

Hospitality teamwork is often transient (shift-based) and cross-functional (housekeeping with maintenance). This differs from stable project teams studied in manufacturing. Therefore, selection methods must predict teamwork in fluid contexts where team members may have no prior history. Research indicates that in fluid teams, personality-based selection (high agreeableness, low neuroticism) becomes more important than job-specific skills for initial cooperation, because trust builds quickly from dispositional cues (Bulger et al., 2025; Lan et al., 2021).

## THEORETICAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

Direct empirical studies linking selection methods to teamwork in hospitality are sparse, but related evidence from organizational psychology and service industries provides instructive findings.

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

Research found that using structured behavioral interviews with teamwork-specific questions (e.g., “Describe a time you shared resources with a colleague”) was associated with higher manager-rated team cooperation and lower team conflict six months post-hire (Chuang & Liao, 2010; Levashina et al., 2014). Similarly, assessment center methods for selecting restaurant general managers predicted lower employee turnover in their units, mediated by improved team psychological safety. Situational judgment tests have also shown promise: a validation study in a casino resort found that SJT scores for teamwork scenarios correlated significantly with peer ratings of “willingness to help” and supervisor ratings of “team reliability” (Reddock et al., 2020; Wilk & Cappelli, 2003).

Not all selection methods contribute positively. Unstructured interviews have shown no relationship or negative relationships with teamwork. For instance, Managers who relied on “gut feeling” during interviews selected candidates who scored higher on individual achievement but lower on collective orientation, leading to social loafing in teams. General mental ability (GMA) tests, while valid for individual task performance, exhibit near-zero validity for teamwork and can even be detrimental if high-GMA individuals are paired with lower-GMA peers due to frustration and poor communication (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). In hospitality’s fast-paced environment, selection solely for intelligence may produce “lone wolves” unable to integrate (Guchait et al., 2020). The effect of selection methods on teamwork is not universal; it depends on contextual moderators. Team task interdependence is critical when tasks are highly interdependent (e.g., fine-dining service requiring coordinated plate delivery), selection for personality (agreeableness) and teamwork-specific SJTs becomes more predictive than when tasks are low interdependence (e.g., housekeeping strip-and-fold) (Lim et al., 2024). Organizational culture also moderates in collectivist-oriented hospitality firms (e.g., family-run hotels), even unstructured interviews may select for teamwork if managers inherently value harmony; but in aggressive sales cultures, interviews emphasize individual metrics that undermine cooperation (Jung et al., 2023; Kusluvan et al., 2010).

Based on the reviewed literature, the present study proposes that employee selection method type predicts teamwork effectiveness. Specifically, the following research hypothesis was proposed for empirical testing in the hospitality context:

H1: Employee selection methods have positive impacts on teamwork outcomes.

## METHOD

This quantitatively designed research aimed at investigating the impact of employee selection methods on teamwork outcomes in hotel enterprises. Data was collected by using a questionnaire form having three parts. The first part of the questionnaire covered the measure for the employee selection methods. The second part involved the measure for the teamwork, and the third part included questions for the demographic characteristics of the participants. The measure for the employee selection methods is a 5-point Likert type scale ranged from “1 = rare ” to “5 = frequently”. Similarly, the teamwork outcomes measure is a 5-point Likert type scales ranged from “1 = strongly disagree ” to “5 = strongly agree”.

The employee selection methods was measured by using items adapted from Jackson et al. (2018). This measure consisted 10 selection methods. A reliability analysis performed for this measure in this research. Results of the reliability analysis revealed a good internal consistency  $\alpha = 0.74$  (10 items) among items. This scale had two dimensions: test (personality tests, aptitude tests / ability tests, assessment center support, neuropsychological brain screening test, intelligence test / IQ test, case study analysis, academic achievement review) and assessment (interview, resume screening, personal references).

The scale for the teamwork outcomes was measured by using items adapted from Bauer and Bauer (2006). This scale had four dimensions: problem solving, adaptation, resource management, and collaboration. This measure consisted 20 items. The reliability analysis results revealed a strong internal consistency  $\alpha = 0.90$  (20 items) among items. Results of the reliability tests suggested that both measures were reliable.

Population of the research was four-star and five-star hotels operating in Ankara, in Türkiye. Ankara is one of the top tourism destinations in Turkey attracting over one million tourist each year (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2024a). Hotel industry in Ankara is well developed. There are 92 hotels certified by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Ankara (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2024b). Sampling framework of the research was employees working in four-star and five-star hotels operating in Ankara. A total of 500 questionnaires were delivered to randomly selected employees and 406 of them were scrutinized valid for analysis. Human resource managers of the

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

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ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

hotels were contacted and 16 of them agreed to allow to survey their employees. Sampling size of the research considered adequate to make generalization based on the given limitations (Hox & Bechger, 2006). Expert feedback was collected from five experts working in the hospitality industry and two academics in the field of research to improve the validity of the questionnaire. A pilot study was conducted to test the preliminary validity of the measures. By analyzing 36 valid pilot data, some measures were rephrased to clarify the meaning of the measures.

### Findings

Data were analyzed by employing descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, and multiple regression analysis techniques. The analysis of the demographic characteristics revealed that majority of the respondents were male (51.19%); married (50.25%); at the age groups of 25-34 (40.39%); having experience at the current workplace more than four years (61.80%); and working as an employee (81.80%) in four-star and five-star hotel enterprises. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted for the measure of employee selection methods. The value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy revealed that the sample was factorable (KMO = 0.843). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity test had a significant result ( $\chi^2 = 2511.299$ ,  $df = 45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that the factor analysis can be applied for this measure. Exploratory Factor Analysis was performed by using "Direct Oblimin" rotation with Principal Component Analysis method. None of the items of the measure were eliminated from the analysis due to dual or low loading reasons. Exploratory factor analysis generated five components explaining 69.303% of total variance. Further analysis was conducted with the two compound variables named as test and assessment.

Another exploratory factor analysis was conducted for the measure of teamwork. The KMO results of this measure also suggested that the sample was factorable (KMO = 0.902). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity test had a significant result ( $\chi^2 = 5518.823$ ,  $df = 190$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that the factor analysis can be applied for this measure. Exploratory Factor Analysis was performed by using "Direct Oblimin" rotation with Principal Component Analysis method. No items of the measure were eliminated from the analysis because of dual or low loading reasons. Exploratory factor analysis generated four components explaining 69.592% of total variance. Further analysis was conducted with four compound variables named as problem solving, adaptation, resource management, and collaboration.

Pearson correlation analysis was performed to determine whether there is a significant linear relationship between compound variables of the two measures. Table 1 displays the results of the Pearson correlation analysis. According to the results, the correlation between compound variables ranged from 0.014 to 0.766, indicating low to moderate significant correlation. Table 1 also reveals that test named compound variable has no significant linear relationship between adaptation and resource management compound variables.

Table 1  
Pearson Correlation Analysis

| Compound Variable      | N   | Mean  | Std. Deviation | Std.    |         |         |         |         |   |
|------------------------|-----|-------|----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---|
|                        |     |       |                | 1       | 2       | 3       | 4       | 5       | 6 |
| 1. Test                | 406 | 1.156 | 1.061          | 1       |         |         |         |         |   |
| 2. Assessment          | 406 | 2.952 | 1.547          | -       | 1       |         |         |         |   |
|                        |     |       |                | 0.149** |         |         |         |         |   |
| 3. Problem Solving     | 406 | 2.493 | 0.887          | 0.442** | 0.180** | 1       |         |         |   |
| 4. Adaptation          | 406 | 3.026 | 1.048          | 0.076   | 0.519** | 0.435** | 1       |         |   |
| 5. Resource Management | 406 | 3.018 | 1.050          | 0.014   | 0.573** | 0.383** | 0.594** | 1       |   |
| 6. Collaboration       | 406 | 2.567 | 0.913          | 0.403** | 0.232** | 0.766** | 0.476** | 0.452** | 1 |

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The proposed hypothesis was tested by performing multiple regression analyses with four teamwork component variables as predictors and compound variables of each employee selection methods as a dependent variable. As Table 2 depicts, all regression models were statistically significant, indicating that employee selection methods explained a significant amount of variance in teamwork perception. To test the predictive power of the two

employee selection method dimensions for test (personality tests, aptitude/ability tests, assessment center support, neuropsychological screening, IQ tests, case studies, academic achievement review) and assessment (interview, resume screening, personal references) on each of the four teamwork dimensions (problem solving, adaptation, resource management, collaboration), a series of multiple regression analyses were conducted. Preliminary checks for multicollinearity indicated acceptable levels: the variance inflation factor (VIF) was 1.023 for both predictors, and tolerance was 0.978, well above the common threshold of 0.1 (Hair, et al., 2019). The regression results are summarized below.

Table 2  
Regression Analysis

| <b>Dependent Variable: Problem Solving</b>     |          |                       |                                |                   |          |                  |            |
|------------------------------------------------|----------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|----------|------------------|------------|
|                                                | <i>R</i> | <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> | <i>Adjusted R</i> <sup>2</sup> | <i>Std. Error</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i>         |            |
| Model                                          | 0.507    | 0.257                 | 0.254                          | 0.766             | 69.768   | < 0.001          |            |
| <b>Predictors</b>                              | <i>B</i> | <i>Std. Error</i>     | <i>Std. Beta</i>               | <i>t</i>          | <i>p</i> | <i>Tolerance</i> | <i>VIF</i> |
| Constant                                       | 1.603    | 0.098                 |                                | 16.418            | 0.000    |                  |            |
| Test                                           | 0.401    | 0.036                 | 0.479                          | 11.043            | 0.000    | 0.978            | 1.023      |
| Assessment                                     | 0.144    | 0.025                 | 0.252                          | 5.797             | 0.000    | 0.978            | 1.023      |
| <b>Dependent Variable: Adaptation</b>          |          |                       |                                |                   |          |                  |            |
|                                                | <i>R</i> | <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> | <i>Adjusted R</i> <sup>2</sup> | <i>Std. Error</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i>         |            |
| Model                                          | 0.542    | 0.294                 | 0.290                          | 0.883             | 83.767   | < 0.001          |            |
| <b>Predictors</b>                              | <i>B</i> | <i>Std. Error</i>     | <i>Std. Beta</i>               | <i>t</i>          | <i>p</i> | <i>Tolerance</i> | <i>VIF</i> |
| Constant                                       | 1.762    | 0.112                 |                                | 15.664            | 0.000    |                  |            |
| Test                                           | 0.155    | 0.042                 | 0.157                          | 3.707             | 0.000    | 0.978            | 1.023      |
| Assessment                                     | 0.368    | 0.029                 | 0.543                          | 12.816            | 0.000    | 0.978            | 1.023      |
| <b>Dependent Variable: Resource Management</b> |          |                       |                                |                   |          |                  |            |
|                                                | <i>R</i> | <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> | <i>Adjusted R</i> <sup>2</sup> | <i>Std. Error</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i>         |            |
| Model                                          | 0.582    | 0.339                 | 0.336                          | 0.856             | 103.368  | < 0.001          |            |
| <b>Predictors</b>                              | <i>B</i> | <i>Std. Error</i>     | <i>Std. Beta</i>               | <i>t</i>          | <i>p</i> | <i>Tolerance</i> | <i>VIF</i> |
| Constant                                       | 1.721    | 0.109                 |                                | 15.777            | 0.000    |                  |            |
| Test                                           | 0.101    | 0.041                 | 0.102                          | 2.490             | 0.013    | 0.978            | 1.023      |
| Assessment                                     | 0.400    | 0.028                 | 0.589                          | 14.374            | 0.000    | 0.978            | 1.023      |
| <b>Dependent Variable: Collaboration</b>       |          |                       |                                |                   |          |                  |            |
|                                                | <i>R</i> | <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> | <i>Adjusted R</i> <sup>2</sup> | <i>Std. Error</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i>         |            |
| Model                                          | 0.500    | 0.250                 | 0.246                          | 0.792             | 67.083   | < 0.001          |            |
| <b>Predictors</b>                              | <i>B</i> | <i>Std. Error</i>     | <i>Std. Beta</i>               | <i>t</i>          | <i>p</i> | <i>Tolerance</i> | <i>VIF</i> |
| Constant                                       | 1.601    | 0.101                 |                                | 15.859            | 0.000    |                  |            |
| Test                                           | 0.385    | 0.038                 | 0.448                          | 10.259            | 0.000    | 0.978            | 1.023      |
| Assessment                                     | 0.176    | 0.026                 | 0.299                          | 6.850             | 0.000    | 0.978            | 1.023      |

The regression model significantly predicted Problem Solving,  $F(2,403)=16.418$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . The model explained 25.7% of the variance in Problem Solving ( $R^2=0.257$ ), with a standard error of the estimate of 0.766. Both predictors contributed uniquely. Test-based selection methods had a stronger positive effect on problem-solving capabilities than Assessment-based methods.

The model significantly predicted Adaptation,  $F(2,403)=15.664$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . The explained variance was 29.4% ( $R^2=0.294$ ), with a standard error of 0.883. Both predictors were statistically significant. Assessment methods showed a substantially stronger effect ( $\beta=0.543$ ) compared to Test methods ( $\beta=0.157$ ). This suggests that interviews, resume screening, and reference checks are more effective predictors of employees' adaptability in hotel teams.

The regression model for Resource Management was significant,  $F(2,403)=15.777$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . The model accounted for 33.9% of the variance ( $R^2=0.339$ ), with a standard error of 0.856. Assessment methods again emerged as the

dominant predictor. Notably, while the correlation analysis (reported in the Methods section) indicated no significant bivariate relationship between Test and Resource Management, the regression model revealed a small but statistically significant effect ( $p=.013$ ) after controlling for Assessment. This suggests a classic suppression effect, wherein Assessment methods masked the modest predictive power of Test methods.

The model significantly predicted Collaboration,  $F(2.403)=15.859$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . The explained variance was 25.0% ( $R^2=0.250$ ), with a standard error of 0.792. Both predictors were significant. Test methods showed a stronger association with Collaboration than Assessment methods, aligning with the pattern observed for Problem Solving. This finding supports the theoretical expectation that personality and ability tests are particularly effective at identifying individuals who will engage in cooperative team behaviors (Jung et al., 2023; Lan et al., 2021; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).

## DISCUSSION

The regression results reveal a differentiated pattern depending on the teamwork criterion. Test-based methods (personality tests, ability tests, assessment centers, case studies, academic records) better predict Problem Solving ( $\beta=0.479$ ) and Collaboration ( $\beta=0.448$ ). This aligns with prior research showing that cognitive ability and personality traits (e.g., agreeableness, conscientiousness) are strong predictors of analytical problem-solving and cooperative behaviors in teams (Lan et al., 2021; Salas et al., 2015).

Assessment-based methods (interviews, resume screening, references) better predict Adaptation ( $\beta=0.543$ ) and Resource Management ( $\beta=0.589$ ). This may be because interviews and reference checks elicit explicit evidence of past adaptive behaviors (e.g., handling schedule changes, reallocating tasks), which are central to resource management and flexibility in hotel operations (Levashina et al., 2014; White, 2020).

The suppression effect observed for Resource Management (Test becoming significant only in regression but not in bivariate correlation) is noteworthy. Such effects occur when a predictor (Test) has a weak or zero bivariate relationship with the outcome but gains predictive power after controlling for another predictor (Assessment) that shares variance with both. Methodologically, this underscores the importance of multiple regression over simple correlations. Practically, it suggests that Test methods may have a small but real contribution to resource management that is masked by the stronger influence of Assessment methods (Lan et al., 2021; Podsakoff et al., 2012; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).

The  $R^2$  values across the four models range from 0.250 to 0.339, indicating that the two selection method dimensions explain between 25% and 34% of the variance in teamwork outcomes. In social science research, particularly in hospitality and human resource management, these are moderate to substantial effect sizes (Cohen, 1988). The remaining unexplained variance (66–75%) is likely attributable to other factors not included in the model, such as organizational culture, team leadership, training, or individual differences beyond selection methods (Kusluvan et al., 2010). The adjusted  $R^2$  values are very close to the unadjusted  $R^2$  values (differing by only 0.003 to 0.004), confirming that the model is not overfitted and would likely generalize well to similar samples.

## CONCLUSION

The regression analyses demonstrate that both Test and Assessment selection methods significantly predict teamwork outcomes, but their relative importance differs by criterion. Problem Solving and Collaboration are better predicted by Test-based methods, while Adaptation and Resource Management are better predicted by Assessment-based methods. These findings suggest that hospitality organizations should adopt a multi-method selection battery rather than relying on a single approach. For roles demanding frequent problem-solving and close collaboration (e.g., front desk, banquet service), investment in personality and ability tests is warranted. For roles requiring adaptability and resource allocation under pressure (e.g., housekeeping management, event coordination), structured interviews and thorough reference checks may be more valuable.

This study makes several theoretical contributions to the human resource management and hospitality literature. First, it extends the Composition-Emergence Framework (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000) by demonstrating that different individual-level attributes, measured through distinct selection methods, combine to predict different emergent team-level phenomena. Problem-solving and collaboration, which require cognitive and dispositional resources, are better predicted by Test methods. Adaptation and resource management, which draw on behavioral history and demonstrated flexibility, are better predicted by Assessment methods. This nuanced understanding moves beyond

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

the simplistic assumption that "selection improves teamwork" to specify which selection methods improve which teamwork competencies.

Second, the findings support Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 2017) core tenet that organizations benefit from using complementary selection methods: Test-based methods appear particularly effective for selecting employees who will engage in analytical and collaborative reciprocity, while Assessment-based methods are better suited for identifying employees who will demonstrate adaptive and resourceful reciprocity in dynamic hospitality environments. This differentiated pattern highlights the value of a multi-method selection approach aligned with the specific teamwork demands of the role.

Third, the study provides empirical support for the Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) model (Schneider, 1987), which proposes that organizations attract, select, and retain individuals with similar characteristics, creating homogeneous cultures over time. If organizations consistently prioritize Test methods, they may systematically select for analytical, conscientious individuals who excel at problem-solving but may be less adept at adaptation. Conversely, prioritizing Assessment methods may select for flexible, adaptable individuals but potentially at the expense of analytical depth. The optimal approach is a balanced multi-method battery that selects for a diverse range of teamwork competencies.

The findings offer actionable guidance for hospitality practitioners, particularly human resource managers in four- and five-star hotels. Findings revealed that no single selection method is sufficient to predict all dimensions of teamwork. Organizations should combine Test-based methods (personality tests, ability tests, structured case studies) with Assessment-based methods (structured behavioral interviews, reference checks) to capture the full spectrum of teamwork competencies.

For roles demanding frequent problem-solving and close collaboration (e.g., front desk, banquet service, concierge), investment in personality and ability tests is warranted. For roles requiring adaptability and resource allocation under pressure (e.g., housekeeping management, event coordination, maintenance), structured interviews and thorough reference checks may be more valuable. Job analysis plays a crucial role in defining job responsibilities, skills, and qualifications, ensuring alignment between candidate capabilities and organizational needs.

While interviews are part of the Assessment dimension and thus better for predicting adaptation and resource management, their effectiveness depends on structure. Research consistently finds that structured behavioral interviews are more predictive than unstructured conversational interviews. Hospitality managers should invest in training interviewers to ask standardized, job-relevant questions and evaluate candidates against consistent rubrics. Although assessment centers are part of the Test dimension in this study, they are distinct in their ability to simulate real job scenarios. Assessment centers typically include multiple evaluation methods like interviews, group exercises, and role-playing scenarios to assess a candidate's overall fit. They are particularly valuable for managerial roles where teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving under pressure are paramount. Candidates are often evaluated by a team of trained assessors, reducing biases in the selection process.

Despite the robust findings, several limitations must be acknowledged: Both predictors (selection methods) and outcomes (teamwork) were measured via employee self-reports, raising the risk of common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Future studies should obtain teamwork ratings from supervisors or objective performance data (e.g., service recovery speed). The data were collected at a single time point, precluding causal inferences. Although selection methods temporally precede teamwork in practice, the design cannot rule out reverse causality or third-variable confounds. The Test dimension combines seven distinct methods (e.g., personality tests, IQ tests, assessment centers) that have different psychometric properties. Aggregation may obscure the unique predictive validity of each method. Similarly, Assessment combines interviews, resume screening, and references. The sample was limited to four- and five-star hotels in Ankara, Türkiye. Cultural and organizational factors (e.g., collectivism, power distance) may moderate the observed relationships. Replication in other hospitality contexts (e.g., restaurants, budget hotels, other countries) is necessary. Task interdependence, team size, and leadership style may moderate the effects of selection methods on teamwork. These were not tested in the current analysis.

Future longitudinal research should disentangle the specific effects of individual selection methods (e.g., personality tests alone vs. assessment centers) and incorporate objective teamwork metrics to validate and extend these findings.

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## THE IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL CAPITAL ON INNOVATION: A RESEARCH ON TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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### ABSTRACT

Emotional capital represents a core psychological resource that determines the capacity of individuals and organizations to strategically manage emotional intelligence, psychological assets, and interpersonal feelings. A high level of organizational emotional capital enhances employees' capacity to cope with work stress, fosters a positive service climate, and accelerates adaptation to operational changes. Consequently, proactive corporate efforts to expand emotional capital positively influence innovation performance and long-term competitiveness. Innovation remains an essential driver for tourism and hospitality firms to maintain their market positions, survive macroeconomic shocks, and capture new markets. By elevating innovation capacity, emotional capital underpins sustainable growth in highly dynamic service environments. This quantitative research empirically investigated the effect of emotional capital on innovation within tourism and hospitality businesses. Utilizing a structured survey as the primary data collection tool, 332 valid responses were gathered from employees across 25 distinct tourism and hospitality enterprises via simple random sampling. The data were systematically evaluated using descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling path analysis. The empirical results demonstrate that emotional capital exerts a positive, statistically significant, and direct effect on business innovation. This major finding indicates that employees working within organizations characterized by high emotional capital are profoundly more willing to generate novel ideas, submit creative proposals, and actively implement service enhancements.

**Keywords:** emotional capital, innovation, tourism and hospitality industry

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism and hospitality, one of the world's largest and fastest-growing industries, operates in a highly dynamic, volatile, and intensely competitive environment shaped by rapid technological change, shifting customer expectations, and recurrent macroeconomic shocks (Gursoy et al., 2011). In volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) landscape, firms can no longer rely solely on traditional tangible resources, standardized service routines, or cost-based strategies to secure sustainable competitive advantage and operational resilience (Hallin & Marnburg, 2008). Instead, contemporary research consistently highlights innovation as a primary driver for maintaining market position, enhancing service quality, and achieving long-term growth in tourism and hospitality enterprises (Tajeddini et al., 2020). Given the labor-intensive and interaction-heavy nature of this sector, innovation is heavily contingent upon frontline employees who interface directly with diverse customer segments and implement day-to-day operational changes (Martin-Rios & Ciobanu, 2019). Consequently, understanding the psychological and strategic factors that foster creative orientations among hospitality employees has become a critical priority for both scholars and practitioners.

At the same time, the tourism and hospitality industry is chronically plagued by structural human resource challenges, including high employee turnover, intensive emotional labor, and widespread burnout (Karatepe & Kilic, 2007). Persistent work-related stress and emotional exhaustion erode employees' internal energy, reducing their willingness and capacity to generate novel ideas, propose creative solutions, and voluntarily engage in service improvements (Kim et al., 2012). These conditions not only undermine service quality and customer loyalty but also constrain firms' ability to sustain innovation-driven competitiveness, especially in markets where a perceived lack of skilled labor further intensifies competitive pressures (Jiony et al., 2021). In such a challenging environment, innovation is not a discretionary choice but a necessity for survival and resilience. However, innovation cannot flourish when the workforce lacks the psychological resources required for creativity, initiative, and adaptive behavior (Miao et al., 2021; Sukhragehaa et al., 2021). This situation underscores the need to identify and develop core strategic assets that can buffer emotional strain while simultaneously energizing proactive, innovation-oriented behaviors.

Within this context, emotional capital emerges as a central organizational resource. Emotional capital can be defined as a suite of emotional competencies, psychological resources, and interpersonal skills such as self-confidence, social skills, self-awareness, self-esteem, empathy, self-regulation, and adaptability. These skills shape how effectively individuals manage their own emotions and professional relationships (Newman et al., 2015; Tutcu & Çelik, 2018). Going beyond individual-level emotional intelligence, emotional capital reflects a collective capability that enables organizations to create positive work environments, strengthen interpersonal bonds, and sustain constructive employee–customer interactions, all of which are critical for service-oriented sectors like tourism and hospitality (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013). Theoretically grounded in Hobfoll’s Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, emotional capital functions as a reservoir of psychological energy that protects employees against operational stressors while encouraging proactive, goal-directed actions (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Employees with abundant emotional capital are better equipped to cope with work stress, maintain resilience, foster a positive service climate, challenge the status quo, and engage in experimentation and problem-solving that drive organizational change and innovation (Cudjoe et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2023).

Despite the recognized importance of both emotional capital and innovation, existing literature reveals a notable gap. While emotional intelligence, employee well-being, and various dimensions of workplace performance have been widely studied in hospitality settings (Jameel et al., 2025; Knežević et al., 2021; Shoeib & Salavati, 2018), research that conceptualizes emotional capital as a distinct, multidimensional construct and examines its direct impact on innovation remains limited. Empirical studies that systematically link the sub-dimensions of emotional capital (e.g., self-confidence, self-regulation, empathy) to specific innovation outcomes, such as innovation orientation and innovation culture, are particularly scarce within tourism and hospitality firms, especially in emerging markets like Turkey (Cahyadi, 2024; Yesuf & Fields, 2026). This scarcity constrains understanding of how micro-level emotional competencies aggregate into macro-level innovation capabilities in a service-dominant context, leaving a critical void in both theory and practice.

Addressing this theoretical and empirical omission, the present quantitative study investigates the impact of emotional capital and its sub-dimensions on innovation within tourism and hospitality firms in Türkiye. Drawing on data collected from employees across diverse tourism enterprises, the study examines how emotional capital shapes both innovation orientation and innovation culture, thereby extending the explanatory scope of COR theory by positioning emotional capital as an active antecedent of innovation rather than merely a buffer against stress. By adopting a multidimensional perspective on emotional capital and innovation, the research provides a nuanced analysis of the specific ways in which emotional resources contribute to organizational innovativeness. Beyond its theoretical contribution, the study offers practical implications for managers and policymakers by identifying actionable strategies for cultivating emotional capital to enhance innovation performance, strengthen competitive advantage, and support a more resilient and sustainable workforce in the Turkish tourism and hospitality industry. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: the next section reviews the relevant literature and theoretical background, followed by the development of research hypotheses. The subsequent section details the methodology, including sample, measures, and data analysis procedures. The results are then presented and discussed in light of existing theories and empirical findings. Finally, the paper concludes with implications for theory and practice, along with limitations and directions for future research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section reviews the key concepts of emotional capital and innovation, and situates their relationship within a robust theoretical foundation. First, the construct, dimensions, and organizational significance of emotional capital are examined. Next, the concept of innovation and its role in the tourism and hospitality industry are discussed. Finally, the relationship between emotional capital and innovation is explained through Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and Emotional Intelligence theory, leading to the development of the research hypothesis.

### Emotional Capital

Emotional capital is a multidimensional and dynamic psychological resource that reflects individuals’ and organizations’ capacity to manage emotions effectively, build interpersonal relationships, and use emotional intelligence as a strategic asset (Newman et al., 2015; Tutcu & Çelik, 2018). Beyond individual-level emotional intelligence, emotional capital encompasses collective emotional competencies, shared values, and trust among employees, and thus can be regarded as an organizational capability embedded in the social fabric of the firm (Cottingham, 2016). In labor-intensive, high-contact service sectors such as tourism and hospitality, emotional capital plays a critical role in mitigating burnout, enhancing job satisfaction, and sustaining a positive service climate, thereby contributing to sustainable competitive advantage (Cudjoe et al., 2023; Jiony et al., 2026).

Drawing on Newman et al. (2015) and subsequent adaptations in hospitality and public administration research, this study conceptualizes emotional capital as comprising several distinct yet interrelated dimensions, including self-confidence, social skills, self-awareness, self-esteem, empathy, self-regulation, adaptability, optimism, and straightforwardness. These dimensions range from recognizing and managing one's own emotions (self-awareness, self-regulation) to understanding others' feelings and building effective social relationships (empathy, social skills). High levels of self-confidence and self-esteem support employees in dealing with demanding customer requests and ambiguous service situations, while strong social skills and empathy foster teamwork and customer satisfaction (Avey et al., 2011; Bandura, 1997; Genc & Gulertekin Genc, 2018). Empirical studies consistently show that emotional capital is positively associated with subjective well-being and psychological health, and negatively related to depression, anxiety, and stress, highlighting its dual role as both a personal and organizational strategic resource (Jiony et al., 2021; Shafait & Huang, 2023).

#### Innovation in Tourism and Hospitality

Innovation can be broadly defined as the introduction or implementation of significantly improved or entirely new products, services, processes, or business models within an organization (García-Villaverde et al., 2017). The tourism and hospitality industry operates in a highly competitive and volatile environment, characterized by rapidly changing customer expectations and sensitivity to macroeconomic fluctuations, making innovation essential for survival, market share preservation, and sustainable growth (Martin-Rios & Ciobanu, 2019; Tajeddini et al., 2020). Given that many tourism enterprises are small and medium-sized firms without formal R&D departments, innovation often emerges through informal, employee-driven processes that rely on frontline staff creativity and customer interactions (González-González & García-Almeida, 2021; Kesting & Parm Ulhøi, 2010).

In service contexts, innovation extends beyond technological advances to include new service concepts, process improvements, marketing practices, and organizational changes (Hertog et al., 2011). In this study, innovation is conceptualized through two core dimensions: innovation orientation and innovation culture. Innovation orientation refers to the strategic and operational inclination of firms to embrace new ideas, reward creative suggestions, and allocate resources to new product or service development (Gomezelj, 2016; Tajeddini et al., 2020). Innovation culture reflects the internal climate, values, and norms that encourage risk-taking, support experimentation, and provide psychological safety for employees to express creative ideas without fear of negative consequences (Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Yesuf & Fields, 2026). Prior research indicates that a supportive innovation culture and strong managerial backing are critical preconditions for employees to engage in innovative work behaviors and sustain continuous service improvement (Mishaal, 2016; Zhu et al., 2024).

#### Theoretical Framework: COR and Emotional Intelligence

To clarify how emotional capital translates into organizational innovation, this study draws primarily on Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, complemented by Emotional Intelligence theory. COR theory posits that individuals possess finite resource caravans, including object, condition, personal, and energy resources, and strive to obtain, protect, and build these valued resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018). In the emotionally demanding environment of tourism and hospitality, frontline employees frequently experience resource depletion due to deep acting, intensive customer contact, and irregular work schedules, which can trigger defensive behaviors and reduce discretionary effort (Choi et al., 2019; Halbesleben et al., 2014). Conversely, when employees command robust resource reservoirs, they may enter "resource gain spirals," investing surplus psychological resources into proactive, creative, and innovative behaviors that benefit the organization (Duhović et al., 2023).

Within this framework, emotional capital is conceptualized as a critical personal resource caravan that fuels such gain spirals. The sub-dimensions of emotional capital (self-confidence, self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, social skills, self-esteem, adaptability, and related competencies) do not merely buffer stress but expand employees' cognitive capacity, psychological safety, and willingness to engage in exploratory behaviors (Hobfoll, 2011; Newman et al., 2015). Emotional Intelligence theory further supports this link by emphasizing individuals' abilities to recognize, understand, and regulate their own and others' emotions, and to use this emotional information to guide thinking and action (Mayer et al., 2016; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Empirical findings in hospitality settings suggest that higher emotional intelligence enhances innovative work behavior, service innovation performance, and the adoption of constructive emotional labor strategies, all of which contribute to organizational innovation (Knežević et al., 2021; Miao et al., 2021; Sukhrachaa et al., 2021).

#### Emotional Capital and Innovation: Hypothesis Development

The intersection of COR theory and Emotional Intelligence theory provides a strong rationale for expecting a positive relationship between emotional capital and innovation in tourism and hospitality firms. Employees with high emotional capital possess the psychological energy, resilience, social skills, and creative thinking capacity needed to cope with the uncertainty, risk, and potential failure inherent in innovation processes (Gendron, 2017;

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

Hobfoll et al., 2018). Self-confidence and adaptability encourage experimentation with new service solutions and recovery strategies, while empathy and social skills foster knowledge sharing and collaboration, which are vital for building and sustaining an innovation-supportive culture (Gursoy et al., 2011). In this sense, emotional capital functions not only as a protective mechanism against stress but also as a strategic driver of innovation orientation and innovation culture at the organizational level.

Based on these theoretical arguments and empirical indications, the main hypothesis of this study is formulated as follows:

H1: Emotional capital has a positive and statistically significant direct effect on innovation within tourism and hospitality businesses.

## METHOD

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to empirically examine the direct impact of emotional capital on innovation within the tourism and hospitality sector in Türkiye. Grounded in the theoretical foundations of Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 2001) and Emotional Intelligence Theory (Mayer et al., 2016; Salovey & Mayer, 1990), a conceptual model was developed in which emotional capital is treated as a multidimensional personal resource that predicts organizational innovation.

### Sample and Data Collection

The target population consisted of employees working in the tourism and hospitality industry in Türkiye, including frontline staff, supervisors, and middle- and upper-level managers employed in major tourism destinations. Data were collected using a simple random sampling method from 25 tourism and hospitality enterprises operating in Konya, comprising four- and five-star hotels and leading travel agencies.

Out of the distributed questionnaires, 332 valid and fully completed responses were obtained and retained for analysis. The socio-demographic and operational characteristics of the respondents show a higher proportion of male respondents (59.64%) compared to female respondents (40.36%), with the majority of participants between 25 and 34 years old (51.20%). Educational attainment is relatively high, as 35.84% hold a bachelor's degree and 26.51% an associate degree. In terms of organizational position, operational employees constitute the largest group (64.16%), followed by supervisors (15.66%) and department managers (14.76%). The majority of respondents work in marketing and sales (26.51%), front office (23.80%), and human resources (14.76%), and most are employed in four- and five-star hotels (81.02%), with the remainder in travel agencies. These indicators show that the sample is demographically diverse with varying levels of experience. This enhances the representativeness of the data and supports the generalizability of the findings within the context of the Turkish tourism and hospitality sector.

### Measurement Instruments

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of three main sections. The first section included demographic and job-related questions (e.g., gender, age, education, position, department, sector type, tenure). The second section measured emotional capital, and the third section measured innovation. All items were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree").

The independent variable, emotional capital, was measured using a 30-item scale adapted from the Emotional Capital Report (ECR) developed by Newman et al. (2015) and the Turkish adaptation validated by Tutcu and Çelik (Tutcu & Çelik, 2018). The instrument captures multiple internal competencies such as self-confidence, social skills, self-awareness, self-esteem, empathy, self-regulation, adaptability, optimism, and straightforwardness. Representative items assess statements like trust in one's own abilities, sensitivity to others' feelings, and ease of adapting to innovations.

The dependent construct of innovation was measured using a 14-item scale adopted from Erdem et al. (2011) and Mishaal (Mishaal, 2016). This scale captures two key dimensions: innovation orientation and innovation culture. Items tap into strategic openness to change and new ideas (e.g., management willingness to introduce new practices) and the extent to which the organizational environment supports, rewards, and leads innovation efforts within the sector.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS and AMOS software packages in several stages. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the socio-demographic and organizational characteristics of the sample.

Second, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed separately for the Emotional Capital and Innovation scales to assess construct validity and dimensionality. For both scales, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity confirmed suitability for factor analysis. Using principal component extraction with Oblimin rotation, seven distinct factors were extracted for emotional capital and two factors for innovation, all with eigenvalues greater than 1. The seven emotional capital dimensions, named self-confidence, social skills, self-awareness, self-esteem, empathy, self-regulation, and adaptability, explained 66.485% of the total variance, while the two innovation dimensions, named innovation orientation and innovation culture, explained 65.370% of the total variance. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for all dimensions exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating high internal consistency and reliability.

Third, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to explore the linear relationships between the emotional capital sub-dimensions and the two innovation dimensions. The results indicated (Table 1) that self-confidence, empathy, and adaptability exhibit the strongest positive correlations with both innovation orientation and innovation culture, whereas social skills and self-regulation are negatively and significantly correlated with these innovation dimensions. The strongest correlation was observed between innovation orientation and innovation culture, reflecting their close conceptual linkage.

Table 1  
Pearson Correlation Analysis

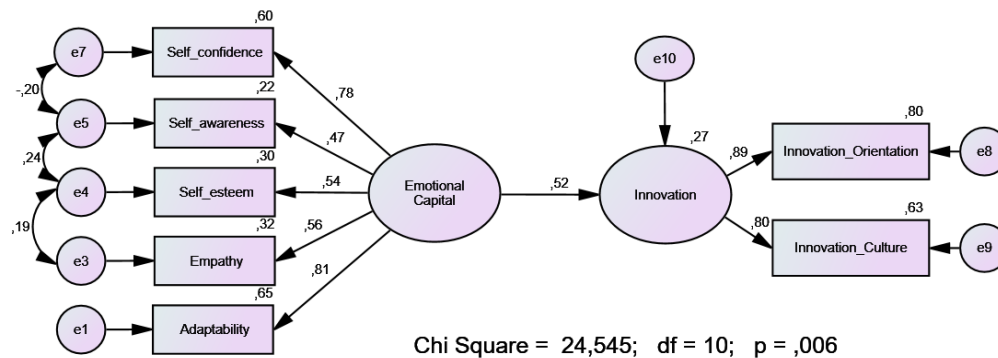
| Compound Variable         | N    | Mean | Std.      |         |          |         |         |         |          |         |         |
|---------------------------|------|------|-----------|---------|----------|---------|---------|---------|----------|---------|---------|
|                           |      |      | Deviation | 1       | 2        | 3       | 4       | 5       | 6        |         |         |
| 1. Self confidence        | 3.64 | 0.88 | 332       | 1       |          |         |         |         |          |         |         |
| 2. Social skills          | 2.70 | 0.86 | 332       | 0.052   | 1        |         |         |         |          |         |         |
| 3. Self awareness         | 4.17 | 0.67 | 332       | 0.209** | -0.247** | 1       |         |         |          |         |         |
| 4. Self esteem            | 4.13 | 0.62 | 332       | 0.378** | -0.232** | 0.446** | 1       |         |          |         |         |
| 5. Empathy                | 3.99 | 0.80 | 332       | 0.358** | -0.209** | 0.360** | 0.448** | 1       |          |         |         |
| 6. Self regulation        | 2.94 | 0.95 | 332       | 0.085   | 0.522**  | -0.084  | -0.007  | 0.002   | 1        |         |         |
| 7. Adaptability           | 4.19 | 0.70 | 332       | 0.622** | -0.125*  | 0.339** | 0.445** | 0.427** | -0.017   | 1       |         |
| 8. Innovation Orientation | 3.70 | 0.74 | 332       | 0.388** | -0.122*  | 0.207** | 0.240** | 0.282** | -0.140*  | 0.315** | 1       |
| 9. Innovation Culture     | 3.74 | 0.76 | 332       | 0.287** | -0.176** | 0.229** | 0.193** | 0.293** | -0.151** | 0.314** | 0.701** |

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Finally, Structural Equation Modeling path analysis was employed to test the hypothesized effect of emotional capital on innovation and to evaluate overall model fit. The structural model (Figure 1) demonstrated good fit, with  $\chi^2/df = 2.454$ , GFI = 0.979, CFI = 0.937, IFI = 0.940, and RMSEA = 0.066, all meeting commonly accepted thresholds. The path coefficient from emotional capital to innovation was positive and statistically significant ( $\beta \approx 0.52$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), providing empirical support for Hypothesis 1 and confirming that higher levels of emotional capital are associated with enhanced innovation performance in tourism and hospitality organizations.

Figure 1

## Structural Equation Modeling Path Analysis



## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to empirically examine the impact of emotional capital on innovation within the tourism and hospitality industry. The findings provide strong support for the main hypothesis, confirming that emotional capital has a positive, statistically significant, and direct effect on organizational innovation ( $\beta \approx 0.52$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This result underscores the strategic role of psychological and emotional resources in shaping innovation orientation and innovation culture in service-intensive environments. This result is consistent with the core propositions of Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001) and Emotional Intelligence theory (Mayer et al., 2016), which highlight the importance of personal resource reservoirs in enabling proactive, goal-directed behavior in demanding work settings.

The results also show that specific dimensions of emotional capital, particularly self-confidence, empathy, and adaptability, are most strongly and positively associated with both innovation orientation and innovation culture. Self-confidence provides employees with the self-efficacy and psychological safety needed to take risks, propose novel ideas, and challenge established routines, while empathy enhances their capacity to understand customer needs and translate these insights into customer-centric innovations. Adaptability, reflecting the ability to adjust to new situations and embrace change, is especially critical in the dynamic tourism and hospitality context, where firms must continuously innovate to cope with volatile demand, technological shifts, and macroeconomic shocks. Employees who feel confident, empathetic, and adaptable are more likely to view challenges as opportunities and engage in proactive behaviors that lead to service improvements and new product development. These patterns align with prior research (Cudjoe et al., 2023; Jameel et al., 2025; Zhu et al., 2023) emphasizing that emotionally resourceful employees are more likely to engage in innovative work behaviors and contribute to the development of supportive innovation climates. Employees who trust their skills are naturally more comfortable proposing creative enhancements and participating in service revisions (Tutcu & Çelik, 2018).

An interesting nuance emerges in the negative correlations observed between the social skills and self-regulation dimensions of emotional capital and the two innovation dimensions. Although at first glance counterintuitive, this pattern may reflect the trade-off between strict emotional control or highly standardized interpersonal scripts and the freedom needed for creative deviance (Tajeddini et al., 2020). In highly codified service environments, employees with strong social skills and high self-regulation may prioritize harmony, compliance, and consistency over experimentation, thereby dampening their willingness to deviate from norms and suggest unconventional solutions (Janssen, 2004). This suggests that the relationship between certain aspects of emotional capital and innovation may be curvilinear or context-dependent, pointing to the need for future research to explore boundary conditions, such as organizational structure, leadership style, and task complexity, that might moderate these effects.

## CONCLUSION

This research empirically investigated the link between emotional capital and innovation in the Turkish tourism and hospitality industry, a sector characterized by intense competition, high emotional labor, and constant pressure to adapt to evolving customer expectations. Using data from 332 employees across 25 enterprises and employing

covariance-based structural equation modeling, the study showed that emotional capital exerts a positive, statistically significant, and direct impact on organizational innovation. By adopting multidimensional measures of both emotional capital and innovation, the analysis revealed that specific components, such as self-confidence, empathy, and adaptability play a particularly important role in driving innovation orientation and innovation culture.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce the applicability of COR theory in explaining service innovation dynamics. Emotional capital operates as a valuable personal resource caravan that not only buffers employees against stressors such as emotional labor and demanding customers but also fuels a “resource gain spiral” in which surplus psychological energy is invested in creative and innovative behaviors. Employees who feel confident, empathetic, and adaptable are more likely to interpret challenges as opportunities, engage in proactive problem-solving, and contribute to service improvements and new product development. This study thus extends existing research on psychological and emotional resources by demonstrating that emotional capital functions not merely as a defensive shield but as an active driver of innovation performance in tourism and hospitality organizations.

The practical implications of these findings are considerable for industry practitioners. First, recruiting for emotional competencies becomes a strategic priority: integrating assessments of emotional intelligence, resilience, and adaptability into selection processes can help organizations identify candidates with high emotional capital potential. Second, targeted training and development programs aimed at strengthening self-awareness, empathy, and stress management can enhance employees’ capacity to cope with emotional labor and to engage in creative problem-solving. Third, fostering an organizational culture that promotes psychological safety, open communication, and recognition of innovative efforts is essential to leveraging emotional capital; employees must feel safe to voice ideas and experiment without fear of punitive consequences. Finally, leadership development focused on emotional intelligence can equip managers to model emotionally competent behavior and create climates that nurture emotional capital and innovation simultaneously. For practitioners, the message is clear: investing in employees’ emotional capital is not a peripheral HR initiative but a core strategic lever for sustaining innovation and competitive advantage in tourism and hospitality firms.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design precludes strong causal inferences; longitudinal studies would be valuable to examine how changes in emotional capital over time influence innovation outcomes. Second, the reliance on self-reported survey data raises the possibility of common method bias; future research could incorporate multi-source data, such as supervisor ratings or objective indicators of innovation performance. Third, the study was conducted within a single national context, which limits the generalizability of the findings; cross-cultural comparative research could explore how cultural values and norms shape the emotional capital and innovation relationship.

Moreover, the unexpected negative associations between social skills, self-regulation, and innovation suggest that the functional role of these dimensions may vary depending on situational and organizational factors. Future research could examine potential curvilinear relationships or test moderating variables such as autonomy, formalization, or leadership style to better understand when and how these aspects of emotional capital support or constrain innovation. Finally, while this study focused on individual-level emotional capital, future work could investigate team- or organizational-level emotional capital and its influence on collective innovation processes and outcomes, offering a more multilevel perspective on the phenomenon.

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# PLATFORM-BASED ACCESSIBILITY CERTIFICATION AND HOTEL PERFORMANCE: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM ACCESSIBLE TOURISM

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## ABSTRACT

## INTRODUCTION

Accessible tourism is based on the principle that all individuals, regardless of disability status, have the right to fully participate in travel experiences (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011). This issue is increasingly important as the World Health Organization estimates that 1.3 billion people worldwide live with significant disabilities (WHO, 2023). These disabilities are often linked to reduced mobility, limited social participation, and broader challenges to economic and social inclusion. In response, digital tourism platforms have begun to play a mediating role by providing accessibility-related information to travelers. One such platform, Wheel the World, assesses hotel accessibility features and designates a “verified destination” to properties that disclose reliable and standardized accessibility information. Despite the rising visibility of these platform-based certifications, their effects on hotel performance and customer reviews are still largely unexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining whether accessibility verification impacts hotel ratings and review sentiment.

## METHODS

This study uses a quantitative, secondary-data approach. Data on hotels with the “verified destination” designation will be gathered from the Wheel the World platform and combined with a hotel-level dataset that includes customer ratings, textual reviews, and basic hotel characteristics. To isolate the impact of accessibility verification, hotels with the designation will be matched with similar hotels without it based on observable features. Statistical analyses will then be performed to compare average ratings and the frequency of negative review sentiment between the two groups.

## RESULTS

Preliminary results are expected to show that hotels with the “verified destination” designation receive higher customer ratings than non-verified hotels. In addition, the designation is anticipated to be associated with a lower incidence of negative sentiment in customer reviews. These findings would suggest that verified accessibility information not only benefits travelers with disabilities but also shapes broader customer evaluations, potentially by reducing uncertainty and information asymmetry in the booking process.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study are expected to demonstrate that platform-based accessibility verification can generate measurable performance benefits for hotels. By improving the quality and credibility of accessibility information, the “verified destination” designation may mitigate negative review experiences and enhance overall customer satisfaction. This research contributes to the accessible tourism literature by empirically linking accessibility certification to hotel performance outcomes. It highlights the strategic value of digital platforms in advancing inclusive and sustainable tourism practices aligned with global development goals.

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

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## **DESTINATION ATTRACTIVENESS FOR AGING MEDICAL TOURISTS: A TOURISM-ORIENTED MULTI-CRITERIA INDEX APPROACH**

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### **ABSTRACT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

As medical tourism increasingly overlaps with wellness, recovery, and extended-stay travel, travelers aged 65 and older form a rapidly growing yet under-studied segment (Alén, Domínguez, & Losada, 2012). Compared to younger medical tourists, older travelers prioritize destination attributes such as safety, accessibility, recovery environments, and overall quality of life, reflecting age-related risk perceptions and post-treatment needs (Aggarwal, Hajra, & Kukreja, 2023; Connell, 2013). However, existing medical tourism research has mainly focused on provider-level factors and cost benefits, offering limited insight into how destinations compete for this age-sensitive market (Hanefeld et al., 2015). This study addresses this gap by defining aging medical tourism (65+) as destination-based recovery tourism and systematically evaluating destination attractiveness.

### **METHODS**

Drawing on destination competitiveness theory (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003) and push–pull models of medical tourism decision-making (Heung, Kucukusta, & Song, 2010), this study develops an Ideal Medical Tourism Destination Index (IMTDI). The index integrates national-level indicators across six tourism-relevant dimensions: healthcare system reputation; affordability measured by cost of living; safety and security assessed using the Global Peace Index and national crime rates; recovery and well-being environment captured by the World Happiness Index; economic development measured by GDP per capita; and population aging structure, operationalized as the percentage of residents aged 65 and older as a proxy for age-friendly destination infrastructure. A weighted Technique for Order Preference by Similarity to Ideal Solution (TOPSIS)–based Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) approach is employed, with criterion weights informed by prior medical tourism research and expert judgment (Roy et al., 2017; Riandari, Defit, & Yuhandri, 2023).

### **RESULTS**

The analysis ranks leading medical tourism destinations, including Thailand, Mexico, Costa Rica, India, Turkey, and Malaysia. The results reveal systematic trade-offs in destination competitiveness. Destinations that primarily compete on affordability and clinical capacity tend to underperform on safety and recovery-oriented quality-of-life indicators, whereas destinations with moderate healthcare costs but stronger place-based attributes demonstrate higher overall attractiveness for aging medical tourists. Sensitivity analysis confirms the robustness of destination rankings across alternative weighting scenarios.

### **CONCLUSION**

By shifting analytical focus from healthcare providers to destinations, this study advances tourism scholarship on the competitiveness of medical tourism and aging tourism markets. The IMTDI offers a structured and comparative tool for assessing destination appeal for aging medical tourists and provides actionable insights for destination marketing organizations and hospitality stakeholders aiming to attract this high-value, extended-stay segment in line with sustainable destination development goals.

**ABSTRACT**

The healthy-living lifestyle has been capturing much attention in the United States of America and in various parts of the world. More than ever, data are showing more attention is being directed from various hospitality and tourism players to the reality of officials and medical experts and shedding the light on the following: exercise, weight control, balanced diet, stress control, smoking cessation programs and smoking ban laws, regular physical exam, sensible alcohol consumption, the fight against drugs, safe sex, and safety measures (sun lotion, seat belt, etc.). An exploratory study by Hallab (1999) examined the relationship between healthy-living and travel behavior. The results of the mentioned study revealed significant correlation between an individual's healthy-living practices and healthy-oriented push and pull travel motivation factors (e.g. spas; bath in warm springs and mineral waters; travel to learn; fitness and wellness seminars; daily access to fitness facilities; healthy cuisine; health-oriented and organic products; developing healthy habits; open-air running tracks; smoking-free environment; clean environment; educational tours; hygiene standards; seat belt regulations; alcohol-free coffee shops; sun bed with umbrellas; etc.). The research study revealed that one's healthy-living orientation in life does have an effect on their travel motivations; the higher the individual's healthy-living standards in life, the more likely they are going to be pushed and pulled by healthy-living oriented hospitality and travel and tourism factors. Interestingly, the study also revealed strong connection between healthy-living and the socio-demographic variables of age, education income and education; the older the individual with higher income and education the more they follow a more healthy-living lifestyle and exhibit a higher level of healthy-living attitudes towards their hospitality and tourism-related experiences. In other words, individuals with a higher level of healthy-living orientation, motivational and attitudinal, perceive their hospitality and tourism experiences as a channel through which they exercise their healthy lifestyles while advancing their physical and mental states.

Hallab (2006) stressed on the importance for hospitality and tourism public and private players to factor in the needs and wants of the healthy-living segment and to incorporate relevant push and pull motivations into their product, information and marketing development strategies if they are to secure a competitive edge in the global tourism industry. Hallab and Gursoy (2006) examined the relationship between U.S. travelers' healthy-living attitude and their travel information search strategies. Their study revealed a strong connection between an individuals' healthy eating and exercise habits and their travel information search behavior; those with higher healthy-living standards tend to be more active information seekers and attach more value and importance to various sources of travel information.

The purpose of this research study is to examine and compare the content of official destination tourism websites of various tourist destinations from several and diverse parts of the world and to analyze their content from the angle of their inclusion of healthy-living travel push and pull factors on their sites and their incorporation of messages that promote a healthy-living lifestyle and target and appeal to the healthy-living travel segment. The study will present practical and theoretical recommendations.

**KEYWORDS:** healthy-living, tourist destination, website, travel motives, lifestyle, push factors, pull factors

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# OUTSIDE THE DRAGON'S DOMAIN: PUBLICITY, IMAGE, AND THE PROSPECTS OF TOURISM IN THE NATIONAL PARK

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## ABSTRACT

There has not been much research conducted regarding destination publicity and its impact on national park tourism and national park tourism marketing, as well as its relevance in influencing tourist decision-making and sustainable tourism. This research aims to examine destination publicity and its impact on tourist travel intention to visit and travel to Komodo National Park, one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites located in Indonesia. The study aims to examine the interaction of destination publicity, destination image, and destination preference to determine visit intention. A total of 230 surveys, mostly from respondents aged 17 to 25, were collected using a structured questionnaire. This research employed Exploratory Factor Analysis in order to validate the constructs of each measurement, and then used Structural Equation Modelling to test the variables in the research. The research confirms that destination publicity has a significant impact on the destination image, as well as the intention to visit a particular destination, proving that destination publicity has a very important and strategic role in destination marketing. However, destination publicity did not have a significant impact on destination preference. This research shows that, in fact, destination image does positively impact visit intention, however, it does not significantly impact the destination preference. On the other hand, it does hold true that destination preference does positively impact visit intention, and that is the main focus of the research. Publicity campaigns have a particularly important role in enhancing destination image, and in turn, stimulating and influencing tourist interest in travel, even when destination preference does not strongly impact the results proposed. There has been an unprecedented integration of destination publicity into models of tourist behavioural intention which is rarely discussed in the existing body of national park tourism literature. This pioneering contribution from a theoretical standpoint is likely to inspire others to follow suit. In a practical sense, there is a call for a sustainable tourism strategy that inverts the publicity of conservation-mining ecological destruction to conservation positive erosion tourism. In advocacy marketing of the Komodo National Park, genuine care for the environment and storytelling marketing should be incorporated to democratise the advocacy of sustainable marketing. There is a need for future studies to understand the dynamics of publicity in sustainable tourism.

**Keywords:** Destination publicity, Komodo National Park, visit intention, sustainable tourism, destination marketing, national park tourism.

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## HOW IS DESTINATION LOYALTY FORMED? CONCEPTUAL INSIGHTS FROM NATURE-BASED DESTINATIONS

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### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

#### INTRODUCTION

Destination loyalty refers to repeat visits to a tourism destination (Wang et al., 2020), a concept rooted in brand loyalty, which is defined as a deep commitment to repurchasing a brand consistently in the future that resists switching behaviour (Oliver, 1999). Similarly, repeat tourists demonstrate such commitment, making them highly valuable to destinations as they tend to stay longer, spend more, share positive word-of-mouth, and plan future visits (Qu et al., 2021). Despite its significance in destination marketing (Lee, 2007), research on how destination loyalty forms remains limited, particularly regarding the underlying emotional and psychological processes of repeat visitation.

There has been growing interest and attention paid to nature-based destinations globally, especially post-pandemic. These destinations attract tourists seeking experience around natural resources such as forests, lakes, mountains, and rivers (Fredman & Tyrväinen, 2010). Immersive experiences in these settings often foster deep emotional bonds and psychological connections, providing deeper personal meaning and strengthening relationships with destinations (Curtin, 2009). Nature enthusiasts form strong connections through activities like wildlife excursions. Positive experiences in the nature, linked to well-being and satisfaction, deepen these connections, encouraging both revisits and a commitment to protecting cherished landscapes (Vada et al. 2019; Yoon et al., 2024).

#### METHODS

Given the limited qualitative exploration of destination loyalty, this research adopted a qualitative approach to explore its development from the viewpoints of destination management organisations (DMOs) and international repeat tourists in the context of nature-based tourism destinations. Study 1 aimed to understand the strategies DMOs employ to foster loyalty along with their perceived benefits and challenges in attracting repeat tourists. Interviews were conducted with 20 nature-based DMOs. Study 2 investigated the emotional and psychological processes shaping destination loyalty via 63 semi-structured interviews with international repeat tourists to British Columbia, Canada, a leading nature-based destination. Data was analysed thematically.

#### RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Findings reveal that while DMOs value repeat tourists and recognise their benefits, they rarely develop targeted strategies due to challenges such as limited understanding of loyalty formation and dimensions. Insights from tourist interviews offer a fresh perspective, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of destination loyalty. The research offers practical implications and future recommendations.

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# **DOES FAMOUS AND LOCALIZED LABUBU LEAD YOU TO THE DESTINATION? THROUGH MEANING TRANSFER THEORY (MTT) AND SIMILARITY-ATTRACTION THEORY (SAT)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Several regions recruit famous characters (e.g., Labubu) for temporary destination promotion, yet their marketing effectiveness remains underexplored. Grounded in meaning transfer theory and similarity-attraction theory, this study examines how perceived character familiarity (PCF) and localness (PCL) affect impulsive travel intention (ITI) via destination familiarity (DF), and verifies the moderating role of perceived character similarity (PCS). Analyzing 303 respondents using PLS-SEM, results show PCF affects ITI only through DF mediation. PCL directly affects ITI but not via DF. PCS positively moderates PCL→DF transfer but unexpectedly negatively moderates PCL→ITI. This offers critical insights for regions integrating famous characters in destination promotions.

Key Words: Character Familiarity, Character Localness, Destination Familiarity, Character Similarity, Meaning Transfer Theory, Similarity-Attraction Theory

## **INTRODUCTION**

Nowadays, several regions have employed famous characters (i.e., Labubu) for temporary destination promotions. For instance, the Macao SAR utilized a localized Labubu and leveraged their popularity for short-term destination promotion (Moura, 2025). These characters are familiar, and their major function is to introduce an unfamiliar environment by creating exposure (Radomskaya & Pearce, 2021). Yet, given the promotion is temporary, a critical question arises whether the perceptions of familiarity and localness of these characters foster impulsive travel intention.

Specifically, gaps exist in two aspects. First, a prior study demonstrated that attractiveness (like likability or cuteness) can be transferred from endorsers to an endorsed brand (Jain & Roy, 2016). Yet, whether character familiarity (a dimension of attractiveness) functions the same is still underexplored. Second, a recent study claimed that the symbolic representation and meaning of a character do not evoke impulsive travel intention (Chen et al., 2022), contradicting the default function of these characters, therefore warranting further investigation about how to improve this relationship.

In response to these gaps, the objective of this study is to examine whether and how perceived character familiarity (PCF) and localness (PCL) affect impulsive travel intention (ITI). Grounded by the meaning transfer theory (MTT) and similarity-attraction theory (SAT), this study tests the direct impact of PCF and PCL on ITI, and further proposes that both PCF and PCL may also foster destination familiarity (DF) through the meaning transfer mechanism and finally affect ITI.

Moreover, given that self-image congruence and emotional value of these characters may contribute to the formation of impulsive travel intention (Chen et al., 2022), and the SAT states that similarity may foster a sense of close relationship, which may potentially facilitate the formation of impulsive intention. Therefore, this study further verifies whether character similarity (PCS) as a potential moderator improves the prior weak relationship between PCL (a perception of the character's symbolic representation) and ITI, by exploring if it improves the direct effect from PCL to ITI and strengthens the meaning transfer from PCL to DF.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Nowadays, tourism industries have started to employ digital characters for destination promotions (Ho & Ngan, 2025). This approach can be attributed to one of the well-known examples, Japan adopted Kumamoto for their destination promotions (Wattanacharoensil et al., 2020). And these famous characters act as place identity markers, attracting the audience to visit the destination (Radomskaya & Pearce, 2021). To maximize the third-party characters' destination promotion effectiveness, it is essential to understand the market trends and align with public aesthetics (Wang et al., 2025). Scholars claimed that localizing these characters may enhance their effectiveness (Wu et al., 2025), leading to the enhancement of destination reputation (Wang et al., 2025).

### Meaning Transfer Theory (MTT) and Similarity-Attraction Theory (SAT)

Meaning Transfer Theory was introduced by McCracken (1986) and later refined as how positive feelings transfer from endorsers to products (Erdogan, 1999). This meaning transfer helps with product image polishing, introduction, and repositioning, and also allows cultural meaning transfer (Erdogan, 1999). Different attractiveness dimensions can be transferred from endorsers to products or destinations, like likability and physical attractiveness (Huang et al., 2025; Jain & Roy, 2016). The Similarity-Attraction Theory indicated that people will be attracted to those who are similar to them (Byrne et al., 1971). When people find similarity with others, it is easy for people to form a closer emotional relationship (Yang et al., 2025), as empirically supported by Shen et al. (2022).

## HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

### Character Familiarity (PCF), Destination Familiarity (DF), and Impulsive Travel Intention (ITI)

PCF means the knowledge of the character through prior experience and exposure; it acts as an attractiveness, and is crucial in enhancing persuasion power (Martensen et al., 2018). An empirical study showcased that characters can leverage their attractiveness to foster impulsive purchase intention (Li et al., 2025). Theoretically, the source attractiveness model also supports the relationship between familiarity and people's behavioral intention (Erdogan, 1999; Fleck et al., 2012; McGuire, 1985). Besides, DF refers to the mental and visual impression of a destination or tourism experience (Horng et al., 2012). A recent study has outlined the familiarity transfer between two objects, empirically supporting the notion that familiarity can be transferred from a known object to an unknown one (Małecki, 2015). The MTT also supports this, as a positive feeling (familiarity in this case) may transfer to the promoted destination, helping to introduce the destination. Casali et al. (2020) also proved the positive relationship between destination familiarity and visit intention. In this study, ITI refers to an unconscious and sudden desire to travel (Yao et al., 2021). Therefore, we proposed that:

H1: PCF positively predicts ITI.

H2: PCF positively predicts DF.

H3: DF positively predicts ITI.

### Character Localness (PCL), Destination Familiarity (DF), and Impulsive Travel Intention (ITI)

PCL refers to the degree to which the character symbolizes the value of the endorsed destination (Özsomer, 2012). A prior study indicated that symbolic representation of a character may not foster impulsive behavior (Chen et al., 2022). Besides, according to Zhou et al. (2024), there is an image-to-image association effect, emphasizing that the image of the endorser is connected to the destination image, which implies that the perception of localness (as an image of the endorser) may allow the audience to know more about the destination. The MTT again supported this meaning transfer process, stating that the cultural meaning from the character can transfer to the endorsed destination, thereby strengthening people's familiarity with the destination. Therefore:

H4: PCL does not positively predict ITI.

H5: PCL positively predicts DF.

### The Mediating Role of Destination Familiarity (DF)

Destination familiarity has been rapidly adopted as a mediator to explain the relationship between the perception and evaluation of external stimuli and tourism outcomes (Marinao Artigas et al., 2015). Additionally, it also mediates the relationship between the image of the destination and travel intention. Also, based on the MTT, image-to-image association effect (Zhou et al., 2024), and "familiarity transfer effect" (Małecki, 2015), this study posited that:

H6: DF mediates the relationship between (a) PCF and ITI, and (b) PCL and ITI.

### The Moderating Role of Characters' Similarity (PCS)

PCS means the resemblance between the source and audience (Erdogan, 1999). Based on the SAT, when an individual perceives someone as similar to themselves, they may experience a positive feeling, be willing to form a friendship or closer relationships (Abbasi et al., 2024). Also, as indicating that self-image congruence and emotional

value help in fostering the formation of impulsive behavior (Chen et al., 2022), this study proposed that when people perceived similarity towards those characters, the meaning transfer from PCL to DF will be enhanced, as people pay more attention to the attractive localized character, which potentially fosters a higher familiarity with the endorsed destination. Also, similarity may potentially boost the direct impact of PCL on ITI:

H7: PCS positively moderates the impact of (a) PCL on DF, and (b) PCL on ITI.

## METHODOLOGY

This quantitative research collected data via the online survey platform during July 2025. A real website about the Labubu temporary destination promotion event was provided, followed by the measurement items and demographic questions. A pilot test has been conducted to ensure questionnaire quality. All the measurement items are adapted from existing literature and contextualized, measuring and using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. A total of 17 items was used: PCL with 3 items (Swoboda et al., 2012), PCF with 5 items (Nazir & Wani, 2024), DF with 3 items (Guan et al., 2022), PCS with 3 items (Xie & Feng, 2023), and ITI with 3 items (Yao et al., 2021).

## RESULTS

Among the 303 valid responses, nearly half are female (58.09%). Most of them are aged between 25-34 (62.71%), from China (99.34%), hold an undergraduate degree (79.87%), income between 8001 and 12500 (46.53%), are married (76.57%), with a kid (74.92%). As a preliminary analysis, all the constructs' Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) are above 0.7, ranging from 0.724 to 0.863 and 0.844 to 0.901, indicating internal consistency reliability. AVEs range between 0.643 and 0.748, which are above the recommended threshold of 0.5, showcasing convergent validity. For factor loadings, all items were above 0.7, further confirming validity. To address discriminant validity, all the HTMT ratios are below 0.85, highlighting discriminant validity. VIFs ranging from 1.242 to 2.591, which are below 3, indicating no multicollinearity issue.

Through PLS-SEM, results indicate that PCF insignificantly affects ITI ( $\beta = 0.030$ ,  $p = 0.756$ ), yet PCL also positively and significantly influences ITI ( $\beta = 0.207$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ). Additionally, PCF positively and significantly predicts DF ( $\beta = 0.627$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), yet PCL insignificantly affects DF ( $\beta = 0.067$ ,  $p = 0.177$ ). And DF has a positive and significant impact on ITI ( $\beta = 0.182$ ,  $p = 0.019$ ). For the mediating role of DF, it positively mediates the relationship between PCF and ITI ( $\beta = 0.114$ ,  $p = 0.022$ ), showcasing full mediation. However, DF does not mediate the relationship between PCL and ITI ( $\beta = 0.012$ ,  $p = 0.275$ ). Finally, PCS positively moderates the impacts of PCL on DF ( $\beta = 0.060$ ,  $p = 0.032$ ). Yet, PCS unexpectedly negatively moderates the impacts of PCL on ITI ( $\beta = -0.148$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). To summarize, H1, H4, H5, H6b and H7b are rejected, while H2, H3, H6a, and H7a are supported.

## DISCUSSION

Results revealed that PCF does not lead to ITI, contradicting a prior study (Li et al., 2025). It can be explained by the assumption of the source attractiveness model, when characters overly endorse different brands or destinations, like the use of these famous characters, the attractiveness impact will be weakened (Erdogan, 1999). Despite the insignificant direct effect, PCF has a significant positive impact on DF, aligning with Małeckı (2015), who claimed the 'familiarity transfer effect'. Besides, DF also positively affects ITI, which aligns with Casali et al. (2020)'s results.

Next, PCL positively affects ITI, challenging the prior study by Chen et al. (2022). Unlike the findings by Chen et al. (2022), stating that symbolic representation of the character does not affect impulsive intention, famous characters are different, as they have been localized. This crafted symbolic representation integrates trendiness and local value, unlike their own symbolic representation, which evokes a novelty appeal and therefore stimulates ITI. Yet, the meaning transfer mechanism between PCL and DF is not significant, as these characters are localized, which may potentially complicate the cultural representation, weaken the pure cultural meaning transfer, thereby not significantly boosting DF. DF mediates the relationship between PCF and ITI, aligning with Marinao Artigas et al. (2015)'s finding, while it does not mediate the relationship between PCL and ITI, as the direct impact from PCL and DF is not supported.

PCS positively moderates the influence of PCL on DF, and this result is supported by SAT. When tourists perceive character similarity, it may attract them to form a closer relationship with the localized character, facilitating more efficient cultural meaning transfer to the destination. It is also supported by Xu (2022), who indicated that when people perceive the cultural value as similar to themselves, it fosters the formation of destination image, implying

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

people will be more familiar with the destination. Furthermore, PCS unexpectedly negatively moderates the impact of PCL on ITI, challenging the original assumption supported by SAT. And these unexpected results can be explained by findings by Guan et al. (2022), who highlighted that when people perceive the cultural value as highly similar to their own culture, the novelty appeal may be reduced, thereby diminishing ITI.

## CONCLUSION

This study is among the first to integrate MTT and SAT to explore the marketing effectiveness of the famous and localized character in destination promotion, refining the theoretical development. The results revealed that not all types of source attractiveness enhance marketing effectiveness directly, especially when the endorser overly endorses different brands or destinations, confirming the traditional assumption of the source attractiveness model empirically (Erdogan, 1999). Besides, character familiarity can affect destination familiarity through meaning transfer, verifying the ‘familiarity transfer effect’ (Małeckı, 2015), and extending the usage of MTT. For the meaning transfer from localness to destination familiarity, this study confirmed that ‘crafted cultural value’ may not be able to transfer, strengthening the theoretical understanding of MTT. Finally, similarity positively moderates the meaning transfer relationship between localness and destination familiarity, offering unique interaction insights between the SAT and MTT. While similarity negatively moderates the relationship between localness and impulsive travel intention, highlighting that SAT has its limitations, the positive or negative impact depends on different contexts.

It is recommended to leverage a famous and localized character for temporary destination promotions. And depends on the goals, if it aims to boost destination familiarity, it is advisable to design a character that is similar to the targeted tourists, but if it prioritizes fostering impulsive travel intention, marketers need to avoid designing a similar audience style character for promotion.

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June 22 – June 26, 2026

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ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

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ID 119

**THE EVOLVING LANDSCAPE OF TOURISM STAKEHOLDERS IN THE MARKETING OF THE  
OKAVANGO DELTA WORLD HERITAGE SITE, BOTSWANA: A TELECOUPLING FRAMEWORK  
ANALYSIS**

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and

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**ABSTRACT**

Globally significant protected areas are increasingly influenced by telecoupled interactions, in which distant international dynamics shape resource governance, branding strategies, and benefit-sharing. The primary driver of these dynamics is the UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS) designation. This prestigious global brand profoundly influences the marketing, management, and tourism activities of premier destinations like Botswana's Okavango Delta. As UNESCO's 1000th WHS, the Okavango Delta WHS represents a complex tourism system where a diverse network of stakeholders, including government agencies, foreign and local tour operators, local communities, and international organisations, interact to shape the region's global market position and sustainable development trajectory.

While the WHS status amplifies brand equity and global visibility, it simultaneously introduces management tensions by prioritising global conservation narratives over local cultural products, thereby complicating stakeholder collaboration. Although extensive research exists on the Delta's ecological and tourism significance, few studies have examined stakeholder interactions in the tourism sector in response to the 2014 World Heritage designations. This study therefore employed the telecoupling framework to analyse the evolution of stakeholders' dynamics and to assess the effects of the UNESCO inscription on the Delta's visibility. Utilising a desktop-based longitudinal policy and content analysis (2004-2014), the research maps the agent and flows across the sending, receiving, and spillover systems to evaluate how the WHS brand has reconfigured the tourism value chain.

The findings revealed that the inscription accelerated the influence of spillover system agents, particularly international regulatory bodies and global NGOs, over local community trusts and government entities. The government's role transitioned into a proactive destination stewardship, yet the study identifies critical marketing trade-offs driven by asymmetrical power. These dynamics favour distant, environmentally focused stakeholders, often at the expense of equitable citizen participation and local economic value retention. Furthermore, the prevailing destination branding narrative focuses almost exclusively on natural values, marginalising the cultural heritage that constitutes a vital part of the local tourism product.

The study concludes that, for telecoupled tourism systems, resilient and sustainable outcomes require government agencies and Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) to reconfigure power relations to integrate cultural and natural values. These distant actors interact with national government, parastatal agencies and local communities, creating complex flows of finance, images, regulations, and meanings across space. These findings provide essential theoretical insights for tourism marketing and offer practical policy implications for managing the power asymmetries inherent in international designations, ensuring that global brand success translates into inclusive local economic growth.

**KEYWORDS:** telecoupling, tourism governance, Okavango Delta, stakeholder roles, tourism marketing, UNESCO World Heritage Site

ID 120

# THE DYNAMICS OF TRUST IN RURAL TOURISM COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE: EVIDENCE FROM NQILENI VILLAGE, SOUTH AFRICA

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## ABSTRACT

Trust is a pivotal yet often underexplored element in tourism collaborative governance, particularly in rural contexts where social relations and traditional authority structures significantly influence development outcomes. This study investigates the impact of trust on collaboration, leadership legitimacy, and collective participation in a rural tourism context. While tourism governance literature has traditionally focused on power dynamics and institutional structures, this article foregrounds trust as both a relational and institutional mechanism that sustains cooperation, enhances legitimacy, and promotes inclusive development. The study conceptualises trust as a multidimensional construct encompassing interpersonal, institutional, and collective dimensions. Trust is viewed as a form of social capital that underpins effective communication, cooperation, and reciprocity among tourism stakeholders. A qualitative case study design was employed, focusing on Nqileni Village in South Africa's Eastern Cape Province. In this rural area, tourism plays a significant role in the local livelihood strategies. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 18 key stakeholders, including traditional leaders, municipal officials, tourism operators, and community representatives. Triangulation of interview data with field observations and cross-verification among participant groups ensured the analytical rigor and validity of the findings.

The findings reveal three interrelated dimensions of trust essential for collaborative governance in rural tourism: trust in traditional and political leadership, trust in legitimate leaders, and trust in collective action. First, trust in traditional and political authorities emerged as foundational, with chiefs, headmen, and municipal councilors perceived as legitimate conveners of community participation. Their leadership provided cultural and institutional stability, reinforcing residents' willingness to collaborate in tourism initiatives. Second, leadership legitimacy was identified as critical for maintaining community trust and ensuring equitable distribution of tourism benefits. Participants emphasized that trusted leaders act as mediators and facilitators, enhancing transparency and fairness, thereby preventing elite capture of tourism gains. Third, trust in collective action underscored the importance of horizontal trust among community members and external partners. This form of trust fostered cooperation, compromise, and mutual understanding, enabling diverse stakeholders to pursue shared developmental goals even when individual benefits were not immediate.

The study concludes that trust functions as both a prerequisite and an outcome of effective collaborative governance in rural tourism. By reinforcing legitimacy, transparency, and reciprocity, trust enables inclusive participation and long-term sustainability. Moreover, trust must be continuously nurtured through consistent communication, shared decision-making, and equitable distribution of benefits. The case of Nqileni Village highlights that sustainable rural tourism depends not only on institutional design but also on the social fabric of trust that binds stakeholders together. These findings contribute to expanding the theoretical and empirical understanding of trust as a cornerstone of collaborative tourism governance in rural contexts.

**KEYWORDS:** Trust, Collaborative Governance, Partnerships, Stakeholders, Tourism Governance.

ID 121

**TOURISM COMPETITIVENESS IN THE FACE OF EXTREME CLIMATE RISKS**

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**ABSTRACT****PROBLEM DEFINITION**

Global warming has intensified extreme weather events, posing severe systemic risks to the tourism industry—a sector highly sensitive to climate fluctuations. However, few studies have quantitatively captured how such climate-induced systemic risks reshape national tourism competitiveness.

**OBJECTIVES**

This study aims to examine the suppressive effects of extreme climate risks on national tourism competitiveness and to explore the moderating roles of economic capacity, technological empowerment, and institutional regulation. Methodology and Analysis

Using high-frequency meteorological data from 1993 to 2024, an Extreme Climate Risk Index was constructed across 156 countries. The empirical analysis employs panel regression models, with robustness tests.

**FINDINGS**

Extreme climate risks significantly suppress national tourism competitiveness. However, the effect is mitigated in countries with stronger economic resilience, higher technological penetration, and more robust regulatory governance. The negative effect is more pronounced in countries with high geopolitical risk, low international openness, and low biodiversity.

**THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION**

This research extends risk society theory and sustainable transition theory into the domain of tourism, proposing that extreme climate risks constitute a systemic force that reshapes institutional boundaries and long-term sectoral resilience. It provides a novel analytical lens beyond event-based disruptions.

**PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

The findings offer actionable insights for policymakers aiming to build climate-resilient tourism sectors. Recommendations include strengthening economic safety nets, accelerating green technology diffusion, and enhancing adaptive regulatory frameworks—particularly in geopolitically fragile and biodiverse-vulnerable nations.

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ID 122

**PERCEIVED PRICING FAIRNESS IN CAPTIVE VENUE CONCESSIONS: DEVELOPING AND TESTING A 2×2 DIAGNOSTIC FRAMEWORK FROM DIVISION I COLLEGE FOOTBALL EVENTS**

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California State University, Fresno

**ABSTRACT**

The global sports and entertainment events industry has an economic impact of approximately USD 2.65 trillion. Captive venue concessions face ongoing criticism for prices that are higher than external market rates. In these monopolistic environments, limited alternatives heighten the perception of exploitative pricing, reducing satisfaction, loyalty, and spending. However, operators lack systematic, theory-based tools to assess fairness, identify problem items, and adjust pricing to balance revenue and guest satisfaction.

Two research questions guided this study: (1) How do attendees perceive concession pricing fairness at live sporting events, and which items appear most unfair? (2) Can a 2×2 matrix effectively measure, visualize, and predict the effects of unfairness on satisfaction and spending? The framework was tested at California State University, Fresno (Fresno State), a Division I football program (Mountain West Conference) averaging approximately 40,000 attendees per 2025 home game.

Data were collected via intercept surveys during the 2025 football season, yielding 155 usable responses. Measures captured perceived exploitation (PE) and adjusted consumer value (AVC), operationalized as marginal utility minus the willingness to pay. Respondents rated four concession categories—soft drinks, alcohol, snacks, and hot foods—using five-point Likert scales. Mean PE and AVC scores were plotted on a 2×2 matrix to classify items and identify those perceived as price gouging versus higher-value offerings.

Items were plotted along the two axes—PE and AVC—to classify products into four quadrants: Worth the Splurge (high AVC/low PE), Price Gouging (high AVC/high PE), Fair but Forgettable (low AVC/low PE), and Unreasonable Pricing (low AVC/high PE). Quadrants prioritize action: high-value/low-exploitation items indicate success, low-value/high-exploitation items require intervention, and intermediate zones suggest opportunities for value enhancement or improved transparency.

Results revealed a clear divide in perception. Soft drinks (MPE = 3.11, MAVC = 4.18) were categorized as Worth the Splurge, indicating high utility relative to the perceived cost. Hot foods (MPE = 3.72, MAVC = 4.33) landed in the Price Gouging quadrant, reflecting a high product value dampened by perceived exploitative pricing. Alcohol (MPE = 4.10, MAVC = 4.00) and snacks (MPE = 3.79, MAVC = 3.91) clustered in Unreasonable Pricing, driven by high perceived exploitation not offset by consumer value.

Practically, the framework suggests actionable strategies, such as price adjustments for high-risk items, bundling, portion improvements, transparency efforts, and ethical guidelines, to enhance the fan experience, increase attendance, and support sustainable revenue. The matrix also offers a tool that can be easily interpreted by relevant practitioners.

Theoretically, this study contributes a novel methodological tool—the 2×2 PE–AVC matrix—that allows researchers to systematically measure and visualize perceptions of fairness in captive markets. The matrix can be adapted to related contexts, such as retail, dining, or festival environments, providing a replicable framework for examining the interaction between perceived value, exploitation, and behavioral outcomes.

As an exploratory study, future work will expand to professional baseball and replicate at Fresno State in 2026 (post-Pac-12 transition) with larger sample sizes across all home games.

ID 123

**THE DIAGNOSTICITY OF COLOR EFFECTS ON HOTEL GUESTS**Yingying Dong  
Purdue UniversityAleí Fan  
Purdue University

and

Kevin Kam Fung So  
Purdue University**ABSTRACT****INTRODUCTION**

The quality of hotels' sleeping-related amenities (e.g., bedding and pillows) significantly influences guests' booking intentions (Lv et al., 2020). The hotel bedding has been dominated by white. However, maintaining the crisp whiteness requires bleaching, placing great demand on energy and water (Li et al., 2022). To address these challenges, there is a growing trend toward exploring alternative bedding colors, particularly neutral tones such as gray. This trend makes color a relevant visual cue that shapes guests' perceptions of hotels and influences their decision-making. Regarding the relationship between color effects and general perceptions, previous literature has mainly focused on the manufacturing products (e.g., Hagtvedt, 2020); little is known about how these perceptions function in the hospitality industry. Considering the fundamental differences between goods and hospitality services, more academic attention is warranted. To address this research gap, the current study draws on Accessibility-Diagnosticity Theory to explore answers to three research questions: (1) What are the general attitudes of guests toward hotel bedding in neutral tones? (2) How does the color effect influence guests' perceptions and behavioral intentions? (3) What is the relationship between color effects, guests' perceptions, and behavioral intentions?

**METHODS**

This research employs a scenario-based experimental design approach for a series of two studies. Study 1 used a single-factor between-subjects design (color: white vs. light gray) to explore guests' general attitudes toward non-white hotel bedding. Study 2 employed a similar one-way between-subjects design (color: light gray vs. dark gray) to examine the role of color effect on diagnosticity, brand image, and word-of-mouth (WOM), as well as the serial mediation of color effect on WOM through diagnosticity and brand image.

**RESULTS**

In Study 1, after controlling for the importance of pillows when choosing hotels, a one-way ANCOVA revealed no significant difference in guests' perceived quality between white and light gray bedding. Regarding the general attitudes, about 86% participants expressed a preference for hotel bedding in neutral colors (e.g., gray) over white because of perceived uniqueness. In Study 2, after controlling for pillow importance, a one-way MANCOVA showed a significant effect of color on diagnosticity, brand image, and WOM. Specifically, dark-colored bedding resulted in higher levels of diagnosticity, brand image, and WOM than light-colored bedding. PROCESS Model 6 analysis further indicated a serial mediation mechanism: color influenced diagnosticity, which in turn affected brand image, ultimately enhancing WOM.

**CONCLUSION**

Drawing on Accessibility Diagnosticity Theory, this research found that color serves as a visually accessible and diagnostic cue, which significantly influenced people's perceptions and behavioral intentions. Theoretically, the research contributes to the literature in sensory marketing, color psychology, and digital marketing in the service

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

context. Practically, the insights from this research are particularly valuable in the corporate social responsibility context. We recommend that hotels adopt non-white bedding, particularly darker neutral tones, not only to reduce the environmental challenges associated with white bedding maintenance but also optimize the perceived brand image, thereby enhancing positive word-of-mouth.

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# THE CATALYTIC ROLE OF AMBIDEXTROUS DIGITAL INNOVATION IN CONNECTING DIGITAL LEADERSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN SMTEs

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and

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The tourism industry relies on continuous innovation to adapt to changing customer demands. Leaders' digital literacy is essential for facilitating the sustainable transformation of small and medium-sized tourism enterprises (SMTEs). This paper explores how leaders' digital literacy impacts sustainable transformation within the tourism sector and investigates ambidextrous digital innovation as a mediating factor. The study aims to provide insights into how effective leaders' digital literacy can empower employees to generate innovative ideas, enhance service quality, and drive sustainability.

**Study/Design/Methodology/Approach:** A quantitative research design was employed to test the hypothesized relationships between constructs of leaders' digital literacy, ambidextrous digital innovation, and sustainable transformation. Data were collected from 110 SMTEs in South Africa's tourism industry via a structured online survey. The mediation analysis using SPSS-PROCESS was applied to assess the direct and indirect effects of leaders' digital literacy on sustainable transformation via ambidextrous digital innovation.

**Results:** A cross-sectional survey of 110 small and medium tourism enterprises reveals that leaders' digital literacy does not directly drive sustainable transformation. Instead, their impact primarily occurs through both incremental and radical digital innovation capabilities, emphasizing the importance of organisational ambidexterity. Although the modest sample size and cross-sectional design may limit the statistical generalisability and causal inference of the findings, the study provides insights that are analytically generalisable, contributing to the understanding of digital transformation and organisational ambidexterity within the tourism sector. From a practical standpoint, the results indicate that managers of small and medium tourism enterprises (SMTEs) should prioritise the development of digital capabilities that enhance both operational improvements and more radical service innovations to achieve sustainable transformation.

**Originality/Value:** This study adds to the existing literature by highlighting the integration of leaders' digital literacy and ambidextrous digital innovation as key factors influencing sustainable transformation in the tourism industry. While previous research has examined the concepts of digital literacy and sustainability, there has been limited focus on the mediating role of ambidextrous digital innovation in this context.

**Keywords:** digital leadership; sustainable transformation; ambidextrous digital innovation; small to medium tourism enterprises; South Africa.

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has significantly changed the competitive environment for small, medium, and micro tourism enterprises (SMTEs), forcing them to seek sustainable transformation in order to stay competitive in increasingly unpredictable markets. In developing countries like South Africa, SMTEs function within ongoing structural limitations, such as restricted access to financing, gaps in digital literacy, deficiencies in digital infrastructure, and shortages in capabilities, which impede their capacity to use digitalisation for long-term sustainability (Ndlovu, Sifolo & Tshipal, 2026). In this scenario, leaders' digital literacy has become an essential organisational asset, allowing leaders to define strategic digital objectives, mobilize technological resources, and

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foster adaptive cultures that encourage environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable business transformation (Kane et al., 2019).

From the extant literature, indicators are that leaders' digital literacy goes beyond mere technical skills, incorporating strategic foresight, change management, and the ability to promote innovation across organizational boundaries (Hess et al., 2016; Chen, Li & Shahid, 2024). Even though there is increasing interest in leaders' digital literacy and sustainable transformation, there is a lack of empirical research focusing on the ways in which leadership-driven digital capabilities (Alaskar, 2025) lead to sustainability outcomes, especially in tourism-focused SMTEs in the Global South. Ambidextrous digital innovation, which is defined in innovation literature as the ability to simultaneously engage in exploratory initiatives and exploitative efficiencies through digital means, provides a compelling explanatory framework (He & Wong, 2004; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013). Studies indicate that organisations that can balance digital exploration and exploitation are better equipped to adapt to environmental fluctuations while enhancing performance and creating sustainable value (March, 1991; Turner, Swart & Maylor, 2013). Consequently, this study examines how leaders' digital literacy affects sustainable transformation, mediated by ambidextrous digital innovation, within South African SMTEs. By incorporating insights from digital transformation, innovation ambidexterity, and sustainability literature, it builds upon foundational research in leaders' digital literacy (Kane et al., 2019; Hess et al., 2016; Mashinini & Sethibe, 2025), sustainable business transformation (Bocken et al., 2014), and ambidextrous innovation (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013) to offer a detailed conceptual framework. The results are anticipated to guide policymakers, practitioners, and researchers on how leader-driven digital capabilities can foster inclusive, resilient, and digitally enabled sustainability pathways for SMTEs in resource-limited settings.

## **HYPOTHESES**

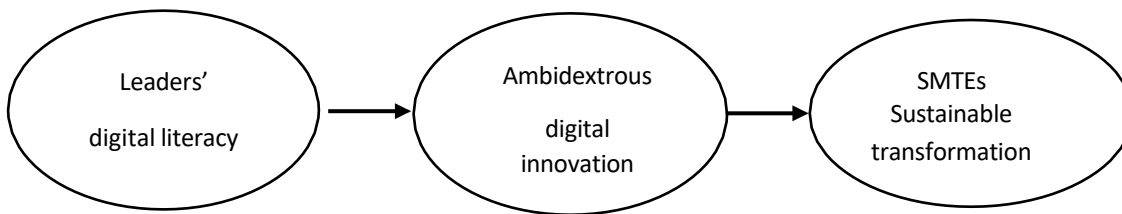
H1: Leaders' digital literacy has a positive effect on SMTE's sustainable transformation.

H2: Ambidextrous digital innovation mediates the relationship between leaders' digital literacy and SMTE's sustainable transformation.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS, AND RESEARCH MODEL**

The digital literacy of leaders has increasingly been recognised as a vital factor for transformation in small, micro, and medium tourism enterprises (SMTEs), particularly through the enhancement of their digital skills, which improves their ability to understand technological changes, utilise digital resources, and align innovation with sustainability objectives. Current research suggests that leaders who are digitally literate enhance organisational adaptability and learning, creating an environment conducive to simultaneous incremental improvements in existing digital processes as well as radical innovations that generate new value propositions and business models (Teece, 2014; Ndlovu, 2021). In resource-limited SMTEs, exploitative digital innovation plays a role in improving operational efficiency, service quality, and short-term competitiveness, whereas explorative digital innovation fosters long-term renewal, resilience, and differentiation in unstable tourism markets (March, 1991; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013). This dual approach mirrors the principles of Dynamic Capabilities (DC) theory, which views a firm's competitiveness as the capacity to detect, grasp, and rearrange resources in response to changes in the environment; in this context, digital literacy and leadership act as foundational elements that allow SMTEs to effectively manage digital technologies for both efficiency and innovation (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997; Warner & Wäger, 2019).

Building on this foundation, the theory of IT Ambidexterity (IAT) elucidates how the concurrent exploration of new digital technologies and the utilisation of existing IT infrastructures create dynamic digital capabilities that boost organisational agility, innovation effectiveness, and ultimately the sustainable transformation of small and medium tourism enterprises (SMTEs) (Melin et al., 2024). Empirical research increasingly connects ambidextrous digital innovation with various sustainability outcomes, including economic viability, environmental stewardship, and the creation of social value, indicating that a balanced approach to digital exploration and exploitation allows SMTEs to enhance current operations while trialing more environmentally friendly services, platform ecosystems, and inclusive tourism frameworks (George, Merrill & Schillebeeckx, 2021). Consequently, merging the perspectives of dynamic capabilities (DC) and IT ambidexterity (IAT) offers a clear explanatory framework: leaders' digital literacy nurtures sensing and reconfiguration skills (DC), while the ambidextrous use of IT facilitates a balance between exploration and exploitation (IAT), together fostering sustainable transformation in the context of rapidly changing digital tourism.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework (Source-authors)

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research survey designed to explore the effects of leaders' digital literacy on SMTE's sustainable transformation. The approach enabled the systematic measurement and analysis of relationships between leaders' digital literacy, ambidextrous digital innovation, and SMTE's sustainable transformation. The research method employed in this study was a cross-sectional online survey (SurveyMonkey) of 110 SMTE's in South Africa. Although the modest sample size and cross-sectional design may limit the statistical generalisability and causal inference of the findings, the study provides insights that are analytically generalisable, contributing to the understanding of digital transformation and organisational ambidexterity within the tourism sector. For our study, we focused on small and medium-sized tourism enterprises (SMTEs) that embraced digital technologies and were willing to share their experiences through our online survey. Participants took part in an engaging online survey, where their insights were gathered through a thoughtfully designed questionnaire. The mediation analysis using SPSS-PROCESS was applied to assess the direct and indirect effects of leaders' digital literacy on sustainable transformation via ambidextrous digital innovation. The relevant ethics committee approved the study, and all participants provided informed consent before participating in the survey. The informed consent statement was provided to all participants before they completed the survey, and they were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequence.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following section presents the descriptive and inferential statistics analysis of the study data. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire was developed and administered, covering three primary domains: leaders' digital literacy, ambidextrous digital innovation, and SMTE's sustainable transformation. The questionnaire's reliability was confirmed through internal and external consistency checks, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.7 (Pallant, 2010). Data was collected from a sample of 110 respondents.

**Table 1:** Reliability test

| Constructs                                  | Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Leaders' digital literacy                   | 0.899                         |
| Exploitative incremental digital innovation | 0.878                         |
| Exploitative incremental digital innovation | 0.865                         |
| Sustainable transformation of SMTEs         | 0.932                         |

Also, construct validity was assessed through correlation analysis to determine the degree of association among the study constructs in line with theoretical expectations. The results indicated that all constructs exhibited strong positive and statistically significant correlations with one another, suggesting that the measurement items were capturing conceptually related dimensions of the underlying theoretical framework (Hair et al., 2014). These strong interrelationships provide empirical support for convergent validity, demonstrating that constructs expected to be related were indeed meaningfully associated.

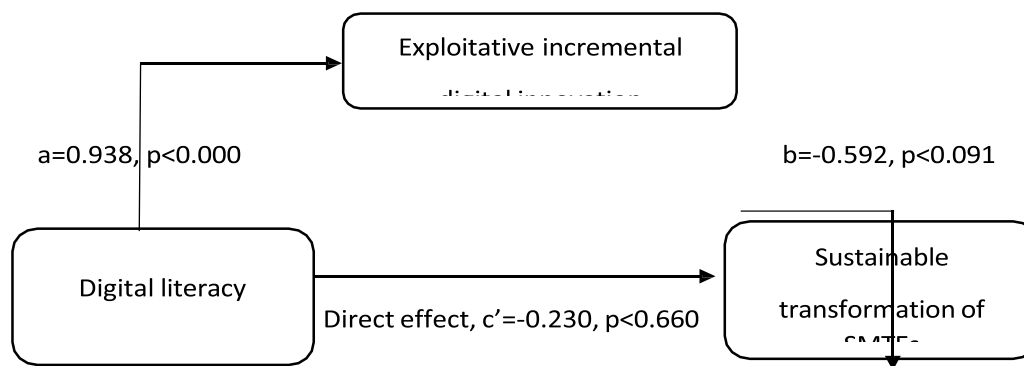
### Mediation Analysis

Regression analysis was used to test whether ambidextrous digital innovation mediates the effect of leaders' digital literacy and sustainable transformation of SMTEs. According to Hayes & Rockwood (2019), the mediation test should meet three conditions in the regression analyses: For a mediation effect to be confirmed, the predictor X (leaders' digital literacy) must predict M (ambidextrous digital innovation), and M (Mediator) must predict the outcome Y (sustainable transformation of SMTEs). For full mediation to be confirmed, the predictor variable (leaders' digital literacy) must not have a significant predictive effect on the outcome variable (sustainable transformation of SMTEs) in the presence of the mediator variable (ambidextrous digital innovation). Where the predictor variable is still significant, then partial mediation is confirmed.

*Exploitative incremental digital innovation mediating leaders' digital literacy and sustainable transformation of SMTEs*

The mediation hypothesis proposed that exploitative incremental digital innovation (EIDI) mediates the relationship between leaders' digital literacy (LDL) and sustainable transformation of SMTEs (ST). Regression results showed that leaders' digital literacy significantly predicts exploitative incremental digital innovation ( $\beta = 0.938$ ,  $SE = 0.370$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that higher levels of leaders' digital literacy are associated with increased engagement in exploitative incremental digital innovation. This result is consistent with existing studies indicating that leaders' digital literacy and competencies serve as essential enablers of digital transformation in SMTEs, allowing these enterprises to integrate technology into their operations, enhance organizational learning, and foster innovative practices (Philbin, Viswanathan, & Telukdarie, 2022; Marçal Alves Pinto Mick et al., 2024). However, exploitative incremental digital innovation does not significantly predict sustainable transformation of SMTEs ( $\beta = -0.592$ ,  $SE = 0.347$ ,  $p = .091$ ), and leaders' digital literacy also does not directly predict sustainable transformation ( $\beta = -0.223$ ,  $SE = 0.520$ ,  $p = .660$ ). The indirect effect was tested using a percentile bootstrap estimation approach with 5000 samples implemented with the PROCESS macro Version 3 (Hayes, 2017).

Taken together, these findings indicate that the conditions for mediation are not satisfied, as the mediator (EIDI) does not significantly influence the outcome variable (ST), and the indirect pathway is therefore unsupported. Although leaders' digital literacy enhances exploitative incremental digital innovation, this improvement does not translate into sustainable transformation of SMTEs (Alhameed & Emeagwali, 2026). Consequently, exploitative incremental digital innovation cannot be regarded as a mediating mechanism linking leaders' digital literacy to sustainable transformation of SMTEs, and the proposed mediation hypothesis is not supported.



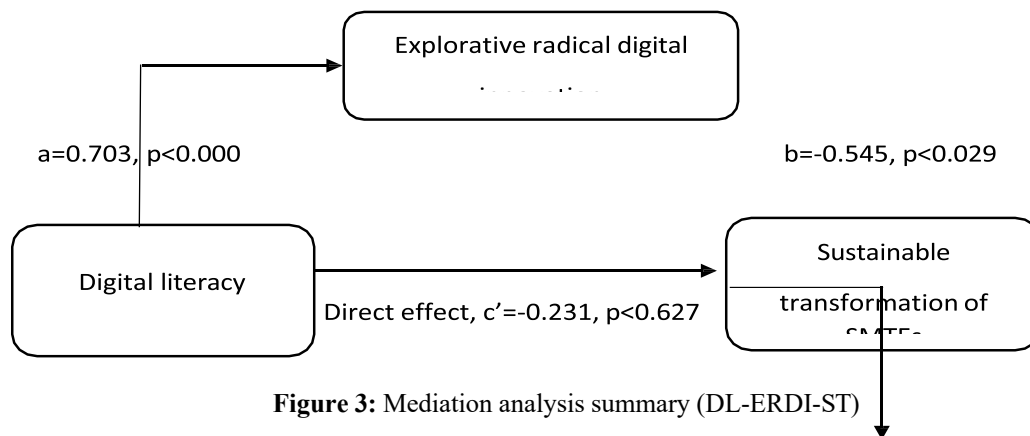
**Figure 2:** Mediation analysis summary (LDL-EIDI-ST)

*Explorative radical digital innovation mediating leaders' digital literacy and sustainable transformation*

The mediation analysis examined whether explorative radical digital innovation (ERDI) mediates the relationship between leaders' digital literacy (LDL) and sustainable transformation of SMTEs (ST). The results indicated that leaders' digital literacy has a statistically significant positive effect on explorative radical digital innovation ( $\beta = 0.703$ ,  $SE = 0.231$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting that higher levels of leaders' digital literacy are associated with greater engagement in radical digital innovation. This finding aligns with broader research showing that digital competencies and literacy are foundational capabilities for digital transformation in SMTEs, enabling them to incorporate technologies into

business processes, improve organizational learning, and support innovation practices (Philbin, Viswanathan & Telukdarie, 2022; Marçal Alves Pinto Mick et al., 2024). Explorative radical digital innovation, in turn, was found to have a statistically significant negative effect on sustainable transformation of SMTEs ( $\beta = -0.545$ ,  $SE = 0.157$ ,  $p = 0.029$ ), indicating that higher levels of ERDI are associated with lower sustainable transformation of SMTEs. The direction and significance of this effect suggest a more complex relationship than traditional assumptions that digital innovation automatically translates to positive sustainability outcomes (Ying & Jin, 2023). However, empirical evidence increasingly points to conditional and context-dependent pathways in which digital innovation outcomes depend on organizational alignment, strategy, and absorptive capacity (Wang & Zhang, 2025). However, the direct effect of leaders' digital literacy on sustainable transformation of SMTEs was not statistically significant ( $\beta = -0.231$ ,  $SE = 0.474$ ,  $p = 0.627$ ), showing that leaders' digital literacy alone does not directly influence sustainable transformation. This pattern is consistent with the literature, which emphasizes how digital transformation and sustainability are often distinct but related processes, where digital competencies must be integrated into strategic frameworks and sustainability plans to effect meaningful outcomes (Philbin et al., 2022; Marçal Alves Pinto Mick et al., 2024).

To assess the mediation effect, the indirect effect of leaders' digital literacy on sustainable transformation through explorative radical digital innovation, it indicates that the indirect effect is statistically significant, given the p-value of 0.029 for the  $b$  path, suggesting that ERDI partially transmits the effect of leaders' digital literacy on sustainable transformation. However, because the direct effect of leaders' digital literacy on sustainable transformation remains non-significant, the mediation is inconsistent in direction. While leaders' digital literacy enhances explorative radical digital innovation and ERDI significantly influences sustainable transformation of SMTEs, the mediation is partial and negative, indicating that increased radical digital innovation may, under the current conditions, inversely affect sustainable transformation, and the hypothesized positive mediation effect is not fully supported.



**Figure 3:** Mediation analysis summary (DL-ERDI-ST)

## CONCLUSION

Leaders' digital literacy significantly enhances both exploitative incremental and explorative radical digital innovation in SMTEs, confirming its role as a foundational capability for digital transformation. However, neither form of innovation consistently translates into positive, sustainable transformation outcomes. Exploitative incremental digital innovation does not significantly influence sustainable transformation, and while explorative radical digital innovation shows a statistically significant effect, the relationship is negative, reflecting a more complex and context-dependent pathway. Consequently, neither EIDI nor ERDI fully mediates the relationship between leaders' digital literacy and sustainable transformation, highlighting that digital competencies alone are insufficient to drive sustainability outcomes in SMTEs without strategic integration, organizational alignment, and contextual enablers.

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**IMPACT OF POSITIVE HAGGLING ON VISITORS AND DESTINATIONS**Annmarie Nicely  
Purdue UniversityFrank Badu-Baiden  
University of Central Florida

and

Vedaant Saksena  
Purdue University)**EXTENDED ABSTRACT****INTRODUCTION**

For some visitors, haggling with micro-traders (such as craft traders) at destinations is fun, while others find it tiring and often a ripoff. What if we established guidelines that help visitors negotiate with micro-traders in ways that yield positive results for themselves, the micro-traders, and the destination as a whole? The present research team created Positive Haggling (PH) 1.0 to pursue this goal. PH 1.0 draws on seven principles: RESPECT—Reciprocal benefit; Embrace the local selling practice; Savor the experience; Prudence; Extract information before and during the micro-trader interaction; Compassionately listen; and Tactfully and with clarity repeat the details of the agreement. To date, researchers have not confirmed PH 1.0's impact on visitors, micro-traders, or destinations. This study aims to assess this impact by examining whether PH 1.0 affects visitors' shopping satisfaction, their support of micro-entrepreneurs at the location, and their overall destination satisfaction when controlling for age, gender, marital status, educational level, income level, professional field, travel experience, repeat visitor status, and visitor's personal haggling culture. Several theories, studies, and proven negotiation strategies in business informed the present research hypothesis. For example, social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) and the science of persuasion, particularly the principle of liking (Cialdini, 2001); studies by Kozak (2016), Kozak et al. (2017), and Mathew et al. (2024) as well as the investigative (Malhotra & Bazerman, 2007), ethical (Malutan, 2025), and Harvard (Fisher et al., 2011; Malutan, 2025) negotiation approaches. The following is hypothesized. PH 1.0 overall, and its principles individually, will be significant positive predictors of: visitors' shopping satisfaction in markets, their support of micro-traders at the destination, and their overall satisfaction with the location, when nine features of their demographic background are statistically controlled.

**METHODS**

To determine the link between PH 1.0, its principles, the three outcomes the focus of the study, and the reasons for the associations found, quantitative predictive correlational and interpretive qualitative research will be conducted, respectively. Closed-ended survey questions will be used for the former, and focus group discussions, and open-ended survey questions will be used for the latter. Travelers 18 years or older who haggled with a micro-entrepreneur in a destination market—such as a craft trader in a local market—within five years of data collection will form the survey population. Researchers in visitor harassment/haggling, sustainable/responsible tourism, consumer behavior, cross-cultural communication, destination image/tourism marketing, and tourism psychology will form the focus groups. There will be one focus group session for each group of researchers. The study's data will be analyzed using regression and thematic content analyses.

**EXPECTED OUTCOME**

One outcome expected from the study is a clear statement that PH 1.0, when applied, will improve visitors' shopping experiences with micro-traders at a destination, their support of micro-traders at the location, and their overall satisfaction with destinations where haggling commonly occurs.

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## OCCUPATIONAL INSTABILITY IN THE AGE OF AI: IMPACTS ON FAMILIES AND SOCIETY

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### ABSTRACT

The rapid adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping the global workforce, with profound implications for the tourism and hospitality (T&H) industry, a sector traditionally rooted in human-centric services. This paper explores the concept of AI-induced occupational instability as a multi-level challenge, focusing on its ripple effects across individual, familial, organizational, and societal dimensions. Drawing upon Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory, the study highlights how workplace disruptions caused by AI propagate through families and communities, exacerbating social inequality and weakening social cohesion.

At the individual level, T&H employees experience heightened job insecurity due to AI-powered automation, catalyzing psychological stress and threatening professional identity. Families bear the residual effects of this workplace stress through financial instability and relational strain, as characterized by the spillover-crossover model. These disruptions compound risks to mental health and socio-economic well-being. Women, migrant workers, and youth—who dominate frontline service roles—are disproportionately affected, amplifying vulnerabilities in tourism-dependent regions.

This research further reveals the “human-touch paradox,” wherein organizations face the dual challenge of leveraging AI for operational efficiency while preserving the interpersonal warmth that defines their brand equity. Over-reliance on technology marginalizes employees and risks diminishing customer satisfaction, creating long-term reputational and financial vulnerabilities. At the societal level, AI intensifies pre-existing divides by favoring AI-literate roles, leaving low-skilled workers with limited reskilling opportunities and deepening economic inequality.

To mitigate these challenges, the study advocates agile policy interventions, including participatory co-design strategies, AI-driven reskilling programs, and portable benefits for displaced workers. Universal policies, such as automation transition funds and Social Safety Net 2.0 models, are proposed to safeguard the most at-risk populations. Beyond workforce-focused solutions, fostering equitable AI integration through ethical governance and algorithmic accountability will ensure that advances in automation do not erode human dignity. By refocusing the narrative on human-centered values and resilience, this study provides a roadmap for aligning technological innovation with societal well-being.

Ultimately, AI-driven occupational instability presents a significant, multi-dimensional challenge that requires interdisciplinary collaboration and systemic policy reform to preserve social stability in the age of automation.

*Derived from:* Darvishmotevali, M., So, K. K. F., & Bai, B. (2026). AI-Induced occupational uncertainty as a multi-level challenge: Reconciling human-centered values with automation in tourism and hospitality. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2026.2684288>

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**DIGITAL ESCAPISM ON THE WARD: THE RESTORATIVE POTENTIAL OF VIRTUAL GREEN AND BLUE TOURISM EXPERIENCES FOR STRESSED NURSING PROFESSIONALS**

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and

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**ABSTRACT**

The nursing profession is globally recognized as a high-stress occupation, characterized by excessive workloads, emotional labor, and irregular shift patterns (Li et al., 2021). The chronic accumulation of occupational stress not only leads to adverse psychological outcomes, such as burnout and anxiety, but also impairs cognitive function, thereby threatening patient safety (Huang et al., 2025; Olaleye et al., 2022). In the post-pandemic era, the intensified prevalence of mental distress has created an urgent demand for effective interventions. While physical travel is a well-established mechanism for stress recovery, the rigid constraints of clinical shifts often preclude participation in traditional tourism activities (Fernández-Martínez et al., 2024). Consequently, there is growing interest in “digital leisure”, specifically, short-duration virtual tourism experiences, as a cost-effective alternative to facilitate rapid psychophysiological recovery during micro-breaks (Albulescu et al., 2022).

Although recent studies suggest that simulated nature can serve as a viable “digital therapeutic”, a significant gap remains regarding which type of tourism landscape is most effective (Kari et al., 2024). Most existing literature focuses on “green space” (e.g., forests). However, emerging research in environmental psychology highlights the distinct potential of “blue space” (e.g., oceans), suggesting that aquatic environments may offer superior restorative benefits (Lee et al., 2022; White et al., 2020). This study integrates Attention Restoration Theory and Stress Recovery Theory to investigate the differential impacts of virtual green versus blue tourism landscapes on nurses’ acute stress recovery (Kaplan, 1995; Ulrich et al., 1991).

This study employs a scenario-based, between-subjects experimental design. Registered nurses will be recruited from a large tertiary general hospital in China and randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: (1) Green tourism experience (a serene forest trail), (2) Blue tourism experience (a quiet coastal beach), or (3) Urban control (a busy commercial street).

The intervention involves a 3-minute immersive visual and auditory experience, designed to induce a state of “being away”. We hypothesize that both virtual tourism experiences will yield significantly greater reductions in anxiety and increases in vitality compared to the urban control (H1). Aligned with the “blue gym” concept in leisure studies (White et al., 2016), we anticipate that the virtual coastal environment will elicit higher perceived restorativeness and better emotional recovery than the forest environment (H2). We also propose that perceived restorativeness will mediate the relationship between environmental exposure and recovery outcomes (H3). Finally, drawing on the depletion-restoration hypothesis, we expect that nurses with higher levels of work-related burnout will exhibit greater sensitivity and positive responsiveness to these virtual nature interventions (H4).

This research contributes to the tourism and leisure literature by validating “virtual micro-tourism” as a functional practice for time-constrained professionals. By differentiating the efficacy of green versus blue landscapes, the findings will offer evidence-based guidelines for designing restorative digital environments to protect the well-being of the healthcare workforce.

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## ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES ON DIGITAL DETOX EFFECTIVENESS DURING VACATION: HOW STATE ANXIETY SHAPES SELF-EFFICACY

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### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

#### INTRODUCTION

Today's hyper-connected society has precipitated a growing need for digital detox, defined as the voluntary and intentional abstinence from digital devices for a specified period (Radtke et al., 2022), as a means of alleviating the adverse psychological effects associated with digital overuse (Radtke et al., 2022; Rayburn, 2024). Scholars have increasingly shown interest in digital detox within the tourism context, often conceptualized as digital-free tourism (Egger et al., 2020) or digital detox tourism (Gong et al., 2023). Prior studies suggest that digital detox requires deliberate and sustained effort from travelers to resist the disciplinary power of digital technology (Cai & McKenna, 2023), with effective resistance involving not only being "physically away" from digital devices but also being "mentally away" (Floros et al., 2021).

Focusing on the relationship between individuals and digital technology, previous literature has identified several factors that impede the effectiveness of digital detox, such as nomophobia and fear of missing out, both of which significantly undermine individuals' ability to achieve mental disengagement. However, far less is known about how characteristics of the digital detox environment itself may implicitly influence this "mental away" state, potentially resulting in less effective detox experiences. In the present research, digital detox effectiveness is operationalized and measured as self-efficacy. Accordingly, this study adopts an environmental psychology perspective to examine whether features of the digital detox environment influence individuals' self-efficacy in digital detox during vacation. Specifically, two environmental characteristics—destination familiarity and destination distance—are proposed to affect self-efficacy through state anxiety as the mediating mechanism.

#### METHODS

This research employed a  $2 \times 2$  between-subjects experimental design, resulting in four vacation destination scenarios. Destination distance was operationalized as either a short-distance getaway (within 50 miles) or a long-distance getaway (over 200 miles). Destination familiarity was operationalized based on travelers' prior experience with the destination, distinguishing between first-time visitors and frequent visitors. Data were collected through Prolific, where participants were asked to imagine participating in a three-hour digital detox program corresponding to their assigned scenario and subsequently report their levels of state anxiety and self-efficacy.

#### RESULTS

The collected data were analyzed using PROCESS version 4.1 in SPSS 30.0. After controlling for relevant covariates, the results indicate that destination familiarity does not significantly influence travelers' state anxiety during digital detox. In contrast, visiting a long-distance destination significantly increases state anxiety ( $\beta = 1.370$ ,  $p < .01$ ) compared to visiting a nearby destination. Elevated state anxiety, in turn, significantly reduces travelers' self-efficacy in digital detox ( $\beta = -0.132$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The findings further reveal that the effect of destination distance on self-efficacy is fully mediated by state anxiety.

#### CONCLUSION

This study advances digital detox tourism research by theoretically extending "mental away" from an individual capacity to an environmentally contingent process shaped by travel distance-induced anxiety. Practically, the findings suggest that closer destinations inherently support detox efficacy, whereas long-distance retreats should incorporate anxiety-reduction and psychological scaffolding to strengthen travelers' self-efficacy and detox outcomes.

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# WELLNESS ON A TIGHT SCHEDULE: DECIPHERING BUSINESS TRAVELERS' INTENTIONS TOWARD MEDICAL WELLNESS TOURISM IN MACAO

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Macau University of Science and Technology

and

Ying Li  
Macau University of Science and Technology

## ABSTRACT

As Macao advances the “tourism + big health” initiative under the “1+4” strategy, non-invasive medical wellness services have become increasingly compatible with tourism consumption due to their comparatively lower risk and more controllable procedures. Yet the medical wellness tourism literature has concentrated on leisure markets, offering limited explanation of how mainland Chinese business travelers form consumption intentions under short stays, rigid itineraries, and time poverty. It also remains unclear whether intention-formation pathways differ systematically across segments with varying levels of health consciousness. These gaps call for a context-sensitive model that captures the constraints and decision logic of business travel.

Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this study proposes a model in which attitude (ATT), subjective norm (SN), and perceived behavioral control (PBC) predict behavioral intention (BI) to purchase non-invasive medical wellness services during business trips to Macao. Health consciousness (HC) is incorporated as a boundary condition to examine whether the structural paths vary between higher-HC versus lower-HC groups. The target population is mainland Chinese residents aged 18 or above who, within the past 12 months, visited Macao for business, MICE, or official purposes and stayed at least one night. Following the TACT principle, the focal behavior is their intention, within the next 12 months, to consume non-invasive medical wellness services during business trips to Macao. The study focuses on preventive health screening, traditional Chinese medicine-based wellness, mind–body stress relief, SPA, and non-invasive aesthetic services, while excluding injection-based and invasive procedures.

A mixed-method design is planned. Expert interviews will be conducted to contextualize the measurement and refine questionnaire items to reflect business-travel constraints. The main study will employ a questionnaire survey and aims to obtain 350–400 valid responses. Measurement quality will be assessed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and hypothesized relationships will be tested using covariance-based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) in AMOS. After establishing measurement invariance, Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) will compare path coefficients across HC groups. In addition, Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA) will be used to identify priorities for service attribute improvement, complementing mechanism-oriented inferences from SEM.

This study is expected to clarify the explanatory boundary of TPB in a high time-constraint business short-stay context and to specify how health consciousness conditions the intention-formation mechanism. Practically, it may inform process optimization, service portfolio design, and resource allocation for government agencies, healthcare providers, and tourism enterprises, thereby supporting the implementation of “tourism + big health” under Macao–Hengqin synergy.

**Keywords:** medical wellness tourism, business travelers, Theory of Planned Behavior, health consciousness, CB-SEM, Macao.

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# EXPLORING HOTEL MANAGERS' AND GUESTS' INSIGHTS ON THE APPLICATION OF NORMATIVE FEEDBACK INTERVENTION (NFI) IN HOTELS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

Guests' sustainable behavior is essential for fostering a more sustainable hotel industry (Nisa et al., 2017), with behavioral change interventions playing a central role in promoting such practices (Dolnicar, 2020). To drive meaningful change, there is an urgent need for future research to continuously develop innovative and cost-effective behavioral interventions to encourage guests' sustainable behavior (Dolnicar, 2020; Dolnicar & Greene, 2025; Xiao et al., 2026).

Normative feedback intervention (NFI) is a behavioral strategy rooted in behavioral science and social psychology that motivates behavioral change by comparing an individual's behavior with that of a reference group (i.e., social norms of the group) (Xiao et al., 2026). NFI has proven effective in promoting sustainable behaviors, including water conservation (Schultz et al., 2019), energy saving (Allcott, 2011), and recycling (Mertens & Schultz, 2021), across various domains. A notable example is Opower's Home Energy Reports (HERs) (Allcott, 2011), which are monthly bill statements that compare residents' electricity use with that of their neighbors (descriptive norms) and use suggestive symbols, such as smiley or frowny faces, to indicate social approval or disapproval (injunctive norms) (Schultz et al., 2019). With Opower's support, utility companies achieved a 2.5% average reduction in household energy consumption across the U.S. (Allcott, 2011). However, NFI's application has primarily focused on household resource conservation in Western contexts, with limited exploration in other sectors, such as the hotel industry, particularly in Eastern settings (Xiao et al., 2026). Key questions remain regarding NFI's potential in the hotel industry, including hotel managers' attitudes toward its adoption and guests' acceptance of exposure to such interventions. This paper aims to address these gaps by exploring the insights of both hotel managers and guests on the application of NFI in hotels.

Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with 15 hotel managers and 20 hotel guests from mid-to-upscale hotels in China. Given the limited research on NFI in the tourism and hospitality sectors (Xiao et al., 2026), semi-structured interviews are particularly suited for generating in-depth insights (Tracy, 2013). This approach allows flexibility in data collection and facilitates the exploration of hotel managers' attitudes toward NFI's implementation and guests' acceptance of such intervention. The choice of China as the research context is driven not only by the lack of exploration on NFI's application in Eastern settings (Xiao et al., 2026) but also by the country's rapidly growing hospitality industry, where environmental protection poses an increasingly significant challenge for the industry (Luo et al., 2020).

This study aims to make both theoretical and practical contributions. Firstly, it extends the literature on hospitality sustainability by introducing NFI as an innovative strategy for promoting guests' sustainable behavior. Secondly, it deepens our understanding of NFI's application in hotels by analyzing the perceptions and attitudes of both hotel managers and guests toward it, highlighting the key factors that influence its successful implementation. Practically, this study provides valuable insights for hotels on how to effectively use NFI to promote guests' sustainable behavioral change.

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# **IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ON JOINT TRAVEL EXPERIENCE-TAKE MBTI (MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INDICATOR) AS ATTRIBUTES**

LI YUENING

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## **ABSTRACT**

Nowadays, tourists become more favored in joint travel as it offers a platform for them to share and communicate with someone regarding their travel experience as soon as possible. However, it remains significant for tourists to select the appropriate companions who can truly bring happiness to them in order to form a memorable travel experience. The form of happiness during joint travel relies heavily on the mutually emotional support. Therefore, in this research, emotional support will be chosen as a key component to discuss how it can impact on joint travel experience to demonstrate the importance of emotional support on joint travel experience which can result in tourists' mutually memorable experience. Meanwhile, since emotions are closely related to personalities, MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) will be applied as key attributes to research on. This study applies mixed method combining qualitative analysis by reviewing more than 1000 comments on little red book in terms of the topic "desired travel companions" "expected behaviors of your travel companions" to understand tourists' understanding of emotional support. After that, questionnaires were designed and distributed based on the comments of these tourists. Totally 195 valid responses were collected for further quantitative analysis through SPSS and AMOS is used for Structural Equation Model testing to find out whether the model fit. This study aims to research on these three questions (1) Through what mechanism does MBTI personalities influence emotional support provided? (2) Under what conditions does MBTI personalities affect the emotional support provided? (3) Can positive emotional support impact companions memorable travel experience? By answering these research questions, the 16 MBTI personality types will be categorized into EI(Extroversion-Introversion), SN (Sensing-Intuition), TF (thinking-feeling), JP (Judging-Perceiving). In addition, the MBTI personalities that are more preferred to be selected as travel companions in this study are found to be people with "E(Extroversion)" Personality like ENFJ、 ENTJ,ESFJ, ESTJ. While people with "S(Sensing)" "T(thinking)" and "I(Introversion)"like INFJ、 INTJ, ISFJ, ISTJ are found to be not so good at providing emotional support to their companions. In addition, in this study, introverts are found to be steady, harmonious travel patterns who prioritize comfort and mutual respect, but extroverts are found to be dynamic, proactive travel leaders who drive creativity, adventure and group engagement. Collectively, this topic which focuses specifically on the emotional support during joint travel, remains a research gap under the theme of selecting appropriate companions during travel experience. Furthermore, this research takes MBTI personalities as key attributes while other research on the similar theme applied the big-five personality traits as indicators which provides a new perspective for future studies. In essence, it provides theoretical contributions and practical insights for tourists to select appropriate companions based on the most advanced indicators of personality traits as well as generating implications for tourism destinations to make plans for ensuring tourists and their companions can have a memorable travelling experience.

ID 136

## RECONFIGURING DIGITAL RESOURCES FOR RENEWAL: HOW HOSPITALITY INCUMBENTS REVITALIZE?

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### ABSTRACT

### INTRODUCTION

The decline of certain hospitality incumbents has become more prominent than ever as digital platforms, such as Booking.com, Expedia.com, and Airbnb, have become dominant in the digital era. Facing those disadvantages, hospitality incumbents are eager to know how to achieve revitalization, that is, recapturing lost ground through enterprises returning to their roots to reverse the recession trend and regain a competitive advantage (Li et al., 2019). Indeed, revitalization enables incumbents to avoid platform displacement threats (Raffaelli, 2019) and regain control of customer relationships (Wichmann et al., 2022).

Existing literature on incumbents revitalization (Raffaelli, 2019; Haki et al., 2024) has considered resource acquisition from external environment (Eggers & Park, 2018), such as hiring digital human capital (Ge et al., 2020), allying with digital start-ups (Cuzzolino & Rothaermel, 2018), resource reconfiguration efforts (Chaturvedi & Prescott, 2022), involving merger and post-acquisition integration (Datta & Roumani, 2015) and addition, subtraction and combination across units (Karim & Capron, 2016). However, due to the evolving and highly uncertain nature of travelers' demands and the fragmentation of partners in hospitality platforms (Buhalis et al., 2023), existing means for incumbents' revitalization may not be applicable to the tourism and hospitality sector. Yet there is limited understanding in terms of how hospitality incumbents pursue revitalization.

Drawing on the resource-based view (Barney, 1991), digital resources—such as algorithms, data, platforms, and software—possess unique characteristics (Amit & Han, 2017; Piccoli et al., 2022) that can influence the breadth and scale of firms' resource reconfiguration. Such highly fungible resource reconfiguration in an efficient and quick manner is essential for incumbents' revitalization. While D'Angelo, Ghezzi and Cavallo (2024) initially investigated incumbents' digital skills, competence, and knowledge that enable revitalization, they did not examine revitalization efforts at the collective level. Building upon the above findings, we enquire how incumbents reconfigure digital resources from digital platforms for revitalization.

### METHODS

Given the limited empirical evidence, this study adopts a longitudinal case study (Eisenhardt, 1989) to understand this complex phenomenon. Judo (pseudonym), a leading industrial hospitality brand with historical roots, is selected as an extreme case (Seawright et al., 2016). Facing aggressive digital platforms, they can reposition and revitalize themselves in the platform ecosystem thanks to digital resources. It provides a suitable setting to gain an in-depth understanding of how incumbents can reconfigure digital resources from digital platforms.

### RESULTS

This study delineates three specific digital resource reconfiguration mechanisms—tentative trailing, partial anchoring, and co-synergizing. The potential framework is shown in Figure 1.

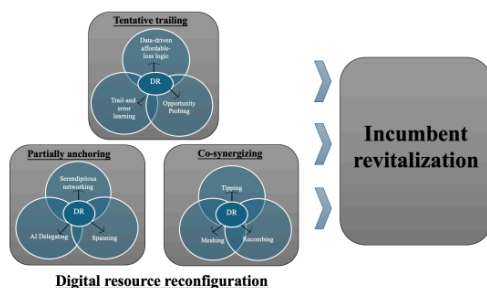


Figure 1. The theoretical framework on digital resource reconfiguration and incumbent revitalization.

## **CONCLUSION**

Overall, this study has three potential contributions. First, we identify an alternative pathway for pursuing incumbent revitalization in the tourism and hospitality platform context: reconfiguring digital resources within hospitality platforms. Second, we expand the scope of revitalization. Moving beyond previous literature that emphasizes incumbent revitalization as a standalone process, this study demonstrates that heterogeneous actors engage in incumbent revitalization collectively. Thirdly, we contribute to hospitality platform literature by shifting attention to non-focal firms' digital capability.

ID 137

# **RISK, RESPONSIBILITY, AND RIVERS: INVESTIGATING WHY SELF-GUIDED ADVENTURE TOURISM THRIVES IN NEW ZEALAND BUT STRUGGLES IN JAPAN**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Culture, people, and lived experience strongly shape the types of tourism activities developed at a destination and, in turn, the visitors those destinations attract (Janowski et al., 2025). This study examines how cultural and institutional contexts influence the development of adventure tourism by comparing multi-day, nature-based travel practices in New Zealand and Japan.

New Zealand actively promotes itself as a global adventure tourism destination, offering a range of well-established multi-day hiking and canoeing experiences. Signature examples include the Great Walks and Te Araroa, which can be undertaken independently or with guides and are supported by a nationwide network of trails, huts, campsites, and commercial outfitters. Similarly, the Whanganui River Journey provides a structured yet self-guided multi-day canoe experience, in which participants hire canoes and safety equipment from local outfitters, receive logistical support, and travel independently between designated Department of Conservation campsites along the river corridor. These systems enable independent travel while distributing risk across state agencies, commercial providers, and participants.

In contrast, Japan's tourism image is more closely associated with cultural and heritage experiences such as temples, historic towns, and shopping districts. Despite possessing extensive natural environments suitable for multi-day hiking and canoeing—particularly in the northern island of Hokkaido—self-guided, multi-day adventure tourism remains limited and is rarely promoted as a mainstream tourism product. This contrast raises the central research question guiding this study: what cultural, legal, and institutional factors constrain the development of self-guided, multi-day adventure tourism in Hokkaido?

Drawing on the author's perspective as a New Zealand-born, long-term Hokkaido resident and outdoor enthusiast, the study explores the untapped potential for a multi-day canoe journey on the Teshio River in northern Hokkaido. Empirical data were collected through a community engagement workshop held in Nakagawa Town, where local residents and stakeholders interested in regional revitalisation were introduced to New Zealand's self-guided canoe tourism model. Participants were also presented with a scenario illustrating how a similar experience could be offered on the Teshio River if appropriate equipment rental and logistical support were available.

Participant perceptions regarding the feasibility of such services were gathered through questionnaires administered before and after the workshop presentation, as well as through facilitated group discussions. The data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring perceptions, concerns, and perceived barriers to implementation.

The findings reveal a strong perception of risk and personal responsibility associated with outdoor adventure activities. Participants frequently cited cultural upbringing, legal liability, limited insurance options, and a lack of government support as key deterrents for local businesses considering canoe hire and logistical services for independent travellers. These concerns are discussed in relation to Hofstede's cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance and the Japanese concept of *omotenashi* hospitality, which emphasises the host's responsibility to ensure a fully supported and trouble-free guest experience (Hofstede et al., 2002). This contrasts with the New Zealand context, where institutional frameworks and social norms legitimise independent adventure travel within managed risk environments.

This study contributes to tourism research by demonstrating how cultural values, legal frameworks, and institutional arrangements shape the viability of self-guided adventure tourism in non-Western contexts. Focusing on Hokkaido, the findings suggest that targeted policy interventions and risk-sharing mechanisms may be necessary to support the development of self-guided, nature-based tourism in rural Japan.

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ID 138

**HOSPITALITY IN THEMATIC EVENTS: VISITOR PERCEPTION AT D23 EXPO**

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and

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**ABSTRACT:**

This academic article investigates hospitality in brand events through the lens of Disney's D23 Expo, a biennial convention that serves as a case study for understanding how visitors perceive and experience hospitality at large-scale fan gatherings. The research establishes that hospitality extends far beyond simple service delivery, encompassing a sophisticated network of relationships and interactions designed to welcome guests, satisfy their needs, and reinforce brand values in meaningful ways. Drawing upon the Experience Economy framework, which posits that modern value creation lies in delivering memorable experiences rather than mere products or services, the study examines how brand events transform consumption into significant, emotionally resonant occasions. The analysis identifies three interconnected dimensions of hospitality: the operational dimension, which includes infrastructure, logistics, queue management, and access to attractions; the interpersonal dimension, characterized by interactions with Disney's Cast Members who demonstrate cordiality, proactivity, problem-solving abilities, and effective communication; and the emotional dimension, which encompasses the feelings of belonging, validation of fan passion, and the complex interplay between visitor expectations and lived reality. Employing a qualitative methodology that combines semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and social media analysis, the research reveals that while operational efficiency remains important for visitor satisfaction, the interpersonal interactions with Cast Members emerge as the most critical factor in shaping positive hospitality experiences. These human connections possess the remarkable capacity to compensate for operational shortcomings and strengthen emotional bonds between fans and the Disney brand. The study further demonstrates that fan culture significantly influences hospitality perception, as devoted fans bring heightened expectations and greater sensitivity to service quality, making them simultaneously more demanding and more appreciative of authentic, meaningful interactions. The article concludes that successful hospitality in brand events requires achieving a delicate equilibrium between operational excellence, positive human engagement, and emotional resonance. Disney's approach at D23 Expo illustrates that when brands invest comprehensively in staff training and empower employees to create genuine, personalized interactions, they can deliver transformative experiences that reinforce brand loyalty, nurture fan community, and generate lasting positive impressions that extend well beyond the event's temporal boundaries, ultimately converting satisfied visitors into passionate brand advocates who carry their enthusiasm into their social networks and future consumption behaviors..

ID 140

# HOW SOCIAL MEDIA NOSTALGIA SHAPES VISIT INTENTION - EXPLORING THE MEDIATING ROLES OF EMPATHY AND INSPIRATION

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and

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates how nostalgia-driven social media content influences tourists' intentions to visit a destination, with empathy and inspiration serving as key mediating mechanisms. Grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework, the research examines how emotionally evocative media stimuli activate internal psychological responses that subsequently shape behavioral outcomes. Data were collected through an online survey of 326 Thai respondents who viewed a nostalgic travel video and completed validated scales measuring nostalgia, empathy, inspiration, and visit intention. Using SmartPLS 3 (version 3.2.9), the results indicate that nostalgia significantly enhances both empathy and inspiration, which in turn positively influence visit intention. Mediation analysis further confirms that empathy and inspiration function as significant pathways linking nostalgia to behavioral intention, with inspiration exerting a stronger mediating effect. These findings contribute theoretical insights into the emotional and motivational processes underlying media-induced tourism behavior and offer practical implications for destination marketers seeking to craft compelling narratives that foster emotional resonance and travel motivation.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Nostalgia, Empathy, Inspiration

ID 141

**RESEARCH ON THE CONSUMPTION LOGIC OF LOCALIZED DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA'S  
WELLNESS ECONOMY — BASED ON THE MOTIVATION AND INTENTION ANALYSIS OF SIX  
SENSES RESORT QINGCHENG MOUNTAIN**

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and

Yang Zhou  
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**ABSTRACT**

**Abstract**

As wellness economy entering spreading while growing rapidly in Chinese market recent period, wellness related market synchronously obtained the opportunity for appreciation. The consumer market that provides services related to consumers' intangible emotions and moods has attracted much attention from all quarters, the wellness hotel market also has witnessed rapid growth in recent years (Chi et al., 2024), which play an essential role in the market and research field. To reveal the importance of the wellness consumer market, A questionnaire survey was used as the research method. The questionnaire sample size is expected to be around 500 to support the study, assisted by the ANOVA analysis method. In the research, combining the case of "Qingcheng Mountain Six Sense Resort", the relationship between Wellness Consumption Intention (WCI) and Wellness Consumption Motivation (WCM) is discussed by categorizing WCM into three sections: Emotional exhaustion (negative individual factor); Physical and Mental harmony desire (positive individual factor); Social. identification and conformity emotions (social factor), with personal value congruence (PVC) as a mediator. The expected result of the study should be: three different factors of WCM are highly likely to have an impact on WCI, as the mediator--PVC can assist WCM in affecting WCI. The paper make effort on generally focusing on the influences on wellness consumers themselves and their surrounding environment, paying more attention to the wellness consumption intention generated under the relatively strong subjective consciousness of consumers. Additionally, taking "Qingcheng Mountain Six Sense Resort" as an analysis case, the study attempted to analyze the reasons for the success of "Qingcheng Mountain Six Sense Resort" in the Chinese wellness consumption market and attempted to figure out the possible feasibility for more diverse types of Chinese culture being the carrier of Wellness economy with expected localization, which explores consumer motivations in different cultural environments.

**Keywords:** Wellness Consumption Intention、 Wellness Consumption Motivation、 Personal Value Congruence、 Wellness Hotel、 Cultural Difference、 Wellness economy localization

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ID 143

# FROM PLATE TO PLACE: STORYTELLING AND AUTHENTIC GASTRONOMIC TOURISM EXPERIENCES IN SRI LANKA

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## ABSTRACT

Storytelling has emerged as a powerful mechanism within gastronomic tourism for communicating authenticity, cultural identity, and a sense of place. As tourists increasingly seek meaningful, immersive, and experience-led encounters, food-related tourism has shifted beyond consumption towards narrative-driven engagement that connects visitors with local heritage, traditions, and communities. Rather than relying on standardised destination branding, gastronomic tourism experiences are increasingly shaped through stories of origin, tradition, and people, allowing destinations to differentiate themselves while preserving cultural integrity. This study explores the role of storytelling in enhancing authentic gastronomic tourism experiences, with a particular focus on how narrative-based food experiences influence tourists' perceptions of authenticity, emotional engagement, satisfaction, and place attachment within hospitality and tourism settings.

The study is theoretically informed by concepts of authenticity, cultural identity, and experiential value in tourism. It adopts the extended 3Cs framework of authenticity, consistency, conformity, connection, and continuity, as a conceptual lens to examine how culinary practices and food narratives maintain cultural significance while adapting to contemporary tourism demands. Within this framework, storytelling is positioned as a mediating tool that links tangible elements, such as local ingredients and traditional cooking methods, with intangible cultural meanings, memories, and emotions. Through storytelling, gastronomy becomes a cultural performance that enables tourists to engage with local identity in a more personal and emotionally resonant way.

A mixed-methods research design is employed to capture both demand-side and supply-side perspectives of gastronomic storytelling. Quantitative data are collected through structured questionnaires administered to tourists participating in gastronomic tourism activities, including cooking classes, food tours, and immersive dining experiences. The survey measures key constructs such as perceived authenticity, emotional engagement, satisfaction, and intention to recommend. Complementing this, qualitative data are gathered through semi-structured interviews with gastronomy experience providers, including hospitality professionals, cooking class facilitators, food tour operators, and local producers. These interviews explore how storytelling is designed, communicated, and strategically embedded within gastronomic experiences, as well as the challenges of balancing authenticity with commercialisation.

In conclusion, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of research on gastronomic tourism by exploring the role of storytelling in shaping tourists' emotional engagement and perceptions of authenticity. By examining narratives related to local ingredients, culinary heritage, personal histories, and community practices, the research seeks to enhance understanding of how storytelling functions as an experiential and cultural mechanism within hospitality and tourism contexts.

This research is expected to provide valuable insights into how emerging gastronomic destinations, such as Sri Lanka, can utilise storytelling to support sustainable and authentic tourism development while fostering community involvement and cultural preservation. By positioning storytelling as a strategic component of experience design and destination identity formation, the study aims to offer a conceptual foundation for hospitality practitioners, destination managers, and policymakers seeking to develop inclusive, community-based tourism models. Ultimately, this research intends to inform future academic inquiry and industry practice by highlighting storytelling as a potential tool for enhancing visitor experiences and long-term destination sustainability.

ID 144

**WHEN AI POWERS CSR: HOW COMMUNICATION FRAMING SHAPES CONSUMER RESPONSES**

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**ABSTRACT**

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives is becoming increasingly prevalent in the hospitality and travel industries, driven by growing consumer expectations for ethical business practices and rising regulatory demands for transparency in AI usage (Anderson, 2025; Morch, 2025). While prior research has extensively examined customer responses to AI in customer-facing service encounters, far less is known about how consumers perceive AI when it is deployed in back-of-house operations (e.g., Gursoy & Cai, 2025), particularly in morally laden contexts such as CSR. Existing studies on AI disclosure have also yielded mixed findings (Cicek et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2024), suggesting that current explanations remain fragmented and insufficient to account for consumer responses in contexts where ethical judgment and expectations of measurable impact coexist.

To address these gaps, this research draws on mind perception theory, which posits that individuals evaluate entities based on perceived agency and experience (Gray et al., 2007). Although AI is often perceived as possessing strong agentic capabilities, it is generally viewed as lacking experiential qualities such as moral sensitivity and emotional capacity (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014). CSR initiatives provide a theoretically rich context for applying this framework, as evaluations of CSR inherently involve moral judgment, sincerity, and ethical intent. Moreover, prior applications of mind perception theory have focused primarily on mind perception as a mediating mechanism (e.g., Liu & Lee, 2024), overlooking the potential of context-specific evaluative processes that may shape consumer responses to AI-powered CSR initiatives.

Across three experimental studies conducted in hospitality-related CSR contexts, this research examines how different CSR communication frames influence consumer responses to AI-powered CSR initiatives. Specifically, it investigates the effects of agency-focused versus communion-focused CSR messaging on consumers' willingness to support AI-enabled CSR initiatives. The studies further examine perceived sincerity and perceived credibility as key psychological mechanisms underlying these effects. In addition, the research tests the boundary conditions associated with the role of AI in CSR initiatives, distinguishing between situations in which AI plays a dominant versus a supportive role.

The findings demonstrate that communication strategies that emphasize different aspects of AI-powered CSR initiatives systematically shape consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions. The results revealed a prominent effect of agency-focused messages in promoting hospitality organizations' AI-powered CSR initiatives. The results add to prior research on AI disclosure by showing that the effectiveness of AI communication depends on how AI's role and qualities are framed, rather than on disclosure alone. This research makes several contributions. Theoretically, it extends mind perception theory to the domain of AI-powered CSR communication and highlights the importance of context-specific mediators. Empirically, it provides evidence from multiple experimental studies across hospitality-related CSR contexts. Managerially, the findings offer actionable guidance for hospitality and tourism organizations navigating AI transparency, suggesting that aligning CSR communication strategies with consumer expectations about agency, experience, and sincerity can enhance support for AI-enabled CSR initiatives.

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Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

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ID 145

**THE BURDEN OF ROBOTIC FAILURE: A STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELING OF  
TECHNOSTRESS AND EMOTIONAL LABOR AMONG FRONTLINE HOTEL EMPLOYEES**

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**ABSTRACT**

The rapid proliferation of service robots in the hospitality industry has transitioned from "technological novelty" to "operational necessity". However, these technologies frequently encounter service failures, such as navigation errors and communication breakdowns, which represent a critical "dark side" of automation. While current literature focuses heavily on guest satisfaction, the psychological and operational toll on the human staff who must rectify these failures remains under-explored.

This study aims to examine how the severity of service robot failures influences employee job burnout through the lens of the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. The research specifically investigates how technical malfunctions translate into psychological strain and resource depletion for frontline hotel staff.

This study employs a quantitative research design utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test a multi-path mediation model. Data are collected via purposive sampling of frontline hotel employees in robot-integrated hotels across the Asia-Pacific region. Measurement instruments include established Likert-type scales for Service Robot Failure Severity (SRFS), Technostress (overload and invasion), Emotional Labor (Surface Acting), and Job Burnout (MBI). Data analysis is performed using SmartPLS 4.0 to evaluate model reliability, validity, and hypothesized structural paths.

Preliminary results indicate a significant positive relationship between SRFS and Job Burnout. This relationship is partially mediated by two distinct resource depletion paths: (1) a "Cognitive Path," where failures increase Technostress through the "hidden labor" of troubleshooting, and (2) an "Emotional Path," where failures force employees into high-intensity Surface Acting to pacify guests. Furthermore, Perceived Organizational Support (POS) acts as a crucial buffer, significantly weakening the link between technostress and burnout.

Theoretically, this research extends COR theory by identifying robotic failure as a primary "resource threat" in the modern service ecosystem. Practically, the findings suggest that hotel managers must implement "human-centric" support systems, including specialized technical training and service recovery protocols that provide employees with more autonomy and emotional support when technology fails.

**Keywords:** Service Robot Failure, COR Theory, Technostress, Emotional Labor, Job Burnout

ID 146

# **A STUDY OF DETERMINANTS OF SATISFACTION IN HOTEL CHOICE AMONG HONG KONG TOURISTS IN SHENZHEN**

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THEi

XU LI  
THEi

Sammy CHAN  
THEi

and

Tak Po CHAN  
THEi

## **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Due to the convenience transportation, such High-Speed Rail between Hong Kong and Chinese Mainland, Shenzhen has been the most popular traveling city for Hong Kong people. The factors influencing Hong Kong tourists' hotel selection, particularly in economy level hotel groups, has become one of key concern for those hotel operators in Shenzhen.

### **RESEARCH PURPOSE**

The objective of this study was to analyse how hotel pricing, location, service quality, facilities and amenities, and customer reviews influenced hotel selection among Hong Kong customers in Shenzhen, based on tourists' basic demographic information to infer its sales volume and make a series of recommendations. Primary data, survey from 153 guests who stay at the targeted hotels, were collected through a questionnaire survey, and factor analysis was employed to identify the relative influence of different factors on tourists' hotel selection decisions as well as on overall hotel satisfaction. The findings of this study provided empirical evidence to support hotel operational analysis, as well as in revising or enhancing service improvement plans.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study applied the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Bosnjak, Ajzen, & Schmidt, 2020) to examine Hong Kong tourists' hotel selection behaviour and satisfaction in Shenzhen. According to TPB, an individual's behavioural intention is jointly determined by attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control, those factors would affect tourists' intention which in turn influence actual behaviour.

A total of 186 respondents, who stayed in Shenzhen hotels in the past half year, were collected from online survey. Based on the TPB framework, it is assumed that these three structures have a significant impact on behavioral intentions, which are defined as tourists' willingness to choose a hotel and their likelihood of staying there again. This study integrate the room rate, hotel location and overall facilities into TPB to extend its framework. The questionnaire survey further revealed a correlation between behavioral intentions and actual hotel selection behavior and overall satisfaction. Specifically, this study investigated how attitudes toward hotel attributes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral controls influence tourists' willingness to choose hotels and their satisfaction with hotel services. Regression Analysis was applied to analyze the details intentions from target populations.

### **FINDINGS**

The findings of this study indicate that room rates (0.693) and hotel services (0.335) are not significant factors influencing Hong Kong tourists' hotel selection in Shenzhen, suggesting that they constitute a relatively price-sensitive and pragmatic tourist segment. In addition, Hong Kong tourists tend to have relatively low expectations regarding hotel services. In contrast, hotel location (0.004) and overall facilities (0.007) were found to play a significant role in their hotel choice, particularly the convenience of the location.

## CONCLUSION

Compared with international travel contexts, Hong Kong tourists place greater emphasis on hotel location and facilities, while only a small proportion prioritize room rates when selecting accommodation. These findings underscore the importance for researchers and industry practitioners to further explore effective approaches to identifying and enhancing guest satisfaction in the context of travel to Shenzhen.

**Keywords:** Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Hong Kong tourists, hotel selection, customer satisfaction

ID 147

**WHY AND HOW PEOPLE PARTICIPATE IN MACAO STUDY TOUR?**

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and

Jing Yu

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**ABSTRACT**

Against the strategic background of the Macao SAR government promoting appropriate economic diversification, study tours (educational travel), as a new business format of “Tourism + Education” fusion, hold significant importance for the transformation and upgrading of Macao’s cultural tourism industry. Based on self-determination theory, this study explores the participation mechanism of Macao study tours through a mixed-methods approach. In the qualitative research phase, a thematic analysis of 20 interview records identified core attractions such as cultural history, science and technology venues, and distinctive cuisine, as well as major concerns regarding price, regulation, and content quality. In the quantitative research phase, a Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis was conducted on 537 participants. The results indicate that Autonomy and Competence play significant mediating roles in the relationship between core attractions and study tour intentions, whereas the mediating role of Relatedness is not significant. Specifically, cultural and technology venues significantly enhance study tour intentions by elevating autonomy; culture, cuisine, and technology venues significantly enhance intentions by elevating competence. Meanwhile, factors such as price and inaccessibility significantly reduce intentions by weakening autonomy and competence. This study constructs a development path for study tours with Macao characteristics, providing a theoretical basis and practical guidance for the SAR government to formulate industrial policies and optimize product design.

**Keywords:** Macao Study Tours, Self-determination Theory, Intention to Participate, Mixed Methods Research, Study Tour Destination

ID 150

**HOW E-MOP CAN HELP MACAU MERCHANTS WITH THE PAYMENT ECOSYSTEM OF TOURISTS**

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University of Macau

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University of Macau

and

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University of Macau

**ABSTRACT****PROBLEM DEFINITION**

In Macau, the current unified payment platform "Simple Pay" lacks a central clearing system. Settlement relies on cooperating banks, which usually takes T+1 days or more. This delayed arrival of funds severely impacts the cash flow of merchants, especially during peak tourist seasons. Furthermore, tourists often experience mobile network connectivity issues upon arrival, making online payments difficult. While the newly launched digital Macao pataca (e-MOP) offers real-time settlement and dual offline payments, its practical impact on local merchants needs to be evaluated.

**OBJECTIVES**

This study aims to explore the multidimensional impact of different digital payment architectures, specifically comparing e-MOP and Simple Pay, on tourism merchants in Macau. The primary objectives are to evaluate how e-MOP addresses the operational pain points of delayed settlements and network dependency, and to assess its potential to enhance merchant operational efficiency, alleviate cash flow pressure, and optimize the overall tourist consumption experience.

**METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS**

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach. First, a qualitative content analysis is conducted using the AMCM's e-MOP Technical White Paper and Simple Pay settlement guidelines to build a comparative framework focusing on three key elements: Settlement (real-time vs. deferred), Cost (profit-driven vs. non-profit), and Technical capabilities (dual offline payment). Second, a quantitative questionnaire survey is administered to merchants in Macau's tourism districts. The survey collects data on operational capital pressure, transaction volumes, fee sensitivity, and offline payment needs across peak and non-peak seasons. The collected quantitative data will be analyzed to conduct descriptive and inferential statistics, validating the theoretical advantages identified in the qualitative phase against the merchants' actual operational realities.

**THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

This study contributes to the literature on digital currency by providing a basic comparative framework between traditional unified payment platforms and Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) like e-MOP in a tourism-heavy economy. Also, it provides practical implications for merchants by showing how e-MOP's real-time settlement and

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

low transaction fees can enhance liquidity turnover and reduce operational overheads. Additionally, the dual offline payment function helps eliminate payment barriers for inbound tourists, directly improving the consumption experience and promoting the sustainable development of Macao's tourism industry..

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## EXPLORING THE DEVELOPMENT OF BLUE HIGHWAYS FROM A MARINE TOURISM PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

Marine tourism refers to leisure travel activities through which tourists experience coastal and marine environments by engaging with the natural, cultural, and recreational resources of coastal and marine areas. Through participation in marine tourism-related activities, whether directly or indirectly, tourists contribute to the generation of local income, the creation of employment opportunities, and the promotion of regional economic development. This development model is commonly regarded as an integral component of the blue economy. In Taiwan, the development of Blue Highways has in recent years become one of the key directions of national tourism policy and is viewed as an important instrument for connecting marine resources and fostering regional tourism development. Taiwan plans to complete the development of five Blue Highway routes by 2025. However, existing studies indicate that most current Blue Highway initiatives remain primarily transport- or short-distance transfer-oriented, raising a critical research problem concerning how marine tourism experiences can be developed and how industry integration can be achieved within the Blue Highway framework. Accordingly, this study adopts a marine tourism perspective and conducts in-depth interviews with ten experts—including scholars, port authority representatives, and private-sector operators—to address the research problem identified above. The study aims to (1) identify key development themes emerging from the practical implementation of Blue Highways, (2) examine the tourism environment expected by private-sector operators, and (3) analyze the major challenges and constraints currently encountered. The authors conducted in-depth interviews with ten experts, including academics, port authority representatives, and private-sector operators. The study focuses on the development themes emerging from the practical implementation of Blue Highways, the tourism environment expected by private-sector operators, and the major challenges and constraints currently encountered. The interview findings reveal that: (1) when Blue Highways shift from a transportation-oriented approach to an experience-oriented marine tourism development model, their overall tourism attractiveness and market sustainability can be significantly enhanced; (2) the stability of regulatory and policy environments positively influences private-sector willingness to invest in Blue Highways and marine tourism industries, as well as their long-term business planning; (3) Blue Highways achieve more effective development outcomes when integrated with yachts, marinas, accommodation, activity design, and workforce development to form a marine tourism cluster, compared with development models based on single routes or isolated facilities; and (4) incorporating educational orientation and pro-marine culture into the governance framework of Blue Highways helps reduce potential social conflicts arising during marine tourism development and contributes to the establishment of a stable long-term market foundation. Finally, this study contributes to the literature by proposing a policy-oriented framework for Blue Highway development that shifts the focus from transportation to experiential marine tourism, emphasizes regulatory coherence across government agencies, promotes cluster-based industry integration, and positions education and maritime culture as the core of long-term development.

**Keywords:** Marine tourism; Blue Highways; Qualitative research; Industry integration; Governance challenges

ID 152

## HONG KONG AS EDUCATION DESTINATION: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AS HONG KONG AMBASSADORS

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### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The global image of a university for international students is tied to visibly diverse student bodies. To attract excellent international students, universities offer complementary services that enrich students' lives while they study in another country. The percentage of international students is also one of the primary elements in university rankings worldwide. International students help depict a global community within the education destination. Evidence appears in university flyers, social media posts, and media coverage that feature international students. Enrolling these students, therefore, provides universities with a competitive global advantage. Empirical studies suggest that many international students persist in pursuing their studies in the United States despite unsatisfying social situations in the last decade (de Wit, 2019; GillenO'Neel, 2021; Zhou, 2015). Considering that top American universities benefit from a halo effect in this global competition and attract many talented applicants, a well-defined strategic approach is essential for other education destinations to succeed. While using different strategic marketing approaches, top American universities such as the Ivy League focus on selling prepackaged education experiences that go beyond an academic major and include food, housing, and student activities. Hong Kong benefits from positive attributes in the international travel context, including special dining experiences, an image as a global society, status as a shopping destination, and a group of top-ranking universities (Ahn & McKercher, 2015; Guillet et al., 2011; Wang & Lopez, 2020). The major globally recognized universities include The University of Hong Kong, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, the City University of Hong Kong, and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. From the consumer perspective, students and their parents want the degree to be worth the investment. When selecting a university in another country, their decision depends on academic excellence and international recognition. According to Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2021), these families often use university rankings to judge reputation and academic quality. Prior research shows that financial assistance, location, language of instruction, cultural fit, and 2 career opportunities are important determinants (Fakunle, 2021; Galloway et al., 2019; Lesjak et al., 2015; Wen & Hu, 2019). Comparative studies illustrate how the importance of each determinant varies among nationalities and cultures (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017; Leask & Bridge, 2013). To target qualified international students, universities pair quality academic experiences with complementary services that make life abroad more convenient. Because student life extends beyond campus, the surrounding community plays a crucial role in shaping positive and memorable experiences (Davari et al., 2024). This research project therefore rests on two pillars education destination and travel experience during study. The host community and government policies that support pleasant travel experiences for international students are vital. This study uses Mezirow's transformative learning theory (TLT) to promote inclusive learning environments in top Hong Kong universities. TLT investigates how learning can change beliefs, attitudes, and actions. It focuses on assessing current assumptions and creating new knowledge and meaning. A shift in one's frame of reference leads to personal growth, changed behavior, and stronger problem-solving ability (Mezirow, 1994; Taylor, 2007; Zhao & Agyeiwaah, 2023). TLT has been used widely to study how learning drives transformations in perspectives, attitudes, and behaviors (Mezirow, 2000). It is therefore appropriate for examining how current and future international students become intuitive ambassadors for Hong Kong universities through new roles, new relationships, and growing competence. Twenty interviews were conducted using the critical incident technique (CIT). Informants were chosen for their knowledge of the study context (Weiss, 1994, p. 17). Participants included university professors with administrative roles, international students and faculty members, senior leaders of major universities, advisory council members, and philanthropists. CIT (Flanagan, 1954) is widely used in social settings for in-depth studies and gathers unprompted information that interviewees consider important. To predict the behavior of potential tourists based on attitudes, a specific case considers action, target, context, and time (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1974). The interviews therefore focused on teaching quality, language barriers, the campus welcome, safety of the location especially at night, the welcoming nature of Hong Kong, home country reputation of the university, visa issues, lifestyle changes, cost of living, tuition, post-graduation career concerns, and alumni networks. About thirty-five items were identified as potential indicators of education destination competitiveness and are being polished to improve grammar, use active voice, avoid jargon, reduce reading level, enhance cross-cultural relevance, and increase comprehension. Exploratory factor analysis is planned for the next phase. Sample

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items include I arrived and campus housing felt effortless; Local classmates invited me to local festivals; Night travel from the library felt completely safe; Visa renewal help cut anxiety quickly; Dorm kitchens encouraged cultural recipe exchanges; Health clinic respected my cultural preferences; City transit made late classes manageable; Student union welcomed new voices immediately; Alumni mentors shared candid job advice; Local cafés offered student discounts; Immigration briefings clarified post-study options; Neighborhood landlords honored student leases; City museums granted free student entry; Graduation services eased family visit planning. This study has two dimensions. First, it applies transformative learning theory to overseas education as a vehicle for reinterpreting the University of Hong Kong experience. Second, it examines transformative learning through travel to and residence in Hong Kong for higher education, based on feedback from international students who have already chosen Hong Kong. Delivering a pleasant travel experience for current international students is vital for attracting more applicants and uplifting the global brand of Hong Kong universities. Word of 3 mouth and electronic word of mouth generated by current students influence acquaintances and social media audiences (Davari & Jang, 2024). Their stories can spark curiosity among prospective students about the destination. Besides university internationalization, key constructs include travel experience as well as word of mouth and electronic word of mouth. In a globally competitive academic market, it is essential to have effective messaging. Simple advertising, such as placing international students on flyers, using the word global in mission statements, or assigning student ambassadors, does not guarantee an efficient, joyful, or inclusive experience for degree seekers. From a practical standpoint, this project draws on the opinions of people with hands-on experience in the Hong Kong education system to craft realistic policies for internationalization. It also clarifies marketing implications for universities that act as destinations, leveraging Hong Kong's appeal as a tourist site for students who want meaningful years abroad. Finally, it helps major Hong Kong universities maintain global reputations and high QS rankings through deeper internationalization of their student communities.

**Keywords:** internationalization; education system; travel experience; Hong Kong

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# **EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) SERVICE ON GUEST SATISFACTION IN F&B DEPARTMENT OF HONG KONG HOTELS: SERVQUAL METHOD**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The hospitality industry has made significant use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in changing the provision of services, particularly in hotels' Food & Beverage (F&B) outlets. The current study aims to investigate the implications of AI service on customer satisfaction among hotels in Hong Kong using the SERVQUAL approach, which is a reliable instrument for evaluating the quality of service across various industries with the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the current application of AI technology on guest satisfaction?

RQ2 : How does AI technology influence the guest satisfaction level in the F&B department of Hong Kong hotels?

RQ3 : What recommendations can be given to hoteliers if adoption of AI technology?

Given the speed at which hotels are integrating artificial intelligence and AI innovations in the sector, such as the automated ordering of food and drinks and robotic delivery assistants, this research is deemed relevant to explore the impact of these applications on customer experience. Having the greatest implications in the context of Hong Kong's highly competitive hotel business, where customer satisfaction is critical in ensuring continuous success and differentiation, the current study seeks to explain the positive or negative effects of AI services on customer satisfaction and unveil the alternatives for improvement, particularly in F&B departments. Through an in-depth investigation of the interconnectedness between AI service and customer satisfaction, this study will be of great significance to both scholars and practitioners in the field of hospitality management, as it lays the foundation for further exploration of AI technology and experiential strategies to enhance the quality of services. The motives for conducting this investigation arise from the increasing investment in AI solutions by hotel operators and the necessity of substantiating the effectiveness of their integration into practice for augmenting customer satisfaction. The proposed research methodology is the SERVQUAL model that has been modified to measure guest satisfaction with AI services in the F&B departments. This research follows a quantitative design in the form of a structured questionnaire that is used to understand the perception of guests regarding the quality of service along five dimensions including Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. The sample will include 300 respondents, which are hotel guests with experience using AI services in the hotel's F&B department. The data will be collected through online questionnaires that will be shared in hotel partners and social media aligned with global distribution. This allows representation from guests with different perspectives concerning their experiences. This study aims to gain actionable insights that would be beneficial for hotel management in implementing AI services that would positively contribute to their guests' satisfaction. The results may find that guests possess varying satisfaction levels across the different types of AI services. Areas with opportunities for improvement may also be revealed, including the process of personalization and guests complaining of service failures.

Limitations of this study may include the bias in self-reported data and the geographical scope being concentrated in Hong Kong, limiting the generalization of the results. This study recommends improvement areas including better staff training that would complement the AI services, technological improvements for a more user-friendly interface

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ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

for guests, and personalized AI engagement to minimize perceived service gaps in empathy through a more humanlike approach.

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# THE IMPACT OF SERVICE QUALITY ON BAR PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF CORDIS HOTEL HONG KONG

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THEi

Kwok Sang Kester Lai  
THEi

Sammy Chan  
THEi

Chris Wong  
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and

Vivian Li  
THEi

## ABSTRACT

The hospitality sector within Hong Kong has encountered various challenges post-COVID-19 pandemic, which range from enforced closures, lowered occupancy, to considerable financial deficits. Hotel drinking spots, have been negatively affected, making it essential to adapt to a changed atmosphere influenced by the behaviors and lifestyle of patrons. The standard of service has proven to be an essential component in preserving customer loyalty and satisfaction, with notable effects on financial outcomes. While extensive scholar has scrutinized service quality within the context of restaurants, hotel bars has received less attention. This investigation endeavored to close the existing knowledge gap by analyzing the connections among the determinants of service quality, customer satisfaction levels, and the sales outcomes of beverages, using Cordis Hotel Hong Kong. The research made use of the SERVQUAL framework, studying five vital service quality dimensions to assess their contribution to guest satisfaction and revenue generation in hotel bars.

This analysis highlighted the relationship between the caliber of service, customer satisfaction, and revenue, with Cordis Hotel Hong Kong for investigation.

This examination applied a quantitative method, with standardized surveys as the instrument for data gathering. Approximately 150 surveys were distributed to patrons at the Cordis Hotel bar utilizing structured questionnaires over a one-month period during peak hours. The surveys evaluated guest perceptions regarding the five SERVQUAL dimensions through established Likert scale. The study utilized statistical methods that included descriptive statistics, correlation evaluations, and the application of multiple regression modeling via SPSS software. Six research propositions examined the positive correlations between individual service quality factors and customer satisfaction, in addition to the direct relationship between customer satisfaction and beverage sales outcomes. The investigation underscored the significant importance of particular dimensions of service quality in shaping customer satisfaction and financial performance. When evaluating customer satisfaction, the average achieved was 4.13 out of 5.0. Among the service quality components, Empathy achieved the highest average score of 4.14, followed closely by Responsiveness at 4.15. The results from the multiple regression analysis revealed that Responsiveness stood out as the primary determinant of customer satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.615$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), with Empathy following in the second position ( $\beta = 0.177$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). A notable positive link was found between how satisfied customers are and their beverage buying habits ( $\beta = 0.484$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that higher satisfaction levels lead to more spending on drinks.

This investigation emphasized the significance of service quality, mainly in the areas of Responsiveness and Empathy, as key for improving customer satisfaction in hotel bars, which then influences beverage sales directly. Timely and personalized service that fostered a sense of value among customers is demonstrated to be more effective than the physical setting in cultivating satisfaction. The analysis revealed that hotel leadership must

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ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

prioritize training initiatives for staff to better the guest experience and improve fiscal results. Future investigations should examine hotel situations and implement unique strategy on customer loyalty.

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# REVITALIZING INDIA'S PARSI CUISINE APPROACHES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE ETHNIC FOOD TOURISM

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## ABSTRACT

With its rich history and cultural significance, Parsi cuisine has become an unfortunate victim of the declining popularity of traditional cuisines in Mumbai, India. Despite its unique blend of Zoroastrian and Indian influences, Parsi cuisine has struggled to compete with other emerging cuisines in India as well as attract a younger generation of “foodies.” This paper will examine the approach being taken in a short documentary currently in production entitled, “Vanishing Voices: The Struggle to Preserve India’s Parsi Culture & Heritage”, in which we ask the question “Can the Parsi Cuisine Be Saved?”. The Parsis are descendants of the Persian Zoroastrians who migrated over varying periods to the Indian subcontinent (Raghavan, Asia & Singh, 2015). Most of them fled to India from the Pars region in northern Iran to escape persecution under the expanding Muslim caliphate (Balsara, 1969). The paper will analyze the themes and strategies presented in the documentary and assess their potential for revitalizing Parsi cuisine and preserving its cultural heritage. The authors will also reflect on insights gained from early interviews with members of the Parsi community regarding the challenges and opportunities facing the revitalization of Parsi cuisine. The primary focus will be to highlight the importance of preserving cultural heritage through food tourism, this could also provide a potential model for reviving other traditional cuisines in India and beyond. The research will also investigate how ethnic food tourism can have an impact on promoting cultural diversity and preserving cultural heritage. Through interviews with Parsi chefs and restaurateurs like the iconic Britannia Restaurant (a Mumbai landmark), Yazdani Bakery, and Kayani Café –all well-known Parsi establishments– as well as discussions with food critics, and members of the Parsi community in Mumbai, the short documentary reflects on the hopes for a popular revival of Parsi cuisine that can serve as an example or model for sustainable ethnic food tourism and contributes to the growing literature on the role of food tourism in preserving cultural heritage and reviving traditional cuisines in India.

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ID 165

# THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION ON MILLENNIAL TOURISTS' BOOKING INTENTIONS IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

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## ABSTRACT

Millennials increasingly prioritize ethical considerations when selecting accommodations, yet limited research explores how hotels' social sustainability messaging shapes their booking decisions. This study investigates the relationship between social sustainability communication and millennial tourists' booking intentions through emotional engagement and moral evaluation as mediating variables. Survey responses from 105 participants reveal strong positive associations between sustainability messaging and booking behavior ( $M = 3.53$ – $3.61$ ,  $Mode = 4$ ). Nearly half of respondents (49.5%) travel frequently, demonstrating heightened receptivity to hotels emphasizing fair labor standards and community partnerships. Our findings indicate that transparent communication about ethical practices strengthens booking likelihood and justifies premium pricing. These results advance hospitality marketing theory by illuminating affective and moral pathways linking sustainability narratives to consumer choices, offering evidence-based recommendations for practitioners seeking to engage values-driven millennial travelers.

**Keywords:** Social sustainability communication, millennial tourists, booking intentions, emotional engagement, moral evaluation, hotel industry

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Contemporary hospitality organizations confront intensifying expectations to demonstrate meaningful social responsibility extending beyond traditional environmental programs. Communications addressing social sustainability articulate organizational commitments to equitable employment practices, community investment, and human rights advocacy Crane and Glozer (2016). Despite growing sustainability discourse, numerous hotel operators express reluctance toward publicizing such initiatives, concerned that guests may misinterpret these efforts as disguised cost-reduction strategies rather than authentic ethical commitments Kasim and Scarlat (2007).

Millennials constitute a consumer segment demonstrating pronounced sensitivity to corporate ethics and sustainable operations Sharmin, Sultan, Badulescu, Bac, and Li (2020). Scholarly attention, however, has concentrated predominantly on environmental sustainability dimensions Chan, Hon, Chan, and Okumus (2014), leaving social sustainability aspects relatively underexamined. Moreover, the psychological processes whereby sustainability communications influence consumer decisions warrant deeper investigation Chen, Hsu, Yan, Lee, and Zhang (2023). This research examines whether and how social sustainability messaging affects millennial tourists' booking intentions, with particular attention to emotional engagement and moral evaluation as potential mediating mechanisms.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

### 2.1 Social Sustainability Communications and Behavioral Intentions

Social sustainability denotes equitable allocation of resources and opportunities that enhance societal welfare Elshaer et al. (2024). Within hospitality contexts, this encompasses living wages, workplace safety, meaningful community participation, and cultural preservation Baum et al. (2016). Millennial consumers exhibit heightened awareness of these considerations, actively seeking lodging options that support local economic development and demonstrate labor fairness Gan and Seo (2018).

Strategic sustainability communication confers competitive benefits for hospitality providers Font and McCabe (2017). Transparent messaging cultivates favorable consumer perceptions and encourages prosocial behaviors Kapoor, Balaji, and Jiang (2021). Nevertheless, implementation challenges persist, notably greenwashing (deceptive sustainability representations) and greenhushing (inadequate communication of legitimate initiatives), both of which erode consumer confidence Tölkes (2018); Villarino and Font (2015). Evidence suggests that authentically communicated sustainability practices delivered via digital platforms strengthen brand perceptions and stimulate booking behaviors Li, Ahmad, and Lewandowska (2024). Accordingly:

**H1:** Social sustainability communication exhibits a positive relationship with millennial tourists' booking intentions.

### 2.2 Emotional Engagement as Mediator

Emotional engagement represents a multifaceted construct incorporating cognitive immersion, affective identification, and behavioral responsiveness Sharma, Sharma, Aggarwal, and Gupta (2024). Social sustainability messaging enhances brand attractiveness by aligning with consumers' preferences for responsible tourism Elshaer et al. (2024). Personalized, responsive communication cultivates emotional bonds that strengthen loyalty and purchase motivation Huang and Benyoucef (2015). User-generated endorsements amplify credibility through emotional resonance, encouraging preference for ethically committed establishments Li et al. (2024). Therefore:

**H2:** Emotional engagement mediates the association between social sustainability communication and booking intentions.

### 2.3 Moral Evaluation as Mediator

Moral evaluation encompasses ethical assessments of organizational sustainability conduct. Research demonstrates that altruistic orientations enhance support for environmentally responsible hospitality options Tan, Aziz, and Ngah (2020). Consumers experience moral elevation upon perceiving organizations as ethically principled Xie, Bagozzi, and Grønhaug (2019). Social sustainability communications trigger such elevation, positioning patronage of responsible hotels as morally commendable behavior Vu, Vo-Thanh, Nguyen, Bui, and Pham (2024). Hence:

**H3:** Moral evaluation mediates the linkage between social sustainability communication and booking intentions.

### 2.4 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 illustrates our theoretical model wherein social sustainability communication influences booking intentions through direct and indirect pathways: a direct association (H1), indirect influence via emotional engagement (H2), and indirect influence via moral evaluation (H3).

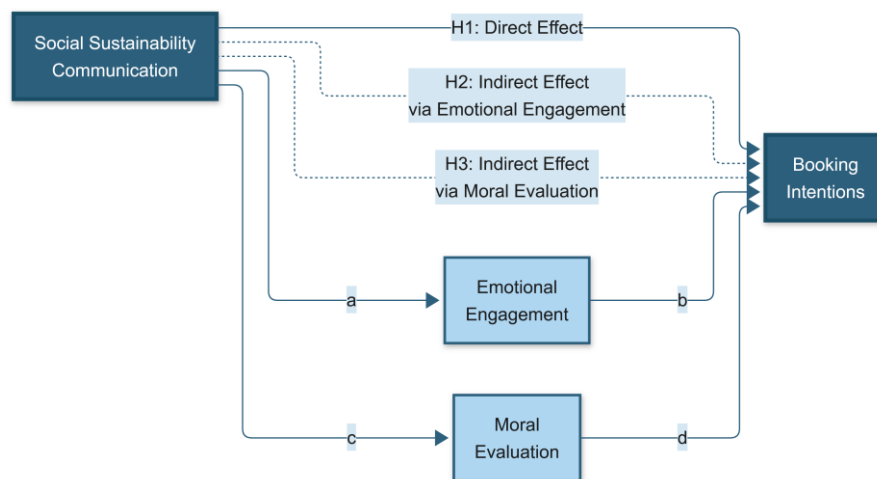


Figure 1: Conceptual Research Model

### 3 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design and Sampling

This investigation employed quantitative survey methodology to assess social sustainability communication effects on millennial tourist behavior. Simple random sampling procedures ensured equitable selection probabilities, minimizing bias while optimizing result generalizability Lohr (2021). Data collection transpired online throughout February 2025, yielding 105 usable responses following exclusion of incomplete submissions. Participants furnished informed consent consistent with established ethical protocols.

#### 3.2 Measurement Instruments

Five-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree) operationalized all constructs. *Social Sustainability Communication* captured respondent perceptions of hotel messaging regarding community engagement and ethical operations (4 items, crane2016researching). *Booking Intentions* assessed visitation likelihood and premium payment willingness (5 items, kim2019sustainability). *Emotional Engagement* measured affective connections to ethical hospitality practices (3 items, sharma2024exploring). *Moral Evaluation* gauged perceived ethical obligations (3 items, xie2019impact).

#### 3.3 Analytical Approach

Descriptive statistics including means, medians, and modes characterized central tendencies and distributional properties, revealing patterns in millennial booking preferences and sustainability responsiveness.

### 4 Results

#### 4.1 Participant Characteristics

Table 1 summarizes demographic composition. Participants predominantly represented the 35–44 age cohort (82.9%), with smaller proportions aged 45+ (13.3%), 25–34 (2.9%), and 18–24 (1.0%). Regarding accommodation frequency, 49.5% reported frequent annual hotel usage (4+ occasions), 46.7% occasional usage (2–3 occasions), and 3.8% infrequent usage (1 occasion).

Table 1: Participant Demographics (N = 105)

| Characteristic | Category              | n (%)      |
|----------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Age            | 35–44 years           | 87 (82.9%) |
|                | 45+ years             | 14 (13.3%) |
|                | 25–34 years           | 3 (2.9%)   |
|                | 18–24 years           | 1 (1.0%)   |
| Hotel Usage    | Frequent (4/year)     | 52 (49.5%) |
|                | Occasional (2–3/year) | 49 (46.7%) |
|                | Infrequent (1/year)   | 4 (3.8%)   |

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics: Sustainability Attitudes (N = 105)

| Survey Item                                      | M    | Mdn | Mode |
|--------------------------------------------------|------|-----|------|
| Sustainability affects my booking choices        | 3.59 | 4   | 4    |
| I favor sustainability-promoting hotels          | 3.55 | 4   | 4    |
| I recommend sustainable accommodations           | 3.55 | 4   | 4    |
| Transparency builds my confidence                | 3.56 | 4   | 4    |
| Ethical employment resonates emotionally         | 3.56 | 4   | 4    |
| Sustainability messaging evokes positivity       | 3.53 | 4   | 4    |
| Supporting sustainable hotels is ethical         | 3.61 | 4   | 4    |
| Socially responsible hotels offer greater value  | 3.58 | 4   | 4    |
| I feel obligated to choose ethical options       | 3.55 | 4   | 4    |
| Premium pricing for sustainability is acceptable | 3.60 | 4   | 4    |
| I avoid hotels lacking sustainability focus      | 3.58 | 4   | 4    |

## 4.2 Sustainability Perceptions

Table 2 displays descriptive statistics across measurement items. Elevated mean scores (3.53–3.61) alongside consistent median (4) and modal (4) values indicate substantial agreement that social sustainability considerations shape accommodation preferences.

These findings substantiate H1, confirming that social sustainability communication positively influences booking intentions. Notably, moral responsibility perceptions ( $M = 3.61$ ) and premium pricing acceptance ( $M = 3.60$ ) received strongest endorsement, supporting H2 and H3 regarding emotional and moral mediation.

## 5 DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Theoretical Advances

Our investigation contributes meaningfully to sustainability marketing scholarship by foregrounding social rather than exclusively environmental dimensions—a domain receiving insufficient empirical attention Rezaee (2016). Results validate expanding analytical focus beyond ecological considerations. Pronounced agreement concerning emotional resonance ( $M = 3.56$ ) and ethical responsibility ( $M = 3.61$ ) substantiates Engagement Theory Sharma et al. (2024) and Moral Identity Theory Xie et al. (2019), demonstrating that affective and normative mechanisms operate concurrently in processing sustainability information.

Context-specific insights emerge regarding millennial hospitality consumers. Premium pricing acceptance ( $M = 3.60$ ) indicates that social sustainability transcends mere preference, functioning as actionable decisional criteria. Response consistency (Mode = 4) suggests sustainability messaging achieves meaningful value alignment, producing both immediate persuasive impact and enduring attitudinal connections.

### 5.2 Managerial Recommendations

Our results inform strategic practice for hospitality managers. First, social sustainability should receive prominent positioning within marketing communications. Organizations should develop transparent, evidence-anchored messaging highlighting authentic collaborations and quantifiable community benefits. Second, narrative approaches incorporating guest testimonials and visual documentation of community impact enhance emotional connection. Authenticity remains paramount—greenwashing undermines credibility. Communications require third-party validation through recognized certifications.

Third, value-aligned pricing strategies prove viable given millennial willingness to accept premiums ( $M = 3.60$ ). Hotels might implement community investment surcharges or curate bundled experiences emphasizing sustainability. Fourth, integrated multi-platform communication through social media, proprietary websites, and booking aggregators optimizes message dissemination. User-generated content strengthens credibility via peer validation. Finally, substantive community partnerships ensure stakeholder authenticity, generating compelling narrative content while producing tangible social benefits.

### 5.3 Study Limitations and Research Directions

Self-report methodology introduces potential social desirability effects. Future investigations should incorporate behavioral observation or experimental manipulations assessing actual patronage. Our exclusively millennial sample limits generalizability; comparative analyses incorporating Generation Z would illuminate cohort-specific sustainability orientations. Cross-sectional design precludes causal determination; longitudinal tracking would reveal attitude evolution trajectories. Geographic and cultural sampling expansion would enhance external validity. Finally, examining congruence between communicated and implemented sustainability practices would clarify how authenticity discrepancies influence consumer trust and choice behavior.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This research examined social sustainability communication impacts on millennial booking intentions within hospitality contexts. Findings strongly support hypothesized associations whereby sustainability messaging enhances booking likelihood through emotional engagement and moral evaluation pathways. Millennials demonstrate clear preferences for hotels transparently communicating sustainability commitments, exhibiting willingness to pay premiums for socially responsible accommodations perceived as ethically aligned with personal values.

For hospitality practitioners, results underscore social sustainability's strategic centrality when targeting millennial markets. Optimal approaches integrate transparent communication, authentic storytelling, and verifiable social impact documentation. Authenticity proves essential—millennials demonstrate sophisticated detection of superficial positioning. As sustainable tourism expands globally, hotels successfully embedding social sustainability within brand identities will capture expanding segments of ethically motivated travelers. This investigation furnishes theoretical frameworks and empirical validation supporting strategic sustainability positioning, advancing both scholarly understanding and applied development of sustainable hospitality marketing.

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### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the increasingly growing trend of celebrities being used as influencers in contemporary marketing communications, with a particular focus on destination marketing contexts. Research has shown that celebrity endorsements can significantly boost destination awareness, attract tourists, encourage travel intentions, shape the image of a destination, improve brand equity and influence destination choice (Bapna, Gupta, Rice & Sundararajan, 2017; Barari, Eisend, & Jain, 2025; Glover, 2009; Huo, Lin, Zheng & Zhang, 2022; Jamal, 2019). While on the other hand authors have pointed out that a celebrity can also have a negative influence due to their negative behavior, their values and lifestyle which may damage the destination's image and alter tourist's perceptions and preferences (Roy, Dryl, & de Araujo, 2021; Peltier, 2017). Based on this this paper identifies the following gaps. First, as organizations continue to allocate substantial financial resources to celebrity endorsements, questions remain regarding the actual effectiveness of celebrity influencers compared to non-celebrity (or "ordinary"). Secondly, prior research has largely depended on self-reported methods to measure celebrity influencers vs non-celebrities influence to enhance audiences' attention, cognitive, emotional and motivational engagement, and destination brand memory which may not fully capture the subconscious processes underpinning the audiences' engagement (Yao & Wang, 2024).

This study therefore explores first whether consumers pay greater visual attention to products and brands that use celebrities. Second the study investigates whether the use of a celebrity motivates destination visitation. Since prior studies have largely depended on self-reported methods to measure the impact of celebrities' vs non-celebrities, this study used neuroscience tools i.e. eye-tracking and EEG to understand these questions.

This study contributes to both theory and practice by offering empirical evidence that questions the assumed importance of using celebrity influencers. Further, the findings highlight the need for marketers to also prioritize brand salience and message clarity over celebrity prominence when design a destination marketing campaign.

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## REVISITING SUSTAINABILITY METRICS IN TOURISM DESTINATIONS: A WELLBEING-ORIENTED PERSPECTIVE INTRODUCTION

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### ABSTRACT

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism systems are increasingly exposed to structural tensions generated by growth-oriented development models, platform-mediated dynamics, and escalating social and environmental pressures. Although sustainability has become a dominant paradigm in destination governance and tourism management, its operationalization often relies on reductionist and efficiency-driven logics, privileging mitigation strategies and standardized performance indicators (Hall, 2019). In this context, positive tourism and flourishing-oriented perspectives have emerged as complementary frameworks aimed at reorienting tourism development toward the generation of positive value for destinations, communities, and visitors, yet their implications for impact assessment and managerial decision-making remain insufficiently articulated (Sfodera & Lehto, 2025; Filep & Laing, 2019).

### BACKGROUND

Recent contributions across adjacent fields have attempted to address the limitations of traditional sustainability metrics through more formalized approaches to impact evaluation. These include the monetization of environmental impacts to internalize ecological externalities, as well as structured ESG scoring models designed to improve transparency and comparability. While indicators such as ecological footprint remain essential for assessing environmental pressure in tourism systems (Lenzen et al., 2018), their capacity to account for wellbeing-related outcomes remains limited. Similar limitations have been highlighted in relation to ESG-based evaluation models, whose divergence and lack of interpretative convergence constrain their usefulness for guiding complex, place-based decision-making. Consequently, a persistent gap remains between increasingly sophisticated impact metrics and the lived experiences, social interactions, and wellbeing outcomes produced within hospitality and destination contexts.

### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to: (1) examine positive tourism as an interpretive framework capable of complementing metric-driven sustainability approaches; (2) identify key dimensions through which impact measurement tools can be reconnected to experiential and wellbeing-oriented outcomes in hospitality and destination development.

### METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative and interpretive research design based on expert workshops and moderated group discussions involving scholars and practitioners in hospitality, tourism marketing, experience design, sustainability, and destination governance. This methodological approach is grounded in collective sensemaking and comparative

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June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

expert dialogue, consistent with qualitative traditions that emphasize processual understanding and shared meaning construction (Vaara & Whittle, 2022).

## RESULTS

The findings indicate a strong convergence among experts regarding the limitations of current sustainability frameworks when applied to complex, experience-intensive tourism systems. Participants recognized the relevance of environmental impact monetization and ESG-based evaluation models for enhancing accountability and policy alignment, yet consistently highlighted their inability to capture experiential quality, relational density, and place attachment. Within this context, positive tourism emerged as a practice-oriented lens capable of reconnecting impact evaluation with the subjective and collective dimensions of tourism. Importantly, experts did not advocate the abandonment of quantitative metrics but emphasized the need for hybrid evaluation architectures integrating monetized, ESG-based, and experiential indicators.

## THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study contributes to hospitality and tourism research by positioning positive tourism as a complementary framework bridging the gap between impact measurement and experiential value creation (Dwyer, 2023). From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that destination managers and hospitality operators should move beyond purely metric-driven sustainability strategies and adopt integrated approaches aligning impact evaluation with experiential and wellbeing-oriented objectives.

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# INVESTIGATING THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD EFFECT OF AI TECHNOLOGY OVERLOAD ON HOTEL EMPLOYEES' PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

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## ABSTRACT

Currently, artificial intelligence (AI) has penetrated the core operation of hotels. Hotel employees are required to learn and apply relevant AI technologies. The application of complex AI tools across various work links leads to technology overload, becoming a key source of work pressure for hotel employees. Recent research has revealed that AI technology overload exerts adverse effects on employees' mental health and job performance. However, we still observe two research gaps regarding the specific impact of AI technology overload on employees' different performance outcomes, which motivate us to conduct the current study. Firstly, in the context of employees facing AI technology overload stress, little research has paid attention to the interaction between individual stress cognitive appraisal mechanisms and leaders' regulatory focus styles. Second, research remains scarce on how different stress appraisal outcomes affect employees' task performance or contextual performance.

To address these gaps, we draw on the cognitive appraisal theory of stress. While AI integration in hotels has yielded substantial efficiency gains, it has also imposed considerable learning and adaptive demands on hotel employees, triggering varied stress appraisal processes. This study adopts the challenge-hindrance framework to clarify how AI technology overload impacts employees' work stress and subsequent performance outcomes. This study collected data via in-depth survey with 425 hotel employees from five international hotels in Macau to test the hypothesized relationships. The analysis followed a systematic two-stage process: (1) Data analysis using SPSS software (2) descriptive sample analysis. The results reveal that AI technology overload is a significant antecedent of hindrance and challenge appraisals, and its indirect effects on performance outcomes (contextual performance / task performance) depend on leaders' regulatory focus styles. Specifically, when AI technology overload is perceived as a hindrance appraisal, overload stress triggers work anxiety, thereby enhancing contextual performance. When perceived as a challenge, it stimulates proactive problem-solving and confidence in learning AI techniques, which positively enhances task performance. Furthermore, prevention-focused leaders strengthen the positive link between AI technology overload and hindrance appraisal, whereas promotion-focused leaders amplify the association between AI technology overload and challenge appraisal. This study, using the cognitive appraisal theory of stress, makes two key contributions. First, this paper contributes to the literature on performance management by clarifying the dual-path mechanisms through which stress appraisal outcomes induce different performance outcomes. Second, it offers empirical evidence for hotel managers to adjust leaders' regulatory focus, thereby optimizing employee performance management.

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## HOW SOCIAL MEDIA NOSTALGIA SHAPES VISIT INTENTION - EXPLORING THE MEDIATING ROLES OF EMPATHY AND INSPIRATION

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### ABSTRACT

#### PROBLEM DEFINITION

With the rapid growth of short-form social media platforms, nostalgia-driven digital content has become increasingly prevalent in tourism marketing. While prior research acknowledges nostalgia as a powerful emotional trigger in advertising and destination branding, limited empirical evidence explains how nostalgia-driven social media content translates into visit intention. In particular, the internal psychological mechanisms linking nostalgic stimuli to behavioral responses remain underexplored. Specifically, the mediating roles of empathy and inspiration in this process have not been sufficiently examined within a unified theoretical framework.

#### OBJECTIVES

Grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, this study aims to:

- (1) Examine the direct effect of nostalgia-driven social media content on visit intention.
- (2) Investigate the effects of nostalgia on empathy and inspiration.
- (3) Test the mediating roles of empathy and inspiration in the relationship between nostalgia and visit intention.
- (4) By integrating emotional (empathy) and motivational (inspiration) mechanisms, this study seeks to clarify how nostalgia-driven media influences tourism decision-making.

#### METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

Data were collected through an online experimental survey administered to 326 Thai respondents. Participants first viewed a nostalgia-driven travel video and then completed validated measurement scales assessing nostalgia, empathy, inspiration, and visit intention.

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS (version 3.2.9). Reliability and validity were assessed through Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, AVE, and discriminant validity. Mediation effects were examined using bootstrapping procedures.

#### FINDINGS

The results reveal that nostalgia significantly enhances both empathy and inspiration. Both empathy and inspiration positively influence visit intention. In addition, nostalgia demonstrates a direct positive effect on visit intention. Mediation analysis confirms that empathy and inspiration both serve as significant mediators between nostalgia and visit intention. Notably, inspiration exhibits a stronger mediating effect compared to empathy, suggesting that motivational activation plays a particularly important role in translating nostalgic emotions into behavioral intention.

#### THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

This study contributes to tourism and media psychology literature in three ways. First, it extends the application of the S-O-R framework by incorporating nostalgia-driven social media as a digital stimulus. Second, it integrates empathy and inspiration into a unified model, demonstrating how emotional immersion and motivational activation

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June 22 – June 26, 2026

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ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

jointly shape visit intention. Third, it advances inspiration theory by empirically validating the dual process of “inspired-by” and “inspired-to” responses within a tourism context.

### **PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

The findings offer actionable insights for destination marketers and digital content creators. Nostalgia-driven storytelling—incorporating familiar imagery, music, and emotionally resonant narratives—can effectively enhance empathy and inspiration, thereby strengthening visit intention. Marketing strategies should focus not only on evoking emotional warmth but also on triggering motivational inspiration that encourages concrete travel planning. Short-form platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube provide strategic channels for delivering emotionally engaging tourism content. By designing narratives that facilitate perspective-taking and personal identification, destinations can foster deeper psychological connections and stronger behavioral outcomes.

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## SHOULD DIGITAL PLATFORMS DEPLOY AI FOR ONLINE DISPUTE RESOLUTION? THE LENS OF PROCEDURAL JUSTICE AND APPRAISAL THEORY

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### ABSTRACT

#### PROBLEM DEFINITION

The rapid adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) in online dispute resolution (ODR) has transformed how hospitality and tourism digital platforms manage service conflicts. AI-based systems offer advantages such as efficiency, scalability, and cost reduction. However, whether AI can appropriately replace human agents in high-stakes dispute resolution remains debated. Despite the existing prevalence of AI adoption in platform ODR process, scant attention has been paid to the focal matter in hospitality and tourism literature.

#### OBJECTIVES

This study investigates and compares how disputants respond toward AI- vs. human-handled ODR processes on hospitality and tourism digital platforms. Drawing on procedural justice theory and appraisal theory, the research examines whether AI and human agents lead to different levels of satisfaction with dispute resolution experiences and identifies the underlying mechanisms of the differences. Specifically, the study proposes interactional justice as the primary mechanism distinguishing human and AI ODR agents. The salience of interactional justice can be further influenced by dispute complexity and decision outcomes. The research also compares arbitration and mediation procedures to examine how different ODR structures influence disputants' evaluations of AI and human agents.

#### METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

Two online experiments were conducted using participants recruited from Prolific in the context of food delivery service disputes. Study 1 employed a 2 (ODR agent: AI vs. human)  $\times$  2 (dispute complexity: low vs. high)  $\times$  2 (decision outcome: favorable vs. unfavorable) between-subjects design in an arbitration scenario where the ODR agent makes a binding decision. Study 2 adopted a 2 (ODR agent: AI vs. human)  $\times$  2 (dispute complexity: low vs. high) between-subjects design in a mediation scenario where the ODR agent facilitates negotiation without making binding decisions.

#### FINDINGS

In arbitration scenarios, human agents generated significantly higher satisfaction than AI agents only when disputes were highly complex and outcomes were unfavorable. This effect was fully mediated by interactional justice, suggesting that disputants rely on interpersonal respect, empathy, and attentiveness as socio-emotional coping resources under conditions of high uncertainty and negative outcomes. When disputes were less complex or outcomes were favorable, satisfaction differences between AI and human agents diminished. In mediation scenarios, no significant differences were observed between AI and human agents regardless of dispute complexity, and interactional justice did not significantly influence satisfaction.

#### THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This research contributes to hospitality and tourism literature by extending AI adoption research to the domain of dispute resolution on digital platforms. Theoretically, it advances procedural justice research by identifying interactional justice as the key mechanism differentiating AI and human agents in high-stakes arbitration contexts and integrates appraisal theory to explain when this mechanism becomes salient. By comparing arbitration and mediation procedures, the study also highlights how procedural structures shape disputants' psychological needs during dispute resolution. Practically, the findings suggest that digital platforms can effectively deploy AI agents in mediation processes and low-complexity arbitration cases, while retaining human agents for complex arbitration

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disputes with unfavorable outcomes where empathy and interpersonal acknowledgment are essential for maintaining user satisfaction..

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# IMPERFECT AESTHETICS: POLITICAL IDEOLOGY IN CONSUMERS' RESPONSES TO VISUALLY IMPERFECT PRODUCE

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

### PROBLEM DEFINITION

Consumers often reject ugly produce despite its equivalent functional quality, as visual imperfections trigger negative quality inferences (Mookerjee et al., 2021). However, prior research (e.g., Yang et al., 2023) largely assumes that all consumers uniformly respond to ugly produce. To fill that gap, we investigate which segments of consumers are less likely to purchase ugly produce and why. In this research we address these questions by introducing consumers' political ideology as an important antecedent of their responses to ugly produce.

### OBJECTIVES

First, we aim to examine whether consumers' political ideology influences their intention to purchase ugly produce. Second, we investigate the underlying mechanism by testing whether conservative consumers' greater need for structure leads them to perceive ugly produce as lower in quality, which results in lower intention to purchase such produce.

### METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

To test our research questions, we conducted three scenario-based studies using different types of produce (e.g., potato, lemon, mixed vegetables). The first two studies employed a 2 (type of produce: ugly vs. non-ugly) between-subjects design, with political ideology measured as a continuous variable. The third study measured political ideology and examined participants' preferences between ugly and non-ugly vegetables, as well as their need for structure and perceived quality. All participants were recruited from the United States.

### FINDINGS

Across the three studies, we found that conservative consumers are less likely to purchase ugly produce than their liberal counterparts. Furthermore, this effect is driven by conservatives' greater need for structure, which leads them to perceive ugly produce as lower in quality, resulting in lower intention to purchase such produce.

### THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION AND PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Theoretically, this research contributes to the literature on political ideology, ugly produce, need for structure, and perceived quality by demonstrating that political ideology shapes consumers' evaluations of imperfect produce through differences in need for structure, which in turn influence perceived quality.

Practically, the findings of this research provide insights for marketing managers in the hospitality industry by identifying political ideology as an important antecedent of consumers' responses to ugly produce and suggesting that promotional campaigns emphasizing quality may help mitigate negative reactions, particularly among conservative consumers.

**Key Words:** Political ideology, imperfect produce, perceived quality, need for structure

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Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau  
ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9



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## **EXTENDED ABSTRACT: INVESTIGATING THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD EFFECT OF AI TECHNOLOGY OVERLOAD ON HOTEL EMPLOYEES' PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES**

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Macau University of Science and Technology

### **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

#### **PROBLEM DEFINITION**

AI has penetrated hotel core operations, requiring employees to master complex AI tools, which leads to AI technology overload and becomes a key source of work pressure. Existing studies have confirmed the adverse effects of AI technology overload on employees' mental health and job performance, but two research gaps remain: insufficient attention to the interaction between individual stress cognitive appraisal mechanisms and leaders' regulatory focus styles under AI technology overload, and scarce research on how different stress appraisal outcomes affect employees' task and contextual performance.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

Drawing on the cognitive appraisal theory of stress and the challenge-hindrance framework, this study aims to clarify how AI technology overload impacts hotel employees' work stress and subsequent performance outcomes, and explore the moderating role of leaders' regulatory focus styles in this process.

#### **METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS**

Data were collected via in-depth surveys with 425 hotel employees from five international hotels in Macau. A systematic two-stage analysis was adopted: first, data analysis using SPSS software; second, descriptive sample analysis, to test the hypothesized relationships.

#### **FINDINGS**

AI technology overload significantly predicts hindrance and challenge appraisals, and its indirect effects on contextual and task performance depend on leaders' regulatory focus styles. Hindrance appraisal triggers work anxiety and enhances contextual performance; challenge appraisal stimulates proactive problem-solving and improves task performance. Prevention-focused leaders strengthen the link between AI technology overload and hindrance appraisal, while promotion-focused leaders amplify the association between AI technology overload and challenge appraisal.

#### **THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION**

This study enriches the performance management literature by clarifying the dual-path mechanisms through which stress appraisal outcomes induce different performance outcomes, and expands the application of the cognitive appraisal theory of stress in the context of AI-related employee stress.

#### **PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

It provides empirical evidence for hotel managers to adjust leaders' regulatory focus styles, helping optimize employee performance management and alleviate the negative impacts of AI technology overload on employees.

## IMPACT OF DYNAMIC PRICING ON HOTEL PERFORMANCE

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## ABSTRACT

Efficient pricing strategy is a key determinant of operational profitability and a critical factor in business success (Abrate et al., 2012; Gibbs et al., 2018). In particular, the role of strategic pricing is indispensable for superior performance in the highly competitive hotel industry, due to its unique business characteristics, such as the intangible, time-sensitive, and inseparable nature of its main products (George, 2021). Despite its considerable importance, many hotels fail to fully optimize their pricing practices because of the complexity and heterogeneity of price structures (Simon & Fassnacht, 2019). Therefore, this study aims to identify the impact of dynamic pricing on hotel profitability. In addition, we examine whether the impact of dynamic pricing on hotel profitability differs across hotel characteristics, including full-service versus limited-service hotels and high-class versus low-class hotels. To measure room price variability, we use the standard deviation of monthly room prices, and to assess hotel performance, we use yearly operational profit ratios, including net, operating, and gross profit ratios. To address potential endogeneity issues related to room price variability, we compare the results of ordinary least squares regressions, random-effects regressions, and endogeneity-robust Hausman–Taylor regressions.

This study confirms that hotel room rate volatility has a negative effect on operational profitability, but that this relationship is positively moderated by hotel service style (e.g., full-service hotels). The findings indicate that greater room price volatility or deeper discounts may increase hotel occupancy and revenue in the targeted month but ultimately harm the hotel's overall operational profitability over the whole year. However, the negative effects of room price volatility on operational profitability are less pronounced in full-service and high-class hotels than in limited-service and low-class hotels. The findings are consistent across all models and point to the same implication: excessive room price discounting (or excessive room price volatility) is not a desirable pricing strategy, especially for limited-service and low-class hotels. In other words, full-service and high-class hotels can improve the profitability of other departments and service offerings and thereby compensate for the profitability loss caused by deep room price discounts. Nevertheless, even full-service and high-class hotels cannot achieve significant improvements in operational profitability through deep room price discounts, as the impact of room price volatility on operational profitability is insignificant. This study clarifies how hotel operators can make the best use of their hotel characteristics to make optimal pricing decisions. When setting room rates, revenue managers should consider the potential positive spillover effects (beyond room revenue) of increasing guest volume in the short term, but at the same time recognize the negative long-term impact of deep room price discounts. Therefore, hotel revenue managers should adjust and balance their room pricing strategies based on both their short-term and long-term operational effects.

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# ARTICULATING A MUSEUM STRATEGY AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF TANZANIA: FROM ROYALTY TO NATIONALITY, POPULARITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

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## ABSTRACT

This study articulates a strategy being implemented by museums in sub-Saharan Africa, drawing on empirical evidence from the National Museum of Tanzania. It employed documentary analyses, semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. The findings indicate that the museum centres were established using an object-preservation strategy intended to serve the interests of colonialists. After independence, however, they changed to serve the nationalisation agenda (nationality). In the early 2000s, the principal charge of museums shifted to address their underutilisation by the public, with a strategic transformation into a popular platform for residents (popularity). In light of technological developments and societal and economic realities, museums currently embrace sustainability as a core pillar. It is their ability to move beyond the boundaries of the classic object-based museology and the colonial *royalty* perspective, and to strategically address change within their broader internal and external historical, social, and economic contexts, that has enabled them to strive and perform fairly well in enhancing preservation and increasing their popularity and sustainability. The study demonstrates the importance of integrating the new museology and Collis and Rukstad's (2008) strategy frameworks in a museum context and argues that strategizing is not a linear but a fluid process. The study provides recommendations for future research.

**Keywords:** Strategy, Museum, Museum strategy, Tanzania, Heritage management, Sustainability.

## INTRODUCTION

The notion of strategy has been widely adopted by organisations as a useful managerial tool since the 1950s (Tirrell, 2001). It facilitates the identification of opportunities, the prioritisation of choices, the appropriate allocation of resources, and organisational commitment to achieving goals (Phadtare, 2011). Interestingly, most entities cannot articulate their strategies and are therefore more likely to fail, whereas those with clear strategies are less likely to fail (Collis & Rukstad, 2008). In this regard, Collis and Rukstad's (2008) framework provides a comprehensive tool for articulating a strategy that has not yet benefited museums, which often fall into the trap of striving for operational effectiveness without a distinct *strategy* (Porter, 2006).

The existing strategic management model in the field of museums was conceptualised by Reussner (2003) in a seminal article titled "Strategic Management for Visitor-Oriented Museums" in the International Journal of Cultural Policy. It focused beyond business, strategic planning and external marketing aspects contended earlier by Oster (1995), Kawashima (1998), and Kotler and Kotler (1998), respectively, to propose the strategic management view that considers a cultural policy, visitor attractiveness and the duties of museums as public institutions, which contradicts the intrinsic *trade-offs* notion of a strategy. As public entities, national museums adhere to the cultural principles and policies that enable access for diverse audiences (Lwoga et al., 2023; Reussner, 2003). However, as posited by Collis and Rukstad's (2008) framework, a strategy requires an entity to make trade-offs, such as targeting a specific category of museum users or objects. This constrains the democratic nature of museums, leaving them with the tension between the demand to become user- or object-oriented and the political demand to fulfil their social mandate (Reussner, 2003). In most cases, following Reussner's (2003) museum strategy argument, museum executives take incremental steps in structuring museums *for all* or museums *of all things* that surpass those limits but blur their strategy (Griffin, 1987). On the other hand, there are inevitable translation problems because the notion of a strategy emerged from the business context, which differs from the *raison d'être* of not-for-profit museums and their political realities, priorities and settings (Kovach, 1989; Griffin, 1987). In addition, most museum executives are trained scientists and are unprepared to resolve the corporate challenges of redefining the museum as an organisation that reflects societal and economic realities (Tirrell, 2001).

The new museology perspective is known to influence expectations of the purpose and role of museums and inherently shape the articulation of a museum strategy. In contrast to the classic object-centric museology, the new museology recognises that museums exist within society and are part of it, and thus are aware of the expectations society has of them (Griffin, 1987; McCall & Gray, 2014). As a result, the products and services that museums offer

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

their customers are believed to shape the articulation of their strategic positioning (Tirrell, 2001; Porter, 2006; Reussner, 2003). However, empirical evidence supporting this assertion has emerged from studies in the Western world, and their conclusions may not be appropriate for informing the articulation of a strategy for museums in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

In the SSA region, before the arrival of colonialists, traditional museum sites, such as burial grounds, were important to local people as heritage for addressing social and cultural challenges, thereby making them relevant to their conservation (Joffroy, 2005; Kisusi & Lwoga, 2023). Modern museums in the region were designed to provide colonial administrators with an in-depth understanding of the colonial territory and to cater to their scientific and cultural needs (Maligisu, 2018; Msemwa, 2005a). They were further developed by African post-colonial states, using Western-based monumentalism frameworks that encouraged a materialistic approach and the strict custodianship, fines, and fencing strategies (Msemwa, 2005b). Over the past two decades, however, cultural policy has changed to emphasise decolonisation and the increasing contribution of museums to contemporary development needs and to their financial viability, without compromising their cultural and social mandate (Reussner, 2003). This study demonstrates how museums in Africa can articulate a strategy in such contexts. It specifically adopts a comprehensive approach, drawing on Collis and Rukstad's (2008) strategy framework and the new museology, and using empirical evidence from Tanzania's national museums to examine the strategy being implemented. The seven national museum centres in the country, which are managed by the National Museum of Tanzania (NMT), are among the few cases in the SSA region that have welcomed the concept of a strategy, having articulated and implemented one fairly well, which has led to an increase in the number of community engagement programs and domestic museum users from 79,070 in 2018 to 475,175 in 2024, introduction of digital system of documenting museum collections, enhancement of exhibitions and collection base, growth from seven to 13 centres and increase in internal revenues from an average of Tsh. 389,100,000.00 (USD 150,000.00) in previous years to Tsh. 1,086,000,000.00 (USD 418,658.44) in the financial year 2023/24 (NMT, 2023; NMT, 2024). The study presents empirical evidence to broaden our understanding of how museums can strategize to accommodate and embrace dynamic changes, the new museology, and the notion of sustainability.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Strategy from a new museology perspective*

Conventional models treat strategy as an act (Porter, 1996). However, this is criticised for presenting a linear, static view of strategy. It is increasingly recognised that strategy refers to long-term, holistic choices that an organisation makes to distinguish itself from competitors, define how it will compete uniquely, and articulate its competitive advantage (Porter, 2008). In this regard, a strategy articulates the unique value of a particular entity relative to other organisations and devises a tailored value chain with clear trade-offs and activities that fit together and mutually reinforce one another to attain a clearly defined goal (Porter, 2006). While the definition of value for profit-oriented entities centres on superior returns on investment, for not-for-profit entities such as museums, it centres on multiple social benefits, including preservation, educational significance, and increased public awareness (Porter, 2008). Museum literature focuses overwhelmingly on the core functions of museums, and much less on corporate issues such as strategy. A few studies on corporate aspects indicate the existence of different schools of thought. On the one hand, museums are not to be considered efficient businesses, but rather as places where museum staff use their professional skills to collect important artefacts, while adhering to the ethics of museology (Star, 1980). On the other hand, museums are regarded as organisations that function through the roles of Boards and Trustees, their strategy and other aspects of organisational management (Griffin, 1987). They are also regarded as organisations of people, not merely objects, and therefore they need to reflect the dynamic world around them, embrace change, and define broad strategic goals rather than remaining static and frozen within their professional grounding (Griffin & Abraham, 2000; Griffin, 1987). In this regard, museums require a strategy that aligns their operational functioning with the broader social and cultural context.

The literature on the new museology supports adopting a museum strategy with a broader social goal, as it contends that museums' core functions should be linked to their evolving relationship with society and the communities around them (McCall & Gray, 2014). The new museology contrasts with *classic* museology, which embraces an object-centred and building-based museum model that gives exclusive authority over museum operations and roles to a small group of those considered experts and elites (Harrison, 1993), causing these people to shape the museum's role of civilizing, and sometimes disciplining, the so-called lay population with little cultural appreciation, to advance their position in society (Bennett, 1995). Therefore, the new museology seeks to redistribute power within museums, shift the identity of museum professionals from legislators to interpreters, and foster a more public-oriented ethos (Kreps, 2009; McCall & Gray, 2014; Ross, 2004). However, there is limited empirical evidence

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regarding the extent to which museums' strategies have met the expectations of the new museology. A few studies indicate that the new museology has implications for museums, including changes to their strategies and structures, staffing, and management practices, but these changes occur in an ad hoc manner (Stam, 1993). European museums, such as the Louvre in Paris and the National Gallery of London, have been shown to exhibit change toward public consumption (Duncan, 1995), but this has not been universally achieved, and little is known about how museums in the SSA region articulate their strategies and whether or not they embrace the new museology. Therefore, in exploring the articulation of a strategy, this study draws on the new museology to examine how it shapes expectations regarding museums' purposes and roles. However, since the new museology framework does not elucidate the structure of organisational strategy, the study adopts Collis and Rukstad's (2008) framework to guide the analysis of museums' strategies, as described in the next section.

*The articulation of an organisational strategy: Collis and Rukstad's Framework*

Collis and Rukstad's (2008) framework (Figure 1) decomposes a strategy into its objective, scope, and advantage. It defines an objective as a clear, specific, measurable and time-bound statement that outlines the ends that the strategy is designed to achieve. Scope defines the boundaries of the customer or product, geographic location, and vertical integration, guiding the organisation to focus on its core competencies. Advantage refers to an organisation's unique value, namely, what it does differently to position itself as the best and most capable of delivering that value through a unique, complex combination of reinforcing choices and activities.

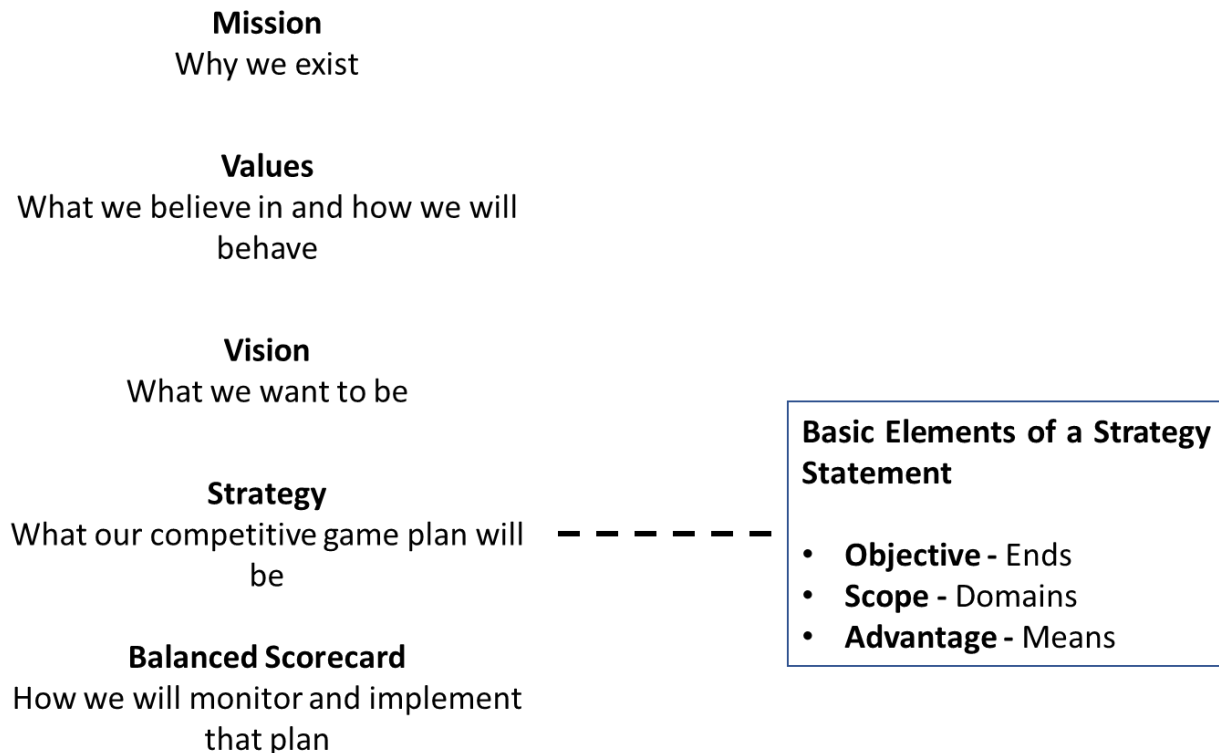


Figure 1. Hierarchy of organizational statement and the place of strategy. Source: Collis and Rukstad (2008)

An empirical example of articulating a strategy in museums is provided by Tirrell (2001), using the case study of the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, one of the foremost university museums in the USA, which employed a strategic approach that led to the identification and assessment of its strengths and weaknesses, the redefinition and repositioning of its identity and mission, the proposition of scenarios with appropriate strategies and the prioritization of realistic action steps, the intention being to show that the community would benefit from the museum. The museum's primary mandate was previously to serve the university community, including students, but it had to broaden its mandate to also serve the public through exhibitions, programs, and entertainment. It had to redefine its vision and mission to expand its role in public education rather than limit it to serving the university community (Tirrell, 2001). The review of this case teaches us that articulating a strategy goes hand in hand with

ascertaining the museum's current position and context, the external environment and demands, and identifying a strategic position to better achieve necessary social goals.

In the SSA region, before the initiation of museums with the western perspective, the heritage was conserved communally under the chiefs, heads of clans and families, with age- and gender-based responsibilities, and its spiritual and cultural goals and benefits were reinforced and passed on to the next generation through oral traditions and storytelling, guarded by rituals and taboos (Joffroy, 2005; Msemwa, 2005a; Kisusi & Lwoga, 2023). In addition, the sacred places designated for rituals and ceremonies, such as forests, caves and burial sites, which can be equated to modern museums, were conserved and used for resolving social and cultural problems (Msemwa, 2005a). Modern museums began with the colonial invasion of Africa and were established to provide colonialists with an in-depth understanding of local culture for their benefit and for the benefit of a few privileged individuals who represented and accessed the heritage (Maligisu, 2018; Msemwa, 2005b). They were further developed by postcolonial states, yet retained Western-derived features. Over the past two decades, however, policy changes have emphasised increasing museums' contributions to contemporary social and development needs (URT, 2008), and museums in the SSA have begun to shift from a colonial-based *royalty* strategy to a people-oriented *popularity* strategy (Msemwa, 2005a). However, the nature of the strategy the museums have articulated and its operationalisation, given their cultural and social contexts, remain unclear. This study addresses this knowledge gap.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted an interpretivist approach given the exploratory nature of the research question. It specifically employed a qualitative case study design, using Tanzania's national museums as the case, and collected data through documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews, and anecdotal accounts. The documentary thematically examines documents such as strategic plans, institutional annual reports, and sections of the strategic management literature that address how strategies are developed and implemented in Tanzania's national museums. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview protocol that included topics and probes on the strategy and its development. They involved eight purposively selected museum executives (see Appendix I). In addition, the anecdotal account involved the researcher's experience of developing a strategy. Thematic analysis was used to generate themes.

## FINDINGS

This section presents the study's findings in terms of themes and verbatim quotations from documentary analyses and interviews, which express choices, activities, and changes that characterise museum strategies across different periods.

### *Object-based Colonial Strategy - Royalty*

The annual museum report of 1970-71 (NMT, 1972:pp. 10) shows that the idea of initiating a museum began during the German colonial times to save objects encountered during construction activities:

...geological objects resulting from intensive geological research as a preparation for the construction of the Central Railway Line in Tanganyika were saved and stored. Later, in 1911, Dr Hans Meyer (a famous, wealthy geographer at that time) offered about 10,000 Marks for the initiation of a museum to give the best visual and widespread picture of the geographical features of the Colony, including its population and cultural pattern. The idea was abandoned as a result of the First World War (1914-1918).

The annual museum report for 1970-71 (NMT, 1972) shows that the British administration, through Governor Sir Harold MacMichael, acknowledged the country's rich heritage and, in 1934, began seeking support for the construction of a museum. The Governor instructed all Commissioners to collect objects. The fundraising was successful in connection with the death of King George V early in 1936, when an appeal was made for the museum to become his Memorial, through which Tsh. 101,575/= (equivalent to USD 43.5) was collected from all communities and Tsh. 100,000/= (equivalent to USD 42.8) was provided by the colonial government. Construction began in 1938, and the museum opened in 1940. In its early years, it interested foreigners rather than local Africans as indicated below:

...with the mission of becoming the storehouse of valuable information about the nature and culture of the British Territory and honouring the first British sovereign to rule this Territory...in 1942, out of 5,000 visitors, Africans numbered 1,730, and the rest were Europeans and Asians (Third Annual Report of 1944 in Meyer-Heiselbelg, 1972).

As indicated in the Annual Report for 1974-1976 and as stated below verbatim, the museum's strategic intention at that time was to aid colonialists' understanding of the territory and to reinforce their rule.

...despite the good intentions of preserving objects of scientific and cultural significance, the role of the museum during the colonial period was to serve the interests of the colonialists (statement of the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the National Museum of Tanzania, in the Annual Report for 1974-1976, NMT, 1977).

...the major strategy during the colonial times was to reinforce colonial rule through museum displays that glorified the whites and undermined the black Africans (Interviewee 08).

### *Nationality*

After independence (1961), the museum focused on transforming the King George V Memorial Museum into a national museum. Among the museum's objectives at that time were to expand to provide space for the storage and exhibition of additional collections, to develop a national identity, and to engage Africans in running, managing, and visiting the museum.

...after independence, we struggled to expand the museum. We built the new extension at the main museum in 1963 to provide storage and office space. In 1964, we constructed the Village Museum to conserve the traditions of Tanzanian architecture (Interviewee 04).

...we received the *Zinjanthropus* skull in 1965, and for the first time, appointed a museum education officer in 1966 and initiated museum service for schools...introduced a mobile museum unit in 1968 and raised the number of students from 5,000 in 1966 to 10,500 in 1971/72, the total number of visitors rose from 40,000 in 1963 to 100,000 in 1971/72, the majority being Africans...the number of museum staff increased from six in 1961 to forty-four in 1971/72, dominated by Tanzanians... (Interviewee 04, also data from Masao, 1975).

The Annual Report for 1974-1976 (NMT, 1977) indicates that, in 1975, the Board of Trustees stated the five-year focus of the museums (1975 – 1980), portraying the strategy by then, which was focused on contributing to the nationalisation efforts:

...involve the development of a plan for enabling the museum to become a tool for development to avoid the danger of becoming an irrelevant service in a situation of revolutionary change, to play its revolutionary role in interpreting Tanzania's history, culture and education, the engagement of workers in decision making and strengthening the relationship between the Board of Trustees, the museum management and the ministry responsible for the national museum.

...the museum, after independence, strived to become relevant to society and nationalise its institution... (Interviewee 03).

Some of the outcomes of the strategy include the reorganisation of main exhibitions, the establishment of the Arusha Declaration Museum in Arusha in 1977, and deliberations to establish the National Natural History Museum in Arusha. The management committee was separated from the Board of Trustees to enable the planning and day-to-day operations to be delegated to museum staff and management. However, "the lack of adequate funds prevented the museum from carrying out many of the intended activities" (Annual Reports of 1978–1980 – NMT, 1981). To strengthen the museum's governance, the National Museum of Tanzania Act was enacted in 1980, establishing a corporate body, the National Museum of Tanzania, with a Board of Directors that replaced the Board of Trustees. "...The Board continued the earlier mission of enhancing the African identity by initiating the National Ethnic Day in 1994, which allowed ethnic groups to show their heritage to the public" (Interviewee 04).

### *People-based Strategy - Popularity*

Analysis of the museums' plans shows that, in the 2000s, the museums began recognising the importance of clearly defining their strategy using a strategic plan. They developed the first strategic plan in 2003 to define their core

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strategy. According to the interviewee's responses, the strategy aimed to improve the delivery of the museum's core functions, encompassing the following:

...(i) conducting research and acquiring museum collections, (ii) managing museum collections and (iii) educating and sensitising the public to the value of the national heritage through exhibitions, education programs and publications... (Interviewee 07).

A 2000 study by the museum (Msemwa, 2002) on museum visitors found that few Tanzanians used museums because they perceived them as places for keeping old things. The museum management decided to address misconceptions about the museum's role and underutilisation by transforming it into a popular public platform. The outcome was the initiation of the House of Culture project funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), through which the national museums developed an outward-looking vision that guided them for three years (2005–2008). The popularity strategy was largely successful in promoting the museum through events and educational programs. The vision was stated as follows:

...to make a society with a strong sense of value and pride, responsible in its dynamic use of and access to its heritage and culture (Interviewee 06).

Documentary findings indicate that the strategic plans from 2012 to 2017 aimed to transform national museums into centres of excellence for the sustainable preservation of Tanzania's cultural and natural heritage (strategic plans, 2012–2017). "...This strategic vision was inward-looking as it did not focus on the impact they would have, and so it was difficult to measure how well the museums provided a societal service..." (Interviewee 03). However, analysis of the strategic plans for 2017/18–2020/21 indicates that strategic planning returned to an outward-looking approach aimed at creating a society that values and sustainably manages its heritage (Strategic Plans, 2017/18–2021/22). With this strategic vision, several achievements were attained, namely, enhancing the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, increasing participation among heritage stakeholders, and strengthening the museum's collection. Despite these achievements, the challenges faced included understaffing in core functions, limited financial resources, low visitor numbers, ageing infrastructure, high preservation costs, low participation by local communities, limited investment, and limited use of new technologies.

#### *Towards Sustainability*

The rolling five-year strategic plan (2021/22–2025/26) and interviews indicate that the current strategy aims at not only strengthening preservation and institutional capacity to deliver service, but also promoting the museums, engaging the people and dealing with the financial and other resource problems:

...to strengthen the society and digital component, preserve not only museum objects but also historic sites and monuments, and ensure financial sustainability (Interviewee 05).

...in strategizing, we focused on tackling the problem of poor preservation infrastructure, promoting our objects, getting the public into the museums and becoming financially stable... (Interviewee 01).

...by then, the public and policymakers wanted to hear from us, promoting what we keep in our museums through social media and events, making museums more active... (Interviewee 02)

The findings below show that the process of crafting the strategy was not straightforward or static, but rather involved dialogue among staff, executives, and partners regarding the NMT's objectives. The dialogue ignited a two-sided exchange on the issue of the direction to ensure financial stability. One side argued for maintaining the inherent value of museums as not-for-profit institutions, for preserving the intrinsic value of heritage for its own sake, and for continuing the proper acquisition, storage, and display of objects to bring society, especially researchers, to museums for appreciation and scientific purposes. (Interviewee 03). Another side argued that museums, although they are not-for-profit, can maintain their intrinsic goal of preserving heritage assets for their own sake, but they cannot ignore their explicit opportunities to become relevant not only to conventional education and the scientific community, but also to the parent ministry of tourism by utilizing these opportunities to contribute to increasing the number of tourists and revenues – not profit-based though (Interviewee 01). Another participant supporting the second side added:

...our ultimate customer is society, and the museum objects are our primary business. We can maximise societal value by securing the support required to preserve our museum objects.  
(Interviewee 02)

The intense debate led the museums to adopt a more sustainable approach, moving beyond conventional preservation to incorporate the public (popularity) and economic (prosperity) dimensions, and to ensure that all implications of that choice were fully explored. Table 1 summarises the strategic objectives as set out in the current strategic plan. The objectives indicate that the *preservation* dimension prioritizes two areas; i) decolonization of the preservation agenda, including the incorporation of intangible expressions and sites apart from the museum objects, the encouragement of private museums over and above the acquisition of objects for storing at the national museum centres, and the incorporation of restitution over and above the research function, and ii) incorporation of the shift from manual to digital technology. The *popularity* dimension complements public education and outreach initiatives by prioritising a marketing approach that targets domestic and international museum users; stakeholder engagement rather than expert-based popularisation programs; and activating museums through cultural events and entertainment. The *prosperity* dimension focuses on enhancing museums' financial sustainability and prioritises the mobilisation and efficient management of resources to avoid dependence on government subvention and to build the museum's capacity to deliver high-quality services.

Table 1. Strategic objectives; National Museum of Tanzania Strategic Plan of 2021/22 – 2025/26.

| <b>Strategic Objectives</b> |                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Preservation</i>         | Develop 5 and improve 8 Artefacts infrastructure by June, 2026                       |
|                             | Conduct 25 research projects by June, 2026                                           |
|                             | Develop a cultural heritage resource database by 80% by June, 2026                   |
|                             | Rehabilitate 50 cultural heritage sites by June, 2026                                |
|                             | Develop and register 25 new museums by June, 2026                                    |
|                             | Establish 1 National Museum Research Centre by June, 2026                            |
| <i>Popularity</i>           | Increase the number of visitors from an average of 60,000 to 2,000,000 by June, 2026 |
|                             | Install 12 permanent and 80 temporary exhibitions by June, 2026                      |
|                             | Conduct 240 awareness programs by June, 2026                                         |
|                             | Engage 50 local community groups in conserving by June, 2026                         |
| <i>Prosperity</i>           | Conduct 50 cultural events and festivals at museums and sites by June, 2026          |
|                             | Increase revenue collection to USD 2,256,000.00 (Tshs 6,000,000,000/=) by June, 2026 |
|                             | Establish 15 investment projects by June, 2026                                       |
|                             | Provide staff with the required skills and motivation by June, 2026                  |
|                             | Install ICT infrastructure by 90% by June, 2026                                      |

Figure 2 presents the range of selected choices and reinforcing activities under each strategic dimension, indicating that the proposed strategic actions in the strategic plan are strategically aligned to achieve the set objectives.

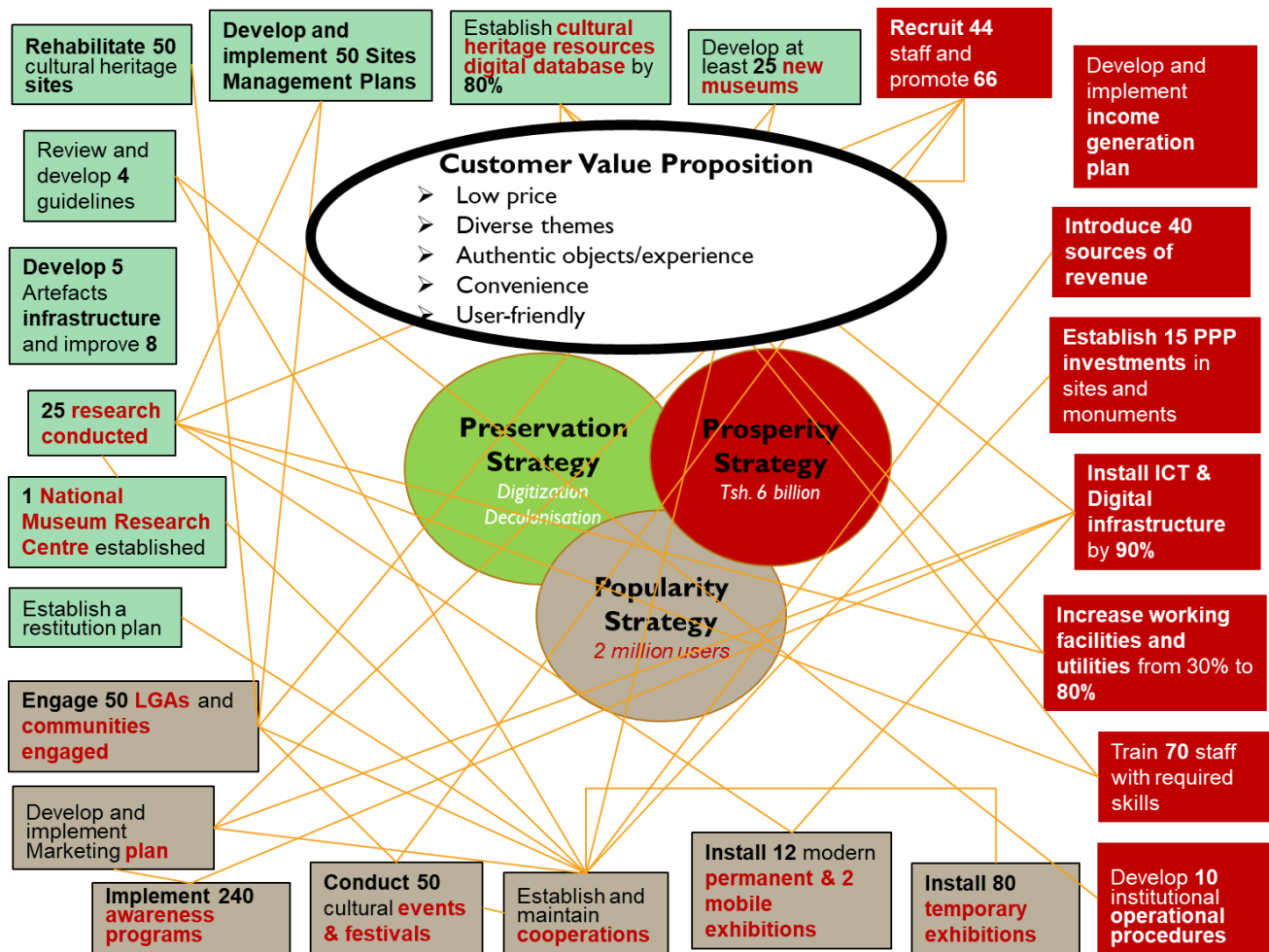


Figure 2. The multitude of selected choices and reinforcing activities. Image courtesy of the National Museum of Tanzania.

In terms of scope, the strategic plan documents for 2021/22–2025/26 indicate that the museums are configured to meet the needs of specific customer groups, primarily domestic users, particularly those in the education sector, including students and researchers, as well as various community groups. On the other hand, from a tourism perspective, museums are primarily visited by international tourists, who also visit national parks.

Based on the documentary analysis and the findings, the strategic advantage, that is, the proposed value of the museums, can be summed up as:

Low prices for public access to a broad range of authentic past cultural and scientific objects and sites, and cultural and educational experience (e.g., traditional and theatrical performances, events and festivals) offered in convenient geographic locations (some in city centres) and local and user-friendly facilities (e.g., gardens, libraries and restaurants).

As indicated in Figure 3, it is those aspects of what the national museums deliver (low prices for public access and use, convenience, authentic objects, diversity of themes and educative experience relative to other destinations) that make them competitive.

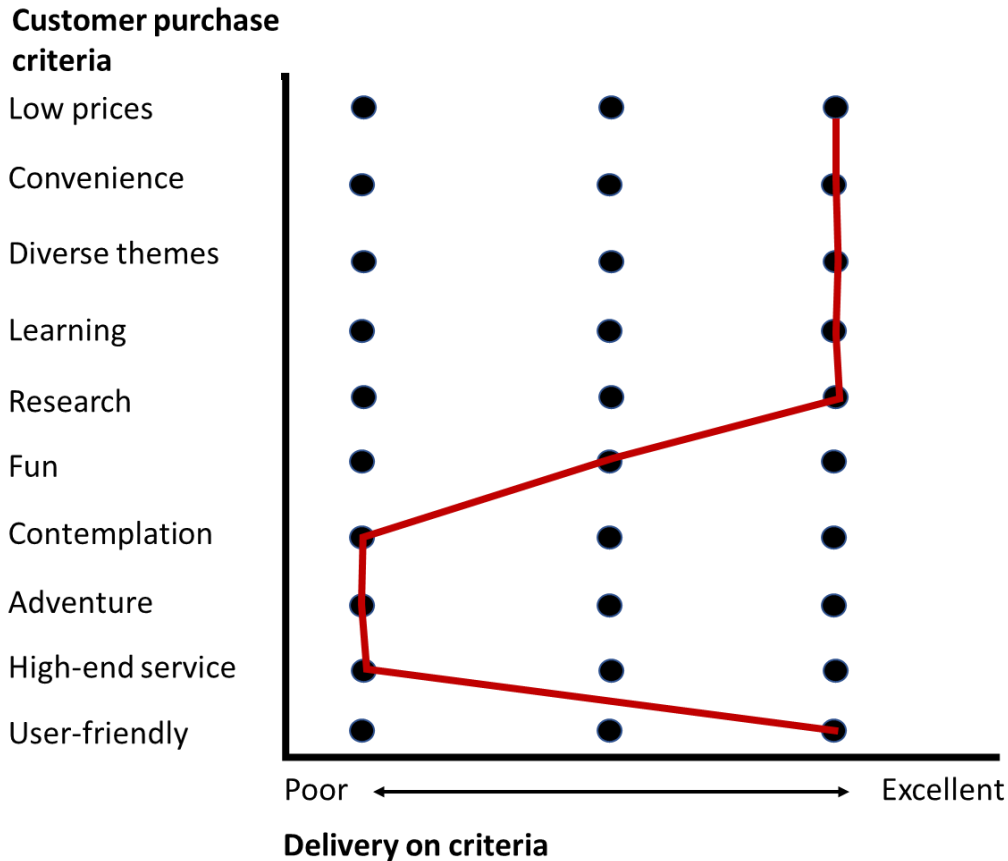


Figure 3. National museum value proposition. Image by author, generated from the findings in this study.

## DISCUSSION

Significant questions remain concerning how strategy is articulated in museums, especially in the SSA region. The findings of this study demonstrate that museums are striving for a strategy that decolonises them, transforming them from object- and colonial-based royalty to people-based organisations and to sustainable organisations, reflecting features of traditional African museums and modern corporate organisations. They specifically show that the museums began with an object-based strategy that was interwoven with colonial dominance and royalty, whereby they sought to reinforce colonial supremacy and to isolate cultural and natural objects from local people. After independence, the museums adopted a nationalist agenda intended to remove Western indoctrination and promote Africanization, including the distribution of power within them. The strategy employed in the 2000s sought to embrace the new museology's notion of popularisation and to engage the public with their intangible heritage. Despite resistance from some experts and limited funding, the findings indicated that the strategy implemented at the Museum and House of Culture in Tanzania conceived the *House of Culture* project and strengthened educational programs that attracted the public. An interesting finding is the rolling strategy, grounded in the notion of sustainability, which aligns museums' functioning with social, cultural, technological, political, and economic realities, while re-embracing certain features of the traditional African conservation system and the decolonisation agenda. The strategy is based on the pillars of *prosperity, preservation and popularity (3Ps)*. While the *prosperity* strategy is intended to enhance the institutional capacity to deliver a service and generate internal revenue for financial sustainability, the *preservation* strategy focuses not only on the objects and sites, but also on people's culture and on encouraging the development of private and regional museums rather than solely on collecting objects for national museums. It also emphasises research and the restitution agenda, and the use of digital technologies. The *popularity* strategy continues the agenda of the *House of Culture* and educational services while embracing stakeholder engagement, the marketing and tourism approaches and the use of events and festivals.

The findings have several significant implications for museum strategy. First, they demonstrate that museums strive to move toward a broad-based corporate mission, which reflects not only the core functions and museum objects as conventionally argued, but also changes in historical, social, and economic contexts. However, this move is proceeding slowly, consistent with Tirrell's (2001) earlier argument. This implies that the move towards embracing the new museology in the SSA region is real and strategic, in contrast to Stam's (1993) argument that museums' change is ad hoc.

Interestingly, the findings indicate that the process by which museums are transforming themselves is dynamic and fluid rather than static and linear, and aligns with the intrinsic African traditional conservation system, which is people-centred. This is contrary to the conventional dogma concerning the new museology, the features of which are accredited to Western innovation. In this study, the findings show that museums' historic and cultural contexts have shaped their transformation from colonial structures by engaging the public and initiating museum centres, such as the Village Museum, and programs, such as National Ethnic Day, that preserve and celebrate local culture, identity, traditions, and history. Striving to become financially stable and to address societal development problems aligns with the traditional heritage management system, which was instrumental in resolving the local community's challenges. The findings extend the *sustainability* path to the museum's strategic shift, earlier observed by Msemwa (2005a), from *royalty* to *popularity*.

The findings of this study imply that Collis and Rukstad's (2008) framework can be applied across a range of contexts for devising strategies and is not limited to the business arena. The utility of this framework lies in its treatment of the vexed question of the elements that structure a strategy in both analytical and holistic terms, and in its recognition of the need to integrate a wide range of contexts dynamically. This is a clear advance over static models of strategy. The framework enabled the articulation of the museum strategy and its trade-offs, in contrast to Reussner's (2003) argument that trade-offs are impossible in museums. In this regard, the findings indicate that being clear about who their customers are is advantageous for museums, as it allows them to focus on what they do well. For instance, the focus on the educational and cultural components is well structured to give the museums a competitive advantage, which captures the complex combination of well-aligned activities that enable the museums alone to give customers value in terms of low prices, diverse themes and cultural and educational experience relating to authentic past objects at convenient (*in most cases in cities and towns*) locations. It is worth noting that museums have roots in the cultural and educational sectors since colonial times; thus, they are well equipped with program departments that employ cultural and educational officers to design and administer creative programs and events. Indeed, underperformance in other dimensions, such as adventure and servicing high-end tourists (see Figure 3 in the findings section), is a strategic choice of the museums. In addition, since international tourists visit nearby national parks, the museums may wish to target this market in the near future; however, this would require substantial investment in upgrading the museums' exhibitions and tourist facilities and services.

What is fascinating about the Tanzanian museums' strategy is the way it aligns a multitude of reinforcing activities with the framework of the 3Ps (*Preservation, Popularity and Prosperity*) to deliver value (see Table 1 and Figure 2 in the findings section). The choices shown under each P dimension have likely reoriented museums toward the public and structured them to address a range of problems now and in the future. By demonstrating the possibility of aligning choices with the museums' strategic positioning, particularly with respect to museum users, products, and activities, these findings corroborate those of Tirrell (2001) and Porter (2006), thereby indicating that strategic positioning is feasible and relevant in SSA museums.

## CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated the utility of Collis and Rukstad's (2008) framework and the new museology perspective for systematically articulating a museum strategy. Using this framework, the study has demonstrated that the adoption of the notion of strategy is possible in the museum context and embraces the internal and external social dynamics that resonate with not only the features of the new museology but also with aspects of traditional African heritage management and contemporary corporate management systems. Indeed, the journey from the dimensions of *royalty* to *nationality*, *popularity*, and sustainability reflects the key to the survival of national museums in Tanzania and similar countries, and to their success in balancing their core mission and social roles. It is their ability to move beyond the boundaries of the classic object-based museology and the colonial *superiority* perspective, and to strategically address change within their broader internal and external historical, social, and economic contexts, that has enabled them to strive and perform fairly well in enhancing preservation and increasing their popularity and prosperity.

From a policy perspective, the study has significant implications. First, on a positive note, a strategy appears to have been articulated well in museum documents and by officials, especially in this decade (the 2020s). Second, the shifting nature of a strategy means that the process of strategizing is ongoing and dynamic. Thus, the national museums must continue to plan and seek new ways to do the work they do best, namely, collecting, researching, preserving, interpreting, and educating society. However, museums need to continue to redefine and reposition themselves, develop their constituencies, and devise ongoing strategies to preserve, promote, mobilise resources, engage the public, and enhance their capacity to deliver services. Museums also require effective governance to address a range of problems now and in the future. Training and building staff capacity in strategic planning and management are critical. Although assessing museum staff awareness and understanding of the strategy was beyond the scope of this study, it is doubtful that all staff would be able to articulate the strategy effectively. This issue requires further research, not only to understand the factors that underlie their awareness and understanding, but also to examine the impact of the strategy on staff performance, motivation, and attitudes toward achieving the museum's core mission. In addition, the implementation of the strategy was beyond the scope of this study; however, it would be interesting to learn from Tanzanian museums about the dynamic processes involved in ensuring successful strategy implementation.

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Appendix I: Interviewees; (this study's sample).

| SN | Identification | Profile |                             |                        |
|----|----------------|---------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
|    |                | Sex     | Position                    | Education              |
| 1. | Interviewee 01 | Female  | Head, Planning Unit         | Masters in Economics   |
| 2. | Interviewee 02 | Female  | Head, Public Relations Unit | MA Public Relations    |
| 3. | Interviewee 03 | Male    | Senior Conservator          | MA Heritage Management |
| 4. | Interviewee 04 | Male    | Senior Curator              | MSc Biology            |
| 5. | Interviewee 05 | Male    | Head, ICT Unit              | MSc ICT                |
| 6. | Interviewee 06 | Male    | Curator In-Charge           | MA Heritage Management |
| 7. | Interviewee 07 | Female  | Director of Museum Center   | MSc Ecology            |
| 8. | Interviewee 08 | Male    | Museum Curator              | MA Heritage Management |



## MEDICAL TOURISM IN UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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## ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, medical tourism has turned from a localized phenomenon into a global, multi-billion-dollar industry encompassing medical, health, and wellness services (Connell, 2006; Foley et al., 2019; Hopkins et al., 2010; Leahy, 2008). Patients now travel cross-border for planned procedures such as surgeries, dental work, fertility treatments, and cosmetic interventions—often motivated by cost-effectiveness, reduced waiting times, or access to unavailable services in their home countries (Chang et al., 2024; Connell, 2006; Foley et al., 2019). It involves a broader ecosystem that includes healthcare tourism, which addresses restorative treatment and chronic disease management (Godlewska et al., 2023; Chang et al., 2024; Zhong et al., 2024), as well as wellness tourism, such as voluntary travel for yoga, spa, and nutrition courses (Dryglas & Salamaga, 2018). Although these types differ in purpose, they overlap and form a continuum of health-seeking behaviour that better characterizes patient mobility in the 21st century (Cha et al., 2024). This transformation has been further accelerated by the emergence of Medical Tourism 4.0, where digital technologies are increasingly integrated into healthcare delivery and patient decision-making processes (Medhekar, 2020; Wong et al., 2020; Haleem et al., 2022; Dar et al., 2022; Yuhnovska et al., 2025). As medical tourism destinations become more technology-driven, patients are no longer influenced by cost and service quality. Instead factors such as technology usability, digital capability, information accessibility, and trust in health-care systems are increasingly shaping destination choice and behavioural intention (Medhekar, 2020; Wong et al., 2020; Haleem et al., 2022; Dar et al., 2022; Yuhnovska et al., 2025). Despite the growing interest on healthcare transformation, little is known about how tourism motivations, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness and digital health capability collectively influence international patients' behavioural intentions within value-based and innovation-driven medical tourism destinations (Yang et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024; Park et al., 2025; Kalayou et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2025). Accordingly, this study addresses this gap in the literature by exploring the role of push factors associated with the patient home country and the pull factors related to the characteristics of the destination that the patient chooses to seek treatment (Godlewska et al., 2023; Chang et al., 2024; Zhong et al., 2024). In particular, the study examines the mediating role of perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, trust and digital capability in influencing international patients' destination choice intention (Godlewska et al., 2023; Chang et al., 2024; Zhong et al., 2024). In the context of this study, the destination is the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which has positioned itself as a policy-driven medical tourism destination known for its advanced digital capabilities and healthcare service excellence. The current research is underpinned by an integrated theory framework that combines Push-Pull Theory, and Technology Acceptance Model and trust theory (Lee, 1966; Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977). Using a quantitative approach, the study focuses on international medical tourists who interact with healthcare systems in the UAE. From a practical perspective, the findings are expected to contribute to policy and practice by providing guidance for policy makers and healthcare regulators in the UAE, highlighting the importance of interoperability, health information exchanges, and data integration across providers (Dubai Health Authority, 2024). For healthcare SMEs and platforms, this study shows that technology adoption has significant competitive advantages when it is translated into seamless information experiences for patients (Bulatovic & Iankova, 2021). Overall, this study contributes to a data-driven understanding of the impact of digitalization on international patient satisfaction and competitiveness in Medical Tourism.

**Keywords:** Medical Tourism; Push–Pull Motivation; Digital Health Capability; Destination Choice; United Arab Emirates

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June 22 – June 26, 2026  
Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau  
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## EXPLORING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PATH OF SOCIAL SHARING IN THE WET MARKET TOURISM EXPERIENCE

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### ABSTRACT

The wet market is a common marketplace and fair in Asia, which consists of many individual retailers clustered together to sell fresh products, including green vegetables, fruits, agricultural products, seafood, groceries, etc. (Wu et al., 2023). In the process of urbanization, some traditional wet markets have undergone renovation to cater to the needs of tourism development. And the street food they offer were identified as significant channels through which tourists can experience local culture and authenticity (Park & Kim, 2023). And under the promotion of various social media platforms, “Yanhua Chi” and “Wet Market Roaming” have become hashtags for culinary tourism. Therefore, classifying the tourism experience of wet market as part of culinary tourism, agri-tourism, or rural tourism is not entirely accurate.

Certainly, the significance of wet markets goes far beyond food, it plays a dual role. In current situation, wet markets are both traditional shopping venues and destinations for tourists and foodies (González, 2020). Therefore, how to balance the dual identities of wet market as both a functional community space and an emerging tourist attraction is a question worth considering. The boundary between the two is becoming increasingly blurred, with more tourists paying attention to the everyday attractions of the destination: everyday locales like wet markets, coffee shops and commercial circles (Stors, 2022). The trend reflects that these everyday locales are being re-positioned and given more practical functions and symbolic meanings. However, there is still a lack of research on this particular form of tourist consumption. The elements that should be present in a successful and attractive wet market for tourists are not yet known.

According to Su et al. (2021), travel experience sharing can be divided into two categories of content: desirability-focused (symbolic/affective) and feasibility-focused (diagnosticity/informational). It demonstrates that the dual identity of the wet market triggers different psychological pathways through different experiential focuses. Therefore, the study proposes the following research questions: (1) What elements make a successful and memorable wet market attractive to tourists? (2) What factors influence the desirability sharing type of self-expression? (3) What factors influence the feasibility sharing type of information usefulness?

This research will be conducted in two study. Specifically, Study 1 will confirm the initial measurement items of the Wet Market Tourism Experience Scale through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis (UGC of web texts). The interviews were conducted with tourists who met the screening criteria of having a wet market tourism experience. Finally, the preliminary scale containing five dimensions of aesthetic, nostalgic, social interaction, cultural education, and entertainment was generated. In Study 2, the reliability of the scale and dual path was tested by exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modeling (SEM).

Theoretically, the results of the study will enrich the existing literature and enhance the academic understanding of wet market tourism as a new form of tourism and leisure. Practically, the study provides targeted recommendations and content strategies for enhancing the experience of tourists and designing leisure spaces.

**Keywords:** Wet Market Tourism Experience, Perceived Authenticity, Perceived Diagnosticity, Social Sharing Behavior

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# EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF SMART RESTAURANT ATTRIBUTES ON TOURISTS' RESTAURANT ADVOCACY: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF BRAND IMAGE AND PERCEIVED VALUE

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## ABSTRACT

With technological advancement, smart restaurants have become a vital scenario in smart tourism. However, limited research clarifies the dimensions of smart restaurant attributes and their influence mechanism on tourists' long-term behavioral consequences. This study explores the impact of smart restaurant attributes on tourists' restaurant advocacy, with brand image and perceived value as mediators. Using a mixed-methods design, this research develops and validates a three-dimensional scale of smart restaurant attributes: Technical Function, High-Tech Ambience, and Personalized Interactive. Empirical results confirm that smart restaurant attributes positively promote restaurant advocacy, while brand image and perceived value play significant parallel and serial mediating roles. These findings enrich the theoretical framework of smart tourism and service marketing, and provide practical implications for enhancing tourist experience and driving positive word-of-mouth in tourism destinations.

Key Words: Smart Restaurant Attributes, Brand Image, Perceived Value, Restaurant Advocacy

## INTRODUCTION

With continuous technological advancement and iteration, an increasing number of products and services have been empowered by technology, delivering brand-new and distinctive experiences. As an innovative integration of intelligent technology and catering services, smart restaurants have become an important scenario for the development of smart tourism, and play a critical role in optimizing tourists' dining experiences and enhancing the competitiveness of tourism destinations (Gretzel et al., 2015). However, existing studies still show fragmentation in the definition and measurement of concepts related to smart restaurants. Some studies focus on smart catering, smart restaurants, and smart service quality, while others adopt smart restaurant service quality scales as the measurement basis, resulting in a lack of consistent conceptual integration for the perceptible dimensions of smart restaurant characteristics (Wong et al., 2022). Relevant research has long emphasized technology adoption and usage intention, with relatively few studies starting from post-use customer psychological evaluation and relational outcomes. This makes it difficult to address management needs amid the normalization of smart services, and leaves insufficient evidence on whether smart investment can translate into higher-level customer behavioral value (Tussyadiah, 2020). Brand image refers to the overall impression formed by brand-related associations in consumers' memory, encompassing functional, symbolic, and affective meanings (Gómez et al., 2015). Perceived value is consumers' overall evaluation of a product or service after weighing the benefits obtained against the costs incurred (Zeithaml, 1988). Restaurant advocacy can be regarded as the operationalization of brand advocacy in the catering context, referring to customers' spontaneous, non-incentivized motivation to speak positively, strongly, and influentially about a restaurant after having actual dining experiences (Rao & Wu, 2025).

In the smart restaurant context, smart restaurant attributes may enhance tourists' perceived value; in turn, high perceived value drives stronger positive behavioral responses, such as revisit intention, recommendation, more

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

active advocacy behaviors, and brand recognition (Chen & Chen, 2010). The introduction of robots can improve customers' impressions of a restaurant as advanced and creative, strengthen expectations of stable and consistent services, and shape brand image (Seo & Lee, 2025). From the perspectives of brand image and perceived value, this study can explore the impact of smart restaurant attributes on tourists' restaurant advocacy and fill these research gaps.

Therefore, the research objectives of this study are: 1) To explore the attributes of smart restaurants. 2) To examine the impact of smart restaurant attributes on restaurant advocacy. 3) To investigate the mediating roles of brand image and perceived value between smart restaurant attributes and restaurant advocacy. 4) To explore the interaction between brand image and perceived value. To achieve the above objectives, the research questions are as follows:

1. What attributes do smart restaurants possess?
2. Do smart restaurant attributes influence customers' restaurant advocacy behaviors?
3. What roles do brand image and perceived value respectively play in the process whereby smart restaurant attributes affect restaurant advocacy?
4. Do brand image and perceived value influence each other?

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative research. First, Study 1 conducted semi-structured interviews and questionnaire surveys, using three-level coding and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to extract and verify the dimensions of smart restaurant attributes. Subsequently, Study 2 collected quantitative data from a sufficient sample, and used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) to conduct reliability and validity analysis of the questionnaire and test the hypotheses.

The main objective of Study 1 was to extract the core perceptual dimensions of smart restaurant attributes. The respondents were recruited through "Redbook", the largest online social platform in China, consisting of tourists or consumers who had visited a smart restaurant at least once in the past six months. A total of 11 interviewees were recruited, with each interview lasting approximately 31 to 48 minutes. For data analysis, this study employed three-level coding based on grounded theory, assisted by Nvivo software for data organization and analysis.

In Study 2, the smart restaurant attribute dimensions extracted in Study 1 were further transformed into scale items, which were combined with established mature scales for brand image, perceived value, and restaurant advocacy to form the formal questionnaire. Specifically, the measurement items for smart restaurant attributes were mainly derived from the interview results of Study 1; items for brand image, perceived value, and restaurant advocacy were adapted from scales in relevant literature. A 7-point Likert scale was used, ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to "7 = strongly agree", to measure respondents' perceptions and evaluations of each construct.

The first round yielded 513 questionnaires. After excluding invalid samples, 431 valid responses were retained, mainly for EFA and scale dimension development. The second round collected 562 questionnaires; after removing invalid samples, 500 valid responses were kept, primarily for CFA and subsequent hypothesis testing.

Questionnaires were distributed via the Credamo platform, with attention checks, screening questions, IP and response time verification set up to eliminate duplicate or invalid samples. The research participants were tourists or consumers who had experienced smart restaurants in the past six months.

## DISCUSSION

The results show that: 1) This study successfully developed a reliable and valid measurement tool for smart restaurant attributes, comprising three dimensions: "Technical Functionality", "High-Tech Ambience", and "Personalized Interaction". Technical Functionality refers to the practicality, convenience, and operational efficiency of smart technology tools centered on QR code ordering, AI interaction, and smart payment in the actual dining process. High-Tech Ambience denotes the overall environmental experience with technological attributes and futuristic vibes created by environmental elements such as spatial design, lighting, music, and visual presentation. Personalized Interaction means the on-demand, appropriate, and targeted two-way interactive experience between consumers and the restaurant's intelligent system before, during, and after dining. 2) Smart restaurant attributes exert a significant positive effect on tourists' restaurant advocacy. 3) Brand image and perceived value play significant mediating roles between smart restaurant attributes and restaurant recommendation behavior, and these two mediators show a mutually influential relationship.

Regarding the theoretical implications of this study, first, it improves the construct definition system of smart restaurant attributes and develops a measurement scale applicable to tourism contexts, filling the theoretical gap of

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June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

lacking systematic and precise measurement tools for smart restaurant attributes. Second, this study verifies the bidirectional positive interaction between brand image and perceived value in the smart restaurant context, enriches the theoretical connotation of the relationship between the two constructs in the field of service marketing, and addresses the insufficient research on their interaction mechanism in smart service scenarios (Youn & Yoon, 2013; Sabiote et al., 2016).

In terms of practical implications, first, smart restaurant operators should prioritize optimizing technical function, such as improving the convenience and stability of ordering, payment, and food delivery processes, as these directly affect customers' perceived value. Second, in ambience design, a balance should be struck between high-tech appeal and comfort, avoiding overemphasis on technology at the expense of the dining experience. Third, in interactive design, the system's real-time responsiveness and personalization should be enhanced to align smart services more closely with tourists' needs. Finally, brand management should not be limited to technological demonstration; instead, it should further enhance customers' perceived value to promote their proactive recommendation, sharing, and advocacy behavior.

For limitations and future research about this study, First, the sample mainly consists of domestic Chinese tourists, limiting cross-cultural representativeness. Second, this study adopts a cross-sectional design, which cannot strictly test the causal sequence among variables. Third, the research model does not incorporate more moderating variables, such as technology acceptance, tourism type, or smartness level. Fourth, this study does not further distinguish between low, medium, and high-level smart restaurants. Accordingly, future research can be expanded in four directions: 1) Include tourists from different regions and cultural backgrounds to improve the external validity of the research. 2) Adopt a longitudinal tracking design to more rigorously test the causal effects of smart restaurant attributes on brand image, perceived value, and restaurant advocacy. 3) Incorporate moderating variables such as tourists' technology acceptance, innovativeness, tourism experience, and companion type to explore differences under varying conditions. 4) Classify restaurants according to the application level of smart technology and compare whether differences exist in their mechanism of action across different smartness levels.

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# AI TOUR GUIDES: THE ROLE OF FUNCTIONAL ATTRIBUTES ON INTERACTIVE INTENTION BASED ON COGNITIVE-AFFECTIVE SYSTEM THEORY

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## ABSTRACT

Benefiting from the cooperation between the tourism and technology industries, artificial intelligence tour guides with machine learning technology and virtual appearance have been widely applied in various tourist attractions (Tussyadiah et al., 2020). Based on high intelligent algorithms, AI tour guides contribute to the accessibility, interactive experience, personalized service, and informatization of tourism (Şahin et al., 2026). This evolution from human tour guides to digital tour guides not only breaks through the limitations of time and space, but also marks the shift of guided tour service towards emotional intelligent agents.

Existing measurement scales focus on exploring AI tour guides' basic capabilities (Chen et al., 2026) and anthropomorphic style (Wang et al., 2023). However, there is a lack of a multidimensional scale to comprehensively reveal AI tour guides' intrinsic characteristics, indicating the significance of developing a standardized measurement tool. Furthermore, previous studies have focused on exploring tourists' psychological mechanisms from a cognitive perspective (e.g. Yan et al., 2026). This study introduces the Cognitive-Affective System Theory (CAST) to further explore the dual mediating effect. This study aims to develop a measurement scale for the functional attributes of AI tour guides (FAAITG) and construct a conceptual model on the influencing factors of intention to interact. The research questions include: (1) What are the core dimensions of the FAAITG? (2) Based on the CAST, does emotional engagement and perceived creativity play a mediating role between the FAAITG and tourists' intention to interact?

This study will adopt a mixed-methods approach, including five main steps. Step 1 will generate initial measurement items (semi-structured interviews). Step 2 will conduct a content validity test (expert review and pre-test). Step 3 will purify items through exploratory factor analysis (questionnaire survey 1). Step 4 will conduct scale validation through confirmatory factor analysis (questionnaire survey 2). Step 5 will involve nomological validity test (SEM). The target sample for qualitative and quantitative research will consist of tourists who have previously used AI tour guide. This study is expected to develop a multidimensional scale on the functional attributes of AI tour guides and expand the application scenarios of CAST.

For expected theoretical implications, this study will contribute to the existing academic knowledge of virtual tour guide services, customer psychology and behavior, tourist attractions management, and destination marketing. A new measurement tool is expected to provide theoretical basis for future research on the functional characteristics of AI tour guides. For practical suggestions, this study will provide valuable insights for tourism managers on digital transformation, smart tourism service optimization, and customer technology acceptance.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence Tour Guide; Functional Attributes; Emotional Engagement; Perceived Creativity; Intention to Interact

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June 22 – June 26, 2026  
Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau  
ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

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# URBAN STAYCATION MOTIVATIONS AMONG HOME-BASED TELEWORKERS: A PUSH-PULL PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

Since 2020, working from home (WFH) has evolved from an emergency measure into a normalized employment mode in China, with approximately 537 million teleworkers (Center, 2024). While WFH offers flexibility, it challenges job satisfaction and mental health. Home-based teleworkers often experience blurred work-life boundaries, social isolation, digital fatigue, and job burnout (Baruch, 2001). Against this background, urban staycation, characterized by short duration, proximity, and low cost, has become a popular leisure alternative. It enables teleworkers to relieve stress and recover emotionally without the logistical burdens of traditional travel (Satpute & Bapat, 2024).

Despite this growing phenomenon, three critical research gaps remain. First, existing studies have viewed the target audience of staycation as a single group of ordinary urban residents. This ignores that home-based teleworkers are a distinct group with unique spatial and psychological needs. Second, the classic push-pull motivation model has not been adequately adapted to the WFH context. Existing research fails to measure specific push factors rooted in remote work systematically. This makes it hard to understand why home-based teleworkers would explicitly prefer urban staycations rather than long trips. Third, the mechanism through which staycation alleviates WFH-related stress and enables psychological detachment remains underexplored, leaving a “black box” in tourism decision-making theory.

To address these gaps, this study adopts a work-family perspective within the push-pull framework to examine the motivations that drive urban staycations among home-based teleworkers. Push factors, including blurred work-life boundaries, loneliness, emotional recovery needs, and digital fatigue, represent the internal psychological pressures experienced by home-based teleworkers. Pull factors, including time-cost advantages, service experience, and social atmosphere, represent the external attractiveness of urban staycations. Psychological escape serves as a crucial variable, linking push factors to staycation behavioral intention. Additionally, WFH duration, personal attributes, office characteristics, and urban attributes are incorporated as control variables to ensure statistical robustness. Data will be collected via an online questionnaire targeting home-based teleworkers, using validated 7-point Likert scales. First, IBM SPSS 29.0 will perform data cleaning and descriptive statistics, yielding a preliminary reliability check (Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ ) and validity results. The prepared dataset will then be analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4.0.9.5. The analysis will include the assessment of the measurement model (factor loadings, CR, AVE, HTMT) and structural model performance (path coefficients,  $R^2$ , significance tests, and mediation effect analysis). Regarding the expected results, the study predicts that push factors will positively increase psychological escape (the mediator), which in turn will strengthen staycation behavioral intention, while pull factors will exert a direct positive effect on staycation behavioral intention.

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

By linking teleworking psychology to tourism motivation, this research extends the classic push-pull framework and enriches psychological detachment theory. The findings offer practical guidance for hotels and destination managers to develop targeted staycation products that support emotional recovery, convenience, and social interaction for home-based teleworkers in urban China. Acknowledged limitations include a cross-sectional design, geographic constraints of the Chinese sample, and potential common method bias, suggesting future research should adopt longitudinal designs to improve causality.

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## DIGITAL ECONOMY AND TOURISM RESILIENCE IN THE GREATER BAY AREA: SPATIAL SPILLOVER EFFECTS AND INSTITUTIONAL MODERATION

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates how digital economy development enhances tourism resilience in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA). Using panel data of 10 GBA cities from 2015 to 2024, entropy-based indices are constructed for digital economy (DEI) and tourism resilience (TRI). Two-way fixed effects and mediation models show that DEI significantly improves TRI, and retail sales (market expansion) partially mediates this relationship. The findings are robust to alternative specifications. The study contributes to smart tourism and regional resilience literature, offering policy insights for cross-border digitally-enabled tourism development.

**Keywords:** Digital economy; Tourism resilience; Greater Bay Area; Market expansion; Fixed effects model

### INTRODUCTION

The digital economy is widely seen as a key driver of growth, reshaping industries across the board (OECD, 2024). At the same time, the tourism industry is under increasing strain, from pandemics, geopolitical tensions, and climate change. Unsurprisingly, tourism resilience has become a central theme in recent research (Prayag, 2020; Gössling et al., 2021).

That said, most existing work still focuses on linear relationships at the provincial level. Non-linear mechanisms, spatial spillovers, and the role of institutional boundaries in cross-border regions remain largely overlooked (Huang et al., 2025).

The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), operating under the “One Country, Two Systems” framework, offers a unique setting to address these gaps. Its institutional heterogeneity – three separate customs territories and three legal systems – poses both opportunities and challenges for digital integration and resilience building (Mou, 2022).

Against this background, the present study develops a city-level analytical model to examine how the digital economy influences tourism resilience, paying particular attention to spatial spillovers and geopolitical moderation.

Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: How can digital economy development and tourism resilience be systematically measured at the city level in the GBA? What are the spatial-temporal evolution patterns and spatial spillover effects? Through what mechanisms and non-linear pathways does the digital economy influence tourism resilience? How do institutional and geopolitical factors moderate this relationship?

To answer these questions, an entropy-based index system is used with panel data from 11 GBA cities (2015-2024). Two-way fixed effects models and mediation analysis are applied. (Spatial and configurational methods are part of the full research design but not reported here due to page limits.)

The paper contributes to smart tourism and regional resilience literature, offering policy insights for cross-border digital-enabled tourism development. The remainder is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews literature, Section 3 methodology, Section 4 results, Section 5 discussion, Section 6 concludes.

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Digital Economy Research

Early digital research focused on the ICT sector (Machlup, 1962; Porat, 1977). Tapscott (1996) expanded the concept, and Bukht & Heeks (2017) proposed a three-layer framework. The OECD (2014) developed a four-dimensional framework, while domestic research has begun city-level measurement (Zhao et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021). The FIIF framework (Xu et al., 2022) provides a systematic decomposition. However, fine measurement at the city level, especially in cross-border areas, remains underdeveloped, and digitalization measurement in tourism needs further attention.

#### 2.2 Tourism Resilience Research

Resilience originated in ecology (Holling, 1973) and later entered tourism studies (Cochrane, 2010; Lew, 2014). Various measurement frameworks exist (Wang et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2022). Factors influencing resilience include technological innovation, economic development, and policy support (Sharma et al., 2021; Tang, 2023). The digital

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

economy promotes tourism resilience through growth level, technology carriers, and human capital (Zhu, 2024). Existing studies tend to adopt static indicators, missing dynamic resilience evolution and spatiotemporal interactions.

### **2.3 Intersection of Digital Economy and Tourism Resilience**

Recent studies show that digital innovation enhances tourism resilience (Sharma et al., 2021), but most use linear regression (Tang et al., 2023). Non-linear mechanisms are emerging (Huang et al., 2025). Further exploration is needed in non-linear effects, mediation channels (innovation and market expansion), spatial spillovers, and potential negative effects (digital divide, platform monopoly).

### **2.4 GBA Research**

Recent GBA studies include tourism resilience evaluation (Li et al., 2024) and intelligent decision-making (Zhang et al., 2025). Mou (2022) identified an “administrative boundary effect”. Quantitative research incorporating geopolitical factors (institutional distance, policy coordination) into the digital economy-tourism resilience nexus is extremely scarce, despite the GBA’s unique “One Country, Two Systems” institutional complexity.

### **2.5 Research Hypotheses**

**Based on the above, this study proposes:**

**H1:** Digital economy development significantly enhances tourism resilience.

**H2a:** Tourism innovation capacity mediates the relationship.

**H2b:** Market expansion mediates the relationship.

**H3:** Positive spatial spillover effects exist.

**H4a:** Institutional distance negatively moderates the relationship.

**H4b:** Policy coordination intensity positively moderates the relationship.

**H4c:** Border clearance facilitation positively moderates the relationship.

**H2a, H3 and H4a-c are part of the full research design and will be tested in future work due to page constraints of this conference paper.**

## **METHODOLOGY AND DATA**

### **3.1 Data Collection and Sources**

The geographical scope includes 11 GBA cities. However, due to data availability, the empirical analysis covers 10 cities (excluding Hong Kong) from 2015 to 2024. A mixed-method design is used. Quantitative analysis relies on secondary panel data; qualitative insights come from primary data collection (questionnaires and interviews). The secondary panel data cover 11 GBA cities from 2015 to 2024, drawn from sources such as the Guangdong Annual Statistical Yearbook, the Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics, the Macao Annual Statistical Yearbook, and other official repositories.

### **3.2 Measuring the Digital Economy Index (DEI)**

Digital economy activities are broadly defined as those enabled by digital technologies and infrastructure. To capture digital development across GBA cities, a composite index is constructed based on the four dimensional FIIF framework (Xu et al., 2022). This framework includes Digital Infrastructure, Digital Industrialization, Digital Innovation, and Digital Finance. The entropy method is used to assign objective weights (Zou et al., 2006). Principal component analysis is also conducted as a robustness check.

### **3.3 Measuring the Tourism Resilience Index (TRI)**

The geographical scope includes 11 GBA cities: Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Foshan, Huizhou, Dongguan, Zhongshan, Jiangmen, Zhaoqing, Hong Kong, and Macau. Tourism resilience is defined as the capacity of a tourism system to withstand external shocks, recover from disruptions, and adapt to changing conditions (Prayag, 2020; Gössling et al., 2021). A three-phase resilience framework is developed: Resistance Capacity, Recovery Capacity, and Reconfiguration Capacity. The entropy method again provides the weights, and a rolling-window procedure generates annual resilience scores for each city.

### **3.4 Geopolitical Moderation Variables**

Under the “One Country, Two Systems” arrangement, different institutional systems operate across GBA cities. Geopolitical factors may influence how the digital economy affects tourism resilience. Accordingly, three indicators are used to capture these effects: Institutional Distance, Policy Coordination Intensity, and Border Clearance Facilitation.

### **3.5 Empirical Strategy**

A multi-method empirical strategy is employed. First, a two-way fixed-effects panel model is used to estimate the overall impact of the digital economy on tourism resilience. Then a mediation model (with bootstrap significance

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

tests) examines whether market expansion serves as a mediating channel. Several robustness checks are performed: replacing core variable measurements, excluding special samples, and applying cluster-robust standard errors. Because of page constraints, this conference paper focuses only on the two-way fixed-effects and mediation results. The spatial Durbin model, panel threshold model, and fsQCA remain part of the full research design and will be reported in future work. It should also be noted that DEI proxy and TRI proxy are standardized indices (z-scores) based on entropy weighting.

## EMPIRICAL RESULTS

**Data Limitation Note.** Due to data availability, the empirical analysis covers 10 GBA cities (excluding Hong Kong) from 2015 to 2024. Macau is included in descriptive statistics but excluded from regressions due to missing control variables.

### 4.1 Data Description

The study area includes 11 cities in Greater Bay Area: Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Foshan, Huizhou, Dongguan, Zhongshan, Jiangmen, Zhaoqing, Hong Kong and Macau.

**Due to data limitations, the analysis covers 10 cities (excluding Hong Kong) from 2015 to 2024, yielding 100 city-year observations.** Macau is included in descriptive statistics but excluded from regressions due to missing GDP per capita, resulting in 90 city-year observations for the baseline models.

**Table 1** presents descriptive statistics. TRI proxy has mean -0.012 (Std. Dev. = 0.983) and DEI proxy mean -0.000 (Std. Dev. = 0.962), indicating substantial variation.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (2015–2024)**

| Variable       | Obs | Mean   | Std. Dev. | Min    | Max     |
|----------------|-----|--------|-----------|--------|---------|
| TRI proxy      | 100 | -0.012 | 0.983     | -0.998 | 2.250   |
| DEI proxy      | 100 | -0.000 | 0.962     | -0.915 | 2.322   |
| Retail Sales   | 100 | 2564.8 | 3061.2    | 727.6  | 11055.8 |
| GDP per capita | 90  | 101437 | 40849     | 42709  | 206507  |
| Population     | 100 | 794.5  | 561.4     | 64.5   | 1897.8  |
| Openness       | 100 | -0.008 | 1.004     | -0.724 | 3.712   |

Note: GDP per capita missing for Macau.

### 4.2 Correlation Analysis

The correlation matrix shows that DEI is positively correlated with TRI, providing preliminary support for H1. DEI proxy correlates with TRI proxy at  $r = 0.742$  ( $p < 0.01$ ). Retail Sales also correlates strongly with TRI proxy ( $r = 0.786$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting mediation potential.

### 4.3 Baseline Regression Results

A two-way fixed effect panel model is constructed to estimate the overall impact of the digital economy on tourism resilience.

**Table 2** reports results. Model 1 includes DEI proxy with controls (GDP per capita, Population, Openness) and year/city fixed effects. The coefficient of DEI proxy is **1.021** ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that a one-unit increase in DEI is associated with a 1.021-unit increase in TRI. The results consistently show that DEI has a significant positive effect on TRI across all specifications, supporting H1.

**Table 2. Baseline Regression (Dependent Variable: TRI proxy)**

| Variable       | Model 1           | Model 2             |
|----------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| DEI proxy      | 1.021*** (0.000)  | 0.422* (0.050)      |
| Retail Sales   |                   | 0.00018*** (0.001)  |
| GDP per capita | 0.0000004 (0.567) | -0.00000001 (0.985) |

| Variable       | Model 1          | Model 2          |
|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Population     | -0.00031 (0.187) | -0.00024 (0.267) |
| Openness       | 0.115*** (0.000) | 0.118*** (0.000) |
| Year FE        | YES              | YES              |
| City FE        | YES              | YES              |
| N              | 90               | 90               |
| R <sup>2</sup> | 0.821            | 0.861            |

Note: p-values in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.10.\*

#### 4.4 Mediation Effect Analysis

The intermediary effect model is used to test the potential mechanism, with market expansion as an intermediary variable. The bootstrap method tests the significance of the mediation effect.

H2b: Market expansion mediates the relationship between digital economy and tourism resilience.

Following the three-step approach (500 bootstrap replications), Model 2 adds Retail Sales. The DEI proxy coefficient drops from 1.021 (Model 1) to 0.422 (Model 2), and significance declines from p<0.001 to p=0.050, while Retail Sales is significant (0.00018, p=0.001), indicating partial mediation.

**Table 3** shows the indirect effect = 0.437 (p=0.018, 95% CI [0.082,0.792]), direct effect = 0.422 (p=0.050), total effect = 0.859 (p<0.001). Mediation ratio ≈ 50.9%. The mediation analysis reveals that market expansion partially mediates the relationship between digital economy and tourism resilience, supporting H2b.

**Table 3. Mediation Effect Results (Bootstrap, 500 reps)**

| Effect                        | Estimate | p-value | 95% CI          |
|-------------------------------|----------|---------|-----------------|
| Indirect (DEI → Retail → TRI) | 0.437    | 0.018   | [0.082, 0.792]  |
| Direct (DEI → TRI)            | 0.422    | 0.050   | [-0.002, 0.846] |
| Total                         | 0.859    | 0.000   | [0.526, 1.192]  |

#### 4.5 Robustness Checks

Robustness is evaluated by replacing core variable measurement methods and excluding special samples.

Several checks are performed. (1) Lagged DEI proxy yields a coefficient of 0.896 (p<0.01). (2) Excluding Macau gives 1.045 (p<0.01). (3) Cluster-robust standard errors confirm significance.

**Table 4. Robustness Checks**

| Specification            | Coefficient of DEI proxy | R <sup>2</sup> | N  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|----|
| Baseline (Model 1)       | 1.021***                 | 0.821          | 90 |
| With lagged DEI          | 0.896***                 | 0.813          | 80 |
| Excluding Macau          | 1.045***                 | 0.829          | 81 |
| Cluster-robust SE (city) | 1.021**                  | —              | 90 |

#### 4.6 Summary of Findings

The results consistently show that DEI has a significant positive effect on TRI across all specifications, supporting H1.

The mediation analysis reveals that market expansion partially mediates the relationship, supporting H2b.

The positive effect of digital economy on tourism resilience remains robust after controlling for city and year fixed effects and other variables.

In summary, digital economy significantly enhances tourism resilience in GBA cities, and this effect is partially transmitted through market expansion (retail sales). Findings are robust to alternative specifications.

## DISCUSSION

Theoretically, this study attempts to contribute to the interdisciplinary dialogue between digital economic geography and tourism elasticity research.

This study systematically investigates the driving factors of digital economy resilience, spatial spillover effect and geopolitical appropriateness, and establishes an analytical model of digital economy and tourism resilience at the city level in Greater Bay Area, thus providing a theoretical basis.

**First**, by constructing a city-level measurement system for digital economy (FIIF framework) and tourism resilience (resistance-recovery-reconfiguration three-phase framework), this study responds to the call for fine-grained, cross-border urban measurement. As noted in the literature review, fine measurement at the city level, especially in cross-border areas, remains underdeveloped. Moreover, most existing studies adopt static indicators, whereas the rolling-window approach captures dynamic resilience evolution.

**Second**, the mediation results confirm that market expansion serves as an intermediary channel through which digital economy enhances tourism resilience. This aligns with previous studies (Tang Rui, 2023; Sheng Yanchao et al., 2022) but provides systematic quantitative verification of the mediation mechanism, addressing a gap identified in the literature.

**Third**, as part of the full research design, spatial spillover effects will be examined using the Spatial Durbin Model in future work. This will allow us to identify how digital economy benefits diffuse across neighboring cities and how institutional boundaries shape spillover processes. The current paper focuses on baseline and mediation results due to the 10-page conference format.

**Fourth**, this study incorporates geopolitical moderation variables into a unified analytical framework. The unique value of the GBA lies in its “One Country, Two Systems” institutional complexity. However, existing quantitative research has not fully incorporated variables capturing this institutional dimension (institutional distance, policy coordination, border clearance). Their moderating effects will be tested in future extensions.

In practice, this study provides a policy reference for the digital transformation and resilience management in the development of the Greater Bay Area, a world-class tourist center. Policymakers should prioritize cross-border institutional coordination, reducing institutional distance, increasing policy coordination, and streamlining border clearance, to fully unlock the potential of digital economy for tourism resilience.

Several limitations are acknowledged. Annual data may hide short-term resilience shifts, especially during crises (2020–2022). Geopolitical moderation uses city-pair variables. Finer indicators (firm- or individual-level) would deepen insights. Data constraints left some negative digitalization effects untested: digital divide, technology dependence, platform monopoly. These dark sides remain for future research, ideally with more granular institutional indicators.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

### 6.1 Core Conclusions

It is against this background that this study systematically investigates the driving factors of digital economy resilience, spatial spillover effect and geopolitical appropriateness, and establishes an analytical model of digital economy and tourism resilience at the city level in Greater Bay Area, thus providing a theoretical basis.

Based on panel data of 10 GBA cities from 2015 to 2024, using entropy method, two-way fixed effects models, and mediation analysis (spatial and configurational analyses are ongoing), this study yields two main conclusions:

**First**, digital economy development significantly enhances tourism resilience in GBA cities, supporting **H1**.

**Second**, market expansion (proxied by retail sales) partially mediates this relationship, supporting **H2b**.

**These findings remain robust after controlling for city and year fixed effects and other economic and social variables.**

### 6.2 Theoretical Contributions

Theoretically, this study attempts to contribute to the interdisciplinary dialogue between digital economic geography and tourism elasticity research.

**First**, it constructs the first city-level, cross-border measurement system for digital economy (FIIF) and tourism resilience (resistance-recovery-reconfiguration) in the GBA, addressing the gap that fine measurement at the city level, especially in cross-border areas, is still underdeveloped.

**Second**, beyond linear analysis, the full research design includes non-linear mechanisms (panel threshold), spatial spillovers (SDM), and configurational pathways (fsQCA), which will be reported in future extensions. The current paper focuses on establishing the baseline linear relationship and mediation mechanism.

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June 22 – June 26, 2026

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ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

**Third**, it incorporates institutional and geopolitical variables (institutional distance, policy coordination, border clearance) into a unified framework, demonstrating that “One Country, Two Systems” institutional heterogeneity actively moderates digital dividends.

### 6.3 Practical and Policy Implications

In practice, this study provides a policy reference for the digital transformation and resilience management in the development of the Greater Bay Area, a world-class tourist center, with academic contribution and practical value.

**Three** policy implications are highlighted:

**First**, cross-border digital infrastructure needs improvement. This includes 5G networks, smoother data flows, and digital payments. Such improvements help regional coordination.

**Second**, institutional coordination is crucial. More frequent liaison meetings, cross-border data pilots, and easier border clearance reduce institutional distance. These measures strengthen the resilience effects of digitalization.

**Third**, resilience strategies should differ by city type. Core cities (Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hong Kong) can focus on reconfiguration capacity: new business models and digital innovation. Peripheral cities should prioritize resistance and recovery capacities: diversification, policy support, and employment resilience.

### 6.4 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations remain. **A limitation worth noting** is that annual data might not capture short-term resilience fluctuations during crises like 2020–2022; higher-frequency data would improve accuracy.

**Similarly**, the geopolitical moderation variables are only available at the city-pair level. More granular indicators (firm-level, individual-level) would allow deeper analysis. And data constraints prevent testing of digitalization's potential negative effects: digital divide, technology dependence, platform monopoly. Those remain important topics for subsequent studies. Fourth, primary data (questionnaires, interviews) were collected but not fully reported due to the 10-page limit; future full-length articles will integrate these qualitative insights.

Based on the above observations, this study systematically explores these multi-dimensional characteristics by comprehensively using panel regression, spatial econometrics, intermediary effect analysis and fsQCA, in order to make contributions to relevant literature.

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Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

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**THE INTERSECTION OF ISLAM AND TOURISM: BALANCING FAITH AND HOSPITALITY**

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**ABSTRACT**

Halal tourism, which provides Sharia-compliant services to Muslim travelers, is a growing market segment, with global Muslim tourism expenditure projected to reach \$410.9 billion by 2032. This review synthesizes contemporary studies on how destinations, businesses, and communities balance religious values with global hospitality demands. Three objectives guide the review: analyzing the paradigm shift in Halal tourism from a compliance-based niche toward a digitally integrated ecosystem; examining how technological innovation and product diversification reshape pilgrimage economies; and evaluating models for balancing faith with hospitality requirements. A qualitative approach involved searching for relevant literature on Halal tourism from 2020 to 2025, including journal articles, contemporary works, and Halal trip blogs. Key findings highlight the emergence of Muslim female travelers (approximately 45 percent of the segment) and Generation Alpha as significant market opportunities, as well as the transformative role of digital platforms, blockchain for certification transparency, and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 in enhancing religious tourism. Persistent challenges include standardization gaps across Halal certification frameworks, operational difficulties, and stakeholder tensions between spiritual expectations and commercial profit motives. Future research directions include comprehensive Muslim-friendly hotel operations, global Halal tourism standards, longitudinal studies on Generation Alpha, and Islamic tourism at the intersection of sustainable development, digital transformation, cultural preservation, and interfaith dialogue. Ultimately, balancing faith and hospitality is not a fixed point but a continuous negotiation among religious authorities, tourism businesses, host communities, and travelers, requiring adaptive governance, culturally intelligent practices, and formal stakeholder dialogue mechanisms that integrate religious perspectives alongside commercial and consumer interests.

**Keywords:** *Halal tourism, Muslim travelers, pilgrimage management, Islamic hospitality, Stakeholder negotiation.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Halal tourism, tourism that provides Sharia-compliant services to Muslim travelers, has emerged as a significant market segment (Alamdar, Shah, Arie, Ahmad, & Sridadi, 2023; Battour, Salaheldeen, & Mady, 2021; Supardin & Wijaya, 2023). Muslim tourism expenditure is expected to reach \$410.9 billion by 2032, ("No Title," 2025) driven by rising disposable incomes, a youth demographic, and global demand for halal-friendly experiences (Benmehdi, 2025) and expanding halal-certified infrastructure in accommodation, food, and cultural tourism (Crescent Rating 2025). Halal tourism can be viewed from both religious and industrial perspectives. The religious perspective defines halal as food permissible for Muslims to consume in accordance with their faith, thereby ensuring consumer protection. The industrial perspective views halal as a business opportunity for producers, particularly in the food industry, where halal certification adds intangible value, making halal-labeled products more attractive to Muslim consumers (Randa, 2025). Ethics and responsible practices stand at the heart of halal tourism, reflecting Islamic principles of inclusivity, justice, and mutual respect (Uula, 2024). This focus on ethical tourism fosters a welcoming environment not only for Muslim travelers but also for diverse travelers. (Norazami, Anuar, & Zani, 2025). Implementation of halal tourism business requires professional ethics to realize superior and quality services, implying that halal industry actors must be professional (Solehudin, Ahyani, & Putra, 2024). The created welcoming atmosphere that respects cultural and religious diversity, makes halal tourism to meet the varied needs of its audience while staying true to Islamic values.

**STUDY PROBLEM**

The global tourism landscape continues to intersect with religious identity and practice, creating a complex dynamic for destinations, businesses, and communities where Islamic principles are central to social and cultural life. The period from 2020 to 2025 has been marked by profound transformation, including post-pandemic recovery, accelerated digitalization, and shifting traveler expectations. In this context, a critical challenge has emerged: How can destinations and enterprises within or serving the Muslim world effectively and authentically balance the imperatives of faith-based values with the demands of a competitive, global hospitality industry?

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

This balance is not merely a logistical or marketing concern but a multifaceted problem involving socio-cultural integrity, economic viability, and religious authenticity (Bajpai, Mahesh, & Chauhan, 2025; Vol & Ngurahrusmawan, 2025). On one hand, there is significant market growth and sophistication in segments such as Halal tourism and spiritual pilgrimage, driven by a rising Muslim middle class and digital connectivity (Azam, Muflih, & Haq, 2024; Battour et al., 2021). This development has triggered tensions, such as the commodification of sacredness and socio-cultural friction within host communities (Bajpai et al., 2025).

Existing literature from 2020 to 2025 reveals advancements in understanding specific components such as Halal certification (Norazami et al., 2025; Randa, 2025), pilgrimage management technology (Abdulaziz, Abalkhail, Mashraf, & Al, 2022), and Islamic hospitality models (Kılıç, 2024) and also highlights the persistent contractions and unresolved conflicts. The core problem resides in the negotiation among the halal tourism industry stakeholders through development of integrated governance that include religious scholars, community leaders, and tourism planners to create coherent policies and certification standards. Countries with sound halal standards and well established global networks are more adept to bring crowds of tourists and also push for sustainable development (Norazami et al., 2025). Therefore, understanding the intersection of Islam and tourism is key to developing sustainable, respectful, and resilient tourism pathways that honor religious identity and engage positively with the global economy. This study builds upon that gap by reviewing relevant literature that seeks to synthesize and critically examine scholarly work during this period to address the interconnected dimensions of this issue.

### **Objectives of the study**

- i) To analyze the paradigm shift in Halal tourism from a compliance-based niche market to a sophisticated, digitally integrated ecosystem.
- ii) To analyze how technological innovation and strategic product diversification are reshaping pilgrimage economies and balancing spiritual integrity with economic development.
- iii) To evaluate innovative models and frameworks proposed for balancing faith with hospitality requirements, including Islamic hospitality management models.

### **1. Methodology**

To achieve the outlined objectives, this literature review synthesized current research across the following thematic areas: the evolving Halal tourism ecosystem, pilgrimage management, persistent socio-cultural tensions, community-based tourism, and innovative approaches to balancing faith with hospitality demands. The study retrieved and critically analyzed existing qualitative and relevant literature from 2020 to 2025 obtained from journal articles, contemporary works as well as reports on Islamic blogs.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **4.1 The Maturing Halal Tourism Ecosystem: From Concept to Market Sophistication**

#### **4.1.1 Evolution beyond basic compliance**

Islamic tourism has emerged as a significant and rapidly growing market segment within the global tourism landscape. It encompasses three distinct yet interconnected concepts. First, Halal tourism refers to tourism products that comply with Islamic law (Shariah) across all aspects, including food, accommodation, transportation, and activities, ensuring complete adherence to religious requirements.

Second, Shariah-compliant tourism emphasizes integrating Islamic ethical principles into tourism operations, focusing on lawful (halal) practices while avoiding prohibited (haram) activities such as alcohol, gambling, and inappropriate entertainment. Third, Muslim-friendly travel encompasses tourism services that accommodate Muslim travelers' religious needs without requiring full Shariah compliance, such as halal food options, prayer facilities, and modesty dress codes, while serving a diverse clientele (Khan, Falahat, Ullah, Sikandar, & Van, 2025). Halal travel services may also satisfy the needs of non-Muslim travelers, as they are not only for Muslims (Battour et al., 2021; Island, 2025). The increased awareness of halal products has led to an increase in Muslim tourist arrivals, which has generated higher incomes; thus, various countries have started developing Muslim-friendly tourist destinations that provide tourist accommodations, especially for Muslim visitors (Supardin & Wijaya, 2023). The growth in this market segment calls for halal tourism service providers to act as stakeholders capable of attending to the various needs of the diverse categories of Muslim tourists (El-gohary & El-gohary, 2024).

Earlier studies (pre-2020) primarily focused on defining Halal tourism components, while current research (2020-2025) examines sophisticated market dynamics. Battour et al. (2021) identified five key dimensions of Halal tourism competitiveness: Islamic ethics, destination image, service quality, perceived value, and customer satisfaction. Their longitudinal study across Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, and the UAE revealed that destinations excelling in Islamic ethical infrastructure, such as prayer facilities, Halal food assurance systems, and modest recreational options, demonstrated stronger resilience during the COVID-19 crisis and faster recovery.

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ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

EL-Gohary's (2024) study on the future expected directions in halal tourism noted that incorporating technology into the provision of halal services during travel facilitates Muslim travelers' experiences and elevates awareness and appreciation of the halal concept in tourism. It also noted that technological applications can be used to suggest halal food outlets available to tourists. Such facilities could also be included in hotels for non-vegetarian guests who would wish for halal food, whether for health, moral, or personal reasons. This represents a shift from viewing halal compliance as a constraint to recognizing it as a value-added differentiator in competitive tourism markets. Empirical studies by Azizurrohman et al. (2024) in non-Muslim majority countries like Singapore, Thailand, and the United Kingdom found that halal tourism can enhance their GDP by actively promoting and supporting halal tourism through targeted policies and infrastructure that cater to Muslim travelers. Island (2025), on Muslim-friendly tourism in non-Muslim-majority destinations, found that Bali offers supportive infrastructure, several Muslim-friendly facilities, including prayer spaces, hotels, halal food options, and business interest.

**Table 1. The Halal Tourism market segment**

| Market Segment                   | Components                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. By accommodation              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Halal certified hotels</li> <li>▪ Bed and breakfast with Muslim-friendly amenities.</li> <li>▪ Vacation rentals with prayer facilities</li> </ul>                                                                                                                               |
| 2. By food and beverage          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Halal dining options at restaurants and cafes</li> <li>▪ Supermarkets and specialty stores with a wide selection of halal food products.</li> <li>▪ Cooking classes and culinary tours that cater to Muslim-dietary needs.</li> </ul>                                           |
| 3. By activities and Attractions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tours and excursions to historically significant Islamic sites.</li> <li>▪ Visits to museums and cultural centres that showcase Muslim Heritage.</li> <li>▪ Opportunities for religious observances for example prayer facilities and designated spaces for worship.</li> </ul> |
| 4. By transportation             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Airport transfers and ground transportation options with Muslim-friendly services.</li> <li>▪ Halal logistics and supply chain management for businesses serving Muslim travelers.</li> <li>▪ Designated prayer areas or quiet zones on public transportation.</li> </ul>       |
| 5. By services and facilities    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Translation and interpretation services in Islamic languages.</li> <li>▪ Muslim-friendly banking and financial services</li> <li>▪ Health and wellness facilities that cater to Muslim dietary lifestyle preferences.</li> </ul>                                                |

**Source:** Adopted from- <https://www.credenceresearch.com/report/halal-tourism-market> (accessed on February 10, 2026).

#### 4.1.2 The Rise of Muslim-Female Travelers

A substantial area of interest in recent literature focuses on Muslim women as a distinct and influential market segment. Muslim female travelers represent an emerging, distinct niche in the travel industry, one of the fastest-growing tourism segments, driven by young, independent, and socially connected women, whose purchasing decisions are deeply influenced by both religious identity and gender (Crescent Ratings, 2022). They are reshaping the industry by demanding halal-friendly, safe, and modest accommodation, while influencing travel decisions for families and couples (<https://www.asiamediacentre.org.nz>). This study highlights that these travelers are no longer merely a subordinate group but a significant segment that requires specialized, inclusive services from industry stakeholders. Therefore, exploring Muslim women's tourist expectations incorporates a rich embroidery of cultural, religious, and

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June 22 – June 26, 2026

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ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

gender dynamics offering valuable understanding into the complexities of contemporary tourism practices (Asbollah, Zakariya, & Mansor, 2024). The growth of Muslim female travelers challenges the view that gendered interpretations of religious texts promote a male-controlled orientation in a Muslim community that suppresses women's leisure (C. M. Hall, Seyfi, & Rasoolimanesh, n.d.).

Asbollah et al. (2024) studied the Muslim women's tourist gaze and emphasized the importance for tourism stakeholders to prioritize the safety of female Muslim travelers by addressing issues like harassment and unwanted attention through policies and cultural sensitivity training. Tourism destinations are more likely to attract and retain Muslim female travelers if they create safe and inclusive environments that meet their religious interests and needs. A multi-country survey of Muslim female travelers by Crescent Ratings (2022) identified the major travel motivations as spiritual fulfillment, family bonding, and personal development. The study indicated that safety, privacy, and availability of female-only spaces were major concerns that significantly influenced destination choice.

## **4.2 Technological innovation and strategic product diversification in reshaping pilgrimage economies and balancing spiritual integrity with economic development.**

### **4.2.1 Digital Transformation and Platform Ecosystems**

The period 2020-2025 saw accelerated digital transformation in Islamic tourism. Halal Travel Network identified a shift from simple booking services to integrated lifestyle platforms that offer prayer time notifications, Qibla direction finders, Halal restaurant certification verification, and community features (<https://halaltravel.network/>).

The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed digital innovation, as documented in Saudi Arabia's Management of the Hajj Season through Artificial Intelligence and Sustainability (Abdulaziz et al., 2022). The successful implementation of the program Arc Gis Pro 2.9.2 indicated how the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has become a leader in crowd management and a reference and role model in managing crowds through the expanded use of artificial intelligence during the COVID-19 pandemic. The program took all the necessary precautions to protect the pilgrims, and no injuries were reported.

### **4.2.2 Management of Sacredness and Pilgrimage Extension Strategies**

A study by Hammad and Felebemban (2025) on Smart Mobile features for Hajj revealed significant improvements in crowd management technology, including monitoring systems such as a lost-pilgrim tracker, biometric identification, destination management location, virtual guides to holy sites, an emergency guide interface showing AR directions to nearby assistance, and real-time translation services. These technological interventions have reduced and managed challenges such as logistical, navigational, communication, and safety issues. The use of "Nusuk" applications supports permits, bookings, and basic guidance, which is likely to translate into extended stays by pilgrims from 10 to 16 days when bundled with cultural tourism sites like Diriyah and the Red Sea coast. This strategy aligns with the KSA's Vision 2030 goals to increase tourism's GDP contribution while deepening visitors' cultural engagement.

Similar strategies are documented in other Muslim-majority destinations. Turkey's tourism strategies through building spiritual and cultural experiences (Bozkurt, Nurdan, & Tekeoğlu, 2024) connects major mosques and historical Islamic sites with conventional tourism infrastructure. Urfa and Trabzon are among Turkey's important and prominent religious centers. Urfa, known as the 'City of Prophets' by the locals, is believed to be the birthplace of Prophet Abraham, making it a significant pilgrimage site for both Muslims and people of other faiths. The sacred sites in Urfa hold great importance not only for religious tourism but also for the preservation of cultural heritage. These initiatives represent a conscious effort to balance reverence for sacred sites with economic development goals.

Indonesia has experienced a trend of increasing numbers of Umrah pilgrims each year. Among the factors contributing to this are the influence of social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, which have popularized Umrah and served as a source of inspiration for many (Madyan, 2025). The phenomenon of Umrah-related religious tourism in Indonesia is now signaling a paradigm shift, in which community leaders tend to emphasize the tourism aspects rather than spirituality.

The "Umrah Plus" trend reflects the transformation of the Islamic pilgrimage from a purely religious obligation into a blend of worship and tourism. Fueled by better infrastructure, digital marketing, and a growing desire for spiritual meaning combined with leisure, lifestyle, and shopping, this shift blurs the line between sacred journey and commercial product. It has given rise to distinct, branded experiences, including luxury options such as upscale hotels and guided tours. While this modern approach challenges the traditional emphasis on simplicity, it also makes Umrah more accessible to a broader range of Muslims as a contemporary spiritual practice (Madyan, 2025).

Due to the massive number of pilgrims during the Hajj pilgrimage, one of the major challenges in its effective execution is ensuring alignment with environmental sustainability principles (Fairuz, 2024). While technological solutions are improving, behavioral change among pilgrims remains a significant challenge. Sustainability challenges in sacred tourism are being addressed through emerging research. For instance, a study by Ibn & Bogor (2024) observed that Khalifah principles promote key values essential for sustainability, including the responsible use of

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ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

natural resources, the prevention of environmental harm, and the pursuit of ecological justice. Islamic environmental ethics emphasize a commitment to preserving and protecting the earth as a sacred trust (Ibn & Bogor, 2024; Sule & Musa, 2025; Wani & Azhar, 2024). The Quran (Surah al-Baqarah 2:30 and Surah al-An'am 6:165) stresses the role of humans as khalifah (stewards) entrusted with the responsibility of preserving the balance of nature (Fairuz, 2024). With the integration of traditional Islamic teachings on environmental sustainability and modern efforts, the Hajj pilgrimage holds potential as a robust model for environmental stewardship among Muslims, serving as inspiration for sustainable approaches on a global scale.

## **4.2 Islamic Hospitality Models**

### **4.2.1 The RIDA Framework**

The development of the RIDA (Responsible, Immersive, Digital, and Assured) framework by Crescent Rating was an attempt to provide a strategic roadmap for destinations and businesses to cater to the growing Muslim travel market (Jcu, 2025), (<https://www.halaltimes.com/>).

RIDA integrates ethical, cultural, and technological elements to meet the unique needs of Muslim travelers while appealing to a broader audience. The Arabic term "Rida," meaning "contentment" or "satisfaction," reflects the framework's goal of delivering fulfilling and faith-aligned travel experiences (<https://www.halaltimes.com/>).

The four key dimensions of RIDA

- **Responsible Tourism:** Emphasizes sustainable practices that respect the environment, local communities, and Islamic values of stewardship and social justice within the tourism sector.
- **Immersive Experiences:** Focuses on creating authentic cultural connections, such as visits to historical mosques or local community interactions, to enrich travel.
- **Digital Innovation:** Leverages technology, like AI-driven concierge services and halal travel apps, to streamline and personalize the travel experience. This dimension recognizes that the integration of digital innovations in tourism services can significantly elevate the accessibility, convenience, and personalization of travel, aligning perfectly with the contemporary needs of travelers and the specific requirements of the Muslim travel market.
- **Assured Services:** Ensures trust through consistent halal standards, clear certifications, and faith-compliant amenities like prayer spaces and halal dining. This dimension highlights a crucial aspect of service quality that is reliability which includes factoring in Muslim travelers' faith-based service (Jcu, 2025).

### **4.2.2 Muslim-Friendly Hotel (MFH) concept as a business opportunity**

The Muslim-friendly hotel (MFH) exemplifies a customer-oriented marketing approach. During the establishment phase, hotels are designed for this market segment, or existing hotels are converted to this concept, targeting customers with religious sensitivities (Kılıç, 2024). The key drivers of the rise of MFHs are the growth in Islamic financial resources and the increasing number of Muslim travelers. Muslim-friendly hotel (MFH) practices that blend conventional hospitality with services tailored to Muslim guests have been introduced in many hotels. Typical offerings include halal-certified food, prayer facilities, qibla direction indicators, alcohol-free dining areas, family-oriented services, and digital tools that help travelers locate halal amenities, which have also become part of service delivery (Branch et al., 2025).

To analyze the complex relationships in Islamic tourism, this study draws on stakeholder management theory (Freeman, 1984). This framework is particularly suited to the 'Umrah Plus' phenomenon and similar Islamic hospitality contexts, where multiple actors with sometimes conflicting interests converge. Key stakeholders include pilgrims (seeking spiritual authenticity), tour operators (focused on commercial viability), hoteliers (providing luxury or budget accommodations), religious authorities (upholding doctrinal simplicity), and host communities (managing cultural and economic impacts). Stakeholder theory enables a systematic examination of how these groups negotiate competing demands such as spiritual fulfillment versus leisure and how power imbalances or collaborative strategies shape the tourism product.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Paradigm Shift in Halal Tourism: From Compliance to Digital Ecosystem**

Addressing the first objective, the findings reveal a notable paradigm shift in Halal tourism from a compliance-based niche market toward a sophisticated, digitally integrated ecosystem. A key indicator of this shift is the surge in Muslim-female travelers, who now account for approximately 45 percent of this segment. Typically young, educated, and equipped with moderate to high purchasing power, this demographic represents a growing and perceptive market. This trend creates strategic opportunities for Halal entrepreneurs to develop new products and services tailored to the unique needs of Muslim women travelers, which in turn can further encourage female participation in travel. Such expansion is theologically grounded; the Qur'an (Surah Al-An'am, 6:11; Al-Naml, 27:69) encourages both men and women to

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June 22 – June 26, 2026

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ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

travel for knowledge and understanding of the world, complementing the obligatory pilgrimage to Makkah for Hajj or Umrah. Consequently, contemporary notions of Islamic travel have expanded to embrace modern concepts of leisure (M. Hall, Prayag, & Azzam, 2024)

Further evidence of this paradigm shift lies in the emergence of Generation Alpha as a significant market segment. This digitally native cohort presents opportunities for Halal entrepreneurs to offer tailored edutainment and activities across various travel touchpoints. In response, entrepreneurs are developing new digital platforms that provide personalized Halal travel packages, booking services, and analytics, catering specifically to this technology-savvy generation (Battour et al., 2021). Overall, future travelers, especially younger ones, will increasingly favor destinations and companies that offer quality services while being environmentally sustainable and culturally respectful (Battour et al., 2021). Muslim travelers are now embracing digital tools that offer seamless access to faith-aligned services and personalized experiences. In alignment with this trend, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 is implementing new services and technological advancements in the holy pilgrimage to enhance religious tourism (Bashir, 2024).

#### **Technological Innovation and Product Diversification in Pilgrimage Economies**

With respect to the second objective, the results demonstrate how technological innovation and strategic product diversification are reshaping pilgrimage economies while balancing spiritual integrity with economic development. The global Muslim travel market is projected to grow substantially; however, current hospitality practices remain narrowly focused on Halal food certification, leaving other Islamic aspects of hotel operations largely unexplored (Amira et al., 2022). While the increasing number of international visitors presents a bright prospect for the industry, these opportunities also bring significant challenges. In response, Branch et al. (2025) note that Muslim-friendly hotel (MFH) practices that blend conventional hospitality with services tailored to Muslim guests have been introduced in many hotels. Other studies encourage facilities to adopt Muslim-friendly tourism and hospitality through Shariah compliance and Halal certification (Tourism & Management, 2024).

The findings illustrate a classic stakeholder management challenge of balancing the spiritual expectations of pilgrims (primary stakeholders) with the profit motives of hospitality firms (secondary stakeholders). In the 'Umrah Plus' context, luxury hotels have successfully aligned their interests with pilgrims' desires for comfort; however, this alignment often disregards religious stakeholders who advocate for stricter adherence to traditional practices.

#### **Challenges in Balancing Faith with Hospitality Requirements**

Addressing the third objective, several challenges have hindered the implementation of Muslim-friendly hospitality and innovative balancing models. Standardization remains a major barrier, as Halal certification frameworks, branding, and terminology vary significantly across regions, leading to confusion among industry practitioners and travelers. Operational difficulties persist, including limited availability of Halal-certified supply chains, inadequate staff training, and slow adoption of digital innovation. Halal certification is crucial for assuring and convincing tourists that the food they choose is permissible. Furthermore, awareness gaps among policymakers, operators, and travelers have weakened the credibility and effectiveness of implementation (Branch et al., 2025). These findings underscore the need for integrated frameworks that harmonize faith requirements with hospitality operations, as proposed in emerging Islamic hospitality management models.

### **CONCLUSION**

The balance between faith and hospitality emerges not as a fixed point but as a continuous process of negotiation involving multiple stakeholders: religious authorities, tourism businesses, host communities, and tourists themselves. Future research should extend beyond Halal food certification to investigate comprehensive Muslim-friendly hotel operations, personalized Halal travel technologies, blockchain for certification transparency, and global standardization of Halal tourism. Additionally, longitudinal studies on Generation Alpha's edutainment preferences and travel-habit formation are needed. Promising directions also include examining Islamic tourism at the intersection of sustainable development, digital transformation, cultural preservation, and interfaith dialogue. Ultimately, the field must explore how destinations can develop economically viable, spiritually enriching, and socially responsible tourism models grounded in Islamic principles, supported by formal stakeholder dialogue mechanisms that genuinely integrate religious perspectives alongside commercial and consumer interests.

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- Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference. June 22 – June 26, 2026  
Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau  
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# WHAT GEN Z REALLY WANTS IN SHORT BREAK VACATIONS: A MARKETING PERSPECTIVE ON PERCEIVED VALUE, TPB, AND CONSUMPTION MOTIVATION

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## ABSTRACT

Recent social media trends in China show that tourists, especially Gen Z, are shifting from mass urban attractions to unique micro-vacation destinations, motivated by distinctive scenery or local performances. (Hong & Liang, 2026) Similarly, the “No.1 central document” for 2026, for the first time, advocates the development of “small yet beautiful” cultural tourism formats, emphasizing refined and differentiated rural destinations (Hao, 2026). However, existing research suffers from three gaps. No study has integrated perceived value with TPB in the micro-vacation context (Ma et al., 2024). A micro-vacation motivation scale exists but lacks a perceived value perspective (Shen & Hu, 2024). Moreover, TPB-based rural tourism research remains pre-pandemic and has not extended to micro-vacations (Azhar et al., 2023). To address these gaps, this study aims to identify which dimensions of perceived value (functional, emotional, social) drive Gen Z’s attitude and behavioral intention and test a mediation model where attitude mediates the effects of perceived value on intention. This study proposes a quantitative survey targeting Gen Z respondents aged 18–28 with prior micro-vacation experience or intention (target N = 300–400). Validated scales measuring perceived value, TPB constructs, and behavioral intentions will be adapted. Structural equation modeling (SEM) will be employed to test the hypothesized paths and mediation effects. We expect that emotional value will most strongly shape attitudes toward “small yet beautiful” micro-vacations, followed by social value, and that attitude will be the dominant TPB predictor of behavioral intention. The significant indirect effects of both emotional and social value via attitude will confirm that Gen Z’s micro-vacation choices are driven by “heart-driven value” (i.e. emotional and social returns) rather than utilitarian concerns. This study offers a theoretical foundation for marketing “small yet beautiful” destinations to Gen Z. Destination managers should therefore prioritize emotionally restorative experiences and authentic local distinctiveness over price competition, and amplify social value by designing shareable moments that encourage user-generated content.

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# FROM SEASONAL FLOWER VIEWING TO SUSTAINABLE COUNTY DEVELOPMENT: A SYMBIOTIC MODEL OF FLORAL BRANDING AND LOCAL INDUSTRY INTEGRATION

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines how flower-viewing tourism can move beyond seasonal sightseeing and become a sustainable driver of county-level economic development. In China, flower-viewing tourism has increasingly contributed to rural tourism, destination branding, and local consumption (Lu et al., 2022). Cases such as Wuyuan's canola flower tourism, Luoyang's peony landscapes, and Qianxi's azalea-based tourism show how floral resources can support regional visibility and county economic growth (Hu & He, 2020; Li, Fu, & Ding, 2012; China Tourism News, 2026). However, many destinations face what this study defines as the "flower-soil disconnect." In this framework, "flower" refers to regional branding, tourism appeal, floral intellectual property, and symbolic destination image, while "soil" refers to local resources, industrial foundations, rural communities, and supporting systems. When branding is separated from industrial support, floral tourism may remain superficial and seasonal. Similarly, when local industries lack brand value, counties fail to capture the broader economic benefits of tourism (Cai & Lin, 2017).

Drawing on symbiosis theory, this study proposes the "Flower-Soil Mutual Construction" model to explain how floral branding and local industries can form a mutually beneficial relationship. Symbiosis theory has been applied in tourism research to understand cooperation, co-development, and resource exchange among destinations, industries, and communities (Wu & Gu, 2004; Lu et al., 2021). In this model, the "flower" attracts tourists, capital, talent, and market attention, while the "soil" provides authentic local experiences, cultural resources, product innovation, industrial continuity, and community participation. Through this interaction, flower-viewing tourism can develop from short-term visitor consumption into a more resilient county economic system.

Using a qualitative multiple-case study approach, this research analyzes different stages of flower-viewing economy development. The study identifies an evolutionary pathway from "pure soil," which depends mainly on single-season sightseeing, to "soil + flower," where destinations begin to build brands, and finally to "soil + flower + industry," where branding and industrial chains are deeply integrated. Advanced cases such as Yili Lavender Manor and Suizhou Ginkgo Valley illustrate how floral resources can be connected with tourism, processing industries, cultural products, local participation, and rural revitalization strategies.

The findings suggest that the model operates through two linked mechanisms. In the short term, "flower-viewing +" experiences generate visitor-driven revenue growth. In the long term, brand building and industrial chain extension transform seasonal floral resources into durable economic assets. Together, these mechanisms reduce seasonality risks, strengthen county economic resilience, increase rural income, and support rural revitalization. This study contributes to tourism and rural development research by integrating destination branding and industrial development within a symbiotic framework (Almeida & Almeida, 2023; Zhao & Zhang, 2024).

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## EXAMINING RISK PERCEPTION ON MAINLAND CHINESE TOURISTS' WELLNESS TOURISM VISIT INTENTION IN MACAU

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### ABSTRACT

Health and wellness tourism has emerged as one of the most dynamic and fast-growing segments in the global tourism industry, driven by the worldwide shift in public health consciousness and the surging demand for holistic well-being experiences. Underpinned by risk perception theory, this study aims to examine the impacts of three proposed perceived risk factors on obstructing Chinese mainland tourists' willingness to travel to Macau for health and wellness purposes, and to examine the mediating roles of tourist dissatisfaction and negative WOM in these associations. This study contributes to the extant tourism literature by extending risk theory to the specific context of Macau's health and wellness tourism, clarifying how different risk factors could affect tourists' attitudes and destination choices.

**Keywords:** Wellness Tourism, Risk Perception, Visit Intention, Macau, Dissatisfaction, Negative WOM

### INTRODUCTION

The market for wellness tourism in China was expected to generate revenues of USD 25.6 billion in 2022 and grow to USD 74.6 billion by 2030 with a compound annual growth rate of 14.3 percent (Grand View Research, 2024), a trend that is supported by the State Council's Healthy China 2030 strategy, which explicitly links preventive health with travel (Zhong et al., 2023). This vast tourist group presents unprecedented development opportunities for tourism destinations with high-quality health and wellness resources. As a world-renowned tourism destination, the Macau Special Administrative Region has long been dominated by its gaming industry, which contributes the majority of its local GDP (Liu et al., 2024). However, in recent years, Macau has been actively advancing economic diversification to reduce its over-reliance on the gaming industry, as such, the health and wellness tourism has been identified as a strategic emerging industry with huge growth potential (Macao SAR Government, 2023; Pai et al., 2023). Benefiting from well-established traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) treatment capabilities, a large number of high-end private medical institutions and professional wellness centers have been established (Cheng et al., 2024; Zhong et al., 2023). Therefore, Macau has unique competitive advantages in developing health and wellness tourism targeting mainland Chinese tourists (Liu et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024).

Grounded in risk theory, this study focuses on three core risk dimensions (i.e., financial risk, performance risk, and time risk) that are likely to be relevant to prevent people from engaging in health and wellness tourism (Kaplan & Jacoby, 1972; Mitchell, 1992). These three risk factors have been widely validated as critical antecedents shaping tourists' service evaluation, emotional response, and subsequent behavioral outcomes in tourism consumption research (Boguszewicz-Kreft et al., 2022; Park & Tussyadiah, 2017; Setiawan et al., 2026). Moreover, empirical studies in the context of medical tourism confirm that high levels of these three risk dimensions could lead to negative service evaluations and weakened tourists' behavioural intentions, providing robust empirical evidence for including these dimensions in the current model (Boguszewicz-Kreft et al., 2022; Chaulagain et al., 2023).

This study addresses the following research questions: **(1)** What are the effects of financial risk, performance risk, and time risk on Chinese mainland tourists' dissatisfaction, negative word-of-mouth and travel intentions to visit Macau for health and wellness tourism? **(2)** Does tourists' dissatisfaction and negative word-of-mouth negatively mediate the proposed three types of risk and Chinese mainland tourists' intention to travel to Macau for health and wellness?

### METHODS

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.  
June 22 – June 26, 2026  
Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau  
ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

All the measurement items were adopted from previous research. This study used a non-probability sampling strategy to examine proposed relationships in the conceptual framework. Prior to the full-scale data collection, 46 pilot data were collected to ensure the validity of the construct. The full-scale data collection spanned January to March 2026, with a total of 297 valid samples collected from various Chinese social media platforms (e.g., WeChat). This study used Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4 to carry out the analysis.

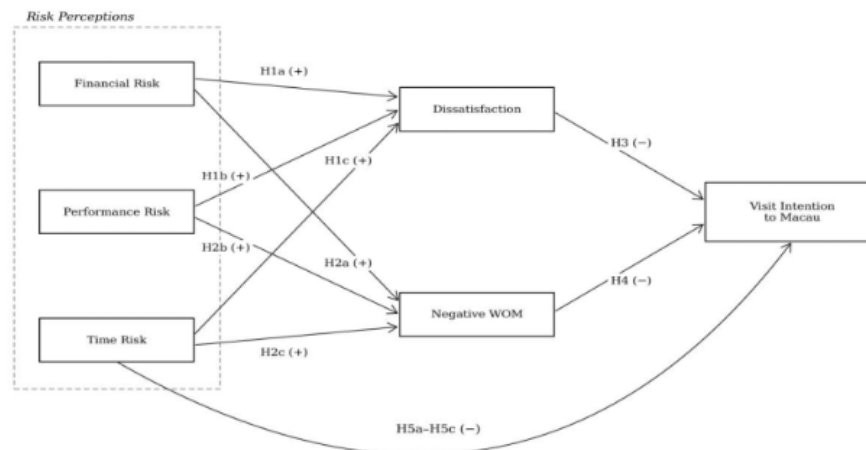
## RESULTS

The PLS-SEM analysis revealed that all three perceived risk factors (i.e., financial risk, performance risk, and time risk) significantly increased tourists' dissatisfaction (H1a, H2a, H3a supported) and negative word-of-mouth (H1b, H2b, H3b supported). Furthermore, tourists' dissatisfaction was found to significantly reduce visit intention to Macau (H4 supported), whereas the effect of negative WOM on visit intention was not statistically significant (H5 not supported). Regarding the direct effects of three proposed risk perceptions on visit intention, financial risk and performance risk significantly reduced tourists' visit intention (H1c and H2c supported), while time risk did not exert any significant effect on visit intention (H3c not supported). Overall, nine out of the eleven proposed hypotheses were supported.

## CONCLUSION

This provides both theoretical and practical implications to the tourism field. Theoretically, this study has validated the application of risk perception (Mitchell, 1992) in the context of wellness tourism. Moreover, this study has successfully integrated dissatisfaction and negative WOM along with the proposed risk perception factors, validating these variables could play mediating role among risk perception and tourists' visit intention to Macau. Practically speaking, this study provides Macau wellness tourism operators insights to prioritize mitigating financial and performance risks to reduce tourists' dissatisfaction and negative WOM, strengthening their visit intention. Although time-related concerns generate dissatisfaction and negative WOM, they do not directly deter tourists' visit intention; thus, managing cost and service quality aspects could offer the most effective pathway to attract mainland Chinese tourists to Macau for wellness and health related tourism activities.

**Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework**



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## **HOTEL INTELLIGENT SERVICES WITH ANTHROPOMORPHIC ROBOTS: EXPLORING KEY DETERMINANTS OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The hospitality industry is undergoing a profound transformation driven by the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) robots, as technological advancements increasingly reshape service production, delivery, and customer experiences. Service robots continue to permeate and automate the hospitality sector. In doing so, these technological innovations pose to radically change current service production and delivery practices and, consequently, service management and marketing strategies (Tuomi et al., 2020). By 2030, robots are predicted to constitute about twenty-five percent of the hospitality industry's workforce (Bowen & Morosan, 2018). This research aims to address a core practical contradiction in the process of intelligent service in the hotel industry, that is, how anthropomorphic robots can effectively meet customers' essential demands for humanized experiences. Most of the existing research focuses on the anthropomorphic technology of robots themselves, while relatively neglecting the structural limitations that prevent them from engaging in genuine emotional interaction in the hospitality service industry. This has led to an inconsistency between the application goals of the technology and the core of the service industry. For this reason, this paper proposes and explores the influence of the gender of anthropomorphic robots, service accuracy, and personalized services on customer satisfaction. To achieve the core research objective of this study, a questionnaire survey will be conducted through the Credamo platform, with a plan to collect 400 valid questionnaires. During the data processing stage, regression analysis and analysis of variance (ANOVA) will be employed to conduct basic statistical tests and relationship explorations on the survey data. Meanwhile, with the help of SmartPLS software, a structural equation model was constructed to fit, estimate and empirically test the complex causal relationship model containing potential variables and observed variables, in order to verify the theoretical hypotheses proposed in the research. The potential contributions of this research are mainly reflected at the theoretical and practical levels: Theoretically, focusing on the core contradiction between technological personification and service humanization in hotel intelligent services, incorporating robot gender, service accuracy, and personalized services into the same analytical framework enriches the empirical research system of the relationship between service robots and customer satisfaction, and provides a new perspective for understanding the adaptation mechanism of technological variables and emotional needs in complex service scenarios. In practice, the research conclusions can help hotel enterprises optimize the configuration strategy of service robots, assist in resolving the practical predicament of the disconnection between technological application and core service demands, and promote the sustainable development of intelligent transformation in the hospitality industry.

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**PERCEIVED UGLY-CUTE CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURAL AND CREATIVE IP: SCALE  
DEVELOPMENT AND EVIDENCE FROM DESTINATION CO-BRANDING**

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**ABSTRACT**

As consumer aesthetics become increasingly diverse, ugly-cute cultural and creative intellectual property (IP) has gained growing visibility in commercial and tourism markets. Yet tourism aesthetics research remains largely shaped by a positivity bias toward conventional beauty, leaving limited understanding of composite aesthetic experiences that combine visual awkwardness, cuteness, incongruity, and affective appeal. Existing studies have often treated ugly-cute aesthetics as a contextual feature or experimental stimulus rather than as a measurable tourist perception. Addressing this gap, this study develops and empirically validates the concept of perceived ugly-cute characteristics (PUC) in cultural and creative IP from a tourist perspective. Following a multi-stage scale development procedure, the study first defines the construct domain through literature review and semi-structured interviews with 14 highly involved consumers, then refines and validates the measurement model through two survey studies. The resulting PUC scale is conceptualized as a first-order reflective, second-order formative Type II construct comprising two dimensions: temperamental clumsiness, which captures the naive, harmless, awkward, and protection-evoking qualities of ugly-cute IP characters; and contrastive integration, which captures the perceived reconciliation of incongruent, contradictory, or unconventional visual cues into an aesthetically acceptable and appealing whole. Exploratory factor analysis based on 298 valid responses produced a 10-item, two-dimensional scale with satisfactory reliability. A subsequent survey of 370 respondents, analyzed using PLS-SEM and confirmatory composite analysis, further supported the reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and formative higher-order structure of the scale. To examine nomological validity, the study situates PUC in a destination co-branding context and draws on the Elaboration Likelihood Model as the main framework, complemented by benign violation theory, schema incongruity theory, and affect transfer theory. The results show that PUC positively influences both brand love and destination image. Perceived humor and cognitive elaboration partially mediate the relationship between PUC and brand love, representing the peripheral and central routes through which ugly-cute aesthetics generate affective attachment. Brand love, in turn, positively affects destination image and mediates the effect of PUC on destination image. The findings further confirm two serial mediation paths, whereby PUC enhances destination image through perceived humor and brand love, and through cognitive elaboration and brand love. IP familiarity functions as a boundary condition, but its moderating effects differ across the two routes: higher familiarity weakens the positive effect of PUC on perceived humor, while it does not significantly moderate the effect of PUC on cognitive elaboration. These findings suggest that ugly-cute IP appeals are not driven solely by novelty or surface-level amusement; they can also sustain deeper cognitive processing in destination co-branding encounters. The study contributes to tourism aesthetics by offering a reliable measurement tool for ugly-cute perceptions, extending the theory of boundary aesthetic experiences, and demonstrating how unconventional IP aesthetics can create brand and destination value. Practically, it provides guidance for cultural IP design, destination co-branding, and familiarity-based marketing strategies.

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# HOW TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY STUDENTS NAVIGATE AI: COGNITIVE CONSTRUCTION, CAREER IMAGINATION, AND COPING STRATEGIES

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) is profoundly reshaping the workforce ecosystem of tourism and hospitality, attracting significant attention to these issues from both academia and industry. However, research on the connection between AI and employment is uneven in several areas: the study subjects are mainly current employees, the view of Generation Z as future workers is seriously lacking (Bakir et al., 2025; Fu et al., 2024); from a methodological standpoint, the quantitative paradigm dominates and is well suited to testing relationships among variables, but it is difficult to reveal how individuals are gradually forming their perception of AI, how they make career choices under conflicting emotions, and the potential tension between their stated positions and actual behavior; at the level of analysis, most research attributes the impact of AI to individual psychological responses and fails to examine how structural shocks are understood and managed by individuals (Nayak et al., 2025). Together, these gaps point to a core blind spot: for students who are still in the critical window of career cognition formation, how is their AI cognition constructed, how are their career choices shaped, and how are their coping strategies formed? This paper will study how the development of artificial intelligence affects university students in tourism-related fields' perception and emotions towards AI (RQ1), how it influences their career selection and planning (RQ2), and what coping strategies these students have developed (RQ3).

Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis will be employed to conduct the research under the interpretivist paradigm. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 18 current undergraduate students of tourism management or hotel management (Years 1-4; 40-90 minutes per person). Dual systems of semantic and latent coding were used in the coding, and a combined inductive-deductive approach, primarily inductive and supplemented by deductive analysis, was employed for analysis. After the 16th interview, the production of new codes decreased significantly, indicating that data saturation had been reached. Three other members of the research team were also current tourism management students, and together they conducted a group researcher introspection based on the same interview guide. As both researchers and members of the group under study, they provided reflexive triangulation for the main sample.

For research question 1 (RQ1), the formation of participants' understanding of AI showed a clear three-stage process. The first stage was indirect exposure via social media and the news. At this time, most of the participants only knew of AI as "high-tech stuff far away" (e.g., P01 remembered "the one that played Go against Ke Jie"). The second stage was close exposure in academic settings, but fewer than half of the participants had learned about AI through formal course teaching. Most of this exposure arose from individual teachers' spontaneous requirements rather than systematic arrangements, reflecting a significant lack of discipline-based educational guidance in AI cognition. The third stage is the functional effect of generative AI, such as ChatGPT; P16 said it completely changed their thinking after trying it themselves rather than just reading about it. Therefore, the path of cognitive construction is fragmented, accidental and not discipline-led. Research has been conducted before (Bakir et al., 2025) on the effect of AI awareness on work attitude and turnover intention; this paper extends this research by investigating the process of cognition formation and finds that this path has a decisive impact on subsequent career imagination and action choices.

Conference Proceedings of the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference.

June 22 – June 26, 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

The research team's introspection data provided reflexive triangulation for this path: before participating in the study, the three researchers had also not connected AI with employment in their own fields of study. The process of participating in the structured interviews itself triggered new cognitive connections, suggesting that fragmented cognition is not impossible to break, but requires a specific dialogue context as a catalyst. In terms of human-AI relationships, most participants stated that they "only use AI as an auxiliary tool", but at the same time described behaviour such as "my first reaction is to ask AI" (P02) and "I rely on it too much because AI is so convenient" (P06), indicating a gradual change from using AI as a tool to depending on it without thinking. In emotional terms, mixed feelings were overwhelmingly common, and their intensity was closely related to perceived employment pressure: lower-year students tended to be optimistic (for example, first-year student P17 stayed "consistently optimistic" throughout), while senior students showed clear anxiety—"I hope it develops, but not this fast" (P02) clearly shows expectation and anxiety existing at the same time in one person, supporting the "double-edged sword effect" of AI awareness identified by Liu et al. (2025).

In the career choice dimension (RQ2), the labor leakage pattern identified by Kang et al. (2024) among current employees appears to move forward to the student stage. P05 changed from hotel management to supply chain, and P09 and P11 moved from tourism management to MICE. The statement "I felt a sense of crisis, so I chose to avoid it" is consistent with the psychological mechanism of this leakage. Most of the participants directly denied that AI had changed their career plans, but there was clear tension between this denial and the observable track shifts; upon further inquiry, participants tended to explain their career adjustment as personal interest rather than AI pressure, yet the direction of their shifts happened to move away from fields they believed were easy for AI to replace. The quantitative finding of Rezapouraghdam et al. (2025) (RAISA concern → dropout intention) receives a more detailed qualitative supplement here: students do not simply "leave" education, but quietly switch tracks within their major, showing a form of "escape before choice."

In their imagination of the industry, "low-threshold jobs will be replaced" and "the human touch cannot be replaced" formed a two-layer narrative shared by almost all participants: "AI does not have that kind of human touch" (P01) was a core belief, and the experimental study by Lv et al. (2025) offered some support for this. However, the data contained subtle cracks in this shared narrative: P09 said that the AI-generated speech "can really connect with people", and P18 described an experience of AI generating warm words. Based on the above, this study puts forward the "dual nature of the human-touch belief": the same belief serves as an industry judgment at the cognitive level and as a psychological defense mechanism against career anxiety at the emotional level. The two functions work simultaneously to expand the application of Gursoy's (2026) hybrid triad theory to student groups. In addition, most of the participants translated the structural changes brought about by AI into narratives of personal competitiveness, such as "the 80/20 rule" (P18), "survival of the fittest" (P13), and "it depends on the person... graduates from Lausanne do not need to worry" (P05); thus, they attribute the macro-level structural change to individual effort. Nayak et al. (2025) show that the hidden costs of algorithmic human resource management create structural, not only individual, impacts on workers. The individualized attribution among students hides this structural dimension.

At the coping-strategy level (RQ3), participants developed two kinds of metacognitive regulation strategies: first, a defensive strategy of "think first, then ask AI," intended to maintain independent thinking ability; second, a proactive strategy of actively learning AI prompting skills, which was more widely used. However, the most important finding is the systematic gap between discourse and behavior: at the discourse level, participants clearly expressed a wish to stay in control—"be the user and controller of AI" (P01) and "not let it completely control my life" (P03)—but at the behavioral level, most had little supporting action—"not really... I don't want to learn it" (P02) and "I'll deal with it when I need it" (P02). Building on the distinction in existing research between problem-focused coping (corresponding to "involution"-style skill improvement) and emotion-focused coping (corresponding to "lying flat"-style psychological disengagement) (Lyu et al., 2026), this study proposes Rhetoric-Focused Coping (RFC) as a third path. The core of RFC is a functional paradox: the psychological satisfaction provided by discourse defense actually suppresses the motivation to act—when saying "the human touch cannot be replaced" is enough to reduce anxiety, specific skill improvement loses urgency. In the research team's introspection, SI-H clearly noticed that they were repeating the same discourse-behavior gap as the participants (calling themselves a "negative example"), but still continued to use the same rhetorical frame afterward, suggesting that RFC may have a kind of structural inertia that goes beyond individual metacognition.

Overall, this study reveals the deeper mechanism through which university students in tourism-related majors in the AI era form their understanding of AI through a fragmented path, how this limits the space for career imagination, and how coping at the discourse level can functionally replace real action. The three themes form a progressive cycle of "fragmented cognition → impoverished imagination → discourse defense" (see Figure 1), and the links between them reinforce each other: a fragmented cognitive base limits students' room to imagine the future

of the industry; impoverished imagination further reduces the range of coping options available; and the psychological satisfaction brought by discourse defense lowers the motivation to deepen understanding, creating a self-enclosed cycle. Unlike the linear “antecedent → mediator → outcome” assumption in existing literature, this study shows the self-reinforcing nature of the process. In the time dimension, labor leakage and coping strategies already take shape before students enter the workforce; in the functional dimension, discourse-level “coping” psychologically replaces actual action at the behavioral level, challenging the linear assumption of “AI awareness → behavioral adjustment.”

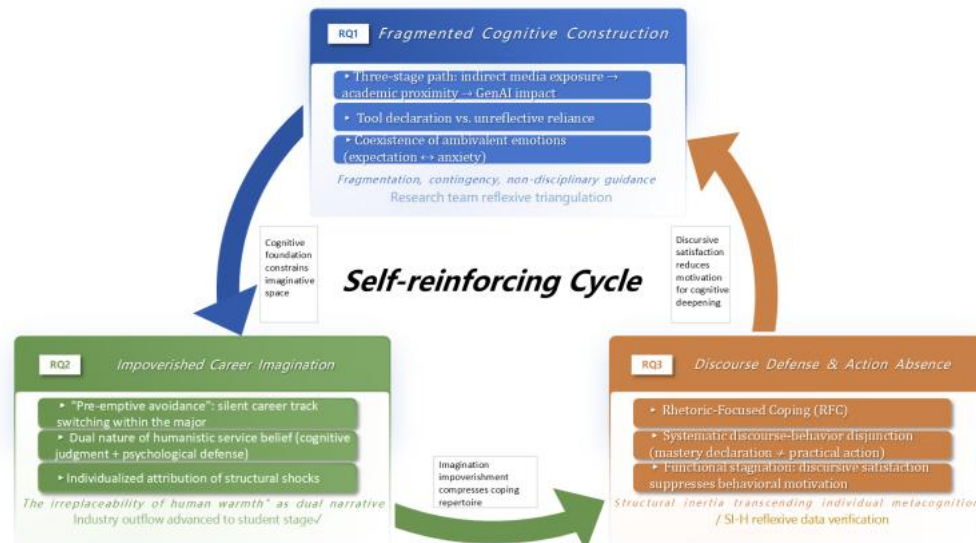


Figure 1. Progressive cycle model: Fragmented Cognition → Impoverished Imagination → Discourse Defense

Figure 1. “Fragmented cognition → scarce Imagination → Discourse Defense” progressive cycle model

The theoretical contributions of this study are at four levels. First, it shows the decisive effect of the cognition-formation path itself (fragmented, accidental, and non-discipline-guided) on later career imagination and action, extending the AI awareness framework of Bakir et al. (2025) forward to the stage of cognition formation. Second, it proposes the “dual nature of the human-touch belief”—integrating the experimental evidence of Lv et al. (2025) with Gursoy’s hybrid triad theory (2026) and showing how the same belief works in two ways: as an industry judgment at the cognitive level and as psychological defense at the emotional level. Third, based on the problem-focused and emotion-focused coping distinguished by Lyu et al. (2026), it proposes Rhetoric-Focused Coping (RFC), showing how satisfaction from discourse can functionally replace behavioral action. Fourth, it moves the labor leakage pattern found by Kang et al. (2024) forward to the student stage and identifies the phenomenon of “escape before choice.” These findings suggest that educators and industry practitioners in tourism and hospitality management should pay attention to the systematic construction of students’ AI understanding and be alert that discourse-level “readiness” may hide a real lack of action.

**Keywords:** artificial intelligence cognitive construction, career imagination, rhetoric-focused coping, tourism and hotel management students, generative artificial intelligence

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