Year 16, No. 2, August 2023, issn 2335-4194

Academica Turistica

Tourism & Innovation Journal
Revija za turizem in inovativnost

Academica Turistica

Tourism & Innovation Journal – Revija za turizem in inovativnost
Year 16, No. 2, August 2023, issn 2335-4194
https://doi.org/10.26493/2335-4194.16_2

University of Primorska Press

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Published by University of Primorska Press
University of Primorska
Titov trg 4, SI-6000 Koper
E-mail: zalozba@upr.si
Web: http://www.hippocampus.si

Editorial Office Academica Turistica
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Obala 11a, SI-6320 Portorož, Slovenia
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Subscriptions The journal is distributed free of charge. For information about postage and packaging prices, please contact us at academica@turistica.si.

Copy Editor Susan Cook
Cover Design Mateja Oblak
Cover Photo Alen Ježovnik
Printed in Slovenia by Grafika 3000, Dob
Print Run 100 copies

Academica Turistica – Revija za turizem in inovativnost je znanstvena revija, namenjena mednarodni znanstveni in strokovni javnosti; izhaja v angleščini s povzetki v slovenščini. Izid publikacije je finančno podprla Agencija za raziskovalno dejavnost Republike Slovenije iz sredstev državnega proračuna iz naslova razpisa za sofinanciranje domačih znanstvenih periodičnih publikacij.

ISSN 1855-3303 (printed)
ISSN 2335-4194 (online)

Original Scientific Article

Beach Visitors' Satisfaction and Loyalty during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Protection Motivation Theory Approach

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This paper aims to investigate beach visitors' satisfaction and loyalty during the COVID-19 pandemic using the Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) framework. Through interviews with beach visitors on three separate, distinct beach locations in Croatia, Primorsko-Goranska County, we identify the antecedents of beach visitor satisfaction and consequent behavioural intentions representing loyalty. A novel, combined satisfaction/importance method to investigate satisfaction with heterogenous beach types is assessed and empirically validated. Using PLS-SEM structural equation modelling we identified that natural beach characteristics carry the largest impact on overall beach satisfaction and the consequent visitors' behavioural intentions of recommendation and revisit. Furthermore, we find that beach occupancy has no significant impact on overall satisfaction. Lastly, we demonstrate that fear and risk of COVID-19 moderate the relationship between visitors' satisfaction with beach facilities and their overall experience satisfaction with the beach. Satisfaction with the overall experience at the beach significantly affects the intentions of recommendation and revisit. This study investigates beach visitors' satisfaction and loyalty under the COVID-19 pandemic conditions. We employed the PMT to obtain a deeper understanding of beach visitors' preferences during the pandemic. Our results provide recommendations for management and future research.

Keywords: beach visitors, satisfaction, loyalty, COVID-19, protection motivation theory

 https://doi.org/10.26493/2335-4194.16.151-171

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically and negatively impacted the world tourism and leisure sectors (Duro et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021). Unlike the previous health crises SARS or MERS, COVID-19 is highly infectious and has higher rates of susceptibility (Liu et al., 2020). The economic impacts of beach tourism have led many countries to reopen borders for tourists as soon as the number of infection cases decreased (Zielinski & Botero, 2020). The study of tourists' beach experiences has gained importance in the pandemic, as it was one of the first tourism experiences to become available post-lockdown in 2020, and to a lesser extent in 2021. Alegre and Cladera (2006) demonstrate that in the case of the Balearic Islands, satisfaction with sunshine and beaches has the strongest impact on overall satisfaction with the destination. Beach tourists demand high-quality environments and high-quality experiences (Botero et al., 2013). In recent studies, researchers have begun to focus on tourists' perception of beach quality (García-Morales et al., 2018; González & Holtmann-Ahumada, 2017) and beach tourists' future behaviour intentions (Dodds & Holmes, 2019; Yu et al., 2021).

At the same time, a growing focus on pandemic-related risks in tourism research can be observed (Bhati et al., 2021; Rather, 2021). As an affective component of a tourist's perceived risk, fear has been identified as important concerning future travel behaviour (Luo & Lam, 2020). Protection motivation theory (PMT), developed by Rogers (1975), offers a theoretical framework under which components of fear appeal are cognitively weighted in a mediating process forming protection motivation, which in turn, directly affects attitude change, or intent to adopt a recommended response.

The conceptual model in this research expands upon the model proposed in Dodds and Holmes (2019) and is based on the satisfaction with attribute performance levels of the following constructs: satisfaction with natural beach characteristics, satisfaction with beach facilities, satisfaction with perceived beach crowding, their respective effects on the satisfaction with the overall experience of beach visitors, and loyalty measured as behavioural intentions of recommendation and revisit. The COVID-19 pandemic conditions are integrated into the model as hypothesised moderation effects of perceived pandemic-related health risks of beach visitors utilising the PMT approach. In this regard we build a model of satisfaction, attitude and behaviour of beach visitors while controlling for the COVID-19-related conditions, to better understand beach visitor preferences and beach management priorities under global pandemic conditions.

The research questions that are proposed in this paper are, thus, how fear and risk of COVID-19 interplays with satisfaction of beach visitors, and how beach visitors' satisfaction with the overall experience at the beach during the COVID-19 pandemic affects their future behavioural intentions of recommendation and revisit.

The aim of this paper is to extend PMT to the COVID-19 pandemic conditions to explore how it has affected beach tourists' satisfaction and future behavioural intentions. Furthermore, this study investigates the role of COVID-19 perceived fear and risk as a moderator in influencing visitors' satisfaction with natural beach characteristics, beach facilities and beach crowding.

To investigate these research questions, a quantitative research was conducted on three distinct beaches of Primorsko-Goranska County in Croatia. Sampled beach locations along the littoral coastline are shown in Figure 1.

Theoretical Background

Protection Motivation Theory

Rogers (1975) postulates that three crucial components of fear appeal – the magnitude of noxiousness, probability of occurrence, and efficacy of a protective response – predict health-protective behaviour, i.e. protection motivation. The magnitude of noxiousness initiates the appraisal of severity, the probability that the event will occur appraises vulnerability and the efficacy of protective response initiates appraisal of response efficacy. A threat appraisal process is conducted, which influences the protection motivation. Furthermore, Rogers (1975) adds that fear is an affective state protecting against possible hazards and a motivational state directing an individual away from something, but also an intervention variable, subjected to stimuli and response, that motivates an organism to avoid a noxious event.

Protection motivation theory (PMT) has recently been used by tourism scholars to investigate travel health risks (Bhati et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2019), tourists' climate change adaptation intention (Wang

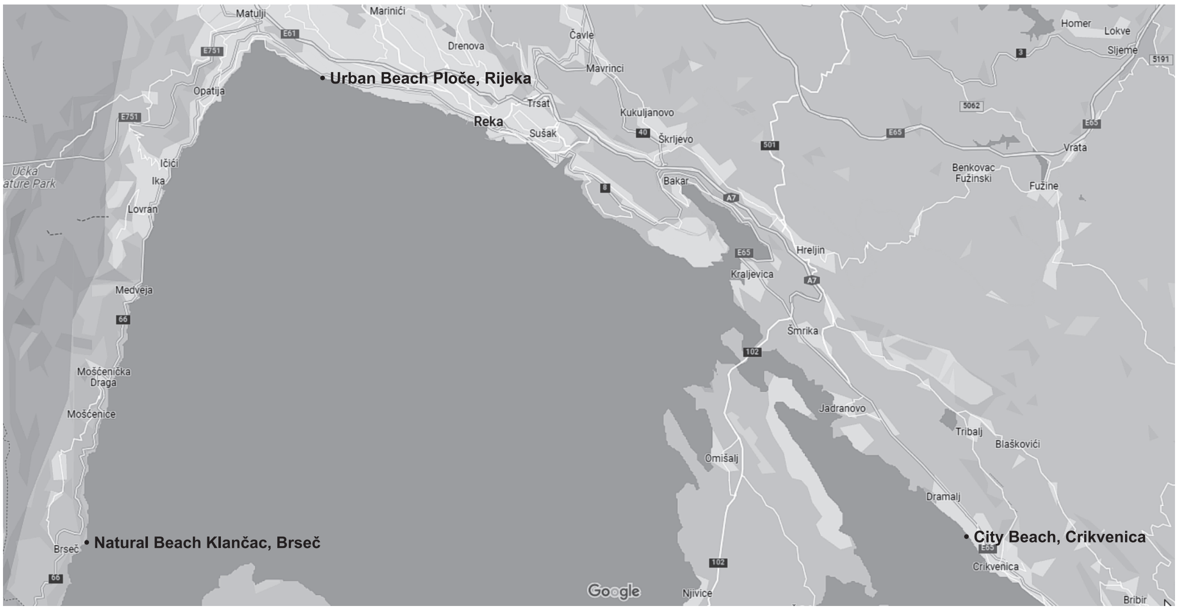

Figure 1 Sampled Beach Sites, Croatia

et al., 2019) and virus outbreaks prevention on cruise ships (Fisher et al., 2018), among others. Recently, Rather (2021) revealed that social media during COVID-19 significantly affects customer brand engagement which in turn has an effect on revisit intention during COVID-19, with the risk of travelling during COVID-19 and fear of COVID-19 acting as moderators on the relationships.

The focus on the pandemic-related fear of travelling during tourists' stay, and its impact on the beach tourism experience, offers a further development of the PMT in the field of tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research extends the PMT to investigate how it influences beach visitors' satisfaction with beach attributes, overall experience satisfaction, and their intentions of recommendation and revisit. According to Rather (2021), only a few studies contend with health-related risks of travellers during the pandemic.

The conceptual model in this research is adapted based on the model proposed by Dodds and Holmes (2019) and is shown in Figure 2. Since overall satisfaction with a hospitality service or experience is dependent on all individual attributes that make up the service or experience (Chi & Qu, 2008), we propose in our mode that natural beach characteristics, beach facilities and visitor perceptions of beach crowding affect overall beach experience. Since the influence of satisfaction on post-purchase behaviour is well established in the literature (Olsen, 2002; Prebensen et al., 2010), we insert in the model recommendation and revisit intention as dependant on overall experience satisfaction. Following Rather (2021) and J. Wang et al. (2019), we consider the threat and coping appraisal components of PMT (perceived risk and fear) to affect

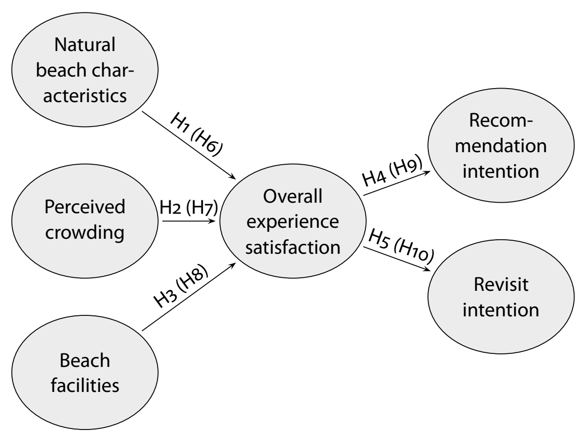

Figure 2 Conceptual Framework

beach visitors' overall experience satisfaction and loyalty.

Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction with products or services is considered one of the most important determinants of successful business operations. Anderson and Mittal (2000) consider customer satisfaction a key link in the satisfaction-profit chain, and argue that improvement of product or service attribute performance levels leads to an increase in customer satisfaction, which consecutively leads to higher customer retention and increased profitability.

While the importance of the satisfaction concept is considered to be generally acknowledged in the literature, the approaches to its definition and measurement have been diverse (Morgan et al., 1996). The reason for this may lie in the fact that various theoretical frameworks have been used by scholars as bases for conducting quantitative research, interpreting the results, and explaining the satisfaction or dissatisfaction process in customers.

A significant part of earlier research into customer satisfaction is dominated by the expectancy disconfirmation theory of consumer satisfaction. Oliver (1980) thus defines consumer satisfaction as a function of expectations and expectancy disconfirmation and argues it can influence attitude change and purchase intention. The expectancy disconfirmation theory has been one of the earliest and most widely used theoretical frameworks in customer satisfaction measurement (Cadotte et al., 1987; Day, 1977; Oliver, 1976; Oliver, 1980). At the same time, some authors (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982; Tse & Wilton, 1988) find that direct attribute performance level measurement, as opposed to the measurement of difference in expected and perceived performance, can arguably, in some cases, be a more robust predictor of customer satisfaction. Both these approaches to satisfaction measurement presume there is a linear relationship between performance and disconfirmation on one side, and customer satisfaction on the other.

More recent literature on consumer satisfaction (Anderson & Mittal, 2000; Alegre & Garau, 2011; Mikulić & Prebežac, 2008; Matzler et al., 2004) suggests classification of product or service attributes, pertaining to the fact that besides linear, asymmetrical relationships may exist between importance, performance and satisfaction. The three-factor model of satisfaction (Alegre & Garau, 2011) enables differentiation between factors that delight visitors and factors that are perceived as basic service factors. Matzler and Sauerwein (2002) group attribute performance indicators into three factors as dependent on the nature of their relationship with satisfaction, and propose that (1) Basic factors act as minimal requirements that affect dissatisfaction when performing low, but do not affect satisfaction when performing high or exceeding expectation, (2) Performance factors affect both satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and (3) Excitement factors affect satisfaction if fulfilled but do not affect dissatisfaction if they are not.

Cadotte et al. (1987) add that satisfaction is an emotional response to the result of the confirmation/disconfirmation process of product performance evaluations. Placing the emotional response within the confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm, Oliver et al. (1997) propose that emotions coexist with satisfaction judgment and correlate with satisfaction (Mano & Oliver, 1993). Spreng et al. (1996) identify that subjective satisfaction judgments of service attribute performance influence overall satisfaction, which is in turn, an emotional reaction to a product or service.

In the context of customer satisfaction in tourism, previous research has shown that satisfaction with tourism destinations (Court & Lupton, 1997; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000) and satisfaction with tourism experiences (Chen & Chen, 2010; Prayag et al., 2017) contribute to tourism destination loyalty. Chi and Qu (2008) investigate how destination image and satisfaction with attributes of a tourism destination affect overall satisfaction and loyalty; their findings indicate that destination image affects overall satisfaction. Furthermore, destination attribute satisfaction affects overall satisfaction and overall satisfaction affects destination loyalty. Considering satisfaction with the sun and sea tourism destinations, Alegre and Garau (2011) reveal that the most important among the performance factors are in fact beaches, while considering familiarity with a destination as an excitement factor, linked to the affective and emotional dimensions of satisfaction.

Loyalty

Early loyalty research has been concerned with the concept of brand loyalty, with three approaches to measurement: behavioural measures, attitudinal measures and composite measures, as the combination of behavioural and attitudinal measures (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978). Behavioural measures of loyalty (Oppermann, 2000) are based on actual purchasing behaviour or reported purchasing behaviour. Attitudinal measures of loyalty include consumer preferences, intentions and affection for a brand (Petrick, 2005). Oppermann (2000) argues that a composite measure of loyalty, taken as a combination of behavioural and attitudinal measures, may be a more comprehensive measure, but not as practical, due to the question of weighing of the behavioural and attitudinal components in the composite approach to measurement. Since repeated purchasing behaviour may be out of convenience or because of other factors not related to brand loyalty (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978), measurement of behavioural loyalty as actual repurchase behaviour has not taken significant root in modern literature (Olsen, 2002), and researchers have instead relied predominantly on attitudinal measures, which, in more recent literature, are commonly referred to as loyalty behaviours (Pinkus et al., 2016) or (future) behavioural intentions (Žabkar et al., 2010). This approach to measurement is based on the popular (Ajzen, 1991) theory of planned behaviour, which states that behavioural intentions are a reliable predictor of future behaviour. Two typical behaviours of consumer loyalty in tourism are the willingness to recommend (positive word of mouth) and intention of revisit (intention of return), and may be regarded as two subdimensions of loyalty (Bosque & San Martín, 2008). These are commonly conceptually combined in modern tourism loyalty research (Chi & Qu, 2008). However, some destinations require considerable effort and expense to visit (Pinkus et al., 2016), and this fact may influence their future intentions. For example, in their investigation of tourists to the Galapagos islands of Ecuador, Rivera and Croes (2010) found that tourists will gladly recommend the destination, but will not consider revisiting. Other reasons for wanting to recommend a destination, but not consider revisit may include general novelty seeking in tourism (Kim & Chen, 2019; Lončarić et al., 2018). For these reasons willingness to recommend and intention of revisit should be modelled as separate constructs but may conceptually be used together to describe loyalty in tourism.

Building on the attitudinal, i.e. behavioural intention, approach to loyalty, Oliver (1999) explains that consumers become loyal in a cognitive sense first, then in an affective sense, following a conative manner and finally a behavioural manner. Cognitive loyalty is based on available information about the brand, beliefs, and prior experience. Affective loyalty is a positive attitude toward the brand developed on a basis of a continuous number of previous purchases and is not as easily dislodged from the consumer mind by marketing of other alternative brands. Conative loyalty is influenced by the affective stage and implies a serious commitment of repurchase. In the final stage of action loyalty, the repurchase commitment is accompanied by the desire to do so, no matter the obstacles encountered.

Edvardsson et al. (2000) expand this framework and differentiate between bought and earned loyalty, as well as between loyalty to product companies and loyalty to service companies. Bought loyalty is earned through indirect payments to customers in the sense of loyalty programmes and member discounts. Earned loyalty, on the other hand, results in an affective attachment of the customer to the company or brand, which is not as easily removed by marketing of competitors. The authors furthermore demonstrate empirically that satisfaction impacts profitability significantly in the service loyalty model, while in the product loyalty model, the effect is also significant, but smaller. The impact of loyalty on profitability for services was found to be positive, while for the products it was found to be negative. The findings of their study suggest that for services, revenue growth comes primarily indirectly through satisfaction and word-of-mouth recommendation, while, on the other hand, product companies rely more on paid loyalty strategies, which have a negative effect on profitability.

Loyal visitors are important to destination managers as it is less expensive to retain visitors than seek new ones (Thomas, 2001); they are more likely to spread positive word of mouth with no extra cost (Shoemaker & Lewis, 1999), while typically attributing service errors to uncontrollable factors (Weiner, 2000). The concept of loyalty in tourism includes, but is not exclusive to: tourism destination loyalty (Niininen & Riley, 2003; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Meleddu et al., 2015), hotel brand loyalty (So et al., 2013; Nam et al., 2011), loyalty to digital tourism platforms such as Airbnb (Lalicic & Weismayer, 2018) and, more recently, loyalty to nature-based tourism destination settings (Pinkus et al., 2016; Mirzaalian & Halpenny, 2021).

Perceived COVID-19 Fear

Fear is an emotion that is activated when a dangerous situation is perceived as a risk to personal safety, or safety of others (Garcia, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly influenced individual perceptions of fear and risk (Hassan & Soliman, 2021). In accordance with PMT (Dillard et al., 2012) individual perception of risk from an event may motivate protective behaviour related to that event. Ahorsu et al. (2022) suggest that perceived fear of COVID-19 may even amplify the damage of the disease, and with high levels of fear, individuals may not be rational in making their decisions.

Studies thus far have identified a significant influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourists' perceived risk (Lu et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2021), travel intention (Turnšek et al., 2020) and behaviour (Bae & Chang, 2021).

Some authors model fear of COVID-19 as a moderator between previously established relationships from the literature (Hassan & Soliman, 2021; Rather, 2021). Hassan and Soliman (2021) find that fear arousal concerning COVID-19 moderates the relationships between destination reputation and revisit intention. Furthermore, Turnšek et al. (2020) add that in the case of women, age affects the level of perceived threat, while people with higher education perceive higher risk. T. H. Lee and Jan (2023) find that travellers' personality traits are also connected to different levels of risk perceptions concerning COVID-19. Lu et al. (2022) suggest that perceived risk of COVID-19 is linked to temporal dynamics of the pandemic, geographical distance from outbreak areas, and differences in regional tourism development.

Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

Satisfaction with Beach Natural Characteristics and Overall Experience Satisfaction

According to Pizam et al. (1978), tourist satisfaction is the result of interaction between a tourist's experience with the destination and their expectations about the destination. Expectations have widely been explored (Roca & Villares, 2008; Lozoya et al., 2014) in the study of beach visitors. A significant number of studies (Roca et al., 2008; Roca et al., 2009; Marin et al., 2009) measure visitor satisfaction with beach natural and environmental characteristics. The findings indicate that visitors highly value both the natural and environmental beach characteristics. Dodds and Holmes (2019) find that both satisfaction with natural characteristics and facilities are correlated with overall satisfaction. Based on these arguments the first hypothesis is proposed as:

H1 *Satisfaction with natural beach characteristics has a significant impact on overall experience satisfaction.*

Tourism and marketing literature has established that attribute-based performance evaluations of products/service quality affect overall satisfaction (Alegre & Cladera, 2006; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Grappi & Montanari, 2011; Giese & Cote, 2000). Baloglu et al. (2004) argue that empirical work concerning the effect of experience attributes of products/services on overall satisfaction leads to a better understanding of the relative contribution of these attributes to the overall experience and/or behavioural intention.

Beach Crowding and Overall Experience Satisfaction

Beaches are vulnerable socio-ecological systems and are under increased pressure of high tourist visitation during the summer season. According to Da Silva (2002), the straightforward notion of less crowding equals more quality, or better tourist experience, is not always applicable, particularly in the context of beach experiences. Studies of beach crowding often use the concept of available space in m^2/visitor to estimate crowding, i.e. determine the beach carrying capacity thresholds. Roca et al. (2008) investigated the effect of sand area availability in m^2/visitor in their study of the Spanish Catalan coast and found that there is no statistically significant relationship between sand area availability and visitor satisfaction. Furthermore, the results showed that minimum mean values observed were often lower than recommended thresholds in the literature, which, depending on the author, amount to 4 – 6 m^2 per visitor available for the most congested urban beach type (Roca et al., 2008). Cabezas-Rabadán et al. (2019) find that beach visitor density is very subjective in connection to the evaluation of crowding. Indeed, previous research (Da Silva, 2002; Kane et al., 2021) identified that beach visitors congregate in the area less than 30–50 meters away from the sea and often group together (Guyonnard & Vacher, 2016). However, since data on beach crowding preferences during a global pandemic is scarce and limited to the USA (Kane et al., 2021), we formulate the second hypothesis as:

H2 *There is a statistically significant relationship between perceived crowding on the beach and the overall experience satisfaction at the beach.*

We measure perceived crowding as perceptions of satisfaction with the space available at the beach, crowding and noise, following the social carrying capacity paradigm. Shelby and Heberlein (1984, p. 433) define social carrying capacity as the 'level of use beyond which experience parameters exceed acceptable levels.' High crowding may lead to reduced available space on the beach and produce presence of unpleasant noise.

Beach Facilities and Overall Experience Satisfaction

Research conducted thus far offers mixed results on the connection between visitors' satisfaction with the beach and their satisfaction with beach facilities. Beach visitors were found to prioritise beach facilities at urban beach locations (Lozoya et al., 2014). However, Peña-Alonso et al. (2018) find that visitors place importance on the quality of beach facilities in both natural and semi-urban environments. Frampton (2010) argues that, following the holistic beach management approach, facilities and amenities must be included in beach evaluation, as they meet the needs of those who use the beach. Evaluation of beach facilities are also part of the BARE (Bathing Area and Registration Evaluation system) scheme developed by Micallef and Williams (2004). Dodds and Holmes (2019) found that beach facilities have a positive impact on overall experience satisfaction. We thus formulate the third hypothesis as:

H3 *Beach facilities have a positive effect on overall experience satisfaction.*

Beach facilities and amenities are identified as important in the literature (Botero et al., 2013) and a minimum service offer is expected by beach visitors (Lozoya et al., 2014). However, a 'diminishing return' function is hypothesised by some researchers. For instance, Marin et al. (2009) argue that when the anthropic pressure is too high, the result can be a 'banalisation' of the natural marine environment. Furthermore, Roca and Villares (2008) argue that overexploitation of the beach area results in reduction of available beach surface and influences perceived crowding.

Loyalty: Intention to Recommend and Intention of Revisit

Oliver defines loyalty as 'a deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour' (Oliver, 1999, p. 34). Borrowing an environmental psychology perspective of place attachment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010), we derive that Oliver's product/service-oriented definition is applicable to the concept of a tourists' loyalty to a beach, i.e. a specific place.

According to Yoon and Uysal (2005), repeat purchases or recommendations to others are the most usual indicators of consumer loyalty in marketing literature. Previous research studies of loyalty in tourism have established that high level of satisfaction leads to intention of recommendation (Oppermann, 2000; Prebensen et al., 2010) and intention of revisit (Hai et al., 2020). According to Alegre and Cladera (2006), repeat visitors are likely to return to the destination, but the main determinant of repeat visitation is high satisfaction.

The satisfied tourist has a tendency to express a favourable opinion about the destination and is likely to recommend the destination to others or revisit (Verma & Rajendran, 2017). According to Zeithaml et al. (1996), when customers express preference for a company over available alternatives in the form of competition, increase the volume of purchase, or are willing to pay a price premium, they are behaviourally bonding with the company. Word of mouth recommendations are highly regarded information among tourists (Prebensen et al., 2010), and are also typically perceived as highly reliable (Chi & Qu, 2008). Logically, we formulate hypothesis 4 as:

H4 *Overall experience satisfaction positively affects the intention to recommend the beach.*

Regarding beach visitors, Dodds and Holmes (2019) find that overall experience satisfaction at the beach is positively correlated with intention of revisit. However, Assaker and Hallak (2012) find that some tourist segments, even when satisfied with the destination, may not revisit, and at the same time, some segments that are not satisfied might revisit. Consequently, we examine the following hypothesis.

H5 *Overall experience satisfaction positively affects the intention to revisit the beach.*

By understanding the relationship between provided services and their connection to visitor satisfaction and loyalty, destination managers are better informed on how to influence the creation of satisfaction and loyalty among destination visitors (Petrick, 2005).

Moderating Role of COVID-19 Perceived Fear and Risk

Previous studies have established the relation between health protective behaviour and travel behaviour (Bhati et al., 2021; Park & Almanza, 2020). Rather (2021) revealed that perception of fear and risk of COVID-19 moderates relationships between social media, consumer brand engagement, co-creation, and revisit intention. In exploring the links between destination reputation and revisit intention, and between perceived trust and revisit intention during the COVID-19 pandemic, Hassan and Soliman (2021) also found a moderating role of fear arousal. This study models the perceived risk and fear of COVID-19 as a moderator in a conceptual model of attribute satisfaction, overall experience satisfaction and loyalty of beach visitors following the framework of Oliver (1993).

In context of beaches, Botero et al. (2013) have established that water and sand quality are top preferences of beach visitors in urban and rural areas. Hong et al. (2020) demonstrate that tourists placed great importance on natural and green areas in B&B tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic. Visitor perceptions of the beach and sea environment as unclean or unhygienic during a pandemic, according to the PMT, may trigger health protective behaviour which in turn may moderate the relationship between satisfaction with natural beach characteristics and overall experience satisfaction. We therefore propose to examine the following hypothesis:

H6 *Perceived COVID-19 fear and risk moderate the relationship between satisfaction with natural beach characteristics and overall experience satisfaction.*

Previous research (Cumberbatch & Moses, 2011) has established that perceptions of 'too many people' and lack of personal space are the main factors that cause beach visitors to perceive the beach as crowded. According to De Ruyck et al. (1997), beach visitors' group size affects space taken on the beach inversely; the larger the group size, the less beach space was used by the group. COVID-19 protocols include safe distance from others as an avoidance strategy, and fear of COVID-19 may moderate the relationship between perceived crowding and overall experience satisfaction. We therefore examine the following hypothesis:

H7 *Perceived COVID-19 fear and risk moderate the relationship between perceived crowding on the beach and overall experience satisfaction.*

Ivanova et al. (2021) find that hygiene, disinfection, and a reliable health system in a destination are leading factors in deciding to travel. At the same time, clean drinking water, good sanitary conditions and hygiene of the environment, restaurants and accommodation is expected by tourists (Liu et al., 2014; Bhati et al., 2021). Logically, we propose to examine the following hypothesis:

H8 *Perceived COVID-19 fear and risk moderate the relationship of satisfaction with beach facilities and overall experience satisfaction.*

Since personal behaviour varies by the individual's perceived risk level (Kim & Chen, 2019), we propose to examine the possible moderation of COVID-19 fear on the relationship between overall experience satisfaction and intention to recommend. We thus propose the following hypothesis:

H9 *Perceived COVID-19 fear and risk moderate the relationship between overall experience satisfaction and intention to recommend.*

As consumers have a higher preference to avoid risk than maximize utility, perceived risk is an important factor in an effort to explain purchase behaviour (Yu et al., 2021) and is part of the PMT model. Perceived risk experienced during travel and recreational activities may moderate the relationship between overall experience satisfaction and intention to revisit. Consequently, we propose to examine the following scientific hypothesis:

H10 *Perceived COVID-19 fear and risk moderate the relationship between overall experience satisfaction and intention to revisit.*

Research Design

The data for the purpose of hypothesis testing was obtained by quantitative research (*N* = 377). A structured questionnaire was used as a survey instrument. The three beaches represent a natural (*n* = 121), municipal (*n* = 152), and urban beach (*n* = 104).

Operationalisation of the Constructs

The original set of 23 items measuring beach natural characteristics, crowding and facilities on the beach was reduced to 17, as 6 items from the beach facilities construct were deleted based on the statistical significance of the formative construct outer loadings criteria (Hair et al., 2017).

Satisfaction measures of performance for seven items measuring satisfaction with natural beach characteristics were adopted from previous research (Roca et al., 2009). These include: NC1 – *Beach sediment texture,* NC2 – *Available shade on the beach,* NC3 – *Texture of beach sediment when entering the sea,* NC4 – *Cleanliness of the sea,* NC5 – *Opportunities to observe maritime species,* NCE1 – *Litter/plastic on the beach,* and NC_SCN – *Beach scenery and local landscape.* Following the socio-ecological systems (Refulio-Coronado et al., 2021) paradigm of coastal and marine environments, natural beach characteristics are modelled together with perceptions of water and sand cleanliness in a single construct.

Beach crowding items were adapted from previous research (Roca et al., 2008; Lozoya et al., 2014). Namely, items OCC1 – *Available space on the beach* and OCC – 3 *Crowding on the beach.* We insert also item OCC2 – *Noise on the beach,* as Cumberbatch and Moses (2011) find that presence of unpleasant noise on the beach, associated with the various activities of beach visitors, may contribute to perceptions of a crowded beach.

Regarding beach visitor satisfaction with beach facilities, items were adapted form Roca et al. (2009) and Lozoya et al. (2014). These include measures of general beach facilities (BF1 – *Changing room availability,* BF2 – *Available parking space,* ...), sanitary facilities (BSAN1 – *Litter bin availability,* BSAN2 – *Shower availability,* ...), recreation facilities BF4 – *Areas for sport, recreation, and children's play on the beach* and BF5 – *Accessibility to the beach and sea for persons with disabilities.*

Overall experience satisfaction at the beach is based on the scale proposed in Oliver (1997) and adapted for this research, containing affective (1 – *I really enjoyed this beach*), cognitive (2 – *I made a wise choice to visit this beach*) and fulfilment (3 – *This beach is exactly what I needed*) components of satisfaction. This original scale was expanded by del Bosque and San Martín (2008) by a single overall satisfaction measure which was also included and adapted for this research

(4 – *I am satisfied with the overall experience at this beach*).

Loyalty is measured in constructs of intention to recommend the beach and intention of revisit. These two constructs measuring loyalty represent attitudinal loyalty in the form of behavioural intention. The Intention to revisit construct includes two items adapted from del Bosque and San Martín (2008) (1 – *I will try to visit this beach again* and 2 – *I think I will visit this beach*) and one item adapted from Dodds and Holmes (2019) (3 – I will probably visit this beach again). Intention to recommend items were included using the three items adapted from Prayag et al. (2017) based on Grappi and Montanari (2011) and Lee et al. (2008).

We measure perceived risk and fear of COVID-19 as a single reflective construct with 2 items which demonstrate high face validity: 1 – *I feel safe on this beach* and 2 – *I do not fear getting COVID-19 on this beach.* The 2 items of the Perceived risk and fear of COVID-19 construct were generated for the purpose of this research by a focus group including university professors. As the results in Table 2 demonstrate, the construct exhibits satisfactory levels of reliability and convergent validity.

Appendix A presents the full list of items. Items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

Since the natural beach contained almost no facilities from the original set of items, we proxied satisfaction with importance on the natural beach. We find justification in this approach as, according to Teas (1993), a perceived ability of a product to deliver satisfaction can be conceptualised as a conformation with a consumer's ideal product features.

Data Collection

The research was conducted on three distinct beaches of Primorsko-Goranska County in Croatia: City beach in the municipality of Crikvenica, Ploče beach in the city of Rijeka and Klančac beach in the municipality of Brseč. The investigation took place during the months of July, August and September of 2021. Beach visitors were approached on each beach location with a formal introduction, explanation of study goals and assurance of anonymity. The research was conducted only on working days of the week, between the hours of 09.00 am – 12.00 am and 03.00 pm – 06.00 pm to avoid high sun exposure of the investigators. A pilot study was carried out in order to ensure all questions were clear to the respondents, establish the feasibility of the research protocol and test the sampling strategy. Feedback from the pilot study was used in the final versions of the research protocol and questionnaire. The sampling strategy used was a stratified random sample approach. Age and gender proportion stratums on each beach were estimated daily, and the random sample was picked proportionally to and from ratio sizes of stratums identified. Both tourists and the local population are part of the sample, following the sustainable development paradigm.

Descriptive statistics show that 59.4% of the sample are female and 40.6% are male respondents. Furthermore, 21% of respondents were between the age of 15–24, 16.7% were 25–34, 20.7% were 35–44, 25.7% were 45–54, 10.9% were 55–64 and 5% were 65 years and above. The results of the descriptive analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Categories	(1)	(2)
Gender	Male	40.6	153
	Female	59.4	224
Age (years)	15–24	21.0	79
	25–34	16.7	63
	35–44	20.7	78
	45–54	25.7	97
	55–64	10.9	41
	Above 65	5.0	19
Education	Elementary school	1.1	4
	Highschool	54.6	206
	University degree	43.5	164
	PhD	0.8	3
Visitor type	Domestic tourist	20.7	78
	Foreign tourist	60.2	227
	Local resident	17.2	65
	Season resident	1.9	7

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) proportion (%), (2) frequency.

Common Method Variance (CMV)

CMV is variance that originates from the measurement method rather than the measurement of constructs, and can be a problem commonly known as method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Employing the commonly used Harman's single factor test for assessing CMV, we find that most of the variance is not explained by a single factor. In fact, variance explained by one factor amounted to 22.9% of total variance explained. We conclude that CMV is not an issue in this research.

Research Results

The model was tested using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 3.3.5 software. PLS-SEM has become a standard tool for analysing complex relationships between variables in tourism and many other fields of study (Sarstedt et al., 2020). The PLS-SEM approach is recommended due to the ability of generating high statistical power with smaller sample sizes, working with non-normally distributed data and different scale types, while taking a predictive modelling approach (Hair et al., 2017).

Reflective Measurement Model Assessment

Since our model includes both formative and reflective constructs, we report the reliability and validity results for the reflective constructs separately in Table 2. All the constructs factor loadings are above the 0.7 threshold value (Hair et al., 2017). Composite reliability values range from 0.95–0.89, while the Cronbach's alpha values are in the range of 0.77–0.93. The lowest value for alpha is 0.77 and it is associated with the perceived fear/risk from COVID-19, which is at an acceptable level for exploratory research (Hair et al., 2017). Cronbach's alpha values of other constructs range from 0.90–0.93 and display excellent levels of reliability. Average variance extracted (AVE) is a measure of convergent validity and the recommended threshold is above 0.5. AVE ranges from values of 0.81–0.88. Thus, the measures of the reflective constructs have high levels of convergent validity. We conclude that the reflective constructs indicators are reliable and convergently valid.

Next, we assess the discriminant validity of the reflective constructs using the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion followed by the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) criterion as recommended by Hair et al. (2017). The results are represented in Table 3 and Table 4, respectively.

The squared root of each construct's AVE is higher than correlations with other constructs, as shown in Table 3, by which discriminant validity using the Fornell and Larcker criterion is established. We do not calculate AVE for the formative variables as this measure is appropriate only for reflective construct assessment. All HTMT values are below the recommended threshold of 0.9, as shown in Table 4. This result confirms discriminant validity of the reflective constructs using the HTMT criterion.

Table 2 Reliability and Validity of Reflective Model Items

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
(a)	C191	0.812	0.896	0.774	4.61	0.73	0.868
	C193						0.933
(b)	SATE1	0.821	0.948	0.927	4.29	0.94	0.882
	SATE2						0.917
	SATE3						0.915
	SATE4						0.912
(c)	RECI1	0.843	0.942	0.907	4.35	0.90	0.922
	RECI2						0.905
	RECI3						0.927
(d)	RI1	0.886	0.959	0.936	4.49	0.88	0.947
	RI2						0.944
	RI3						0.933

Notes Constructs: (a) perceived fear/risk of COVID-19, (b) overall experience satisfaction, (c) recommendation intention, (d) revisit intention. Column headings are as follows: (1) items, (2) average variance extracted, (3) composite reliability, (4) Cronbach alpha, (5) mean, (6) standard deviation, (7) outer loadings.

Formative Measurement Model Assessment

In this section we assess the formative constructs indicators for issues of collinearity and test their statistical significance. According to Hair et al. (2017), a VIF indicator value of 5 and higher represents a possible collinearity problem. Table 5 presents the VIF for the formative constructs' indicators. All values are below

Table 3 Discriminant Validity by Fornell and Larcker's Criterion

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1)	0.901			
(2)	0.243	0.906		
(3)	0.195	0.822	0.918	
(4)	0.239	0.762	0.816	0.941

Notes Column/row headings are as follows: (1) COVID-19 fear/risk, (2) overall satisfaction, (3) recommendation intention, (4) revisit intention.

Table 4 Discriminant Validity by HTMT Criterion

	(1)	(2)	(3)
(2)	0.281		
(3)	0.228	0.895	
(4)	0.277	0.816	0.885

Notes Column/row headings are as follows: (1) COVID-19 fear/risk, (2) overall satisfaction, (3) recommendation intention, (4) revisit intention.

Table 5 Assessment of Formative Model

Constructs with variables	(1)	(2)	(3)
BF1 → Facilities	0.308	0.003	1.33
BF2 → Facilities	0.707	0.000	1.16
BF3 → Facilities	0.561	0.000	1.47
BF4 → Facilities	0.407	0.000	1.20
BF5 → Facilities	0.545	0.000	1.28
BSAN1 → Facilities	0.742	0.000	1.35
BSAN2 → Facilities	0.451	0.000	1.36
NC1 → Natural Characteristics	0.776	0.000	1.55
NC2 → Natural Characteristics	0.185	0.021	1.07
NC3 → Natural Characteristics	0.731	0.000	1.57
NC4 → Natural Characteristics	0.648	0.000	1.29
NC5 → Natural Characteristics	0.654	0.000	1.29
NCE1 → Natural Characteristics	0.376	0.000	1.12
NC_SCN → Natural Character.	0.646	0.000	1.38
OCC3 → Crowding	0.945	0.000	1.55
OCC1 → Crowding	0.800	0.000	1.699
OCC2 → Crowding	0.484	0.026	1.458

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) outer loadings, (2) p values, (3) VIF.

the recommended threshold of 5; this indicates that the issue of collinearity is not a problem in the formative indicators. All items are statistically significant at $p < 0.01$ level except items NC2 and and OCC2, which are significant at $p < 0.05$ level.

Structural Model Evaluation

Next, we evaluate the structural model. Using standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) we evaluate the model fit. We also investigate the model's path coefficients, coefficients of determination of endogenous constructs – R^2, effect size of exogenous on endogenous constructs – f^2, predictive relevance – Q^2, and effect size of the predicted effect – q^2. The SRMR value in this research (SRMR = 0.053) indicates a good fit as it is below the recommended conservative threshold of 0.08 (Hair et al., 2017). R^2 values are as follows: Overall satisfaction – $R^2 = 0.44$, recommendation intention – $R^2 = 0.67$ and revisit intention – $R^2 = 0.58$. Following guidelines from the literature, overall satisfaction displays moderate to weak R^2 values, while the recommendation and revisit intention R^2 values may be described as moderate to substantial. All Stone-Geisser's Q^2 values for endogenous constructs (overall satisfaction: 0.35, recommendation intention: 0.56 and intention to revisit: 0.50) are positive, which establishes the predictive relevance of the proposed model (Hair et al., 2017).

Furthermore, q^2 values of predictive effect size of exogenous construct's contribution to an endogenous latent variable Q^2 were calculated. In the proposed model the calculation was possible for the influence of satisfaction with natural characteristics on overall satisfaction and the influence of satisfaction with facilities on overall satisfaction. The q^2 resulted in values of 0.23 and 0.03, respectively. Satisfaction with natural characteristics has a moderately strong predictive effect size on overall satisfaction, while satisfaction with facilities has a weak predictive effect size. All constructs in the proposed model are statistically significant at $p < 0.01\%$, except occupancy, which is not statistically significant. The results are displayed in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6 Structural Model Results

Hypothesis/paths		β	p	f^2	Supported
H1	Natural Characteristics → Overall Satisfaction	0.515	0.00	0.32	Yes
H2	Crowding → Overall Satisfaction	0.022	0.58	0.00	No
H3	Facilities → Overall Satisfaction	0.175	0.00	0.03	Yes
H4	Overall Satisfaction → Recommendation Intention	0.822	0.00	2.08	Yes
H5	Overall Satisfaction → Revisit intention	0.762	0.00	1.38	Yes

Notes Overall satisfaction $R^2 = 0.44$, $Q^2 = 0.35$; recommendation intention $R^2 = 0.67$, $Q^2 = 0.56$; revisit intention $R^2 = 0.58$, $Q^2 = 0.50$. β – regression coefficient, p – statistical significance, f^2 – effect size.

Table 7 Predictive Effect Sizes

Paths	(1)	(2)	(3)
Natural Characteristics → Overall Satisfaction	0.353	0.204	0.23
Facilities → Overall Satisfaction	0.353	0.329	0.03

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) Q^2 included, (2) Q^2 excluded, (3) q^2.

Moderation Analysis

In the final stage, the moderating effect of perceived fear and risk of COVID-19 is assessed in the proposed relationships between satisfaction with natural beach characteristics and overall satisfaction, between satisfaction with beach facilities and overall satisfaction, and between overall satisfaction and intentions of recommendation and revisit. Since the perceived crowding effect on overall satisfaction is not statistically significant, we do not test the moderating effect in this relationship. Thus, Hypotheses H7 is rejected. The product indicator approach was used as the moderator calculation method and the product term generated was standardised following recommendations from the literature (Rasoolimanesh, Wang et al., 2021). The results of the hypothesised moderating relationships are displayed in Table 8. The only statistically significant ($p < 0.05\%$) moderated relationship in the model is between beach facilities and overall satisfaction. The negative beta coefficient in the supported moderation indicates that an increase in the perceived fear/risk of COVID-19 increases the effect of satisfaction with beach facilities on overall satisfaction with the beach. Lower values on the COVID-19 fear/risk scale indicate higher values of perceived fear/risk. The effect size is weak at $f^2 = 0.02$. The results are displayed in Table 8.

Discussion

As the results of our investigation show, natural beach characteristics have the largest effect on overall visitor satisfaction, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, confirming H1. These results support the findings of previous research (Dodds & Holmes, 2019; Lozoya et al., 2014) which reports that beach visitors highly value natural beach characteristics. However, as demonstrated in Lozoya et al. (2014), there are significant differences in beach visitor preferences between different beach types. The authors find that visitors placed higher importance on natural beach characteristics than facilities, in a natural beach setting, while on the urban beach, a higher proportion of visitors valued facilities over natural characteristics.

As for the relationship between perceived crowding on the beach and overall beach visitor experience satisfaction, our investigation finds no significant connection, thus H2 is rejected. These results support the findings of previous research. Namely, Roca et al. (2008) demonstrate a limited descriptive influence of higher beach area availability on beach visitor satisfaction; however, they find no significant correlation. Taking both these results into consideration, we suggest the possibility of an asymmetrical relationship between crowding at the beach and beach visitor experience satisfaction. Namely, higher levels of perceived crowding may influence only visitor dissatisfaction, while a lower level of perceived crowding does not lead to higher levels of beach visitor satisfaction. It

Table 8 Moderation Analysis

Hypothesis/tested paths		β	p	Moderation
H6	COVID-19 Moderating Effect Natural characteristics→ Overall Satisfaction	−0.014	0.81	No
H8	COVID-19 Moderating effect Facilities → Overall Satisfaction	−0.107	0.02	Yes
H9	COVID-19 Moderating Effect Overall satisfaction → Recommendation Intention	0.004	0.90	No
H10	COVID-19 Moderating Effect Overall satisfaction → Revisit Intention	−0.042	0.28	No

seems a certain 'baseline performance' of crowding at the beach is expected by visitors and is an integral part of the overall beach experience, and consequently the sun and sea tourism destination product.

Next, the results indicate that beach facilities have a significant positive effect on overall experience satisfaction at the beach, thus confirming hypothesis H3. These results are in line with previous research (Rodella & Corbau, 2020) which has established that visitors value highly good quality services and facilities, even in natural beach settings (Lozoya et al., 2014). Furthermore, Botero et al. (2013) find that beach facilities are among the top three priorities of visitors at both European and Caribbean beaches. Beach managers should take special interest in visitor preferences and evaluations regarding beach facilities at each beach location, as it is an important feature directly under their control.

Our investigation shows that overall experience satisfaction positively affects the intention to recommend the beach and the intention of revisit, thus confirming hypothesis H4 and hypothesis H5, respectively. These results are in line with previous research, which has established that (Žabkar et al., 2010) tourism destination attributes affect perceived destination quality and consequently tourist satisfaction and behavioural intentions. This hypothesis has also been confirmed as valid in the case of nature-based destinations (Pinkus et al., 2016), and particularly beaches (Dodds & Holmes, 2019).

Research results did not support hypothesis H6, concerning the existence of a moderating effect of COVID-19 fear and risk between the relationship of satisfaction with natural beach characteristics and overall experience satisfaction. This indicates that even in the presence of a health/safety risk during the pandemic, visitors perceive the natural beach environment as relatively safe. This may be explained by the fact that epidemiological studies of COVID-19 (Qian et al., 2021) suggest that there is higher risk of COVID-19 infection indoors than outdoors. Furthermore, Kane et al. (2021) argue that coastal environments offer lower risk of infection than regular outdoor areas, due to the dispersion of respiratory droplets in the regular airflow of the coastline. As perceived crowding does not affect overall experience satisfaction at the beach, the hypothesis H7 concerning a possible moderating effect of COVID-19 fear and risk between perceived crowding and overall experience satisfaction was not tested and is thus rejected.

Beach facilities affect overall satisfaction positively, but as the moderation analysis has shown, when the perceived fear and risk are higher, the influence of beach facilities on overall satisfaction is stronger, confirming hypothesis H8. Since previous research has demonstrated (Yu et al., 2021) that emotion regulation ability is a significant moderator between perceived risk of COVID-19 and stress, the availability of necessary facilities at the beach can aid visitors in their ability to regulate perceived risk, which in turn leads to higher overall experience satisfaction levels. These results support the findings of Hassan and Soliman (2021), which show that fear arousal has a moderation impact on the relationships between visitors' perceived trust and revisit intention, social responsibility and revisit intention, and between destination reputation and revisit intention.

No moderating effect of COVID-19 fear and risk has been found between the paths of overall experience satisfaction and recommendation intention, thus hypothesis H9 is rejected. The reason for this may lie in the fact that 39.8% of the respondents had significant previous experience with the beach and the destination, namely domestic tourists, local and seasonal residents. Rasoolimanesh, Seyfi et al. (2021) find that past experience with a destination is a significant factor contributing to tourists' willingness to support a destination. According to Han and Hyun (2015), previous travel experience tends to create trust and minimises future travel risk perceptions.

Finally, no moderating effect of COVID-19 fear and risk was found between overall experience satisfaction and revisit intention, thus hypothesis H10 is not confirmed. These results are opposite to those of Rather (2021), who finds that perceived COVID-19 fear moderates the relationship between consumer brand engagement and revisit intention. Furthermore, Hassan and Soliman (2021) find that fear arousal negatively moderates the direct positive relationships between destination reputation and return intention and between perceived trust and return intention. The reasons for these differences in results, besides previous destination experience, may lie in the visitor perception of beaches being relatively safer during a pandemic, as opposed to other environments within the tourist destination. Regarding this result, it may also be argued that during pandemic conditions, destination managers should emphasise the tourism destination beach environments in their marketing campaigns and in particular to the marketing segments with previous experiences with the beach and the destination.

Using PMT nested in the satisfaction-loyalty framework we have demonstrated that under the pandemic conditions, perceived threat of COVID-19 increases the value visitors place on facilities in public areas, or in the case of this investigation, at the beach. As the protection motivation of the PMT framework is amplified, because of perceived fear/risk increase, beach visitors place more value on facilities (available parking space, areas for recreation, easier accessibility) and sanitary standards (litter bin and shower availability). These results can be interpreted within the PMT framework, as activation of efficacy response. The availability of these common facilities leads to higher levels of overall satisfaction as the perceived fear/risk of disease increases.

Conclusion

This paper investigated the antecedents of beach visitors' satisfaction with beaches during the COVID-19 pandemic in the case of three distinct Croatian beaches of the Primorsko-Goranska County wider littoral area. A significant number of authors (Ariza et al., 2014; Magaš et al., 2018; Milanés Batista et al., 2020; Villares et al., 2006) argue that stakeholder participation is a key element in an integrated approach to beach and coastal zone management. We have employed the PMT approach to model visitors' perceptions of fear and risk of COVID-19 in a conative model of visitor satisfaction and future behavioural intentions. Furthermore, we have tested and demonstrated the validity of the combined satisfaction-importance method for investigating beach visitors' satisfaction with heterogenous beach types (rural, urban, town) in an integral approach. This novel holistic methodology can be used by destination managers in assessing satisfaction with beaches of a tourism destination in a wider geographical sense, while controlling for different preferences of visitors to natural and/or rural beach locations as opposed to visitor preferences of urban and semi-urban beach types.

The empirical findings of this study offer theoretical contributions to the PMT. When, in accordance with the PMT model, the intent to adopt a recommended response is triggered, the availability of basic facilities provides protective response ability, leading to higher overall satisfaction of visitors and favourable future intentions toward the destination. These findings have implications for beach and destination managers about visitor satisfaction and loyalty during a global pandemic.

The main limitation of this paper is the combined satisfaction/importance measurement for the purpose of combined assessment of natural and urban beach types in our investigation. A further limitation of this research is a sample of 3 beaches in only one country. Future research on the topic should include more beaches in a multiple-country investigation.

Further future research recommendations include identification of attributes that carry the largest effect sizes on overall satisfaction and future behavioural intentions in a beach sample under investigation. This can be accomplished using the importance-performance technique. The attributes carrying the largest impacts on satisfaction and loyalty, in the overall sample, should be the ones that managers need to consider and prioritise to foster sustainable and competitive beach tourism destinations, even during the times of a global pandemic. Lastly, future research in tourism during a pandemic, on visitor satisfaction and loyalty, should focus on the tourism destination, accommodation establishments (hotels, B&B), hospitality establishments (restaurants, bars), and entertainment events and model the pandemic influence on the previously established theoretical relationships from the literature.

Acknowledgments

This paper was funded under the project line ZIP UNIRI of the University of Rijeka, for the project ZIP-UNIRI-116-1-20.

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Appendix A

Natural beach characteristics. Please rate your level of satisfaction where 1 – very dissatisfied, 2 – dissatisfied, 3 – neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied, 4 – satisfied, 5 – very satisfied.

- NC1 Beach sediment texture
- NC2 Available shade on the beach
- NC3 Texture of beach sediment when entering the sea
- NC4 Cleanliness of the sea
- NC5 Opportunities to observe maritime species (fish, crabs, shells ...)
- NCE1 Litter/Plastic on the beach
- NC_SCN Beach scenery and local landscape

COVID-19 fear/risk. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements where 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – somewhat disagree, 3 – neither agree, nor disagree, 4 – somewhat agree 5 – strongly agree.

- C191 I do not fear getting COVID-19 on this beach
- C193 I feel safe on this beach

Perceived crowding. Please rate your level of satisfaction where 1 – very dissatisfied, 2 – dissatisfied, 3 – neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied, 4 – satisfied, 5 – very satisfied.

- PCO1 Available space on the beach
- PCO2 Noise on the beach
- PCO3 Crowding on the beach

Beach facilities. Please rate your level of satisfaction/importance where 1 – very dissatisfied, 2 – dissatisfied, 3

– neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied, 4 – satisfied, 5 – very satisfied.

- BF1 Change room availability
- BF2 Available parking space
- BF3 Lifeguard and/or medical service
- BF4 Areas for sport, recreation, and children play on the beach
- BF5 Accessibility to the beach and sea for persons with disabilities
- BSAN1 Litter bin availability
- BSAN2 Shower availability

Overall satisfaction and intentions of recommendation/revisit. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements where 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – somewhat disagree, 3 – neither agree, nor disagree, 4 – somewhat agree, 5 – strongly agree.

- SATE1 I am satisfied with the overall experience at this beach
- SATE2 I made a wise decision to visit this beach
- SATE3 This beach is exactly what I needed
- SATE4 I really enjoy this beach
- RECI1 I will recommend this beach to other people
- RECI2 I will tell other people positive things about this beach
- RECI3 I will encourage friends and relatives to visit this beach
- RI1 I will try to visit this beach again
- RI2 I think I will visit this beach again
- RI3 I will probably visit this beach again

Original Scientific Article

Re-Examining the Push-Pull Model in Tourists' Destination Selection: COVID-19 in the Context of Kerala, India

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This paper discusses a new conceptual model that can better describe the destination selection decision of tourists during and possibly after COVID-19. The utility theory proposed by Lancaster (1966, 1971) is the basis of the proposed model. This research paper revises the existing push-pull literature by redefining 'pull' factors as the 'pull back factors' or constraints in destination selection. The external destination-related pull factors have become risky and unknown to travellers on account of the distress created by COVID-19. This model identifies primary push-pull constructs: environment, ethnicity, entertainment, expenses, and endurance. Responses from 311 tourists who have either visited or booked to visit Kerala in 2021 were collated for empirically testing this concept. The classic co-variance-based structural equation modelling approach (CB-SEM) was used for statistical validation. From this study, it is observed that the tourists visiting a destination are willing to spend money to experience the climate and culture; but from the entertainment point of view, they are cost-conscious. A direct positive relationship between the safety and spending habits of the tourists were found. These results call for replacing the current leisure-oriented strategies by prioritizing health, culture, outdoor experiences, nature, and well-being.

Keywords: push-pull model, tourist motivation, destination selection, CB-SEM

 https://doi.org/10.26493/2335-4194.16.173-189

Introduction

Before COVID-19, tourism was considered one of the world's largest economic sectors that creates jobs, drives exports, and generates prosperity worldwide. The World Travel and Tourism Council's research (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2018), in its annual analysis quantifying the global economic and employment impact of travel and tourism in 185 countries and 25 regions, reveals that the sector accounted for 10.4% of global GDP and 319 million jobs, or 10% of total employment, in 2018. Tourism is a growing industry in developed and underdeveloped countries (Tasci & Knutson, 2004). The report by WTTC highlights that travel to emerging economies is expected to increase at twice the rate of travel to advanced economies from now until 2030. In these countries, tourism is a catalyst of change in household economies, leading to new opportunities for employment, new sources of cash income, and new information about technologies (Barkin, 1996; Eadington & Smith, 1992; Levy & Lerch, 1991).

As an impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism industry is reported to be one of the most damaged industries, with a steep decline amounting to 2.86 trillion US dollars (Abbas et al., 2021). COVID-19 has drastically shifted travel patterns globally (Irwin, 2020). However, some literature has rightly pointed out that policymakers can consider this an opportunity as well-being and wellness can become a factor of destination choice (Wen et al., 2020; Buckley & Westway, 2020). According to De Vos (2020), active modes, i.e. walking and cycling, would aid in enhancing physical activities and maintaining the health and well-being of people during pandemics. Santos et al. (2020) pointed out that tourists may now look more for quieter places with outdoor experiences and in nature. This scenario can be used as an opportunity for smaller enterprises as they can promote health, well-being, safety, etc. as a factor of attraction (Sharma et al., 2021). These positive outlooks can add more value to this research.

Correia and Pimpao (2008) argue that selecting tourist destinations depends on developing theories about consumer behaviour and understanding tourists' choices. While it is commonly accepted that a clear understanding of travellers' images of a destination is crucial for developing successful marketing and positioning strategies, equally important is the area of behaviour, motivations, perceptions and images of places across sub-segments of a potential market (Sirakaya et al., 1996).

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Lancaster's original work on the consumer analysis-product characteristics approach (1966, 1971). Lancaster's original work on consumer analysis was published in 1966 but has since been refined and extended to provide an interesting and innovative approach to consumer demand theory. The spark for formulating Lancaster's theory originated from the simple observation that traditional demand theory ignored highly pertinent and obvious information and the properties of goods themselves (Lancaster, 1971). Despite the contribution and prominence of the traditional demand theory for tourism research, it still suffers from serious drawbacks since it ignores the particularities of the product (Rugg, 1973; Morley, 1992; Papatheodorou, 2001). Lancaster views the relationship between people and products as at least a two-stage affair. This affair comprises the relationship between products and their characteristics (objective and technical), and the relationship between characteristics and people (personal, involving individual preferences). Rugg (1973) was the first to incorporate the Lancasterian characteristics approach to tourism. As was seen earlier in this section, the essence of Lancaster's approach is that goods are no longer utility objects by themselves. Goods are assumed to generate certain characteristics or attributes from which utility is ultimately derived. Maximizing utility requires choosing a bundle of goods that generates the optimum bundle of characteristics. In the Lancasterian approach to consumer analysis, the utility for each good is defined as a weighted sum of a set of characteristics. Characteristics demand theory by Lancaster states that consumers derive utility not from the actual contents of the basket but from the characteristics of the goods in it. When applied to tourism, these characteristics can be defined as the set of attractions and facilities that can offer visitors a pleasant experience.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to understand the push and pull factors that would affect the tourism destination selection in the ambit of the five 'E's. The literature survey identified five major destination selection characteristics, viz., expenses, endurances, environment, ethnicity, and entertainment. Those aspects that can positively influence tourists in selecting a destination were classified as push items. The other factors that can also stand as an obstacle in their decision were categorized as pull items. In the context of Lancasterian theory, the tourists should weigh utility for push characteristics rather than pull factors in selecting a destination. This research is very relevant in the COVID-19 scenario as it attempts to redefine the existing theoretical model. This may help policymakers to shape brand-new tourism strategies post COVID-19. The classic covariance-based structural equation modelling was employed for observing the relationship with push and pull variables.

Literature Review

According to the International Monetary fund, tourism receipts worldwide are expected to recover to 2019 levels in 2023 (Behsudi, 2020). COVID-19 and tourist typology and its influence on short or long-haul travel can become a major challenge for the travel and tourism industry across the world (Senbeto & Hon, 2020). During pandemics, people avoid places with medium or high risks (Hotle, 2020). One of the most adopted preventive behaviours during COVID-19 was the avoidance of public transportation (Yıldırım et al., 2020). Pandey et al. (2021) pointed out that the pandemic has considerably impacted the Indian tourism industry, and across the country those working in the tourism sector are confronting a decline in their income. They have suggested a sustainable recovery framework to overcome this trauma. According to Jafari et al. (2021), this pandemic invariably hits tourism-reliant sectors such as hotels, restaurants, travel agents, the transport sector, etc.; therefore, the strategies designed to address the pandemic must be holistic. This pandemic adversely affected our foreign exchange earnings and regional developments (Jaipuria, 2020).

There are many factors that act as major actors for tour attractions, the attractiveness of the spot, historical aspects and entertainment facilities being some of them. It is required to provide a basket of services in all those fields in order to satisfy customers (Neal, 2003). The performance of a tourist destination and satisfaction of visitors with the destination are of paramount importance to the destination competitiveness since the pleasantness of the experience is more likely to influence visitors' future behaviour. (Baloglu et al., 2003). A tourist destination consists of several independent interest groups that, in turn, have concrete and different goals and plans. Its residents act simultaneously as recipients and producers of the destination's brand image (Freire, 2011).

Consumers' choice processes are influenced by psychological variables such as motivations, attitudes, beliefs, and images, and non-psychological variables like time, destination attributes, perceived costs of tourism products, buyer characteristics, and benefits sought. The different research works in consumer decision theory suggest that images of tourism and travellers' perceptions of destinations play important roles in the destination choice decisions of potential travellers (Ahmed, 1991; Alhemoud & Armstrong, 1996; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997). According to Fakeye and Crompton (1991), destinations with positive images can be expected to prosper, while those with less favourable images may never achieve their fullest tourism potential.

Understanding why people travel and what factors influence their behavioural intention of choosing a travel destination is beneficial to tourism planning and marketing. Many researchers have investigated travel motivation within different fields, such as sociology, anthropology, and psychology (Cohen, 1972; Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Gnoth, 1997). One popular typology for understanding travel decisions is the 'push and pull' model (Crompton, 1979). A review of the past literature on tourist motivation indicates that the analysis of motivations based on the two dimensions of push and pull factors have been generally accepted (Yuan & McDonald, 1990; Uysal & Hagan, 1993).

The examination of studies (Gilbert & Terrata, 2001; Hanqin & Lam, 1999; Kim et al., 2006; Kozak, 2002; Mohsin & Alsawafi, 2011; Phau et al., 2013; Sangpikul, 2008; Sirakaya et al., 2003) in the area of travel motivation demonstrates that among the proposed models, Crompton's (1979) push and pull factors are more popular among researchers. The push-pull theoretical framework is a popular theory to explain why tourists decide to visit the destination rather than other places, the kind of experience they want to get, and the type of activity they want to do (Prayag & Hosany, 2014). Crompton (1979) first sought to draw seven socio-psychological push motives: escapeexploratory, relaxation, prestige, regression, kinship-enhancement, social interaction, and cultural, and for pull motives, novelty and education. The conceptual framework developed would influence the selection of a destination, and this approach implies that the destination can influence vacation behaviour in meeting an aroused need.

Numerous studies (Devesa et al., 2010; Hanqin & Lam, 1999; Kozak, 2002; Lo & Lee, 2011; Phau et al., 2013; Prayag & Hosany, 2014; Yoon & Uysal, 2005) were conducted to test and to integrate this concept, and in these studies, the push factors are treated as the internal factors by which people feel motivated for the trip, considering their own needs. One of the positive features of Crompton's model was its dynamism, which allowed later researchers to add some factors to the model or remove some with regard to the tourists' nationality and their own destinations. Travel motivation is a push factor that impels an individual to make a trip. Holiday motivations can be characterized as the need for relaxation, social contact, mastery, and intellectual stimulation (Ryan & Glendon, 1998). According to Leiper (1990), tourists are pushed by their own motivation toward the places where they expect their needs will be satisfied. Goffi and Cucculelli (2014) reported the core attractors or push factors in destination selection as natural and cultural resources, events, and gastronomy.

In this research, the authors judged the major demotivating variables in destination selection as pull variables. In some other literature, pull motivation is defined as the tangible resources and traveller's perception of the features or attributes of a specific destination; therefore, it plays an important role in the destination choice of tourists once the decision to travel has been made (Crompton, 1979; Uysal & Hagan, 1993; Kim et al., 2006). The pull factor is the external forces related to food, people, recreation facilities, and the marketed image of the destination (Uysal & Hagan, 1993). Considering the above notions, we intend to redefine the pull motives as the major factors that pull back tourists from visiting a destination. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, some more factors can be added to this such as isolation costs during the quarantine period, COVID testing charges, and the cost involved in treating COVID-infected tourists, etc. (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021).

The pull motivation factors related to wellness tourist products were labelled as Basic wellness, Intangible wellness, and Extra wellness. Sometimes the tourists may give importance to intangible wellness aspects like atmosphere, relaxation, and surroundings, compared to tangible wellness aspects such as massage, sauna, mud baths/wraps, etc. (Damijanić, 2020).

According to Jackson (2000), time, cost, skills problems, and fears may become increasingly important constraints in selecting a destination. There are constraints related to cost, transportation, companionship, health, and available activities/programmes (McCarville & Smale, 1993; Scott & Munson, 1994; Searle & Jackson, 1985). The limitations, viz., time availability, transportation access, fear of crime, family responsibilities, lack of skill and ability, and a lack of self-confidence, can act as major pull aspects in visiting a destination (Horna, 1989; Searle & Jackson, 1985; Witt & Goodale, 1981; Jun et al., 2009; Das & Tiwari, 2020). The fear of travelling can induce coping strategies, increasing individuals' resilience, and embracing careful travel behaviours (Zheng et al., 2021).

While reviewing some studies on expenses, it is reported that destination selection depends on higher buying power resulting from a favourable currency exchange rate and lower living expenditures (Pokharel et al., 2018). The currency exchange rate between destination and outbound countries also has an impact on the number of international tourists; tourists were more likely to visit countries with higher exchange rates, and the international tourists were more attracted to countries where exchange rates were more favourable (Song et al., 2003). Food quality is reported as essential to destination choices (Bjork & Raisanen, 2016). The tourists will search for food-related information before their trips, and the uniqueness of local food impacts travel satisfaction.

The COVID-19 restriction has made tourists look for a new way to travel. COVID-19 has impacted economically, socially, and psychologically among potential tourists (Jaipuria et al., 2021). In this context, numerous enduring pull factors, such as lockdown, fear of social isolation, fear of infection, government restriction, depression, boredom, etc., can be identified. (Di Renzo et al., 2020; Pradana et al., 2020; Golets et al., 2021). From the angle of expenses, the major pull factors are the cost of COVID testing, hotel isolation expenses, money spent on quarantine, additional expenses on avoidance of public transportation, etc. (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021). This may pave new trends in travelling, such as one-day trips, home picnics, etc. (Roy & Sharma, 2021).

It is reported that responsible travellers post COVID-19 will be determined by three main factors, namely, travel preferences, health and hygiene considerations, and destination choices (Gamil, 2022). Hygiene should be projected as a niche market solution post COVID-19 (Hosta & Plevnik, 2021). In another research the cleanliness of accommodation products was reported to be the most important aspect post COVID-19. The hotels and restaurants in tourist destinations should adhere to public health strategies to limit the spread of disease and regain customers' trust (Chang & Kim, 2022). Post COVID-19, the tourism cities should project a safe and healthy image to attract more tourists. The tourism marketers should treat the image of the destination as the key parameter for pitching their marketing strategies (Sahebi et al., 2022).

The Proposed Conceptual Model

In the literature, push factors were defined as the motivation and intangible desires of individual travellers to visit a destination, whereas pull factors refer to the external forces of destination attributes in the country (Dann, 1977; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994; Hanqin & Lam, 1999). In the proposed conceptual model, some slight modifications were brought to the above definitions by redefining push factors as the implicit drive of a tourist to visit a destination and the pull factors as the explicit constraints. Here the push factors are described as the way of satisfying the psychological needs of the visitors. In this context, three major factors, viz., environmental image (Okoroafo, 1995), ethnicity parameters Hitchcock (1999) and entertainment amenities (Nallathiga, 2006) were listed. These factors internally motivate the tourists to opt for tourism for elusive rewards such as fun, assurance, and other emotional needs. In contrast, the pull factors are the major factors that can also become constraints in visiting a tourism destination. The restrictions attributed to the visitor also play an important role in selecting or rejecting a destination (Karl et al., 2015). Financial and operational restrictions are important (Saito & Strehlau, 2018). This includes travel and transportation expenses, currency exchange, the impossibility of finding a suitable travel partner, dangers, political situations at the destination, etc. Based on the above variables, two major constructs, viz., Expenses and Endurance, were developed.

Thus, three push factors (environment, ethnicity, and entertainment) and two pull factors (expenses and endurance) were identified. Further, a conceptual model was developed based on the identified constructs. We have made a solemn effort to fit our conceptual model in the context of Lancasterian (1966, 1971) utility theory. This work proposes five major factors for selecting a tourist destination. In other words, the utility for each destination is defined as a weighted sum of a set of characteristics. Characteristics demand theory by Lancaster (1971) states that consumers derive utility not from the actual contents of the basket but from the characteristics of the goods in it. In our model, the central postulation is that the tourists visiting the destination will neglect the hurdles such as expenses and endurances to satisfy their emotional needs. And the internal drives of the tourists to experience environment, ethnicity, and entertainment have significant influence over other constraints. The primary objective of this research is to examine the statistical viability of this conceptual model based on real data. This model will add to the existing literature by redefining the push-pull model used by various practitioners and thinkers amidst COVID-19.

Table 1 explains the proposed redefined push-pull model for tourism destination selection. This model has used two key parameters in the context of COVID-19, viz., health and safety restrictions imposed in the tourism destinations by the government and the financial positions of the tourists. If the health and safety restriction is minimal and the personal financial position of the tourists is strong, then it is evident that they tend to explore the destination. This model argues that if the government restrictions are minimal,

Table 1 Redefined Push-Pull Destination Selection Model Amidst COVID-19

		Health & safety restrictions in destinations	
		Minimal	Maximal
Financial position of the tourist	Strong	Push Motives (Ethnicity, Entertainment & Environment)	Push Motives (Environment & Ethnicity)
	Weak	Push Motives (Ethnicity, Entertainment & Environment)	Pull Motives (Expenses & Endurance)

tourists prioritize exploration despite their individual financial condition.

Conversely, if the health and safety measures in the destination are stringent, only financially sound tourists prefer to visit the destination, and their primary motive will be to reconnoitre the environment. During the pandemic period, if the safety restriction is at its maximum, it is observed that tourists are less favourable to the entertainment opportunities offered in the destinations.

Finally, it is expected that tourists will give weightage to expense and endurance over other push motives if their financial position is weak and health and safety restriction are at its maximum. In such a situation, it is obvious that people will prioritize satisfying their physiological needs rather than exploring new tourist destinations. Here this theory is redefining pull motives as the major factor pulling back tourists from visiting a destination amidst the pandemic.

Data and Methodology

In this study, Kerala, the southwestern state of India, has been selected as a destination for the survey. This state's tourism is popularized with the 'God's Own Country' campaign. The exclusive geographical diversity of Kerala offers tourists a range of attractions and experiences, such as beaches, backwaters, wildlife sanctuaries, evergreen forests, and diverse flora and fauna of the State (Edward & George, 2008). A report released by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, reported that 340,755 foreign tourists visited Kerala in 2020. Based on the travel trend report that The Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) released, Kerala is ranked eighth among the twelve destinations to watch (India Today, 2017). As per official statistics, Tourism contributes 10 percent of Kerala's GDP and 23.5 percent to the total employment in the state (Kavya Lekshmi & Mallick, 2020). However, COVID-19 has hit the tourism sector in Kerala at its worst. The statistics from authorities reported that the total loss the sector incurred between January and September 2020 was Rs.249.71 billion, while the loss in earnings from the decline in foreign tourist arrivals is estimated to be Rs.5.274 billion after witnessing 8.52% growth in the year 2019 (Times of India, 2021). This scenario calls for a revisit of the existing models and redefining the destination selection factors considering the COVID-19 pandemic.

Three major tourist destinations in Kerala state have been identified as the places for conducting this research. They are Thangassery in Kollam district, Kuttanad in Alappuzha district and Kumarakom in Kottayam district. The population for this research consists of the international tourists who have visited or booked to visit the above destinations prior to imposing the travel ban due to COVID-19. In the year 2019–2020 a total number of 340,755 international tourists have visited Kerala and out of this, 46,629 tourists have visited Alappuzha, 20,072 to Kottayam and 5,141 persons to Kollam respectively (Kerala Tourism, 2020). Considering the above information as a foundation, available data of international tourists who made reservations to visit these destinations before the imposition of travel restrictions were duly collected. One of the limitations in this method is that the survey was restricted to respondents whose emails/contacts were shared by the resorts or travel agents in these destinations. The electronic questionnaire was circulated among 1,400 prospective respondents who had either visited or booked to visit the

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics and Variable Selection

Factors	Categorization	Observed Variable	Mean	SD	Rank
Pull Factors	Expenses	Cost of Accommodation	3.11	1.34	1
		Cost of Food and Beverages	2.55	1.36	
		Shopping Expenses	2.87	1.36	
		Travel Cost	2.95	1.49	3
		Visa Charges	2.66	1.37	
		Currency Exchange	3.07	1.54	2
		Miscellaneous Expenses	2.51	1.48	
	Endurances	Safety and Security at Destination	6.35	1.57	1
		Security measures in Adventure Sports	5.29	1.46	
		Food and its quality	6.21	1.20	2
		Nightlife and Safety	5.32	1.00	
		Easy Transportation Access	6.11	1.20	3
		Security for Outdoor Activities	5.92	1.47	
		Communication Systems without breaks	6.09	1.52	
Push Factors	Environment	To appreciate natural resources	6.02	1.53	2
		To sightsee tourist spots	5.72	1.48	
		For exploration	5.99	1.26	3
		To experience the climate	6.10	1.13	1
		To expose to new surroundings	5.48	1.30	

Continued on the next page

above destinations before the spread of COVID-19. The questionnaire was written in English and was distributed to the respondents who could read and understand English. Later it was reported that, as an impact of pandemic, the number of international tourists visiting Kerala had dropped to 60,487 in the year 2020–2021. Out of this, 777 tourists have visited Alappuzha, 365 visited Kottayam and only 77 visited Kollam (Kerala Tourism, 2021). A simple random sampling technique was used for data collection. Finally, 311 valid responses were obtained from this survey.

The questionnaire design was adapted from previous researchers' work, such as Dann (1977, 1981), Uysal and Jurowski (1994) and Hanqin and Lam (1999). Push factors, origin-related and intangible desires of individual travellers, comprised 25 items. Likewise, 14 pull motive items, which were the external forces of destination attributes in the country, were put together. The push and pull items were assessed using a 7-point Likert scale, from 7 indicating very important to 1 not important. This research devised five major constructs in the proposed theoretical model, viz., expenses, endurance, environment, ethnicity, and entertainment. For developing this framework, the authors have considered 39 push-pull variables determining the destination selection of tourists across the globe.

The G*Power 3.1 software package was used to test whether the number of observations are adequate for regression analysis. G*Power 3.1 provides power analysis procedures for both the conditional (and fixed-predictors) and the unconditional (or random-predictors) models of multiple regression (Gatsonis & Sampson, 1989). In this study, power analysis procedure suggested by Faul et al. (2009) was used to justify the sample size for the linear regression model. A minimum power level of 0.80 can be accepted at 5 percent level of significance (typically $\alpha = 0.05$). The software has generated a sample value of 225. This value statis-

Table 2 Continued from the previous page

Factors	Categorization	Observed Variable	Mean	SD	Rank
	Ethnicity	For social interaction	6.30	1.23	2
		For visiting heritage sites	5.92	1.32	3
		For relationship enhancement	3.70	1.09	
		For social relationship with family and friends	2.11	1.00	
		To explore different cultures	6.39	1.25	1
		To experience new and different lifestyles or traditions	5.20	1.17	
		To seek novelty	4.62	1.54	
		For prestige and impression	5.23	1.23	
		To exchange customs and traditions	4.79	1.68	
		To enhance communication with local community	5.15	1.74	
		To reconnect with spiritual roots	5.81	1.37	
	Entertainment	For relaxation and having fun	6.70	1.06	1
		To find a new or unusual experience	5.98	1.23	
		For shopping	5.32	1.55	
		To participate in new activities	4.99	1.25	
		To fulfil my dream of visiting a foreign land/country	5.63	1.24	
		For experiencing adventure	6.42	1.75	2
		Experience festivals and events	6.01	1.65	3
		To have enjoyable time with my travel companion(s)	5.69	1.37	
		To find thrills and excitement	5.96	1.05	

tically justifies the obtained sample size of 311. In this analysis, five constructs and 15 observations were retained. Moreover, the academic literature shows that a sample size of 200 is appropriate for path modelling (Hoyle, 1995; Boomsma, 1982; 1985). Thus, a sample of 311 can be considered sufficient for the regression modelling.

After gathering the final response, each variable's weighted average mean and standard deviation were calculated. At this stage, an effort has been taken to retain three variables per construct for further modelling, as many variables per construct may produce dubious outcomes in path analysis (Ropovik, 2015). The variables with the most favourable response from each category were identified based on the respective weighted mean score of the individual item. At most, care has been employed for ensuring three indicating variables, each per construct. This is because a single indicator per construct needs to pay attention to the unreliability of measurement. Therefore, using three items is the minimum threshold as a general rule for the number of items per construct (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996). The study was carried out with covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM), and the IBM-AMOS.21 package was employed for processing the data. It is reported that CB-SEM is useful for examining moderating effects, especially when a third variable changes the relationship between two related variables (Hair et al., 2010). Table 2 represents the descriptive statistics of the variables selected for the study.

Simple weighted average mean criterion was employed for ranking the all variables mentioned in the questionnaire. This is because the highest rank preference will be given to the variables with maximum weighted mean scores. The variables such as accom-

Table 3 Demographic Profile

Variable	Category	Count	%
Gender	Male	204	65.60
	Female	107	34.40
	Total	311	100.0
Age	<25	23	7.40
	26–35	127	40.83
	36–45	52	16.72
	46–55	66	21.22
	>55	43	13.83
	Total	311	100.0
Occupation	Employed	128	41.20
	Entrepreneur	74	23.80
	Retired	43	13.80
	Student	1	0.30
	Unemployed	65	20.90
	Total	311	100.0
Education	<12th Standard	4	1.30
	Bachelors	144	46.30
	Master's	52	16.70
	Professional	111	35.70
	Total	311	100.0
Marital Status	Single	156	50.16
	Married	155	49.84
	Total	311	100.0

Notes $N = 311$.

modation cost, currency exchange, and travelling expenses under the construct expenses (weighted mean scores are 3.11, 3.07, and 2.95) were retained. For measuring endurance, we have used safety and security, quality of food, and transportation access as the highest obtained mean values for these variables are 6.35, 6.21, and 6.11. The construct of environment is observed to be influenced by climate, natural resources, and exploration (the reported weighted means are 6.10, 6.02, and 5.99). From the ethnic angle, most respondents favoured culture, social interaction, and heritage (obtained mean values are 6.39, 6.30, and 5.92). And finally, from an entertainment angle, the variables such as fun, adventure, and festival were reported to be important, with respective weighted mean scores of 6.70, 6.42, and 6.01. Thus, from the push perspective, nine variables were retained, and from the pull viewpoint, six variables were preserved for further modelling. The demographic profile of the participants in this survey is exhibited in Table 3.

The sample is well-distributed and represents the right demographic mix. A majority of 65.6% of the respondents are male. A greater part, 40.83%, is aged between 26 and 35 years. In a broader perspective, 78.7% of the respondents are in the larger group of 26 to 55 years of age, with a lesser percentage of 13.8% respondents representing greater than 55 years of age and an even lesser 7.4 % representing the age group below 25 years. A high of 46.3% of the respondents are employed, while 23.8% of the respondents are entrepreneurs, 13.8% are retired, and only 20.9% are unemployed. The sample selected is well-educated, given that 98.7% of the respondents have earned a university degree or above. The sample is almost equally distributed with respect to marital status, with 50.16% being single and 49.84% being married.

Data Analysis

The classic Cronbach's alpha model (1951) was used to measure the constructs' reliability. The alpha values of the constructs were computed using the estimates of the residuals and their standard error. Sources indicate that an alpha value of 0.8 or above reports sound reliability of the constructs (Cortina, 1993).

From Table 4, it is clear that Cronbach's alpha values of the respective factors range from 0.94 to 0.81. The above range signals the strong reliability of the constructs as the threshold limit set in this direction is only 0.8 ($\alpha > 0.8$). The composite reliability (CR) of the constructs is also reported to be sound as the obtained values range from 0.68 to 0.86. It is obtained by combining all of the true score variances (λ^2) of the observed variables related to constructs and by dividing this sum by the total variance in the constructs. If the CR of the factor loadings is above the threshold of 0.7, it indicates internal consistency (Hair et al., 2014). Here, with respect to the factor 'endurance,' the composite reliability is reported to be 0.68, which can be further rounded off to 0.7. Other than this, all other

Table 4 Constructs' Reliability and Validity

Factor	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Expenses	0.84	0.76	0.51
Endurance	0.81	0.68	0.63
Environment	0.92	0.85	0.67
Ethnicity	0.94	0.86	0.69
Entertainment	0.90	0.81	0.61

Notes CR indicates composite reliability.

Table 5 Measurement of Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Factors	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Expenses	0.72				
(2) Endurance	1.01	0.80			
(3) Environment	−0.03	−0.11	0.82		
(4) Ethnicity	−0.06	−0.06	0.56	0.83	
(5) Entertainment	-0.26	−0.24	0.44	0.58	0.78

Notes Diagonal values are squared roots of AVE; off-diagonal values are the estimates of inter-correlation between the latent constructs.

constructs were reported to have sound internal consistency, scoring above the doorstep limit of 0.7.

The convergent validity and discriminant validity of the constructs were duly assessed. An AVE of 0.5 or more confirms the convergent validity of the factors (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). From Table 5, it is clear that the obtained AVE of the constructs is much above the stated limit of 0.5, with a range of 0.51 to 0.69. This result confirms the convergent validity of the scale. Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion was used for checking the discriminant validity. Based on this norm, if the square root of the AVE is higher than the correlation between the respective latent variables, it confirms discriminant validity.

From Table 6, it is clear that other than the correlation between the construct's endurance and expenses (0.72 < 1.01), the rest of the constructs satisfy the criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) as the correlation between the square root of AVE is reported to be much higher than that of the inter-correlation between the factors. A majority of the construct satisfies the norms in connection with the discriminant validity; therefore the results can be substantiated.

Table 6 CB SEM Model

Observed variable ← Construct	B	SE	T	p	f^2
Accommodation Cost ← Expenses	1.00				0.52
Currency Exchange ← Expenses	1.50	0.15	10.08	0.00	1.85
Travelling Cost ← Expenses	1.44	0.15	9.64	0.00	1.22
Safety and Security ← Endurance	1.00				0.44
Food and its quality ← Endurance	1.44	0.16	9.03	0.00	1.14
Transportation Access ← Endurance	1.18	0.14	8.48	0.00	0.75
Climate ← Environment	1.00				11.19
Natural Resources ← Environment	0.67	0.08	8.76	0.00	0.28
Exploration ← Environment	0.96	0.04	23.32	0.00	6.25
Cultural Experience ← Ethnicity	1.00				9.53
Social Interaction ← Ethnicity	0.67	0.07	9.97	0.00	0.36
Heritage Sites Visit ← Ethnicity	0.94	0.04	26.74	0.00	8.01
Fun ← Entertainment	1.00				2.02
Adventure ← Entertainment	0.75	0.09	8.77	0.00	0.31
Festivals and Events ← Entertainment	1.12	0.07	16.10	0.00	10.76

Table 6 exhibits the result of the path analysis of the established model. This model intends to study the effect of the observed push-pull variables on the established constructs. Interestingly, all the observed variables were reported to have a positive and significant effect on the 5E factors, viz., expenses, endurance, environment, ethnicity, and entertainment. This is because the probability value of the test statistics is much below the critical point of 0.05. Moreover, the T-test results are much above the reference point of 1.96. These results will force us to signify our hypotheses by accepting the fact that the push factors and pull factors have a positive influence on destination selection.

Each path's effect size was measured using f^2 values (Cohen, 1988). From Table 6, it can be realized that the f^2 values range from 11.19 to 0.28. Cohen (1988) defined effect sizes as small if the obtained f^2 score is below 0.2; an f^2 score above 0.8 indicates a large effect size. In this analysis, all the observed variables possess a medium or large effect on their respective constructs. Concerning the factor of expense, currency exchange is considered the primary factor with an effect size of 1.85 ($\beta = 1.50$, $p = 0.00$). It can be inferred that people are hesitant to visit Kerala because of the fluctuation of their home currency exchange rates with INR. The β is a coefficient that indicates the impact of change in the observed variables on the respective factor. For instance, in the above situation, β is 1.50; this indicates that every one percent change in the currency exchange rate would pull the tourists 1.5 times from visiting a destination because of the expense factor. This result agrees with Pokharel et al. (2018) and Song et al. (2003), as these studies emphasized that exchange rate was a major variable in destination choice. Another important pull factor from the endurance angle is the food quality ($f^2 = 1.14$, $\beta = 1.44$, $p = 0.00$), which indicates that foreigners visiting Kerala are greatly concerned about the food quality, and they are very anxious about their ability to survive with the cuisine in this state. It is perceived that this result was obtained on the ground that the traditional Kerala food is usually spicy, which is different from the taste of the westerners, and the visitors are concerned about whether they can access the western style of food while visiting remote areas. This strongly adds to the literature quoted by Bjork and Raisanen (2016).

From another dimension, the climatic conditions in the host place seem to be the major push factor from the environmental angle, with an effect size of 11.19 ($\beta = 1.00$, $p = 0.00$). This variable possesses the highest effect size among all other variables used in this study, signalling that tourists are prominently selecting Kerala as a destination to experience its climatic conditions. From an ethnic angle, the destination selection is mainly based on the motive of experiencing the culture in that place ($f^2 = 9.53$, $\beta = 1.00$, $p = 0.00$). In the literature, Crompton (1979) has also highlighted the importance of cultural aspects in the destination points and has quoted culture as one of the important variables among seven socio-psychological push motives. Another intention of visiting a place is to participate in and experience major festivals and events ($f^2 = 10.76$). This finding seems true for a destination like Kerala, a land of festivals. The literature review also identified the festivals and events as core attractors in destination selection (Goffi & Cucculelli, 2014).

Table 7 Covariance among Constructs

Constructs	β	SE	T	p
Expenses ↔ Endurance	0.60	0.09	6.64	0.00
Expenses ↔ Environment	−0.03	0.06	−0.46	0.65
Expenses ↔ Ethnicity	−0.06	0.06	−0.93	0.35
Entertainment ↔ Expenses	−0.23	0.06	−3.55	0.00
Endurance ↔ Environment	−0.09	0.06	−1.49	0.13
Endurance ↔ Ethnicity	−0.05	0.06	−0.83	0.41
Entertain. ↔ Endurance	−0.20	0.06	−3.17	0.01
Environment ↔ Ethnicity	0.79	0.09	8.13	0.00
Entertain. ↔ Environment	0.59	0.09	6.32	0.00
Entertainment ↔ Ethnicity	0.76	0.10	7.62	0.00

The covariance techniques measure the relationship between the constructs. The covariance among constructs is used to infer the relationships between the focal construct and its measures (Bollen, 1989). The co-variances among the constructs are presented in Table 7, which shows that in terms of direction, the push and pull factors possess a negative relationship. On the other hand, the similar natures of constructs have a positive relationship. For instance, the pull constructs of expense and endurance are reported to have a covariance estimate of 0.60, and the probability value of the test statistics also signifies the result (p-value $0.00 < 0.05$). This indicates that the tourists will spend more if the place ensures adequate safety. Likewise, the push constructs such as environment, ethnicity, and

Table 8 CB-SEM Model Fit Assessment

Criterion	Norms	References	Obtained value
RMSEA	Value less than 0.08 indicates good fit	MacCallum et al. (1996)	0.02
NFI	Value of more than 0.90 indicates fit to the model	Bentler and Bonett (1980)	0.95
CFI	Value of more than 0.90 indicates fit to the model	Bentler (1990)	0.91
PNFI	Value of more than 0.90 indicates fit to the model	Mulaik et al. (1989)	0.86

entertainment also accounted for the positive and significant relationship among them.

Some interesting results were obtained to prove the theoretical propositions statistically. Though the constructs of expenses and environment have a negative relationship with a covariance of −0.03, the test statistics' probability value does not signify the result (p-value 0.65 > 0.05). Similarly, expenses and ethnicity is reported to have a negative direction of −0.06, but this relation cannot be signified as the probability value of the test statistics is 0.35 (p-value > 0.05). On the other hand, the factors such as expenses and entertainment accounted for a negative and significant covariance of −0.23. This can be verbally written as the tourists visiting the destination are willing to spend money to experience the climate and culture, but from the entertainment point of view, they are cost conscious. These results support the utility theory of Lancaster (1966, 1971) by agreeing that consumers derive utility not from the actual contents of the basket but from the characteristics of the goods in it. From another angle, the constructs such as ethnicity and environment hold a negative and insignificant relationship with endurance as the reported p-values 0.13 and 0.41 are much above the critical line of 0.05. This indicates that tourists are willing to suffer all sorts of difficulties attributed to a destination to satisfy their utility (Lancaster, 1966, 1971). The covariance between entertainment and endurance is −0.20, and the probability value of this relation is 0.01 (0.01 < 0.05). This shows that the tourist's value utility on the variable entertainment is less, as other powerful factors influence their destination selection.

The fitness of the CB-SEM model was assessed with numerous statistical techniques (Table 8). The root means square error approximation (RMSEA) reported a value of 0.02, which is much below the threshold limit of 0.08 suggested by MacCallum et al. (1996). The normed fit index (NFI) value of 0.95 and the comparative fit index (CFI) value of 0.91 are close to the critical mark of 0.90. The parsimonious normed fit index (PNFI) reported with a value of 0.86 is much closer to the required level of 0.90 (Mulaik et al., 1989). The above results confirm the statistical fitness of the path analysis employed in this study.

Discussion and Policy Implications

In push and pull factors of destination selection, pull has been given a different connotation during the pandemic as those factors that discourage a tourist from making a favourable decision. The push factors are those which encourage tourists to make a favourable decision. Pull factors in this study are expenses and endurance, and push factors are environment, ethnicity and entertainment. In this study, it has been observed that the tourist's value utility on the variable entertainment is less, as other powerful factors influence their destination selection. The tourists visiting a destination are willing to spend money to experience the climate and culture, but from the entertainment point of view, they are cost conscious. The other attractive features are festivals and events happening in the destination. The pull factors affecting the decision-making are the ease of currency exchange and the food and its quality in the destination.

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, the existing style of branding tourist places should be reconsidered by introducing innovative strategies. It is reported that travelling culture has changed a lot as people tend to prefer one-day travel, home picnics, etc. (Roy & Sharma, 2021). This trend forces policymakers to give more priority to local tourists than foreigners, at least during the pandemic period. However, this can be used as a supportive strategy and may need to be a more sustainable model in the long run. Many experts are of the opinion that the industry cannot flourish without foreign exchange earnings (Jaipuria et al., 2021). The destinations should plan unique selling propositions for the industry to attract foreign visitors. The destinations can be projected as a place of responsible tourism post COVID-19 (Sahebi et al., 2022; Gamil, 2022; Hosta & Plevnik, 2022).

Since the study results support the utility theory of Lancaster (1966, 1971) by agreeing that consumers derive utility not from the actual contents of the basket but from the characteristics of the goods in it, efforts should be made by various stakeholders, including tour operators, local tourism centres, hotels and resorts to have a holistic approach while marketing a destination. Since this study has been done in Kerala, i.e. the southernmost state of India known as 'God's own Country,' the findings have implications for other, similar, tourist destinations worldwide. It is reported that rather than leisure, other aspects, such as culture, tradition, climate, etc., play an important role in attracting travellers. COVID-19 has created an opportunity for a destination like Kerala to promote our traditional ayurvedic resorts, nature, festivals, etc. From this, we should design exclusive strategies for Ayurveda as our literature pointed out that health and well-being are likely to become the selling points post COVID-19 (Santos et al., 2020; Wen, 2020; Buckley & Westway, 2020; Yang et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2021).

In Kerala, festivals and events play a major role in attracting tourists, so the tourism department should make strategies to draw up a marketing communication campaign targeting the same. Efforts should be made to highlight the culture of Kerala, and since this southern state has a rich history, this can be showcased to international tourists. Since Kerala is known for its greenery and, during the monsoon season, the state's beauty grows manifold, monsoon tourism can also be highlighted to attract tourists. The above features must be marketed by highlighting how the destinations are prepared to ensure the health and safety of the visitors.

The hotels and resorts should focus on providing good quality food to the tourists, including catering to the host's preferences, in this case, the international tourists. Wayside eateries should also focus on this aspect. The currency exchange organizations can also play a major role in providing their services and acting as a reference point for the destinations. Overall, Kerala, other than focusing itself as 'God's Own Country,' should also offer itself as a tourist destination that is safe and relatively less costly. Better value propositions need to be offered at optimum cost. Kerala is known for beaches, backwaters and mountains, and efforts should be made to highlight the same, and offerings should be customized based on the requirements of the tourists. The physical contact points can be minimized by migrating to digital platforms like online ticket booking, electronic tickets, accepting digital payments, advanced slot booking, customized travel facilities, etc., which would help to enhance travellers' confidence during the pandemic period.

Conclusion

The idea of this paper is based on Lancaster's original work on the consumer analysis-product characteristics approach (1966, 1971). Lancaster has already articulated that consumers derive utility based on the characteristics of goods offered in a basket rather than the actual content. In this context, this work supports that the tourists weigh satisfying their emotional needs over the obstacles such as cost and safety. The proposed theoretical model points out that if the health and safety measures of the government are liberal; more tourists are expected to visit destinations for entertainment and to explore the culture and environment. However, if the health and safety measures are stringent, only financially sound visitors will attempt to explore the destinations. To tap this opportunity, the destinations should be prepared with unique packages exclusively designed for an elite group of customers. This quadrant of the theoretical model agrees with the suggestions proposed by Roy and Sharma (2021) and Zheng et al. (2021).

The last quadrant of the proposed model signifies how pull motives operate during the pandemic. If the financial position of the tourist is weak and the health and safety measures of the destination are at their maximum, then it is expected that the tourist may turn down their travel plan. The expense of travel, stay, cost of COVID testing, hotel isolation expenses, money spent on quarantine, additional expenses on account of avoidance of public transportation, etc., may need to be more affordable to financially weak travellers (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021). Based on this notion, expenses and endurances act as the major pull-back factors in destination selection.

The suggested model's major limitation is that it can be used to frame strategies only in a crisis where the government or local authorities impose numerous restrictions on travel and stay. However, in an ordinary situation, the pull factors cannot act as a constraint for waning the travel decision by the tourist. Secondly, the data used for the study include tourists who have either visited or booked to visit three tourist destinations in Kerala, viz., Thangassery, Kuttanad, and Kumarakom before COVID-19 restrictions. Their post-travel plan should have been tracked based on this model. The above shortfalls point towards the scope of some future research on topics like:

- Devising a strategic business model for destination selection post COVID-19.
- How to create a USP (Unique Selling Proposition) model for the tourism business post COVID-19.

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The Value of Digital Innovation for Tourism Entrepreneurs in Rural Iceland

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The aim of this paper is to explore digital innovation and entrepreneurial dynamics in rural areas in Iceland. More specifically, the main objective is to describe the current significance digital innovation has for rural tourism entrepreneurs in Iceland. The goal of this study is hence to investigate if and how digital innovation becomes meaningful for rural tourism entrepreneurs in Iceland. Apart from answering the question of 'what is going on on the ground,' the aim is to describe the level of involvement of rural businesses and entrepreneurs in innovation, digital application and technology. Despite the global political discussion about smart tourism and the necessity of digital innovation in the tourism industry, the study revealed that innovation and digitalisation are not necessarily interrelated in the understanding of the rural Icelandic tourism entrepreneurs. The research is an exploratory study and is based on qualitative methodology. Information has been gathered through 34 semi-structured interviews with tourism entrepreneurs and members of their support system in rural Iceland. The research provides knowledge about the status and the value of digital innovation for rural tourism entrepreneurs in Iceland. The study furthermore contributes to gaining understanding about the missing link between policy and practice and thus adds both practical and scientific value to the body of literature.

Keywords: lifestyle entrepreneurship, Iceland, smart tourism, digital innovation, rural entrepreneurship

 https://doi.org/10.26493/2335-4194.16.191-204

Introduction

This article explores the dynamics of digital innovation among rural tourism entrepreneurs based on a case study in Iceland. We are particularly interested in how rural tourism entrepreneurs understand and work with digital innovation and perceive its value, and their experiences of support mechanisms intended to boost innovation. Applied digitalisation is currently a highly discussed topic in policy and business in Icelandic and international contexts (Hjalager, 2014; Stjórnarráð Íslands, 2018; Williams et al., 2020; Zavratnik et al., 2018; Falter et al., 2022). In the tourism industry, digitalisation typically manifests as 'smart tourism.' However, despite an open-mindedness towards digitalisation, tourism practitioners frequently remain sceptical about adopting smart approaches in practice (Liburd et al., 2017). Tourism's economic role has rapidly increased globally over the past couple of decades,[1] and innovation and entrepreneurship have received increased attention in tourism research. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for innovation in the tourism industry (Tiwari et al., 2021). In light of this, it is concerning that the literature on rural innovation reveals a gap between rural and urban areas concerning the application of (digital) innovation (Mayer et al., 2016). In Iceland, most tourism businesses are small or micro-sized (SMIEs), many of which can be categorised as lifestyle businesses. Such businesses are not limited to rural areas, potentially affecting innovation in the sector. Lifestyle entrepreneurs have been criticised for showing restraint towards technological progress and a lack of interest in profit maximisation (Ioannides & Petersen 2003; Peters et al., 2009).

Our objective is to explore the value of digital innovation for rural tourism entrepreneurs in Iceland and identify how they understand and apply innovation in practice. We focus on the value of innovation from the perspectives of entrepreneurs with different operations and business goals and the challenges they face when engaging in innovation. This paper begins with a brief overview of innovation research in tourism and subsequently explores how tourism operators perceive digitalisation in the tourism industry. This study demonstrates that smart tourism's value differs significantly within the Icelandic tourism industry. The findings indicate black-and-white thinking regarding digital applications in tourism. Business-oriented entrepreneurs are likely to perceive digital applications as valuable, while those more aligned with their business' lifestyle values tend to reject them due to concerns about 'robotising' their interactions with tourists. This paper identifies a communication gap between support systems and the tourism industry, which hinders innovation in rural tourism. We conclude this paper by making recommendations for further research.

Literature Review

Innovation in the Context of Tourism

Although innovation is frequently discussed in current tourism entrepreneur literature (Hansen et al., 2019; Jaafar et al., 2015; Romão, 2020; Sørensen & Hjalager, 2020; Tuomi et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2020; Zach et al., 2020), it is often considered 'too fuzzy a concept to be measured and accounted for' (OECD, 2018, p. 1). The classic Schumpeterian approach (Schumpeter, 1999) describes innovation, in the sense of idea and value creation, as the quintessence of entrepreneurial activity. Within this approach, technological change and productivity growth are closely connected (Ruttan, 1959). The OECD defines innovation as more than developing ideas and creating prototypes and inventions (OECD, 2018) and identifies implementation, knowledge, novelty, and value creation (p. 48) as four essential dimensions of innovation. As the OECD observes, global government initiatives have called for innovation to boost economies and strengthen communities. Due to tourism's continued growth and potential economic value, innovation in this sector has become the focus of public administrations globally (Hjalager et al., 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2014). Furthermore, in the case of Iceland, innovation is seen as an essential driver of regional development, not least in the context of tourism. Recent efforts by public authorities to establish support systems for innovative development in tourism have highlighted this political interest (Stjórnarráð Íslands, 2018).

Tourism is not an easily defined sector and is affected by sectors that are not linked to it at first appearance (Hjalager, 2015). For example, EU transnational corporations, such as infrastructure provision, and the principles of consumer protection, are also linked to tourism and shape the sector subliminally. Hence tourism innovation is often a combination or variation of existing innovative services rather than a 'breakthrough innovation' (Zach, 2016, p. 273). Innovation outside the tourism sector affects tourism, and, to some extent, tourism innovation is a response or consequence of external changes (Hjalager, 2015). As in other sectors, tourism innovation is considered essential for responding to fast-changing global competition (Sørensen & Hjalager, 2020). Businesses need strategies fostering innovative behaviour that eventually leads to business improvement to maintain a competitive advantage in the global tourism market

[1] https://www.unwto.org/why-tourism

(Hansen et al., 2019; Ottenbacher, 2007). Perceived service innovation can positively impact customer experience (Teng & Chen, 2021). In this regard, Hjalager (2015) argues that the role of innovation is increasing in successfully operating tourism businesses.

This article focuses on digital innovation in the context of rural tourism entrepreneurship. The changing trend towards increased application of digitalisation in the service industry has started to affect and change dynamics in tourism and hospitality services (Tuomi et al., 2021). The goal is to support the business' efficiency by increasing customer service and cutting costs through automated processes. Examples include automated check-ins, room service and luggage storage or artificial intelligence-supported learning (Tuomi et al., 2020).

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the attraction of the countryside (French, 2022), there are few examples addressing such digital pilot approaches in rural areas. Nevertheless, rural areas are confronted with the consequences of ongoing change and the transition towards a more technology-driven development. Innovation is imperative for rural areas' resilience and ability to adapt to change to counteract rural-urban migration and promote an attractive living and working environment (French, 2022). The successful implementation of rural innovation depends on the actors involved, a network that French (2022) refers to as an 'innovation ecosystem' (p. 4), and political support (Mann & Miller, 2022). According to Mann and Miller (2022), academia's overarching focus on urban innovation creates a false image of rural areas having little innovation potential. However, due to the lack of access to resources, infrastructure and networks compared to urban areas, rural innovation occurs on different levels and is rarely directly comparable to urban innovation (Mann & Miller, 2022).

Hjalager et al. (2018) relate the discussion of rural innovation to tourism, pointing out that it has a certain ambiguity. The typical rural tourist seeks authentic and back-to-basics experiences (Hjalager et al., 2018). However, rural tourism must simultaneously meet global tourism expectations and provide a certain standard of comfort and modernisation to remain attractive to future customers. Such expectations can place rural tourist entrepreneurs in a paradoxical position when deciding whether to become innovatively active.

Innovation Obstacles and Lifestyle Entrepreneurship

Rosalina et al. (2021) differentiate between internal and external challenges to entrepreneurial innovation. Political issues and dependence on government support are examples of external innovation hindrances (Rosalina et al. 2021). Cooperation between the state and private businesses is frequently regarded as fundamental for effective response to competition in the fastgrowing tourism sector (Rodríguez et al., 2014). Innovation policies and support systems aim to reduce entry barriers and effectively implement tourism innovation. However, Rodríguez et al. (2014) criticise public institutions' tendency to implement innovation strategies *for* actors in the tourism industry instead of collaborating *with* them. Top-down approaches without incorporating the private sector have failed to fulfil companies' needs when implementing innovation.

Rural tourism entrepreneurs also face internal challenges that can negatively influence innovation, such as their tendency to be 'late bloomers' when adopting and implementing innovation (Rodríguez et al., 2014). In light of digital innovation's increasing role in tourism (Işık et al., 2019; Hjalager, 2015), this restraint can affect their level of business improvement and market advantage. The COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to respond to the global trend of increasing digitalisation (Sigala, 2021). The hesitant and late adoption of digital innovation in the tourism sector is rooted in further internal innovation hindrances. Possible reasons include lack of time and financing, insufficient knowledge and a fear of risk and change (Rodríguez et al., 2014; Rosalina et al., 2021).

Another common feature of the tourism industry is hesitation to collaborate with other tourism firms due to rivalry and fear of competition (Rodríguez et al., 2014). Tourism companies' reluctance to collaborate and share knowledge at the government and private sector levels impedes innovative development internally and externally (Işık et al., 2019). Zach (2016) emphasises the benefits of collaboration, especially for SMIEs. Compared to larger tourism companies, these businesses have limited innovation possibilities due to their small size, financial framework and workforce (Zach, 2016). An understanding of innovation is essential for its implementation and enhancing business performance (Martínez-Román et al., 2015).

However, limited knowledge, lack of collaboration and failure to adopt new technologies are said to be typical characteristics of lifestyle entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is commonly defined as 'the pursuit of opportunity beyond resources controlled' (Eisenmann, 2013), often concerning the willingness to take risks (Gunnarsdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2016) and the underlying rationale of economic gain and business growth (Peters et al., 2009). Entrepreneurs are considered to have a key role in innovation and the development of technology and smart processes (Williams et al., 2020).

Unlike conventional entrepreneurs, lifestyle entrepreneurs' business goals are not necessarily growth-oriented and are often driven by various motivations (Peters et al., 2009; Jóhannesson, 2012; Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000). According to Hjalager et al. (2018), the rural tourism industry attracts lifestyle entrepreneurs who pursue the idea of turning a hobby into a career instead of profit maximisation (Hjalager et al., 2018; Peters et al., 2009). They have been criticised for 'primarily following a dream, often with no experience, training or expertise in these areas' (Peters et al., 2009, p. 6). Further criticism has been voiced regarding lifestyle entrepreneurs' aversion to applying new technologies and their lack of management skills and interest in collaborating and networking (Peters et al., 2009; Gunnarsdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2016). Conversely, lifestyle entrepreneurs are said to foster the development of innovative (niche) products and their distribution in the wider industry (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000).

Dias et al. (2022) argue that lifestyle entrepreneurship in the rural context is an essential driver of innovation. They maintain that lifestyle entrepreneurs' embeddedness in communities increases knowledge and network formation on a local scale. The authors also observe that entrepreneurs' attachment to surrounding nature positively affects innovative value creation (Dias et al., 2022).

Digitalisation and Smart Tourism in Rural Areas

The discussion concerning digital innovation and tourism frequently manifests as smart tourism in the current body of tourism innovation literature and is increasingly gaining global government attention (Hjalager et al., 2018; Rodríguez et al., 2014; Zavratnik et al., 2018). The level of digitalisation in the tourism industry has increased due to extensive technological development (Tuomi et al., 2020). In digital innovation, a distinction is frequently made between smart tourism and e-tourism (Kazandzhieva & Santana, 2019). E-tourism focuses on providing digital connections and is typically used in e-marketing and online booking systems. It is the foundation of smart tourism (Gretzel, Sigala et al., 2015). In contrast, smart tourism has a broad scope of involved technologies, is based on ICTs (Jovicic, 2019; Roopchund, 2020) and is described as 'technical, data-driven, system-oriented and service-dominant' (Liburd et al., 2017, p. 4). It is a meaning-enriched and context-driven application of technology (Gretzel, Reino et al., 2015). The link to virtual reality, artificial intelligence (AI) (Del Chiappa & Baggio, 2015) and social media indicates that tourism innovation is user-driven and responds to the needs of 'smart tourists.' These 'travellers 2.0' (Magasic & Gretzel, 2020, p. 5) demonstrate changed tourism behaviour following digitalisation. This new form of traveller is also referred to as a 'digital native,' emphasising the omnipresence of emerging technologies in daily applications (Skaletsky et al., 2017). Practical examples include the application of AI, online streaming, the use of apps and mobile marketing, for example, cloud-based training programmes for the hospitality sector (Roopchund, 2020). Specifically, smart tourism replaces conventional information channels, such as tourist guidebooks, with smartphones and other digital devices (Mieli & Zillinger, 2020).

However, Ren et al. (2018) argue that smart tourism remains an indistinct and weakly defined concept from the perspective of tourism actors (Gretzel, Sigala et al., 2015). Therefore, despite an open-mindedness towards digitalisation, tourism practitioners often remain sceptical about how to adopt smart approaches in practice (Liburd et al., 2017). Ren et al. (2018) stress that it is important to 'not see smart tourism as driven exclusively by technological developments and data' (p. 135) but as an amalgamation of digital and social attributes. They see smart tourism as a combination of skills and resources that neither focuses solely on technology and big data nor exclusively on social approaches. Zach et al. (2020) point out that the decision to adopt a new strategy, such as smart tourism, 'happens between becoming aware and forming an understanding of the innovation' (p. 3). Hence, the ability to see value in smart tourism requires a basic understanding of what it implies. The lack of concrete ideas about how to apply smart tourism in practice could lead to the digital exclusion of those unwilling or incapable of making use of technological changes underpinning smart tourism. In the near future, tourism companies will likely require more IT and digital application knowledge (OECD, 2022).

Smart development is more challenging in rural than urban areas (Zach et al., 2020). One reason is that rural areas often lag behind regarding the infrastructure necessary to use or develop digital solutions (Mayer et al., 2016). Moreover, rural areas are associated with high transportation costs, low levels of innovation and fewer creative minds (Gibson, 2010). Another reason is the differences in access to digital applications among individuals. Varying levels of digital involvement produce social division, intensifying the so-called digital divide (Gunkel, 2003). The less peoples' knowledge and involvement in technological development, the less attracted they are to the idea of applying digitalisation. Hence, rural areas often face a downward spiral since information is increasingly provided through digital channels. Those who lack access to technology become even more disadvantaged (Rooksby et al., 2002) and wary of technology, as manifested in technophobia, a feeling of anxiety towards digitalisation and technology (Tussyadiah et al., 2020).

Case Study: Digital Innovation In The Icelandic Tourism Industry

Tourism in Iceland, Organisational Structure and Support for Innovation

In past decades, Iceland has become a popular tourist destination. Tourism has become one of Iceland's most significant economic pillars, with 2,013,190 arrivals at the international airport in Keflavík in 2019 (Ferðamálastofa, 2020b). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism's share of foreign exchange earnings was 42% (Ferðamálastofa, 2018) among the highest in OECD countries.[2] The country's landscape and natural attractions are the main incentives for travelling to Iceland. The Ministry of Culture and Business Affairs (Department of Tourism) is in charge of the development and execution of Icelandic tourism policy and of coordinating various tourism collaboration partners, including the Icelandic Tourist Board. Iceland is divided into seven regions, each with its own DMO supported by public authorities.[3] The DMOs are in charge of marketing their regions as tourism destinations, and they collaborate with municipalities and member companies in tourism development. The Tourism Strategy 2021–2030 (Ferðamálastofa, 2021) was developed under the auspices of the Ministry. It demonstrates an ongoing emphasis on tourism as a tool for developing rural areas. In summary, the tourism strategy aims to achieve a 'profitable and competitive tourism industry in harmony with the country and its people' (p. 3). Its focus is on enhancing the visitor experience and the quality of life for locals. Its purpose is to increase sustainability and effectiveness regarding the 'community,' 'economy' and 'environment.' The strategy emphasises responsible tourism by applying technological and innovative approaches (p. 5). Tourism also features in the Icelandic Strategic Regional Development (Stjórnarráð Íslands, 2018, p. 16) plan, which aims to 'boost tourism services in rural areas.' Regarding implementing the measures described in the plan, public authorities in Iceland collaborate with various private initiatives that carry out training programmes for tourism businesses to increase access to innovation and digital development. The tourism sector's organisational structure largely consists of SMIEs, often characterised by lifestyle entrepreneurs, with a few large companies. Despite increased digital activity in the Icelandic tourism industry, the level of digital applications is relatively low. Many SMIEs lack a con-

[2] https://data.oecd.org/industry/tourism-gdp.htm
[3] https://www.visiticeland.com/the-regions/

crete social media strategy and the motivation to undertake further education in digital marketing (Ferðamálastofa, 2020a).

Methodology

This study is based on qualitative fieldwork undertaken by the first author. In total, 34 tourism entrepreneurs were interviewed, of which 17 were tour or activity operators, nine were accommodation establishment operators, and eight were catering business operators. The interviewees' ages ranged from 30 to 70 years. Most of the businesses were SMIES and family-run. Although most of them were open all year round, their peak operation period was the summer. The number of employees varied between seasons, from no additional employees in winter months to 40 employees in the high season.

A snowball technique was used to select interviewees throughout Iceland from July 2020 until March 2021. Snowball sampling, also called network chain referral (Lawrence Neuman, 2014), refers to the metaphor of a snowball that gains volume when rolled in the snow. The snowball sampling technique begins by approaching one or a few people and increases the number of contacts based on these initial interactions (Lawrence Neuman, 2014). Since Iceland does not have a formal list of rural tourism innovation network members, snowball sampling allowed us to gradually widen our network and approach actors in this informal network. Most of the interviews were conducted along the South Coast (12), followed by East Iceland (7), North Iceland (6), West Iceland (5), the Westfjords (3) and Reykjanes (1). The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), and themes were identified through open and axial coding rounds.

Although the entrepreneurs interviewed in this study were all SMIES, their business aims varied significantly. The vast majority were classified as lifestyle entrepreneurs. The rest had more economic and global perspectives on the tourism sector; hence, they could be classified as growth and business-oriented entrepreneurs, whose business goal is economic growth and scalability. The identified key themes were, firstly, how the interviewees understand and apply innovation in their businesses, focusing on innovation during the COVID-19 pandemic, including perceived innovation hindrances. Secondly, the analysis focused on digital innovation, how the interviewees apply it and, notably, how they perceive smart tourism.

Analysis

Definition of Innovation

In tourism, the innovation process is described as complex, resulting in additional difficulties for SMIES (Dias et al., 2022; Zach, 2016). As previously discussed, innovation has become a buzzword in the global tourism sector (Hjalager, 2010). To gain understanding, it is essential to obtain insights into how innovation manifests in practice. We attempted to elicit interviewees' understanding of how they apply innovation by asking them to illustrate or describe innovation. We observed that although many of the entrepreneurs initially associated innovation with 'something new' or 'unique,' most of them perceived it as 'doing existing things in a new way.' Hence, most of the interviewees saw innovation as an improvement or 'twist' on existing products or processes instead of initiating something 'ground-breaking.'

For many of the interviewees, innovation means to actually *do* something and bring the idea-finding process further towards implementation. Identifying oneself with the implemented innovation ('with heart and soul') was a frequently mentioned aspect. Two entrepreneurs argued that innovation occurs 'out of need;' great ideas are more likely to happen under pressure. In six of the cases, the term 'innovation' was unclear and required further explanation or translation into Icelandic.

Innovation in Practice

Despite the interviewees' overall agreement in defining innovation, the above definitions remain theoretical. Contrary to the literature's emphasis on the key role of technology in innovation processes, only three entrepreneurs associated innovation with something digital. When asked what innovation means in practice and how it manifests for them, most of the entrepreneurs referred to their business as a whole rather than identifying specific examples. They often saw their innovation manifesting as a business idea that was new to the area or executed in a way that had never been tried before. Gastronomy entrepreneurs, in particular, defined their innovation as using natural materials and converting them into products that do not yet exist in that form. Another connection to innovation was made through education, notably 'raising awareness for sustainability in local food' and Icelandic history:

> Cause [sic] we are doing something new on a very old foundation. So we are taking something that wasn't really known. Because the Icelanders that come to us, they are always like, 'Oh, I didn't know you had caves here.' [Tourism Entrepreneur, South Iceland]

Only a few entrepreneurs gave examples of their innovation in practice that matched their previous description of innovation. A restaurant owner in North Iceland described innovation as something 'which was maybe behind, and you take it and put it in a new dress.' In practice, she 'dressed up' traditional rural Icelandic food and served it as original meals in her restaurant. She aimed to reveal old Icelandic traditions and combine them with contemporary tourism requirements.

Innovation During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The field study was conducted from the summer of 2020 until the spring of 2022, when the tourism industry was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In Iceland, tourism decreased by 75.8% compared to the previous year (Ferðamálastofa, 2021). Many tourism companies suffered financial losses despite government support.[4] The most frequent business response was to reduce services to a minimum. All operational businesses shifted their focus to the Icelandic market due to global travel restrictions, implying a redefining of their marketing strategies. Several interviewees stated that although they did not take specific action to cope with the sudden effects of the pandemic, they used the time to rethink their business philosophy. They explained that due to their small business size, the daily workload required all their time, resources and workforce during COVID-free years. Hence, restructuring the business had largely been placed on hold:

> And we started to realise how nice it is to not constantly be stressed. That was a very important experience for us, which eventually led us to starting [sic] to restructure our business model. [Lifestyle entrepreneur; tour operator, North Iceland]

Several of the interviewed tourism entrepreneurs adapted their services so that they could continue to operate their businesses despite social gathering restrictions and reduced numbers of tourists. They reused their business resources in a different context. For example, a tour operator in South Iceland temporarily offered car cleaning services using the equipment they used to clean their tourist trucks:

> It was a brilliant idea because what could we do? I mean, we did not have any travellers. Because we had everything there. The best products and equipment and all of the machines. [Tour operator, South Iceland]

Using existing resources was also a crucial coping strategy adopted by restaurant owners who supplied packed raw materials typically used in their business. Apart from the abovementioned restructuring of (online) marketing strategies, only one entrepreneur mentioned a digital coping strategy. He restructured his restaurant and offered an online takeaway service.

Innovation Obstacles: The Gap Between Policy and Practice

Most of the interviewees stated that they would like to increase their innovation level within their business. Lack of time and financial resources were the most frequently named hindrances, as highlighted in the following quote:

> Maybe when you are in a rural setting, you are fighting a much harder life within your com-

[4] https://www.government.is/government/covid-19

> pany. You are the manager, the marketing manager, the sales manager; you are the chef, you probably have 100 jobs, so this [increasing innovation] is something you always leave for later. [Hotel owner, East Iceland]

This statement reveals that apart from the time aspect, the rural setting further complicates innovation development. In rural areas, tourism is more seasonal, which is a challenge when hiring staff. Seasonal staff turnover forces businesses to allocate resources to teaching and training employees instead of focusing on expansion. Hence, developing innovative ideas is placed on hold to ensure day-to-day business operations. Furthermore, the 'countryside mindset' was a frequently named innovation hindrance. The entrepreneurs differentiated between individuals and local governments hampering innovative actions. Regarding individual actions, one entrepreneur pointed out a particular area's unused tourism potential and criticised the lack of private initiatives for developing it:

> It is so funny because there are a lot of people here that are talking about this kind of stuff: 'Yeah, we need to find something to do and do something.' But nobody is doing that. Maybe it is because everybody thinks people should do it for them [laughs] and not themselves. [Tourism entrepreneur, West Iceland]

Several entrepreneurs highlighted the difficulties rural companies encounter when accessing venture capital. They argued that in remote areas, banks demand a long-term business plan and securities to ensure repayments. Due to the short tourism season, many applicants cannot provide this; thus, they are not granted a loan. However, the current Icelandic Regional Development Plan refers to rural equalisation regarding several measurements (Stjórnarráð Íslands, 2018). According to one interviewee, this development is either too slow or non-existent:

> Rural areas. They are not really on their focus plan. It's very fancy to say, 'we want to strengthen the rural areas.' You get a lot of votes, and people are very positive and blah, blah, blah, but they are not showing it by doing anything. [Lifestyle tourism entrepreneur, East Iceland]

The local grant system was also criticised. According to one interviewee classed as a growth-oriented entrepreneur, non-scalable and non-innovative projects with a low impact on the region's economic development predominantly receive local government support. The following quote emphasises criticism of this lack of understanding of innovation on the part of authorities:

> I think with the governmental programmes, when they are talking about innovation, they are thinking about creating jobs for one. But real innovation is when you have something that really scales. [Growth-oriented tourism entrepreneur, South Iceland]

Further criticism towards the (local) government was voiced, especially by entrepreneurs in the most remote areas, the Westfjords and East Iceland, because they do not feel seen and supported by local and national governments. Two business operators from West Iceland criticised the lack of practical relevance in government educational programmes and funding for SMIEs. They considered government support to be too little and irrelevant. They also argued that mentors and lecturers lack the practical experience and insights into the reality of the tourism industry required to teach educational programmes. These entrepreneurs criticised the missing link between policy and practice that hampers successful collaboration benefitting both sides. They argued that tourism businesses and the government work separately with little exchange:

> The system is so broken. The companies and the system, they are not talking together. This is just like there is not an understanding between these two groups, [of] what we are doing. [Tourism Entrepreneur, West Fjords]

Entrepreneurs in the west and east of Iceland predominantly highlighted this perceived disconnection from policy. However, several other entrepreneurs from these regions had a very positive attitude towards the government, as did entrepreneurs in the north and south. According to one entrepreneur, government support follows the 'principle of demand and supply.' Due to the lower entrepreneurial activity in rural areas compared to the 'innovation centre Reykjavík,' fewer requests are submitted to local governments. Hence the likelihood of obtaining support increases. The fact that companies and individuals are 'more unique and better known' (Entrepreneur, West Iceland) in smaller local communities improves this likelihood.

The Digital and Tourism: Smart Tourism

As demonstrated above, the current body of digital tourism literature and tourism development leans towards fostering digital innovation and smart tourism strategies. In this case study, we observed that the interviewed entrepreneurs held different opinions regarding the value of digitising and automating processes in the tourism sector. Several entrepreneurs associated smart tourism with digital marketing and online booking, an area in which all the interviewees demonstrated high levels of expertise. In contrast, some interviewees did not perceive any usefulness in smart tourism in the sense of automated processes onsite and pointed out that they could not imagine applying it in their own businesses. They associated smart tourism features with urban areas, where travelling is faster and more anonymous. They argued that automated processes such as self-check-ins fit 'the younger generation' and considered themselves digitally 'old-fashioned.' These entrepreneurs feel that personal communication with guests is an essential requirement of Icelandic tourism. Hence, they related automation processes with a loss in personal services and, thus, a decline in the offered experience:

> But I find it quite sad; humans are lacking so much interaction because of technical advances. Covid has also highlighted the loneliness of being in a virtual world. [Lifestyle gastronomy entrepreneur, South Iceland]

These entrepreneurs also fear 'missing touch with the real world.' Two entrepreneurs voiced concerns that smart applications could attract mass tourism and careless travellers. An entrepreneur from South Iceland argued that her sole-trader business does not fulfil the requirements for digital applications, and extra demand through online systems would exceed her capacities.

In contrast, the entrepreneurs classed as growth-oriented saw great value in smart tourism and argued that digital features improve service and *save* capacities. This group is divided into those who find smart tourism development meaningful in *general* and those who find it relevant only in *specific* application areas. Instead of fearing a loss of personal service through digital applications, several entrepreneurs see an opportunity to use smart tourism to improve it. They anticipate that outsourcing time-consuming processes will allow them to focus on communicating with tourists, which positively contributes to improving their service and, hence, their product:

> I don't want you to stand behind the desk and sell tickets; I want you to go on the outside. I want you to greet the [guests]. And then I want you to lead them to the ticket machine. Eventually, we will only have automatic ticket machines and will only have greeters. [Growth-oriented entrepreneur, South Iceland]

These entrepreneurs see smart tourism as 'the future' of Icelandic and global tourism and expect 'easier business.' Several of them criticised the slow digital development in the Icelandic tourism sector and anxiously referred to the lack of digital awareness among their colleagues. They criticised the 'dinosaur' mindset of those unwilling to apply digital innovation and pointed out the lack of openness towards new trends in Icelandic tourism, such as innovative paying systems. According to one growth-oriented interviewee, tourism innovation in Iceland is predominantly driven by large companies due to a lack of understanding in the SMIEs community:

> They don't understand the reason, and if I want to help them to do digital innovation, they want

> me to do Facebook ads. That's their innovation. [Growth-oriented entrepreneur, South Iceland]

Despite an expressed openness towards smart tourism, most of the entrepreneurs do not consider smart tourism features a fit for their business. A hotel owner in East Iceland, who is very open towards digitalisation per se, observed that guests visiting remote rural Iceland are looking for personal contact:

> I like that for natural landmarks, it is good to have these gates where you can just pay and come in. Or for the toilets and stuff like that. But my feeling is you are not coming to the end of the world where we live, like people who live in cities. This is surreal, that peaceful town. I think that would be strange. [East Iceland]

Most of those entrepreneurs who do not consider digital innovation a fit for their businesses see the future in a combination of traditional and digital measures. Whether they find digitalisation useful, all the interviewees share the common goal of increasing personal service and experience. Thus they see aspects of smart tourism as a method of simplifying processes, saving staff or providing touchless payment systems through technological support without 'robotising' their business. For example, one hotel owner in East Iceland supplies her rooms with iPads providing an integrated booking system for the hotel's and region's services. At the same time, she employs additional staff at the service desk exclusively for personal customer contact:

> Of course, it costs something, but I really think it is worth it because this is one way of doing things more simple [sic] for my staff and also doing something good for the environment. But we have to be careful because I don't want to have a place where I don't see the people. The technology, it's both positive and negative. [Hotel owner, East Iceland]

Discussion and Conclusion

Lack of time and financial resources are the main obstacles hindering small Icelandic tourism entrepreneurs from educating themselves about digital marketing strategies (Ferðamálastofa, 2020a). Our above observations support this finding: SMIES are too occupied with their daily work to study digital applications and decipher innovative projects. The enforced break during the COVID-19 pandemic gave them room to rethink their strategies and business models and develop new approaches. This lack of time raises the question of whether lifestyle entrepreneurs can increase their level of innovation on a larger scale. The interviewees also observed that financial restrictions indicate a gap between tourism reality and policy. Large funding applications require significant time and labour commitments. It is evident that the interviewees, who are already running businesses, cannot meet grant requirements requiring the time-consuming instigation of ground-breaking projects.

For the interviewees, applied innovation manifests in various novelties or variations in their businesses. However, these innovations tend to serve their specific business and demonstrate little capacity for growth. Due to increased competition in the Icelandic tourism industry in previous years, innovation has become imperative for survival in the market, raising the question of how tourism companies will cope in the future. If they strive for non-scalable, local innovation while global development aims for high-scalable, international innovation, further research is needed to investigate what this implies in practice. If lifestyle entrepreneurship reaches its limits in a future dominated by digitalisation and automation, creative destruction could result as entrepreneurs who do not jump on the bandwagon disappear from the market.

The financial aspect of the innovation dynamic seems to reproduce the rural divide. Entrepreneurs in areas with short seasons and a modest flow of tourists highlighted the difficult conditions for obtaining loans. Banks are more likely to support tourism projects close to the capital area because the steady flow of tourists guarantees the ability to make repayments. The lack of support in rural areas also hinders tourism innovation. Again, tourism entrepreneurs face a vicious circle, and the dynamics of innovation come to a halt: the lack of financial resources supporting tourism innovation leads to a lack of innovative projects. Hence a lack of investment results in a lack of innovation.

At this point, rural innovation is facing a double-edged sword. On the one hand, policy aims to foster rural tourism by boosting innovation (Stjórnarráð Íslands, 2018). The considerable political interest in tourism is largely due to its contribution to the GDP. On the other hand, several entrepreneurs state that the grants are difficult to obtain and too small to implement innovative and creative change. Further criticism of the mismatch between education provision and tourism business needs indicates another gap in demand and supply between tourism entrepreneurs and the support system. As previously discussed (Rodríguez et al., 2014), including tourism actors in policy formulation and implementation is essential for achieving desirable outcomes. The interviewed SMIEs perceived a lack of broad involvement in the tourism policy framework. Tourism plans, strategies and education appear to be developed *for* tourism entrepreneurs rather than *with* them using a top-down approach in collaboration with a few strong, large companies.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates that the rural tourism sector does not consist of a uniform group but various businesses with different goals. We see the need for more straight-forward and open conversation between tourism businesses and policymakers to overcome this mismatch and establish more customised bottom-up approaches. Therefore, acknowledgement from the tourism support system that the Icelandic tourism sector is not uniform is an essential precondition. The sector consists of various forms of entrepreneurs with different business goals, ranging from growth-oriented to lifestyle entrepreneurship, and while most appear to be interested in innovation, its meaning and value for their businesses differ. Hence, a vibrant innovation ecosystem in rural Iceland requires a support system that considers these companies' individual characteristics, strengths and weaknesses.

Uncertainty regarding the implications of smart tourism was a recurring theme throughout the research, influencing its perceived value for the interviewees. Since most of them were tour operators, caterers or accommodation owners, they could not completely digitise their core services. We often received the impression that smart tourism and automation were directly associated with the image of heavy industry. Most of the interviewees appeared to think in black-and-white terms, either for or against smart tourism. Since smart tourism seemed to symbolise industrialised robotic technology, some automatically associated it with decreased personal communication with customers. Only a minority, predominantly growth-oriented entrepreneurs, saw smart tourism features as an opportunity to minimise necessary daily tasks and focus on personal interactions with tourists. They largely referred to smart tourism features as staff- and time-saving tasks such as automated ticket sales or audio guides. Despite scepticism and restraint towards automated processes, digital marketing tools are crucial for most of the interviewees. Since tourism operators are highly proficient in digital marketing, although most are somewhat reserved concerning smart tourism strategies, we would categorise the scale of digital applications in Icelandic tourism as e-tourism (Kazandzhieva & Santana, 2019). While e-tourism uses digital channels to provide information, smart tourism implies experiencing co-creation through technology. Only two of the interviewees, whose businesses are based on co-creation and digital interaction with tourists, matched the classification of smart tourism providers. For the rest, the value of digital innovation lies more in advertising and information provision. As soon as the guests arrive, they focus on personal interactions.

Regardless of the interviewees' business intentions, they all pursued the common goal of increasing personal customer service and positive experiences for tourists. As discussed in the literature review, the global digitalisation trend will lead to a changed and more digitised tourism demand in the near future. As smart applications gradually replace tourism leaflets, the future of tourism will require a higher level of automation and digital possibilities. Since many of the interviewees do not see a match between digitalisation and remote Icelandic nature, we wonder how Icelandic tourism businesses will react when tourists' expectations change in the near future. Global tourism development is bipolar, with an enhanced requirement for convenient travel and a high level of new technologies, on the one hand, and a growing demand for authentic rural and back-to-basics experiences, on the other. Further research is needed to investigate the extent of these future changes and their potential impact on the rural tourism industry in Iceland and elsewhere.

As previously stated, tourism entrepreneurs who strongly favoured smart tourism development voiced heavy criticism, and in some cases even annoyance, because they perceived digital development in the Icelandic tourism industry as too slow. They especially criticised their industry peers' indignation at increasing their digital applications. Like Rooksby et al. (2002), they observed a link between low levels of digital competence and understanding and the decreasing likelihood of becoming digitally active and blamed individuals' 'fear of the unknown.' We found these arguments very similar to the common criticism of lifestyle entrepreneurship: hindering economic growth.

Nevertheless, lifestyle entrepreneurs can also significantly impact rural innovation development. Notwithstanding the wariness towards digital applications in their businesses, we did not receive the impression that the interviewees were against applying digital features. Several entrepreneurs who felt less technology-aware often outsourced digital marketing, leaving analytical work to experts. We identified significant conformity between their operational management, location and guests' (largely nature lovers seeking outdoor activities and peace) requirements. The main concern of tourism operators who did not see digital applications as meaningful was their fear of losing what they described as the authentic tourist experience. Concerns that smart tourists could miss being fully present in the moment have also been addressed in academia in the context of smart tourism development (Gretzel, Reino et al., 2015).

Listening and responding to customer feedback can provide a successful resource for increasing business success (Hjalager, 2014). The importance of understanding customers became evident when exploring the first research question about how innovation is understood and applied. In contrast to the above-stated emphasis on digital innovation in policy documents and literature, technology did not have a significant bearing on the meaning of 'being innovative' for the interviewees. For lifestyle entrepreneurs, in particular, innovation meant adding new value in terms of new for the area, the situation or the people involved. Hence, despite remaining restrained about applying digital innovation in their businesses, the interviewed lifestyle entrepreneurs indicated significant interest in and awareness of tourism innovation.

The aim of this paper was to explore the value of digital innovation for rural tourism entrepreneurs in Iceland and identify how they understand and apply innovation in practice. The study offers some important insights into the role of digital innovation in rural tourism. It demonstrates how a lack of clear communication between tourism actors and authorities can hinder innovative development of the industry. A limitation of this study is that the sample group is relatively small. To investigate the dynamics of digital innovation in Icelandic tourism on a bigger scale, further research is needed. As previously mentioned, the tourism industry in Iceland is not uniform and consists of a variety of different actors. It would be interesting to gather a bigger sample group of each type and hence get deeper insights into the dynamics of each type.

Acknowledgments

The Vísindasjóður Suðurlands and the University of Iceland Research Fund are thanked for supporting this project. The first author especially wants to thank the interviewees for their time and sharing their thoughts.

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Original Scientific Article

Archaeological Tourism Products: Towards a Concept Definition

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Archaeological site managers generally recognize the economic benefits of archaeological tourism, but many sites still have many unexploited development opportunities. The importance of connecting different providers of products and services is still too often overlooked. Despite several publications dealing with different aspects of archaeological tourism, we found that the definition of one main concept is still missing: the definition of 'archaeological tourism product.' The paper is aimed at establishing and explaining this very concept, by providing its definition and categorizing it into different types and components. We moreover point out principles to be considered in its development and problems related to the loss of authenticity which frequently emerge in its commercialization. Ultimately, our aim is to highlight the importance of developing integral archaeological tourism products that meet the needs and wants of tourists and at the same time ensure preservation and sustainable management of archaeological heritage.

Keywords: archaeological tourism product, archaeological tourism, archaeological park, archaeological route, sustainable development

 https://doi.org/10.26493/2335-4194.16.205-220

Introduction

Archaeological tourism, or archaeotourism as it is also called, is a growing branch of cultural tourism which also helps to increase public awareness of archaeological heritage as well as its preservation (Egri, 2021, p. 93). From a historical perspective, archaeological tourism has a very long tradition. Early forms of archaeological tourism, or journeys aimed at visiting the vestiges of the past, can be traced back to antiquity, with a master example in the figure of Pausanias and his *Description of Greece* (2nd century AD). Similarly, the Grand Tour (mostly between the 17th and early 19th century) can also be seen as an early form of archaeological tourism (Melotti, 2007; Díaz-Andreu, 2020).

In more recent years, archaeological tourism developed as a specific discipline, with a rich theoretical background (e.g. Melotti, 2011; Mihelić, 2011; Comer & Willems, 2019; Timothy & Tahan, 2020) and with its own fairs. The Mediterranean Exchange of Archaeological Tourism fair in Paestum has been organized yearly since 1998 with the participation and exchange of experiences among countries reaching beyond the Mediterranean area and the Middle East.[1] Since 2015,

[1] www.borsaturismoarcheologico.it/en/partner/

another similar event, tourismA, has taken place every year in Florence.[2]

At the time of the coronavirus epidemic, as even more people began to retreat from the urban environment and into nature, where a large part of archaeological sites are located, we can assume that their potentials have increased even more. This is also related to the fact that several cultural heritage institutions, such as museums, architectural complexes, etc., which represent the main attractions for culturally interested visitors, were at least partially closed to the public (Geser, 2021, p. 6), while several archaeological sites (which are mostly open-air) were not subjected to restrictions. Although the managers of archaeological sites recognize the advantages of archaeological tourism, most of the sites still have considerable untapped potential, especially in terms of connecting different providers of services necessary for a successful touristic approach. This problem was tackled by the ArcheoDanube project (Archaeological Park in urban areas as a tool for Local Sustainable Development), in the frame of which we performed the research presented in this paper. The project was co-funded by the European Union (ERDF, IPA, ENI) in the frame of the Interreg Danube Transnational Programme and was joined by 15 partners[3] from 11 different countries (Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia). One of the main objectives of the project was the development of archaeological tourism in the Danube macro-region by improving the management of archaeological heritage with special emphasis on archaeological parks (Anranter et al., 2021; Drda-Kühn, 2021; Zanier & Ratej, 2021; 2022a; 2022b; Zanier et al., 2022; Egri, 2021, 2022; Danube Transnational Programme, 2022).

Despite several valuable studies and publications dealing with different aspects of archaeological tourism, we found that a definition of the main concept is still missing: the definition of 'archaeological tourism product.' In fact, in the literature this concept has not even been extensively presented or thoroughly analysed, although the term is frequently used. In this paper,[4] we therefore propose our own definition of archaeological tourism products, that we developed proceeding from already existing definitions of cultural tourism products and considering a wide range of case study examples, i.e. established archaeological attractions sold to tourists from all over Europe and beyond. We also substantiate why we believe that archaeological tourism products need to be considered as a specific concept, separated from cultural tourism products. We then define different types of archaeological tourism products and identify, as well as explain, their possible components. In the last part, we present different steps for developing archaeological tourism products and point out problems related to the loss of authenticity which frequently emerges in their commercialization.

Methodological Premise

Our aim is to propose a concept definition of archaeological tourism products and their systematization in different types and components, which does not yet exist in the literature. We started our research by reviewing the definition of (cultural) tourism products. Since the definition of archaeological tourism products had to be newly established, we implemented a comparative analysis of case studies. Firstly, we analysed the 10 pilot archaeological sites included in the ArcheoDanube project (Zanier & Ratej, 2021, pp. 131–

[2] www.tourisma.it/home-2/

[3] These are: City Municipality Ptuj; Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia; First Hungarian Responsible Innovation Association; West-Pannon Regional and Economic Development Public Nonprofit Ltd; Romanian Academy Cluj branch, Institute of Archaeology and History of Art; The National Museum of Unification Alba Iulia; City of Vodnjan – Dignano; Association of Culture & Work; Bulgarian Association for Transfer of Technology and Innovation; Regional Development Agency of the Pilsen Region; Sustainication; Museum of Srem; Municipality of Centar Sarajevo; City Hall of Chisinau Municipality; Rousse Regional Museum of History.

[4] We attempted a first definition of 'archaeological tourism product' in a short publication about archaeological tourism (Egri, 2022, pp. 33–41) and we would take here the opportunity to improve the definition itself and to better explain and deepen the concept as well as related topics.

152).[5] Since these archaeological sites are still developing their tourism potential and can still hardly be recognized as tourism products, we widened our research to nine already established archaeological tourism attractions of the same Danube macro-region (Zanier & Ratej, 2021, pp. 33–52).[6] Both these steps were performed through survey research, collecting the data in the form of a questionnaire with the help of all ArcheoDanube project partners. In addition, we collected data about numerous case study examples from all over Europe, 17 of which were selected as good practices (Anranter et al., 2021).[7] Furthermore, five archaeological attractions were selected as examples of integral archaeological tourism products: these are Salzwelten in Austria, Brijuni in Croatia, the Archäopark Vogelherd in Germany, the archaeological park of Herculaneum in Italy, and Hadrian's Wall Country in the United Kingdom (Egri, 2021, pp. 64–75).

For the purpose of this paper, other case study examples were analysed in order to cover the full spectrum of integral archaeological tourism products. These are essentially the Selinunte Archaeological Park and the archaeological site of Rome in Italy, the Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route, archaeological tours all over the world of the Archaeological Institute of America, DigVentures archaeological excavation camps, the Archaeological Festival in Biskupin in Poland, as well as the Castle Park Archaeological District and Moccasin Bend National Archaeological District in the United States.

The comparative analysis performed on the above-mentioned case study examples converged into the definition and systematization of archaeological tourism products, which we present in this paper. Due to the extensiveness of the research, we refer to the above-quoted studies for details on the single case study examples and their analysis.

Definitions of (Cultural) Tourism Products

Archaeological tourism, which attracts tourists primarily with the aim of acquiring new knowledge about past human activity, is, of course, part of the broader term 'cultural tourism.' As a result, when developing

[5] The sites are (listed in countries' alphabetical order): the prehistoric archaeological site Vranjače and the Harem of Kalin Hadži Alija's mosque (built in 1535 and demolished in 1947) in Sarajevo for Bosnia and Herzegovina; the late antique and medieval fortress in the 'Horizon' residential area at Balchik in Bulgaria; the medieval town of Cherven and the rock-hewn churches of Ivanovo not far from the city of Rousse, also in Bulgaria; the open air museum 'Park kažuna' in Vodnjan – Dignano for Croatia, displaying typical vernacular architecture of the Istrian (and also broader Adriatic) area; the medieval castle 'Old Pilsen' on the Hillfort Hůrka in Starý Plzenec for the Czech Republic; the Iseum or temple of Isis and the Romkert or 'Ruin garden' (with remains of the 'Amber Road,' governor's palace, public baths, Mercury sanctuary and other buildings) in Szombathely, i.e. the Roman town of Savaria in Hungary; the 'Visterniceni archaeological area' with a bastion fortress built in the 1770s'in the city of Chisinau in Moldova; the Alba Iulia fortress in the homonymous city in Romania, which includes fortifications from different eras (a Roman camp, a medieval fortress and the Austrian bastion fortification built in the 18th century); the archaeological areas of the Roman town of Sirmium in Sremska Mitrovica in Serbia; the 'Archaeological Park Panorama' (in development?) with underlying remains of the Roman town of Poetovio in Ptuj for Slovenia.

[6] We considered Carnuntum in Austria, the Radnevo archaeological park in Bulgaria, the site of Pohansko and the Archaeoskanzen Trocnov in the Czech Republic, the Archäopark Vogelherd and the ArchaeoCentrum Bayern-Böhmen/Čechy-Bavorsko in Germany, the Iseum in Szombathely in Hungary and the archaeological parks of Emona/Ljubljana and Simonov zaliv in Slovenia.

[7] The following good practices were identified: the archaeological parks of Aguntum and Carnuntum as well as the MAMUZ museum in Austria, the Neolithic settlement in Tuzla in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the medieval town of Cherven in Bulgaria, the Pavlov ArcheoPark in the Czech Republic, the Fortress of Culture in Šibenik in Croatia, the archaeological park of Bibracte in France, Xanten Archaeological Park in Germany, the Gorsium-Herculia Archaeological Park in Hungary, the archaeological park of Pompeii in Italy, the Alba Carolina Fortress and the Museikon museum in Alba Iulia in Romania, the Viminacium Archeological Park in Serbia, the Pavilion for the presentation of archaeological remains in Celje in Slovenia, as well as the London Mithraeum and the archaeological park of Vindolanda in the United Kingdom. The aforementioned sites were also used to define specific success factors and a development strategy for archaeological tourism (Drda-Kühn, 2021).

the new definition for archaeological tourism products, we can refer to already existing definitions of cultural tourism products, and also of tourism products in general.

According to Medlik and Middleton (1973, p. 138), a tourism product can be described as a group of activities, services, and benefits combined from components such as attractions, facilities and accessibility that complete the entire tourism experience.

Copley and Robson (1996) define cultural tourism products as anything that is offered to tourists at the destination that can satisfy their needs.

Another definition, from Richards and Munsters (2010, pp. 52–53), describes a cultural tourism product offered by historic cities as a combination of:

1. the core product, being the cultural tourism supply (monuments, street patterns, museums, art galleries, theatres, cinemas, routes, local culture, cultural events) and the related specific cultural tourist services, such as information and education; and
2. the additional product, being the general tourism product elements and the related tourist services consisting of:
   - general tourist facilities and services:
     - tourist organizations and travel intermediaries: tourist information offices, tourist associations, travel agencies, tour operators;
     - accommodation suppliers: hotels, holiday parks, camping sites;
     - catering industry: restaurants, cafés, and pubs;
     - retail business: (souvenir) shops, outdoor markets, banks;
   - transportation infrastructure:
     - accessibility, signposting, parking facilities;
     - private and public inner-city transporters: taxi companies, city bus service, underground.

Mckercher and Du Cros (2015, pp. 154–155) also divided the concept of cultural tourism product into the *core product* (the main attraction), the *tangible product* (that converts benefits into something consumable for tourists), and the *augmented product* (additional value of the product for tourists).

Cultural tourism products can also be defined as a packed-up presentation of cultural heritage that meets all of the requirements of tourist demand in the destination while also providing high-quality support services to ensure a positive overall experience (Mihelić, 2019, p. 80).

According to the World Tourism Organization (2019, p. 18), 'a tourism product is a combination of tangible and intangible elements, such as natural, cultural, and man-made resources, attractions, facilities, services, and activities around a specific center of interest which represents the core of the destination marketing mix and creates an overall visitor experience including emotional aspects for the potential customers. A tourism product is priced and sold through distribution channels and it has a life-cycle.'

Our Definition of Archaeological Tourism Product

From the review of various definitions of (cultural) tourism products, especially on the basis of Richards and Munsters (2010, pp. 52–53) and the World Tourism Organization (2019, p. 18), and considering the comparative assessment of all the above-mentioned case study examples, we suggest defining an archaeological tourism product as follows:

> An archaeological tourism product is composed of the main archaeological attraction or a group of such attractions, which represents the core of the destination, as well as of assets and services such as information, interpretation, and education, accessibility to the destination, accommodation facilities, and other services that satisfy the needs of tourists at the destination and create an overall visitor experience in accordance with the principles of authenticity and sustainability.

In other words, an archaeological tourism product is composed of:

- the *archaeological core product,* being the archae-

ological tourism supply to be used in a sustainable way (archaeological parks, sites, or monuments as well as archaeological theme parks; archaeological trails and routes; archaeological museums and archaeological open-air museums; living history and experimental archaeology events; archaeological excavations and other archaeological research activities open for the public; specific cultural tourism services such as information, interpretation, and education); and
- the *additional touristic product,* being the general tourist facilities and services (food and beverage; accommodation; transportation; shopping; recreation, sport, wellness and entertainment; tourist organizations and travel intermediaries).

Archaeological Tourism Products vs Cultural Tourism Products

Most definitions emphasize information and education as an essential part of the cultural tourism product (e.g. Chiriko, 2020, p. 4). This is also especially important for archaeological tourism products, but here the field of interpretation has to be emphasized even more. In order to be comprehensible to the average visitor, archaeological attractions need a more extensive and high-quality interpretation than other cultural destinations.

External factors such as politics, the economy, as well as social and cultural aspects have an impact on the development of cultural tourism products and the same is also valid for archaeological tourism products, as they are based on long-term management of archaeological attractions.[8] Preservation and conservation of archaeological heritage is particularly demanding. Archaeological remains are injured and fragile relics, with special needs in relation to conservation and protection procedures, if we would like to display them. They are not usable as they are, unlike other types of cultural heritage (e.g. a castle that can be renovated and used in a similar way as it was designed for); a new usage concept has to be designed (Zanier, 2016, p. 79; 2017, p. 29). It is also important to consider that an increased number of visitors can seriously threaten the preservation of archaeological remains; on the other hand, any restriction of visits can lead to negative reactions from visitors. Archaeological sites are also threatened by looting and vandalism, so security systems are essential in the frame of archaeological tourism products.

The principle of authenticity also has to be especially stressed in relation to archaeological tourism products. Archaeological sites adhere to the concept of 'ruins,' and any reconstruction can be misleading, i.e. lead to confusion for the uninformed visitor. The balance between authenticity, interpretational supplements, and conservation/protection measures is very difficult to achieve in archaeological sites.

Because of all the above-mentioned peculiarities, research, staff training, and specialization seem to be even more important within archaeological tourism products. The same is valid for cooperation and exchange with all stakeholders involved in developing the product.

We constantly come across examples of cultural heritage managers focusing on tangible assets rather than understanding how to provide quality tourism experiences. It is crucial that archaeological heritage managers also understand the needs and desires of tourists, so that their archaeological tourism products can be shaped to meet those needs and desires while also meeting management goals, such as heritage protection and conservation (Comer & Willems, 2019; Mckercher & Du Cros, 2015).

Types of Archaeological Tourism Products

As mentioned above, archaeological tourism is part of cultural tourism, which is classified under *special interest tourism.* Cultural tourists, among whom we also include those who seek archaeological attractions, are not attracted by heritage in general, they are searching for travel experiences that will help them understand other cultures, and therefore they are seeking the informational and educational element of the tourism product, which is one of the main motives for their tourism consumption. Although cultural tourists want to have a sense of independence when travelling, they

[8] On the special needs of archaeological heritage management cf. e.g. Breznik (2014a, 2014b), Pirkovič (2018; 2022), Egloff (2019), and Zanier and Ratej (2022a; 2022b).

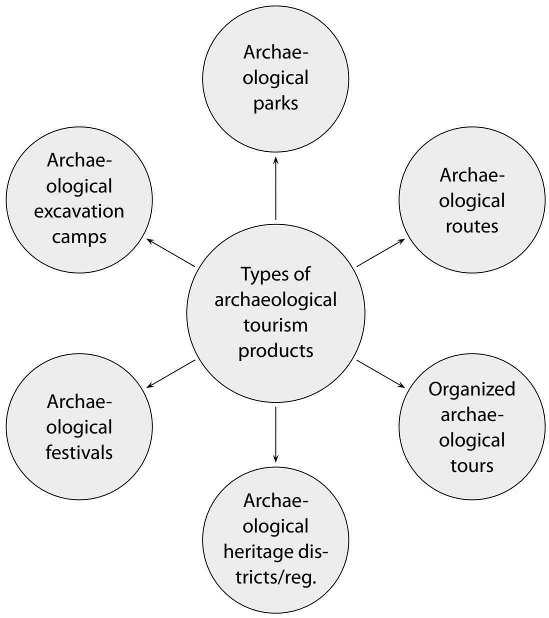

Figure 1 Types of Archaeological Tourism Products

tend to demand tourism products or services that offer compelling high-quality experiences, and which are integrated into a comprehensive service. Such travel arrangements consist of a set of partial tourist services (that include accommodation and transportation facilities) which are further subdivided into individual services (Brezovec & Nemec Rudež, 2009, p. 133). By understanding why tourists visit archaeological destinations, providers of archaeological tourism products and services can shape the whole experience in such a way as to better satisfy the needs and desires of tourists and thus meet the market demand.

Archaeological tourism products are also very much dependent on the specific conformation of the archaeological tourism supply itself. As a result, we propose to classify integral archaeological tourism products into several different types, as listed in Figure 1.

The first type of archaeological tourism product are *archaeological parks,* which can be considered integral tourism products if, in addition to their main archaeological attraction, they also offer additional services and products to better satisfy the needs and wants of their visitors. A good example of such archaeological park being an integral archaeological tourism product is Selinunte in Sicily, which is considered one of the largest archaeological parks in Europe, where visitors can choose from a variety of products and services such as different kinds of tours and excursions that also take into account other attractions in the area. A variety of information about the transportation and accommodation facilities, events, sports, nightlife, nearby beaches, and culinary services is provided on site, and comprehensive information about other local providers is also given.[9]

An *archaeological route* can also be a type of archaeological tourism product that connects different sites and tourism and other service providers that can be promoted under a common brand which helps with product visibility and its competitive advantage. This type of integration can also contribute to the better economic development of the wider region. Most tourists go on such trips individually, therefore it is even more important to provide them with all necessary information (besides information about archaeological attractions and sites, they may also need other basic information about nearby markets, restaurants, accommodation facilities, public transportation services, information centres, petrol stations, and emergency and healthcare facilities). The Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route, which connects multiple providers, archaeological sites, and vineyards from 10 European countries, is a good example of such an archaeological tourism product. It includes various archaeological sites, attractions, buildings, and locations associated with the Roman period.[10]

Guided archaeological tours are another type of archaeological tourism product that integrate additional products and services and are adapted for different target groups. Usually, they include transportation, accommodation, escort and local guides, entrance fees for museums or parks, meals, tourist taxes, and travel insurance packages. The Archaeological Institute of America, for example, offers a diverse range of organized archaeological tours to archaeological destinations around the world.[11]

[9] https://en.visitselinunte.com/archaeological-park/
[10] www.romanemperorsroute.org/
[11] www.archaeological.org/programs/public/tours/

Public *archaeological excavation camps* can also represent integral tourism products, if they offer additional services such as transportation and accommodation services. These types of archaeological products are more common in developing countries, particularly in the field of volunteer tourism, which is usually a less profitable form of tourism for the destination. In general, volunteer tourists are also known for spending significantly less than ordinary cultural tourists. The motives of tourists who take part in volunteer work at archaeological sites can, in addition to having a unique experience or understanding more about other cultures and the human past, be their devotion to helping other communities or deepening their knowledge of foreign languages (Timothy & Tahan, 2020, p. 10). There are examples where, in exchange for volunteer work on their archaeological sites, managers offer paid accommodation to their volunteers, and sometimes they also have meals included. The DigVentures platform from the United Kingdom has a list of different archaeological sites from which tourists can choose and apply for their volunteer work. They also organize other courses in relation to archaeology and provide other general information that tourists may need or desire in the consumption process.[12] Vindolanda in the United Kingdom is also a very well-known example in this regard, where the focus is on the volunteer excavation programme. The site is managed and owned by the Vindolanda Trust which is an independent charity that raises its income from contributions and donations of the general public and its visitors (Birley, 2018). Archaeological excavation camps in Vindolanda are organized every year and attract many volunteer tourists from all around the world. Volunteer positions for camps are filled months in advance and so far, with their help, archaeologists have already uncovered 24% of their archaeological site, so they predict that they have another 150 years of excavations left. This kind of archaeological excavation camp is a good example of interactive involvement of tourists, which raises awareness and educates them about the historical significance and vulnerability of the site (Anranter et al., 2021).

[12] www.digventures.com/projects/

Another type of integral archaeological tourism products are *archaeological festivals* that connect many different providers and include additional services and products. The target groups of these kinds of staged festivals are mostly families with children and individuals. They can include animation, various workshops both for children and adults, theatrical and musical performances, information points, playground areas, food and beverage areas, toilet facilities, souvenir stalls with products from local vendors, and much more. Two good examples are a year-long festival called the 1900 Festival in the United Kingdom that is organized along Hadrian's Wall.[13] Another one is the Archaeological Festival in Biskupin in Poland, which has been organized since 1995 and whose archaeological reserve is also one of the largest in Europe. Within these festivals, many different kinds of activities are organized, which attract thousands of visitors.[14]

We add to this overview an, in the archaeological field, somehow unusual definition: the *archaeological heritage district or region,*[15] which can be described as an extensive area that exhibits a degree of cultural homogeneity in a particular period (Darvill, 2009). Products consisting of archaeological districts or regions containing several archaeological attractions (archaeological sites, archaeological museums, archaeological events, etc.) normally also include other services, such as overall travel organization (travel packages offered by travel agencies), travel services (transport, guidance, and supply), and other services within the archaeological district or region (accommodation, restaurants and bars, animation, shops, etc.). A good example of an archaeological heritage region is Hadrian's Wall Country in the United Kingdom, which shows how different service and product providers can connect and promote each other at the

[13] https://1900.hadrianswallcountry.co.uk/events/

[14] https://www.biskupin.pl/zwiedzanie/#kalendarium

[15] The definition of 'archaeological district' in particular is not very common and relates to the more usual definitions of 'cultural district' (cf. e.g. Wynne, 1992; Brooks & Kushner, 2001; Santagata, 2002; Nuccio & Ponzini, 2016) and 'historic or heritage district' (cf. Ginting & Vinky Rahman, 2016; Saleh El-Basha, 2021), both used especially in urban studies.

same time.[16] This is one of the best examples from the marketing point of view, as it increases the visibility of the region as a whole. Archaeological districts include extensive areas with a cohesive group of sites. For example, Castle Park Archaeological District and Moccasin Bend National Archaeological District, which are both located in the United States of America, represent the history of human habitation through different periods (History Colorado, 2022; National Park Service, 2022).

These are, in our opinion, the main types of archaeological tourism products that can be offered to the public for consumption; every other combination of archaeological attraction with products and services, that satisfy the needs and wants of tourists, meeting the definition explained previously, can also be defined as an archaeological tourism product.

How to Compose an Archaeological Tourism Product

When designing a cultural or archaeological tourism product, it is essential to be aware that cultural tourists consume these products because they want to fulfil an inner need. Archaeological tourism demand is akin to heritage tourism demand in general, since cultural tourists' motives for travelling also include curiosity to learn about other cultures and to meet their special interests, hence the educational component. On the one hand, cultural tourists want to have a sense of independence, but simultaneously they want their experience to be guided and at the same time authentic. This must be taken into account in the development of a cultural tourism product as well as when developing an archaeological tourism product. One of the most important aspects of a product is its consumption to satisfy the needs, wants, and desires of tourists, which helps the managers in achieving their long-term financial goals and other goals such as education, and cultural heritage conservation and protection for future generations. It is crucial that the target groups of the product are clearly identified and that the product is adapted to their needs (Timothy & Tahan, 2020).

The commodification or transformation of assets into archaeological tourism products is an important step in archaeological tourism that can be offered to tourists for sustainable tourism consumption. Because of its complexity, scale, location, and setting, each cultural heritage asset is unique; therefore, it is particularly important that the managers of the archaeological sites implement sustainable development and management and that they preserve the authenticity of the site. Otherwise, the consequences can be irreversible (Kotler & Turner, 1989, p. 435; Mckercher & Du Cros, 2015).

As already mentioned, archaeological tourism products are composed of different assets and services. Some are related to the *archaeological core product,* others to the *additional touristic product.* Archaeological tourism products are compound entities and only appropriate components can be composed into a sound ensemble. The thematic link should be respected in most components of the archaeological tourism product. But it can be also of advantage to seek new, unexpected, surprising combinations in order to awaken the attention and curiosity of the visitors as well as their emotions, such aspect being continuously more emphasized in recent tourism research (Buda et al., 2014; Scott et al., 2017; Mitas & Bastiaansen, 2018; Skavronskaya et al., 2019; Skavronskaya et al., 2021).

Multi-sensoriality is another important principle, which is highlighted in recent works on the tourism experience and tourism marketing (Isacsson et al., 2009; Agapito et al., 2013; Meacci & Liberatore, 2018; Gómez-Suárez & Yagüe, 2021) and we also recommend it for archaeological tourism products, where it seems even more important to bring to life the lost multi-sensorial reality of the past (Melatti, 2011, pp. 9–10).

As we have already stressed, interpretation is especially important in archaeological tourism products, and in this context, it is also important to take into account people with different disabilities. In the same way, they have to be considered in relation to all other facilities and services of the product.

We can certainly expect that archaeological tourism products will also increasingly evolve in the direction of digital technology, which is especially useful

[16] www.hadrianswallcountry.co.uk/

for the interpretation of archaeological attractions. For example, archaeological virtual tours of sites or museums have already been included by many destinations in their offer and help to enhance visitors' experiences. Particularly during the coronavirus epidemic, when travelling to other destinations was significantly more difficult due to strict regulations, the demand for such products and services increased.

The networking of different providers and the combination of different products and services into integral archaeological tourism products, which meet the demand of cultural tourists at the destination, can help with product differentiation and in increasing the competitiveness when marketing this type of products.

In the following paragraphs, we identify possible components of an archaeological tourism product as also illustrated in Figure 2. We firstly highlight assets of the archaeological core product and then its services. Lastly, we discuss assets and services of the additional touristic product.

Figure 2 Components of an Archaeological Tourism Product

Assets of the Archaeological Core Product

The basic component of an archaeological tourism product is a *place* of archaeological relevance (the archaeological destination) or a group or series of such places, connected by spatial, thematic, cultural or chronological relations, together composing a unitary itinerary or cultural district or region, telling us one story of our past. Such places can conform to different types of archaeological sites, archaeological monuments, archaeological trails (as well as routes), archaeological parks, archaeological theme parks, archaeological museums, archaeological open-air museums, or other museums with archaeological content. These places have to be publicly accessible and need to have at least minimal visitor infrastructure and equipment. To understand archaeological remains, despite their fragmentary nature, especially equipment for the clarification and illustration of their contents, original state and meaning, i.e. *non-personal interpretation, information, and education media,* seems to be essential for all mentioned types of assets.

Some of the above-mentioned assets need some explanation, as even at this level there is no universal terminological consensus. One example is the already mentioned *archaeological parks.* They can represent integral archaeological tourism products in their own right, if they include a complete range of tourism services. Otherwise, they can represent one of the components of a bigger, composed product. But what specifically are archaeological parks? The term has various uses (Breznik, 2014b; Jurak, 2020). After reviewing various definitions in recent international doctrinal documents (ICOMOS, 2015, 2017), based on the definition in the Croatian legislation (Zakon o zaštiti i očuvanju kulturnih dobara, 2020, article 6), we propose to define 'archaeological park' as follows: 'An archaeological park is a researched, protected, and presented archaeological site or its part, that includes informative and didactic components of presentation and interpretation in order to raise awareness of the importance of archaeological heritage' (Zanier, Ratej, 2021, p. 154).

A term mistakenly frequently used as a synonym for archaeological park is *archaeological open-air museum.* This category is defined by the charter of the International Association of Archaeological Open-Air Museums:[17] 'An archaeological open-air museum is a non-profit permanent institution with outdoor true-to-scale architectural reconstructions primarily based on archaeological sources. It holds collections of intangible heritage resources and provides an interpretation of how people lived and acted in the past; this is accomplished according to sound scientific methods for the purposes of education, study, and enjoyment of its visitors.' Archaeological open-air museums therefore are not necessarily located on an archaeological site, but also at other places, and consist mostly of reconstructions.

Areas without archaeological remains that are open to the public and exhibit outdoor collections of buildings, true to scale architectural reconstructions, and artefacts, but intended for amusement and profit are *archaeological theme parks* (Paardekooper, 2015).

The term *archaeological trail* is normally used for physically existing paths crossing archaeological sites. *Archaeological routes* or itineraries connect different archaeologically interesting points (or poles of attraction), without presupposing the establishment of a new, dedicated path.[18] For their ability to connect various attractions and services, we have already mentioned routes between the possible types of archaeological tourism products, and frequently they perform in fact as such.

Specific definitions for *archaeological sites* and *archaeological monuments* depend on each country's legislation. In Slovenia, an 'archaeological site is the original place of deposition and discovery of archaeological remains.' At the same time, 'archaeological remains are all things, and any traces of human activity from previous periods on the surface, in the soil and water, the conservation and the study of which contribute to discovering the historical development of mankind and its relation with the natural environment, for which the main source of information is archaeological research or discovery and for which it can be assumed that they were under ground or under water for at least 100 years and that they have characteristics of heritage. Archaeological remains are also things related to cemeteries, as defined under the regulations on war graves, and to war, together with the archaeological and natural context, which were under ground or under water for at least 50 years' (Zakon o varstvu kulturne dediščine (ZVKD-1), 2008, article 3). Protection is established with different gradations: registered cultural heritage, monuments of local importance, and monuments of national importance (Zakon o varstvu kulturne dediščine (ZVKD-1), 2008, articles 3, 8, 11), so *archaeological monuments* (of local or national importance) represent the highlights of our archaeological heritage.

The definition of *archaeological museums* is similarly related to legal definitions concerned with the establishment of protection of movable archaeological finds, which are stored and presented to the public in such museums. In Slovenia, 'archaeological finds are moveable archaeological remains, which have been under the ground or underwater for at least 100 years. Archaeological finds are also weapons, ammunition, and other military equipment, military vehicles, and vessels, or parts thereof, which were underground or underwater for at least 50 years' (Zakon o varstvu kulturne dediščine (ZVKD-1), 2008, article 3). But in Slovenia, we do not have archaeological museums as such, as this function is covered by the regional museums as well as by the National Museum. In other countries, specialized museums for archaeology are very common. Independently from the designation of the institution, very successful synergies can be established within a composed archaeological tourism product by connecting archaeological sites and museums with archaeological content.

Services of the Archaeological Core Product

The archaeological core product is also composed of *activities and services* of archaeological and educational character. Typically, the above-mentioned places dispose of services offered by specialized staff,

[17] www.exarc.net/about-us/charter

[18] For a review of different definitions of 'cultural route,' which we consequently apply to the concept of archaeological route, cf. Durusoy (2014, pp. 9–13).

related to the explanation of its archaeological contents. These are called *personal interpretation, information, and education media* and they comprise different kinds of guided tours, workshops, and lectures.

The archaeological core product can also be based on other activities of archaeological content, such as *public forms of archaeological excavations* and other organized forms of archaeological research activities with the participation of the lay audience. These activities allow visitors to participate *in medias res,* but imply, of course, extensive preparation on the part of the participants, as well as strict protocols and agreements.

Further, lively participation of visitors can be assured by *living history events* of archaeological character. These events seek to give observers and participants a sense of stepping back in time by using tools, activities, and costume in an interactive presentation of a specific archaeological culture or re-enactment of a specific event related to archaeological periods. A lot of experience has been accrued for this kind of events, especially for later historical periods; it is clear that in relation to archaeological periods the reconstruction of several aspects can be problematic, because of insufficient or fragmentary information. Intense preparation of the participants is therefore advised for these events and can be part of a comprehensive learning or research process.

Re-enactment can be also pushed to a very sensitive, experienced form, which is called *Live Action Role-Playing* or LARP, where the participants portray different and specific characters in accordance with an agreed scenario, which can again be related more generally to an archaeological culture or a specific event of relevance for an archaeological period.

Other activities and services related to the archaeological core product may include aspects of *experimental archaeology,* which often implies the creation of copies of structures and objects of a specific culture or period, based on archaeological evidence, using only appropriate technologies, tools and materials. Living history and experimental archaeology can, of course, be perfectly intertwined in order to recreate comprehensive and informative experiences of the past. Sometimes these fields are also connected to research activities and help us to understand and reconstruct specific facets of the past. Here we can point out as an example experimental works on practical aspects of gladiatorial combat (Battaglia, 2002; Teyssier & Lopez, 2007), typically performed in the frame of popular living history events.

The Additional Touristic Product

As we are discussing archaeological tourism products here, the touristic aspect should not fall short, either. We must not forget that our visitors need some traditional touristic services. First of all, we have to reflect on transportation means leading to our archaeological destination or between a group of such destinations composing an itinerary or cultural district, or between our archaeological destinations and places where other touristic services can be reached. We should be able to offer our visitors different transport options, from standard to more sportive or thematic ones, and arrange facilities in accordance with them. Also in this aspect, the main message or story related to our archaeological tourism product can be reflected by using appropriate means of transportation (e.g. in use in the period represented by the archaeological destination).

Food, beverage, and accommodation are, of course, essential services for tourists and if we cannot provide them within our archaeological destination, we need to include suitable suggestions in our archaeological tourism product. Fruitful collaborations are possible with external providers and in this case a thematic relation to the archaeological destination can also be easily assured (e.g. with recipes and lodging inspired by the period or specific context illustrated by the specific archaeological destination). For example, near a site related to the Roman military, a camping site inspired by Roman military camps can be created, as was tentatively established within the Claustra+ project in Slovenia.[19] Win-win solutions, which are favourable for all partners involved, with mutual advertising and a strong comprehensive visitor programme, can be easily established.

[19] www.claustra.org/project-claustra/

Shopping is another service that seems to be indispensable in such a frame and can also create an important link to local economic development and creative industries. In this case, too, it is not necessary to organize specific shops and products such as souvenirs or other local artefacts at the archaeological destination itself. However, the production and sale of such objects in affiliated or associated shops, where the link to the archaeological destination is still recognizable, should be encouraged.

An archaeological tourism product may also include other services related to *recreation, sport, wellness, and entertainment.* These activities can be perfectly in line with the topic of the archaeological destination, or they can represent a welcome diversion. Many of these activities can be easily combined with the visit of the archaeological destination (e.g. running or horse riding through extensive archaeological sites) and can represent an added value for many visitors who are not only interested in archaeology, but would also like to experience something else. For example, in Rome, Archeorunning was developed in 2016 and represents a successful, registered trademark offering running tours through the ancient remains and much more.[20] In several archaeological areas surrounding Rome, riding tours also are available.[21] Especially in this segment, it is possible to integrate different services in one, combining, for example, *sport, recreation, and transportation* in one activity. Some of these activities can match specific functions and aspects of the archaeological destination and can help to immerse the tourist in the experience, even if they are accomplishing these activities in another context (e.g. combining a visit to an ancient thermal area with a visit to a contemporary spa). Also, in this case, successful collaborations with external partners are possible and represent a way to anchor the archaeological destination into the local economy.

Tourism organizations and travel intermediaries have to be part of the product, promoting, boosting, and selling it to the public. The best product cannot reach the buyer without a professional seller.

[20] www.archeorunning.com/en/

[21] www.freedome.it/passeggiate-cavallo/roma/

Figure 3 Steps for Developing an Archaeological Tourism Product

Steps for Developing an Archaeological Tourism Product

Hence, integral archaeological tourism products are composed of an archaeological core product and an additional touristic product, each having different components which can be combined into a sound, multi-sensorial ensemble representing for the tourist a unique, comprehensive experience. All components do not need to be covered by one entity; networking with appropriate local partners which can benefit in the same way from the archaeological tourism product should be encouraged. The chosen components of the product should be in line with its target groups and offer them different options, also ensuring easy adaptation and frequent updates. In all chosen components, principles of sustainability and inclusion have to be respected, otherwise the archaeological tourism product will soon be burnt out.

For the development of an archaeological tourism product we propose to follow a simple approach (Figure 3), derived from several models for cultural tourism product development.

The first step includes the analysis and evaluation of the current situation concerning the archaeological heritage and the present tourism flows, their composition, and present satisfaction grade. A *report* about these aspects with solid numeric data and clear overviews represents a necessary requirement.

On the basis of this analysis the needs and the opportunities, both in relation to the specific local economic and archaeological situation, should be identified. In accordance therewith, specific goals related to the archaeological tourism product should be formulated, while simultaneously also recognizing stakeholders. All these data should be systemized in a concise *strategy.*

Together with the stakeholders, the planning process of the archaeological tourism product should then be started, in line with already identified needs, opportunities, and goals, as well as current and coveted target groups of the product. In this, synergies should also be recognized. Special attention must be paid to thematic soundness, multi-sensorial experiences, sustainability, and inclusion. All possible components of an archaeological tourism product should be considered. Solutions for all of the aforementioned aspects should be envisaged in order to plan a truly comprehensive product. All measures and ideas must be systemized and explained in a *management plan* related to the whole archaeological tourism product, not only to the archaeological destination. Within the management plan, a realistic time schedule for the implementation of the tourism product must be defined, as well as indicators that will allow the progress of the archaeological tourism product to be clearly tracked. Responsibilities, a clear management structure, and a decision-making process should also be defined. A *management agreement* should be defined and signed by all actively involved partners. Other stakeholders should testify their interest and support within *letters of intent.*

Then, the implementation of the plan should follow, making the archaeological tourism product come to life. Collaboration with partners and stakeholders should be kept at an optimal level, including through frequent meetings. In relation to the staff working with the product, ambitious professionals, kept up to date with training, are a must. *Periodical reporting,* especially in relation to the defined indicators, is necessary for progress monitoring.

As a very important step in this process, *promotion and marketing* of the archaeological tourism product should be highlighted in a special way (cf. Chiriko, 2020; Sedmak, 2017), even if these activities represent only one part of the implementation process of the archaeological tourism product.

Once the archaeological tourism product is implemented, visitors must be monitored, including quantitative and qualitative information. *Surveys* aimed at documenting more complex qualitative data and visitor satisfaction are very important, but they should be kept to a minimum, as they can bother visitors if they are too long. In response to the visitor feedback and new tourism trends, the archaeological tourism product should be regularly *updated* with new activities and elements. Every product has a life cycle and after the first boom, a period of stagnation and less interest is normal, and has to be overcome with improvements and novelties, the importance of which we have already highlighted above. At this point new needs, opportunities and goals have to be defined and the planning and implementation process can start once again.

Archaeological Tourism Products and the Trap of Consumerism

After encouraging the development of integral archaeological tourism products, it is necessary to also draw attention to risks and problems. In our constantly changing, liquid post-modern society, archaeological heritage has also become a liquid concept, or in the words of Marxiano Melotti (2011, p. 2): 'Archaeological parks are gradually taking on the features of theme parks. Museums compete to draw in visitors by offering attractions which have little to do with traditional archaeology. These are, however, marginal signs and remain outside a far wider process. Such changes are, in fact, keeping pace with other far more crucial transformations. Archaeological tourism no longer necessarily implies contact with an archaeological object. It is possible to enjoy experiences of an archaeological kind in contexts totally devoid of archaeological monuments or archaeological finds.' In the same way, new forms of relative authenticity are also emerging heavily in archaeological tourism (cf. e.g. the reconstruction of the Altamira cave, visited by hundreds of thousands of visitors), of course accompanied by a massive use of virtual reality. The very aim of archaeological tourism, to be a mechanism enabling the preservation, valorisation, and dissemination of archaeological heritage, is falling short in several examples, either because of the effects of mass tourism, consuming the fragile remains of the past, or by creating sensational archaeological experiences made only of reproductions, digital media, virtual reality, shopping, and edutainment. Hyper-tourism, consumerism, and relativization of authenticity risk distorting and consuming our archaeological destinations and we should not aim at that.

Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to present a new concept within cultural tourism, i.e. the integral archaeological tourism product. To successfully meet the needs and wants of tourists that visit archaeological attractions it is essential that managers of archaeological attractions are aware of the importance of an integral approach when developing their archaeological tourism product, which is composed of the main archaeological attraction and a group of assets and services. The result of connecting different providers and services into an integral archaeological product improves the overall experience of tourists who will return home with a positive impression and will more likely revisit and recommend a destination to their friends and family. Although economic competitiveness is not so often discussed in the field of archaeological tourism, it is important, especially in terms of providing funds for maintenance and restoration of the archaeological heritage itself, which is best achieved by a self-funding approach through the thoughtful development of an integral, authentic, and sustainable archaeological tourism product.

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Original Scientific Article

Destination Image, COVID-19 Perceived Risk and Intention to Travel: Malaysian Case

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The current study aims to analyse the impact of destination image and perceived risk on tourists' intention to travel to urban cities of Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study addresses the effects of risk and destination image on the perception of destination risk and how the perceptions of destination risk impact travel during the COVID-19 pandemic by utilising the planned behaviour theory. A total of 237 respondents participated in the current study. WarpPLS (7.0), a variance-based structural equation modelling (SEM) software, was used to test the research model. The empirical results offer exciting insights into urban tourism services on important factors to consider while designing safety measures and practical actions to restore urban tourism. The study offers novel findings. First, the study empirically revealed the travel intentions of tourists travelling to Malaysia during the coronavirus situation. Second, the study's findings exposed quantifiable insights to make Malaysia a preferable tourist destination.

Keywords: COVID-19, destination image, perceived risk, intention to travel, theory of planned behaviour, Malaysia

 https://doi.org/10.26493/2335-4194.16.221-232

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a massive immobilisation of productive activity, with severe economic effects at the global level. Many problems have emerged in the most vulnerable areas, including health and safety issues, political changes, financial crisis, and the tourism industry (Chang & Kim, 2022; Poulaki & Nikas, 2021; Cakar, 2020). COVID-19 continues to impact national economies, businesses, health services, and social life almost two years after it began. With new highly infectious virus variants such as Omicron, the unavailability of vaccines in poor economies, and protests by anti-vaxxers in significant parts of the population in industrialised countries, COVID-19 endures, affecting national economies, businesses, health services, and social life (Gössling & Schweiggart, 2022).

The travel and tourism sector accounts for 10.3% (US$8.9 trillion) of global GDP and 28.3% of exports of services at the worldwide level. In 2019, tourism contributed 10.3% to the GDP and 14.7% of total employment creation in Malaysia (WTTC, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted travel decisions due to the limited availability of tourist destinations and the occurrence of unfavourable travel conditions (Kusumawati et al., 2021; Chang, 2009). Several risks are involved in travel and tour, including health, financial, social, and time risks (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006). Any of the risks can directly be associated with COVID-19. In the current situation, tourists generally worry about health risks; the uncertainty of becoming COVID-19 positive can lead to their decision to choose a particular tourist destination (Poulaki & Nikas, 2021; Chinazzi et al., 2020).

Most countries closed their borders during the COVID pandemic, although a handful opened them for foreign travellers at that time. Travel outside one's country has reduced to such a number as to become negligible. People opt for shorter distances, especially those that can be reached by road. Several studies have covered the intention to travel, but there is still a gap in the research on the intention to travel during a pandemic while people have a high perception of risk (Wen et al., 2020). This type of research is crucial as it supports decision-making to stimulate tourism demand (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006). The most recognised theories, goal intention (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006) and the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985), are adapted for current research. This study seeks to understand the impact on the destination's image, the perception of risks regarding the tourist's destination, and the intention to travel during COVID-19 to urban cities of Malaysia. Since Malaysia is the most urbanised country in East Asia, the study aims to analyse the impact of destination image and perceived risk on the intention to travel to urban cities of Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of this study can provide recommendations to restore tourism and the development of security measures for tourism services.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Risk Aversion and Intention to Travel

Individuals generally avoid travelling after disease outbreaks as they are highly averse to any risk accompanied by infections (Novelli et al., 2018). Risk aversion is also one of the critical factors for individuals' travel decision-making. Generally, risk-taking attitudes are a significant element of human behaviour as this influences decision-making strategies and makes individuals deal with complex, ambiguous, uncertain outcomes (Chan et al., 2020). Rogers (1975) has argued in his protection motivation theory that individuals adapt to protect themselves and thus depend on their subjective risk perceptions and risk aversions regarding a perceived health threat; in this case, it is COVID-19 infection. The literature has also shown gender differences in risk aversion and travel visits; specifically, females tend to be more risk aversive than males (Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009; Park & Reisinger, 2020).

Previous studies in similar disease outbreak situations have yielded different results. For example, Lee et al. (2012) found people engaged in more adaptive behaviours to cope with the threats of the 2009 H1N1 influenza outbreak; however, on the other hand, Cahyanto et al. (2016) found people stopped travelling at the risk of aversive response to the Ebola outbreak in the United States. Similarly, studies in the literature witness a reduction in travel behaviour among people due to COVID-19 risk. For example, studies by Isaac and Keijzer (2021), Li et al., (2020) and Neuburger and Egger (2020) showed that passengers decline in their intention to travel or postpone their trips due to higher risk aversion or risk perception of a pandemic.

Boto-García and Leoni (2021) highlighted in their study that social distancing norms in crowded destinations make people cancel or postpone their travel plans. Also, people with high infection rates or who experienced COVID-like symptoms are more risk-aversive to travel. Research also indicates people prefer 'slow tourism' (Wen et al., 2020) in response to the pandemic risk aversion. We also must acknowledge that some people are risk-averse, while others are willing to take risks. From a behavioural research perspective, analysing the reasons behind risk-related decision-making will help us understand people's intention, in this case, to travel (Bauchner & Fontanarosa, 2020). Average individuals need higher risk compensation to perform the behaviour (Trimpop, 1994). Pullanoet al. (2020) conducted a recent study in France to understand risk aversion behaviour during the lockdown and documented that senior people are more risk aversive and avoid leisure travel and family trips as insisted by the authorities. Along similar lines, this study aims to understand people's risk aversion and travel intentions after the COVID-19 outbreak in Malaysia. Hence, we hypothesise,

- H1 *Risk aversion is positively related to the intention to travel.*

Risk Aversion and Perception of Destination Risk

The likelihood of unfavourable consequences and uncertainty is well explored in the financial decision-making and behaviour of tourists (Hasan et al., 2017). Risk perceptions can be described as the personal opinions of tourists about risk characteristics and seriousness in three categories: health security, moral hazards and weather (Cui et al., 2016). In the tourism context, risk perception has been explored for tourists' fear, anxiety, and worry (Wolff et al., 2019). Health-related risks in tourism, such as Ebola, H1N1, SARS (Jonas et al., 2011) and COVID-19 (Nazneen et al., 2020; Wen et al., 2020), are well investigated. However, few studies have explored risk aversion and destination risk perception among tourists after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hence, tourists with less concern about risk do not prioritise safety and security while choosing the destination for a visit. Recently, Prince and Kim (2021) also explored the relationship between risk aversion and perception of destination risk among tourists and found supporting evidence to argue the risk aversion. The tourist is likely to perceive the destination as risky. In a nutshell, the risk aversion trait is associated with destination risk perception. Hence, this study explores the risk aversion and perception of destination risk in travel intention, and we hypothesise,

- H2 *Risk aversion is positively related to perceptions of destination risk.*

Perceived Risk of Destination and Intention to Travel

Perceived risk is subjective; no matter how informed or thorough the decision might be, it represents the individual's expectation of a negative outcome (Hassan & Soliman, 2021). Studies have shown that the perceived risk of a destination affects tourists' travel intentions, particularly in the context of health-associated risks (Matiza, 2020; Carvalho, 2022; Poulaki & Nikas, 2021). Tourists' decision-making is influenced by the perception of risk associated with a destination (Kani et al., 2017). For example, tourists with higher perceived risk are less likely to intend to travel compared to those with a lower perceived risk. Şengel et al. (2022) argue that the perceived risk of a destination, especially during international travel, leads to avoidance of that destination. This supports previous research by Sonmez and Graefe (1998) who found that perceived risk of a destination is a crucial predictor of a tourist's intention to travel. Destination risk perception can influence tourist intentions to travel or avoid specific destinations (Silva et al., 2011). However, few studies have examined destination-specific risk perception and travel intention (Sharifpour et al., 2014). Hence, this study aims to explore the perceived risk of COVID-19 in Malaysia as a destination among tourists. Previous studies have shown that a destination's negative impact makes tourists avoid travelling due to perceived risks (Cui et al., 2016; Činjarević et al., 2020; de Castro Mendes & Jose Cavenaghi, 2020). This avoidance arises from cognitive dissonance between tourists' motives and the perceived destination risk. To address this dissonance, tourists often postpone or avoid travelling to specific destinations to mitigate associated risks. Matiza (2020) argues that the probable link between destination risk perception and post-COVID-19 travel intentions of tourists should be thoroughly examined. Furthermore, considering the current scenario, it is reasonable to assume that the global tourism industry will be affected if proper measures to mitigate perceived destination risks are not implemented by respective countries. Therefore, this study intends to understand the perceived risk of Malaysia and the travel intentions among tourists. In light of these considerations, the hypothesis of this study is that perceived risk, irrespective of the comprehensiveness or quality of decision-making, reflects an individual's expectation of negative outcomes (Hassan & Soliman, 2021). The literature also confirms that the perceived risk of a destination influences tourists' travel intentions, especially in terms of health-associated risks (Matiza, 2020; Carvalho, 2022; Poulaki & Nikas, 2021). Hence we hypothesise, H3 *Perceived risk of destination is negatively related to the intention to travel.*

Destination Image and Perceived Risk of Destination

Perpiña et al. (2019) conducted a content analysis of 62 articles from reputed tourism journals. They confirmed that destination image might influence tourists' mental image, which can be perceived as safe (positive) or risky (negative) of the specific destination of travel intent. The decision to travel is based on the destination image and the perceived risk of the destination. San Martin and del Bosque (2008) highlighted that tourists perceive the destination as attractive and familiar if they perceive low risk in the specific destination. For instance, tourists perceiving the low risk of the destination develop a more favourable mental image before visiting the place.

Conversely, if the perceived destination risk is high among tourists, they create a negative image of the destination. Literature also confirms that awareness, cognitive and affective image, past visitation, perceived risk of travelling and perceived risk are the primary factors for international tourism compared to domestic tourism. Concern for safety and security develops the destination's cognitive image and perceived safety. But it also triggers the perceived risk of travelling (Carvalho, 2022). Also emphasised by the literature (Perpiña et al., 2019) is the importance of linking destination image and perceived risk of destination to understand tourist cognitive evaluation and, thereby, their travel behaviour. Ruan et al. (2017) studied the relationship between the perceived risk of a destination and its image among 635 foreign tourists. The study found that tourists consider the perceived risk of a destination to form a destination image, influencing their intention to visit.

Researchers must conduct studies integrating these two variables to contribute important information to tourists, influencing their travel intent. Perpiña et al. (2021) have integrated destination image and risk perceptions as an overall construct to understand travel behaviour. According to the researchers, risk perception of the destination will influence beliefs on specific destinations and shape their destination image. Despite the importance of understanding perceived risk and destination image as distinct constructs within a single study, the literature barely examines the relationship (Kani et al., 2017). Hence, this study aims to add to the existing body of literature to precisely understand the linkage as mentioned earlier, examining Malaysia as the context of the study, and we hypothesise,

H4 *Destination image is positively related to the perceived risk of the destination.*

Destination Image and Intention to Travel

The study by Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020) on a meta-analysis of 87 studies highlighted the relationship between destination image and intention to travel. Their study has also highlighted that a destination image can be a two- or three-dimensional construct; in some cases, researchers examine a single construct, for instance, an overall image. Overall, the destination image is the holistic perception of a tourist destination (Josiassen et al., 2016) and in this study, we use 'overall image' as the destination image construct. Overall, the destination image is an abstract construct consisting of three sub-dimensions: cognitive, affective, and conative.

Alvarez and Campo (2014) found that destination image perception significantly and directly affects travelling to a particular destination. Along the same lines, Leisen (2001) argued that tourists with a more favourable destination image tend to visit the destination more than those with the least favourable destination image. Molinillo et al. (2018) highlighted that destination image forms the antecedent of intention to visit. The study also showed that destination image formation and intention to travel depend on the tourists' access to information on the destination. Perpiña et al. (2021) established a significant relationship between destination image and intention to visit. Tourists who develop a positive perception of a specific destination choose to visit the destination. Kanwel et al. (2019) showed a positive relationship between perceived destination image and the intention to travel. Research by Chen and Phou (2013) found a negative relationship between perceived destination image and intention to travel. The literature shows mixed results, although destination image is an essen-

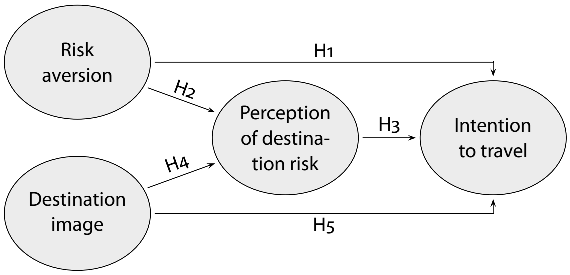

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

tial antecedent of tourist behaviour (Josiassen et al., 2016). The current study, therefore, would like to establish the linkage between destination perceptions and intentions to visit, and we hypothesise,

H5 *Destination image is positively related to intentions to travel.*

Research Methodology

Research Instrument

The current study analyses the impact of destination image and perceived risk on the intention to travel to Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data was collected online using a self-administered survey instrument. Demographical questions, including age, gender, marital status, monthly income, education level, occupation, and nationality of the participants, were asked in the first section of the survey. The second section of the survey had four travel-related questions, including international trip frequency in the last five years, the purpose of the trip, travel companions, and the duration of the trip. Twenty-five items measured research constructs by using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from '1' being 'poor' to '5' 'excellent;' 11 items for destination image were adapted from Lepp et al. (2011), six items for risk aversion were adapted from Wolff and Larsens (2014), five items for the perception of destination risk were adapted from Baloglu and McCleary (1999), and three items for intention to travel adapted from Schroeder et al. (2013) were included in the last section of the survey.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Any adults (foreigners, non-Malaysians) who travelled out of their home country for any reason and were interested in visiting Malaysia were considered the population for this research. Data was collected using an online survey (Google forms) using the self-selection sampling method from December 2020 to February 2021. A total of 237 responses were received, and four were discarded due to missing data, which would have negatively affected the analysis.

Table 1 shows that 57.9% of the respondents were female. The majority of the respondents fall under the

Table 1 Demographics

Variables	Categories	(1)	(2)
Gender	Male	98	42.1
	Female	135	57.9
Age (years)	20 years or below	65	27.9
	21–30	114	48.9
	31–40	29	12.4
	41–50	22	9.4
	51 years or above	3	1.3
Marital status	Single	93	39.9
	Married	106	45.5
	Separated	27	11.6
	Other	7	3
Income (monthly in US$)	Less than 1,000	131	56.2
	1,001–2,000	35	15
	2,001–3,000	38	16.3
	3,001–4,000	8	3.4
	4,001–5,000	7	3
Highest level of education achieved	Junior High School	0	0
	Secondary School	0	0
	College	1	1
	University	50	49.5
	Other	9	8.9
Occupation	Retired	0	0
	Self Employed	2	2.5
	Unemployed	49	62
	Private Employee	15	19
	Public Employee	2	2.5
	Other	0	0

Continued in the next column

Table 1 *Continued from the previous column*

Variables	Categories	(1)	(2)
Nationality	Australia	4	1.7
	Bangladesh	4	1.7
	China	5	2.1
	Philippines	18	7.7
	India	17	7.3
	Indonesia	59	25.3
	Italy	1	0.4
	Japan	31	13.3
	Kenya	10	4.3
	Korea	11	4.7
	Libya	2	0.9
	Maldives	4	1.7
	Mauritius	1	0.4
	Pakistan	54	23.2
	Sri Lanka	11	4.7
	Tanzania	1	0.4

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) frequency, (2) percentage.

Table 2 Travel Information

Variables	Categories	(1)	(2)
Number of abroad (international) holiday trips during the last 5 years	3 or less	128	54.9
	in between 4–6	60	25.8
	in between 7–9	25	10.7
	10 or more	20	8.6
Purpose of the travel	Leisure/vacation	138	59.2
	Business	28	12
	VFR	26	11.2
	Other	41	17.6
Travelling with	Family/spouse/kids	121	51.9
	Colleague/Friends	76	32.6
	Alone	32	13.7
	Other	4	1.7
Duration of the trip	2–5 days	124	53.2
	One week	51	21.9
	More than a week	58	24.9

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) frequency, (2) percentage.

age group '21–25' (48.9%), followed by '20 years or below' (27.9%) and the majority of the participants were married (45.5%), followed by single (39.9%). Out of 101 respondents, only 50 stated their highest education level was achieved at university. Only 79 respondents indicated their occupation, where 62% were employed, followed by 19% as private sector employees. With regards to nationality, the maximum number of participants was Indonesian (25.3%), followed by Pakistani (23.2%), Filipino (7.7%) and Indian (7.3%).

Table 2 shows the travel information details; it was found that 128 respondents had three or fewer international trips followed by 60 participants (between 4–6 trips) in the last five years. 59.2% of participants travelled for leisure or vacation, and 51.9% of participants (the majority) with their families, including spouses and kids, for 2–5 days (53.2% – majority of participants).

Data analysis Partial Least Squares (PLS) using WarpPLS 7.0 software was chosen over the common covariance-based technique, given that it places fewer restrictions on sample sizes, data distribution, and normality and is gaining more prominence in hospitality management research (Ali et al., 2018). A two-step procedure, suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), was adopted to test the hypotheses for this study. An assessment of the structural model followed an assessment of the measurement model.

Data Analysis and Findings

This study used the variance-based structural equation modelling (SEM) software WarpPLS 7.0 to analyse the study's conceptual path model. The data analysis part is segmented into two main parts: the measurement model and the structural model. The measurement model was assessed to examine the validity and reliability of the derived measures for the outer model-theoretical constructs. In contrast, the estimation of the path model was examined through testing (structural model) the inner model. PLS path modelling is one of the robust methods to analyse conceptual models in social sciences, mainly in hospitality and tourism (Ali et al., 2018). Furthermore, in or-

Table 3 Indicator's Validity, Reliability and Cross-Loadings

Constructs		Ri_Av	De_IMG	PR_DR	In_Trav	CR	AVE	VIF
Risk Aversion	RA1	0.755	−0.152	0.133	0.101	0.862	0.530	1.125
	RA2	0.820	0.034	−0.016	0.043			
	RA3	0.860	0.049	−0.204	−0.055			
	RA4	0.812	0.032	−0.014	−0.208			
	RA5	0.758	0.075	0.205	0.280			
	RA6	0.687	−0.001	0.069	0.046			
Destination Image	DI1	0.094	0.832	−0.019	−0.051	0.935	0.569	1.170
	DI2	−0.031	0.771	0.021	0.028			
	DI3	0.069	0.825	0.043	0.065			
	DI4	0.241	0.768	−0.216	−0.159			
	DI5	0.129	0.754	−0.178	−0.208			
	DI6	−0.155	0.710	0.248	0.227			
	DI7	−0.132	0.772	0.096	−0.047			
	DI8	−0.123	0.685	0.031	−0.011			
	DI9	0.029	0.765	−0.148	−0.160			
	DI10	−0.048	0.676	0.109	0.343			
	DI11	−0.123	0.722	0.045	0.026			
Perception of Destination Risk	PDR1	0.279	0.086	0.653	−0.083	0.878	0.680	1.033
	PDR2	0.067	−0.052	0.854	0.071			
	PDR3	−0.031	0.031	0.908	−0.011			
	PDR4	−0.094	0.007	0.900	0.020			
	PDR5	−0.161	−0.059	0.780	−0.018			
Intention to Travel	IT1	−0.034	0.013	0.035	0.949	0.930	0.878	0.878
	IT2	0.032	−0.052	0.012	0.966			
	IT3	0.001	0.043	−0.050	0.894			

Notes Loadings are unrotated and cross-loadings are oblique-rotated. *P*-values are for loadings. *P*-values < 0.05 are desirable for reflective indicators.

der to maximize the predictability of the dependent constructs, the conceptual model incorporates reflective measurement, exhibits a multi-dimensional nature, and deviates from the assumptions of multivariate normality (Hair et al., 2019).

Measurement Model

The purpose of assessing the measurement model is to ensure the validity and reliability of the model through the evaluation of (a) internal consistency reliability, (b) convergent validity, and (c) discriminatory validity. The measurement model of this study has been assessed. Firstly, the internal consistency reliability values exceeded the set criteria of Cronbach's alpha (α) > 0.7, Jöreskog's ρc > 0.7, and Dijkstra-Henseler's ρA > 0.7. The outcome values of the cross-loadings revealed that all the measurements were above the set criteria of 0.65. Table 3 demonstrated that the composite reliability values were above 0.86 and lower than 0.94, thus indicating the measurements are reliable and have the predicting capability of their own construct, respectively. Moreover, the convergent validity of the outer

Table 4 Discriminant Validity

	RA	DI	PDR	IT
RA	*			
DI	0.869	*		
PDR	0.891	0.871	*	
IT			0.881	*

Notes * Standard procedure for reporting HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait) ratio.

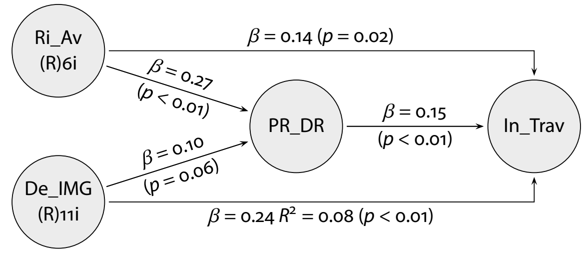

Figure 2 Model

model was assessed by measuring the cross-loading of measurements and the assessed value of average variance extracted (AVE). The AVE value of each construct was above the threshold limit of 0.50, resulting in it being able to explain at least 50% of the variance of its indicators (Hair et al., 2019). As per Table 3, the AVE values of each construct are 'Risk Aversion' 0.530, 'Destination Image' 0.569, 'Perception of Destination Risk' 0.680, and 'Intention to Travel' 0.878, respectively. Lastly, the assessment values of VIF within Table 3 indicated that all the constructs' VIF values are below the threshold of 4, which indicated none of the constructs were affected by the variance inflation factor.

The discriminant validity for the model was assessed to ensure that constructs within the path model are empirically distinct. Two measures were used to assess the discriminant validity, Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) and cross-loading. HTMT < 0.85 means 95% confidence to consider (Henseler et al., 2015), as the value from Table 4 indicates the respective construct has a more significant value compared to all other constructs in the row and column (Hair et al., 2014). The HTMT ratio within Table 4 indicated the values were below the critical limit of 0.90, which indicated the accuracy of correlation.

Structural Model

According to Hair et al. (2014), the significance level and co-efficient value should achieve a certain level, ensuring an impact on the dependent construct. The assessed path model from Figure 2 demonstrates 'Risk Aversion → Perception of Destination Risk' with a *p*-value = 0.005 and beta-value = 0.27, indicating that if travellers have a substantial and significant sense of potential risk they may not be willing to travel to the destination. The following hypothetical result indicates 'Destination Image → Perception of Destination Risk' has a positive but insignificant relationship, *p*-value = 0.06, beta-value = 0.10, which indicates the past image of the destination is insignificant in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak, as travellers are more concerned with the safety of themselves and their families. Further, the 'Perception of Destination Risk → Intention to Travel' *p*-value = 0.001, beta-value = 0.15 indicates a positive and significant relationship, which indicates that despite the risk and the past image of the destination, travellers are still willing to take risks and want to travel, which could indicate that the results of repetitive lockdowns and social restrictions has mentally and emotionally deprived the travellers. They are eager to travel desperately despite the risk. H1 and H5 support this as both hypotheses have a positive relationship and vital significance. Further, in terms of measuring the f^2 effect size, within the path model, the minimum effect size was found to be 0.141, and the most significant effect size is 1.327. The Q^2 values were 0.614 (minimum) and 0.653 (maximum), respectively, which indicated the indicators within each exogenous construct have enormous predictive relevance on their respective endogenous constructs.

Regarding the model fit for the path model, the assessment of standardised root means square residual (SRMR), the unweighted least squares discrepancy dULS, the geodesic discrepancy dG, and the normal index (NFI) were necessary. Hence, Table 5 shows that the structural model of this research achieved the value of 0.061 and 0.060, indicating a fit model, which was below the critical limit of SRMR < 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999), dULS < 95% bootstrap quantile (H195

Table 5 Exact Fit Tests

Item	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.0610	0.0600
dULS	0.0001	0.0002
dG	0.0038	0.0064
NFI	0.9300	0.9300

Notes Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR): Critical value < 0.08; Unweighted Least Squares Discrepancy (dULS): Critical value < 0.05; Geodesic Discrepancy (dG): Critical value < 0.05; Normal Fit Index (NIF): Critical value > 0.90.

of dULS): (critical value < 0.05) (Henseler et al. 2016), dG < 95% bootstrap quantile (H195 of dG): (critical value < 0.05) (Henseler et al., 2016), NFI value > 0.90 (Byrne, 2008). Further, it confirmed that the structural model is considered a well-fit model based on the obtained value of dULS and dG. The value of NFI shows as 0.93, which is above the criteria value of 0.90. Therefore, it also confirmed the model fit of the structural model.

Discussion and Implications

Specifically, the study contributes an imperative understanding of tourists' visit intention towards urban cities of Malaysia by outspreading the existing TPB framework by adding perceived risk, destination image and risk aversion. Few studies have empirically extended the TPB by adding studied variables, to the best of our knowledge. The results demonstrated that all proposed hypotheses relating to the direct relationship were supported except one. Destination image was found to have an insignificant relation to the perceived risk of the destination. This finding suggests that tourist agencies must improve the destination's image to improve the tourists' intention to visit urban cities. Additionally, the results of this study disclose complex associations among these constructs.

The result has shown that destination image has no relationship with COVID-19 perceived destination risk (Malaysia). Earlier research has reported a significant relationship between destination image and perceived risk (Perpiña et al., 2019; San Martin & Bosque, 2008; Ruan et al., 2017; Kani et al., 2017). Not all tourists perceive the risk to the Malaysian destination image. In addition, it was also found in the study results that tourists with higher risk aversion are less likely to visit Malaysia than those with lower aversion. The results of this study were in line with the earlier studies by Gallego and Font (2020), Li et al. (2020), Neuburger and Egger (2020), and Şengel et al. (2022). Tourist authorities must facilitate hygiene practices and communicate through appropriate media channels to reduce perceived destination risk in Malaysia's urban cities.

The descriptive analysis of the study reveals that 57.9% of the respondents were female, with 48.9% in the age bracket of 21–30. Both groups of respondents are taking the COVID-19 situation seriously, and a considerable decline has been observed in travel behaviour among people due to COVID-19 risk. But interestingly, a positive and significant relationship has been found between travel risk aversion and perceptions of destination risk. Though the study is limited to tourist cities of Malaysia, we have included tourists from various nationalities, giving us a fair idea of their perceptions and intention to travel. This study provides a significant understanding of destination image and perceived risk in the intention to travel to Malaysia. This study examines the destination image of Malaysia and perception of the COVID-19 pandemic risk. This empirical study contributes to the existing literature by explaining how the perception of COVID-19 pandemic risk is integrally related to travel decisions and destination image for Malaysia based on individual aspects. As the traveller's behaviour becomes an essential aspect of studies since it helps to analyse the immediate and distant future of the travel and tourism industry, it is highly essential to know how to build up a positive destination image and avoid or minimise these risks. The findings of this research will be helpful.

The study also throws light on interesting practical implications. Since travel risk perception is an important variable influencing the intention to travel, the tourism industry can take steps to mitigate the risk perceived by the tourists visiting urban cities of Malaysia. Moreover, the study results also exhibited a significant positive relationship between the perception of destination risk and the intention to travel to

Malaysia, which contradicted this research's proposed hypothesis. This result could be unique to this study's targeted samples, as Malaysia has already initiated a 'travel bubble' to provide more confidence to incoming travellers. However, the study's remaining hypotheses were consistent with the past studies (Matiza, 2020; Cui et al., 2016; Sonmez & Graefe, 1998). The findings imply that tourists' visit intention differs by the level of perceived risk in the destination. Perception of risk may make more sense to tourists when they are going to a destination for a second time because this study focuses on the visit intention of tourists. This study also further supports the idea that destination image influences visit intention. Similar results were achieved by the studies in the tourism literature (Perpiña et al., 2021; Kanwel et al., 2019; Molinillo et al., 2018).

Limitations and Future Research

The study acknowledges certain limitations. We focused on a single country, Malaysia. Future research can explore these variables on different destinations, comparing destination risk perceptions across countries etc. The study did not control for demographic variables that future studies can address. In addition, we adopted a cross-sectional design; future research can consider longitudinal research, capturing tourists' perceptions at different time frames and analysing the factors influencing the change in perception. Though we tested for common method bias, we cannot completely rule out that future research can improve the studies employing multi-source, multi-wave surveys. Malaysia is a world-class destination attracting millions of tourists each year. The destination has been highlighted and marketed globally, which helps publicise a positive image to encourage tourists' intention to visit Malaysia. This finding confirms that destination image is decisive factor for tourists' destinations. Future studies can explore other antecedents like destination loyalty, tourists' personalities and situational factors influencing visit intention. Other moderating and mediating variables, such as word of mouth, promotional activities, and tourist delight, can be explored in the context of perceived risk and visit intention. In a nutshell, the study results give an alarming signal to all stakeholders, emphasising the need to address perceived risks related to destination image and enhance tourist influx to promote economic growth.

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Original Scientific Article

The Innovation Elements of Homestay Programmes on the East Coast of Malaysia

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A lack of awareness among homestay operators regarding the significance of innovation implementation contributes to the incompetence of some homestay programmes. This study intends to investigate the types of innovative homestay programmes that were implemented to be sustainable and competitive in the advanced sector. This study applied the qualitative approach, in which in-depth interviews were conducted with the homestay coordinators focused on the impact of innovation implementation, and the collected data were analysed using the content analysis technique. There were seven registered homestay programmes with fourteen respondents on the East Coast of Malaysia which met the criteria of this study. The results indicated that the homestay programmes have adopted product innovation regarding lodging, activity packages, and businesses. According to the findings, homestay programmes have four types of innovation: (1) product and service innovation; (2) marketing innovation; (3) management innovation; and (4) process innovation. This study will aid in enhancing the quality of the accommodation experience for homestay visitors and will guide the sustainable growth of the homestay business. This research contributes to the body of knowledge through the innovation types of homestay programmes. This finding is beneficial to the industry players as a benchmark for stakeholders in planning the strategies of homestay programme development.

Keywords: homestay programmes, innovation, qualitative, East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia

 https://doi.org/10.26493/2335-4194.16.233-246

Introduction

With the rapid growth of the nation's economy, tourism development is also rapidly evolving, and travellers continue to have new demands for tourism items. One of the components of tourism activities is 'living,' which continuously evolves, introducing new ideas. The growth of homestays has partially satisfied the needs of some tourists. Homestays are a type of lodging in which the house design, ecological surroundings, rural environment and local culture (Karki et al., 2019; Walter et al., 2018). They are also an essential alternative to conventional lodgings (Yuan et al., 2018). It can play crucial roles in fostering economic growth, preserving traditional culture and art, and other sectors (Jamal et al., 2011) in addition to meeting the tailored accommodation demands of guests (Karki et al., 2019; Walter et al., 2018).

Today, many nations recognize and actively promote homestays as an integral sector of their tourism industries (Yuan et al., 2018), with some even recognizing them as a major local tourist attraction (Kunjuraman, 2019). One of Malaysia's most popular forms of ecotourism is the homestay programme. Homestay tourism is one of the significant sectors of Malaysian community-based tourism in which the aim is to increase the society's income from tourism activities and sharing the tourism profits and benefits with every part of the rural areas.

The Homestay Programme organization in Malaysia was founded in 1995 to provide visitors with a unique and enjoyable experience, including lodging, food and drink preparation, activity packages, and community product enterprises (Ramele & Yamazaki, 2020; Suffarruddin et al. 2020). Such speedy progress, particularly in the technological sphere, has provided openings for Homestay Programme operators to grow their businesses (Osman & Zakaria, 2020). However, the Ministry of Tourism, Art, and Culture (MOTAC) data shows that from 2011 to 2019, nearly 60% of homestay programmes consistently declined visitor numbers (MOTAC, 2021). MOTAC is the main actor in the programme and manages the procedure of homestay registration.

Considering that tourist consumers' needs and expectations are always evolving, the tourism industry's market structure is inherently fluid and difficult to predict (Durán-Sánchez, 2019). Given this, the tourism industry player must keep up with the times by incorporating new ideas. For the tourist industry, which is subject to constant transformation, innovation is considered the key to maintaining a competitive edge and achieving high levels of performance (Ambrož & Omerzel, 2018; Isik, 2022; Krizaj, 2020). So, it is crucial that those who provide the tourist offer, including the hotel offer, think about how they might incorporate new products, services, and procedures (Brooker et al., 2012). When new ideas are put into action, differentiation opportunities emerge through the development of core competencies, and creative features in the homestay industry are shaped. It is well acknowledged that innovations are a major contributor to success in the business world. Increased global competition, shorter product life cycles, improved technology capabilities, and ever-rising consumer demands are all contributing to a heightened awareness of their significance in today's world. According to Schumpeter, innovation is the creation of new opportunities for added value, taking into account not only the usual product or process innovation of manufacturing but also market, organizational, and resources input innovation (Martínez-Ros & Orfila-Sintes, 2009; Krizaj, 2020).

A recent study has shown that the manufacturing sector is more likely to be the centre of innovation than the tourism industry (Martinez-Roman et al., 2015; Sakdiyakorn & Sivarak, 2016; Boachie-Mensah & Acquah, 2015; Kafetzopoulos & Psomas, 2015; Rosli & Sidek, 2013). The majority of tourism innovation studies have only dealt with the topic on a theoretical level, focusing on the topic of demands and barriers to innovation (Birgit et al., 2018). Therefore, this research aims to investigate how homestay programmes might use novel strategies to ensure their long-term viability and competitiveness in the modern hospitality sector. There have been significant shifts in the hotel and tourism sector in recent years. The necessity to provide innovation is influenced by external variables like rivalry, rising visitor demand and novel distribution channels. According to Ambrož and Omerzel (2018), business innovation is a difficult and complicated process. Also, it is a systematic process that can help the organization do well in new markets, with new customers, in specific market positions, and by giving existing customers something new. Thus, to a great extent, innovation studies in tourism still rely on explorative and qualitative situations where the phenomenon is studied and described from a number of viewpoints where rigid definitions are less prominent.

Literature Review

Homestay Programmes

The concept of community-based tourism (CBT) was first introduced in the mid-1990s (Asker et al., 2010) through community involvement in providing tourism products for economic, social, and political empowerment (Sustainability Leaders United, 2020). According to Jamaludin et al. (2012), CBT is the community's responsibility and ability to make decisions. CBT is a community development strategy that improves rural communities' capacity to organize and manage tourist resources while assuring local participation (Nair & Hamzah, 2015). In a Malaysian homestay programme, visitors live with the host family and become fully absorbed in the culture and way of life of the country (Sustainability Leaders United, 2020). A homestay is a type of housing offered as part of tourism that gives travellers or visitors a taste of rural or kampong living (Nair & Hamzah, 2015). It is a type of private lodging that allows guests to stay with a host family for a certain amount of time in a fully equipped home. Homestay programmes in Malaysia, unlike those in other parts of Southeast Asia, are typically run in rural settings and are governed by the government in terms of certification, training, monitoring, and financial assistance (Sustainability Leaders United, 2020). However, they face competition from commercial homestays operated by the community in both urban and rural areas (Kunjuraman, 2019), where the hosts do not always live together with the guests.

In Malaysia, the homestay programme was placed under the Rural Tourism Master Plan in 2011, which aims to encourage the involvement of rural communities in the tourism industry (Ismail & Daud, 2020). This is in line with Malaysia's tourism policies that have been formulated and given attention by the government to develop the homestay programme. However, the government statistics report shows almost 36 per cent (70 homestay programmes) experienced a decline in tourist arrivals over the last five years from 2011 to 2016 (Suffarruddi et al., 2021; MOTAC, 2021). As a result, nearly ten homestay programmes had either withdrawn or dropped their MOTAC business registration. Kasim et al. (2016) found that the decline in tourist arrivals has affected the income of homestay operators to the point where they are no longer able to survive in the business. In addition, one of the most prominent contemporary challenges is to ensure the sustainability and competitiveness of homestay programmes (Gossling et al., 2020; Janjua et al., 2021). As part of the tourism industry, hospitality services, such as homestay programmes, must adopt innovative elements and offer new trends in their business operation because their services are dependent on constant changes in the tourism market (Ismail & Daud, 2020). Tourism is a dynamic sector that requires innovations to answer the changing and demanding needs of tourists. Therefore, it is important that providers of tourist services take into consideration new products, services, and processes (Brooker et al., 2012).

Domestic and international research on homestays is extensive. Kunjuraman (2019) examined the impact of information technology and customer relationship management practices on the performance of homestays and recommended that homestays strengthen customer relationships, enhance homestay performance, and enhance information technology in order to be more competitive in the industry. In addition, Sakdiyakorn & Sivarak (2016) discovered that local people's lack of understanding and awareness in managing the community's attractions in sustainable ways has led to a slow reduction in the traditional. Previous studies in Malaysia have highlighted the limitations of indigenous human capital. The development of community-based Homestay tourism may be hindered by a lack of education, information, skills, and experiences in tourism, which adds to unsustainable tourism (Kunjuraman, 2019).

Concepts of Innovation

The concept of innovation explains that innovation focuses on aspects of renewal and improvement. Innovation capability is an internal capability (Martínez-Román et al., 2015; Ngo & O'Cass, 2009) that refers to the potential and ability to produce innovative products or services. This involves the use of knowledge and ideas to produce something new in order to benefit the organization and stakeholders. Continuous improvement is also important through adding value to existing efforts (Hogan et al., 2011).

Schumpeter (1934) accurately defined innovation as 'the development and introduction of a new good (product innovation), the introduction of a new method of production (process innovation), the opening of a new market (marketing innovation), new sources in production-that is, new sources of raw material or new semi-manufactures (input innovation), and the creation of new organizational forms or industries (organizational innovation).' In the third edition of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (2015), innovation is defined as: 'the implementation of new or significantly improved products (good or service), or process, a new marketing method, or a new organizational method in business practices, workplace organization or external relations.'

Innovation is an important approach in the growth strategy to enter new markets in addition to improving existing markets and subsequently being competitive (Boachie-Mensah & Acquah, 2015; Esquivel et al., 2021). This approach is also in line with the economic objective, which is to create innovation and difference to achieve business growth (Sundbo, 2009) as well as survive in the market (Jiménez-Jiménez & Sanz-Valle, 2011). Existing concepts that are reused or implemented in different contexts for diverse client groups constitute another aspect of innovation. When considering which products and services would offer value for their customers, the hotel industry has a multitude of possibilities from which to pick (Nieves et al., 2014). As a part of the tourism industry, hospitality depends on constant changes in the tourism market, thus being forced to adapt its offer to new trends in tourism. Today's tourists desire particular experiences linked with the cultural history of a destination. The competitive advantage of a tourism destination can be derived from lodging structures that are innovative in relation to the destination's cultural history and offer tourists unique experiences that tell the tale of the past in the present.

In tourism research, the Schumpeterian approach to search for innovation categories has been implemented to some extent. Some scholars also use these four types of innovation in their studies, such as hospitality studies (Nieves et al., 2014; Esquivel et al., 2021) and various tourism enterprises (Ronningen, 2010). There are four types of innovation that have been used in depth by past researchers.

Product and Service Innovation

Product and service innovation is defined as something offered based on new ideas (Myers & Marquis, 1969) and aims to provide various options to customers. Innovation is also an initiative that parallels the development of current technology and global competition (Gunday et al., 2011). The production of new products and services also refers to originality and uniqueness, which involves modifying an existing product to attract the attention of consumers (Boachie-Mensah & Acquah, 2015). Furthermore, the reform of existing products and services to new products and services can bring change (Rosli & Sidek, 2013).

Kafetzopoulos and Psomas (2015) argued that product innovation is a continuous effort and has a function involving increasing different levels of efficiency inside and outside the organization. In another context, Danneels and Kleinschmidtb (2001) looked at product innovation from the perspective of customers and firms. From the customer perspective, innovation aims to attract the attention of new customers (Hassan et al., 2013) by making modifications to existing products according to their needs. Product innovation has also become one of the important sources of competitive advantage for a firm (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014) because it improves product quality and at the same time contributes to increasing market distribution and business performance (Hassan et al., 2013).

In the tourism industry, product and service innovation focuses on renewal and improvements made to products and activities offered to tourists in a destination (Camisón & Monfort-Mir, 2012; Cosma et al. al., 2014; Nieves et al., 2014). The innovation carried out is important to increase tourist visits by offering more attractive packages (Keling & Entebang, 2017). Among the products and services that are often associated with innovation are accommodation (Uran Maravić, 2016; Martínez-Román et al., 2015; Sakdiyakorn & Sivarak, 2016), food preparation (Keling & Entebang, 2017; Martínez-Román et al., 2015) and traditional cultural performances (Keling & Entebang, 2017; Sakdiyakorn & Sivarak, 2016). In addition, there is also innovation involving a combination of products and services in the form of a more unique package (Sakdiyakorn & Sivarak, 2016). The findings suggest that innovation of products and service improvement initiatives are important in the tourism industry, including for small businesses in rural areas.

Process Innovation

Process innovation means the implementation of new elements and improvements in production techniques or delivery methods (OECD, 2015). Polder et al. (2010) defines process innovation as the introduction of novel production techniques, management strategies, and technology that may be utilized to enhance production and management processes. In other words, process innovation refers to remodelling and improving internal operations of business processes (Boachie-Mensah & Acquah, 2015). This includes the improvement of equipment, technological advances, skill techniques, and the latest software used to improve production and delivery methods (Hassan et al., 2013; Oly Ndubisi & Iftikhar, 2012).

Process innovation involves many aspects related to firm functions such as technical design, research and development (R&D), manufacturing, management, and commercial activities (Hassan et al., 2013). In the tourism industry, process innovation involves significant changes in techniques, equipment, and software that can reduce costs while improving production quality (Aldebert et al., 2011) and solving technical problems (Camisón & Monfort-Mir, 2012). Based on previous studies, process innovation refers to the delivery method of output, the use of technology to improve the quality and effectiveness of services, and the application of new technology and equipment (Martínez-Román et al., 2015). In cultural heritage tourism, process innovations are included in the new methods in providing a more interesting experience to tourists through different and unique alternatives (Sakdiyakorn and Sivarak, 2016). Thus, this study highlights that the innovation process is a way or method to improve and accelerate to stay competitive in the industry.

Marketing Innovation

Marketing innovation is defined as the renewal and improvement of new marketing techniques (Hassan et al., 2013) that enable firms to enter and penetrate the target markets. The implementation of marketing innovation involves an increase in advertising and promotion activities. Marketing innovation also involves the firm's ability to introduce and sell products according to consumer needs, competitive conditions, costs and benefits and the level of innovation acceptance (Yam et al., 2011). Atalay et al. (2013) and Gunday et al. (2011) stated that marketing innovation can increase sales through the implementation of something better in meeting customer needs, opening new markets or changes in product placement in the market. Therefore, firms need to bring marketing innovation to produce a more efficient business (Polder et al., 2010). Previous research has focused on empirical studies to see the relationship between marketing innovation and performance. For example, studies in the manufacturing sector have proven that marketing innovation and business performance have a strong positive relationship (Boachie-Mensah & Acquah, 2015; Hassan et al., 2013; Kafetzopoulos & Psomas, 2015).

Similarly, researchers in the tourism industry also emphasize marketing innovation as an effort to give satisfaction to customers and increase sales (Aldebert et al., 2011). This innovation involves the renewal and improvement of promotional techniques and channels, the use of new media, and product placement and market prices (Cosma et al., 2014; Nieves et al., 2014; Ronningen, 2010; Sakdiyakorn & Sivarak, 2016). Sakdiyakorn and Sivarak (2016) proved marketing innovation as an opportunity to attract tourists to cultural heritage tourism. This is followed by a study by Yiamjanya (2016), who found that technological progress has contributed to the development of homestay and business programmes in local tourism destinations.

Management Innovation

Management innovation is a terminology synonymous with organizational innovation that was introduced by Schumpeter (1934). Furthermore, many recent scholars have adopted the term 'management innovation' in their studies (Damanpour & Aravind, 2012; Sakdiyakorn & Sivarak, 2016). Management innovation is studied in various disciplines such as strategic management, entrepreneurship, and marketing.

In the tourism industry, management innovation is an effort to implement new changes involving management methods that can improve the company's effectiveness (Cosma et al., 2014; Ronningen, 2010). Previous studies were done on the renewal and improvement of information management systems (Camisón & Monfort-Mir, 2012), administrative structures (Booyens, 2012), and collaborative relationships (Booyens, 2012; Camisón & Monfort-Mir, 2012; Nieves et al., 2014; Sakdiyakorn & Sivarak, 2016), human management (Booyens, 2012; Camisón & Monfort-Mir, 2012; Sakdiyakorn & Sivarak, 2016) and workplace organization (Nieves et al., 2014; Sakdiyakorn & Sivarak, 2016).

In conclusion, most studies have used all four types of innovation – product or service innovation, process innovation, marketing innovation, and management innovation – as an effective strategy to meet consumer needs while maintaining a competitive advantage. Innovation is seen as an important aspect of differentiating services' success and survival in many international markets (Hanaysha & Hilman, 2015).

Methodology

A qualitative approach using face-to-face interviews has been undertaken with the homestays' providers In Malaysia, the East Coast is one of the most remote areas but still rich in natural resources, uniqueness of culture, distinctive rural living, and active commercial activities, making it very attractive and competitive as a tourist destination. According to MOTAC (2021), the homestay programmes located in the East Coast of Malaysia have received higher demands from International tourists for rural homestays. According to statistics of the Homestay Provider report by MOTAC in 2021, there are 16 homestay programmes in the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia registered with MOTAC. There were four criterion selections used for this study, which are (1) the homestay is still active with MOTAC; (2) has received the highest number of tourists/guest arrivals after COVID-19; (3) has received awards; and (4) have enough time to participate in the interview conducted. Therefore, the study conducted in-depth interviews with fourteen operators of the Seven (7) homestay programmes on the East Coast of Malaysia in May 2022. The respondents were interviewed in person in Malay and each interview was recorded. Table 1 shows the profile of respondents involved in this study.

Table 1 Profile of Respondents

No./homestay	Location	Sex	Age	Position
1 Homestay A	Terengganu	Male	40	Manager
		Male	47	Owner
2 Homestay B	Terengganu	Male	45	Admin
		Female	38	Admin
3 Homestay C	Terengganu	Female	39	Manager
		Male	49	Host
4 Homestay D	Pahang	Female	46	Admin
		Female	37	Host
5 Homestay E	Pahang	Male	46	Manager
		Male	52	Technician
6 Homestay F	Kelantan	Male	48	Manager
		Female	38	Admin
7 Homestay G	Kelantan	Female	40	Manager
		Male	46	Host

The questions for semi-structured interviews have been developed based on Schumpeter's (1934), which are included four categories of tourism innovation. Products and services innovations, management innovations, marketing innovations, and process innovations were the four categories of innovations that these queries tried to distinguish. Most interviews lasted between thirty minutes to one hour, and then data collected afterwards, or transcripts of the interviews were evaluated. Table 2 shows the types of interview questions for this study.

The interviews were recorded and then transcribed by hand to extract the most important information. The tapes were listened to many times to ensure the accuracy of the transcribing process. For the sake of familiarity and to get ready for coding, the raw data were read many times. Second, open coding was used to create the code frames. Nvivo 8.0 was used to or-

Table 2 Interview Questions

Types of Innovation	Types of questions	Sources
Product	How are the products and services offered? Based on Mr./Mrs. experience over X years, have there been any reforms and improvements made to the products and services offered? If yes, explain. What is the uniqueness of this homestay programme compared to other homestays?	Keling & Entebang, (2015; 2017); Martínez-Román et al. (2015); Nieves et al. (2014); Ronningen (2010); Sakdiyakorn & Sivarak (2016)
Management	What has been the management system of this homestay programme from the beginning of its establishment until now? Based on Mr./Mrs. experience over X years, have there been reforms and improvements made to management activities? If yes, explain.	Ronningen (2010); Sakdiyakorn & Sivarak (2016)
Process	Are there processes carried out in the homestay programme such as the production and delivery of products and services using new technology? Based on the experience of Mr./Mrs. Over X years, have there been reforms and improvements to the process? If Yes, explain.	Martínez-Román et al. (2015); Nieves et al. (2014); Ronningen (2010); Sakdiyakorn & Sivarak (2016)
Marketing	How are the marketing techniques used to promote this homestay programme? Who is involved or is there a responsible party/member? Based on Mr./Mrs.'s experience over X years, have there been reforms and improvements made to marketing activities? If Yes, explain.	Sakdiyakorn & Sivarak (2016); Yiamjanya (2016)

ganize the transcribed interviews. For analysis purpose, the researcher was given access to both numeric and non-numerical, unstructured data. One method utilized to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts was member checking, which involved submitting preliminary findings to interviewees for confirmation.

Results and Discussion

This paper analysed the data obtained from the interview transcripts according to four categories of innovations. Category A involved product and service innovation; Category B is marketing innovation; Category C was about management innovation; and Category D involved process innovation as shown in Table 3.

Category A: Innovation Products and Services

Based on the respondents' explanations, the products and services offered can be classified into four categories, namely (1) The creation of a new concept of accommodation; (2) Rural activity experience; (3) Hospitality; and (4) Small and Medium Enterprises (SMES).

Accommodation is the main product offered by providing space or room as a place for tourists to stay, where each house has a different number of rooms. This study found that seven homestay programmes have carried out this reform where, according to the respondent Homestay C, 'By the era after 5 to 10 years, the accommodation has changed towards kampungstay. Most of the tourists who come are those who live in kampungstay.' He also explained the form of *kampung stay,* that is, 'there are several rooms built next to the homestay house.' According to the respondent, 'There are various types of rooms made of wood and also in the form of cabins. We provide standard and family rooms. So, tourists can choose the type of room they like.'

Traditional and modern house-themed accommodation has been developed with the addition facilities,

Table 3 Themes and Sub-Themes of Innovation in Homestay Programmes

Themes	Sub-themes of innovation	Density
Product and services innovation	Creation of a new concept of accommodation	14
	Rural activity experience	14
	Hospitality	13
	Small and Medium Enterprise	10
Marketing innovation	Dissemination through traditional media	12
	Participation in commercial programmes	6
	Interweaving business ventures of external agencies	8
	Use of the digital medium	10
Management innovation	Systematic administrative structure	11
	Improvement of the information system management	13
Process innovation	Improvement of food service	14
	Improvement of the registration process	10

Notes $n = 14$.

such swimming pool in order to provide a different and exciting experience to tourists. This transformation is seen as an effort to guarantee loyalty and meet the needs of tourists who prefer private accommodation (Suffarruddin et al., 2021) and at the same time to be able to provide a variety of accommodation options (Ramele & Yamazaki, 2020).

The village activity experience provided is in the form of a package that has its own uniqueness depending on the advantages of each destination. It was found that all homestay programmes have implemented various forms of innovation to attract tourists. The result shows that all homestay programmes tend to create new activities in the form of leisure and recreation. According to R4 (Homestay B), 'We need to make reforms to attract young people to the village, such as offering rugged activities.' This was supported by R8 from Homestay D by stating, 'Now, we have to follow the changes and interests of tourists. Some people like to go to the hills, the forest, and the sea.' This innovation is an initiative to attract the attention of tourists who are in the eco-tourism area. Meanwhile, there are some homestays that create new packages by taking tourists to visit interesting places around the area. For example, R10 from Homestay E explained, 'We provide activities such as river cruises where tourists can go around, want to fish [sic], visit the surroundings of Kuala Langat District up to Jugra. There is also an international paragliding place here.' This effort is parallel to Homestays A and C which take tourists by bus to some interesting tourist destinations. Suffarruddin et al. (2021) emphasize that such activities are usually able to offer natural enjoyment to tourists and are abundant in rural areas that are rich in natural resources.

Hospitality is something that is often paid attention to by all homestay programmes in providing the best service to tourists. The results of the analysis found that the innovations carried out can be divided into two levels, namely renewal in terms of hall construction and improvements involving the addition of hall facilities and improved service techniques. Respondent Homestay A commented on this need: 'When it is successful and tourists increase, we make the paperwork for the construction of the hall. This is for cultural performances because the existing hall is quite small.' According to Homestay A respondents, 'Improvements among homestay operators have increased in terms of welcoming guests.'

It was found that all homestay programmes tend to increase various types of output such as food, agricultural products, handicrafts, and health products. The variety of food-based products has been intensified by SMES Homestays A and D where the respondent of Homestay A stated, 'We used to focus on traditional cakes such as bahulu and tempeyek. Now we have produced fish and pickled meat. This is village food that is produced by [the village] itself and sold through this homestay programme.' This heritage food is said to have managed to enter the overseas market through sales to tourists who visit. This initiative can give tourists a different experience to enjoy the beauty of the village (Sakdiyakorn & Sivarak, 2016). This proves that process innovation is very important to ensure that the products and services offered to tourists can be infused with a difference that has its own uniqueness.

Category B: Marketing Innovation

Marketing is also a key aspect of destination competitiveness. Based on the respondents' explanations, the marketing innovations found can be classified into four techniques, which are (1) Dissemination through traditional media; (2) Participation in commercial programmes; (3) Interweaving business ventures of external agencies; and (4) Use of the digital media.

This study found that four homestay programmes implement this reform in an effort to promote their packages. According to Homestay C respondents, 'Malaysian Radio and Television Stations are synonymous with us. In 2014, we recorded the preparations for Aidiladha and broadcast it in the Nasi Lemak Kopi O slot. Then in 2015, we showed the first Eid atmosphere [sic] recorded at the chairman's house through the programme Selamat Pagi Malaysia.' The display of this atmosphere is said to be able to attract viewers to the homestay programme to see and feel for themselves the package offered. Suffarruddin et al. (2021) found that broadcasting stations are an easy channel for tourists to obtain information about homestay programmes. However, in this study, this innovation was only carried out by a small number of homestay programmes, because it required relatively high preparation and expense costs.

Most of the respondents who responded also said that the website needs to be better kept up to date and maintained: some of the people who were listed on the website had already left. It was also decided that brochures, maps, and pamphlets with a list of the activities available in the homestay package were needed. These pieces of advertising help people who might want to visit know more about what they can do there. Also, tourists who drive themselves to homestays will find it easier to locate each one thanks to better signs. This idea is shared by the five homestays that were studied. According to the R4 from Homestay B, 'In addition to using the website provided by MOTAC, we also created our own website to facilitate promotion.'

This means that they will manage marketing according to their own wishes. This new creation is also implemented in Homestays D and F through developing their own website. Besides that, Homestays E and H rely on the entrepreneur themself and according to the response by R13 (Homestay G), 'There are also the offspring of entrepreneurs who are skilled at advertising online. Therefore, they will create their own website.' This innovation is the entrepreneurs' effort to enhance the advertising of their homestays. This finding is in line with previous findings involving homestays in Thailand (Yiamjanya, 2016) and other tourism industries (Camisón & Monfort-Mir, 2012; Cosma et al., 2014; Sakdiyakorn & Sivara, 2016), who also showed significant marketing innovation in their business.

Category C: Innovation Management

Referring to the respondents' explanations, the innovations found can be classified into three categories, namely (1) Systematic administrative structure; and (2) creating a new management organization.

The study discovered that competent people are a vital asset in a company in order to start a better management journey in terms of the systematic administrative structure. The same is true for the homestay programme, where Homestays E and F have emphasized the reform of hiring competent workers as a way to raise the calibre of human resources. 'My son went through a course and practice in the hospitality business and now he has a degree,' said Respondent 11 from Homestay E explained that they have someone with previous office experience. They were therefore employed to assist in running this homestay. This result is consistent with other research that discovered this initiative is crucial for enhancing human resource management (Sakdiyakorn & Sivarak, 2016; Camisón &

Monfort-Mir, 2012), especially through hiring knowledgeable and skilled workers (Ronningen, 2010).

The result showed that there are four homestays that have made changes to their administration by establishing an executive body to manage their respective homestay programmes, for example, in Homestay E, where according to the respondent, 'We have been under our own association that was formed solely to manage homestays.' This approach is parallel to Homestays A and G where they have established a cooperative to help with administration. Besides that, the homestay management might also consider encouraging the local youth to be more actively involved in the programme. Most of the homestay programme operators are in their 40s and 50s. According to R3,

> In my opinion, most of the people who participate in homestay activities are adults over the age of 40. I hope that the management can find a way to get more local youth to take part in the homestay programme so that they can continue to run it in the future.

This finding is in line with the findings from Camisón and Monfort-Mir (2012), Sakdiyakorn and Sivarak (2016), and Nieves et al. (2014) in the study of management innovation for other tourism industries as an effort to improve the quality of the workplace. Although only one homestay implemented this innovation, the innovation has proven that the management of the homestay programme is the area to focus on as management innovation can keep the homestay business more alive compared to other tourism products.

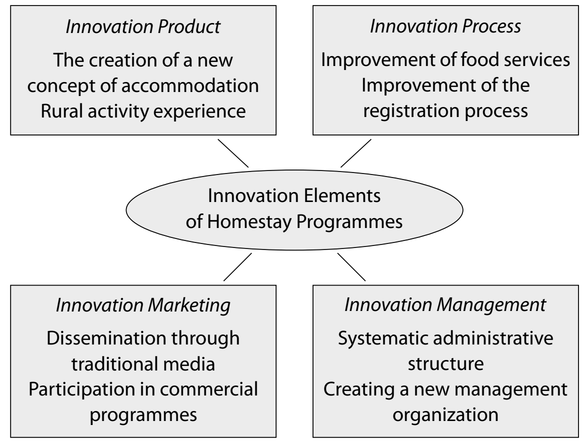

Figure 1 The Innovative Elements of Homestay Programmes in the East Coast of Malaysia

Category D: Innovation Process

Referring to the respondents' explanations, the innovations process found can be classified into two categories, namely (1) improvement of food services, and (2) improvement of the registration process.

Based on the respondents' explanations, process innovation is often linked to the products and services offered. Among them are reforms in terms of providing registration counters and improving the method of preparing food and transportation for tourists. The most significant process innovation is the provision of a registration counter to facilitate the entry and exit of tourists. This innovation was found in Homestay F through the respondent's statement that 'Tourists who come will go to the counter provided. So, all check-ins and check-outs happen here.' This counter is based in the kampung stay area, which is equipped with computers and software to record tourist data, including use for all administrative and marketing matters. The respondents explain that 'All data has been recorded using a computer.'

Online booking was another much sought-after feature identified by the visitors which could have made their booking experience easier. Booking.com allows the homestay owner to interact directly with prospective guests and makes it easier to communicate with the guests prior to arrival and see guest reviews after staying in the homestay. For example, one of the Homestay programmes, encompassing Homestays B and D said that 'We have simplified administrative affairs by providing a specific space for homestay managers . . .'

This innovation is in line with Aldebert et al. (2011) and Yiamjanya (2016), who find that the software and system used can reduce costs and improve business quality. However, this innovation is only found in a small number of homestay programmes, according to their respective ideas and abilities. Furthermore, this initiative requires individuals with expertise in the field of technology (Booyens, 2012; Hjalager, 2010; Ronningen, 2010).

Concisely, Figure 1 illustrates the innovative elements of Homestay Programmes.

Conclusion

As suggested by Mapjabil et al. (2015), the need to focus more on the innovation of homestay programme to become a competitive industry and improve homestay performance to achieve better live for community. The role of community and agency is important and crucial for this programme to sustain and develop in the near future. An innovative aspect of the programme needs to be explored in terms of providing more variety and alternatives in tourism products. Innovation is important to ensure the sustainability of small and medium community businesses. In addition, the business expansion in homestay programmes needs to explore their unique character in local culture (Ye et al., 2018). Homestay businesses should thus make extensive use of local cultural values in their designs, with the result being establishments that accurately convey the nature and character of a genuine rural community-based service.

Despite the problem concerning the homestay operators, some possible explanations and solutions were identified in this study. Most of the homestay operators never experienced being tourists nor they have ever been exposed to foreign cultures and foreign homestay experiences. Most of them have come about operating a homestay through learning from others' experiences. The aesthetics of the homestay environment and generating a distinctive homestay atmosphere are highly valued in this research. As a result, homestay hosts should pay attention to how the setting is created to fully satisfy guests' needs for their aesthetic satisfaction throughout their stay. Thus, hosts should first thoroughly explore the aesthetic elements of life in combination with accommodation products (such as space design, decoration style, catering plates, toiletries, etc.) and homestay activities. Additionally, to establish a distinctive 'host culture,' homestay hosts should concentrate on a particular aspect rather than overtly pursuing the cohabitation of innovation and authenticity. As a result, homestay hosts should provide experiences and activities that reflect the local culture, such as educating visitors on how to prepare unique products like local food and local crafts. This could make the hosting homestay more competitive and adapt to the change in tourist demand.

Besides this, hosts of homestays should create their own marketing channels. To improve communication and connection with visitors, these channels can be utilized to promote certain special activities, such as contests for creative solicitations and writing. The use of social media like TikTok, Instagram and Facebook are platforms that can be used by homestay operators to promote their products and services. The use of this platform could reach many tourists in all parts of the world. A catchy and interesting promotion should be posted on a regular basis to make the homestay accommodation look lively and interesting.

The small sample size, a result of time constraints, could be considered a drawback of this study. This study may not be able to determine every contributing variable or explain every process by which the surrounding environment influences the development of pleasant memories of homestay experiences. Thus, to better understand the function of the environment in the construction of good accommodation memories, future studies can combine quantitative and qualitative study methodologies.

The results of this study prove that the implementation of innovations is very important in rural areas of the East Coast of Peninsula Malaysia, including a homestay programme. The effect of innovation elements is important to encourage community engagement and involvement. It offers the experience of living in the village or countryside with the villagers, the learning process of culture, and the enjoyment of natural and beautiful ambiance. Thus, innovations are part of improving the tourism destination to sustain and be competitive in the tourism industry. In the future, the implementation of innovation for each homestay programme can be studied for the impact of innovation not only visible in the performance of the homestay programme, such as the increasing number of tourist arrivals and income generation, but even involve the achievements of the homestay. The homestay programmes' innovative elements need to be explored in terms of providing more variety and alternatives in terms of product, marketing, management, and process in the tourism industry. Meanwhile, the impact of innovation can be seen through the increase of homestay entrepreneurs, including entrepreneurs' accommodation and SME entrepreneurs.

Acknowledgments

This paper has been written in the frame of the research grant with the title 'Exploring Innovation Elements in the East Coast Homestay Programmes.' This research has been financially supported by the Universiti Malaysia Kelantan with code research R/FUND/A1100/01868A/001/2022/01009.

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Zadovoljstvo in zvestoba obiskovalcev plaž v času pandemije covida-19: pristop teorije motivacije za zaščito
Damir Magaš, Zrinka Zadel in Nikolina Šerić Honović

Namen prispevka je raziskati zadovoljstvo in zvestobo obiskovalcev plaž v času pandemije covida-19 z uporabo okvira teorije motivacije za zaščito (PMT). V prispevku smo kot raziskovalno metodo uporabili intervjuje z obiskovalci plaž na treh ločenih lokacijah plaž na Hrvaškem znotraj Primorsko-goranske županije. Identificirali smo predhodno zadovoljstvo obiskovalcev plaž in posledične vedenjske namene, ki predstavljajo lojalnost. Nova kombinirana metoda zadovoljstva/pomembnosti za raziskovanje zadovoljstva na heterogenih vrstah plaž je ocenjena in empirično potrjena. Z rezultati, ki izhajajo iz modeliranja strukturne enačbe PLS-SEM, smo ugotovili, da značilnosti naravnih plaž najbolj vplivajo na splošno zadovoljstvo s plažo in posledične vedenjske namere obiskovalcev glede priporočil in ponovnega obiska. Poleg tega ugotavljamo, da zasedenost plaže nima pomembnega vpliva na splošno zadovoljstvo. Nazadnje dokazujemo, da strah in tveganje v zvezi s covidom-19 ublažita razmerje med objekti na plaži in splošnim zadovoljstvom na plaži. Zadovoljstvo s splošno izkušnjo na plaži pomembno vpliva na namere priporočila in ponovnega obiska. Zaključek: pričujoča raziskava raziskuje zadovoljstvo in zvestobo obiskovalcev plaže v razmerah pandemije covida-19. Teorijo PMT smo uporabili za globlje razumevanje preferenc obiskovalcev plaž med pandemijo. Naši rezultati zagotavljajo priporočila za upravljanje in prihodnje raziskave.

Ključne besede: obiskovalci plaže, zadovoljstvo, zvestoba, covid-19, teorija motivacije za zaščito
Academica Turistica, 16(2), 151–171

Ponovna preučitev modela potiska in potega pri izbiri turistične destinacije: covid-19 v kontekstu Kerale v Indiji
Aravind Mohanan Potti, Vinith Kumar Nair in Babu George

Članek predstavlja nov konceptualni model, ki lahko bolje od obstoječih pojasni odločitve turistov glede izbire destinacije med epidemijo covida-19 in morda po njej. Osnova modela je teorija koristnosti, ki jo je predlagal Lancaster (1966; 1971). Članek revidira obstoječo literaturo o dejavnikih potiska in potega s tem, da dejavnike potega na novo opredeli kot dejavnike vzvratnega potega ali omejitve pri izbiri destinacije. Dejavniki privlačnosti, povezani z destinacijo, so zaradi stiske, ki jo je povzročila epidemija covida-19, postali tvegani in za potnike neznani. V pričujoči model so bili vključeni primarni konstrukti potiska in potega, ki so: okolje, etničnost, zabava, stroški in vzdržljivost. Za empirično preverjanje tega modela smo zbrali odgovore 311 turistov, ki so leta 2021 obiskali Keralo ali tam rezervirali svoj obisk. Za statistično validacijo koncepta je bil uporabljen klasični pristop modeliranja strukturnih enačb na podlagi soodvisnosti (CB-SEM). Iz te raziskave je razvidno, da so turisti, ki obiščejo destinacijo, pripravljeni zapraviti denar, da bi doživeli podnebje in kulturo; z vidika zabave pa so stroškovno dokaj občutljivi. Ugotovljena je bila neposredna pozitivna povezava med varnostjo in potrošniškimi navadami turistov. Ti rezultati napeljujejo k zamenjavi obstoječih strategij, usmerjenih v prosti čas, s prednostnim obravnavanjem zdravja, kulture, doživetij na prostem, narave in dobrega počutja.

Ključne besede: model potiska in potega, motivacija turistov, izbira destinacije, CB-SEM
Academica Turistica, 16(2), 173–189

Vrednost digitalnih inovacij za turistične podjetnike na islandskem podeželju

Magdalena Falter in Gunnar Thór Jóhannesson

Namen tega prispevka je raziskati digitalne inovacije in podjetniško dinamiko na podeželskih območjih na Islandiji. Natančneje, glavni cilj je opisati trenutni položaj digitalnih inovacij v zvezi s podjetniki podeželskega turizma na Islandiji. Cilj te raziskave je torej raziskati, ali in kako digitalne inovacije postanejo pomembne za podjetnike podeželskega turizma na Islandiji. Poleg odgovora na vprašanje »kaj se dogaja na terenu« je cilj opisati stopnjo vključenosti podeželskih podjetij in podjetnikov v inovacije, digitalno uporabo ter tehnologijo. Kljub globalni politični razpravi o pametnem turizmu in nujnosti digitalnih inovacij v turistični industriji je raziskava pokazala, da inovacije in digitalizacija v dojemanju islandskih podeželskih turističnih podjetnikov niso nujno medsebojno povezane. Gre za poizvedovalno raziskavo, ki temelji na kvalitativni metodologiji. Informacije so bile zbrane s 34 polstrukturiranimi intervjuji s turističnimi podjetniki in člani podpornega sistema na podeželju Islandije. Raziskava prinaša spoznanja o statusu in vrednosti digitalnih inovacij za podjetnike, ki delujejo na področju podeželskega turizma na Islandiji. Poleg tega prispeva k razumevanju manjkajoče povezave med politiko in prakso ter tako literaturi doda tako praktično kot znanstveno veljavo.

Ključne besede: podjetništvo življenjskega sloga, Islandija, pametni turizem, digitalne inovacije, podjetništvo na podeželju
Academica Turistica, 16(2), 191–204

Arheološki turistični produkti: definicija in razvoj

Katharina Zanier in Tajda Senica

Upravljavci arheoloških najdišč na splošno prepoznajo ekonomske prednosti arheološkega turizma, kljub temu pa ima večina najdišč še veliko neizkoriščenih razvojnih priložnosti. Pomen povezovanja različnih ponudnikov produktov in storitev je še vedno prepogosto spregledan. Kljub številnim publikacijam, ki obravnavajo različne vidike arheološkega turizma, smo ugotovili, da manjka definicija glavnega pojma na tem področju: to je definicija »arheološkega turističnega produkta«. V članku smo ta koncept obrazložili ter ga definirali in razvrstili v različne vrste ter komponente. Prav tako smo izpostavili načela, ki jih je treba upoštevati pri njegovem razvoju, in težave, povezane z izgubo avtentičnosti, ki se pogosto pojavljajo pri njegovi komercializaciji. Navsezadnje je naš cilj izpostaviti pomen razvoja celovitih arheoloških turističnih produktov, ki zadovoljijo potrebe turistov in hkrati omogočajo ohranjanje ter trajnostno upravljanje arheološke dediščine.

Ključne besede: arheološki turistični produkt, arheološki turizem, arheološki park, arheološka pot, trajnostni razvoj
Academica Turistica, 16(2), 205–220

Podoba destinacije, zaznano tveganje za okužbo s covidom-19 in namen potovanja: malezijski primer

Jeetesh Kumar, Shameem Shagirbasha in Rupam Konar

Namen raziskave je analizirati vpliv podobe destinacije in zaznanega tveganja pri nameri turistov, da med pandemijo covida-19 potujejo v malezijska mesta. Raziskava obravnava učinke tveganja in podobe destinacije na zaznavanje tveganja na destinaciji ter kako zaznave tveganja destinacije vplivajo na potovanja v času pandemije covida-19 z uporabo teorije načrtovanega vedenja. V raziskavi je sodelovalo 237 anketirancev. Za testiranje raziskovalnega modela je bil uporabljen WarpPLS (7.0), ki temelji na modeliranju s strukturnimi enačbami (SEM) na osnovi variance. Empirični rezultati ponujajo zanimiv vpogled v storitve mestnega turizma in razkrivajo pomembne dejavnike pri načrtovanju varnostnih ter praktičnih ukrepov za obnovo mestnega turizma. Raziskava je v prvi vrsti empirično razkrila potovalne namere turistov, ki potujejo v Malezijo v času razmer med pandemijo covida-19. Kot drugo pa so ugotovitve pokazale merljive vpoglede, s pomočjo katerih bi Malezija postala bolj zaželena turistična destinacija.

Ključne besede: covid-19, podoba destinacije, zaznano tveganje, potovalna namera, teorija načrtovanega vedenja, Malezija
Academica Turistica, 16(2), 221–232

Inovativni elementi programov bivanja v domovanjih na vzhodni obali Malezije

Nor Syuhada Zulkefli, Zaimatul Awang in Suhaida Herni Suffarruddin

Pomanjkanje ozaveščenosti izvajalcev bivanja v domovanjih o pomenu uvajanja inovacij prispeva k nekompetentnosti nekaterih programov bivanja na domu. Ta raziskava namerava raziskati vrste inovativnih programov bivanja v domovanjih, ki so bili izvedeni z namenom trajnostnosti in konkurenčnosti v sektorju. V raziskavi je bil uporabljen kvalitativni pristop, in sicer so bili opravljeni poglobljeni intervjuji s koordinatorji domovanj, osredotočeni na vpliv implementacije inovacije, zbrani podatki pa so bili analizirani s tehniko vsebinske analize. Na vzhodni obali Malezije je bilo sedem tovrstnih registriranih programov, s štirinajstimi anketiranci, ki so izpolnjevali merila te raziskave. Rezultat je pokazal, da so udeleženci v raziskavi sprejeli inovacije produktov v povezavi z nastanitvijo, s paketi aktivnosti in poslovanjem. Glede na ugotovitve imajo taki programi štiri vrste inovacij: (1) inovacije produktov in storitev; (2) trženjske inovacije; (3) inovacije pri upravljanju; in (4) inovacije procesov. Ta raziskava bo pripomogla k izboljšanju kakovosti namestitvene izkušnje za uporabnike in bo usmerjala trajnostno rast tovrstnih poslovanj. Prispeva k naboru znanja preko vpliva inovacij za programe takih nastanitev bivanja. Ugotovitve

so koristne za akterje v industriji kot merilo za zainteresirane strani pri načrtovanju strategij razvoja programov.

Ključne besede: programi za bivanje v domovanjih, inovacije, kakovost, vzhodna obala polotoka Malezije
Academica Turistica, 16(2), 233–246

Instructions for Authors

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