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Female Entrepreneurship in Small Tourism and Hospitality Firms in Poland

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The paper examines characteristics, strategies, and the business environment of ten small firms within the tourism and hospitality industry in the southern region of Poland. The qualitative analysis is based on online surveys and Zoom interviews with ten female entrepreneurs regarding economic, sociocultural, and environmental factors contributing to the firms' success. The results indicate that female entrepreneurs developed resiliency to overcome market challenges during their first years of operation, the financial crisis of 2007, and the COVID-19 pandemic. They faced numerous difficulties that hindered their business growth and the most significant barrier included limited availability of low-cost financing. Their strategies focused on transformation aimed towards sustainability, public involvement, conservation, education, and green efforts, which contributed to the firms' growth. Recognizing market characteristics and the needs of their local communities, employees, and customers as well as cultural preservation and environmental sustainability have been critical to the firms' growth and entrepreneurial success.

Keywords: transformative, sustainable, medical and eco-tourism, entrepreneurs, growth, development, female entrepreneurship

Introduction

Polish female entrepreneurship has been studied over the years, indicating that the transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy has proven to be challenging (Zapalska et al., 2004) but that the Polish economy has observed the unprecedented growth of small entrepreneurial businesses in light manufacturing, service and the hospitality and tourism industries (Zapalska & Fogel, 1998; Hunter et al., 1994). This fast-growing private sector in Poland has proven to be one of the key mechanisms in achieving economic efficiency via creating employment, eliminating shortages, and attracting resources into entrepreneurial operations that have generated profits and economic efficiency in this new market economy (Zapalska et al., 2015). Microfinancing has been the most significant obstacle for Polish female entrepreneurs, but their ingenuity and motivation has enabled them to overcome impediments and seek resources and strategies that have enabled them to succeed (Zapalska et al., 2007).

The tourism industry in Poland was very limited under the Soviet regime, but several years before the collapse significant variation of the market mechanisms

took place, leading to the creation and successful operation of small hotels and inns owned and operated by individual entrepreneurs (Zienkowski, 2000). Joint venture investment in high-quality accommodations in the tourism industry had been permitted at the end of the 1980s, but the overall quality and extent of tourist services was still very inadequate. Extraordinary development and growth in both domestic and international tourism in Poland occurred in the early 1990s. The lack of entrepreneurial experience, the presence of a monopoly power in the tourism market and insufficient coordination and cooperation between tourism enterprises and local and regional authorities brought many of the smaller tourism entrepreneurial firms to failure (Golembski & Majewski, 2003; Zapalska & Fogel, 1998).

Since 2000, Poland's economic and political stability and the rising prosperity of its population together with its distinct pride and sense of religion, culture, folklore, heritage, and community have provided a solid base for the sustained growth of the tourism and hospitality industry. Today's entrepreneurship in the tourism industry is based on developments within special groups who choose country recreational activities and are seeking pollution-free areas, opportunities for contact with nature, a clean environment, and contacts with a regional culture, folklore and regional folk festivals, and active participation in the everyday farm lifestyle. Based on small-scale entrepreneurial firms, Poland became the destination of many tourism attractions for guests with a wide range of interests.

The aim of this article is to examine the characteristics of small female entrepreneurial firms within the Polish tourism and hospitality industry. The paper also analyses the factors contributing to and impeding the firms' growth, including the covid-19 pandemic and other crises. The paper also examines the impact of governmental programmes and policies on the development and growth of small Polish firms in the tourism and hospitality industry to provide recommendations for the growth and expansion of this industry in the areas that are economically underdeveloped and in other countries of the eu and worldwide.

This paper's organization is as follows. First, the paper focuses on the basic characteristics of the tourism and hospitality industry (sustainability, public involvement, conservation, education, and green efforts) and its specific transformative topographies (new perspective, learn something new, reflective moment, solving a challenge, improving well-being and health, and discovering a passion) within small (fewer than fifty employees) entrepreneurial firms. Second, the paper discusses impediments to growth and development of these firms. The last section provides conclusions and policy recommendations that would support the growth and development of firms within the tourism and hospitality industry in Poland.

The paper recommends several strategies that contribute to successful development and growth of small firms in the tourism and hospitality sector. Some of these strategies include: (1) facilitating tourism capacity-building programmes that enhance transformative, cultural, sustainable, health/well-being, and eco-tourism (camping, hiking, mountain biking, caving, climbing, water adventures, birdwatching, wildlife viewing, etc.) offerings; (2) focusing on tourism activities that contribute to combating climate change; (3) providing knowledge services and developing effective planning, decision-making, and policies in support of small tourism and hospitality firms; (4) reducing barriers to tourism and hospitality industry growth; and (5) enhancing its competitiveness and integration into regional and national economic growth that would further contribute to boosting employment opportunities and implementation of new projects and other supporting enterprises.

Using an example of the Polish tourism and hospitality small firms operated by females, the paper concludes that specific policy measures are needed to promote their development and growth. It is important that local authorities pursue economic and development policies that promote the creation of the necessary economic and entrepreneurial conditions and support the growth of existing, and encourage development of new, female-run and operated entrepreneurial activities within the tourism and hospitality industry. The paper also indicates the limitations of this study and provides recommendations for future

research in the area of small entrepreneurial firms owned and operated by females in the tourism and hospitality industry.

Literature Review

Female entrepreneurial success in the area of the tourism and hospitality industry has been studied over the years (Nordbo, 2022). Several studies indicated that female ingenuity is critical to enhancing local communities through creation of jobs and providing products and services that would not be otherwise supplied (Zapalska et al., 2012). Valenti and Katsoni (2021) studied female potential for creating competitive advantages while Serafimova and Petrevska (2018) analysed factors empowering women in their entrepreneurial achievement. Motivation for, and the challenges in, running a female-led business have been found to be related to the female entrepreneurs' embeddedness in the local, regional, national, and international context and historical path dependence (Nordbo, 2022; Zapalska & Brozik, 2017).

Several authors studied the impact of national and global trends on the development and transformation process of the rural, small and hospitality tourism industry in Poland (Hjalager, 2010; Sorensen, 2011; Kosmaczewska & Poczta, 2021). Rus et al. (2022) indicated that transformative tourism, where motivation to learn and transform, the ability to immerse oneself in the experience with an open mind towards change and improved well-being, can be seen as an independent sector. The most widespread forms advanced within the tourism industry involve eco- farms, eco-healing and health or medical centres, and other eco-projects where the primary goal of the enterprise is to provide a transformative experience based on self-changing, self-transformation, self-development, self-improvement, self-fulfilment, and self-realization.

Tourism has been criticized for failing to protect environmental assets and for producing undesirable effects on the nature of the destinations and native communities (Drumm, 2008). Monti et al. (2018) argued that it also creates environmental degradation, pollution, depletion of natural resources, and destruction of wildlife habitat. However, Wolf et al. (2017) argued that sustainability and preservation of natural

resources positively impact tourists and local communities, while Kosmaczewska and Poczta (2021) noted that it also protects and maintains cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems linked to sustainability, public involvement, conservation, education, and green efforts.

Maskay (2000) emphasized that sustainability in tourism can be ecological, economic, and social. Ecological sustainability relates to efficient management and conservation of natural resources, and consists of maintenance of biodiversity, atmospheric and other ecosystems by creating appropriate policies and awareness among people regarding wellbeing and longevity (Ahmad et al., 2012). The development of tourism oriented towards sustainability, public orientation, conservation, education, and green efforts offers opportunities for local communities to participate in self- and community development initiatives which have a positive impact on the socioeconomic activities of local communities (Butler, 2010; 1980), increased employment and economic opportunities for local communities, education, life satisfaction, emotions, and culture (Kim et al., 2013). These specific tourism characteristics can contribute to conservation of protected areas while providing alternative sources of income and local employment (Jalani, 2012), increased community solidarity and enhanced environmental quality, providing an alternative to the exploitative use of environmental resources (Wunder, 2000; Nyaupane & Poudel, 2011), promotion of nature-based and rich cultural and historical heritage (Kim et al., 2019), and biodiversity conservation (Scheyvens, 2007). Similarly, Gyan and Nyaupane (2011) argued that employment and income, generated through tourism businesses, produce incentives and a positive attitude toward conservation.

New elements of tourism emphasize the advancement of tourists' interest in learning and benefitting from ecotourist activities. Lean (2009) contends that the move from nature appreciation to transformative learning within tourism promotes progression of new experiences and learning while advancing entrepreneurship and economic development through eco-innovations. Teoh et al. (2021) suggest that

transformative tourism experiences create ideas that alter tourists' perspectives and advance knowledge, leading to transformation of experiences, life changes and behavioural habits. Perdomo (2016), Vidickiene et al. (2019) and Vidickiene et al. (2020) analyse transformative tourism by focusing on ecological issues and the importance of the entrepreneurs involved in the creation and implementation of eco-innovations that contribute to economic development and growth. The issue of transformation is an indispensable element of the tourist experience, and the goal of transformative tourism is to alter tourists' behaviour and well-being, and positively influence their livelihoods and the world.

Nandasena et al. (2022) argue that the success of learning experiences and development of appreciation for cultural, social, and environmental transformation depends on the goals and philosophy of local communities, owners and stakeholders, with strong governmental support facilitating participation of local communities in advancing and securing sustainability and behavioural transformation of both tourism providers and tourists. The authors argue that transformative experiences provided to tourists involve a process of defining, or re-defining, an individual's self-identity, self-changing, self-development, self-improvement, self-responsibility, self-fulfilment, self-realization, self-monitoring, self-transformation through personal transformation, personal development, change in oneself, reflection on oneself, immersing oneself, finding oneself, and life changes. These specific characteristics have become attractive elements in the tourism and hospitality industry specially produced by female entrepreneurs, who have allowed tourism to transform itself into new levels of human development, experience (Baker & Welter, 2015), and well-being (Marques et al., 2018).

Research Model and Methodology
Data for this case study was collected through an open-ended survey and semi-structured questionnaire that was emailed to ten female entrepreneurs operating in the tourism and hospitality industry and additional interviews conducted between 2015 and 2023. These ten female entrepreneurs were selected throu-

gh the assistance provided by the National Revenue Administration Centre and Tax and Customs Service office. An in-depth questionnaire was distributed followed by additional emails or Microsoft Teams interviews which allowed authors to collect answers as needed to reveal detailed information regarding the firms' nature, characteristics, strategies, motivations, and other responses critical to complete this study. The respondents were very generous with their time dedicated to answering our questionnaire as well as to providing answers through our online interviews and friendly conversations. The interviews were conducted in the Polish language, but all respondents were fluent in English.

The questionnaire and responses were grouped into several distinctive categories to identify the nature of firms, common factors that promoted or inhibited the entrance of women into the entrepreneurial process, and those factors that were critical, important or a matter of concern for growth and development in female businesses. The survey focused on information specific to transformative, sustainable, health/well-being, and eco- tourism. Transformative tourism included a new perspective, learning something new, reflective moments, solving a challenge, and discovering a passion. The simplified version of the questionnaire, which was translated into English for the purpose of this publication, is presented in Figure 3.

The models developed and presented in Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the main research questions that this paper aimed to address. This paper utilized several studies on tourism (Maskay, 2000; Kim et al., 2013; Jalani, 2012; Gyan & Nyaupane, 2011) while developing the research model and questions for this paper. Our model and research questions related to whether the firms' characteristics were interrelated with sustainability, conservation, green efforts, public involvement, and education. All those factors are critical to firms' success in the tourism industry as without education regarding sustainability, conservation, and green efforts, there will not be understanding of the importance of public involvement and actions in tourism development. Entrepreneurial environments can be challenging, and therefore, understanding of institu-

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│            TOURISM COMPONENTS            │
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ECONOMIC	SOCIO-CULTURAL	ENVIRONMENTAL
Employment Generation Income Generation Economic Development Eco-development Initiatives Entrepreneurship Development Economic Equity Employment-generating Benefits Improvement of Infrastructure Raising Standard of Living	Empowerment of Locals Pride on Culture and Heritage Respect of Local Culture Community Unity and Harmony Gender Parity Approval of Socio-cultural Impact Promotion of Traditional Lifestyle Promotion of Healthy Lifestyle Socio-cultural Betterment Community Participation	Conservation of Natural Resources Awareness of Climate Change Awareness of Pollution Sustainability and Prevention Organic Food Production Bio-diversity Conservation Green and Renewable Technology Reforestation and Habitat Restoration

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│       OBJECTIVES, ATTITUDES, AND IMPACT             │
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Figure 1   Basic Components of Tourism (adapted from Das and Chatterjee, 2015, p. 5)

tional perspectives on entrepreneurial behaviour is critical (Welter & Smallbone, 2011).

Moreover, this study has adopted the tourism model developed by Das and Chatterjee (2015) which considers tourism from a perspective of three pillars: *economic* (employment and income generation), *socio-cultural* (empowerment of locals and pride in culture), and *environmental* (conservation of natural resources). This model's approach, together with Welter's top-down processes approach (2011) to studying entrepreneurship in specific contexts of tourism, supports our research. Figure 1 illustrates the model that is horizontally integrated through three pillars in order to understand the firms' objectives, attitudes, and impacts. Several elements are listed under each pillar and used to answer how much different factors, such as conservation of natural resources and cultural elements of local communities, contributed to the firms' success while providing economic benefits, social empowerment, and cultural pride. Based on Figure 1, the model of tourism adopted for the purpose of this study is to analyse *economic, socio-cultural,* and *environmental* tourism elements recommended by Das and Chatterjee (2015).

This research also proposes a dynamic approach to tourism development to examine its impact on economic development, as illustrated in Figure 2. This approach incorporates *past experiences*, *motivation*, and *disposition* as primary factors instigating tourism activities. This paper extended the model to incorporate three environments: (1) *tourism entrepreneurial firms;* (2) *economic, policy and environmental factors;* and (3) *tourism activity* and its *objectives* together with *transformative experience* (Figure 2). This dynamic approach analyses the process of transformative experience within the tourism environment and its impact on tourists' personal change and transformation. The survey included information on specific achievement characteristics of tourism, including a new perspective, learning something new, a reflective moment, solving a challenge, and discovering a passion.

Respondents were asked to describe the type of businesses they were involved in, the working environment within their organizations and their working relationships with their employees, local authorities, and the communities. The questionnaire elicited information on the size and nature of operation, business objectives, level of employment, financial assistance

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│   PAST EXPERIENCES, MOTIVATION, AND DISPOSITION        │
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                    TOURISM ACTIVITY

   Tourism                TOURISM OBJECTIVE          Economic, Policy
   Entrepreneurial        LEARN SOMETHING NEW        and
   Firms                  REFLECTIVE  MOMENT         Environmental
                          SOLVING A CHALLENGE        Factors

              TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE
                  SELF-CHANGING
                  SELF-TRANSFORMATION
                  SELF-DEVELOPMENT
                  SELF-IMPROVEMENT
                  SELF-FULFILLMENT
                  SELF-REALIZATION

                   PERSONAL CHANGE
                   NEW PERSPECTIVE
                  DISCOVERING PASSION
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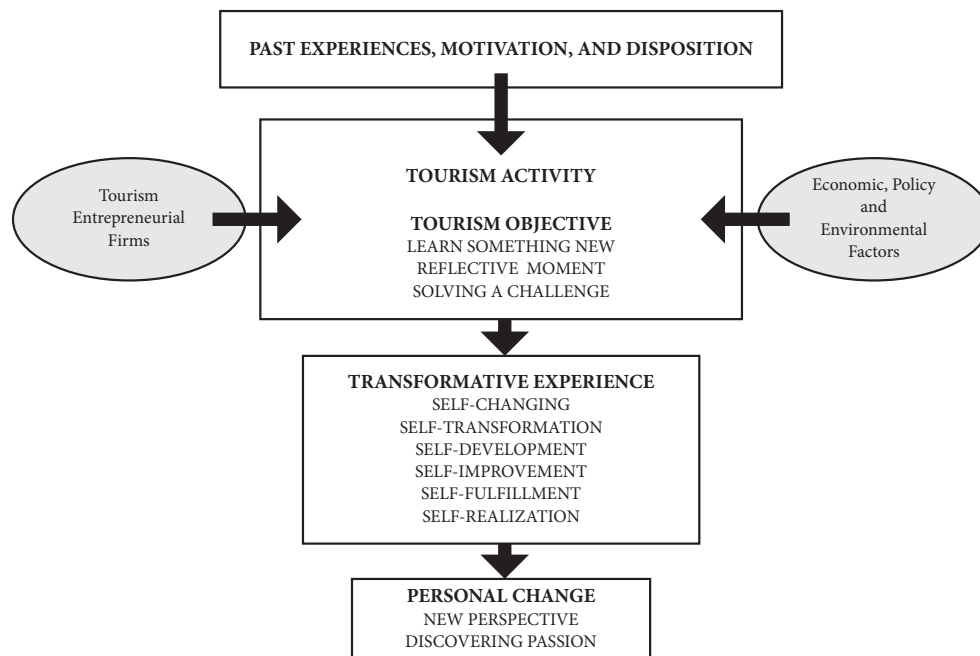
Figure 2   Dynamic Approach to Tourism

received and desired, non- financial support, business training needs, socioeconomic conditions, and policies on taxation, preferences, credit financing, and reporting requirements for small businesses and any changes that took place over the previous years.

There were several research questions that this paper aimed to answer. The five primary objectives of this research are as follows:

1. What are the types of tourism and hospitality industry of the firms included in this study?

2. What are the objectives of the small entrepreneurial firms run by females in the tourism and hospitality industry in Poland?

3. What are the entrepreneurial characteristics of the tourism and hospitality industry of the firms included in this study?

4. What were the sociocultural, economic, and entrepreneurial conditions that contributed to the firms' success or failure given the firms' objectives, attitudes, and impact?

5. What were the experiences, motivations, and dispositions that contributed to delivering products and services within the firms' tourism and hospitality industry?

Background and Basic Characteristics of Tourism and Hospitality Enterprises

Based on Figure 1 and the results presented in Table 1 and Table 2, the ten female entrepreneurs operated their own entrepreneurial firms in an area of transformative, sustainable, health/well-being, and eco- tourism across different areas of Southern Poland. As Table 1 illustrates, those *socio-cultural, economic,* and *environmental* elements are present within the eco-products and eco-services provided by the entrepreneurs, which provide their customers with numerous opportunities to develop a new perspective, learn something new, experience a reflective moment, solve a challenge, and/or discover a new passion. Interviewees noted that pride in culture and heritage, respect for local culture, community unity and harmony, promotion of traditional and healthy lifestyle, socio-cultural betterment and community participation were critical elements of their entrepreneurial undertakings.

Examples include an Art Gallery and Studio and The Pottery House, with a focus on providing art lessons and lectures on culture, ecological aspects of life and nature, and history, while allowing tourists to learn nature painting, making wooden statues, or using

Table 1   Type and Characteristics of Products and Services

Type of Business	Characteristics of Products and Services Provided
Art Gallery and Studio	Art lessons and lectures, cultural orientation
Beauty Salon and Wellness Spa	Wellness lectures, meditation session, yoga classes, fitness and aerobics classes, individual fitness programme
Agrotourism Bed and Breakfast	Cooking classes, wellness lectures, cultural orientation, providing traditional recipes, visiting pilgrimage places, national parks and nature experiences, outdoor and recreational activities
The Farm and Guesthouse	Cooking classes, wellness sessions, cultural orientations, providing traditional recipes, visiting pilgrimage places, nature experiences, outdoor and recreational activities
The Health and Spa Guesthouse	Cooking classes, wellness lectures, cultural orientation, yoga classes, fitness and aerobics classes, individual fitness programme
Horseback Riding Farm	Horseback riding lessons, hunting sessions, holiday festivities, relaxation sessions and nature experiences, outdoor and recreational activities
The Café Shop	Cooking classes, wellness lectures, cultural orientations, providing traditional recipes, holistic and traditional foods
Cosmetic, Dental and Health Services	Wellness lectures, holistic medical services, natural medicine treatments, yoga and other wellness sessions that improve well-being and health
Horseback Riding in the Wilderness	Wellness sessions, horseback riding lessons, cultural festivals, nature experiences, outdoor and recreational activities
The Pottery House	Cooking classes, wellness lectures, cultural orientations, providing traditional recipes, cultural festivals

Note   Developed and provided by the authors based on survey and interviews.

their hands to create clay pottery, while experiencing the activities in natural settings in an old farm, historic cottage, or a building in the historic Skansen (open air museums). At the same time tourists can enjoy exploring outdoor folklore and cultural elements in local towns and villages incorporated in the Lesser Poland (Malopolska) Voivodeship known for its historical places, medieval landscapes and medieval-era architecture and wooden churches as well as its diverse folk costumes, dances, cuisine based on organic or Eco-foods, traditions, and folk music. Clients are involved in cooking lessons using traditional and organic foods, and cultural-based activities where they experience real culture and tradition by learning, studying something new and developing new skills and habits.

A Beauty Salon and Wellness Spa provides products and services arising from the development of healthy lifestyles, in which consumption of organic foods and herbal remedies is recommended and served. Ag-

rotourism Bed and Breakfast, The Farm and Guesthouse, and The Health and Spa Guesthouse provide services and products that are based on traditional Polish cuisine (no genetically modified or processed foods are served but organic and homegrown and old-style cooked foods), cultural orientation (participating in a pilgrimage journey to visit cultural places), and exploration of national parks and nature experiences with outdoor fitness and recreational activities (folk dance and music festivals). The Horseback Riding Farm and Horseback Riding in the Wilderness have been known for delivering horseback riding lessons, hunting opportunities, Christmas holiday festivities and relaxation sessions through nature experiences, and outdoor and recreational activities, especially during summer and winter holidays. Cosmetic, Dental, and Health Services has been proud of providing an integrated approach by recognizing the importance of limiting exposure to dental toxins since they negatively

Table 2   Basic Goals and Characteristics of Ten Polish Entrepreneurial Firms

Characteristics	Examples
Sustainability	Resource efficiency, biological diversity, physical integrity, economic viability, local prosperity, environmental purity, employment quality, social equality, cultural richness, community well-being, local control
Public Involvement	Stress on local participation, ownership, and business opportunities, provide financial benefits for conservation, raise sensitivity to community's environmental, cultural, and social climate, provide positive experiences for visitors and hosts, provide cultural awareness
Conservation	Concern for the environment through all actions and business operations, restoration, alternative energy, recycling, preservation of natural areas and resources, sustainable agriculture, no-dumping signs
Education	Organizing educational and learning meetings and sessions, providing nature programmes, water conservation actions, public conversation on controversial environmental issues in a local community, developing school gardens and composting programmes to improve the quality of meals and reduce waste, and improving well-being and health of local communities and clients
Green Efforts	Reduce, reuse, recycle, elevating science and promoting actions and volunteerism, expanding environmental education and healthy lifestyle from organic foods, healthy diet, and physical activities such as hiking, horseback riding, biking, kayaking, or canoeing

Note   Developed and provided by the authors based on survey and interviews.

impact the human body. This specialized delivery of holistic medical services, and natural-based medical treatments as well as yoga practices and other wellness sessions and lectures have attracted many international clients to their practice as costs are relatively lower than in other countries, especially the U.S. or Canada. They also recommended and prescribed natural ozone therapies to target and eliminate bacteria in the mouth and other eco-products based on herbal and natural ingredients.

The Health and Spa Guesthouse, Cosmetic, Dental and Health Services, Agrotourism Bed and Breakfast, and The Farm and Guesthouse specialized in providing products comprising traditional herbal foodstuffs, medications or remedies that have been popular and utilized in Poland for more than two centuries. The production of those products continued during central planning in the state-run enterprise, called Herbapol, with its location in Lublin, Poland. Today, Herbapol products are globally known for production of natural and herb-based foods, cosmetics, medications, and remedies that have been utilized and valued by firms operated by our respondents.

Table 1 summarizes the details of each entrepreneurial firm's products and services. Table 2 summarizes

the results specifically related to the goals of the firms included in this study. The most important characteristic, rated at 100%, was the *educational* element, followed by *sustainability, conservation*, and *green efforts* at 90%, and *public involvement* at 20%. Those results indicate that there is a strong commitment to sustainability, green efforts, and self-education as well as educating clients by making them involved, delivering products and services. Those results support research conducted by Maskay (2000), Kim et al. (2013), Jalani (2012), and Gyan and Nyaupane (2011) but contradict the research conducted by Drumm (2008). Polish female entrepreneurial firms have focused and significantly contributed to protecting environmental and cultural aspects of their local communities. This is confirmed by the elements of sustainability, conservation, education, and green efforts that were present; according to the respondents those strategies have been critical to the firms' success and continued development. Similarly, production and provision of products and services provided by the female entrepreneurs that are based on the components of a community's well-being and longevity (well-being) are in line with the results discussed by Ahmad et al. (2012).

Table 3   Sociocultural Conditions: Objectives, Attitudes, and Impacts

Sociocultural Conditions	Objectives	Attitudes	Impact
Empowerment of Locals	20	30	30
Pride in Culture and Heritage	100	100	100
Respect of Local Culture	100	100	100
Community Unity and Harmony	100	100	100
Gender Parity	100	100	100
Approval of Sociocultural Impact	60	60	60
Promotion of Traditional Lifestyle	100	100	100
Promotion of Healthy Lifestyle	100	100	100
Socio-cultural Betterment	100	100	100
Community Participation	100	100	100

Note   Developed and provided by the authors based on survey and interviews (values in percent of positive responses).

Female entrepreneurs focused on delivering transformative experiences that included self-transformation, self-development, self-improvement, self-fulfilment, and self-realization. Our results are consistent with the work conducted by Nandasena et al. (2022). All respondents indicated that regardless of their business type and orientation, they have provided products and services that have allowed both domestic and international customers to learn something new, experience nature and culture and have a reflective moment, solve a challenge, provide a new perspective, discover a passion and/or improve customers' well-being through changes and reflections on their actions and lifestyles. Those results confirm the research conducted by Lean (2009). In our case study, the firms have been committed to providing transformative learning experiences with the progression of new experiences through specially designed activities, seminars, lectures, classes, and health and well-being consultations.

Results and Discussions

This section of the paper reports on respondents' objectives, attitudes, and understanding of the impact of both objectives and attitudes on entrepreneurial conditions.

Sociocultural Conditions

Socio-cultural conditions (entrepreneurial culture and what society offers and how individuals perceive entrepreneurship) were a hundred percent critical during their firm's development, growth, and operations. These responses are expected as, after the collapse of the Soviet system, understanding of importance of entrepreneurship, willingness to take risks, and the desire to become an entrepreneur increased with the recognition of a market economy's impact on economic efficiency and economic growth and prosperity. Interviewees stated that the socio-cultural conditions in Poland continued to improve as political and economic conditions kept cultivating free market economy conditions and society was able to experience the successful formation and operation of entrepreneurial firms with strong property rights rules and laws. A positive market-based environment, motivation and drive have strongly contributed to the firms' success during recessions and downturns. The female entrepreneurial firms in this study managed to create successful businesses that provided at first an alternative but later, after 1990, a primary source of their income and employment in their local communities, promoted the rise of cultural and environmental awareness in their local communities, and contributed to the preservation of the rural region's culture, folklore, and traditions.

Table 3 summarizes respondents' positive responses related to their objectives, attitudes, and impact regarding socio-cultural tourism conditions. The Dynamic Approach to Tourism model, presented in Figure 2, summarized their perceptions of sociocultural conditions of respondents' *objectives*, *attitudes*, and *impact* of their actions. Socio-cultural objectives result from market conditions, attitudes mirror personal beliefs and ways of thinking or feeling about entrepreneurial conditions, while impact reflects actions affecting local communities and businesses. Two responses, empowerment of locals and approval of socio-cultural impact, were low in positive responses across objectives, attitudes, and impact. Respondents did not consider either condition as critical in terms of their objectives, attitudes, and impact; they felt their roles would make little difference in empowering their local communities. However, they agreed that Polish culture, beliefs, and past experiences from the communist regime had a strong positive impact on the advancement of interest and trust in, and loyalty to their products and services characterized by the provision of transformation and learning. Those results are similar to the work conducted by Perdomo (2016), Vidickiene et al. (2019 and 2020) as we discussed in the literature review.

Respondents agreed that the Polish tourism sector grew fast due to high demand for tourism that could provide opportunities to domestic and foreign tourists. During the first years of their operations, the greatest interest was in Polish tourists who for years were hungry for any vacation opportunities that would allow them to get away from professional responsibilities. Over the years, the firms went through transformations and began to focus on delivering products and services that were based on the local culture and tradition, including goods and services that were based on traditional Polish cuisine, cooked using healthy and organic foods to promote better and healthier lives. Respondents pointed to the lack of tourism during the Soviet era, and the fall of the Soviet bloc provided new opportunities for the travel industry and especially for the small entrepreneurial firms run by our respondents.

Respondents indicated that the interest and the use of herbal and non-traditional medical products have been part of Polish culture and tradition. The recent increase in the demand for herbs for medical use and consumer consumption of herbs and natural products and foods such as wild mushrooms or berries have been fuelled by the health and wellness trend. There is an increasing number of health-conscious Poles and citizens of other countries of the European Union. More consumers are showing a preference for natural products since those products have fewer side-effects and tend to be less expensive than artificially manufactured goods. The health and wellness trends are becoming a key growth area, and marketing strategies exist within the food, pharmaceutical, and cosmetic industries in Poland. As consumers become more educated about the ecological benefits of natural foods and organic farming, production at the farms becomes more profitable.

As presented in Table 3, the increase in travel across Poland generated in tourists a greater sense of cultural pride and heritage. Our respondents stated that this growing trend towards transformative, sustainable, health/well-being, and eco- tourism among both their domestic and international customers is a vital element of the Polish economy. Respondents indicated that their objectives, attitudes, and responses towards supporting cultural, sustainability and environmental conditions were critical to surviving and growing their businesses. One of the respondents stated:

'As competition was extremely hard, my services had to be unique, safe, innovative, creative, and based on cultural and natural elements, unique to Polish culture, art, and heritage. I had to work on marketing strategies and provide quality, environmentally friendly and health-based and well-being products. Educated customers appreciated our organic foods and cultural and recreational activities we served as they supported cultural enrichment, biodiversity and clean air conservation and sustainability.'

As competition from large and franchised firms in the tourism and hospitality industry continued to grow, respondents had to adapt to those competitive conditions. Several strategies were adopted and used to survive and grow the firms. For example, one of the

Table 4   Environmental Conditions: Objectives, Attitudes, and Impacts

Environmental Conditions	Objectives	Attitudes	Impact
Conservation of Natural Resources	100	100	100
Awareness of Climate Change	100	100	100
Awareness of Pollution	100	100	100
Sustainability and Prevention	100	100	100
Organic Food Production	50	50	50
Biodiversity Conservation	100	100	100
Green and Renewable Technology	50	100	100
Reforestation and Habitat Restoration	0	0	0

Note   Developed and provided by the authors based on survey and interviews (values in percent of positive responses).

respondents stated that 'Over the years, as competition was increasing and my clients demanded high-quality products and services, I had to innovate to meet their expectations.' Another female entrepreneur stated that 'I provided my clients with new perspective(s) and allowed them to learn something new, reflect on it and make them discover that this is their new passion. Markets are competitive and I have to stay educated in what clients need. During the COVID-19 pandemic when my business was shut down, I had time to evaluate my strategies.'

A third respondent admitted that 'Increased customers' interest in transformative tourism and sustainability orientation saved me and my business. Poland has so much to offer in terms of ecological aspects while providing educational experiences related to its unique and rich history, culture, and heritage. I also noticed that my customers were attracted to my offerings as I supported sustainability, conservation, and green efforts.' Respondents took advantage of the increasing opportunities for growth and expansion of their transformative, culture-based, and eco-based tourism businesses especially as soon as the local economy returned to post-COVID-19 conditions, as well as the role of gender for contextualizing entrepreneurship while drawing attention to the interplay between history, place, and gender. Some of those results confirm the lessons from the study conducted by Baker and Welter (2015).

Environmental Conditions

Responses documented in Table 4 reveal that respondents were operating under objectives and attitudes aimed at improving their own and their clients' lifestyles through transformation of their lives while incorporating elements of ecosystems, preservation and conservation of natural resources, cultural elements, and traditions. *Reforestation and habitat restoration* was ranked at zero percent as those operations were not related to the firms' objective. Respondents stated that their primary objective of their entrepreneurial ventures was to eliminate activities that would reverse conservation of natural resources. They all supported those activities that enhanced and encouraged sustainability, especially actions that prevented devastation of the ecological environment. All expressed concerns regarding climate change but upgrading to green and renewable technology was not possible due to the high costs of investment. However, their products and services were based on sustainability, conservation, and ecology. Natural and organic products and materials (especially in medical tourism) were used to increase quality and the well-being and health of their customers.

According to Table 4, all respondents were concerned about climate change and environmental problems and therefore, there was a hundred percent positive response within objectives, attitudes, and impacts related to *awareness of climate change, awareness of pollution, sustainability and prevention* and *biodiversity conservation*. The types of businesses

Table 5   Economic Conditions: Objectives, Attitudes, and Impacts

Economic Conditions	Objectives	Attitudes	Impact
Employment Generation	100	100	100
Income Generation	100	100	100
Economic Development	100	100	100
Ecodevelopment Initiatives	100	100	100
Entrepreneurship Development	100	100	100
Economic Equity	100	100	100
Employment Benefits	100	100	100
Improvement of Infrastructure	0	0	0
Raising Standard of Living	100	100	100

Note   Developed and provided by the authors based on survey and interviews (values in percent of positive responses).

and their orientation support those results summarized in Table 4. For example, the female entrepreneur operating Agrotourism Bed and Breakfast indicated that

'From the very early years, I realized that my competitive advantage was in products heavily based on cultural aspects, historical elements, and natural resources. Also, providing organic traditional meals and packaging them with cooking classes, wellness sessions, and cultural and eco-orientation of my services increased the numbers of bookings of established and loyal clients. My new website developed during the covid-19 pandemic allowed me to extend my services to the clients from the Unites States and Canada.'

The female entrepreneur who owns The Farm and Guesthouse emphasized that 'I stressed the importance of providing sustainability and conservation of natural resources while making my customers aware that well-being is based on a healthy lifestyle. I enjoyed providing cooking lessons and a family cookbook - based on organic and traditional foods - with activities that deliver natural, cultural, and religious experiences to my clients.' Those results support previous studies discussed in literature and are not limited to the studies conducted by Kim et al. (2019), and Gyan and Nyaupane (2011).

According to respondents, the covid-19 pandemic crisis severely affected their businesses because clients could not travel. Our respondents stated that the impact of covid-19 on tourism after its emer-

gence in March 2020 was both overwhelming and immediate. Respondents said that none of them were prepared for such unforeseen emotional distress and economic shock. However, the post-covid economic recovery outlook was improving fast as domestic and international numbers of clients are continuously increasing. Respondents stated that they observed that the pandemic enhanced the need for technology and strategy solutions. During the pandemic shutdown, entrepreneurs had to find ways to save their operation and focus on restructuring, reorganizing, modernizing, renovating, increasing inventories, and developing new products/services to meet the needs of their customers. Post-covid entrepreneurs' actions and strategies are different compared to those that existed prior to the pandemic. Entrepreneurs encouraged transformative, sustainable, health/well-being, and eco- tourism while their strategies firmly focused on the development of strong relationships with their clients where loyalty is dominant in this unique firm-employee-client relationship.

Entrepreneurial Conditions

Respondents observed that business skills acquired before 1990 were not useful in a new post- communist economic and political environment. Undergraduate or graduate degrees acquired prior to the establishment of entrepreneurial businesses allowed the respondents or their parents (who owned and operated their businesses in the past) to choose businesses

that were most efficient given their area of residence, expertise, interest, and competitive advantage. New accounting standards, tax systems, more competitive economic conditions, and government policies required them and their employees to obtain new entrepreneurial and business skills during the early years of their operations. Development of entrepreneurial skills was crucial during the first years of their firms' development and some respondents continued to be dissatisfied with their entrepreneurial and business skills. Respondents admitted that their skills were satisfactory at the time of the pandemic and recovery from the COVID-19 shutdown. Innovative strategies included business training and investments in activities that broaden their tourism products, while re-organization contributed to their success during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Confidence gained in restoring their operations brought their enterprise to effective levels as soon as tourism reopened after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Economic Conditions
Table 5 summarizes objectives, attitudes, and impacts of economic conditions. Of the responses provided, respondents allocated 100 percent positive responses to all economic conditions, but *improvement of infrastructure* measured zero percent for respondents' objectives, attitudes, and impact. Respondents stated that entrepreneurial operations under a free market mechanism confirmed the importance of the impact of free market forces on their firms' success.

Respondents reflected that they never considered their entrepreneurial ventures could affect the improvement of the infrastructure in their local communities, therefore their objectives, attitudes and understanding of the impact measured at the rate zero. Improvement of infrastructure has allowed them to grow their businesses and elevate access to their clients, which in turn, positively affects economic growth and economic development of their communities. All respondents stated that income generation, economic development, equity, employment benefits and raising standards for their families and employees were critical and therefore strongly incorporated into their firms' objectives, attitudes, and impacts. For

example, the female entrepreneur running The Café Shop stressed that, her life as an entrepreneur improved as soon as she focused on improving her employees' economic status and incomes, well-being, and feeling of belonging to the family that operated the firm. Her workers accepted her terms and their trust – that developed over time – pushed them to contribute to her decision making based on their own experiences and observations. This was an important strategy even during the very difficult economic conditions of the 2007 recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. Those actions allowed her firm to survive and keep her workers loyal even during the loss of their employment during the COVID-19 pandemic. She also realized that provision of the sense of equity was important, and the development of self--gratification and work satisfaction led to substantial increase in her employees' productivity and dedication to providing quality services and products during hard economic conditions.

Financial Assistance
Respondents reported that the availability of financial support was critical, yet insufficient, across all years of their operations. Financial mechanisms and the legal framework for effective financial assistance were not available to our respondents during the market socialism between the 1980s and 1990s and prevented their businesses from obtaining a desirable level of production to meet market demand. Entrepreneurs initiating operations in the late 1980s had to rely on their own savings or financial support from family or friends. The collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1990 resulted in a more satisfactory level of financial assistance. After Poland joined the EU, and an efficient and competitive financial sector developed, more options became available to entrepreneurs, and the satisfaction level increased to 80 percent. Financial assistance satisfaction decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic as the process for obtaining available funding was inadequate and restricted due to the pandemic. Diversification to meet customer demand requires financial assistance to be available. The respondents indicated that at first, they could not take full advantage of the governmental programmes prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic when times were

quiet and their businesses stopped their operations due to full lockdown, respondents were able to incorporate recommendations provided by the authorities and regional tourism organizations. Today, they all look back and appreciate the assistance provided to them via regional tourism organizations to enhance their operations as expected by the EU Commission.

One of the respondents stated:

Years of hard work, together with our beautiful culture and attractive nature, allowed me to materialize my dreams and benefit my community through job creation and making my customers happy as they were learning something new or exploring new areas after years of shortages and poor access to tourism activities. My services and products also provided appreciation of ecological elements and brought transformation of the lives of my customers. However, more financial support is needed to let our firms grow continuously and recover fast in the case of economic downturn such as the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. We were lucky during the financial crisis of 2007 as our markets were still new to our customers and we did not lose clients at that time, but the COVID-19 pandemic paralyzed us badly. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we evaluated our past performances and strategized our future plans.

Non-Financial Assistance

Business enterprises face a variety of crises at the managerial levels. According to our survey results, all respondents considered non-financial assistance integral to their business regardless of the stage of operation. The greatest hurdle to the growth of their businesses, according to respondents, was the elevated level of taxation and a lack of access to accounting services and training during the early stages of their operations. According to the female entrepreneurs, construction and manufacturing operations were granted higher levels of financial assistance, especially if run by men. Female-run firms within the tourism and hospitality sectors were ignored, deemed irrelevant, or unimportant. During recessionary times, our respondents learned to decrease the market price of their services and products while covering their cost of operation, with the objective of maintaining normal economic profits. Respondents concentrated on providing products and services by taking advantage of natural resources, as well as cultural and historical elements of Polish society, which were their clients' objectives and attitudes. They produced products and services of high quality and unique characteristics which supported respondents and their clients' patriotic orientation and actions relevant to Polish heritage, culture, and tradition.

Our respondents shared their success stories with us. The first one indicated that:

'As a female, I have a special aptitude to create a transformative and nature-based environment for my international and non-local customers that they truly enjoy. My products are of high quality as they are safe and organically grown while my business actions are through [sic] conservation of natural resources and cultural elements. My clients, who come from all over the world, appreciate the uniqueness of my foods and services based on Polish heritage and traditions. I focus on developing an atmosphere of community unity and harmony through folklore accents and services that provide an authentic experience of Polish culture, heritage, and traditions. I have been providing and improving them throughout the years. Their impacts are appreciated by our customers and make them come back to enjoy and experience a healthy lifestyle, healthy food, and community participation through music, arts, and lessons and experiences related to our traditions. My clients keep coming back every year, bringing or recommending my services to their family members and friends.'

Our second respondent stated that 'During the COVID-19 pandemic I had time to re-evaluate my services and strategies as there has never been a sufficient level of assistance of any kind. I wish we had some small business incubator centres.' The third female entrepreneur admitted that:

'Financial and non-financial assistance is needed. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to develop high tolerance for risk and take a pause and reassess my strategies. I also took time to talk to my people to see what they had to say about working for me and how

all together we could recover from this unexpected shock. This was a great strategy to see what had to be changed and it worked out as my employees were able to build trust in my leadership and managed to vest their talents and interests in contributing to the firm's growth and success.'

Government Policies and Procedures

Respondents provided their opinions on the impact of the EU, national and local policies, and procedures. According to all respondents, government policies and procedures have always been critical to the success of their operations. Lack of effective and market-based policies supporting private sector growth prior to the 1980s prevented private sector development and growth. The changes in government policies between the 1980s and 1990s, followed by the collapse of the Soviet bloc regime, allowed start-up businesses to flourish, developing operations at domestic and international levels. As domestic economic policies provided support for the firms' operation, respondents recognized the importance of the local and national-level policies to their firms' development and growth. Most respondents stated that after the introduction of post-communist reforms and free-market economy policies, their entrepreneurial firms' operations began flourishing; positive effects were visible in terms of numbers of new businesses created and their increasing levels of employment, and numbers of clients.

Respondents rated their level of satisfaction with government policies and procedures at 20 percent during early stages of the firms' development, while 60 percent of respondents were satisfied with the extensive measures of the EU policies established after Poland joined the EU and 30 percent during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the respondents indicated in her open-ended response:

'We all have expected greater government support but after all the years with no assistance, I have learned to care about my workers and clients on my own. I learned that productive workers are those who feel appreciated by employers and customers, and hence they are critical to our business success and profitability. The generation of solid incomes, employment benefits and steady increase in their standards of li-

ving allowed me to create loyalty, which in return increased productivity and high-quality customer service delivered by my employees. I also cared about the loyalty of customers which I developed through provision of healthy products and high quality of products and services.'

Despite the remarkable success of Polish entrepreneurial operations during and after the 2007 financial crisis, respondents stated that their business success was the result of strategic decisions, innovative strategies, and effective resource allocation in those areas that seemed to be low risk. Training and newly developed investment strategies (development of new services, products, marketing, and advertising techniques) undertaken during that time contributed to their survival during and after the financial crisis. Over the years, progressively better local and national government policies have had a positive impact on tourism and hospitality. Respondents gave a rating of 80 percent for local governments, 70 percent for the national level, and 40 percent for the EU government levels. Respondents reported that local and national policies of assistance were more effective than EU policies. Those results are in support of work developed by Kosmaczewska and Poczta (2021).

Conclusions

Polish female entrepreneurs included in this study have developed and opened culturally based activities and events as well as provided wellness, well-being, and health services. Respondents' firms have become more dynamic and subject to steady change and evolution towards sustainability, health, and wellness. Respondents stated that common tourist interest and orientation was towards activities that supported enjoyment of nature, sport-related experiences and other outdoor recreational activities, including outdoor arts and folk festivals, cultural events, pottery making, visiting historical places, and enjoying organic food-based and medical and wellness services. The firms' success was found in delivering products and services that allowed their clients to learn something new, reflect on experiences, solve a challenge, discover a new passion or perspective, grow, and be changed through new experiences and self-reflection, and learn how to stay true

Figure 3   A Copy of the Survey Questionnaire.

RESEARCH STUDY: FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE POLISH TOURISM INDUSTRY
(The original version was in the Polish Language)

Thank you for responding to our request and agreeing to participate in our survey. Your business identity and responses are confidential and will be used to analyse the factors that contributed to your business's success. Your involvement is critical as we want to understand the factors that are critical to female entrepreneurship firms' success and/or failure. This questionnaire is under the first stage of our research. After you complete this survey, we will contact you for additional responses that would provide all information necessary to complete this study. For further correspondence please use the following email address: XX@gmail.com. If you have questions, please contact us. We will be discussing your answers and asking additional questions during the second stage of your interview if necessary to complete our research study. Thank you again for contributing to our research.

STAGE 1: Interview Questionnaire (Responses should be emailed to XXX)

Section One: Background and Basic information

1. What type of business do you operate? What are the characteristics of your entrepreneurial business?
2. How many years have you been in business and what is your educational background and entrepreneurship experience?
3. Provide information that relates to your business regarding: the size and nature of operation, level of employment, financial assistance received and desired, non-financial support received and desired, business training received and desired, socioeconomic conditions, and policies on taxation, preferences, credit financing, and reporting requirements for small businesses.
4. What are the factors that contributed to your business success or failure? Did those factors change over the years?
5. Would you categorize your entrepreneurial business as ecotourism (green efforts and healthy living) and why?
6. Would you categorize your business as transformative (transforms people's lives) and why?

7. Do you believe that the regional, national and/or the EU policies contributed to: (1) increased access to capital and investments; (2) becoming more connected to innovation ecosystems; (3) enhancing your openness, competitiveness, and global potential; (4) enabling growth and innovating of your business within ecosystems; (5) facilitating your access to the local, national, and international markets; (6) improving marketing of your products and services; (7) improving your knowledge on regulatory frameworks and networks to support joint cross-border ventures in new markets? Briefly explain your answers.

Section Two: Elements of Ecotourism

1. What are the objectives of your business? How did they change over time and why? Please briefly explain.
2. Does your business operate with the purpose of sustainability, public involvement, conservation, educating others, and/or green efforts? If yes, when, and why did you choose this objective? Please briefly explain.
3. Using the table provided below, please respond YES or NO.

	Objectives	Attitudes	Impact
Sociocultural Conditions	Yes/No Response	Yes/No Response	Yes/No Response
Empowerment of Locals			
Pride in Culture and Heritage			
Respect of Local Culture			
Community Unity and Harmony			
Gender Parity			
Approval of Sociocultural Impact			
Promotion of Traditional Lifestyle			
Promotion of Healthy Lifestyle			
Socio-cultural Betterment			
Community Participation			
Environmental Conditions	Yes/No Response	Yes/No Response	Yes/No Response
Conservation of Natural Resources			
Awareness of Climate change			
Awareness of Pollution			
Sustainability and Prevention			
Organic Food Production			
Biodiversity Conservation			
Green and Renewable Technology			
Reforestation and Habitat Restoration			
Economic Conditions	Yes/No Response	Yes/No Response	Yes/No Response
Employment Generation			
Income Generation			
Economic Development			
Ecodevelopment Initiatives			
Entrepreneurship Development			
Economic Equity			
Employment Benefits			
Improvement of Infrastructure			
Raising Standard of Living			

Section Three: Elements of Transformative Tourism

4. Does your business operate in support of green efforts, sustainability, public involvement, conservation, and/or education? When and why did you begin this type of operation? Briefly explain.

5. Does your business operate to provide your clients with self-transformation, self-development, self-improvement, self-fulfilment, and self-realization experiences? Are there any other transformative experiences that you incorporated? When and why did you begin this orientation?

6. Did you and why did you develop products and services that would allow your clients to learn something new; have a reflective moment; solve a challenge; provide a new perspective; discover a passion; change ones lifestyle; reflect on oneself; and being true to oneself?

7. If there is anything else that you would like share with us, please feel free to include it in the space provided below. We will have additional questions next time we meet on a Zoom session. Please email us your times and days when you are available to meet on Zoom. We will be asking additional questions that will be specific to the nature and the character of your entrepreneurial business. We will also be ready to answer any questions you have for us.

Thank you again for contributing to our research on female entrepreneurship in the Polish tourism industry. Your collaboration is greatly appreciated. We will share the results of our study once they are available.

to themselves. Female entrepreneurs confirmed that self-transformation, self-development, self-improvement, self-fulfilment, or self-realization offered through their services and products guaranteed enjoyment for their clients, who keep returning to enjoy and learn something new again. Those results are in support of the earlier studies conducted by Maskay (2000).

Entrepreneurs work under the constraints of their environments. Our examination has identified priority areas for strengthening the industry. Success and economic growth require competitive consumer-based services and products that are produced with the objective of physical and emotional health, and which support sustainability and biodiversity conservation and conservation of natural resources. Development of transformative, sustainable, health/well-being, and ecotourism characteristics contributed to employee and customer satisfaction, created a welcoming environment, and supported a sense of community, especially during the challenging economic times of the 2009 recession and later after the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents' orientation towards transformative, sustainable, health/well-being, and eco- tourism promoted a climate of respect for the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities and preservation of their cultural and traditional values as well as ecological orientation and preservation of natural resources. Those results have been confirmed by the work produced by Kim et al. (2013), Kim et al. (2019), Jalani (2012), Wunder (2000), Nyaupane and Poudel (2011), and Gyan and Nyaupane (2011), as discussed in the literature review.

Overcoming challenges of changing economic conditions made these women become resilient and determined to preserve their community's heritage, culture, and natural environment, as well as their own lifestyle. Their resilience, dedication, and hard work reaffirmed belief in their local communities, enabling them to grow and maintain their operation, especially during the challenges and difficulties encountered during the first years of their operations, the great recession, and later during the COVID-19 pandemic. Primary factors that contributed to their success include creatively, tolerance for risk, responsiveness to opportunities, and leadership that appreciates and cares for

its creative, loyal, and productive employees and the ability to take advance of the specific characteristics of their natural, cultural, and historical elements.

The majority of tourism policies are primarily oriented towards increasing economic benefits, attracting profitable visitors, and targeting tourism market share, with limited environmental and social sustainability measures in place to mitigate negative tourism impacts. Respondents believe transformative, sustainable, health/well-being, and eco- tourism ought to be allowed to expand without any regulatory or policy impediments, so that socio-cultural pillars of sustainability can be maintained. Policymakers could provide incentives to promote sustainability. Successful policies would lead to expanded business activity, creating value for a wider range of clients. Local authorities could pursue economic and tax incentives to improve, promote and encourage development of new entrepreneurial activities.

However, the results presented in this study indicate that entrepreneurial development continues to be hindered by fast-changing business conditions, increasing competitiveness, new rules and requirements imposed by the local authorities and the national government that includes new accounting standards, tax systems, more competitive economic conditions, and policies that required them and their employees to obtain new entrepreneurial and business skills. The unavailability of low-cost financing to female entrepreneurs seems to be the most frequently mentioned burden in growing and operating small tourist firms. Those results are consistent with Zapalska's research results (Zapalska et al., 2004; Zapalska et al., 2007; Zapalska et al., 2015).

There are several lessons learned from this research regarding practical approaches to managing small female-operated firms in the tourism and hospitality industry. The first lesson that we have learned is that small firms in the tourism and hospitality industry must focus on products and services that are trendy and meet the expectations of the consumers. The trends are changing as the environmental, economic, and political elements are altering, producing new challenges. Therefore, to be successful, entrepreneurship in small sectors of tourism and hospita-

lity must be vigilant to changes and up to date with what tourists need and cannot receive from the large franchise-based industry. Our second practical lesson learned is that tourism is moving towards sustainability, ecological, well-being, and cultural products and services. Today, tourists want to learn and see the preservation of culture, traditions, and healthy practices that contribute to improving the wellness and well-being of our communities. Third, due to increasing competitive pressures from the large sector, this paper recommends that small entrepreneurial firms should continue focusing on supporting economic growth, employment, and sustainability of the local communities while at the same time maintaining loyalty to their employees' needs and customers' interests.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings, and future studies should also consider those limitations. One of the most critical shortcomings of this research is that it relies on a small sample of respondents, and therefore the approach is limited in terms of examination and obtaining more concrete and extensive assessments. Moreover, contrasting operations of female- versus male-owned and operated small entrepreneurial firms in the tourism and hospitality industry would allow us to obtain a better understanding of how women significantly contribute to this sector of the economy. More research on the tourism and hospitality industry in Poland and other regions of the Central and Eastern Europe is needed and should focus on examining the regulatory environment and its impact on innovative strategies that are critical to strengthening entrepreneurial growth. The authors hope that this paper will develop more interest in addressing the problems faced by small entrepreneurial firms operated by female entrepreneurs in the tourism and hospitality industry as the benefits from those firms to their local communities have been extensive and significantly appreciated by the local communities, employees, and tourists.

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Consumer Expectations in the Context of Unique Tourism Products

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In response to the contemporary trend of tourists actively seeking novel, unique, and distinctive experiences, this study explores the relationship between tourists' perceptions of the uniqueness of tourism products and their expectations. Specifically, it focuses on the coastal destinations of Piran and Portorož in Slovenia, analysing four unique experiences: Gourmet Olive Tours, Fonda Fish Garden, The Disappearance of Tartini's Violin, and E-bike Extravaganza Mareatour. Using a quantitative approach, the study supports the hypothesis that the perceived uniqueness of new tourism products significantly influences tourists' expectations. The findings support the hypothesis, revealing that the perceived uniqueness of an experience is closely tied to its incorporation of local character and a strong experiential or personal touch. For instance, the Gourmet Olive Tour experience, perceived as the most unique, offers tourists immersive encounters within a landscape park and interactions with a local olive family. Furthermore, the study identifies a hierarchy of expectations among tourists, ranging from increasing knowledge of the local offer, traditions, and history, to seeking unique activities and having confidence that the experience will meet their expectations. In conclusion, the research underscores that consumers harbour high expectations for unique experiences, underlining the importance of infusing tourism products with experiential and emotional elements. The positive correlation between perceived uniqueness and expectations underscores the imperative for crafting distinct and memorable tourism offerings. The study enriches our understanding of the relationship between perceived uniqueness and expectations, offering insights for destination marketers creating distinctive tourism products. It also provides recommendations for future research, enhancing scholarly discourse on tourism product development and consumer behaviour.

Keywords: consumer expectations, unique tourism products, destination, tourism experience

Introduction

Today's consumers are looking for something new, unique, or different that leads to strong memories of the travel experience, and demand more than the typical forms of tourism (Kim et al., 2012). They desire a unique experience at the destination (Brown, 2005; Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016). Before visiting a destination, potential visitors tend to look for communicative cues to find out whether it meets their tourism desires. Consumers have more complex choices than ever before and more channels through which to pursue them. Expectations are created in the minds of consumers based on their individual experiences and marketing communication promises. Moreover, these experiences are inherently subjective (Olson & Dover, 1979) and exist in the mind of a consumer who is emotionally, physically, intellectually, or even spiritually engaged (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Pine & Gilmore 1998). The increasing demand for experiences shows that it is no longer enough for destinations to compete with their facilities and amenities; they need to create differentiating experiences to continue attracting tourists (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In this context, the experience of a destination is increasingly its differentiator. For destination marketing and management strategies to be truly successful, creative ways should be sought to promote positive, unique, and high-quality tourism products that can efficiently attract tourists (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Jennings, 2006). Marketing researchers are working on the development of unique and highly differentiated products that have a high potential for market success, and are therefore including the attractive features in the product that strongly differentiate it from other products in its category and provide positive value to the consumer (Carpenter et al., 1994).

In addition, tourists are no longer satisfied with traditional services but want rich, varied experiences and often prefer products with a higher degree of uniqueness, such as innovative, novel, and customized products (Lynn & Harris, 1997; Tian et al., 2001) over products with a lower degree of uniqueness. Customers instinctively compare each new experience, whether positive or not, with their previous experiences and judge them accordingly. If the uniqueness of a tourism product relates to an as-yet-unknown destination or a tourism product that has never been experienced before, expectations may be shaped by market conditions, competition, and the customer's situation. Expectations can therefore be formed before visiting a destination and experiencing a tourism product (Sánchez et al., 2006). In addition, customers can derive their expectations of tourism products from different types of external communication, such as blog posts, online consumer reviews, or social media comments expressing excitement about an experience, so potential tourists have high expectations. Uniqueness encompasses everything a customer expects from a tourism product, service, or provider. These promises of the uniqueness of a chosen tourism product evoke mental images that convey the possibility of having exactly the experiences and perceived values that they expected. Uniqueness is an important benefit consumers seek in tourism products; thus the focus of our study is to explore what consumers expect from unique tourism products. Since expectations – as opposed to actual experiences – determine the level of satisfaction of tourists, it is important to understand the expectations of potential tourists in the design and marketing of tourism experiences.

One of the most important strategic tools of a destination in securing its competitive position is the ability to communicate its attractions and highlight the uniqueness of its tourism products and adapt them to the needs and expectations of its potential customers. Therefore, understanding customer expectations and matching unique tourism products with their perceptions are of great importance for destination marketing strategy decisions.

The main objective of the study is to understand and explore consumer expectations related to unique tourism products from the consumer's perspective. In addition, the purpose is also to explore a theoretical framework for analysing consumer expectations related to unique tourism products. In particular, this study aims to identify the specific expectations of different unique products in the destination and to apply the results of the study in the context of the destination Slovenian Istria.

The paper is structured as follows. First, the literature on consumer expectations and unique tourism

products at the destination is reviewed. This is followed by the research methodology and the interpretation of the research results using the Slovenian region of Istria as an example. Finally, theoretical implications and recommendations for future research are given.

Literature Review
Consumer Expectations
In marketing literature, the term 'expectancy' refers to an individual's beliefs and predictions about how a product or service is likely to perform at a certain point in the future (Higgs et al., 2005). They are usually formed in the pre-purchase phase and are based on prior knowledge about the products or services gathered through non-experiential channels (i.e. advertising or word of mouth) and experiential channels (i.e. previous experiences) (Chen, Jiang, & Liu, 2023). Pre-trip expectations also play a crucial role in shaping post-trip satisfaction through the positive or negative discrepancy between expectations and perceived performance (Oliver, 1980; Xu & Zhang, 2016). Consumers instinctively compare any new experience, whether positive or not, with their previous experiences and judge them accordingly. In tourism, consumer experience expectations are the output between consumers and tourism systems before the trip. Tourism demand reflects the interplay of tourism needs and motivations. Larsen (2007) points out that part of tourists' expectations of their experiences are related to personal characteristics and that expectations of future trips are usually related to their perceptions.

Understanding consumer expectations may be difficult as tourism products involve various elements that co-exist, including emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual feelings of individuals (Shaw & Ivens, 2002). Those values and attitudes related to the choice of destinations, activities, products and services, transportation, and other tourism enablers can be distinguished by the proportion of cognition and emotion they contain. In expectancy theory, the attitude is motivated by the knowledge or belief of future reward and therefore is fundamentally cognitive, while drive theory is emotional (Gnoth, 1997), but both

theories are important in the context of tourism. Within expectancy theory, the most important elements that influence the customer's expectations regarding the offered tourism product are travel recommendations of others, the travel needs of the individual, travel experiences in the past, communication in the media and among providers, and prices during peak periods (Vroom, 1964). Nowadays, consumers' expectations no longer depend only on traditional word-of-mouth or marketing communication from travel agencies or destinations. The posts, texts, photos, or videos that tourists create about their travel experiences, as well as the content and reviews written by the website operator and other users, are important information for users planning their holiday activities (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011), and thus these potential travellers can rely on the experiences of others when making their decisions. In other words, social media and user-generated content enable tourists to share their experiences, so that the content later affects the travel expectations of potential tourists and becomes a valuable source of tourism information (Yoo et al., 2011).

Tourism expectations are also significantly influenced by the design of the tourism product and the way tourists use the products offered by destinations, including the way they combine the product mix and the promised experiences. Tourists may have specific expectations, for example about the particular character of the destination's climate and culture, attractions, and sights. It is also argued that tourism product experiences are constructed to meet consumer demands by designing experiences ever more carefully to meet specific market expectations, which involves the detailed design of tourism products, encounters, and experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). The current trend in tourism is to multiply and intensify impressions and emotions to surprise, amaze, or shock tourists with their experiences so that they are completely satisfied. This is especially true when these expectations relate to destinations that are still unknown or to a tourism product that has never been experienced before. From this point of view, the formation of customer expectations is important because it is an initial element of the purchase decision. In our case,

expectation can be seen as an attitude before consuming unique tourism products at the destination.

Unique Tourism Products

Contemporary tourists increasingly seek distinctive, innovative, and immersive experiences (Azevedo, 2009). Tourism products serve as significant draw factors motivating tourists to explore destinations. The structure of a tourism product is intricate, arising from a complex production process where the product and process are inseparably linked. A tourism product comprises a blend of tangible and intangible elements, encompassing natural, historical, and sociocultural factors, as well as accommodation, transportation, infrastructure, recreational opportunities, and shopping facilities (McIntosh & Goeldner, 1990).

Recent research delves into the concept of uniqueness in tourism products. From a marketing standpoint, unique products are those significantly differentiated from others in their category, with distinct sensory, visual, functional, emotional, or other attributes perceived positively by consumers (Li et al., 2015). This differentiation is pivotal for product success, with perceptible uniqueness enhancing sensory, functional, image, and emotional appeal, thereby adding positive value for consumers (Choi & Coughlan, 2006). The notion of uniqueness evokes positive consumer associations, emphasizing the desirability of the product. The key to uniqueness is the product's distinctiveness from others, aligning with marketing principles emphasizing product differentiation for success. A unique product is also 'one of a kind', possessing elements of novelty and rarity. In advertising, uniqueness translates to a unique selling proposition (usp) (Morrison, 2018), contributing to product differentiation.

In the tourism realm, historical, natural, cultural, and physical attributes underpin the development of unique products, like local cuisine or souvenirs, imbued with emotional significance that engages tourists in personal experiences (Spielmann et al., 2018). Local destination distinctiveness is crucial for crafting unique products, and preserving tourists' perceptions through sensory engagement with the destination's distinctive values (Spielmann et al., 2018). Tourist

experiences cater to higher-level needs such as novelty, excitement, prestige, socialization, and learning, enhancing overall well-being (Andrades & Dimanche, 2018).

Perceived uniqueness refers to the degree to which a consumer views a product as novel and original compared to similar offerings (Sundar et al., 2014). Scholars suggest that in promoting a tourism product, the initial step involves translating the essential qualities of the destination into visually appealing images for tourists (Jenkins, 1999; Tasci et al., 2007). Cornelissen (2005) emphasizes the importance of compiling and presenting the distinctive attributes of the destination, particularly through photographs on websites, brochures, and other marketing materials. Previous research indicates that the uniqueness of a product significantly influences consumer purchase intentions (Berger & Heath, 2007; Rubera et al., 2011). As tourism resources become increasingly homogeneous, recent evidence suggests that the uniqueness of tourism offerings significantly impacts tourist loyalty (Hikmah et al., 2018).

However, it is important to note that investigating causal relationships in such contexts can often be challenging. As suggested by the literature, regression models are commonly used to understand the relationship between variables, such as the impact of psychological antecedents on tourists' experience expectations (e.g. Hanh & Dung, 2023) and attitudinal antecedents influencing tourists' expectations (e.g. Ozturk & Qu, 2008).

Our research on unique experiences in the Slovenian Istria region focuses on experiences marketed under the Slovenia Unique Experiences (sue) quality label (Slovenian Tourist Board, 2022). Slovenian tourism follows the common vision of Slovenia as a boutique green destination offering high-quality, distinctive, authentic green experiences with local character, thoughtful approach and service, and a strong experiential and personal touch.

Based on the theoretical framework and aiming to delve deeper into the concept of the uniqueness of tourism products from the consumers' viewpoint and their associated expectations, the main research hypothesis is formulated as follows: *The uniqueness of*

new tourism products in Piran & Portorož influences tourists' expectations of them.

Methodology

Sample Design and Data Collection

The empirical study was conducted in Piran and Portorož, an attractive tourist destination in Slovenian Istria. An online self-administered close-ended questionnaire served as the primary tool for data collection. Data collection was conducted in 2022. The target population, drawn from the online database of the Portorož Tourist Board, encompassed all tourists or potential visitors who have subscribed to the e-newsletter on www.portoroz.si, representing both major foreign markets (Italy, Austria, Germany) and domestic ones. The majority of the population of the database are visitors to the destination who have participated in destination experiences and used tourism services, or potential visitors who have participated in destination prize competitions in the last five years as part of the destination's promotional campaign in the main foreign and domestic markets. To a lesser extent, some potential visitors have signed up for the e-newsletter on www.portoroz.si.

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative information for testing predefined hypotheses that had previously been established. As outlined by Larsen (2007), tourists' expectations of their experiences were typically shaped by interactions with travel systems, which might have included activities such as reading brochures, virtual experiences online, or past tourism encounters. The questionnaire's structure was centred on investigating consumers' expectations before visiting the destination.

Initially, respondents were presented with four distinct types of unique tourism products chosen by representatives of the Portorož Tourist Board:

A. *E-bike extravaganza Mareatour offers an e-bike extravaganza exploring scenic towns in Slovenian Istria along the Parenzana railway route. Stops include Forma Viva stone sculptures and Sečovlje Salina Landscape Park, followed by Istrian delicacies at selected restaurants.*

B. *Fonda Fish Garden offers guided tours for a unique experience exploring the distinct flavours of Piran sea bass.*

C. *The Disappearance of Tartini's Violin is a novel city quest, merging Escape Room dynamics with 3D avatars through augmented reality on Slovenian streets, to unravel the mystery of Tartini's violin disappearance – a challenge for intellect, creativity, and teamwork.*

D. *Experience Gourmet Olive Tours at Gramona family farm in Piran's hinterland offers a chance to savour freshly produced specialties amid olive groves with stunning views of Sečovlje saltpans. Tourists explore the intricacies of discovering the techniques behind tasting top-quality organic olive oil – an experience perfectly suited for those passionate about food.*

Each product was accompanied by a photograph and a brief description. Subsequently, respondents were asked to rate the uniqueness of each presented tourism product on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not unique at all) to 5 (very unique).

In the following step, respondents were requested to assess their expectations regarding unique tourism products in general. The expectation scale, derived from a tourist-based expectations questionnaire (Sheng & Chen, 2013), aligns with Schmitt's perspective (1999) and encompasses five experiential dimensions: senses, feelings, actions, thoughts, and related aspects. This scale was evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not agree at all) to 5 (totally agree).

A pilot study was conducted to ensure the questionnaire's comprehensiveness, resulting in minor adjustments to the wording of select items.

Data Analyses

Our selection of four independent variables 'uniqueness' in our model and their relationship to the dependent variable 'expectations' was grounded in their relevance and theoretical underpinnings. Each of these independent variables held significance within the context of tourism experiences. These variables were pivotal for comprehending the dependent variable and played a crucial role in elucidating variability within it. Moreover, from a practical standpoint, they address key inquiries within our research.

Table 1   Descriptive Statistics of Uniqueness of Tourism Products and Consumer Expectations

Constructs/ Items	(1)	(2)
Uniqueness of tourism products		
Product A – E-bike Extravaganza Mareatour	3.92	0.878
Product B – Fonda Fish Garden	4.00	0.844
Product C – The Disappearance of Tartini's Violin	3.97	0.975
Product D – Gourmet Olive Tours	4.09	0.815
Consumer expectations regarding unique tourism products		
EXP1 – to find some interesting characteristics of the cities and countryside, and unique activities	4.36	0.695
EXP2 – to travel with companions with similar interests	4.05	0.875
EXP 3 – that the experience will meet my expectations and I will enjoy it	4.36	0.683
EXP 4– that I will increase my knowledge of the local offer, tradition and history of the place	4.55	0.595

Notes   Column headings are as follows: (1) mean, (2) standard deviation.

Table 1 displays the items and their descriptive statistics in relation to the uniqueness of four tourism products and consumer expectations. Following the results, among the four proposed unique tourism products offered in the destination Piran & Portorož, they consider the product D – Gourmet Olive Tours to be the most unique ($M = 4.09$; $SD = 0.815$), followed by product B – Fonda Fish Garden ($M = 4.00$; $SD = 0.844$), product C – The Disappearance of Tartini's Violin ($M = 3.97$; $SD = 0.975$) and lastly product A – E-Bike Extravaganza Mareatour ($M = 3.92$; $SD = 0.878$). Regarding the results of the study, all the products presented were perceived as unique by the respondents.

Following the descriptive statistics of consumer expectations, the highest expectations were related to increasing tourists' knowledge of the local offer, tradition, and history of the place ($M = 4.55$; $SD = 0.595$), which means that this expectation was rated very high. Expectations related to finding interesting characteristics of the cities and countryside and unique activities ($M = 4.36$; $SD = 0.695$), and that the experience will meet their expectations and they will enjoy it also received high (but not the highest) agreement ($M = 4.36$; $SD = 0.683$). Respondents also agree (but not totally agree) that unique tourism products can enable them to travel with companions with similar interests ($M = 4.05$; $SD = 0.875$).

Before analysing the proposed relationship between the constructs, an EFA factor analysis was conducted for the dataset for the items measuring *consumer expectations* using SPSS 28. The validity of the instrument was checked with EFA factor analysis using principal component analysis (PCA), which is commonly used to determine factors. The Kaiser-Mezer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test were applied to check the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The value of KMO was 0.718 and the value of Bartlett's test was significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that factor analysis was appropriate. All factor loadings exceeded 0.50 are significant, ranging from 0.670 to 0.833 ($p ≤ 0,05$) and are higher than the recommended threshold of 0.40 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Thus, after conducting an EFA factor analysis for the construct measuring tourists' expectations, no item was removed as the analysis showed good measurement validity, leaving all four items for further study. The factor solution accounted for 59.626% of the total variance. Next, the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was used to determine the internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.754, indicating an acceptable level of reliability. Table 2 provides factor loadings, eigenvalue, percentage of variance explained, and Cronbach's alpha for the factor 'consumer expectations'.

The uniqueness of each of the four proposed tourism products was considered as separate constructs and each was rated on a 5-point Likert scale for

Table 2   Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for Construct Consumer Expectations

Factor and items	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Factor: Consumer expectations regarding unique tourism products				
EXP1 – to find some interesting characteristics of the cities and countryside, and unique activities	0.800			
EXP2 – to travel with companions with similar interests	0.670	2.385	59.626	0.754
EXP3 – that the experience will meet my expectations and I will enjoy it	0.775			
EXP4 – that I will increase my knowledge of the local offer, tradition and history of the place	0.833			

Notes   Column headings are as follows: (1) factor loadings, (2) eigenvalue, (3) variance (%), (4) Cronbach's Alpha. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Test for Sampling Adequacy = 0.718; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Sig. < 0.001.

uniqueness. An EFA was not conducted for these constructs as each product was measured using a 1-item scale.

Results and Discussion

The Sample Description

The sample consisted of a total of 362 respondents. After excluding outliers and incomplete responses, 230 valid surveys remained for data analysis, yielding a response rate of 63.5%. Table 3 shows the sample profile, indicating a gender distribution of 59.6% female and 40.4% male. The average age of respondents was 55 years (SD = 11.84), with the majority falling within the 46–55 age bracket (34.8%).

Regarding educational attainment, 2.6% of respondents attended primary school, while 27% attended high school or secondary school. Furthermore, 29.1% held an associate degree, 30% possessed a college or bachelor's degree, and 11.3% had attained a master's or PhD degree.

Research Results

In the final step, a regression analysis was performed to test the hypothesis. A multiple linear regression analysis was carried out to analyse the relationship between a single dependent (consumer expectations) and several independent variables (uniqueness of each of the four proposed tourism products). Thus, in the regression model, the uniqueness of each proposed tourism product was used as the independent variable, and consumer expectations as the dependent variable.

Before running the regression analysis, multicollinearity diagnostics were conducted to identify when one independent variable is a linear function of others.

The factor (VIF) values were in the range of 0.240 and 0.399, which is less than 2, thus it is confirmed that no multicollinearity issue exists among the constructs. This means that the independent variables included in the regression model are not highly correlated with each other. Therefore, the coefficients estimated by the regression analysis are likely to be reliable, and the model is not significantly affected by multicollinearity issues. This enhances the confidence in the results obtained from the regression analysis. These contribute to evaluating the overall fit and robustness of the regression model, thus providing a solid foundation for interpreting the results and drawing meaningful conclusions in the research paper.

Additionally, we conducted a test for heteroscedasticity in the regression analysis using the White test, which compares the errors (residuals) of the regression model with the independent variables to determine whether their variance is constant or not. Based on the values of the standardized residuals (Std. Residual), which is 0.0, and the standard error of standardized predicted values (Std. Predicted Value) ranging from −4.8 to 1.6 with a standard deviation of 1, we conclude that there are no observable signs of heteroscedasticity in the regression model. In our case, the test indicated that the variances were constant, meaning that they were equally distributed for each value of the independent variables.

Table 4 shows that the total variance can be explained by the regression model (R Square = 0.227), considering the influence of the uniqueness of each tourism product on consumer expectations in Piran & Portorož. Based on the regression analysis, we find

Table 3   Sample Profile

Category		N	%
Gender	Male	93	40.4
	Female	137	59.6
Age	18–25	6	2.6
	26–35	14	6.1
	36–45	24	10.4
	46–55	80	34.8
	56–65	66	28.7
	65 and older	40	17.4
	Total	230	100
Education	Elementary school	6	2.6
	High school or secondary school	62	27
	Associate degree	67	29.1
	College degree or Bachelor's degree	69	30
	Masters of Science or PhD	26	11.3
	Total	230	100

that the influence of the uniqueness of individual products can explain 24.1% of the variance in the value of consumer expectations. The regression model is statistically significant at the 0.001 level; therefore the regression model is appropriate (F = 17.817; p < 0.001).

Based on the Beta coefficients, which are statistically significant at the 0.05 level, the research results show that there was a strong relationship between product D (Gourmet Olive Tours) and tourists' expectations (B = 0.250), followed by the relationship between product A (E-bike Extravaganza Mareatour) and tourists' expectations (B = 0.169) and product B (Fonda Fish Garden) and tourists' expectations (B = 0.152). No statistical relationship was found between product C and tourists' expectations. The results of a multiple regression analysis show that the uniqueness of unique tourism products such as Gourmet Olive Tours, E-bike Extravaganza Mareatour, and Fonda Fish Garden positively influenced consumer expectations. That is, the higher the uniqueness of the products, the higher the tourists' expectations.

Thus, the proposed hypothesis of the research can be partially confirmed, meaning that the uniqueness of tourism products influences tourists' expectations.

Tourists who perceive tourism products (products A, B, and D) as more unique have higher expectations of them than tourists who do not perceive these products as unique.

Discussion

In the research, we included four unique experiences in the destination Slovenian Istria. Each experience contains elements that distinguish it from other experiences in the destination. On this basis, we consider each experience to be a unique experience. All four products were perceived as unique by the respondents, including Gourmet Olive Tours as the most unique, followed by Fonda Fish Garden, The Disappearance of Tartini's Violin, and E-bike Extravaganza Mareatour. From this, we can conclude that the olive grove experience contains all the above elements that make it unique for the tourist. The olive grove experience takes place in a landscaped park, in contact with a local olive family who have experience and knowledge, and the tourist is taught about the different varieties of olives, the production method of organic extra virgin olive oil, and other local products offered at the farm. Similarly, the unforgettable experience at the Fonda fish farm also includes elements such as its location on the edge of the landscape park of the salt pans, where a family of biologists has been cultivating and maintaining a fish garden with farmed sea bass for several generations, which are characterized by high quality due to the ecological way of feeding and cultivation. The story of the lost violin is closely connected with the town of Piran, which is considered a historical jewel of Venetian architecture on Slovenian soil, and the famous Venetian violinist and composer Giuseppe Tartini. The content appeals to a target audience interested in cultural tourism. In this case, there is no direct contact with the locals during the experience, so the local touch is not as strong as in the first two experiences. Moreover, this experience is conducted as an interactive game in the centre of Piran in a closed group.

From this, we can conclude that the perception of the uniqueness of the experience depends on the inclusion of local character and a strong experiential or personal touch. This can also be related to a quote of unknown source cited by many destinations:

Table 4   Regression Analysis Results

Items	Beta coefficient	P-value
Product A - E-bike Extravaganza Mareatour	0.169	0.010
Product B - Fonda Fish Garden	0.152	0.028
Product C - The Disappearance of Tartini's Violin	0.109	0.088
Product D - Gourmet Olive Tours	0.250	0.001

Notes   Dependent variable: Consumer expectations Table 4 Adjusted R2 = 0.227; p ≤ 0.001.

'The tourist product is what we buy. The experience is what we live and remember for a lifetime'. Therefore, we can define the experience as a tourism product with a strong experiential value and a personal touch that the tourist remembers for a long time. A unique tourism product must also have a local character that distinguishes it from other similar products. Experiences must touch the heart and mind of the curious traveller and invite them to connect with the culture, landscape, people, and traditions. The tourist does not just consume the content but actively participates in it. This confirms the findings that the attitude and sense of place fostered by local people can also have a significant impact on the tourist's experience (Nickerson, 2006). It is about the deep human desire to connect, to feel, to learn about the culture and the people, to be part of something, to feel the authenticity, and to take something away from their trip that they will remember.

In addition, the research results reveal that increasing knowledge about the local offers, traditions, and history of the place tops the list of tourists' highest expectations (EXP4), followed by the expectation of finding interesting characteristics of the cities, countryside, and unique activities (EXP1) and the confidence that the experience will meet expectations and that they will enjoy it (EXP3). They also expect that the experience will take place in a circle of tourists with similar interests (EXP2). Proceeding from the previous definition of expectations, we can see that expectations arise before the experience or before the use of the tourist product in the place. High expectations related to increasing knowledge about the local offer, and unique activities arise from the perception of a unique experience as we defined it before, i.e. from

the authentic experience and the emotional touch that a unique experience involves. As mentioned earlier, we find that expectations are present even before the visitor arrives at the place and experiences or benefits from the tourism product. This is only possible based on high-quality videos, photos, and descriptions that they read before visiting the destination. Furthermore, they anticipate the experience to unfold in the presence of like-minded individuals, enabling the sharing of experiential and emotional connections. The research results show that users have high expectations for experiences and that the local aspect is strongly emphasized. From this, we can conclude that all materials used to describe the experiences considered in the study are of high quality and express uniqueness with a touch of locality.

Based on the results, we found that the perception of the uniqueness of a product has a positive influence on tourists' expectations. The more tourists perceive a product as unique, the higher their expectations of it. This relationship can be explained by the statements made above that a unique experience includes a local touch and high experiential value as well as a personal touch, which creates high expectations. As we have already noted, the olive grove experience includes all the above components, the local environment and providers, and the acquisition of new skills that form the basis of a unique experience. The same applies to the experience of the Fonda Fish Garden, although the relationship is slightly weaker, which can be explained by the more difficult perception of the product, which is harder to understand from the descriptions and photos used. This applies to a slightly lesser extent to cycling, which is perhaps the least distinguished by its uniqueness, but is nevertheless perceived as a unique

tourism product that creates high expectations. However, users perceive cycling as an activity that can be done in different environments and is not as strongly experiential as the other two tourism products.

Since the research results show a positive relationship between the perception of the uniqueness of the new tourism products in Piran & Portorož and tourists' expectations of these products, the hypothesis can be confirmed. Additionally, this is in line with Morgan and Xu's (2009) findings that tourists who engage with the local culture create a unique and memorable tourism experience. Furthermore, we can confirm that tourism experiences can form and reinforce emotional connections or attachment to a place (Prayag & Ryan, 2012) and a sense of local uniqueness (Rivero, 2017), which is expressed in a unique tourism product.

Conclusions

We can conclude that consumers have high expectations when they choose unique experiences. Similarly, unique tourism products or experiences must include an experiential and an emotional touch that creates long-lasting impressions and a journey home, memories that can be shared with others, knowledge about new places visited, and learning about new cultures, which enables personal growth.

However, the study confirms that the perception of the uniqueness of a product has a positive influence on tourists' expectations. This result is an important contribution to the understanding of the uniqueness of tourism experiences and expectations from the consumer's perspective. It also has several implications for destination marketing practice. For example, destinations and tourism providers should possibly focus on improving the uniqueness of tourism experiences. It is interesting to note that consumers who choose a natural, unique product also enjoy the cultural scenes and local touch in the region. In addition, they enjoy the local cuisine that a destination has to offer and they emphasize the special and unique aspect of this cuisine. Consumers are looking for something that is different and suits their taste in culture and art. This reflects the view of Richards and Wilson (2006), who see creative tourism as an alternative to conventional tourism. Many consumers, ti-

red of the serial reproduction of culture in different destinations, are looking for uniqueness. Moreover, a place that offers unique tourism products should use visuals to convey a combination of different attributes of the place. As a practical tool for destination marketing, it is also suggested that marketing research should first identify the perceptions of the target market group and then determine the content and key attributes for designing unique products. The marketing process to develop a unique product for a destination is not always easy and presents particular challenges related to the complexity of the tourism product and the number of stakeholders involved in destination marketing. Although the facts that a tourist experiences are not explicitly known, one could assume that a good customized product must focus on uniqueness.

Before visiting a destination, potential tourists look for communicative cues to find out if the destination meets their own desires. Tourism is uniquely visual and Gilmore and Pine (2002) suggest that selling experiences requires a unique marketing strategy that engages consumers in a personal, memorable way. From the perspective of marketing and presenting the uniqueness of tourism products, to attract attention and raise expectations, high-quality descriptions, images, and videos must be used in communicating experiences that create a strong experiential and emotional note at the purchase stage, and which are considered unique experiences.

Although the study makes an important contribution to the existing knowledge and the role of tourists' expectations regarding unique tourism products, it is subject to certain limitations that can be addressed in future research. First, the word 'uniqueness' could have different meanings for consumers with different experience expectations, such as novel, innovative, exclusive, unusual, new, surprising, etc. Therefore, to stimulate consumers' imagination and motivation, it is suggested that marketing management apply custom marketing strategies for different target markets. Future research on understanding consumers' interpretation of uniqueness expectations for different target markets in constructing a meaningful tourism experience is therefore useful. Secondly, the research findings show that expectations are high for all the

experiences listed, which can also be influenced by the quality of the accompanying descriptions and photographs. However, this aspect needs to be explored in further studies. Thirdly, the study does not focus on the expectation-related aspect of satisfaction. For further research, it would be interesting to explore the role of expectations of unique experiences and satisfaction in more detail. In addition, the choice of unique tourism products was related to a single destination, namely Piran & Portorož in Slovenian Istria. For future studies, it would be interesting to investigate other innovative tourism products at these destinations, as there are many more new and novel products that could be attractive for the right target group. Also, the study of tourists' psychological needs, i.e. consumers' need for uniqueness when choosing unique tourism products, could be a possible topic for further studies.

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Safety and Health Publication Trends: A Case Study of the Tourism Industry

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In the tourism industry, it is critical to prioritise safety and health measures to guarantee the satisfaction and well-being of local communities and tourists. This study analyses the publication patterns, geographic dispersion, most-cited articles, and thematic emphasis on safety and health research in the tourism industry. Our empirical investigation utilised Scopus and Web of Science datasets, which were analysed using ScientoPy and vosviewer. The results showed a significant increase in research activity during the 2000s, suggesting that researchers emphasised the significance of safety and health practices in the tourism industry. China is the most prolific contributor, producing 154 publications, more than 50% of which were published between 2021 and 2022. The term 'health tourism' arises as the predominant subject of investigation in safety and health research on the tourism industry, having been featured in 215 publications. Significantly, 19% of publications utilising the term 'health tourism' were published between 2021 and 2022, suggesting continued enthusiasm and a recent upsurge in scholarly endeavours within this crucial field. Since 2018, the terms 'tourism destination', 'tourism industry', 'satisfaction', 'public health', 'wellness', 'tourism safety', 'China', 'COVID-19', 'mental health', 'well-being', and 'health and wellness' have dominated the emerging subfield or niche area of studying safety and health in the tourism industry.

Keywords: safety, health, well-being, tourism industry, bibliometric

Introduction

The preservation of safety and the promotion of well-being hold the utmost significance within the global travel and hospitality domain, particularly in the tourism industry (Perić & Vitezić, 2021). However, the longstanding tradition of travel to enhance the overall welfare of tourists has been cast into doubt amidst the unforeseen public health crisis of COVID-19 (Yang & Wong, 2020), when numerous travellers encountered a lack of hospitality in their chosen destinations (Chua et al., 2021). As many individuals travel for purposes such as recreation, commerce, or discovery, prioritising their welfare and protecting their physical well-being becomes imperative (Mitsakou et al., 2021). This multidimensional field involves various facets, including ensuring the safety of travellers during transportation and maintaining health standards in accommodations and destinations (Awan et al., 2021). The scholarly work conducted by Ţuclea et al. (2020) underscores the growing significance placed on the health and safety aspects of tourism destinations. In this context, social media platforms assume a heightened level of involvement in travel by fostering trust among individuals seeking reliable and up-to-date information (Berhanu & Raj, 2020; Ţuclea et al., 2020). Likewise, the proficient administration of safety and health measures safeguards the well-being of tourists and maintains the standing and long-term viability of the inclusive tourism environment (Fountain & Cradock-Henry, 2020; Hassan & Salem, 2021). Therefore, tourism destinations and the travel market must be researched to examine the impacts of evolving perceptions of tourism hazards, experiences, and behavioural intentions (Chan, 2021).

Within the field of tourism, the notion of safety and health comprises a wide range of tactics and rules designed to mitigate potential hazards and safeguard the physical and emotional well-being of those engaging in various areas of travel-related undertakings (Chua et al., 2021). This encompasses the execution of proactive methodologies to alleviate incidents, the guarantee of hygienic circumstances in lodgings, and the establishment of contingency plans (Kang et al., 2021). Furthermore, it encompasses strategic oversight of health-related matters, proactive measures to prevent diseases, equitable healthcare services, and optimal mental well-being (Buckley et al., 2021; Gan et al., 2023). These facets are paramount in cultivating a safe and fulfilling travel experience. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic nature of safety and health within the tourism industry is crucial to anticipating potential obstacles and successfully executing proactive, efficient methods. Throughout history, the concept of travel safety has undergone significant transformations, closely intertwined with societal, technological, and environmental changes (Asghar et al., 2020; Farajat et al., 2017; Ma et al., 2020). The proliferation of mobile media devices equipped with internet connectivity has experienced a notable surge throughout various global regions, leading to a substantial transformation in how individuals utilise their trip time when using public transportation (Julsrud & Denstadli, 2017). Hence, gaining knowledge from previous achievements and obstacles provides valuable perspectives for creating robust and flexible safety frameworks in the present day.

The extant literature concerning bibliometric analysis offers significant contributions to understanding research progress within the tourism sector. An extensive bibliometric analysis uncovers several seminal studies that have substantially contributed to the comprehension of this topic. Liu et al. (2023) conducted a bibliometric analysis on tourism risk communication, identifying emerging research clusters and highlighting the importance of data analysis and modelling in advancing research in this field. Toker and Emir (2023) conducted a bibliometric analysis on tourism safety and security, identifying influential authors, publications, journals, and countries in this area. Another study analysed the literature on tourist safety and security, emphasising the need for research on decision-making, risk perception, and sustainable development in this field (Amaro et al., 2023). Mohanan and Shekhar (2022) conducted a bibliometric analysis on wellness tourism, identifying prominent journals, trending keywords, and the leading country in research output. Roziqin et al. (2023) conducted a bibliometric analysis on digital tourism, providing insights into the field's most cited publications, authors, institutions, and countries. These bibliometric

analyses demonstrate the breadth of research in the tourist sector and highlight the value of systematic reviews in identifying trends, significant contributors, and areas that require more investigation. As the tourist business evolves, bibliometric analyses remain essential tools for researchers and policymakers seeking a thorough grasp of the subject.

In the current era of unparalleled global interconnectedness, the significance of conducting research on safety and health within the tourism industry has become increasingly paramount. To effectively cater to a varied and discriminating customer base and effectively manage potential unforeseen emergencies, it is imperative to possess a comprehensive grasp of the ever-changing dynamics around safety and health. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates the rapid and far-reaching effects of health crises on tourism (Lu et al., 2021). Hence, present-day scholarly investigations tackle immediate issues and lay the groundwork for a resilient and flexible future in tourism safety and health management. The principal aim of this study is to examine the publication trends, geographical distribution, frequently cited publications and thematic focus of safety and health research within the tourism industry over the specified period.

Current Trends and Developments in the Tourism Industry

Rationale for Bibliometric Analysis in Tourism

The safety and health research trends within the tourism industry refer to the bibliometric analysis conducted in the study that discusses safety and health research trends in the tourism industry. Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative research methodology employed to examine and assess scholarly literature, predominantly encompassing academic publications such as journal articles, conference papers, and patents (Donthu et al., 2021). The process entails the utilisation of statistical and mathematical methodologies to evaluate different facets of the literature under question (Abdullah, 2023). The extensive and varied literature on safety and health in the field of tourism highlights the necessity of conducting a comprehensive bibliometric study to derive relevant insights. Therefore, bibliometric analysis is crucial for safety and

health studies undertaken in the tourism industry as it shows the past, current, and future trends in any field while highlighting their blind spots. Principally, since the post-COVID-19 era, the health and safety of visitors has emerged as a primary concern within the tourism industry.

Significance of Safety and Health in Tourism, Especially Post-COVID-19

Tourism is preoccupied with promoting tourism destinations to ensure health and safety measures are in place, making them attractive and secure for visitors (Robina-Ramírez et al., 2023). Implementing safety protocols and measures, encompassing food safety, allergen management, and cross-contamination prevention, profoundly influences the overall food and beverage tourism experience (Yeung & Yee, 2020). Wilks et al. (2021) reported that the tourism industry has transitioned from a proactive to a crisis management and recovery framework, emphasising customer service and creating protocols and emergency plans.

It is imperative to acknowledge that safety and security constitute fundamental necessities in human existence, extending their significance to the tourism domain just as they do in other spheres of scholarly inquiry (Toker & Emir, 2023). The public's perception of security is shaped by variables, including the extent to which risks are apparent and the ability of the administration to mitigate them (Ruiz-Sancho et al., 2021). The tourism industry faces novel management challenges in addressing health hazards due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation has necessitated a paradigm shift in the tourism industry's safety measures and crisis communication strategies (Orîndaru et al., 2021). Social distancing, sanitation standards, and contactless interactions have ensured visitor well-being and industry sustainability (Pretto et al., 2023). Transparent and timely information dissemination is crucial to instil confidence in travellers and mitigate potential risks (Ghosh & Uzuner, 2023).

The interconnectedness of safety, security, and health underscores the multifaceted nature of risk management in the tourism sector (Giliberto & Labadi, 2023). Therefore, it is of utmost importance to engage in extensive research and meticulous strategic

planning to tackle the pressing challenges and bolster the industry's resilience in the face of potential future uncertainties. Using bibliometric analysis allows for the acquisition of quantitative data on the quantity of publications, facilitating the evaluation of academic activity and production.

Role of Bibliometric Analysis in Analysing
Research Trends
Bibliometric analysis aids in identifying significant patterns, recurring motifs, and central areas of focus for comprehending the present state of scholarly inquiry and the future trajectory of the discipline (Duan & Zhu, 2020; Veloutsou & Mafe, 2020). In addition, using bibliometric analysis might elucidate domains within research that are inadequately represented or deficient, hence pinpointing lacunae in knowledge (Mukherjee et al., 2022). This information has the potential to provide valuable guidance for future research endeavours aimed at tackling crucial issues of safety and health within the tourism industry. However, the scope of bibliometric analysis on safety and health within the tourism domain remains constrained.

It is worth noting that prior scholarly investigations have indeed undertaken bibliometric analyses concerning safety and security in the context of tourism (Toker & Emir, 2023), tourist security (Félix et al., 2023), and medical tourism (Habibi et al., 2022), as well as the interplay between contagious diseases and tourism (Goel et al., 2021). Toker and Emir (2023) performed a bibliometric analysis of research on tourism safety and security spanning 45 years. Their study provides a basis for future research in this field. Félix et al. (2023) analysed the scientific production related to tourism security. They found that the literature on tourism safety is gradually growing, focusing on the relationship between security and tourism, risk perception, and customer satisfaction. In their study, Habibi et al. (2022) examined 1,535 papers from 1952 to 2020 that focused on medical tourism. They identified six prominent themes in medical tourism: marketing, economic and political factors, social and cultural factors, ethical considerations, technological aspects, and governmental influences. Within these categories, they found that factors influencing the

emotional aspects of tourists' decision-making were not as well-studied as those influencing the cognitive side of their destination choices. Goel et al. (2021) examine the impact of contagious diseases on tourism by analysing scientific papers and selecting essential topics. The study provides an overview of research on contagious diseases in tourism, including COVID-19, SARS, crisis management, and sustainability.

Therefore, the present investigation employs the applied bibliometric technique to address the subsequent inquiries: What is the overall publication trend in safety and health research within the tourism industry? Which countries or regions have been the primary contributors to research on safety and health in the tourism industry? What are the most frequently cited publications in tourism-related safety and health research? What are the key thematic areas within safety and health in the tourism industry that have received significant research attention? Are there emerging subfields or niche areas within safety and health in tourism that have gained traction in recent years?

Methodology
Databases, Keywords, and Software
The meticulous curation of suitable databases serves as the fundamental cornerstone upon which any bibliometric analysis is constructed. In this study, two notable databases, namely Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), were deliberately selected due to their comprehensive scope of encompassing scholarly literature. Scopus presents an extensive reservoir of scholarly publications spanning diverse fields of study (Sofyan et al., 2023), furnishing a comprehensive resource for investigating safety and health research within the tourism industry. WoS, renowned for its meticulous indexing and comprehensive citation tracking (Birkle et al., 2020), is a valuable counterpart to Scopus by providing a curated assemblage of esteemed scholarly journals and conference proceedings with significant influence. Collectively, these databases guarantee a comprehensive and all-encompassing dataset for analysis.

The selection of appropriate and specific keywords is critical to retrieving publications that are precise and relevant. This study used a variety of essential terms that were incorporated into the search strategy

Table 1   Data Integration and Duplicate Xclusion

Data Pre-processing Output	Information	(1)	(2)
Initial datasets	Raw data from Scopus and WoS	2298	-
	Automatic type-filter publication to remove non-related document	505	22.00
	Total publications after selecting document types (Research articles, conference papers, book chapters, review papers, and proceedings)	1,793	-
	Publications in WoS	751	41.90
	Publication in Scopus	1,042	58.10
Duplicated removal results	Duplicated publications in both databases	438	24.40
	Duplicated publications from WoS	7	0.90
	Duplicated papers from Scopus	431	41.40
Final datasets	Total publications after eliminating duplicates	1,355	
	Publications in WoS	744	54.90
	Publications in Scopus	611	45.10

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

as follows: ('safety and health' or 'safety' or 'health') and ('tourism' or 'tourist' or 'hospitality'). The tourism industry's safety and health research datasets were retrieved from Scopus and WoS databases in October 2023. Implementing this varied strategy guaranteed the inclusion of a wide array of safety and health research in the tourism industry. The title search was utilised to retrieve the search string to obtain a more precise and accurate list of publications. The significance of title-based dataset retrieval lies in its ability to emphasise research subjects' structural and content-related advancements (Tullu, 2019). The search string was deliberately constructed to be all-encompassing by including different iterations of these keywords, guaranteeing that the analysis would encompass numerous publications on safety and health in the tourism industry.

The selection of software tools is crucial for efficient analysis and processing of bibliometric data. Both ScientoPy and vosviewer were employed in this study. ScientoPy served as an initial data processing and bibliometric analysis platform. The software's intuitive interface and various features enabled the execution of data extraction, deduplication, and fundamental bibliometric indicator calculations (Ruiz-Rosero et al., 2019). In contrast, vosviewer significantly contributed to the advancements in visualisation and clustering analysis (Liu et al., 2022). By utilising its functionalities to generate keyword co-occurrence maps, co-authorship networks, and thematic clustering, vosviewer facilitated a more comprehensive examination of the structure and content of the dataset (Abd Aziz et al., 2021). Using these software tools in conjunction made a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of safety and health research in the tourism sector possible.

Pre-processing Datasets

The datasets were pre-processed to facilitate the Scopus and WoS integration and eliminate duplicate entries. Preliminary processing is performed on the bibliographic datasets utilising ScientoPy. In this stage, ScientoPy retrieves datasets from the Scopus database by substituting the author's name with a semicolon as part of a standardisation procedure. Additionally, to remove duplicate entries with identical names and authors, the procedure entails removing special characters, dashes, and commas from the metadata of both databases (Ruiz-Rosero et al., 2019).

Table 1 illustrates that the initial findings comprise 2,298 raw datasets acquired from publications in Scopus and WoS. In this study, a document-type filtering strategy was employed to exclude a total of 505 articles, which constituted 22.00% of the datasets.

Before initiating the elimination of duplicates, a total of 1,793 publications were initially found. A total of 438 duplicate entries, accounting for 24.40% of the datasets, were detected in this investigation, including data from both databases. Over time, 1,355 publications have been deemed appropriate for inclusion in the ongoing study. Of the publications, 744 (54.90%) were acquired from the WoS database, while 611 (45.10%) were retrieved through Scopus. The validated datasets in this study met the threshold for undertaking bibliometric analysis, surpassing 300 (Donthu et al., 2021). Notably, having more than 100 publications to conduct a bibliometric analysis is crucial, whereas datasets containing less than 100 articles may necessitate systematic or scoping review approaches (Abdullah, 2023).

Results

The subsequent sections elucidate the findings to address the research questions formulated in the introduction section.

The Overall Publication Trends

The bibliometric analysis entailed an exhaustive examination of scholarly articles encompassing the multifaceted domain of safety and health within the tourism industry, spanning a considerable temporal spectrum from 1953 to 2022. The decision to choose such a lengthy duration offered a thorough and all-encompassing examination of the progression of scholarly inquiry within this pivotal field.

Figure 1 illustrates the annual distribution of publications over this period. Notably, the field witnessed a steady growth in research output, particularly in Scopus and WoS, from the late 1970s onwards. The earliest publications in the 1950s and 1960s primarily laid the foundation for safety and health considerations within the tourism industry. For example, an article by Uchaudabe (1963) entitled 'Health Guide for Tourist Agencies' provided valuable insights into ensuring travellers' well-being. This seminal work addressed essential health guidelines and practices that tourist agencies could implement to safeguard the health of their clientele. It laid crucial groundwork for
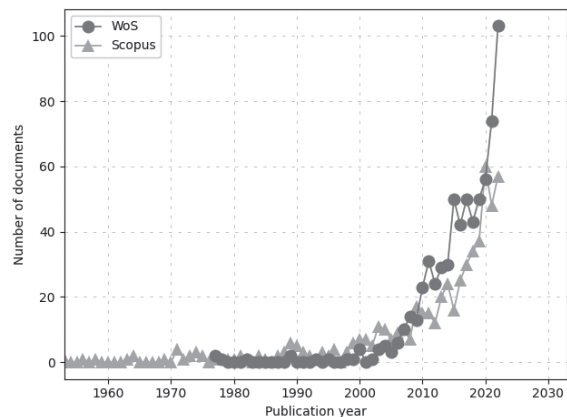

Figure 1   The Evolution of Publications

subsequent research and practices in the domain of safety and health in tourism.

The 2000s marked a notable surge in research activity, indicating an increased recognition of the importance of safety and health practices in tourism in Scopus and WoS databases. This trend continued into the 2010s, as researchers and practitioners focused more on employees' and tourists' welfare and well-being. The most recent decade, from 2012 to 2022, has witnessed a continued growth in research output. This surge indicates the industry's heightened emphasis on ensuring safety and well-being, particularly in the face of evolving challenges, such as global health crises, climate-related concerns, and advancements in tourism technologies.

The longitudinal analysis of publications from 1953 to 2022 reveals a discernible pattern highlighting the growing acknowledgement and importance of safety and health concerns within the tourism sector in both databases, Scopus and WoS. More publications were identified in the WoS database, underscoring comprehensive safety and health research coverage in the tourism industry. The trajectory mentioned signifies the evolution and advancement of the respective field and serves as a testament to the industry's commendable endeavours in proactively emphasising the welfare and satisfaction of its personnel and customer base.
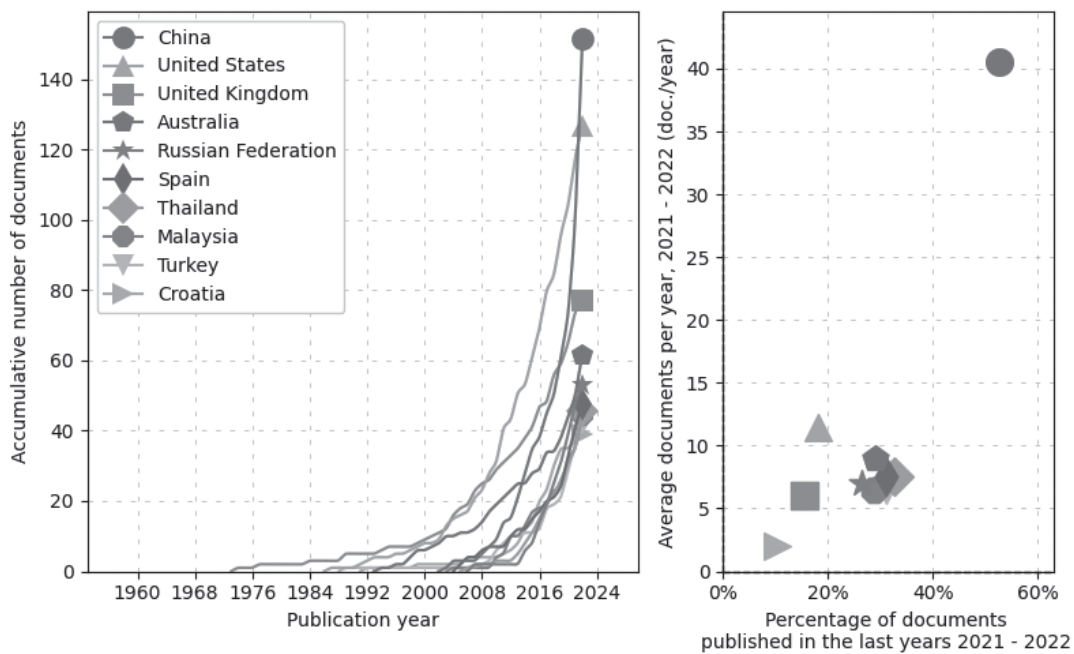
Figure 2   The Productivity of the Top Ten Countries

Productive Country

This bibliometric analysis offers a comprehensive overview of safety and health research in the tourism industry, spanning from 1953 to 2022. Figure 2 visually represents the top ten countries based on their safety and health research productivity within the tourism industry. Based on Figure 2, among the examined countries, China emerges as the most prolific contributor, with 154 publications, over half of which were published in 2021 and 2022. Following closely, the United States and the United Kingdom demonstrate substantial contributions, with 127 and 77 publications, respectively.

Australia and the Russian Federation exhibit significant engagement in this domain, with approximately 29% and 26% of their respective publications released in the most recent two years (2021 and 2022), respectively. Spain and Thailand also show noteworthy involvement, with over 30% of their publications published in 2021 and 2022. Malaysia, Turkey, and Croatia demonstrate substantial commitment to safety and health research in the tourism industry, with 29%, 31%, and 10% of their publications in the same period.

These findings underscore the global interest and commitment to advancing safety and health considerations within the tourism industry, with a notable surge in recent research output, particularly in light of contemporary challenges.

The Most Frequently Cited Publications

Table 2 provides a detailed overview of publications within safety and health research in the tourism industry that have garnered over 100 citations. These influential works are pivotal to the field, significantly impacting subsequent research endeavours. Notable among these is the study authored by Mueller and Kaufmann (2001) titled 'Wellness tourism: Market analysis of a special health tourism segment and implications for the hotel industry', which has accumulated 33 citations. This seminal work stands out as a cornerstone in the discourse surrounding safety and health considerations in the tourism sector, providing a foundational framework for subsequent studies.

Additionally, a review paper authored by Carrera and Bridges (2006) titled 'Globalisation and healthcare: Understanding health and medical tourism' has

Table 2   Publications With More Than 100 Citations

Author	Title	Citation	Document Type
Mueller & Kaufmann (2001)	Wellness tourism: Market analysis of a special health tourism segment and implications for the hotel industry	333	Article
Carrera and Bridges (2006)	Globalisation and healthcare: Understanding health and medical tourism	225	Review
George (2003)	Tourist's perceptions of safety and security while visiting Cape Town	216	Article
Seabra et al. (2013)	Heterogeneity in risk and safety perceptions of international tourists	197	Article
Pocock and Phua (2011)	Medical tourism and policy implications for health systems: a conceptual framework from a comparative study of Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia	180	Review
Hall (2011)	Health and medical tourism: A kill or cure for global public health?	179	Review
Huang et al. (2020)	Predicting tourists' health risk preventative behaviour and travelling satisfaction in Tibet: Combining the theory of planned behavior and health belief model	159	Article
Jonas et al. (2011)	Determinants of health risk perception among low-risk-taking tourists traveling to developing countries	150	Article
Goodrich and Goodrich (1987)	Healthcare tourism - an exploratory study	149	Article
Garcia-Altes (2005)	The development of health tourism services	140	Article
Richter (2003)	International tourism and its global public health consequences	137	Article
Horowitz (2007)	Medical tourism--health care in the global economy.	124	Article
Pienaar and Willemse (2008)	Burnout, engagement, coping and general health of service employees in the hospitality industry	123	Article
Li et al. (2017)	Spatiotemporal Variability of Contaminants in Lake Water and Their Risks to Human Health: A Case Study of the Shahu Lake Tourist Area, Northwest China	114	Article
Hu et al. (2021)	Creating a safe haven during the crisis: How organisations can achieve deep compliance with COVID-19 safety measures in the hospitality industry	110	Article
Weatherdon et al. (2016)	Observed and Projected Impacts of Climate Change on Marine Fisheries, Aquaculture, Coastal Tourism, and Human Health: An Update	110	Review
Fernández et al. (2007)	Impact of the Spanish Smoking Law on Exposure to Second-Hand Smoke and Respiratory Health in Hospitality Workers: A Cohort Study	104	Article
Sönmez et al. (2020)	Understanding the effects of COVID-19 on the health and safety of immigrant hospitality workers in the United States	102	Article
Amo et al. (2006)	Nature-based tourism as a form of predation risk affects body condition and health state of Podarcis muralis lizards	101	Article

amassed 225 citations, further attesting to its enduring relevance and influence within the field. This work addresses critical aspects of safety and health management in the context of medical tourism, offering valuable insights for researchers and practitioners alike. The third-ranked most cited article in safety and health research within the tourism industry is 'Tourist's perceptions of safety and security while visiting Cape Town' by George in 2003. This influential article has accumulated an impressive 216 citations, highlighting its substantial impact on the discourse surrounding safety considerations in tourism.

Other publications listed in Table 2 have also achieved commendable citation counts, underscoring their enduring impact on the tourism industry's discourse surrounding safety and health. Collectively, these works signify a body of literature that has significantly shaped the research trajectory in this domain.

The Key Thematic Areas

The thematic analysis of keywords reveals emerging safety and health research trends within the tourism industry, providing valuable insights into scholarly publications' evolving priorities and focus areas in this field. Figure 3 illustrates the compilation of the keywords of the ten foremost authors that effectively mirror the fundamental thematic elements that have been previously investigated. Based on Figure 3, The keyword 'Health Tourism' emerges as the most prominent area of focus within safety and health research in the tourism industry, with 215 publications. Notably, 19% of these publications were released in 2021 and 2022, indicating a sustained interest and recent surge in research activity within this critical domain. The broader keyword 'Tourism' remains a significant area of scholarly inquiry, with 122 publications dedicated to various facets of safety and health considerations within the tourism industry. Approximately 22% of these publications were produced in the most recent two years, reflecting an ongoing commitment to understanding and enhancing safety and health practices in tourism.

The specific area of 'Medical Tourism' garners substantial attention, with 93 publications addressing the unique safety and health considerations associa-
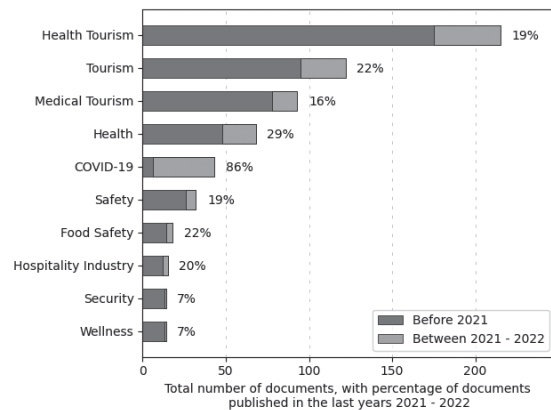

Figure 3   The Rank of the Top Ten Authors' Keywords

ted with this specialised form of travel. Notably, 16% of these publications emerged in 2021 and 2022, indicating a contemporary focus on this evolving aspect of the tourism industry. The broad keyword of 'Health' is a fundamental pillar of safety and health research in the tourism industry, with 68 publications dedicated to understanding and promoting well-being in travel contexts. Impressively, 29% of these publications were released in the most recent two years, underscoring the heightened relevance of health considerations in contemporary tourism.

Unsurprisingly, the global health crisis induced by the COVID-19 pandemic has been a focal point of recent research. Of the 43 publications addressing 'COVID-19' in the context of tourism safety and health, a staggering 86% were published in 2021 and 2022. This signifies the urgent need for scholarly inquiry and practical solutions to navigate the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic. The keyword 'Safety' remains a central concern in the tourism industry, with 32 publications dedicated to understanding and enhancing safety measures for tourists and industry professionals. Approximately 19% of these publications were released in the most recent two years, reflecting a sustained commitment to safeguarding the well-being of all stakeholders.

'Food Safety' emerges as a crucial sub-theme within the broader context of safety and health in the tourism industry, with 18 publications specifically addressing this critical aspect. About 22% of these
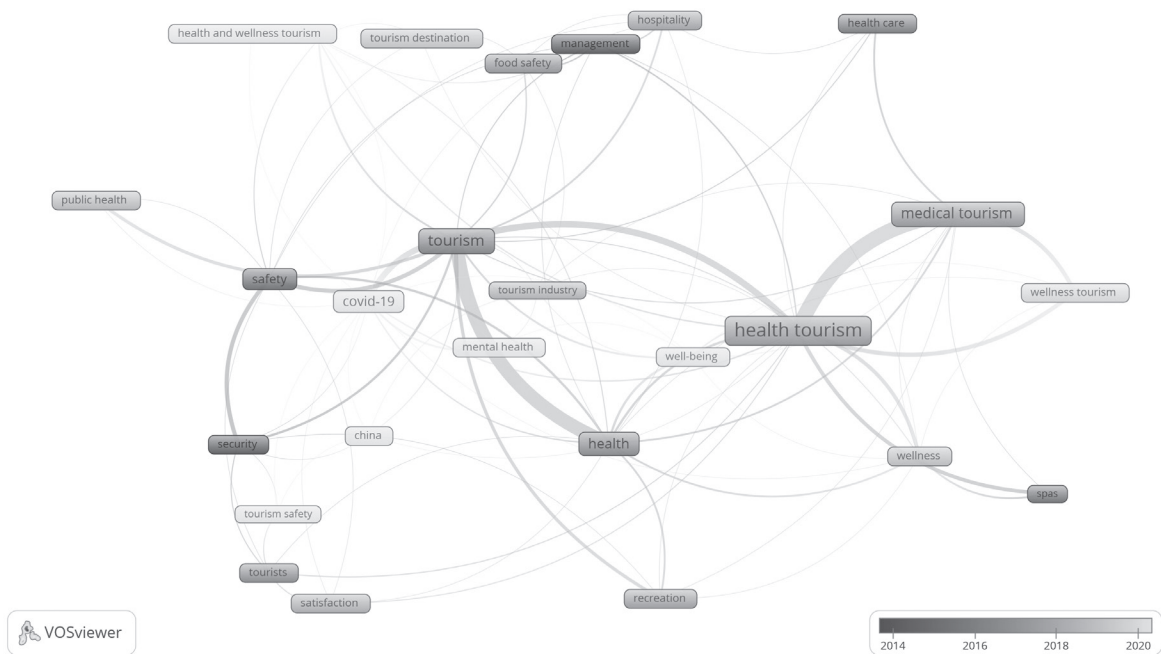
Figure 4   Overlay Visualisation of Authors' Keywords

publications were produced in 2021 and 2022, highlighting the importance of ensuring safe and hygienic food practices in the tourism sector. The 'Hospitality Industry' is a pivotal sector within tourism, and 15 publications are dedicated to understanding and enhancing safety and health practices within this domain. A notable 20% of these publications were released in the most recent two years, indicating a continued commitment to ensuring the well-being of both guests and staff in hospitality settings.

'Security' represents a critical aspect of safety and health in the tourism industry, with 14 publications addressing various dimensions of ensuring the safety and security of tourists and tourism infrastructure. While the percentage of publications in 2021 and 2022 is comparatively lower at 7%, this keyword remains an integral part of the broader safety discourse in tourism. 'Wellness' emerges as a significant area of focus within safety and health research, with 14 publications dedicated to understanding and promoting holistic well-being in tourism. Similarly to the keyword 'Security', the percentage of publications in 2021 and 2022 is

7%, emphasising the enduring importance of wellness considerations in the tourism industry.

These top ten keywords results provide a comprehensive overview of the critical areas of focus in safety and health research within the tourism industry. The percentages of publications in 2021 and 2022 indicate the recent surge in research activity, particularly in response to emerging challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This data will be instrumental in informing future research directions and practical measures to enhance safety and health practices in the dynamic field of tourism.

The Emerging Subfields or Niche Areas

The exploration of emerging subfields and niche areas within safety and health research in the tourism industry is vividly illustrated through the VOSviewer mapping, employing overlay visualisation techniques as depicted in Figure 4. In order to finalise the overlay visualisation network of authors' keywords utilising VOSviewer, this study employed a threshold

of 10 occurrences. Therefore, out of the 3,164 total keywords, only 25 met the specified threshold.

Based on Figure 4, the overlay visualisation of authors' keywords depicted that the keywords 'tourism destination', 'tourism industry', 'satisfaction', 'public health', 'wellness', 'tourism safety', 'China', 'covid-19', 'mental health', 'well-being', and 'health and wellness' have dominated the emerging subfield or niche area of studying safety and health in the tourism industry since 2018. These keywords indicate a holistic and multifaceted methodology in regard to researching safety and health within the tourism sector. These phenomena reflect the dynamic shifts in the field, propelled by worldwide occurrences, shifting consumer inclinations, and an increasing cognisance of the paramount significance of safety and health in travel.

Discussion

The examination of safety and health within the tourism sector has been the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry over several decades, with notable contributions dating back to 1953 as documented in reputable academic databases such as Scopus and WoS. Given the burgeoning corpus of scholarly works, the utilisation of bibliometric methodology within the purview of this study domain is anticipated to augment the existing reservoir of knowledge on the subject matter and make noteworthy contributions to the pertinent research sphere through diverse means. The present study has successfully addressed the research questions outlined within its scope, contributing to a novel comprehension of this domain. It also facilitates the advancement of future research trajectories. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the outcomes will serve as a stimulus for researchers to prioritise safety and health concerns within the tourism industry, thereby acting as agents of change to promote consciousness in this domain.

The findings derived from this study make a valuable contribution to the existing body of literature on safety and health within the tourism industry context. The imperative of exercising scrutiny cannot be overstated, as the tourism industry is intricately entwined with the implementation of safety and health pro-

tocols, necessitating the utmost consideration from all stakeholders, akin to their counterparts in various other service sectors. The recent global pandemic, covid-19, has further emphasised the importance of ensuring the well-being of tourists and employees in the tourism industry (Javed et al., 2023). In response to increasing demand, organisations in the health tourism sector have been transformed to meet global standards and gain a competitive advantage (Doğan & Yüzbaşıoğlu, 2021).

The rise in scholarly investigation regarding safety and health within the tourist business during the 2000s and succeeding years signifies a growing acknowledgement of the utmost significance of safety and health protocols within this realm. This phenomenon is notably apparent in the increased emphasis on employees' and tourists' welfare and well-being (Félix et al., 2023; Toker & Emir, 2023). The time spanning from 2012 to 2022 is significant, signifying a persistent and heightened dedication towards preserving safety and welfare. For example, the covid-19 pandemic has precipitated increased research on public health and the tourism industry's recovery, highlighting the need for additional safety precautions (Qiao et al., 2023). The observed increase in activity indicates the industry's proactive approach to tackling emerging difficulties, such as global health crises, climate-related issues, and developments in tourist technologies (Chaudhuri & Ray, 2015).

China is identified as the prominent leader in safety and health research on the tourism business, based on an analysis of productive countries. China has an impressive record of 154 publications in this field. Significantly, most of these contributions were published during the last two years (2021 and 2022), indicating a notable increase in research endeavours. China's increased involvement in the tourism industry is consistent with its significant position as a prominent participant in the global market (Matveevskaya et al., 2020). This underscores its dedication to safeguarding the security and welfare of both local and foreign tourists. The subject of health and safety also witnesses noteworthy contributions from the United States and the United Kingdom, with 127 and 77 articles, respectively. These nations, widely recognised

for their robust academic and research frameworks, significantly influence the tourism sector's discussion on safety and health.

Understanding the most often referenced articles in safety and health research within the tourism industry carries substantial importance for various convincing rationales. Primarily, the works included in Table 2 are widely recognised and referenced as significant contributions to the scholarly discussion on safety and health aspects within the tourism industry. One particularly noteworthy contribution is the original research conducted by Mueller and Kaufmann (2001) on 'Wellness tourism: Market analysis of a special health tourism segment and implications for the hotel industry'. This study has garnered significant attention, evidenced by its 333 citations, and has established itself as a fundamental framework for later scholarly investigations in this field. Comprehending and appreciating significant contributions of previous academic works is crucial for researchers and practitioners, as it establishes a robust basis for constructing and enhancing further investigations. A likely reason is that advancing safety and health tourism is perceived as contributing to societal progress by stimulating considerable investment in society's political, social, cultural, and economic sectors, generating income, employment, vitality, and satisfaction (Rezapour et al., 2023).

The examination of thematic patterns in the utilisation of keywords, as illustrated in Figure 3, presents a noteworthy augmentation to the existing corpus of knowledge in the realm of safety and health investigation within the tourism domain. This analysis presents a comprehensive overview of the dynamic priorities and focal points within this pivotal domain, imparting valuable discernment of the shifting landscape of scholarly publications. 'Health Tourism' emerges as the most prominent keyword, underscoring the substantial interest and research activity devoted to this specialised form of travel. With 215 publications, it is a pivotal area of focus, reflecting a sustained commitment to understanding and enhancing safety and health practices within health-oriented tourism experiences. Notably, 19% of these publications were released in 2021 and 2022, which indicates a recent surge in research activity, highlighting its enduring relevance and impact on the field. Based on the findings of Dunets et al. (2020), it is evident that health tourism exhibits considerable potential. The authors propose developing specialised programmes close to established resorts, equipped with the requisite infrastructure and medical amenities, tailored to meet the unique demands of individual clients. Thus, the rapid growth of the health tourism sector in recent years has attracted the attention of researchers, entrepreneurs, and managers, highlighting the need for branding activities in health tourism destinations (Lopes & Rodríguez-López, 2022).

The visual representation of authors' keywords, as depicted in Figure 4, offers a striking glimpse into the burgeoning subdomains and specialised spheres within the realm of safety and health research in the tourism industry. The keywords that have been identified in recent research, from 2018 onward, emphasise a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. These keywords include 'tourism destination', 'tourism industry', 'satisfaction', 'public health', 'wellness', 'tourism safety', 'China', 'COVID-19', 'mental health', 'well-being', and 'health and wellness.' Adopting this comprehensive methodology represents a deviation from limited, compartmentalised viewpoints and instead employs a more integrated and all-encompassing strategy for investigating health and safety in the tourism industry. By altering this approach, a fresh and innovative contribution is made to the discipline, providing a more intricate comprehension of the multifaceted dynamics and interconnections within the tourism sector.

The dominance of keywords like 'COVID-19', 'China', and 'public health' reflects the heightened awareness and responsiveness of the tourism research field to contemporary global events and public health concerns. Scholars have focused on the impact of COVID-19 on various aspects of the tourism industry, including its effects on different sectors, countries, stakeholders, and contexts (Alamineh, 2022). The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of public health assurance and the challenges faced in ensuring the safety and effectiveness of health services (Goel et al., 2021). Additionally, the literature has explored the concept of post-pandemic tourism, emphasising

the need for sustainability, local-scale tourism, and the restoration of natural resources damaged by tourism activities (Permata et al., 2022). The pandemic has been seen as a sustainability challenge, and the literature on covid-19 and tourism provides insights into building resilience, adaptivity, flexibility, collaboration, and co-creation in the face of such challenges (Persson-Fischer & Liu, 2021). The research on risk and tourism has also seen an upward trend, focusing on the recovery of the tourism industry and the management of public health risks (Qiao et al., 2023).

Additionally, the identified keywords may be focal points for forthcoming research endeavours. For example, conducting additional research on the precise intricacies of the interactions between the 'tourism industry' and the 'tourism destination' could provide significant knowledge regarding the determinants that impact the safety and well-being of visitors. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies inherent in this connection is paramount to grasping how diverse stakeholders, such as tour operators, lodging providers, local authorities, and destination managers engage in collaborative efforts to guarantee the safety and welfare of visitors. The interactions between the tourism industry and the tourism destination involve collaboration among these various stakeholders to ensure the safety and well-being of visitors (Mălăescu, 2022; Sattar & Sfodera, 2023; Wen et al., 2023).

Destination management organisations play a crucial role in this dynamic by developing plans for sustainable tourism, collaborating with service providers, promoting the destination's image, and creating authentic tourism products (Faur & Ban, 2022). Additionally, directly and indirectly, reenactors impact the development of a heritage site as a tourism destination through involvement in decision-making boards, attracting funding, and designing reenactment activities that enhance the visitor experience (Merkle et al., 2023). Online communities, such as travel vloggers, have also emerged as new stakeholders in sustainable tourism, contributing to the market through their online presence. Understanding these dynamics is essential for comprehending how stakeholders work together to ensure the safety and well-being of tourists in the tourism destination.

An in-depth analysis of the terms 'mental health', 'well-being', and 'health and wellness' in the tourism industry can provide insights into the psychological and emotional welfare of visitors, which is increasingly recognised as crucial for their overall satisfaction and security. The concept of well-being tourism encompasses care for the tourist's body, soul, and mind, as well as the destination area's environment, society, and economy (Coelho et al., 2023; Młynkowiak-Stawarz, 2023). Tourists' motivation in health and wellness tourism significantly predicts their behavioural intentions. Their perceived value of health and wellness tourism partially mediates the associations between their behavioural intention and various motivations (Gan et al., 2023). The positive impact of tourism on public health and well-being is often emphasised. However, tourism policies should also consider potential adverse effects on tourists and the communities of tourist destinations (Buckley, 2023). Understanding and addressing tourists' mental health and well-being is crucial for designing tourism experiences that enhance their satisfaction and overall experience.

Although Figure 4 provides a complete summary of current research goals, there may be specific issues of safety and health in tourism that are not well covered. For instance, it is imperative to consider further distinct cultural factors, regional disparities, and specialised areas within the industry. Moreover, examining the potential impact of future technologies, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, on improving safety and health protocols within the tourism industry presents a promising avenue for investigation.

Conclusion
This bibliometric analysis comprehensively investigates safety and health issues in the tourism sector, covering approximately 70 years. By conducting a thorough bibliometric analysis, this study provides essential insights and significant contributions to this vital field of research. The increasing number of scholarly inquiries highlights the growing recognition of the utmost significance of safety and health protocols in tourism. The increased prioritisation of the well-being of employees and tourists demonstrates

a proactive stance in tackling growing difficulties, such as global health crises and improvements in tourism technologies.

China's significant involvement in safety and health research in the tourism industry underscores its commitment to safeguarding the well-being and security of domestic and international visitors. The United States and the United Kingdom substantially contribute to the industry's discourse on safety and health owing to their well-established academic frameworks. The seminal research conducted by Mueller and Kaufmann regarding 'Wellness tourism: Market analysis of a special health tourism segment and implications for the hotel industry' is particularly notable for its establishment of a fundamental framework that has guided subsequent studies. Comprehending and valuing these seminal contributions is critical for scholars and professionals, serving as the foundation for subsequent inquiries.

The current bibliometric analysis significantly contributes to understanding safety and health in the tourism industry by offering a historical perspective, addressing current challenges, and identifying emerging areas of concentration, fostering a deeper scholarly comprehension. In addition, this study advocates for academics prioritising safety and health problems within a continuously expanding business to offer tourists secure and rewarding experiences. In light of the ongoing advancements in the sector, it is vital to prioritise the comprehension and resolution of these difficulties. Moreover, delving into the prospective ramifications of forthcoming technologies on safety and health standards offers a promising route for further scholarly inquiry.

Although this study thoroughly examines safety and health research in the tourism sector, its limitations must be duly recognised. First, the bibliometric analysis depends on the information obtained from secondary databases (Scopus and Web of Science (WoS)). Although these databases are comprehensive and well-known, they might not encompass all pertinent publications within the discipline. There is a possibility that specific contributions published in non-indexed or specialised journals, grey literature, or emerging digital platforms may not be incorporated. This omission could result in a representation of

safety and health research within the tourism industry that is only partially comprehensive.

The second limitation is that it is imperative to recognise that trends and priorities in safety and health research may continue to change despite the study's provision of a longitudinal analysis spanning nearly seven decades. Possible future developments, technological advances, and changes in societal viewpoints that were not accounted for in this analysis could give rise to additional research domains. Hence, this research provides a momentary depiction; further investigations are required to monitor and comprehend the ever-changing safety and health environment within the ever-changing tourism sector. As tourism safety and health research evolves, intriguing research areas arise. First, tourist industry–destination dynamics must be studied. Understanding how stakeholders work together to protect visitors is crucial. This could involve investigating how tour operators, housing providers, local authorities, and location management create and enforce safety measures.

Given the growing importance of mental health, well-being, and holistic wellness in tourism, future studies should examine the psychological and emotional components of tourist pleasure and security. Well-being tourism research on tourists' experiences, behavioural intentions, and potential negative consequences on tourists and destination communities would be helpful. Additionally, improving travellers' mental health and well-being can improve the design and satisfaction of the tourism experience. Studying how upcoming technologies like artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and augmented reality affect tourism safety and health protocols is intriguing as technology advances. Understanding how these innovations improve safety, immersive training, and crisis management could change the industry's safety and well-being strategy. Finally, cross-cultural research and regional safety and health disparities would help clarify how cultural circumstances affect tourism safety goals. Cultural influences on risk perception, crisis communication, and safety protocols may be examined. Such research would help create culturally sensitive and effective safety and health policies for varied tourism areas.

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Factors Influencing Hospitality Students' Career Goals in Indonesia

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Although the hospitality industry is growing rapidly, several studies show that the industry still lacks a skilled workforce to meet demands. This condition is exacerbated by the fact that many hospitality students change their career aspirations after they graduate. The purpose of this research is to explore the factors that influence the career goals of hospitality students in Indonesia. A self-administered survey was utilized to collect data from Indonesian hospitality students. A total of 430 questionnaires were gathered for statistical analysis. The data were analysed by using the partial least squares structural equation modelling tool that gives proof of data dependability and validity. The empirical results show that the students' intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation significantly influences undergraduate hospitality students' career goals. Similarly, the study also found that career exposure and third parties positively influence hospitality students' career goals. The findings in this study are beneficial for hospitality businesses in preparing and establishing their strategy in the recruitment process. Meanwhile, for higher education institutions, they can better prepare their students by providing various learning opportunities such as seminars, so that students can get career exposure and attain a realistic picture of their future careers.

Keywords: career goals, motivation, career exposure, third parties

Introduction

The tourism and hospitality sector in Indonesia contributes to the economy by providing various employment opportunities, income, and foreign exchange earnings (Situmorang et al., 2019). However, a highly competitive and constantly changing industry with a distinct nature presents its own set of barriers in terms of hiring and retaining talented and trained people (Robinson et al., 2016). The availability of high-quality staff to provide, operate, and manage tourist products is a critical aspect of the success of the hospitality business (Le et al., 2018). Although the hospitality industry is growing rapidly, several studies show that the industry still lacks a skilled workforce to meet the industry's demands (Penny Wan et al., 2014). This is because the tourism and hospitality business has a bad reputation among young job seekers, making it very difficult to hire and retain talented workers due to low pay (Omar et al., 2021), long working hours, a part-time or day labour system and a high

proportion of low-skilled jobs (Seqhobane & Kokt, 2021).

This situation will potentially lead to shortages and gaps in the skilled workforce in the future. Therefore, it is necessary to start looking for a way to attract the interest of the younger generation so that they are willing to work in the hospitality sector (Goh & Lee, 2018). In this study, this refers to tourism and hospitality students who are skilled and well-trained and who are a highly desirable source of workers in the hospitality job market (Aynalem et al., 2016). Employees who have obtained professional qualifications through education will play an important role in improving service quality, increasing productivity, and adding value to the business (Ince & Kendir, 2016). Nevertheless, past research has found that only a limited number of these graduates pursue their career in this sector upon the completion of their studies (Goh & Okumus, 2020; Reichenberger & Raymond, 2021; Tan et al., 2016).

Very often students feel confused and do not have career goals, even at the point when their study period is almost over (Qamaria & Astuti, 2021). A career is described as an individual's personal journey in their professional life, in their field of employment, and from the position in which they begin until the conclusion of their working life (Wong et al., 2019).

One of the most important things in a person's life is to have a career goal, which is described as a chosen career outcome that people want to achieve, such as a promotion, an increase in compensation, or the development of new skills (Seibert et al., 2013). Understanding the content of career goals can be useful knowledge for those who are just starting out in their professions, because they allow a person to direct their efforts in a highly focused manner with a well-defined plan of action (Greco & Kraimer, 2020; Rahim, 2020). Song and Chon (2012) proposed in past research to examine the career decisions of hospitality management students in order to retain talented employees and reduce turnover. Although it is widely assumed that a person may set their own career goals, multiple studies have revealed that these findings are affected by a variety of factors, including intrinsic/extrinsic motivation (Lee et al., 2019).

The drive to act in pursuit of a goal is known as motivation and is the most important factor in determining and achieving our goals (Psychology Today, n.d.). Motivation is divided into two types according to dualistic theories: extrinsic vs intrinsic (Reiss, 2012). Intrinsic motivation is defined as a sense of fulfilment derived from a goal; personal interest and personal choice are two components of intrinsic motivation (Salehpour & Roohani, 2020). Extrinsic motivation is 'taking action to achieve a separate outcome, whether real or not', or in other words, instrumental or external behaviour (Deci et al., 2017). Extrinsic and intrinsic concepts can be used to classify goal content (Lee et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2018). Intrinsic goals, e.g. autonomy, growth, and health (Lee et al., 2019), can positively describe a person's performance, dedication, interactional performance, and work adaptation arising from one's natural interests and values (Zhang et al., 2018). On the other hand extrinsic goals, for example status, reputation, and popularity (Lee et al., 2019), are concerned with accomplishments that are external in nature, such as financial security, social recognition, and attractiveness (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2015).

According to a prior study, intrinsic motivation can be driven primarily by interest or activity-specific incentives, depending on whether the activity's object or performance is the primary motivator (Rheinberg, 2020). Motivation that comes from students themselves is an important determining factor for success (Ghazali et al., 2022). In the context of career goals, a study conducted by Hejazi and Bazrafshan (2013) found that one's professional choices could be affected by extrinsic incentives. Extrinsic motivation has also been demonstrated to have a positive impact on a person's professional choice in previous research (Demagalhaes et al., 2011; Jackling & Keneley, 2009). According to the findings of these previous studies, two of the most common extrinsic incentive elements identified as impacting career pathways are salary and the number of work options available. Another study by Ng et al. (2017), however, found that a career path is not much impacted by an individual's extrinsic motivation. In contrast, several previous studies stated that career goals are influenced by aspects of both intrinsic

and extrinsic values (Lee et al., 2020). Extrinsic work values refer to the financial benefits or conditions of labour, whereas intrinsic work values refer to the immaterial values met by work itself, such as accomplishment or flexibility (Seibert et al., 2013).

Previous studies have shown that career exposure is one of the critical factor for students in shaping their attitudes towards their future careers (Bhat & Kumar, 2021; Ng et al., 2017). Hospitality students are most often exposed to potential careers through professionals who work in the industry (Anthony et al., 2021b). It is critical that students learn about the responsibilities of hospitality jobs and the possibilities for a future in this sector (Rosyidi, 2021). Choosing a career is easier if students have access to more career-related information (Kleine et al., 2021). In an early study, it was found that the largest influence on career decisions was attributed to and inspired by those who work in the hospitality industry (Qiu et al., 2017). This finding was then confirmed by Lee et al. (2019), who found that industry professionals are the most important source of information for students making career decisions.

For tourism and hospitality students, past studies have shown that their career choices are influenced by the exposure the students receive to experienced practitioners (Ghani et al., 2009; Hutaibat, 2012). One example of industry exposure is industry visits (Soon et al., 2017). It is common for hotel management colleges to organize hotel trips for their students during their studies, allowing them the opportunity to witness the real-world working conditions of the hotel business (Dani & Kukreti, 2020). Students benefit from an industry visit since it helps them learn about hotel operations. Furthermore, one of the most significant benefits of industry exposure is the opportunity to learn from the experiences of those who have been working in industry for a long time (Kumar, 2021). Students will gain the opportunity to network with people in the hospitality and tourism industries who are further along in their careers (Immaneni & Sailaja, 2017). Subsequently, this will assist students when choosing a career and searching for a job after they graduate (Windawaty, 2022). As a result of exposure to hospitality jobs prior to graduation, students indicated a notable commitment to the hospitality industry (Appietu et al., 2019).

According to several previous studies, students are influenced by parents (Basnayake & Williamson, 2021; Nawabi et al., 2019), teachers (Faitar & Faitar, 2013; King & Hang, 2011; Tey et al., 2020), social media (Tan et al., 2014; Wong et al., 2022) and friends (Cheung & Arnold, 2014; Mtemeri, 2020; Tey et al., 2020). Moreover, research conducted by Anthony et al. (2021a) found that the influence of friends is one of the strongest factors that influence a person's career choice. In addition, research conducted by Lee et al. (2019) found that traditional sources such as teachers, industry mentors, advisors, and parents currently have a bigger influence on students' career decisions than online social media.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore the factors that influence the career goals of hospitality students in Indonesia. This empirical and exploratory research focuses on motivational factors (intrinsic and extrinsic), career exposure, and the influence of third parties (lecturers, friends, social media, parents). This research is important because it can be the answer to the availability of hospitality workers in the future. The results of this research will later become input for the world of hospitality/tourism education in Indonesia in particular and the hotel industry in general.

Method

This research is quantitative research: we collected data from hospitality students from various universities and from tourism vocational school students in Jakarta. Data collection was carried out from March 2022 to June 2022. The study includes a sample of 430 research participants who are students enrolled in university and vocational school programmes focused on hospitality-related subjects. The sample was chosen from a range of educational institutions nationwide, guaranteeing diversity in both academic disciplines and geographical regions. Furthermore, out of the participants, 57% were female, while 43% were male. The gender distribution in this case roughly mirrors the demographic makeup of students participating in hospitality programmes across the region,

where females tend to be slightly more prevalent than males. Also, in order to gather data from the participants, a survey was disseminated through online platforms such as Google Form and Qualtrics. The selection of these digital survey technologies was based on their accessibility, convenience, and efficiency in reaching a wide-ranging and diverse sample of students. Utilising online surveys enabled participants to provide responses at their own convenience, thus reducing any biases related to limitations in time and geography. Furthermore, the online survey technique was as regarded adequate and effective among participants from Gen Z (Wiastuti et al., 2020). Purposive sampling was chosen as the sample approach in this research, with students in the hospitality industry being specifically chosen to respond to the survey's questions. The study's goals and requirements are declared and discussed at the start of the online survey, and respondent participation was completely voluntary.

Theoretical Models and Hypothesis

Based on the background described above, a conceptual framework was created for this study, which is illustrated in Figure 1. From this conceptual framework, and based on several previous studies, there are four hypotheses that will be used to answer the objectives of this study. The hypotheses are as follows:

- (H1) A hospitality student's intrinsic motivation positively and significantly influences career goals.
- (H2) A hospitality student's extrinsic motivation positively and significantly influences career goals.
- (H3) A hospitality student's career exposure positively and significantly influences career goals.
- (H4) Third parties positively and significantly influence a hospitality student's career goals.

Measurement

The questionnaires were adapted from previous research. Question items for career goals were adapted from research conducted by Yusoff et al. (2011). Examples include *'I understand the career options available to me'* and *'I clearly know my choice of career upon my graduation'*. The influence of third parties was measured by five constructs adapted from Hutai-

Figure 1   Research Conceptual Framework

bat (2012). An example is, *'My family and friends have a high influence on my career goal'*. In addition, five components modified from Hutaibat (2012) are used to assess career exposure. An example is, *'Seminars and workshops in hospitality are provided at universities'*. Constructs for each intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were modified from research conducted by Odia and Ogiedu (2013). An example for intrinsic motivation is *'I love the hospitality industry'*, and for extrinsic motivation, *'I choose a hospitality course because there will be jobs available in the future'*. Each question was assessed using a five-point Likert type scale, with 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

Findings and Discussion

Data Analysis

For the hypothesis testing and analysis, the quantitative multivariate PLS-SEM was employed. Because of its predictive nature, this method can be used to investigate the questions raised in the research (Avkiran, 2018). Moreover, PLS-SEM is a method of data analysis that is commonly used and applicable to the hospitality industry (Ali et al., 2018; Usakli & Kucukergin, 2018). In order to assure the validity and reliability of the suggested measurement scales, the analysis of the model, as well as its interpretation, was carried out

Table 1   Items Property Measurement

Code	Dimension	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Intrinsic motivation				
INS1	I love the hospitality industry	0.783	0.774	0.796	0.657
INS2	I found the hospitality industry to be interesting	0.772			
INS3	I would enjoy working in the hospitality industry	0.749			
INS4	I like studying new skills in hospitality	0.754			
	Extrinsic motivation				
EXT1	I choose a hospitality course because there will be jobs available in the future	0.789	0.768	0.782	0.634
EXT2	I choose a hospitality course because there will always be job opportunities for me	0.767			
EXT3	I can get a good salary if I graduate with a hospitality degree	0.791			
EXT4	Working in hospitality has a lot of prestige	0.786			
EXT5	Working in the hospitality industry is well respected	0.774			
	Influence by third parties				
INF1	My family and friends have a high influence on my career goal	0.810	0.842	0.864	0.682
INF2	I am strongly influenced by educators in my choice of career goal	0.832			
INF3	I am strongly influenced by the media in my choice of career goal	0.797			
INF4	I am strongly influenced by the public/society in my choice of career goal	0.804			
INF5	I am strongly influenced by a career adviser in my choice of career goal	0.826			
	Career exposure				
CE1	I am given real cases of hospitality studies in university	0.842	0.853	0.811	0.657
CE2	Seminars and workshops in hospitality are provided at universities	0.873			
CE3	I visit hospitality businesses, organized by the university	0.891			
CE4	There are plenty of job opportunities for hospitality students	0.802			
	Career goal				
GOAL1	I want to work in the hospitality industry	0.822	0.826	0.815	0.603
GOAL2	I plan to further my postgraduate studies in hospitality after I graduate	0.834			
GOAL3	I understand the career options available to me	0.848			
GOAL4	I clearly know my choice of career upon my graduation	0.851			

Notes   Column headings are as follows: (1) loading, (2) Cronbach's alpha, (3) composite reliability, (4) average variance extracted.

in two stages: an analysis of the measurement model, and then an analysis of the structural model (Hair et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2017; Sarstedt et al., 2014).

Initially, the convergent validity was evaluated utilizing factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), the average variance extracted (AVE), and Cronbach's Alpha. It is better to have a Cronbach's Alpha score that is greater than 0.7, while the requirement for AVE is set at 0.5 (Taber, 2018). CR is utilized to evaluate the degree to which the data are internally consistent, and a value of 0.6 or higher is required before moving on to subsequent analyses. Table 1 lists the relevant

Table 2 Discriminant Validity

		1	2	3	4
1	Intrinsic motivation	0.767			
2	Extrinsic motivation	0.641	0.834		
3	Career exposure	0.597	0.624	0.796	
4	Third parties' influences	0.395	0.585	0.523	0.814

Note The square root of the AVE is plotted on the diagonal, and correlations are constructed below the diagonal.

properties for each measurement item. The convergent validity threshold that was recommended appears to have been exceeded by each of the constructs that were analysed in this study.

The validity of the discriminant then came under scrutiny. Calculations of the square roots of the AVE were performed for each construct, and the results were recorded along the diagonal of the correlation matrix as shown in Table 2. For any given set of measurements, there should be more variation within each measure than there is within the set of measures itself, as shown by the AVE square roots. The constructs' discriminant validity is effectively proved when diagonal elements outnumber off-diagonal elements in rows and columns. As can be seen in Table 2, all the measurements have a level of validity and reliability that is satisfactory overall.

Results

We used Smart PLS 3.2, a variance-based structural equation modelling (SEM) approach, to perform partial least squares (Hair et al., 2012). From a SEM perspective, PLS-SEM is a highly favourable method for exploratory research (Hair et al., 2011). The study's conceptual framework was validated by the development of four hypotheses. Following the criterion provided by Hair et al. (2017), we evaluated the predicted correlations by calculating the explained variance ($R2$) of the dependent variables, path coefficients (β), and their degrees of significance generated from a bootstrapping resampling approach.

The result of the hypotheses test is shown in Table 3. The result revealed that the students' intrinsic motivation ($\beta = 0.295$, $t = 4.786$), extrinsic motivation ($\beta = 0.229$, $t = 4.121$), career exposure ($\beta = 0.311$, $t = 5.423$), and the third parties' influences ($\beta = 0.208$,

$t = 5.245$) were positively associated with the students' career goals, supporting H1, H2, H3, and H4.

Discussion

This study concludes that hospitality undergraduate students' intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation have a positive relationship with their career goal. Similarly, the result of the data analysis found that career exposure and the influence of third parties are also positively associated with hospitality students' career goals.

The findings of this study are consistent with those found in earlier research. The results of hypothesis 1 are in line with previous studies. For instance, intrinsic motivation is suggested to determine a student's career goal (Hejazi & Bazrafshan, 2013). For most students, working in hospitality is attractive, and they expect to be happy with their career choice if they do so. The findings are also in line with the findings of research carried out by Ng et al. (2017) and Thing and Jalaludin (2018), whose analyses show that intrinsic motivation plays a role in the career path that students choose.

Likewise, the results of hypothesis 2 show the same results as previous studies such as those which stated that extrinsic motivation was also found to be positively related to student career goals (Demagalhaes et al., 2011; Jackling & Keneley, 2009). This result is in accordance with the previous study of Wüst and Leko Šimić (2017) who also suggest that extrinsic motivation influences students' career goals in Germany. This finding also implied that financial considerations, job prestige, job security, and job accessibility play an important role in students' career goals (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2015). The result of hypotheses 2 also indicates that when the

Table 3   Hypotheses Test Results

	Relationship		Std. Beta	Std. error	t-value	p value	Decision
H1	Intrinsic motivation	→ Career goal	0.295	0.063	4.786	<0.001	Supported
H2	Extrinsic motivation	→ Career goal	0.229	0.056	4.121	<0.001	Supported
H3	Career exposure	→ Career goal	0.311	0.047	5.423	<0.001	Supported
H4	Third parties' influences	→ Career goal	0.208	0.051	5.245	<0.001	Supported

level of effect exerted by extrinsic motivation is high, there is a corresponding increase in the level of decision making that hospitality students engage in about their future careers. The findings of the study are also consistent with the social cognitive career theory in the presence of outcome expectation and goals components that are impacted by individual behaviour as well as the physical environment. Extrinsic motivation is motivation that comes from outside of oneself and can include aspects of the physical environment such as real rewards or salary. Other examples of external characteristics include the availability of jobs and the high prestige of working in luxury hotels, both of which are believed to influence the behaviour of hospitality students when it comes to deciding which career paths to pursue.

Furthermore, the results for hypothesis 3 are also in line with previous research by Ghani et al. (2009) and Hutaibat (2012), who conclude that there is a positive relationship between career exposure and students' career goals. It is implied that hospitality-related seminars and events on the hospitality career could also be provided to undergraduate hospitality students to give them exposure to future career possibilities. If more career exposure is given to the students, hospitality students' interest in working in industry can be subsequently improved.

For hypothesis 4, the results show that the influence of third parties is also positively related to the career goals of hospitality students, which is in line with previous research conducted by several researchers stating that a person's career goals can be influenced by other people, such as parents, teachers, friends and career consultants (Ng et al., 2017). It was also stated that in previous studies, students were influenced by parents, teachers, friends and social media (Basnaya-

ke & Williamson, 2021; Mtemeri, 2020; Nawabi et al., 2019; Tey et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2022).

The findings in this study are beneficial for hospitality businesses in preparing and establishing their strategy in the recruitment process. Meanwhile, for higher education institutions, they can better prepare their students by providing various learning opportunities such as seminars, internships, and industry visits, so that students can gain a lot of career exposure in order to get a realistic picture of their future career (Enget et al., 2020). In addition, universities should provide more practical experience to influence students' desire to pursue a profession in the hospitality field.

Limitations and Further Research

There are some potential pitfalls that could be associated with the findings of this research. First, this research was conducted using a purposive sampling technique involving several private universities in Indonesia that offer hospitality degrees, and tourism vocational high schools in Jakarta. Hence, the findings cannot be extrapolated to apply to all the undergraduate students from any major in Indonesia. Future research should be conducted by using a larger sample from various universities in Indonesia and involving many other majors that are offered by those universities.

Also, in this research, most of the participants were undergraduate hospitality students in their second and third year of studies. It is possible that the results might be different if most of the responses were from students in their final year. In this particular scenario, the students in their final year may have more experience in their preferred line of work compared to the students in their second and third

year. Experience gained through an internship in the field of hospitality can give students in their final year a broader perspective from which they can evaluate whether or not they want a future in the hospitality profession. Hence, future research should analyse the predictor of the final year hospitality undergraduate students' career goals and how it differs from the first, second, and third-year students.

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Tourism Crisis Communication in Business Hotels During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The aim of the study is to evaluate the process of crisis communication of 4-star business hotels during the coronavirus epidemic and to compare their communication during the first and second waves of the epidemic. As part of the qualitative research, 15 in-depth interviews were conducted with the employees responsible for crisis communication within the surveyed hotels. The research is based on Fall and Massey's (2005) three-step crisis communication model, examining the stages of preparation, response and recovery.

The result of the empirical research shows that, although the strategic management of the hotels was not prepared for an upcoming crisis, they managed to develop a crisis communication plan based on their previous protocols, force majeure contracts and newly acquired knowledge that they could successfully apply during the COVID-19 crisis. The authors of the study were the first to research the crisis communication of Hungarian business hotels during the first two waves of the coronavirus epidemic. The conclusion of the study is that change was needed in the marketing communication strategy after the first wave, as travellers wanted to see messages with a more positive tone. This change proved to be successful; it is worthwhile to continue external communication through several channels and it is not enough to use only a Facebook page.

Keywords: tourism; business hotel; crisis communication; COVID-19

Introduction

The relevance of the topic of the present study is indisputable. Since the appearance of COVID-19, it has sickened more than 695 million people and claimed more than 6.9 million lives worldwide up to the beginning of August 2021 (Worldometer, 2023). Strategic management was not prepared for an upcoming crisis, which was predicted by Gričar et al. (2022) ex--ante. The economic and social effects of the epidemic were very diverse (cf. Kovács, 2020). The tourism sector was especially heavily affected by the epidemic, as travel restrictions and social isolation led to layoffs in

many cases (Nicola et al., 2020; Song et al., 2021). The pandemic appeared as a new source of risk for companies, sometimes with serious business consequences (Juhász & Szabó, 2021).

According to data from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the pandemic threatened 174 million tourism jobs globally in 2020, and a further 62 million in 2021 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2021).

Based on data from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 13 million guest nights were registered in Hungarian commercial accommodation in 2020, which represented a 58 percent drop compared to the previous year. Domestic guests spent 39 percent fewer guest nights (9.6 million), while the number of guest nights spent by foreign guests decreased by 77 percent (3.7 million). Commercial accommodation realized a gross revenue of HUF 228 billion, which was 59 percent less than the previous year (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 2021). Overall, it can be stated that Hungary's tourism is still characterized by a very strong spatial and temporal concentration. The main destinations for both domestic and foreign tourists are Budapest (Mid-Danube region) and the Lake Balaton area (Csapó & Lőrincz, 2020).

Two key research gaps can be identified. First, internal crisis communication as an underexamined area. Existing studies have focused on the discourse about the epidemic in traditional mass media (Chen et al., 2022), but internal crisis communication is one of the less studied areas in tourism management (Combe & Carrington, 2015; Liu-Lastres, 2022). The studies that have been published mainly cover three aspects of internal crisis communication: how it affects tourism employees' resilience and turnover intentions (Liu-Lastres et al., 2023); how it changes employer-employee relationships, employee satisfaction and commitment (Liu-Lastres et al., 2024); and how it affects internal reputation and employees' behaviour (Ndone, 2023). To the best of the authors' knowledge no study has dealt with responsibilities regarding the crisis communication process. Secondly, business hotels were chosen as the subject of the research, which were allowed to remain open during COVID-19, accommodating only business travellers.

Because of their significance during the pandemic, studies on business hotels are essential.

The focus of our research is crisis communication during the coronavirus epidemic in Hungarian 4-star business hotels. The aim of the empirical research is to evaluate the crisis communication process of hotels during the first (March 11, 2020 – June 18, 2020) and second (November 4, 2020 – March 31, 2021) waves of the epidemic, as well as to identify differences between the two waves in communication. In the study, the purpose and process of crisis communication are reviewed and then the different crisis communication models, including the three-step model created by Fall and Massey (2005), which is the basis of the empirical research, are presented.

After explaining the methodology used to answer the research questions and the aspects of sample selection, the results of in-depth interviews conducted with the employees responsible for crisis communication of the examined hotels are presented, highlighting the stages of preparation, response and recovery. The research questions were answered using in-depth expert interviews. The entire population includes Hungarian 4-star business hotels.

Understanding the crisis communication of hotels during a pandemic helps to manage future health crises. The results of the study contribute to the conceptualization of crisis communication, while recommendations have been made for professionals to develop crisis communication strategies.

The Theory of Crisis Communication
In the case of public organizations and for-profit enterprises, it is also important to have a crisis communication plan that helps mitigate risks that threaten the brand or the health and life of consumers.

The Purpose of Crisis Communication
The primary goal of crisis communication is to influence the stakeholders' image of the company in such a way that it maintains the current positive image or restores the image that has deteriorated over time in people's minds (Triantafillidou & Yannas, 2020). Businesses, therefore, try to shift the image formed of them in a positive direction during periods of crisis by

continuously informing, persuading or even motivating those involved. Another goal of communication during a crisis is damage reduction, which means the minimization of negative effects on the stakeholders and the environment (Dezenhall, 2011).

The strategic goal of crisis communication is to avoid deception and build trust (Al-Omoush et al., 2023). In connection with deception, the duty of honesty and truth-telling arises; the collection of crisis communication rules stipulates that it is forbidden to lie to those involved, and to always communicate honestly and openly (Coombs, 1999) to preserve the company's reputation (Schoofs et al., 2019).

Building trust is essential because reputation is the most important asset of companies, which are looking for behavioural tools to maximize it. If a specific message can be communicated in several ways, or if a specific goal is not clear, then the company will choose the way that involves the least effort and brings the greatest benefit in terms of the company's reputation (Benoit, 1995).

When a crisis breaks out, consumers want to know what really happened and, not long after that, who is responsible for it, which is why corporate apologies have developed into a separate science over the years. Even during a natural disaster, for a few weeks the focus is only on the natural phenomenon that caused it, after which the human dimension, i.e. who is responsible, becomes increasingly prominent (Tanács & Zemplén, 2015).

Solutions related to the transfer of necessary and essential information are important not only in the case of government measures, but also in narrower professional fields (Krasnova et al., 2021). Communication is essential in the efficient and effective management of crisis situations, therefore during a crisis accurate information must be provided to those affected as soon as possible (Mazilu et al., 2019). Open communication is the key (Yeh, 2020), but cooperation among the destination's tourism service providers is also essential (Birkner et al., 2018). In those tourist destinations where any dimension of security can be doubted, crisis management and communication will play a particularly important role (Kiss & Michalkó, 2020).

Internal crisis communication refers to communication between managers and employees, during which the need for information is satisfied and which helps employees deal with the crisis (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). Internal crisis communication is unique because employees receive and send messages at the same time (Zaumane, 2016). After the outbreak of a serious crisis, tourism workers expect timely and transparent communication from managers (Liu-Lastres et al., 2024), and employees constantly ask employers for reassurance and support (Ruck & Men, 2021). The quality of internal crisis communication messages is more important than quantity, and transparent communication improves employer-employee relationships (Liu-Lastres et al., 2024).

The quality of the relationship between the employee and the organization affects the communication of the employees (Ndone, 2023). In the case of good relationships, the employees act as advocates of the organization, and in times of crisis they do not leak negative information to the outside (Kim & Rhee, 2011). As the COVID-19 pandemic was a major crisis, in which several employees were made redundant or had to take unpaid leave and many left the tourism industry (Formádi & Gyurácz-Németh, 2021), it is particularly important to communicate well for the sake of the entire sector.

The Process of Crisis Communication

Depending on the stage of the crisis, these communication efforts can be categorized as crisis preparation, crisis response, and crisis recovery (Ketter & Avraham, 2021).

The model of crisis communication created by Fall and Massey (2005) recommends handling crisis situations in three steps. This model is a simplified version of Faulkner's (2001) basic model, which is the first crisis management model specific to tourism.

The first phase is the preparation phase. At that time, the crisis communication plan, which will serve as a basis later on, is prepared, taking into account the resources; at the same time the team responsible for the process, including the spokespersons, is appointed. At this phase, the communication interface that
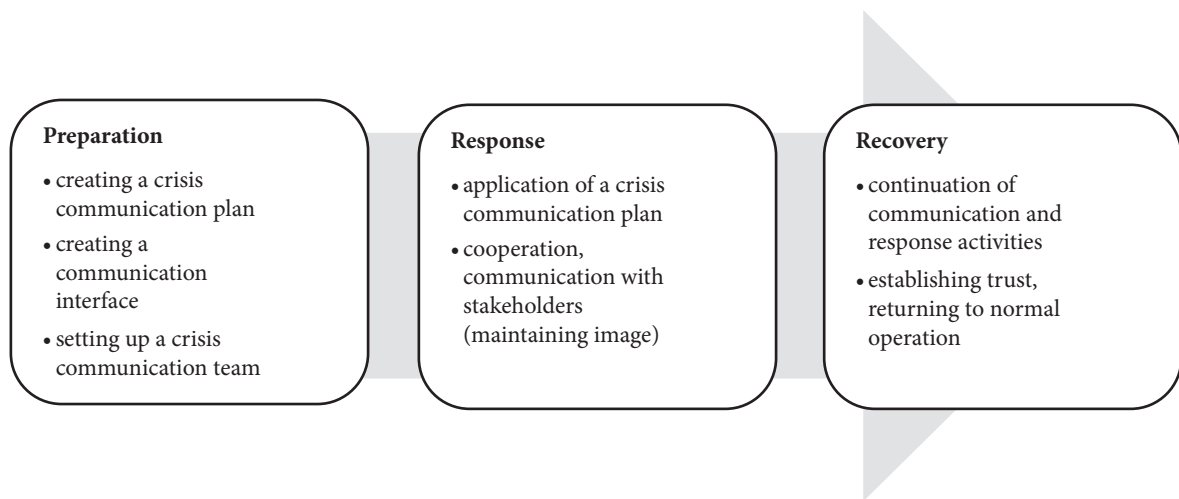
Figure 1   The Process of Crisis Communication (based on Fall and Massey, 2005, p. 80)

will be essential for maintaining trust and getting through the crisis is created (Mazilu et al., 2019).

The second phase is the response period, when the time comes to apply the crisis communication plan created at the previous phase. When an organization faces a crisis, it must act quickly to mitigate the negative effects through crisis communication. This process involves gathering, processing and disseminating available information about the crisis to the public in order to reduce uncertainty and restore damaged reputations (Fearn-Banks, 2017).

At this stage, the sector's decision-makers and key actors are informed, followed by the consultations and actions of the communication team, made up of pr agencies, company representatives, and legal representatives. At this phase, speed is a fundamental condition, since the goal is to prevent communication channels (media, negative word of mouth) that are difficult to control (Marton et al., 2018) from transmitting information. The crisis must be responded to immediately, because the image of the destination or service provider can still be shaped in the first 24 hours; however, in the case of an inappropriate reaction, this can be much worse. Contact with the media is of particular importance at this phase (Mazilu et al., 2019). Brand communication has many functions during crises, such as limiting damage and instilling trust (Wong et al., 2021).

During the management of crises, communication plays an important role in three relational systems: between professionals handling crisis situations and tourism service providers; between tourism actors; and between the destination and tourists. A tourist destination and its service providers find it difficult to keep track of the large volume of news on which their response to the crisis depends (Mair et al., 2014).

At the last (recovery) phase, the most important communication task is to clarify false information and restore previous trust (Mair et al., 2014). In addition to continuing the response activity, the focus is on continuous communication. The marketing and crisis communication team should focus on the repeated establishment of trust, which helps to return to previous operations. The role of the team is to provide accurate and authentic information to all stakeholders through uniform messaging. Perceived risk can be reduced by characterizing the causes and foreseeable consequences of the crisis, providing related information and being constantly available. The two-way communication also contributes to more conscious media activity (Marton et al. 2018).

Social media is an effective communication tool during crises (Ham & Kim, 2019), although it is used to disseminate misinformation as well (Zhou et al., 2021). During the pandemic social media supported contacts between consumers and brands (Kim & Kim,

2020). However, practice shows that crisis communication during COVID-19 in Hungarian social media left much to be desired. The high level of denial is indicated by the continuous degradation of communication activity, the gradual disappearance of personality in favour of centralized content, even though the establishment and maintenance of personal relationships in the service sector is perhaps more important than ever to help the sector restart as soon as possible (Ásványi et al., 2020).

Empirical Research

The research question is the following: How did the crisis communication process develop and change in 4-star business hotels during the first and second waves of the coronavirus epidemic, and in the period between the two?

The sub-questions formulated in connection with the research question are the following:

- RQ1: *How is the crisis communication process structured in 4-star business hotels?*
  In the literature, there are general models for crisis communication processes (see section 2.2), but this has not yet been examined for business hotels. However, 'the crisis response strategies have been dealt with as an outcome-oriented phenomenon rather than the process' (Chaskar & Upadhyay, 2023).

- RQ2: *Which employees are responsible for the crisis communication process in 4-star business hotels?*
  A central issue in the literature on internal crisis communication is the impact on employees (Ndone, 2023; Liu-Lastres et al., 2023, 2024). A novel approach is to identify which employees are involved in the planning and implementation of the crisis communication process.

- RQ3: *Through which communication channels does crisis communication take place in 4-star business hotels?*

Former research dealing with crisis communication in hotels examines leisure hotels (Jaaffar et al., 2023) or partly other tourism enterprises (Liu-Lastres et al., 2024). This is the first attempt to examine business hotels exclusively, which had a special status during the pandemic, as only these were allowed to be open in Hungary.

Methodology

The research questions were answered using in-depth expert interviews and the entire population includes Hungarian 4-star business hotels. In Hungary, the number of guest nights spent in commercial accommodation is the highest in the case of 4-star hotels (Magyar Turisztikai Ügynökség, 2018), which is why all examined hotels belong to this category. During the coronavirus epidemic, a government decree was issued several times, according to which commercial accommodations were only allowed to receive guests arriving for business, economic, and educational purposes (Magyar Közlöny, 2020), therefore all hotels participating in the research are business hotels. Business hotels primarily welcome individual and group business travellers, but a smaller proportion of bookings come from leisure groups as well. They are typically located in the city centre, business districts or near congress centres and have well-equipped meeting rooms in all cases (Gade & Ankathi, 2016).

During our empirical research, we contacted all 4-star business hotels in Budapest (a total of 20 hotels), but the response rate was only 40%, therefore we decided to expand the sample. Using the snowball method, we searched for additional accommodations outside the capital (meeting the 4-star and business hotel criteria) and thus managed to expand the sample.

During the selection of the interviewees, the aim was to interview sales and marketing directors or hotel managers within each hotel who actively participate in the hotel's crisis communication activities. The positions held by the interviewees in the hotels are related to crisis management and communication. Nine of them are involved in this field as sales and/or marketing directors, while five of them are hotel or general managers. One person is responsible for Human Relations, finance, and event management tasks. The interviews were conducted by phone and video calls due to the coronavirus epidemic between February 11 and March 12, 2021.

Table 1   Characteristics of the Hotels Included in the Research

Name of the hotel	Settlement	Category	Conference capacity
Akadémia Hotel	Balatonfüred	4*	1124
Aranyhomok Business Wellness Hotel	Kecskemét	4*	200
Grand Hotel Esztergom	Esztergom	4*	450
Continental Hotel Budapest	Budapest	4*superior	300
Courtyard by Marriott Budapest City Center	Budapest	4*	300
Danubius Hotel Helia	Budapest	4*	400
Globall Hotel Telki	Telki	4*	700
Hotel City Inn	Budapest	4*	240
Hotel Eger & Park	Eger	4*	1600
Hotel Karos Spa	Zalakaros	4*	320
Hotel Moments	Budapest	4*	80
Novotel Budapest City	Budapest	4*	2000
Novotel Székesfehérvár	Székesfehérvár	4*	n.a.
Park Inn by Radisson Budapest	Budapest	4*	450
Saliris Resort Spa Conference Hotel	Egerszalók	4*	450

Results

The interviews were based on the three-step crisis communication model created by Fall and Massey (2005), therefore the questions can be divided into the stages of preparation, response, and recovery, and are mostly based on the tasks included in the model. At the preparation phase, questions were included related to the communication activities of the hotels before the crisis and their preparedness for the crisis. At the response phase, questions were related to the coronavirus epidemic and then crisis communication and management during the crisis. Finally, at the recovery phase, there were questions about post-crisis communication and plans.

Preparation Phase

In the period before the crisis, the main task is to prepare crisis plans. A well-developed crisis communication plan can greatly reduce potential damage (Ritchie, 2004).

Two of the surveyed hotels (Aranyhomok Business Wellness Hotel and Danubius Hotel Helia) already had a basic crisis plan and a crisis communication plan before the coronavirus epidemic, which they could build on. However, they had to adapt them to the given situation later as the pandemic situation is unprecedented, and therefore nobody was able to fully prepare for it. 'I have never seen a crisis communication plan, in which anyone calculated that an entire sector would lose all its income in days, not in months and years' (Danubius Hotel Helia).

Another 8 hotels indicated that they had crisis plans describing general cases of force majeure and affecting the course of operation and administration; however, they were unable to use them directly when the coronavirus epidemic appeared. The representative of Novotel Budapest City mentioned the force majeure clause in current contracts, which describes how they must act in various cases of force majeure. After the outbreak of the epidemic, a much more detailed contract for force majeure was drawn up with the help of lawyers, which also covers the coronavirus pandemic and other global epidemics, and they can refer to this in the current situation. In the case of the other hotels examined, there were also different guidelines on what to do if, for example, a terrorist attack hit the hotel, if someone was injured or if bed bugs were

Table 2   The Main Tasks of the Preparation Phase

Preparing a crisis communication plan	basis: crisis plan, security protocols, force majeure clause, guidelines, foreign good practices
	expansion: pandemics, coronavirus epidemic, health regulations, current government decisions, economic measures
Creating a crisis communication channel	external communication: use of existing communication platforms
	internal communication: activation of new communication channels
Setting up a crisis communication team	management: hotel (general) manager/marketing director
	responsible persons: management, department heads, employees of marketing department

found; however, no one was prepared for a health crisis of this magnitude.

In the case of 10 of the 15 surveyed hotels, according to the interviewees, there were no crisis plans nor crisis communication plans available at all, with which they could have handled an epidemic situation of this size. Three interviewees indicated that they had participated in various trainings of Tripadvisor or the Association of Hungarian Hotels and Restaurants in previous years, while in the case of two hotels, the interviewee had acquired knowledge and experience in the field of crisis management in his previous jobs.

Following the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic, Grand Hotel Esztergom, Courtyard by Marriott Budapest City Center, Hotel Moments, Novotel Budapest City, Novotel Székesfehérvár, and Park Inn by Radisson Budapest implemented changes in both communication and operation that followed the guidelines of their hotel chain. Park Inn by Radisson Budapest, for example, used the hotel company's centrally defined 20-step safety protocol as a basis for safety regulations, which was applied and communicated in accordance with current government decisions. The management of the Continental Hotel Budapest started to compile the crisis plan in March 2020; however, they mostly concentrated on getting it ready for the summer reopening. The crisis communication plan, based on foreign (Italian, Spanish, German, and Austrian) good practices, was prepared by the marketing team. In the case of the Akadémia Hotel, the management of the company drew up the crisis plan, in which they named firstly conditions related to health and hospitality, and secondarily the necessary measures which were essential for the hotel to survive this difficult period economically.

The team responsible for the crisis management process is appointed simultaneously with the preparation of the crisis communication plan (Fall & Massey, 2005). Among the hotels that participated in the research, in the Danubius Hotel Helia, the hotel management as a crisis management body already existed before the coronavirus epidemic; however, the roles and responsibilities were only clarified afterwards. In the other hotels examined, in most cases, in addition to the management, the heads of different departments and employees of the marketing department were responsible for communication related to the coronavirus epidemic. The crisis communication process was managed by the hotel manager/general manager or the hotel's marketing director in all investigated hotels.

Before the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic, none of the examined hotels had created a special crisis communication channel. Even after the outbreak of the epidemic, external communication took place via existing platforms; however, new channels were activated for internal communication in several hotels, mostly via social media. 'We did not create a crisis communication channel but did one very important thing. Employees play a very important role in Marriott's culture; therefore we paid close attention to open and regular communication with our employees, and we activated this on a social media platform' (Courtyard by Marriott Budapest City Center). In the case of the Danubius Hotel Helia, they started a new internal communication channel, an intranet, not because of the crisis, but because of the rebranding that started before the crisis, which with a small modification was still available to them during the pandemic.

It can be summarized that the most important tasks in the preparation phase included the groundwork of the crisis communication plan, channels, and the establishment of the team responsible for the epidemic (Table 2).

Response Phase

The coronavirus pandemic has significantly changed service operations in tourism. Many hotel chains are transforming housekeeping operations and front-line service delivery, creating new policies and increasing guest confidence to prioritize guest health and safety (Chang & Kim, 2022; Li et al., 2022). The hotel service has slowed down to some extent, as much stricter cleaning and hygiene protocols have been introduced, food service has changed, guest reception has been made contactless in several places and sanitary packages have been prepared in rooms. The hotels had to introduce many small changes and at the same time ensure that the guests could continue to spend their days at the usual standard.

In addition to complying with the mandatory epidemiological regulations for hotels, several hotels have also introduced further health and safety precautions. Examples include the periodic testing of employees and resting rooms after cleaning; in several hotels the mandatory use of masks in the hotel's public spaces was already introduced before the government's decision was made. Although the Park Inn by Radisson Budapest still provided breakfast in the usual buffet format, each type of food was packed separately and offered to guests by separate staff. In this way, guests could continue to receive the same hotel care as before, while complying with the current security protocol. Regarding events, the hotel also introduced a coffee break box packaged separately for each person, similarly to breakfast. Courtyard by Marriott Budapest City Center is distinguished from other hotels by using so-called electrostatic sprays, which disperse disinfectant in the air and kill 99% of viruses and bacteria.

Immediate response is recommended for businesses affected by the crisis to avoid growing negative perceptions (Huang & DiStaso, 2020). The perceived risk of tourists plays a role at least as important in the travel decision-making process as the place, time, method, type of travel or the costs involved (Karl & Schmude, 2017). However, according to most of the hotels who participated in the research, tourists' trust did not waver in the hotel, but because of the fear of the coronavirus; therefore, apart from observing and communicating precautions, no additional measures were taken to reduce the perceived risk of guests. Hotels tried to incorporate the various health and safety precautions as quickly and efficiently as possible into their everyday life and communication so that guests could feel safe; however, they were not bothered by deviations from the usual situation. 'I believe that we are a hotel, not a prison. In addition to maximum compliance with current restrictions and regulations, our aim is to provide our guests the usual comfort and care' (Park Inn by Radisson Budapest). Danubius Hotels, including Helia, tried to take measures that they could communicate transparently and create a real sense of security. 'It's very important when it comes to communicating health and safety to show how we actually operate. We do not just have to be like that, but we should be seen as we actually operate our hotels, yet, we must not look better than we are' (Danubius Hotel Helia).

During the crisis, communication requires the greatest attention among travellers and internal stakeholders (Cartier & Taylor, 2020). As a result of the coronavirus epidemic, the hotel service process has changed to a great extent for all examined hotels and affected almost all areas. They developed a multi-page protocol that was made available on their website or sent directly to guests. 'We started the protocol called Safe Rest. This is a protocol created on a completely new basis, considering international recommendations, regulations, the practice of international chains, domestic recommendations and regulations' (Danubius Hotel Helia).

The external communication of the measures taken in connection with the coronavirus epidemic was therefore mainly focused on websites as 12 hotels used websites for informing the guests. The surveyed hotels used several channels for external communication since it was important because of transparency to deliver as much information to interested parties
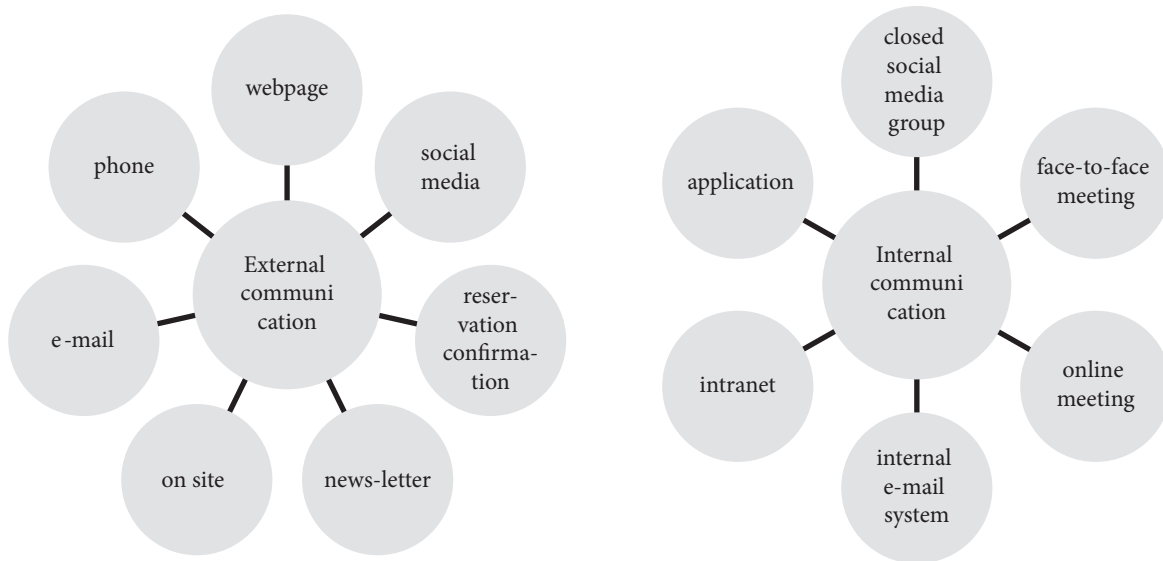
Figure 2 Communication Channels Most Often Used by the Investigated Hotels.

as possible from as many sources as possible. At the same time, there was also a strong focus on direct mail and newsletters, since hotels were able to communicate most effectively through this channel with guests who made reservations before the outbreak of the epidemic. The current information and the changes in the restrictions were placed in the reservation confirmation. However, electronic mail is an excellent opportunity to inform and prepare regular guests. Other frequently used channels were social media sites, most notably Facebook. Only the employee of the Courtyard by Marriott Budapest City Center mentioned that apart from the worldwide campaigns of the Marriott hotel chain, it was not typical to use social media for this purpose at local level. Overall, this parallels Utz et al. (2013), who state that crisis communication through social media is more effective than through other channels.

Communication was needed during COVID-19 that confidently presented the hotel's capabilities in the face of challenges (Li et al., 2022). Based on experience, guests were rather superficially informed about the COVID-19 restrictions on the hotels' websites, and in newsletters or social media, which is why several hotels (Aranyhomok Business Wellness Hotel, Park Inn by Radisson Budapest, Hotel City Inn) also

decided to intensify on-site information, for example through an information booklet given at arrival, a brochure prepared in the room or the announcements published on the information mobile wall and smart TV placed inside the hotel. Novotel Budapest City and Hotel Moments highlighted the measures they had taken to control the epidemic on the booking.com website, while Danubius Hotel Helia and Continental Hotel Budapest representatives highlighted the importance of informing their partners, which they did via telephone and partner letters. Danubius Hotel Helia also issued a press release.

Effective internal crisis communication is the defining element of the trust-based relationship between employer and employee during and after the crisis (Kim, 2020; Yeomans & Bowman, 2021). The approach and content of internal crisis communication messages directly influence employees' evaluation of their organizations' crisis management efforts and their own safety (Heide & Simonsson, 2021; Liu-Lastres et al., 2023). With appropriate communication, the sense of community can be strengthened and those working in tourism can feel that they are not alone in their difficulties and that they can count on help at any time (Cartier & Taylor, 2020; Tuan, 2021).

Therefore, in addition to informing guests and partners, it was also necessary to notify employees properly. According to the hotels that took part in the research, internal communication was the most important since the employees passed the information to the guests. Seven hotels used various social media groups and chat rooms (Viber, Facebook, Messenger) to provide the most important information related to the crisis, 6 hotels preferred verbal, face-to-face communication, 6 hotels used circular e-mail and intranet for information transfer, while two interviewees also mentioned the role of bulletin boards (Figure 2).

In addition to informing employees, the training of hotel staff was also important in the pandemic situation. All examined hotels held some forms of training specifically for the protocol due to the coronavirus epidemic, which in several cases were simply called notification. The management discussed the regulations issued by the authorities, after which the training plans were written, and then the heads of the given departments informed their subordinates and held them accountable later. The Courtyard by Marriott Budapest City Center was the only hotel where regular training related to the coronavirus epidemic was given by an external specialist.

During the coronavirus epidemic, the amount spent on marketing communication changed in the same direction for almost every hotel that participated in the research. In most cases, the answers were 'almost destroyed' (Danubius Hotel Helia), 'reduced to zero' (Continental Hotel Budapest), 'almost zero' (Park Inn by Radisson Budapest), 'it had no cost' (Hotel Eger & Park), and 'approximately it dropped to a fifth' (Courtyard by Marriott Budapest City Center). This was a consequence of the fact that the examined hotels conducted only the most necessary communication and hardly advertised. All costs were cut to the extent to keep the business viable. There was no change in marketing communication costs for the Hotel City Inn and Hotel Moments hotels. Only the employee of Hotel & More, which operates the Akadémia Hotel, answered that this amount increased and even doubled during the epidemic. In the case of Novotel Székesfehérvár, obtaining Bureau Veritas certification involved additional costs.

Six of the examined hotels (Akadémia Hotel, Aranyhomok Business Wellness Hotel, Park Inn by Radisson Budapest, Globall Hotel Telki, Hotel City Inn, Hotel Moments) had no contact with external marketing agencies before the coronavirus epidemic as everything was implemented by their own marketing teams. According to Hotel City Inn, their best marketer, the guest, disappeared with the epidemic. Five hotels (Courtyard by Marriott Budapest City Center, Novotel Budapest City, Novotel Székesfehérvár, Grand Hotel Esztergom, Hotel Karos Spa) were able to keep their contractors for marketing activities, while Hotel Karos Spa indicated that they approximately halved the contract fees with external contractors, and, for example, their agreement related to graphic design activities was changed to a single order instead of a flat-rate order. However, four hotels (Continental Hotel Budapest, Danubius Hotel Helia, Hotel Eger & Park, Saliris Resort Spa Conference Hotel) completely stopped the cooperation with external partners and solved all tasks with full-time employees.

In addition to the risk factors affecting travel, the search for information is also decisive in travel-related decision-making. To reduce their perceived risk, tourists try to gather information from as many sources as possible (Maser & Weiermair, 1998). In most cases, the manager of the given area, the hotel manager or the marketing director were responsible for answering the questions received regarding the coronavirus epidemic. For example, if it was related to room reservation, then Reservations, if it was related to an event, then Sales. Only the employee of the Continental Hotel Budapest mentioned that the hotel has a guest relations employee who answers most of these questions.

The Danubius Hotel Helia pointed out that, based on the questions they received, they updated their publicly available protocol. In the other hotels there was no change in the communication regarding the previously raised questions. In most cases, the questions received from leisure tourists during the pandemic were related to the current rules, the protocol (6 mentions), and when the hotel would be open for them (5 mentions).

Local and national restrictions, regulations, and questions related to protection certificates appeared as

a separate group of questions asked by foreign guests (mentioned by 5 hotels). Several hotels indicated that the guests were most interested in the wellness area or the opening hours of the restaurant (5 mentions). At the beginning of the coronavirus epidemic, the biggest concern was what would happen to their reservation and whether they would be able to rebook it.

Regarding groups, questions were received about the so-called 'bubble'. For example, whether a larger group, usually consisting of athletes, wanted to be accommodated completely separately under very strict regulations. Larger hotels could solve this issue because they tested their staff and did not allow them outside the hotel during that period, and they could fulfil their extra needs, as well. In Hotel Karos Spa, there was also the question of how many people there were currently in the hotel and among how many guests, in how big of a crowd, they had to spend their vacation.

The crisis communication activities of other hotels were continuously monitored by all the hotels who participated in the research, but only the employee of Novotel Budapest City mentioned that this was done at the central level. Competitor monitoring is considered a fundamental process, as everyone follows everyone; that is why the crisis communication of hotels is quite similar. Continental Hotel Budapest's marketing team monitored the activities of foreign hotels at the beginning of the coronavirus epidemic; however, at the time of the interview (March 2021) they were only monitoring the crisis communication of domestic hotels. Several interviewees mentioned that they adopted practices from other hotels. The employee of Park Inn by Radisson Budapest emphasized how proud he was of the cooperation during the pandemic and that the hotels helped one another and shared their experiences in the emergency. In their case, a Covid-proof version of the breakfast buffet was developed very quickly, which was introduced in several other hotels, as well.

If a tourist destination is in crisis, the cooperation of tourism service providers at each destination is essential (Birkner et al., 2018), which was realized in the case of the investigated hotels. 'On the one hand, we lobby through the Association of Hungarian Hotels and Restaurants, and we also lobby government bodies together with other hotel managers' (Courtyard by Marriott Budapest City Center). The examined hotels communicated continuously and were in daily contact with one another and also with various professional organizations, in most cases with the Association of Hungarian Hotels and Restaurants and the Hungarian Tourist Agency. In the case of rural hotels, this was supplemented by local and county institutions. 'I am in daily contact with many hotel managers, and I am also in contact with the leaders of the local government, the county government and the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry' (Hotel Eger & Park).

The crisis communication of two-thirds of the hotels participating in the research changed during the first and second wave, and in the period between the two. The most common reasons for the change were, on the one hand, the current regulations, as the hotels constantly communicated the government's decisions. On the other hand, as the first wave caught everyone completely by surprise, most of the hotels did not have a crisis plan, although they had to react quickly and communicate a lot about many things. However, they could prepare much better for the second wave. 'The first was the planning, the second one was just adaptation and refinement,' (Danubius Hotel Helia). A further reason for the change can be traced back to the fact that hotels felt that their guests were already aware of all the details of the coronavirus epidemic by the second wave and wanted to hear about much more positive topics. Therefore, besides continuing to provide the most important information, they tried to communicate about other events related to their hotel, as well. 'We understand that there is a coronavirus epidemic, but we have to live with it. When communicating with guests, not everything should be about this!' (Park Inn by Radisson Budapest). The hotels that did not change their communication justified their decision by saying that their strategy during the first wave worked, thus they did not feel the need to change.

The application of the crisis plans and the crisis communication plan in the examined hotels helped in some way to reduce the damage caused by the co-

ronavirus epidemic. In two hotels, there was tangible evidence that crisis communication was successful. 'Yes, it helped. What also changes the number of guests is how successful the crisis communication is. We have tangible evidence of this' (Danubius Hotel Helia). 'Rather, it is the principle that helped us, which also included communication. The result of this was that in 2020 the hotel's operating result was practically zero, which we considered a huge success. No changes would be necessary because we believe that what we have done so far is good and we will continue to do so in the coming months' (Courtyard by Marriott Budapest City Center).

Recovery Phase

After a crisis caused by pathogens the recovery of tourism at a destination takes an average of 19.4 months (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2019). Regarding COVID-19, the post-crisis recovery period could begin around May–June 2021 at the earliest according to the surveyed hotels. Domestic tourism would start first, and foreign guests and conferences were not expected before autumn. The hotels dated the return to operations on the same level as before the coronavirus epidemic much later. According to them, the numbers of the year 2019 would be reached in 2023–2024 for the first time. The events organised in the fall of 2021 (Hunting Exhibition, International Eucharistic Congress, Sustainability Expo) could speed up this process, as these brought tens of thousands of guests; however, experts do not like dates with outstanding performance. 'What is very important is the strength of the demand level, which lasts from January 1 to December 31, every day of the week, Monday to Sunday. This is the demand that will recover very slowly, but there may be dates when there are spikes' (Courtyard by Marriott Budapest City Center). 'It is an extremely complex question and there are many unknown factors, e.g., How does demand develop by country and by segment? Can hotels adapt to the changed market conditions? Can the planned new hotel investments be realized? Can the closed hotels reopen?' (Park Inn by Radisson Budapest).

In the recovery phase of tourism crises, the most essential task is to regain the trust of tourists (Mar-

ton et al., 2018). According to the employees of the surveyed hotels, it was not the coronavirus epidemic that was holding guests back during the second wave, but the restrictions, and they believe that those who want to travel in the future will do so. Travellers were not mistrustful between the two waves, either, as they saw that the hotels did everything they could to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. These protocols will be continued going forward.

Discussion

Earlier research highlighted that the worldwide spread of COVID-19 generated significant fear in everyday life. These investigations also emphasize the importance of crisis communication and the publication of appropriate and authentic information (Faour-Klingbeil et al., 2021). Their study highlights that the mood related to the crisis was shaped not only by central organizational communication strategies, but also by individual institutional actors and public opinion. Therefore, the communication of tourism service providers is also particularly important (Obembe et al., 2021).

The authors of the study were the first to research the crisis communication of Hungarian business hotels during the first two waves of the coronavirus epidemic. The authors of the previous study published on the subject (Ásványi et al., 2020) worked with a spatially narrower sample (hotels in Budapest), they focused exclusively on communication on Facebook, and they examined posts created during the first wave of the epidemic. The results obtained are consistent, as the conclusion of both studies is that a change was needed in marketing communication strategy after the first wave, as travellers wanted to see messages with a more positive tone. Our work shows that this change proved to be successful, as it is worthwhile to continue external communication through several channels, and it is not enough to use only a Facebook page.

Chaskar and Upadhyay (2023) focus on the issues of crisis management, some elements of which proved to be useful in our own study, primarily dealing with crisis communication. In agreement with the authors, it became clear that resilience, crisis resistance and adaptability will be key competencies in the future for

all organizations, including tourism providers. The practical advice listed in the article is highlighted in accordance with the results of current empirical research:

- the significance of the strategic development of the crisis plan
- the involvement of a competent crisis leader (in our own research, this remained primarily in the hands of the general director)
- competence development for the sake of crisis management (in our own research, we also found that many organizations participated in trainings led and organized by the country's professional organizations).

As a result of RQ1, it can be said that the examined hotels were caught completely unawares by COVID-19; however, relying on their previous protocols, force majeure contracts and their newly acquired knowledge, they managed to develop a crisis plan and a crisis communication plan that they were able to apply effectively during the coronavirus epidemic. During their internal and external communication, they used all their communication channels, communicated their measures in a transparent manner, and their guests and colleagues felt safe.

The crisis communication process in each examined hotel is managed by the hotel manager/general manager or the hotel's marketing director. However, management, department heads, and marketing staff were responsible for communication related to the coronavirus epidemic (RQ2).

While social media is an effective tool for communicating customer sentiment during a crisis, it remains unclear how tourism organizations can respond to a pandemic crisis on social media so as to prevent negative consequences (Li et al., 2022). The authors find that social media was underutilized in disaster preparation, and in subsequent responses it played a crucial role in generating resources and donations during the recovery phase (Möller et al., 2018). We partially confirmed all of this during our own research. The hotels examined tried to provide as much information as possible to those involved. The most

typical communication channels were their own websites and social media sites. Current information was placed in booking confirmation letters, newsletters, telephone and e-mail notifications and on-site in the hotels. According to the hotels that took part in the research, internal communication is the most important since the employees forward information to the guests. Most hotels preferred verbal information, the most common means of which were online or face-to-face meetings. However, they also considered written communication to be important, which in most cases was conducted via an internal email system, intranet, application or closed social media group (RQ3).

The crisis communication of the hotels that participated in the research changed in almost all cases during the first and second waves, and in the period between the two. The most common reason for the change were the current regulations, and the fact that the first wave caught everyone completely by surprise, and they did not have a crisis plan; however, they had to react quickly. Yet, they were able to prepare much better for the second wave. In addition, travellers felt that by the second wave they were already aware of all the details of the coronavirus epidemic and wanted to see more positive things. Therefore, the hotels continued to provide the most important information and tried to communicate about other hotel-related issues as well.

Our study is based on the crisis communication model created by Fall and Massey (2005), simplified by Faulkner's (2001). This was the basic model, which is the first crisis management model specific to tourism. In our research, we shed light on how business hotels were able to apply this theoretical threefold division in the case of the coronavirus epidemic.

From the results of the study, it can be seen that the preparation phase was practically not implemented: few accommodations had a crisis plan, and even those that did had to specify it. No external experts were employed to avert the crisis; the directors and marketing directors assumed responsibility for both operation and communication.

In connection with the response phase, a result that was contradictory to the professional literature was reached. Business hotels communicated more via

direct mail and on the website, as opposed to the social media emphasized in the literature. The latter was primarily used in their internal communication.

Finally, the study pointed out that while in the literature the recovery of image is considered a key issue in the recovery phase, business hotels did not have to deal with this after the coronavirus epidemic, since it was not basically the trust in accommodation that was broken as a result of the crisis.

Our study, therefore, shed light on the correctness of the phases and key factors listed in the crisis communication model in the event of a health crisis affecting the entire world, clarifying the aspects that can be critical in such situations. On the other hand, we examined all of this in a new way in the world of business hotels, which was unprecedented.

Conclusion and Managerial Implications
Based on the results, proposals can be formulated about the three periods examined during the research (before, during, and after the crisis), thereby covering the preparation, response, and recovery stages of the crisis communication process.

Based on the interviews, it became clear that the hotels did not have a crisis plan or a crisis communication plan that could have been used to handle an epidemic situation of this magnitude. The appearance of the coronavirus epidemic forced them to react immediately, which was greatly complicated by the lack of a prior crisis plan. In the case of a possible future pandemic, it would be a solution if a crisis plan was created that also included an analysis of health risks. A related crisis communication plan should be composed as well, incorporating good practices and the correction of occurring errors. It would be worthwhile to measure the success of the application of the created crisis plan in the case of all hotels in the future.

The employees of the hotels mentioned that the multi-page, detailed covid-19 documents they issued were not always read by the guests. To eliminate this, it would be worthwhile to write a one-pager, in which the most important information was included, with icons that guests would encounter in the hotel afterwards. It would be advisable to place it on the website, in confirmations, and in several places in the hotel, for example at the entrance, reception, and in the rooms.

It is recommended to display the information about covid-19 in a prominent place on the website, as the more prominent it is, the greater the chance is that guests will notice and read it instead of directly contacting the hotel with their relevant questions. However, based on the questions received, it is worth updating this information sheet continuously.

After the emergence of the coronavirus epidemic, many new technologies were created for effective disinfection. It would be advisable to use them in hotels, as they can disinfect an entire conference room in a very short time, even during a coffee break. After the introduction, it would be possible to stand out in terms of safety and cleanliness by communicating accordingly.

The employees of the hotels mentioned several times that during the pandemic there was a big fight for hosting sports teams coming to Hungary, even though it meant that the hotel would be under a 'bubble' upon their arrival. This is expected to be necessary in the future, as well, so it would be a competitive advantage for a hotel if it perfected its methodology. This 'bubble concept' can be used by destinations as well. Malaysia initiated a 'travelbubble' to give more confidence to tourists (Kumar et al., 2023).

During the interviews, it was said several times that, in addition to monitoring each other's crisis communication activities, the hotels also cooperated in most cases. It would be advantageous to increase this cooperation in the future so as to share experience and good practices, thereby helping each other and themselves. Since this was a crisis affecting all hotels, it would have been a good idea to formulate joint messages to the public. It would be of great help to hotels if the Association of Hungarian Hotels and Restaurants would start a crisis communication course for them.

It would also be worthwhile to continue the cooperation during the recovery period after the crisis. From a marketing point of view, it would be advisable for hotels to join the messages and national campaigns of domestic tourism organizations, and it would also be beneficial to cooperate with foreign promotion companies.

In the future, it would be advisable to expand the research to further waves of the coronavirus epidemic. It is also worth extending the investigation to non-business-type and non-four-star hotels, which would provide an opportunity to identify the differences between the crisis communication of different types and classifications of accommodation. It is also worth expanding the range of interviewees to professionals involved in tourism communication at the national or local level. Finally, it is also recommended to examine the subject from the consumer's point of view, i.e. how effective the crisis communication activities of hotels were for business travellers, and what experiences they have in this regard. As a new method, sentiment analysis of website communication is recommended, which is effective in tourism industry research (Gričar et al., 2024).

The main limitation of the in-depth interview research was the topic of the study. Since the pandemic greatly influenced the mode in which the interviews were conducted, and because of the crisis in the hotel industry, several hotels did not respond to the inquiry or refused to participate in the research. Due to the above, although the research endeavoured to include hotels in the capital and in rural areas, as well, it is not representative. In addition, our research focused on examining Hungarian hotels, which further limits the generalizability of the results.

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The Role of Brand in Influencing Online Hotel Booking

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This study aimed to explore how brand awareness and brand image influence customers' intention to book hotels online. It also examined the role of quality perception, price perception, and value perception as mediators, both separately and in combination. Data was collected from 514 online travellers to North Indian hotels based on a judgemental sampling technique which was then analysed with the application of structural equation modelling involving confirmatory factor analysis followed by path analysis. The data analysis software Analysis of Momentum Structure (AMOS)-20 was used to perform confirmatory factor analysis and PROCESS macro-3.4 on Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS)-23 software was used to perform path analysis involving the measurements of latent constructs. The results confirm that value perception serves as a mediator in the relationship between brand awareness and booking intention, as well as brand image and booking intention in both serial and parallel mediations. Perceived quality alone does not mediate the relationship between brand awareness or brand image and booking intention. However, the significance of the impact emerges when brand image precedes perceived quality as a mediator between brand awareness and booking intention. This study managed to throw light on the importance of two major brand attributes in influencing customers' booking intention. This can give clarity on the success factor of both established businesses and new-born start-ups.

Keywords: online hotel booking, brand image, brand awareness, perceived price, perceived value, perceived quality

Introduction

Background

In the modern world, the hotel industry is undergoing significant transformation driven by technological advancements, shifting consumer preferences, and changing market dynamics. Digitalization has revolutionized various aspects of the industry, from online booking platforms and mobile apps to personalized guest experiences and smart hotel features (Fong et al., 2018). Moreover, data analytics and artificial intelligence are being utilized to personalize guest experiences, optimize pricing strategies, and streamline operations (Kryukova & Khetagurova, 2020). Therefore, in the digital age, where the online

marketplace shapes the contours of consumer behaviour, understanding the intricate factors governing transactional decisions involving product purchase or service booking has become a critical pursuit for businesses. The exponential growth of internet penetration has been proven to stimulate online hotel booking (Tao et al., 2018; Masiero et al., 2020). Additionally, the extensive use of online sources for hotel booking is attributed to the convenience, time-saving, and cost-effective model for information access and booking (Aeknarajindawat, 2019).

The significance of brand awareness and brand image in influencing consumer choices has been well-documented, particularly in industries marked by fierce online competition (Agarwal, 2020; Büyük-dağ, 2021). In the hospitality sector, where the virtual space serves as the primary battleground for customer engagement, comprehending how these foundational brand elements shape online booking intentions becomes imperative. However, the hotel booking pattern of the online customer is rather complex to understand (Koundinya, 2019). The complexity lies in the traveller's perception, opinion, trust, experience, convenience, belief, and risk-taking ability in the online space (Koundinya, 2019). Similarly, many times, online brands are unable to comprehend the complexity of user behaviour. This inability leads to poor strategy making in brand building, which in turn leads to the loss of money on bad investments. Hence, adopting the appropriate brand reputation strategy is of utmost importance (Rodríguez-Díaz et al., 2018).

Furthermore, quality perception, representing consumers' assessment of the intrinsic worth of a product or service, stands as a cornerstone in their decision-making process (Stylidis et al., 2020). Simultaneously, price perception evaluates the perceived value vis-à-vis the monetary investment (Kim et al., 2012), while value perception encapsulates the overall satisfaction derived from the transaction (Hsiao & Chen, 2016). Thus, a prospective customer is more likely to assess the price reasonability of a brand in terms of relative pricing strategy (Lee, 2012). In addition, the customer also considers the derived utility from the product or services apart from the price considera-

tion (Hsiao & Chen, 2016). The amount of derived utility in exchange for the sacrifice is considered as value (Hsiao & Chen, 2016; Konuk, 2018). Customers consider different brands of which they are aware, the brand image that is created out of their mental cognition, the price that is offered, and the quality of the service they are getting, and then make a cost-benefit analysis before making a final booking decision (Han & Kwon, 2009; Barreda et al., 2016; Konuk, 2018).

Moreover, understanding online travellers' booking behaviour is getting tougher over time. Some established players like Travelocity, Agoda, Orbitz, Hotels.com, and Booking.com have retained their brand reputation for a long time and are generating good customer conversion (Kim et al., 2020), whereas some new start-up companies like Airbnb, OYO Rooms, and Red Doorz have been seen to gain their market share rapidly within a short period (Kirkos, 2022; Ervina et al., 2021). It is difficult to comprehend how established online hotel booking brands acquire and retain paying customers for so long, while new players expand their business and increase their market share within a short period (Kim et al., 2020).

Research Gap

In line with the current study, brand awareness and brand image was found to influence the booking intention of online travellers (Chi et al., 2009; Chen & Chen, 2010; Loureiro, 2013; Lien et al., 2015; Xu et al., 2015; Barreda et al., 2016; Beneke et al., 2018; Konuk, 2018; Pham & Nguyen, 2019; Graciola et al., 2020). Researchers have incorporated several mediating factors to elucidate the causal relationship between brand image, brand awareness, and booking intention. For instance, Lien et al. (2015) focused on the impact of brand image on travellers' online booking intentions, emphasizing the role of trust as a mediating factor. However, this study overlooked the importance of brand attributes.

Notably, the importance of service quality for online hotel booking users has been highlighted by Keshavarz and Jamshidi (2018) and Chen et al. (2019). Keshavarz and Jamshidi (2018) performed a study involving two important aspects of service quality and perceived value but not the important attribute

of brand. Similarly, Li and Shang (2020) included various dimensions of quality and value for studying a user's transactional intention but missed the important dimension of brand. Chen et al. (2019) included the factor 'actual service quality' instead of 'perceived service quality', treating it as an independent variable, and considered brand awareness followed by perceived value as serial mediators. In this context, Lien et al. (2015) failed to consider service quality despite its importance for the study of online hotel booking, thus lacking a comprehensive perspective. In addition, despite its focus on brand image, the model proposed by Lien et al. (2015) lacks clarity regarding the precursors of brand image. This observation aligns with Tariq et al. (2017), who found that brand image moderates the relationship between brand awareness and online booking intention, suggesting an interactive effect.

Thus, this research endeavours to contribute to this discourse by delving into the complex interplay between brand awareness, brand image, and the mediating variables of quality perception, price perception, and value perception in the context of online hotel booking. This study seeks to illuminate the multifaceted relationships that exist between brand recognition, emotional associations, and the subsequent impact on customers' intentions to transact in the online hotel domain. As businesses navigate the intricacies of the digital marketplace, this research not only contributes theoretically but also offers practical insights for industry stakeholders. Understanding the complex interactions between brand awareness, brand image, and the mediating factors can empower businesses to tailor strategies that resonate effectively with the discerning preferences of online consumers

The research article is organized as follows. The background is set up with the introduction in the first section, followed by the literature review, research gap and hypothesis development in the second section, and methodology describing the tools and techniques applied to achieve the research objective in the third section. The results are presented in the fourth section and the discussion and conclusion section involving the implications, limitations and suggestions in the fifth section.

Literature Review, Research Gap, and Hypothesis Development

Booking Intention

The stage at which a prospective customer expresses the intention to make a payment for the purchase of a product or booking a service, occurring before the actual transaction, is termed the customer's purchase or booking intention, respectively (Dapas et al., 2019). It is the possibility of a customer's transactional action to get the product or avail themselves of the services (Sivaram et al., 2020) and is a precursor to the final transaction (Dapas et al., 2019). Due to the inclination of customers for online transactions, the rise in the number of online platforms can easily be witnessed in almost every business (Kim et al., 2017). These elements are reciprocated in the process of online hotel bookings as well (Kim et al., 2021; Ladhari & Michaud, 2015). Before online hotel booking, customers are involved in multiple actions such as an information search, alternative product or service comparison, website attribute analysis, and the analysis of product or service offerings (Aeknarajindawat, 2019).

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness denotes the name of any brand that influences customers' attitudes and perceptions and creates a noticeable image in their minds (Aaker, 1996). A brand is recognized by its design, logo, sign, name, or associated term (Erdem & Swait, 2004). According to Keller (1993), the recognition of any brand and its recall value combine to form brand awareness. After creating a brand name, the company communicates the brand value to make the brand recognizable and recallable to customers in the future. Brand awareness is the by-product of brand credibility that inspires the choice of consumers (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Customers like associating with the brands they know and recognize (Świtała et al., 2018).

Brand Image

Brand image encompasses a distinct set of features linked to a brand name, setting it apart from other brands in the market (Świtała et al., 2018). It includes understanding customers' product and non-product attributions to the brand (Hou & Wonglorsaichon,

2016). The customer creates a psychological image of a brand when it gets associated with its features (Keller, 1993). Brand image is generated from the brand name, experience with the product or services, the brand's reputation in the market, and promotional activities (Chakraborty & Biswal, 2020). The brand image symbolizes the brand's personality (Saleem et al., 2015). Prospective consumers can recognize, recall, know, and form an opinion of a brand while considering a product or service category (Hou & Wonglorsaichon, 2016).

Perceived Quality

Consumers' cognitive assessments of the product or service quality is considered as their quality perception (Saleem et al., 2015). According to Zeithaml (1988), it is the way customers construct the overall superiority of the product or service. The customers make judgments based on obtained information regarding the products or services (Perera & Dissanayake, 2013). The customer judges the physical characteristics and the extrinsic cues of products or services to perceive their quality (Perera & Dissanayake, 2013). The physical characteristics include the attributes connected with the outside appearance. In contrast, the extrinsic cues involve attributes without relation to the physical appearance, such as brand image, price, market share, advertisement, and warranty (Perera & Dissanayake, 2013). The customer compares the quality they perceive after consuming a product or service with their expectation before consumption (Ali et al., 2021). The expected quality of alternatives is also evaluated by the customers before making a transactional decision (Aaker, 1996). While booking hotels online, users often create an alternative set followed by a consideration set of hotels upon evaluation of certain qualitative and quantitative factors (Park et al., 2019).

Perceived Price

Price is the sum a customer should give to get the products or services (Zeithaml, 1988). Price perception is associated with the relative price of any product or service that a customer compares while purchasing a product or booking a service (Kim et al., 2012). The customer compares the price shown on the current website with the reference price shown on other websites while purchasing or booking from an online source (Kim et al., 2012). In online hotel booking, the customers get the convenience of price comparison with very little effort before making a transactional decision (Lien et al., 2015). Other monetary advantages of online hotel booking are competitive pricing strategies, discounted rates, last-minute promotional offers, and early bird offers to attract online customers and generate more bookings (Masiero et al., 2020).

Perceived Value

In behavioural studies, the role of customer value perception is quite significant. According to Zeithaml (1988), perceived value is the perception regarding the utility that customers derive against the price they pay. Value delivery becomes better either with an increase in benefit or with a price decrease (Hsiao & Chen, 2016). According to Platania et al. (2016), customers often compare obtained benefits and the endured sacrifice. A prospective customer evaluates the product or service quality in relation to the payment they made for it (Lee & Moghavvemi, 2015). According to Liu et al. (2020), shopping value is the combination of both utilitarian value and experiential value. The utilitarian value comprises dimensions such as time and cost savings, service excellence, and product variety. On the other hand, experiential value encompasses dimensions like entertainment, escapism, visual appeal, and interactive experience. According to Hsiao and Chen (2016), the overall value consists of five dimensions.

Hypotheses Formation

Various literature sources have been explored to elucidate the interrelation effects among the variables. The brand image of a marketable product or service significantly shapes a prospective customer's interest in price evaluation (Grewal et al., 1998). A study by Lien et al. (2015) on online hotel booking reveals that the affordability of branded hotels offers greater value for customers and consequently influences their online hotel booking intention. The perceived value plays a mediating role between the 'store image' and the 'transactional intention such as booking intention' in this cognitive process (Graciola et al., 2020, pp. 10–12). According to Kim et al. (2012), brands with

lower prices and more offerings possess more value and induce the customer's intention to transact. Thus, the following hypotheses are framed:

- h1 – Brand image positively impacts Booking Intention with the mediating effect of Perceived Value.
- h2 – Brand image positively impacts Booking Intention with the mediating effect of Perceived Price and Perceived Value.
  According to Konuk (2018), any brand's store image influences the customer's quality perception positively, thereby stimulating the customer's ultimate transactional intention. Again, the perceived quality contributes toward the perceived value and guides the transactional intention (Konuk, 2018). Hou and Wonglorsaichon (2016) also suggest that the quality perception of the website is generated by the positive brand image (Hou & Wonglorsaichon, 2016). The brand name influences individuals' quality perception , leading to their value perception (Han & Kwon, 2009). Further, the service quality was found to have an indirect and positive effect on the transactional intention with the mediating effect of perceived value (Pham & Nguyen, 2019). Value perception plays a substantial role in the close association between the consumer's quality perception and their transactional intention (Mathur & Gangwani, 2021). During hotel booking, when the price of the branded hotel appears reasonable in relation to the perceived service quality, customers feel that they are getting good value for their money (Oh, 2000). Building a positive brand image is vital to developing a private-level brand's portfolio, influencing its customers' quality perception and leading to their positive value perception and ultimate transactional intention (Beneke et al., 2018). Therefore, the hypotheses are proposed as follows:
- h3 – Brand image positively impacts Booking Intention with the mediating effect of Perceived Quality.
- h4 – Brand image positively impacts Booking Intention with the mediating effect of Perceived Quality and Perceived Value.

The perceived quality mediates between brand awareness and customers' repeat purchases or bookings that translates into brand loyalty (Xu et al., 2015). Chi et al. (2009) also confirms the mediating role of quality perception. The study by Perera and Dissanayake (2013) reveals that customers' brand awareness and perceived quality significantly impact their purchase or booking decisions. According to Phong et al. (2021), hotel customers intend to book because they perceive the service quality of the hotel they are already aware of. In their study, Saleem et al. (2015) concluded that heightened awareness of the attributes of a product or service, coupled with the quality perception derived from the brand image, stimulates customers' repurchase or rebooking intention. Thus, following hypothesis is framed:

- h5 – Brand Awareness positively impacts Booking Intention with the mediating effect of Perceived Quality.
  There is a close association between the awareness of a brand and the customer's quality perception (Loureiro, 2013). The awareness of online users concerning the website triggers their quality perception (Loureiro, 2013). The product or service with greater brand awareness generates a larger market share due to its greater quality (Chi et al., 2009). Further, perceived service quality is a significant indicator of value perception, and value perception plays a powerful mediating role when the purchase or booking intention is a dependent variable (Li & Shang, 2020). The customer's trust in a well-known brand leads to booking intentions because it creates a positive perception of value stemming from good service quality (Ramkumar & Liang, 2020). Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed as follows:
- h6 – Brand Awareness positively impacts Booking Intention with the mediating effect of Perceived Quality and Perceived Value.
  The awareness of a hotel's brand often leads a customer to book if they perceive the offered value as unique (Phong et al., 2021). The awareness of the guest house brand stimulates the customers
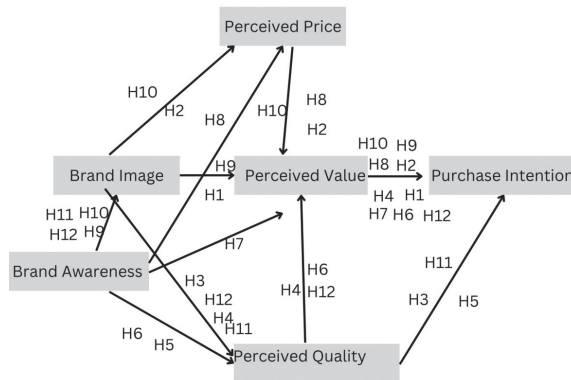
Figure 1   Tentative Model

to evaluate the value (Matikiti-Manyevere et al., 2020). The perceived value plays the role of mediator in the relationship between brand knowledge and transactional intention on the online platform (Ling et al., 2023). Moreover, customers derive the value by judging the price fairness against the known features offered by the brand (Oh, 2000). Later, the derived value translates into the final purchase or booking if it matches the tradeoff between the quality and price perception of the customer (Oh, 2000). Where there is less product knowledge and familiarity, price plays a role in extrinsic cues. Thus, the following hypotheses are framed:

• H7 – Brand Awareness positively impacts Booking Intention with the mediating effect of Perceived Value.

• H8 – Brand Awareness positively impacts Booking Intention with the mediating effect of Perceived Price and Perceived Value.

Brand awareness and the association with the brand form a brand image. The brand image forms consumer value and is generated out of brand knowledge which comes from brand awareness (Barreda et al., 2016). Brand awareness positively enhances the brand image with exposure to memory nodes in repetition (Tariq et al., 2017). The increase in brand awareness significantly affects the brand image (Saleem et al., 2015; Barreda et al., 2016; Tariq et al., 2017). From the literature, the in-

ter-relationship effects are quite apparent. So, the following are hypothesized.

• H9 – Brand Awareness positively impacts Booking Intention with the mediating effect of Brand Image followed by Perceived Value.

• H10 – Brand Awareness positively impacts Booking Intention with the mediating effect of Brand Image, Perceived Price, and Perceived Value.

• H11 – Brand Awareness positively impacts Booking Intention with the mediating effect of Brand Image and Perceived Quality.

• H12 – Brand Awareness positively impacts Booking Intention with the mediating effect of Brand Image, Perceived Quality, and Perceived Value.

Methodology
Research Model
A tentative model was designed considering the hypotheses derived from previous studies (see fig.1). These inter-variable relationships inferred from the previous literature have been depicted visually.

Sample Selection
The data collection was focused on hotel guests of North India with a prior online hotel booking experience. As the objective was to include only the responses from people having familiarity with online hotel booking, the population was found to be infinite. The north Indian states and union territory were chosen as sampling areas. The sample size was decided to be 525, considering the better representation of the population and time constraint to complete the research. The selected sample size was more than the minimum sample size of 385 (adjusted) for an infinite population with a 95% level of confidence as proposed by Cochran (1977), guided by the formula $S = Z_2 \times P \times (1-P)/M_2$ (S = sample size to determine, Z (z-score) = 1.960 for infinite population, P (indicating population proportion) = 0.5 (for infinite population), M (margin of error) = 5%). Bryman and Bell (2015) argued for adopting non-probability sampling without a sampling framework. No sampling frame was adopted in the sampling technique, which led us to adopt judgmental sampling as a non-probabi-

lity sampling technique. The data collection tool was a questionnaire which was distributed in shape of a Google Form and the language used in the questionnaire was English.

Measurement Instrument

The initial questionnaire comprised 26 questions adopted from some standardized scales that supported the current study. Later, three statements were removed based on the experts' opinion (involving 3 industry, 4 researchers and 3 academic experts) followed by a content validity index (CVI) on a 4-point relevance scale. The experts in agreement (agreement of the experts for the inclusion of statements), UA (universal agreement), I-CVI (itemized content validity index), S-CVI (scale-level content validity index), S-CVI/Ave (scale-level content validity index based on the average method) and S-CVI/UA (scale-level content validity index based on the universal agreement method) were measured while performing the content validity and the decision of elimination was made based on that. This ensures the suitability of the scale items. The final questions consisted of a set of 23 statements obtained from standardized scales to address the six constructs included in the current study (see Appendix 1). The brand image scale was adopted from Barreda et al. (2016), Davis et al. (2008), and Lien et al. (2015) with modification and has four items. The brand awareness scale was adopted from Barreda et al. (2016) and Davis et al. (2008) with modification and has three items. The perceived quality scale was adopted from Bao et al. (2011) and Konuk (2018) with modification and has four items. The perceived price, perceived value, and purchase intention scale (synonymously used for booking intention scale) were adopted from Lien et al. (2015), Ayeh (2007) Cheong and Jang (2013), and Dodds et al. (1991) with each modification having four items each.

The data was collected using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, denoting 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Each question in the instrument was made compulsory to nullify the chance of any missing data. In the pilot testing phase, 70 respondents were included, confirming the questionnaire's readability and understandability. The statements were found to be properly read and understood by the respondents, hence all 23 questions related to scaling items (see Appendix 1), along with the seven demographic questions (see Appendix 4) were taken in the final instrument for the collection of data.

Data Collection

Based on the judgmental sampling technique, data were collected from previous guests of budget, mid-range, and premium hotels. A total of 56 hotels (18 in the budget category, 20 in the mid-range, and 18 in the premium category) distributed questionnaires to their previous guests in the form of Google form between September 2021 and April 2022. These hotels were located in various tourist-populated regions of North India, including the Delhi-NCR region, Chandigarh, Shimla, Manali, Amritsar, Srinagar, Jammu, Dehradun, and Rishikesh. The responses of 525 individuals were collected.

Data Analysis and Techniques

Out of 525 responses with no missing frequency, 11 responses were found with zero variance (having the same rating for all the statements on the 5-point Likert type scale), which were considered unengaged and hence removed. After data cleaning, the analysis was implemented on 514 responses. The data analysis for demographic data and customers' booking preferences for the category of online hotel booking sites was carried out with descriptive statistics in SPSS-23 software. Next, the sampling adequacy and scale reliability test were checked with SPSS-23. The sampling adequacy was checked with Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity, and scale reliability was checked with the application of Cronbach's alpha. The problem of common method biases was checked with Harman's single-factor test in SPSS software.

In the following step, the structural equation model (SEM) was performed, which involved the measurement model (aimed at checking the model's fitness and validity) and the structural model (aimed at testing the hypotheses, applying path analysis involving the measurements of latent constructs). Researchers such as Cheng (2001), Nusair and Hua (2010)

Table 1   Measurement Model Summary

Name of Fit indices	CMIN/DF	GFI	PRATIO	CFI	RMSEA
Cut-off value	< 5	> 0.9	Higher is better	> 0.9	< 0.08
Fitness score (Default Model)	2.349	0.923	0.850	0.956	0.051

Table 2   Convergent Validity and Reliability

Constructs	Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Booking Intention	PI1: After reviewing the hotel website/mobile app, the likelihood of booking this hotel is high.	0.810	0.878	0.643	0.860
	PI2: If I am going to book the hotel, I would consider booking this hotel at the price shown on this hotel website/mobile app.	0.749			
	PI3: The probability that I would consider booking this hotel from this hotel website/mobile app is high.	0.833			
	PI4: My willingness to book this hotel from this hotel website/mobile app is high.	0.812			
Perceived Price	PP1: The price listed by this hotel website/mobile app is inexpensive.	0.693	0.868	0.624	0.899
	PP2: The price shown on the hotel website/mobile app is reasonable.	0.763			
	PP3: The price shown on the hotel website/mobile app is affordable.	0.941			
	PP4: The price shown on hotel website/mobile app is appropriate.	0.742			
Perceived Quality	PQ1: This hotel website/mobile app is of low quality/high quality.	0.636	0.874	0.638	0.853
	PQ2: This hotel website/mobile app is not at all reliable/very reliable.	0.799			
	PQ3: The service offered by this hotel website/mobile app is of inferior/superior quality.	0.869			
	PQ4: The hotel options offered by this website/mobile app are of very bad quality/very good quality.	0.868			

and Stylidis et al. (2020) justified the superiority of the structural equation model (SEM) over simple multi-variate regression because of its ability to address the complex mediating relationships, measurement errors, and unreliability through the inclusion of both measurement and structural models, unlike multivariate analysis. The analysis of the measurement model was performed on AMOS-20 software whereas the analysis of the structural model using path analysis was performed on SPSS-23 using the PROCESS macro-3.4 plugin. The limitation of AMOS-20 software in performing the complex serial mediation is the reason for using two different software programs (AMOS-20 and SPSS-23 using PROCESS macro 3.4) to conduct the structural equation model (SEM).

The inter-relationship effects among the variables were checked using the test of measurement model with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on AMOS-20. The model's fitness (using various indices like goodness of fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), proportional reduction in approximation to an ideal model (PRATIO), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and Chi-square minimum (CMIN)/degree of freedom (df)), composite reliability (CR), and construct validity (convergent and discriminant validity) were checked while testing the measurement model. The convergent validity indicators such as average variance extracted (AVE) > 0.5, composite reliability (CR) > 0.7 and itemized factor loading > 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010), and discriminant validity indicators such as AVE > maximum shared variance (MSV) (Hair et al., 2010) and Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) ratio < 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015) were considered for checking overall construct validity. The hypothesis

Table 2   Continued from the previous page

Constructs	Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Perceived Value	PV1: The hotel website/mobile app offers good value for the price.	0.734	0.877	0.642	0.868
	PV2: The hotel website/mobile app provides me satisfactory value.	0.921			
	PV3: It is worth it to book the hotel from this hotel website/ mobile app.	0.741			
	PV4: It is a very good bargain to book the hotel at the price shown on this hotel website/mobile app.	0.797			
Brand Awareness	BA1: The name of this hotel website/mobile app is well-known in online hotel booking.	0.832	0.858	0.668	0.873
	BA2: This hotel website/mobile app is recognized as a strong online hotel booking brand.	0.756			
	BA3: In comparison to other hotel websites/mobile apps, this hotel website/mobile app is a leading brand in the industry.	0.863			
Brand Image	BI1: The company managing this hotel website/mobile app takes good care of its online users.	0.639	0.873	0.636	0.877
	BI2: We can predict how this hotel website/mobile app brand will perform.	0.899			
	BI3: The hotel website/mobile app brand is attractive.	0.884			
	BI4: The hotel website/mobile app brand is pleasing.	0.739			

Notes   Column headings are as follows: (1) Standardized Loading, (2) Composite Reliability (CR), (3) Average Variance Extracted (AVE), (4) Reliability (Cronbach Alpha).

test was performed on SPSS-23 software (using PROCESS macro 3.4) after the satisfactory results of CFA. The PROCESS macro model 4 was used for the path analysis (involving the measurements of latent constructs) with single mediation, and model 6 was used for two or three mediations (Hayes, 2013). While running PROCESS macro, a bootstrap of 5000 was set with a 95% confidence level.

Results

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic responses and the responses regarding respondents' hotel booking site preferences have been depicted in Appendix 4. The respondents included more males than females. This is because males initiate hotel bookings more than females in the Indian context of patriarchal culture. The majority of the respondents who filled out the questionnaire were married. The data relating to the educational profile indicates that more respondents have completed a post-graduation degree, followed by an undergraduate degree, below the 12th Standard of education, M.Phil. or Ph.D. degree, and other qualifications. The data shows that most employed people go for online booking, followed by business people, students, and unemployed persons. Most people prefer online travel agency (OTA) sites like Make My Trip, Goibibo, Yatra, Clear Trip, Ease my Trip, Expedia, and Booking.com for online hotel booking, followed by the hotel aggregating platforms like OYO Rooms, Fab Hotels, and Treebo. Surprisingly, nobody preferred the direct hotel's platform for online hotel booking, which may be due to the limited choices available on the direct hotel's platform. It is also difficult to search the options from individual hotel booking sites.

Data Adequacy

The mean of the measurement items was performed, and the result was found to be above the mean (see

Appendix-2). It indicates that the preferred hotel website type chosen by the respondents over other hotel booking site types is perceived to have higher brand awareness, higher brand image, and good quality, offering hotels with more reasonable pricing, higher value, and higher booking intention. A standard deviation of more than 1 shows the data as more dispersed and having more variance from the mean. Hence, the data does not satisfy the condition of Normal Distribution. The Kaiser- Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity was performed to check sampling adequacy, in which the KMO value was found to be 0.837, which was more than the threshold level of 0.7 (see Appendix 3) and the p-value under Bartlett's test was found to be .000 which was less than .05 and was satisfactory (Marsh et al., 1988). The scale's reliability for each of the six constructs was measured with Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951). It was found to be 0.877, 0.873, 0.853, 0.899, 0.868, and 0.860 for brand image, brand awareness, perceived quality, perceived price, perceived value, and booking intention, respectively (see Table 2). The values were above the threshold limit of .7; hence, satisfactory (Cronbach, 1951). Harman's single-factor test was applied in SPSS to check the problem of common method biases (CMB). Here, the single factor explained 25.67% variance, which lies below the cut-off value, i.e. 50%, hence it is satisfactory and can be concluded as the absence of CMB issue (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Analysis of Measurement Model
Model Fit
The measurement model was formed involving all the items of the considered factors. The measurement model (see Fig. 2) was analysed with the implementation of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS 20. The indices are presented in Table 1 where CMIN/df = 2.349, GFI = 0.923, CFI = 0.956, PRATIO = 0.850, and RMSEA = 0.51 were found to be above the threshold value such as CMIN/df > 3 (Hair et al., 2010), GFI > 0.9 (Hair et al., 2010), CFI > 0.9 (Hair et al., 2010), PRATIO – the higher is better (West et al., 2012), and RMSEA ≤ 0.08 (Steiger, 1990); hence, they were considered satisfactory (see Table 1).

Scales' Reliability and Validity
To assess the reliability of the construct, composite reliability (CR) was calculated, and tests for convergent and discriminant validity were conducted to evaluate its validity. Table 2 shows the scores for checking composite reliability and convergent validity, and Table 3 shows the scores for checking discriminant validity. The CR value of each latent construct was more than .7; the itemized factor loadings were found to be more than .5, and the AVE values of the latent variables were greater than .5 (see Table 2), which satisfies the condition of convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010). The AVE values of each construct were greater than those of MSV values (see Table 3), which satisfies the condition of discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2010). The results of the HTMT matrix considering bivariate correlation results of each pair of variables came out as below 0.85 (see Table 4), and hence satisfied the condition of discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

Path Analysis
The path analysis (with the measurements of latent constructs) was performed to test the hypotheses using Hayes's PROCESS macro. The path analysis includes checking the indirect paths' direct, indirect, and total effects as hypothesized and presented with the tentative model. In an indirect/mediating path, partial mediation refers to the significance of both direct and total effects, full mediation refers to the significance of the full mediating paths and insignificance of the direct path, and no mediation refers to the significance of the direct path and insignificance of the full mediating path (Woody, 2011). Complementary mediation refers to the positive result with the multiplication of all the path coefficients, including the direct and indirect paths involved in a relationship having one or more mediating variables. In contrast, competitive mediation refers to the negative result by multiplying all the path coefficients, including the direct and indirect paths involved in a mediating relationship (Hair et al., 2010). In other words, competitive mediation refers to the significance of direct and indirect effects having different signs. In contrast, complementary mediation refers to the significance of

Table 3 Discriminant Validity

	AVE	MSV	Booking Intention	Perceived Price	Perceived Quality	Perceived Value	Brand Awareness	Brand Image
Booking Intention	0.643	0.287	0.802					
Perceived Price	0.624	0.102	0.320	0.790				
Perceived Quality	0.638	0.016	0.049	−0.032	0.799			
Perceived Value	0.642	0.287	0.536	0.307	0.103	0.801		
Brand Awareness	0.668	0.110	0.187	0.086	0.125	0.323	0.818	
Brand Image	0.636	0.130	0.243	0.176	−0.026	0.361	0.332	0.798

Note AVE- Average Variance Extracted, MSV- Maximum Shared Variance.

both direct and indirect effects having the same signs (Hair et al., 2010).

The latent scores were considered for each construct while performing the path analysis. The indirect effects were tested using the non-parametric bootstrapping method in PROCESS macro on SPSS-23.0 software. The hypotheses depicting the indirect and mediating effects have been presented in Table 5. To establish statistical significance at the 0.05 level, the p-values less than 0.05 were considered both for direct and total effects. Additionally, for indirect effects, the lower and upper bounds (LLCI and ULCI) sharing the same sign with a t-value greater than 1.96 was looked for.

The result of hypothesis H1 revealed that the brand image poses a significant indirect effect on booking intention with perceived value as a mediator ($\beta = 0.176$, $t = 4.377 > 1.96$, LLCI $= 0.099$, ULCI $= 0.258$) and poses an insignificant direct effect ($\beta = 0.061$, $p = 0.187 > .05$) which results in considering the mediation as full and complementary. Similarly, the result of hypothesis H2 revealed that the brand image poses a significant indirect effect on booking intention with perceived price followed by perceived value as mediator ($\beta = 0.190$, $t = 4.313 > 1.96$, LLCI $= 0.11$, ULCI $= 0.282$) and poses an insignificant direct effect ($\beta = 0.047$, $p = 0.304 > .05$) which results in considering the mediation as full and complementary.

The result of hypothesis H3 revealed that the brand image poses an insignificant indirect effect on booking intention with perceived quality as a mediator ($\beta = 0$, LLCI $= −0.005$, ULCI $= 0.006$) and poses a significant direct effect ($\beta = 0.237$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$) which results in no mediation and the effect is caused only due to direct effect. The result of hypothesis H4 revealed that the brand image poses a significant indirect effect on booking intention with perceived quality followed by perceived value as mediator ($\beta = 0.176$, $t = 5.066 > 1.96$, LLCI $= 0.101$, ULCI $= 0.260$) and poses an insignificant direct effect ($\beta = 0.060$, $p = 0.190 > .05$) which results in considering the mediation as full and complementary.

The result of hypothesis H5 revealed that brand awareness poses an insignificant indirect effect on booking intention with perceived quality as a mediator ($\beta = 0.333$, LLCI $= −0.013$, ULCI $= 0.023$) and poses a significant direct effect ($\beta = 0.202$, $p = 0.000 < .05$) which results in no mediation and the effect is caused
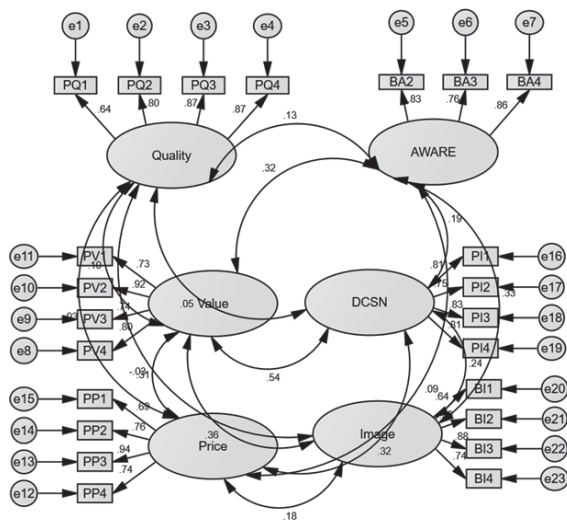

Figure 2 Measurement Model

	Booking Intention	Perceived Price	Perceived Quality	Perceived Value	Brand Awareness	Brand Image
Booking Intention						
Perceived Price	0.328					
Perceived Quality	0.043	−0.012				
Perceived Value	0.566	0.348	0.111			
Brand Awareness	0.192	0.007	0.142	0.350		
Brand Image	0.239	0.202	−0.001	0.372	0.332	

only due to direct effect. The result of hypothesis H6 revealed that brand awareness has a significant indirect effect on booking intention with perceived quality followed by perceived value as mediator ($\beta = 0.189$, $t = 4.8 > 1.96$, LLCI = 0.115, ULCI = 0.269) and the direct effect after mediation was found to be insignificant ($\beta = 0.015$, $p = 0.765 > .05$) which results in considering the mediation as full and complementary.

The result of hypothesis H7 revealed that brand awareness poses a significant indirect effect on booking intention with perceived value as a mediator ($\beta = 0.191$, $t = 4.9 > 1.96$, LLCI = 0.117, ULCI = 0.270) and poses an insignificant direct effect ($\beta = 0.014$, $p = 0.787 > .05$) which results in considering the mediation as full and complementary. The result of hypothesis H8 revealed that brand awareness poses a significant indirect effect on booking intention with perceived price followed by perceived value as mediator ($\beta = 0.186$, $t = 4.772 > 1.96$, LLCI = 0.111, ULCI = 0.265), and poses an insignificant direct effect ($\beta = 0.019$, $p = 0.708 > .05$) which results in considering the mediation as full and complementary.

The result of hypothesis H9 revealed that brand awareness poses a significant indirect effect on booking intention with brand image followed by perceived value as a mediator ($\beta = 0.206$, $t = 4.686 > 1.96$, LLCI = 0.120, ULCI = 0.295), and poses an insignificant direct effect ($\beta = -0.000$, $p = 0.985 > 0.05$) which results in considering the mediation as full and competitive having negative regression coefficient of direct effect and positive regression coefficient of direct effect. The result of hypothesis H10 revealed that brand awareness has a significant indirect effect on booking in-

tention with brand image followed by perceived price and then perceived value as mediator ($\beta = 0.197$, $t = 2.67 > 1.96$, LLCI = 0.116, ULCI = 0.285) and the direct effect after mediation was found to be insignificant ($\beta = 0.007$, $p = 0.88 > 0.05$) which results in considering the mediation as full and complementary.

The result of hypothesis H11 revealed that brand awareness has a significant indirect effect on booking intention with brand image followed by perceived quality as a mediator ($\beta = 0.070$, $t = 2.438 > 1.96$, LLCI = 0.021, ULCI = 0.134) and the direct effect after mediation was found to be significant ($\beta = 0.134$, $p = 0.020 < .05$) as well, which results in considering the mediation as partial and complementary. The result of hypothesis H12 revealed that brand awareness has a significant indirect effect on booking intention with brand image followed by perceived quality and then perceived value as mediator ($\beta = 0.2042$, $t = 4.63 > 1.96$, LLCI = 0.124, ULCI = 0.294) and the direct effect after mediation was found to be insignificant ($\beta = 0.000$, $p = 0.994 > 0.05$) which results in considering the mediation as full and complimentary.

Discussion and Conclusion
This study proposes a robust model by modifying the suggested model of Lien et al. (2015), which studied the effect of brand image on the customer's booking intention. The current study examines the impact of brand image and brand awareness on the customer's booking intention with the mediating effects of perceived price, perceived quality, and perceived value in online hotel booking. The interaction effect of brand image and brand awareness on booking intention was also studied with the above-mentioned mediators.

Table 5   Indirect Effects

Hypothesis	Relationship	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Confidence Interval		t-statistics (β Indirect Effect /S.E.)	Remarks
					LLCI	ULCI		
H1	PI←PV←BI	0.2370 (p = 0.0000)	0.0610 (p = .1870)	0.176	0.099	0.258	4.377	Full Mediation
H2	PI←PV←PP←BI	0.2370 (p = 0.0000)	0.0470 (p = 0.3040)	0.190	0.110	0.282	4.313	Full Mediation
H3	PI←PQ←BI	0.2370 (p = 0.0000)	0.2370 (p = 0.0000)	0.000	−0.005	0.006	0	No Mediation
H4	PI←PV←PQ←BI	0.2370 (p = 0.0000)	0.0600 (p = 0.1910)	0.176	0.101	0.260	5.066	Full Mediation
H5	PI←PQ←BA	0.2050 (p = 0.0000)	0.2020 (p = 0.0000)	0.003	−0.013	0.022	0.333	No Mediation
H6	PI←PV←PQ←BA	0.2050 (p = 0.0000)	0.0150 (p = 0.7650)	0.189	0.115	0.269	4.800	Full Mediation
H7	PI←PV←BA	0.2050 (p = 0.0000)	0.0140 (p = 0.7870)	0.191	0.117	0.270	4.900	Full Mediation
H8	PI←PV←PP←BA	0.2050 (p = 0.0000)	0.0190 (p = 0.7080)	0.186	0.111	0.265	4.772	Full Mediation
H9	PI←PV←BI←BA	0.2050 (p = 0.0000)	−0.0010 (p = 0.9850)	0.206	0.120	0.295	4.686	Full Mediation
H10	PI←PV←PP←BI←BA	0.2050 (p = 0.0000)	0.0070 (p = 0.8800)	0.197	0.116	0.285	2.670	Full Mediation
H11	PI←PQ←BI←BA	0.2050 (p = 0.0000)	0.1340 (p = 0.0211)	0.070	0.021	0.134	2.438	Partial Mediation
H12	PI←PV←PQ←BI←BA	0.2050 (p = 0.0000)	0.0010 (p = 0.9940)	0.204	0.124	0.294	4.630	Full Mediation

Notes   PI = Booking Intention, PP = Perceived Price, PV = Perceived Value, PQ = Perceived Quality, BA = Brand Awareness, BI = Brand Image.

Considering the overnight success of the start-up companies and the relentless growth of established players, in addition to their market share retention, the importance of brand awareness and brand image becomes significant.

The study's findings reveal that the online customer's positive brand image generated out of their brand experience and brand association influences the customer to perceive the website's value positively, ultimately resulting in their booking intention. The current study also corroborates the research results of Graciola et al. (2020) and Qalati et al. (2021). Furthermore, prospective customers evaluate the price offerings by previously experienced websites before evaluating and perceiving the website brand's value and intending to book. The finding of the current research also supports the results of Kim et al. (2012), Oh (2000), and Lien et al. (2015). However, the booking intention of the online customer from any familiar website's brand was not influenced by mere website quality perception. The result did not agree with Konuk's (2018) outcomes. It may be due to the possible mediating effect of another variable apart from perceived quality. Additionally, website quality perception was found to play a pivotal role in assessing a familiar website's value before the customer's booking intention. Again, website quality perception was found to play a pivotal role in assessing a familiar website's value before the customer's booking intention. It was clarified from the acceptance of the hypothesis repre-

senting the significant impact of website brand image on customers' online booking intention with the mediating effect of the website's perceived quality and perceived value.

The result of the current study supports the findings of Pham and Nguyen (2019), Chen and Chen (2010), and Li and Shang (2020). Hence, it can be inferred that the customers did not show booking intention only by perceiving the quality of the website but by adding the value perception generated out of quality perception while considering the quality. Brand awareness does not influence the customers to evaluate and perceive the website's quality for booking. The current study's results contradict the outcomes of Chi et al. (2009) and Xu et al. (2015). Similar to brand image, brand awareness was not found to influence booking intention solely through the perception of website quality, suggesting the possibility of another mediating variable following website quality perception. Furthermore, customers perceive the value offered by a familiar website immediately after assessing its quality, especially when contemplating an online transaction (Ali et al., 2021). Hence, it was apparent that not the mere website quality but the website value was perceived after website quality while considering booking from a known website brand. Further, the online customer's website brand awareness has a significant and positive impact on the brand image, which is supported by the findings of Saleem et al. (2015), Barreda et al. (2016), and Tariq et al. (2017). Brand awareness significantly impacts customers' booking intention with the mediating effect of the brand image followed by their perceived value. Their perceived price also precedes the perceived value in this relationship. The knowledge of a hotel booking platform influences the customers to associate with the brand and creates their value perception, resulting in their booking intention. The price is also perceived before evaluating the value of the website. Brand awareness significantly impacts customers' booking intention with the mediating effect of brand image and perceived quality. The perceived value also succeeds the perceived quality in this relationship. The knowledge of a hotel booking platform influences the customers to associate with the brand and creates their website

quality perception, resulting in their booking intention. After perceiving the quality, the customers may also perceive the value before their booking intention.

From the above discussions, it is derived that only the knowledge of the website is insufficient to influence the customer's website quality perception while considering an online booking. Similarly, only a positive brand image regarding a website does not influence the customers to consider booking only based on perceived website quality. However, the knowledge of the brand, creating brand association, influences their quality perception and results in their booking intention. The customer also perceives the value received from the website after the website's quality perception before considering an online booking. The value shows a significant mediating effect during serial and parallel mediations, so we can say that the customer mostly perceives the value received from the website while considering the online hotel booking. The new dimensions in this research will help new and existing online hotel businesses create an online strategy by understanding the customer's perspective toward brand awareness, brand image, price perception, quality perception, and value perception.

This study offers a theoretical base for online hotel booking companies by which the entrepreneurs or the management of the company can adopt the right strategies for pricing, value creation, website quality maintenance, brand building, and customer online experience enhancement, which can ultimately increase the booking intention of the customers. Theoretical implications of this study extend beyond traditional models by elucidating the nuanced interplay between brand attributes and customer behaviour in the online hotel booking domain. By incorporating variables such as brand awareness, brand image, perceived price, perceived quality, and perceived value, the research underscores the complexity of decision-making processes in e-commerce settings. Researchers can leverage these insights to refine existing models and develop more comprehensive theories that capture the complexity of online consumers' decision-making processes. This holistic perspective contributes to the advancement of theoretical frameworks in marketing and consumer behaviour, offering insights for practi-

tioners to develop more nuanced strategies for online brand management and customer engagement.

Understanding the findings of the current study, some managerial implications can also be presented. Firstly, the hotel booking platforms should offer discounts, offers, and good hotels at a very competitive price which can guide the customer's ultimate booking intention. Secondly, with the increase in customer value perception and booking intention, the hotel booking sites should consider enhancing customers' website quality experience by creating an appealing web platform, offering a user-friendly interface, offering facilities for easy navigation and personalization, offering reliable service and responding to customer queries swiftly. Thirdly, the pricing should be set by the hotel booking platforms considering the competition. Fourthly, hotel booking platforms should consider different digital and traditional strategies for promotion and brand building. Fifthly, hotel booking sites should consider enhancing symbolic value, functional value, and customer experience to improve the customer's brand association, resulting in a positive brand image that may stimulate their booking intention with different mediating effects.

The study has a few limitations. First, the study tried to cover the important variables but missed out on variables like website trust, perceived risk, subjective norms, and online reviews while studying the online booking intention of the customer. Second, this study does not contribute any knowledge in understanding the factors influencing the website booking intention in the final booking behaviour of the customers. Third, the study did not cover the cross-platform adoption of online hotel booking. Fourth, the study was performed in India considering only the Indian tourist's perception and practices. Fifth, the study involved the judgmental sampling technique (a non-probability sampling technique) for the purpose of saving time and resources with the advantage of having expert knowledge, which may involve the possibility of improper representation of the total population.

Considering the above limitations, suggestions for future research can be recommended. Including new variables like website trust, perceived risk, subjective norms, and online reviews in addition to the currently

considered variables can contribute more to the field of research. Studies on the conversion of booking intention into actual booking behaviour with the effect of other factors can further improve the model and contribute hugely to the field of research. Cross-platform studies covering the adoption of an online travel agency (OTA), aggregating platform, or own hotel's website can further contribute to understanding the customers' change in hotel booking behaviour regarding the influential variables. Further, the performance of the same study in other countries or geographical regions can help test the suggested model's validity in a larger context. The use of probability sampling technique can be adopted (provided there is sufficient time for data collection) for checking whether the outcomes of the current study are aligned with the outcomes of the suggested study.

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Appendices

Appendix 1   Scale with Source

Factor Name	Item Number	Statement of variables	Source
Brand Image	BI1	The company managing this hotel website/mobile app takes good care of its online users.	(Davis et al., 2008; Lien et al., 2015; Barreda et al., 2016)
	BI2	We can predict how this hotel website/mobile app brand will perform.	
	BI3	The hotel website/mobile app brand is attractive.	
	BI4	The hotel website/mobile app brand is pleasing.	
Brand Awareness	BA1	The name of this hotel website/mobile app is well-known in online hotel booking.	(Davis et al., 2008; Barreda et al., 2016)
	BA2	This hotel website/mobile app is recognized as a strong online hotel booking brand.	
	BA3	In comparison to other hotel websites/mobile apps, this hotel website/mobile app is a leading brand in the industry.	
Perceived Price	PP1	The price listed by this hotel website/mobile app is inexpensive.	(Dodds et al., 1991; Cheong & Jang, 2013; Lien et al., 2015)
	PP2	The price shown on the hotel website/mobile app is reasonable.	
	PP3	The price shown on the hotel website/mobile app is affordable.	
	PP4	The price shown on hotel website/mobile app is appropriate.	
Perceived Value (V)	PV1	The hotel website/mobile app offers good value for the price.	
	PV2	The hotel website/mobile app provides me satisfactory value.	
	PV3	It is worth it to book the hotel from this hotel website/mobile app.	
	PV4	It is a very good bargain to book the hotel at the price shown on this hotel website/mobile app	
Booking Intentions (PI)	PI1	After reviewing the hotel website/mobile app, the likelihood of booking this hotel is high.	
	PI2	If I am going to book the hotel, I would consider booking this hotel at the price shown on this hotel website/mobile app.	
	PI3	The probability that I would consider booking this hotel from this hotel website/mobile app is high.	
	PI4	My willingness to book this hotel from this hotel website/mobile app is high.	
Perceived Quality	PQ1	This hotel website/mobile app is of low quality/high quality.	(Bao et al., 2011; Konuk, 2018)
	PQ2	This hotel website/mobile app is not at all reliable/very reliable.	
	PQ3	The service offered by this hotel website/mobile app is of inferior/superior quality.	
	PQ4	The hotel options offered by this website/mobile app are of very bad quality/very good quality.	

Appendix 2 Descriptive Statistics of Measurement Items

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perceived Quality				Perceived Price			
PQ1	514	3.9	0.899	PP1	514	3.7	0.734
PQ2	514	4.27	0.863	PP2	514	3.76	0.97
PQ3	514	4.04	0.873	PP3	514	3.75	0.934
PQ4	514	4.14	0.838	PP4	514	3.69	0.961
Average Mean		4.09		Average Mean		3.72	
Braond Image				Booking Intention			
BI1	514	4.22	0.925	PI1	514	4.13	1.046
BI2	514	4.47	0.881	PI2	514	4.09	1.039
BI3	514	4.49	0.892	PI3	514	4.13	1.021
BI4	514	4.27	0.954	PI4	514	4.05	1.043
Average Mean		4.37		Average Mean		4.1	
Perceived Value				Brand Awareness			
PV1	514	3.65	1.004	BA1	514	4.08	1.033
PV2	514	3.98	0.608	BA2	514	3.96	1.053
PV3	514	3.92	0.878	BA3	514	3.93	1.059
PV4	514	3.94	0.766				
Average Mean		3.87		Average Mean		3.99	

Appendix 3 KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.837
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	7353.702
	Df	276
	Sig.	0.000

Appendix 4   Demographic Profile and Hotel Booking Site Preference

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender of the Respondents			
Male	328	63.8	63.8
Female	186	36.2	100.0
Total	514	100.0	
Age of the Respondents			
Below 25	91	17.7	17.7
From 26 to 35	120	23.3	41
From 36 to 45	186	36.2	77.2
From 46 to 55	104	20.2	97.4
Above 55	13	2.6	100.0
Total	514	100.0	
Marital Status of the Respondents			
Married	309	60.1	60.1
Unmarried	205	39.9	100.0
Total	514	100.0	
Educational Qualification			
Up to 12th	25	4.9	4.9
UG	213	41.4	46.3
PG	254	49.4	95.7
M.Phil./Ph.D.	17	3.3	99
Other	5	1	100.0
Total	514	100.0	
Occupation			
Student	63	12.3	12.3
Employee	254	49.4	61.7
Businessperson	183	35.6	97.3
Unemployed	14	2.7	100.0
Total	514	100.0	
Monthly Income			
Up to Rs.15,000	16	3.1	3.1
Rs.15,001 to Rs. 30,000	65	12.6	15.7
Rs.30,001 to Rs. 45,000	136	26.5	42.2
Rs.45,001 to Rs. 60,000	131	25.5	67.7
Above 60,000	166	32.3	100.0
Total	514	100.0	
Preferred Hotel Booking Site			
Online Travel Agency (Make My Trip, Go Ibibo, Yatra, Ease My Trip, Akbar Online, Clear Trip, Booking.com, Agoda, or similar)	345	67.12	67.12
Hotel Aggregating Platforms (OYO, Treebo, Fab Hotels, or similar)	169	32.88	100.0
Direct Hotel Platform	00	00	

Žensko podjetništvo v malih turističnih in gostinskih podjetjih na Poljskem
Alina M. Zapalska in Robin McCutcheon

Članek preučuje značilnosti, strategije in poslovno okolje desetih malih turističnih ter gostinskih podjetij v južni regiji Poljske. Izvedena je bila kvalitativna analiza podatkov, pridobljenih s pomočjo spletnih anket in intervjujev s podjetnicami glede gospodarskih, družbeno-kulturnih in okoljskih dejavnikov, ki vplivajo na uspešnost podjetij. Rezultati kažejo, da so podjetnice razvile odpornost na premagovanje tržnih izzivov v prvih letih poslovanja, med finančno krizo leta 2007 in pandemijo covida-19. Soočale so se s številnimi težavami, ki so ovirale njihovo poslovno rast, med najpomembnejšimi ovirami pa je bila omejena razpoložljivost ugodnega financiranja dejavnosti. Njihove strategije so bile osredotočene na preoblikovanje v smeri trajnosti, vključevanja javnosti, ohranjanja resursov, izobraževanja in okolju prijaznega poslovanja. Prepoznavanje značilnosti trga in potreb lokalnih skupnosti, zaposlenih ter strank in ohranjanje kulture ter okoljska trajnost so bili ključnega pomena za rast podjetij in njihov podjetniški uspeh.

Ključne besede: transformativnost, trajnostni, medicinski in ekološki turizem, rast, razvoj, žensko podjetništvo
Academica Turistica, 17(1), 3–22

Pričakovanja potrošnikov v kontekstu unikatnih turističnih proizvodov
Žana Čivre, Petra Rebec in Petra Zabukovec Baruca

Pričujoča raziskava se odziva na sodobne trende v vedenju turistov, ki aktivno iščejo nova, edinstvena in posebna doživetja, zato raziskuje odnos med zaznavanjem edinstvenosti turističnih proizvodov s strani turistov in njihovimi pričakovanji. Na primeru slovenske obmorske destinacije Piran in Portorož so analizirana štiri edinstvena doživetja: Gourmet Olive Tours, Ribji vrt Fonda, Izginotje Tartinijeve violine in E-bike Extravagance Mareatour. Raziskava s kvantitativnim pristopom potrjuje hipotezo, da zaznana edinstvenost novih turističnih proizvodov pomembno vpliva na pričakovanja turistov. Ugotovitve potrjujejo hipotezo in razkrivajo, da je zaznana edinstvenost doživetja tesno povezana z vključevanjem lokalnega značaja in močnim doživljajskim ali osebnim stikom. Npr., doživetje v oljčniku, ki je bilo zaznano kot najbolj edinstveno, turiste popelje v zaledje destinacije in ponuja interakcijo z lokalno oljkarsko družino. Poleg tega raziskava opredeljuje hierarhijo pričakovanj turistov, ki vključujejo boljše poznavanje lokalne ponudbe, tradicije in zgodovine pa tudi edinstvene dejavnosti in zaupanje, da bo doživetje izpolnilo pričakovanja. Rezultati kažejo, da imajo potrošniki visoka pričakovanja glede edinstvenih doživetij, kar poudarja potrebo po izkustvenem in čustvenem poudarku v turističnih proizvodih. Pozitivna korelacija med zaznano edinstvenostjo in pričakovanji poudarja nujnost oblikovanja drugačne ter nepozabne turistične ponudbe. Raziskava prispeva k razumevanju odnosa med zaznano edinstvenostjo ter pričakovanji, bogati naše razumevanje odnosa med zaznano edinstvenostjo in pričakovanji ter ponuja dragocen vpogled za tržnike destinacij, ki želijo ustvariti edinstvene in diferencirane turistične proizvode. Prav tako podaja priporočila za prihodnje raziskave, s čimer se krepi znanstvena razprava o razvoju turističnih proizvodov in vedenju potrošnikov.

Ključne besede: pričakovanja potrošnikov, edinstveni turistični proizvodi, destinacija, turistična doživetja
Academica Turistica, 17(1), 23–34

Trendi publikacij o varnosti in zdravju: študija primera turistične industrije

Khairul Hafezad Abdullah, Ejiro Uriri Osiobe, Azliyana Azizan, Fadzli Shah Abd Aziz in Afrig Aminuddin

V turistični industriji je ključno, da dajemo prednost varnostnim in zdravstvenim ukrepom, da zagotovimo zadovoljstvo in dobrobit lokalnih skupnosti ter turistov. V raziskavi analiziramo vzorce objav, geografsko razpršenost, najbolj citirane članke in tematski poudarek raziskav na varnosti ter zdravju v turistični industriji. V empirični raziskavi smo uporabili podatke iz Scopusa in platforme Web of Science, ki smo jih analizirali s pomočjo orodij ScientoPy in VOSviewer. Rezultati kažejo na pomemben porast raziskovalne dejavnosti v letu 2000, kar kaže na poudarek, ki ga raziskovalci namenjajo pomembnosti praks varnosti in zdravja v turistični industriji. Kitajska je najpomembnejši prispevalec, saj so tam ustvarili 154 publikacij na to temo, več kot 50 % pa jih je bilo objavljenih med letoma 2021 in 2022. Izraz »zdravstveni turizem« se pojavlja kot prevladujoča tema raziskav o varnosti in zdravju v turistični industriji, saj ga zasledimo v 215 publikacijah. Pomembno je omeniti, da je bilo 19 % publikacij, ki uporabljajo izraz »zdravstveni turizem«, objavljenih med letoma 2021 in 2022, kar kaže na trajno zanimanje in nedavni porast znanstvenih prizadevanj na tem področju. Od leta 2018 prevladujejo izrazi »turistična destinacija«, »turistična industrija«, »zadovoljstvo«, »javno zdravje«, »dobro počutje«, »varnost v turizmu«, »Kitajska«, »covid-19«, »duševno zdravje«, »dobrobit« ter »zdravje in blaginja« kot vznikajoče področje ali specifično področje preučevanja varnosti in zdravja v turistični industriji.

Ključne besede: varnost, zdravje, dobro počutje, turistična industrija, bibliometrija
Academica Turistica, 17(1), 35–52

Dejavniki, ki vplivajo na karierne cilje študentov gostinstva v Indoneziji

Nurul Sukma Lestari in Dendy Rosman

Čeprav gostinski sektor hitro raste, številne raziskave kažejo, da še vedno primanjkuje usposobljene delovne sile, ki bi zadostila zahtevam panoge. To stanje še poslabšuje dejstvo, da veliko študentov gostinstva po končanem študiju spremeni svoje poklicne želje. Namen te raziskave je raziskati dejavnike, ki vplivajo na poklicne cilje študentov gostinstva v Indoneziji. Za zbiranje podatkov med indonezijskimi študenti gostinstva je bila uporabljena anketa, ki so jo izpolnjevali sami. Za statistično analizo je bilo uporabljenih 430 izpolnjenih vprašalnikov. Podatki so bili analizirani z uporabo orodja za modeliranje strukturnih enačb po metodi delnih najmanjših kvadratov, ki daje zanesljive in veljavne podatke. Rezultati raziskave kažejo, da notranja in zunanja motivacija študenta pomembno vplivata na poklicne cilje dodiplomskih študentov gostinstva. Podobno je raziskava pokazala tudi, da so poklicna izpostavljenost in tretje osebe pozitivno vplivale na poklicne cilje študentov gostinstva. Ugotovitve te raziskave so koristne za gostinska podjetja pri pripravi

in oblikovanju njihove strategije v procesu zaposlovanja. Visokošolske ustanove pa lahko glede na rezultate svoje študente bolje pripravijo na kariero z zagotavljanjem različnih oblik učenja, kot so seminarji, tako da se študenti preizkusijo in si ustvarijo realno sliko o svoji prihodnji karieri.

*Ključne besede: k*arierni cilji, motivacija, karierne priložnosti, tretje osebe
Academica Turistica, 17(1), 53–62

Krizno komuniciranje turizma v poslovnih hotelih med pandemijo covida-19
Márta Sirkó, Nikoletta Kaszás in Krisztin Keller

Cilj raziskave je oceniti proces krizne komunikacije štirizvezdičnih poslovnih hotelov med epidemijo koronavirusa in primerjati njihovo komunikacijo med prvim ter drugim valom epidemije. Kot del kvalitativnega raziskovanja smo izvedli 15 poglobljenih intervjujev z zaposlenimi, odgovornimi za krizno komunikacijo v raziskanih hotelih. Raziskava temelji na tristopenjskem modelu krizne komunikacije Lise T. Fall in Masseyja (2005), ki preučuje faze priprave, odziva in okrevanja.
Empirična raziskava je pokazala, da so, čeprav strateško vodenje hotelov ni bilo pripravljeno na prihajajočo krizo, uspeli razviti načrt krizne komunikacije na podlagi predhodnih protokolov, pogodb o višji sili in novopridobljenega znanja, ki so ga lahko uspešno uporabili med pandemijo covida-19. Avtorji raziskave so prvi raziskovali krizno komunikacijo madžarskih poslovnih hotelov med prvim in drugim valom koronavirusne epidemije. Zaključek raziskave poudari, da je bila po prvem valu potrebna sprememba v marketinški komunikacijski strategiji, saj so popotniki želeli brati sporočila s pozitivnejšim tonom. Ta sprememba se je izkazala za uspešno, zato je smiselno nadaljevati z zunanjo komunikacijo preko več kanalov in ni dovolj le uporaba Facebookove strani.

Ključne besede: turizem, poslovni hotel, krizna komunikacija, covid-19
Academica Turistica, 17(1), 63–79

Vloga blagovne znamke pri vplivanju na spletne rezervacije hotelov
Kamakshya Prasad Nayak in Hardaman Singh Bhinder

Raziskava odkriva, kako zavedanje o blagovni znamki in podoba blagovne znamke vplivata na namero strank, da rezervirajo hotele preko spleta. Prav tako preučuje vlogo dojemanja kakovosti, dojemanja cene in dojemanja vrednosti kot posrednikov, tako posamezno kot v kombinaciji. Z uporabo presojevalne vzorčevalne tehnike smo zbrali podatke od 514 spletnih popotnikov severnoindijskih hotelov. Te podatke smo analizirali z uporabo strukturnega enačbenega modeliranja, ki je vključevalo potrjevalno faktorsko analizo, nato pa še analizo poti. Za izvedbo potrjevalne faktorske analize smo uporabili programsko opremo za analizo podatkov Analysis of Momentum Structure (AMOS)-20, medtem ko smo za izvedbo analize poti, ki vključuje meritve latentnih konstruktov, uporabili funkcijo PROCESS macro-3.4 v programski opremi Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS)-23. Rezultati potrjujejo, da dojemanje vrednosti deluje kot posrednik v razmerju med zavedanjem blagovne znamke in namero rezervacije ter med podobo blagovne znamke in namerami rezervacije, tako v zaporednih kot vzporednih posredovanjih. Zaznana

kakovost sama po sebi ne deluje kot posrednik med zavedanjem blagovne znamke ali podobo blagovne znamke ter namerami rezervacije. Pomembnost vpliva se izrazi, ko podoba blagovne znamke presega zaznano kakovost kot posrednik med zavedanjem blagovne znamke in namero rezervacije. Pričujoča razsikava je uspela osvetliti pomen dveh glavnih lastnosti blagovne znamke, ki vplivata na namero strank pri rezervaciji. To lahko razjasni ključni dejavnik uspeha tako uveljavljenih podjetij kot tudi novonastalih zagonskih podjetij.

Ključne besede: spletna hotelska rezervacija, podoba blagovne znamke, zavedanje blagovne znamke, zaznana cena, zaznana vrednost, zaznana kakovost
Academica Turistica, 17(1), 81–101

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