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Does Better Physical Accessibility Lead to Higher Sales Revenues? The Case of Slovenian Restaurant SMEs

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Despite the significance of accessibility for sustainable tourism development, little is known about the relationship between physical accessibility and restaurant sales revenues. Previous studies also did not consider restaurant managers' perceptions of accessibility, although they are responsible for implementing an accessible offer. The objectives of the present study are (1) to investigate if managers of small and medium-sized restaurant enterprises (SMES) perceive restaurants as physically accessible and (2) to determine if better physical accessibility generates higher sales revenues. This study was performed in two steps. First, research on accessibility and relevant legislation was analysed. Second, primary data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire in field research from 149 restaurant managers, and secondary financial data for each SME was obtained through publicly available financial reports. To express the perspectives of people with disabilities (PWDS), disability organisation representatives were included in the questionnaire development process. Descriptive statistics and correlation analyses were used to analyse the data. Findings reveal that managers have low knowledge of accessibility, perceive restaurants as relatively poorly accessible, and that physical accessibility is not correlated to sales revenues. Concerning the different layout areas, managers identified toilet facilities as the most inaccessible restaurant area. Besides the legislative responsibility, managers should also be aware of the economic potential of the disability market in tourism and the fact that an accessible offer facilitates the use of restaurants for society as a whole. The article ends with providing recommendations for the restaurant industry, policymakers, and academia.

Keywords: restaurant SMES, disability, managers, physical accessibility, sales revenue

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Introduction

Tourism, including the restaurant sector, is a global economic driver. In 2019, the tourism industry contributed 10.3% of the world's gross domestic product (GDP). Similarly, in the Republic of Slovenia, one of the smallest European (EU) economies, the contribution of tourism to GDP in 2019 was 10.6% (World Travel and Tourism Council, n.d.). The tourism industry has also provided several opportunities for the growth of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (SMES), which accounted for 99.8% of all business entities in the EU in 2021 (Eurostat, 2021).

Despite its economic significance, tourism also has an essential social perspective, addressing human-related challenges in the global economic environment. Apart from being a labour-intensive industry, in developed (western) societies, 'holidaying' is considered a social right (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020). However, for people with disabilities (PWDS), it can present a source of inequality and frustration.

As the right to tourism engagement is considered a social norm, tourism should provide equal opportunities for all members of society (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020). From this point of view, accessible tourism (also known as barrier-free tourism) refers to activities in which anyone can freely engage regardless of their health conditions, psychological needs, or functional disabilities. Namely, PWDS also desire social participation and expect the same tourism experiences as non-disabled customers (Boxall et al., 2018). From this perspective, a growing body of literature recognises the importance of tourism for sustainable development, which should harmonise economic growth with social inclusion and environmental protection. Accordingly, fighting inequality in tourism is one of the sustainable development objectives of tourism in the 2030 Agenda since everyone should have equal access to tourism activities (World Tourism Organization, n.d.).

It is interesting to note that, globally, the issue of accessibility did not enter the political debate until the late 20th century. Only in 2008 did the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) come into force (United Nations, n.d.). In the EU, the UNCRPD was ratified by the EU only in December 2010. Interestingly, in the United States of America (USA), the rights of PWDS were first protected in 1990 by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). However, there are still many obstacles in the life of PWDS. First, there are obstacles in the built environment (physical barriers), those relating to the connection between supply and demand (communicational and functional barriers), and obstacles relating to how PWDS are perceived in society as a whole (barriers related to social integration) (Lim, 2020). For PWDS to enjoy tourism equally, these restrictions must be removed.

As a result of growing awareness of the issue, an increased number of tourism researchers have been focusing on this topic recently, with the majority of studies focusing on the hotel sector. Most of the studies (e.g. Ferri Sanz et al., 2019; Kuo & Kalargyrou, 2014; Lim, 2020; Zhang & Cole, 2016) analysed the demand side, while the service providers' (managerial) perspective was examined to a much lesser extent (e.g. Grady & Ohlin, 2009; Nicolaisen et al., 2012). Interestingly, only a few studies were found on restaurant physical accessibility (e.g. Dias de Faria et al., 2012; McClain et al., 1993; Wan-Chen & Chi-Chuan, 2012).

Due to the socioeconomic issues that humanity is currently facing, accessibility is a topic that deserves special attention. According to statistical data, more than 1 billion people (approximately 15% of the global population) live with a disability (Eurostat, 2021). PWDS represent 87 million Europeans (approximately 25% of the EU population). Similarly, PWDS represent 13% of the population in Slovenia, although this number excludes those who experience various types of temporary disabilities (Ministrstvo za delo, družino, socialne zadeve in enake možnosti, n.d.; Sendi, 2019). Considering a known connection between population ageing and multiple disabilities, this number is expected to increase considerably in the coming years (Ferri Sanz et al., 2019).

In terms of the share PWDS represent in society (approx. 25% of the EU population), to our knowledge, no study has empirically investigated restaurant managers' perceptions of physical accessibility. Moreover, no studies analysing the relationship between physical accessibility and sales revenue were found. Given the lack of research, this study sought to determine how restaurant managers evaluate physical accessibility and its compliance with legislative requirements and professional recommendations. According to Cockburn-Wootten and McIntosh (2020), service providers are generally unaware that their facility is not accessible to everyone. As managers' awareness of the actual state of restaurants' physical (in)accessibility presents the first step in implementing an accessible offer, we pose the first research question (RQ1): How do restaurant managers perceive the physical accessibility of restaurants they manage?

Besides its social perspective, the accessible tourism market has also been identified as a growing segment that could provide additional economic benefits. Namely, the disability market in tourism includes PWDs and their friends and family members who are emotionally connected to PWDs. According to Donovan (2020), the global disability market has approximately a population of 5.15 billion people and is estimated to control over 13 trillion US dollars in disposable income. Accordingly, many studies (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011; Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Domínguez et al., 2013) investigated the accessible tourism market and its economic importance for tourism destinations. A Spanish study by Domínguez et al. (2013) revealed that PWDs spend significantly more than abled travellers.

Interestingly, studies investigating accessibility and profitability in hotels (Baghdadi et al., 2017; Calvo-Mora et al., 2015; Capitaine, 2016) provided contradictory and inconsistent research findings about the economic importance of an accessible tourism offer. Surprisingly, to our knowledge, no research has investigated the importance of physical accessibility for restaurant business performance. Based on this background, we sought to answer the second research question (RQ2): What is the impact of restaurant physical accessibility on restaurant sales revenues?

In particular, this study has two specific objectives: (1) to empirically explore restaurant managers' perceptions of restaurant physical accessibility and its regulatory compliance in a small EU economy, and (2) to establish whether better (higher-perceived) physical accessibility positively influences restaurant sales revenues. Hopefully, this research will provide new insights into restaurant physical accessibility and determine its importance for restaurant SMEs' financial performance. The findings should make an important contribution to restaurant accessibility and revenue management.

This study applied a mixed methodological approach to achieve its objectives. After the literature review, theoretical findings and the identified physical accessibility indicators were pre-discussed by disability experts. In the next step, data were collected in field research from 149 restaurant managers. A correlation analysis using Spearman's rank and Pearson's correlational coefficient was performed to investigate the correlations between the observed indicators. Next, research results were presented and discussed. The paper concludes with implications for practice and policy, a presentation of research limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Literature Review

Key Disability and Accessibility Definitions: An International Perspective

Disability has been interpreted differently over time and across various cultures. As a result, disability is viewed as a complex, multidimensional, and evolving concept (Boxall et al., 2018). Accordingly, there are several definitions of disability, mainly used for statistical purposes (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011).

From a scientific standpoint, two paradigms of disability (the medical and the social model) dominate disability research (Dominguez et al., 2013). The medical model emphasises each person's medical situation (an individual pathology). In contrast, the social (or the collective) model emphasises limitations imposed by society (Nicolaisen et al., 2012). According to the social model, a person's handicap results from the interaction with the external environment, which might exacerbate any underlying health issues an individual might have by preventing them from participating equally in society (Ameri et al., 2020). Based on both models, the World Health Organization (WHO) has established the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF). Based on the ICF's multidimensionality approach, there are various ways to quantify disability, such as accounting for various impairments, functional restrictions, or social integration problems (Dominguez et al., 2013).

Based on the social model of disability, the UNCRPD declaration introduced the UN definition of PWDs and set the minimum requirements for their rights and protection. The UNCRPD, in Article 1, defines PWDs as 'those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others' (United Nations, n.d.). According to this definition disability is a long-term inability to engage in 'normal' life activities due to psychological, mental, or physical constraints (Cruz-Morato et al., 2021). The fundamental principles of the UNCRPD refer to respecting a person's dignity, autonomy and independence, non-discrimination, participation and social inclusion, equality of opportunity, and accessibility.

The concept of accessibility is, in terms of providing equal access to everyone, inextricably linked to disability. Only with unhindered access to facilities and services will PWDS be included in society. In line with Article 9 of the UNCRPD, countries should identify and eliminate all obstacles and barriers to ensure that PWDS can assess their environment, transportation, public facilities, services, and IT technologies (United Nations, n.d.). Furthermore, to protect human rights, prevent inequalities, and build inclusive societies, the UN General Assembly, in 2015, adopted a critical document entitled 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' The document outlines 17 sustainable development goals (SDG) the UN member states should achieve. Among them, the 11th goal is to ensure free access of PWDS to living space (United Nations, 2015).

Accordingly, physical accessibility can be defined as a set of characteristics that make buildings, environments, and products generally accessible (Calvo-Mora et al., 2015). Furthermore, besides being generally accessible, the physical environments should be safe and healthy, practical, understandable and respectful of diversity, and aesthetically pleasing (Watchorn et al., 2021). Therefore, accessibility is not just about eliminating physical barriers but also about designing and involving solutions that make the offer generally accessible. This approach is also known as the Universal Design Principle (Calvo-Mora et al., 2015; Watchorn et al., 2021).

However, measuring accessibility is not that simple, as the different legislative bodies and research associations use the concept of accessibility according to their research intentions and traditions (Domínguez et al., 2013). Applying different methodologies means that research results are often difficult to compare among the various sectors and countries (Nicolaisen et al., 2012). For this study, based on the UNCRPD definition of disability and by following the meaningful interpretation of the EU Accessibility Act, we will consider physical accessibility as an essential feature of the built environment that allows access, use, and equivalent experience in restaurant facilities (disability and accessibility studies are presented in the following section).

Disability and Accessibility Studies in the Hospitality Industry

Hotel Studies

Studies on accessibility in the hospitality sector have mainly focused on hotel guests. Nevertheless, only some studies examined the service providers' (the managerial) perspective. For example, Grady and Ohlin (2009) examined hotels' compliance with ADA; Darcy and Pegg (2011) examined managers' perceptions of the availability of disability services; and Cruz-Morato et al. (2021) examined the labour inclusion of PWDS in hotels.

Concerning physical accessibility and financial performance in hotels, we only came across a small number of articles, that provide inconsistent research findings. For example, Calvo-Mora et al. (2015) found that hotel managers in Seville (Spain) were highly aware of accessibility potentials for hotel financial performance. In contrast, Capitaine (2016) reported that hotel managers in Quebec (Canada) were mainly sceptical about the economic value of the disability market. Similarly, Darcy and Pegg (2011) reported that hotel managers in Australia needed to be more intelligent and responsible in providing access to PWDS and exploiting the economic potential of this market.

A negative view of the relationship between hotel accessibility and feasibility was also identified in the study of Lebanese hotels by Baghdadi et al. (2017). Authors reported that hotel managers mostly believe that PWD-friendly facilities negatively influence the satisfaction of the abled customer population, consequently negatively impacting hotel popularity and profitability in the long term. Nevertheless, based on calculating the different revenue scenarios, the authors (ibid.) theoretically demonstrated the economic feasibility of an accessible hotel offer.

Restaurant Studies

Only a few studies covering the various issues of disability in the restaurant industry could be found, such as an analysis of Oklahoma managers' attitudes toward hiring PWDS (Chi & Qu, 2005); employment of people with intellectual disabilities in the case of a casual dining restaurant operating in Ohio (Feerasta, 2017); utilisation of restaurants by PWDS in Korea (Joo & Cho, 2012); and the possibility of employing PWDS with dementia in Japanese restaurants (Jiang et al., 2021). In a study on discrimination in the US restaurant industry, Riesch and Kleiner (2005) reported that racial and disability-based discrimination are the two most common forms.

Specifically, concerning restaurant physical accessibility, we have found only a few studies. One of the first studies dates to the nineties when McClain et al. (1993) investigated restaurant wheelchair accessibility in the USA and found notable differences between the different types of restaurants. Significant problems with providing an appropriate dining environment for blind people in Taiwanese restaurants were reported by Wan-Chen and Chi-Chuan (2012). According to Dias de Faria et al. (2012), the ideal restaurant for visually impaired customers would be one where the waiter reads the menu, the staff is compassionate and where careful, low-intensity lighting and sounds, and round tables are used, and the server can be called by pressing a button. Similarly, Sokolenko (2018) reported significant problems with infrastructure development for PWDS in the case of Ukrainian restaurants. Finally, to our knowledge, no studies have investigated the relationship between physical accessibility and restaurant SMES' financial performance. Moreover, we have not identified any studies analysing managers' perceptions of restaurant accessibility within the EU.

Financial Performance Analysis

The primary data source for creating financial analyses are financial statements, such as balance sheets and the profit and loss account. Numerous data, which can be seen from both reports, enable the calculating of a wide range of financial performance indicators such as revenue, assets, and profit analyses.

Nevertheless, a Uniform System of Accounts for Restaurants (USAR) has been developed (Niemeier & Hayes, 2005) to facilitate the financial performance evaluation of restaurants. However, USAR is not binding in the EU (nor in Slovenia), making it more challenging to create comparative analyses. Since several financial indicators are available from financial statements, according to Ferreira and Otley (2009), choosing the most appropriate indicators for the financial performance evaluation is crucial. With this in mind, Planinc (2022) conducted a comprehensive review of financial indicators used in restaurant industry studies and found that researchers measure the financial performance of restaurant SMES using various financial indicators. According to Planinc (2022), several researchers (e.g. Bera, 2021; Lee & Ha, 2012; Hua, 2014) used sales revenue to analyse the financial performance of restaurant SMES, as sales revenue presents the fundamental metric of any financial performance analysis. Moreover, several other industry-specific Key Performance Indicators (KPIS) can be calculated based on sales revenue, such as average spending per person (ASP), sales per employee per hour, restaurant profit margin and efficiency analyses (Harris, 2013). Therefore, for answering RQ2, we decided to use sales revenue as the key financial performance indicator.

Methodology

Disability and Accessibility Legislation

The EU Legislation

In Tables 1 and 2, the key EU initiatives (international treaties, strategies, and conventions) and the EU directives (common rules) related to the field of the study are summarised in chronological order. The EU has no separate disability act (such as ADA). The EU member states' main challenge is implementing the 2021–2030 EU Strategy for the Rights of PWDS, which the Commission supports (European Commission, 2021).

Concerning restaurant accessibility, the EU Acces-

Table 1 The EU Disability Initiatives

Year	Initiatives	Relevance
1953	EU Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)	The first document to protect human rights and political freedoms.
1997	Treaty of Amsterdam (now Article 19 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU)	Protection of human rights against any form of discrimination.
2000	EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR)	Set of human rights that must be protected in the EU.
2008	Ratification of the UNCRPD at the EU level	An international perspective of promoting and protecting the human rights of persons with disabilities.
2009	Lisbon Treaty amendment to the Treaty on the EU	The CFR became a legally binding document within the EU
2010	EU Disability Strategy 2010–2020	The main instrument of the EU Commission to implement the UNCRPD policy.
2017	EU Pillar of Social Rights	This document highlights the right of PWDS to assess goods and services available to the public and enable them to participate equally in society.
2021	Strategy for the Rights of PWDS 2021–2030	The goal is to ensure that Europeans with disabilities no longer experience any form of discrimination and to build a Union of equality.

Table 2 The EU Disability Directives

Year	Directives	Relevance
2000	The Equality Framework Directive Employment and Occupation (EU directive 2000/78/EC)	The minimum accessibility standards for PWDS in the areas of guest service, employment, built environment, transportation, information, and communications.
2006 and 2010	Regulations on the Rights of Passengers with Reduced Mobility in main modes of Transport (e.g. Air – Regulation (EC) No. 1107/2006; Sea and Waterways – Regulation (EU) No. 1177/2010)	
2016	EU web accessibility directive (EU directive 2016/2102)	
2019	EU Accessibility Act (EU directive 2019/882/EC)	

sibility Act will enter into force in 2025 and will not apply to SME restaurants (European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, 2019). Nevertheless, restaurants are considered businesses open to the public. Therefore, according to UNCRPD, PWDS have the right to access all aspects of society equally with others. Specifically, according to paragraph b. of Article 9 of the UNCRPD (United Nations, n.d.), private entities offering services to the public should consider all aspects of accessibility for PWDS.

The National Legislation

The Republic of Slovenia has brought its disability laws into compliance with the EU's. Specifically, the Act ratifying the UNCRPD and the Optional Protocol to the UNCRPD stepped into force in 2008, while the Protection Against Discrimination Act was introduced in 2016. The law mentioned above, in Article 2, strictly prohibits any discrimination regarding access to goods and services available to the public (Zakon o varstvu pred diskriminacijo (ZVarD), 2016).

Regarding restaurant accessibility, several acts cover the different aspects of disability and accessibility provision. This section focuses on legislation and recommendations relevant to public restaurants' accessibility. Table 3 presents the relevant legislation and documentation (national guidelines and action programmes) chronologically.

Table 3 The National Legislation

Year	Document	Relevance
2005	National Guidelines to Improve the Built Environment, Information, and Communications Accessibility for PWDS (Nacionalne usmeritve za izboljšanje dostopnosti grajenega okolja, informacij in komunikacij za invalide)	According to this document, non-discriminatory access to public environments and services is considered a fundamental right of PWDS.
2010	Act on the Equalisation of Opportunities for PWDS (Zakon o izenačevanju možnosti invalidov (ZIMI))	Based on this Act, discrimination due to disability in access to goods and services available to the public is strictly prohibited. Article 38 clearly defines the deadline for public facilities to eliminate all physical barriers by the end of 2025.
2018	Rules on universal construction and the use of construction works (Pravilnik o univerzalni graditvi in uporabi objektov)	This rule specifies the essential requirements to ensure the universal construction of facilities.
2021	Building Act (Gradbeni zakon (GZ-1))	This Act protects the public interest in the construction of buildings by following the principle of equal opportunities.
2021	Spatial Management Act (Zakon o urejanju prostora (ZUreP-3))	This Act enables universal (non-discriminant) access to the public infrastructure.
2021	Action Programme for PWDS 2022–2030 (Akcijski program za invalide)	The programme aims to promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of the human rights of PWDS and to promote respect for their dignity.
2022	Consumer Protection Act (Zakon o varstvu potrošnikov (ZVPot-1))	This Act demands accessibility, clarity, and unambiguous provision of messages to all consumers.

Moreover, in the analysis of the national legislation, the following standards have also been considered: SIST ISO 21542:2022 (this document specifies a range of requirements and recommendations related to the design and constructional aspects of the usability and accessibility of buildings); SIST 1186:2016 (this standard relates to the tactile surface indicators for the blind and partially sighted); SIST EN 17210:2021, and SIST TP CEN/TR 17621:2021 (these standards describe minimum functional requirements for an accessible built environment) (https://www.sist.si). In addition, the different professional recommendations (manuals and handbooks) were also taken into consideration, such as the manual(s) for inclusive design and access to information (Albreht, 2018), universal housing construction (Albreht et al., 2017), accessibility of facilities in public use (Sendi et al., 2015), and accessibility of built environmental and informational technology (Sendi, 2019).

From our research perspective, it is essential to emphasise that the Act on the Equalisation of Opportunities for PWDS (Zakon o izenačevanju možnosti invalidov (ZIMI), 2010), in Article 38, determines the deadline for all public facilities (including the existing restaurant providers) to eliminate all physical barriers by the first reconstruction or at the longest by December 2025. The Building Act (Gradbeni zakon (GZ-1), 2021) and the Rules on universal construction and the use of construction works (Pravilnik o univerzalni graditvi in uporabi objektov, 2018) prescribe construction following the universal accessibility guidelines for new constructions.

Instrument Design

First, following the analysis of previous research and legislation related to disability and legislative requirements presented in Table 3, indicators of physical accessibility (44 indicators) were identified. In the next step, the identified accessibility indicators were prechecked by three PWD representatives (disability

Table 4 Accessibility Indicators

	Indicators	Layout areas
1	Five per cent of all parking spaces or at least one-are properly marked and no more than 50 m from the entrance.	Parking
2	There is an area for a car to stop safely for a short period if there are no available free parking spots.	
3	Parking space is unobstructed and allows wheelchair manoeuvring (min. length is 5.4 m and min. width is 3.9 m).	
4	There is adequate lighting in the parking area.	
5	Between the parking area and the restaurant, there is a paved, non-slip surface.	Access path
6	The path is adequately marked with contrasting colours and informational signs.	
7	There are floor indicators.	
8	There are no physical obstacles.	
9	The width of the access path is adequate (min. 1.8 m).	
10	Good lighting is provided.	
11	Access from the nearest public transport station is safe and unobstructed.	
12	The entrance is visible and adequately marked.	Entrance
13	There is enough space for wheelchair manoeuvring.	
14	The entrance is unobstructed, the floor mats are at floor level, and the threshold is at most 2 cm high.	
15	The entrance has a canopy or windbreak.	
16	The bell can be easily accessed from the wheelchair.	
17	There is a custom side entrance for PWDS.	
18	A sign at the entrance indicates that the restaurant is appropriate for PWDS.	
19	The corridors are suitably wide and allow unhindered movement.	Connec. spaces
20	Signposts are visible, legible, and of appropriate height.	
21	Room markings are visible, legible, and of appropriate height.	
22	The arrangement of the tables allows unimpeded movement in a wheelchair.	Dining room
23	At least part of the tables allows dining from a wheelchair (the bottom edge and depth of the table is min. 0.7 m).	
24	All inscriptions are of appropriate size.	

Continued on the next page

experts) to ensure that they matched the scope of the study and were appropriate for inclusion in the questionnaire. All disability experts are members of the National Council of Disability Organisations of Slovenia (a convenience sampling method for selecting the experts was used). This non-governmental organisation unites representatives and other disability organisations operating at the state level in the Republic of Slovenia.

The next phase included designing a self-administered questionnaire with mostly binary questions related to accessibility requirements. Physical accessibility indicators were split into six main layout areas of the restaurant (attributes) following the customer movement path (accessibility indicators and attributes are presented in Table 4). Indicators ranging from 11 to 129 are area specific. Indicators ranking from 130 to 140 are considered generic and simultaneously apply to different layout areas (entrance, connecting spaces, dining room, and toilets). In contrast, indicators rank-

Table 4 Continued from the previous page

Indicators	Layout areas
25 The sanitary area is marked with an international sign for the disabled.	Toilets
26 The space size is min 1.7 m × 2.2 m, and there is enough space for unhindered movement.	
27 The equipment is at a suitable height and easily accessible.	
28 Appropriate hand holders and accessories are installed.	
29 An emergency call device is installed.	
30 Doors are visible.	Entrance, connecting spaces, dining room, toilets
31 The doors are suitably (min. 0.9 m) wide.	
32 Doors open with ease and do not obstruct anyone.	
33 Hooks are visible and easily accessible.	
34 The doors stand out in contrast to the surrounding walls.	
35 There is sufficient space for wheelchair manoeuvring.	
36 The flooring is flat and non-slip.	
37 The lighting is adequate.	
38 There are information labels for PWDS.	
39 Colours that contrast are used.	
40 Floor markings are provided.	
41 Steps are marked, with handrails, and of the proper width (min. 1.2 m) and height (max. 15 cm).	Access path, entrance, connecting spaces, dining room, toilets
42 The wheelchair ramp is marked, accessible, and of the proper width (min. 1.2 m), slope (max. 8%), and length that enable wheelchair manoeuvring.	
43 The lift is marked and accessible, and its min. Size is 1.1 m × 1.4 m, and the door is min. 0.9 m wide.	
44 The wheelchair lift platform is marked, easily accessible, and has the proper size (min. 1.1 m × 1.4 m) and slope (max. 8%).	

ing from I41 to I44 refer to potential level differences in five layout areas (access between the parking and the restaurant, entrance, connecting spaces, dining room, and toilets). In case of level differences, the manager subsequently indicated the areas to which they refer.

Following the disability experts' recommendations, managers were also asked to indicate their self-perceived accessibility knowledge (three indicators), competencies (two indicators), the difficulty of adjusting the offer for PWDS (two indicators), and the availability of external support for adjusting the offer (two indicators). For all questions, a five-point Likert-type ordinal scale was used (see also Table 6). Finally, managers provided their demographic characteristics (presented as categorical variables) and basic information about the restaurant facility. Furthermore, managers were asked to indicate whether they had any friends or family members with a disability (Kuo & Kalargyrou, 2014) and the estimated percentage of PWDS in their restaurants. After the questionnaire was developed, three restaurant managers pre-tested it to determine whether it was simple to understand.

Data Collection Process

Given the study's objectives, primary data was collected from 200 restaurants across Slovenia between May and August 2022 from pre-trained data collectors using convenience sampling. In 2021, 8,410 restaurant businesses (NACE code I.56 – Food and Beverage (F&B) service activities) were recorded in the Slovenian business register (https://pxweb.stat.si/sistat/en).

Since the Slovenian national classification system of the different types of restaurant facilities does not fully comply with the EU coding system (NACE), the authors had to focus on those restaurant facilities with comparable operational characteristics. As a result, the sample frame consisted of sit-down restaurants registered as SMEs that are not located in shopping malls, do not have several branches (restaurant units), and are not under monumental protection. Examples of these restaurants include traditional à la carte restaurants, inns, casual and fast food sit-down restaurants, and coffee and pastry shops. Hotel and franchise restaurants and other businesses serving predominately beverages (such as pubs and bars) were excluded from the research. The data collectors prechecked randomly chosen restaurants to ensure that all restaurants met the specified requirements. If the restaurant met the research criteria, the manager was kindly requested to complete the questionnaire, either in the presence of the data collector (questionnaires were hand-delivered to managers) or the data collector agreed to collect the completed questionnaire. In cases where managers needed additional explanation about the research, the data collectors provided the requested information.

Nevertheless, some managers refused to participate in the study for various reasons (mainly lack of time). If the manager refused to participate, the data collector selected another restaurant SME, corresponding to the above-presented research criteria. The final analysis is based on 149 valid questionnaires (the response rate was 74.5%), representing 1.77% of the 156 population in Slovenia.

In the next step, secondary financial data for each restaurant SME was obtained from official financial reports (profit and loss accounts for the year 2021), which in Slovenia are in the public domain (https://www.ajpes.si/fipo/default.asp).

Data Analysis

Data analyses were done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 26.0). Descriptive statistics were used to analyse managers' responses about their demographic and restaurants' physical characteristics. A correlation analysis using Spearman's rank and Pearson's correlational coefficient was performed to investigate the correlations between the observed indicators.

Table 5 Managers' Assessment of Restaurant Accessibility

Accessibility attributes	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Parking	4	2.07	51.75	1.32
Access. between the parking area and the restaurant	11	4.05	36.81	1.85
Entrance	22	11.11	50.5	3.38
Connecting spaces	14	5.90	42.14	3.63
Dining room	14	5.99	42.78	3.35
Toilets	16	5.81	36.31	3.84

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) no. of possible positive responses (indicators) to each attribute, (2) average no. of positive responses-indicators, (3) percentage, (4) stdandard deviation.

Research Findings

Characteristics of the Sample

Most respondents (37%) were between 36 and 45 years of age, and the sample was predominantly composed of male managers (62%). Most managers (42%) had finished a vocational or secondary school. The highest percentage (35%) reported having 11 and 20 years of working experience. Almost seventy per cent (68.9%) of all managers reported owning the restaurant they manage. Notably, 87% of managers indicated they had no relatives or friends with a disability.

In terms of restaurants' characteristics, à la carte restaurants composed 32% of the sample, followed by coffee and pastry shops (26%), inns (27%), and casual and fast food restaurants (15%). On average, restaurants had 8.2 employees, 102 seats, and 27.5 years of business activity. The average age of the restaurants was 67 years (referring to the year of construction); on average, they were last renovated in 2011. Finally, the average yearly sales revenue per restaurant SME was € 364,620.93.

Accessibility Evaluation

To answer RQ1, managers' self-evaluations of accessibility were analysed according to the six-attribute level.

Table 6 Managers' Self-Perceived Knowledge and Perceptions of the Different Accessibility Issues

Indicators	Statements	(1)	(2)
Knowledge	We know the EU accessibility policy	2.45	1.02
	We know accessibility legislation	2.92	1.71
	We know the economic potential of the disability market in tourism	2.90	1.02
Competence	We have the competence to adjust the offer to the needs of PWDS	3.50	0.76
	The staff has the competencies to adjust the offer to the needs of PWDS	3.37	0.82
Difficulty	Adjustment of the offer and removal of physical obstacles is difficult	3.48	0.84
	Adjustment of the offer represents a large financial burden for the restaurant	3.59	0.86
External support	There is enough official information to help us adjust the offer	3.36	0.86
	There is enough professional support to help us adjust the offer	3.18	0.92

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

The findings are summarised in Table 5, where the average number of indicators (managers' positive responses) for each attribute is displayed. To better understand accessibility evaluation, the highest- and the lowest-rated indicators were also presented (see text in brackets below).

The two highest-rated attributes were the parking area and entrance. The highest-rated indicators were I3 (parking space is unobstructed), I12 (visible and adequately marked entrance), and I14 (unobstructed entrance). In contrast, the two lowest-rated attributes were accessibility between the parking area and the restaurant and toilets, with I7 (floor indicators), I28 (hand holders and accessories), and I25 and I29 (signs for disabled and emergency call devices in toilets) as the lowest-rated indicators. Overall, these results answered RQ1 as they indicate that according to managers' perceptions, none of the six restaurant accessibility attributes is perceived as fully accessible for PWDS. The next section of the survey evaluated managers' responses, indicating their self-perceived knowledge and perceptions of the different accessibility issues. All indicators were measured on a five-point Likert-type ordinal scale, ranging from 1 (very low or do not agree) to 5 (very high or completely agree).

Results in Table 6 indicate that the highest-rated indicators reveal managers' perceptions about the financial burden related to offering adjustment (M = 3.59) and their self-perceived competence to adjust the offer to the needs of PWDS (M = 3.50). In contrast, the lowest-rated indicators show managers' knowledge of the EU policy on accessibility (M = 2.45) and their knowledge of the economic potential of the disability market (M = 2.90).

Correlations Between Restaurant Accessibility, Managers' Characteristics, and Sales Revenue

Following the study's second goal (RQ2), correlations between sales revenues and accessibility attributes were calculated. We tested the hypothesis that better physical accessibility positively correlates to higher sales revenues. For the correlation analysis, accessibility indicators were first merged into accessibility attributes (new numerical variables showing the number of positive responses (indicators) for each attribute). Accordingly, correlations were calculated using the Pearson correlation coefficient (r). The correlation analysis revealed that none of the six accessibility attributes is statistically significantly correlated ($p > 0.05$) to sales revenue, which answered RQ2. As this was a surprising and unexpected result, we investigated further. Accordingly, we hypothesised that restaurant sales revenue positively correlates to managers' demographic characteristics, perceptions, and knowledge about accessibility issues. Since all variables related to managers' characteristics (used in correlations) were ordinal categorical variables, correlations between managers' characteristics and sales revenue were calculated using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (rs). The same coefficient was also used

Table 7 Correlations between Restaurant Sales Revenue, Physical Accessibility, Managers' Responses about Accessibility, and Their Demographic Characteristics

Category	Indicators	*r*/*rs*	*p*
Accessibility attributes (*r*)	Parking	−0.036	0.664
	Accessibility between the parking area and the restaurant	−0.050	0.548
	Entrance	−0.036	0.663
	Connecting spaces	0.115	0.162
	Dining room	0.144	0.080
	Sanitary facilities	0.133	0.105
Managers' knowledge/perceptions of accessibility (*rs*)	Knowledge of the EU policy on accessibility	0.119	0.159
	Knowledge of accessibility legislation	0.109	0.198
	Knowledge of the economic potential of the disability market in tourism	0.059	0.487
	Adjustment of the offer and removal of all physical obstacles is difficult	0.190*	0.026
	Adjustment of the offer represents a large financial burden	−0.069	0.422
	We have enough competence to adjust the offer to the needs of PWDS	0.193*	0.022
	Staff is competent in adjusting the offer to the needs of PWDS	0.042	0.618
	There is enough official information to help us adjust the offer	−0.013	0.882
	There is enough professional support to help us adjust the offer	−0.005	0.953
Managers' demographic characteristics (*rs*)	Age	−0.108	0.192
	Education	0.168*	0.041
	Years of experience	−0.093	0.258
	Family members or friends with a disability	0.658	0.417

Notes *Correlations are significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ level (2-tailed).

to calculate the correlations between sales revenue and managers' responses about accessibility (Likert-type ordinal scales). The results of the correlation analyses are presented in Table 7.

There are statistically significant ($p \leq 0.05$) positive correlations only between sales revenues and managers' responses related to the difficulty of removing the physical obstacles ($r_s = 0.19$; $p = 0.026$), their perceived competence to adjust the offer ($r_s = 0.193$; $p = 0.022$), and the level of their formal education ($r_s = 0.168$; $p = 0.041$).

Since the Act on the Equalisation of Opportunities for PWDS (Zakon o izenačevanju možnosti invalidov (ZIMI), 2010) demands that the existing service providers eliminate all physical barriers during the process of the first reconstruction (or by 2025), we decided to additionally test if a correlation exists between the perceived overall level of restaurant accessibility and the reported years of construction, and the last renovation. Accordingly, we hypothesised that newer and renovated restaurants are more accessible. Interestingly, results indicate that only the year of construction (newer buildings) positively correlates to restaurant accessibility ($r = 0.252$; $p= 0.006$), while there is no correlation between the year of the last renovation and restaurant accessibility ($r = 0.096$; $p = 0.299$). The following section, therefore, moves on to discuss the findings.

Discussion

The research approach applied for this study focuses on the social model of disability, which emphasises how society approaches PWDS, rather than viewing disability as an individual pathology. The literature on ensuring restaurant accessibility and its significance for restaurant sales revenues was surprisingly sparse, despite the importance of disability policy in the EU political agenda.

Therefore, RQ1 sought to determine whether managers evaluate restaurants as fully accessible for PWDS. The questionnaire includes the legislative requirements and professional recommendations, indicators identified in previous research, and indicators related to managers' self-perceived knowledge, competencies, and perceptions about accessibility issues. Concerning RQ1, it was found that managers perceive restaurants as relatively inaccessible. According to managers' self-evaluations, the most accessible are the following two attributes – parking area and restaurant entrance. In contrast, the lowest-rated attributes were the access between parking and the restaurant and toilets. What is surprising is that, in the middle of the EU, managers perceive toilets as the most problematic accessibility area in public restaurant facilities.

A more detailed review of accessibility indicators reveals that the lowest scores relate to floor indicators, availability of hand holders, and signs for PWDS. In contrast, the highest-rated indicators are unobstructed parking availability and visible and unobstructed restaurant entrance. It is difficult to explain these results, but they might be related to the fact that the lowest-rated indicators belong to the internal (indoor) environment. In contrast, the highest-rated indicators are publicly visible, which might influence managers' decisions to comply with the legislative requirements. Overall, this self-evaluation study's findings align with earlier studies (Sokolenko, 2018; Wan-Chen & Chi-Chuan, 2012), which also reported accessibility differences in the various restaurant layout areas and were performed by external evaluators.

Another important finding was that managers rated very low their knowledge of EU accessibility policy, accessibility legislation, and the economic potential of the disability market in tourism. A possible explanation for relatively low accessibility evaluations (RQ1) might also be the consequence of managers' low level of accessibility knowledge (see Table 5). In this view, it is surprising that managers believe adjusting the offer presents a significant financial burden, though they reported little knowledge about legislative requirements. Paradoxically, managers also believe they have a high level of competence to adjust the offer to the needs of PWDS. The inconsistency between managers' low self-perceived legislative knowledge and their high self-perceived competence to adjust the offer may be because managers generalise and simplify the complexity of accessibility because they have little knowledge on this matter. Another possible explanation for results related to RQ1 is that managers are waiting till the very last moment (till 2025) to adjust the offer. However, according to their low self-perceived legislative knowledge (see Table 5), we might wonder if they know the deadline for adjusting the offer (although we did not specifically check this in the research). As a result, we may presume that the EU Commission's dedication to increasing disability awareness was not fully effective (European Commission, 2021).

The second objective of this study was to investigate the correlation between restaurant physical accessibility and sales revenue (RQ2). The most prominent finding from the analysis is that none of the six accessibility attributes is statistically significantly correlated to sales revenue. It is difficult to explain this result due to the lack of research on the economic value of accessibility in the restaurant industry. However, these results agree with those obtained by Capitaine (2016) and Darcy and Pegg (2011), who reported that hotel managers are somewhat sceptical about the economic value of the disabled market in tourism. Even though this study has been unable to demonstrate the economic benefit of physical accessibility for the restaurant industry, these results might be partially explained by the low percentage of PWDS dining in restaurants. Namely, managers reported that PWDS, especially those with a mobility impairment, present 4.8% of all customers, while blind people and the visually impaired constitute only 2.4% of their customer base. At the same time, PWDS might avoid public restaurants or tend to be loyal to verified and accessible restaurant providers. Another possible explanation could be that restaurant managers do not take into account the economic benefit of accessible offerings as they do not have sufficient knowledge about the economic potential of the disability market, which according to Donovan (2020), is estimated to control over 13 trillion US dollars globally.

In the next step, managers' self-perceived knowledge, perceptions of accessibility issues, and demographic characteristics were correlated to sales revenues. We especially wanted to check if the observed correlations better explain results related to RQ2. Results indicate positive correlations between sales revenue and three indicators – managers' beliefs about the difficulty of removing the obstacles, their self-perceived competencies, and the perceived financial burden of adjusting the offer. This finding is interesting, though it is somewhat contradictory to results related to the correlation between sales revenue and accessibility, where no statistically significant correlations were found. A possible explanation for this finding might be that managers are somehow aware (or afraid) of the complexity and the financial burden of adjusting the physical environment for PWDS because they have little knowledge about accessibility. Therefore, they relativise its importance and focus on other (e.g. functional) aspects of accessibility, potentially influencing restaurant sales revenues (RQ2). For example, managers may try to compensate for the shortcomings of the physical environment by focusing on service provision (e.g. helpfulness, kindness, and support to PWDS), which they afterwards correlate with their competence to adjust the offer to PWDS. Theoretically, this might eliminate PWDS' momentary discomfort with the shortcoming of the physical environment and result in higher sales revenue. However, it is neither reflected in the actual improvement of the physical environment nor its correlation to sales revenues. Nevertheless, caution must be applied when interpreting these results, as further studies, which take these variables into account, will need to be undertaken.

Concerning the correlations between managers' demographic characteristics and sales revenues, it was found that only the level of formal education is positively correlated to sales revenues. This result means that restaurant managers with higher education generate higher sales revenues. This finding is consistent with that of Lee and Hallak (2018), who confirmed the importance of education for restaurant profitability. Interestingly no correlations were found between managers' years of experience and sales revenues. Accordingly, we might assume that the business's methods are more or less continuous (and potentially suboptimal). As both managers' self-perceived accessibility competence (assumingly gained through informal education) and the level of their formal education proved essential for restaurant sales revenues, additional studies will be needed to develop a complete picture of the importance of the self-perceived accessibility competence for restaurant profitability.

Interestingly, no statistically significant correlation was found between the accessibility level and the reported year of restaurant renovation. On the contrary, a positive correlation was found between the year of construction of the restaurant facility and accessibility, indicating that newly constructed restaurants are perceived as more accessible. This finding suggests that during the last renovation of the restaurant, no significant improvements in physical accessibility were made. According to the Building Act (Gradbeni zakon (GZ-1), 2021, Article 7), a building permit is not required for performing maintenance or minor reconstruction works on existing facilities, nor is a new use permit issued. In contrast, for new buildings, a professional commission performs a technical (on-site) inspection (Gradbeni zakon (GZ-1), 2021, Article 82). Therefore, a possible explanation for these results might be related to managers' relatively poor knowledge of legislative requirements (see also previous explanation) and the fact that the Act on the Equalisation of Opportunities for PWDS (Zakon o izenačevanju možnosti invalidov (ZIMI), 2010) does not specify sanctions for those who failed (or will fail) to adjust the offer on time. From this perspective, this study supports evidence from previous observations, which also emphasised the poor accessibility of facilities in public use in the Republic of Slovenia, such as a recent report issued by the Slovenian Ombudsman on the inaccessibility of the Centres for Social Services work (Komisija za socialno varstvo, delo, zdravstvo in invalide, 2023).

Finally, the current findings are important in at least two significant ways.

First, from the social perspective, results indicate that managers perceive restaurants as insufficiently accessible. Even though the universal design concept has been actively introduced in the hospitality industry (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020; Watchorn et al., 2021) and the EU has taken a serious approach towards the protection of PWDS, the results of our study reveal that basic infrastructure is still not fully provided for PWDS, which limits them from equally integrating into society. Following the EU's anti-discrimination policy, the environmental characteristics should not obstruct PWDS. Even though the Act on the Equalisation of Opportunities for PWDS (Zakon o izenačevanju možnosti invalidov (ZIMI), 2010) enables the adjustment of the offer up till 2025, it is somehow difficult to understand that in the 21st century, in an EU member state, managers perceive restaurant toilet accessibility as a significant obstacle for PWDS. This result is also important because physical inaccessibility represents a deeper form of discrimination (Ameri et al., 2020). Physical barriers negatively affect the human will and limit individual freedom (Cruz-Morato et al., 2021). While customers without disabilities can easily find alternative solutions to environmental barriers (or other unsatisfactory elements of the offer) by choosing a different service provider, PWDS cannot be in the same position as others.

Second, the discussion of accessibility is linked with the marketing literature. Namely, based on the restaurant marketing and quality management theory (Kukanja et al., 2017), better physical accessibility should not encourage customers to dine at specific restaurants. In this view, Darcy and Pegg (2011) reported that even where hotel rooms have been made accessible, they may not always be attractive to PWDS. According to previous studies (Kukanja et al., 2017), for customers without disabilities, the physical environment presents a necessary (fundamental) attribute, while other marketing attributes (e.g. People and Product) influence the choice to (re)purchase. Similarly, Zhang and Cole (2016) reported that staff attitude critically determined PWDS' overall satisfaction with lodging services. Therefore, in terms of making the offer generally accessible to the public, eliminating the physical barriers is not the same as making the product more marketing-attractive.

From the financial perspective, results indicate that restaurant accessibility is not correlated to sales revenue. In the EU alone, the disability population is estimated at 123.9 million, with a disposable income of 547.1 billion US dollars (Donovan, 2020). Moreover, several trends in society imply positive relationships with accessible restaurant offers, such as the increased importance of PWDS in the population, availability of finances and time, awareness of environmental issues, and the demand for a sustainable and socially responsible tourism offer (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020). Financial benefits should not present an argument for investing in accessibility. However, a timely adjustment of restaurant facilities according to the legislative requirements and professional recommendations on physical accessibility (see also Table 4) could (potentially) boost sales revenues and increase business opportunities and employment in the restaurant industry. Nevertheless, an accessible environment is also more comfortable for the abled population (Lim, 2020), meaning that the community benefits from accessible offerings.

Conclusion

The main goals of the current study were to analyse managers' self-assessment of restaurant physical accessibility (RQ1) and to investigate if (in)accessibility influences restaurant sales revenues (RQ2).

This study's results indicate a lack of literature on disability in the restaurant sector. Furthermore, results revealed that despite the EU legislative framework (see Tables 1 and 2), which should prevent discrimination against PWDS, and the Slovenian legislation (see Table 3), which allows for the adjustment of the physical environment for the existing service providers up till 2025, managers evaluate the Slovene restaurant industry as relatively poorly accessible. The second significant finding was that physical accessibility does not influence restaurant sales revenue, although, theoretically, PWDS could (potentially) generate substantial revenue for the restaurant industry.

This study is (to our knowledge) the first to empirically investigate managers' evaluation of restaurant physical accessibility and its correlation to sales revenue. Furthermore, the accessibility shortcomings that we have identified in our study should contribute to the improvement of restaurant accessibility in Slovenia and the implementation of the EU 2021–2030 Disability Strategy in practice (European Commission, 2021).

This study should, in theory, provide an understanding of restaurant physical accessibility from the managerial (the inner) perspective. However, since the convenience sampling method was employed for this study, the generalisability of results should be considered. Another limitation arises from the potential geographical and cultural differences that could affect the generalisability of research results since the present study is focused on the Republic of Slovenia. Third, accessibility evaluations might have been influenced by managers' subjective perceptions of restaurant accessibility. Fourth, this study focused on physical accessibility indicators and their correlation to sales revenue using correlation analysis. Fifth, SMEs often generate revenues from different business activities, even though they are primarily registered as F&B service activities (156). Accordingly, their financial reports are aggregated, which might present a limitation when taking sales revenue as a key financial indicator. Finally, most respondents (restaurant managers) reported owning the facility they manage. However, in the case of tenants' managers, investments in the physical environment are often in the domain of the facility's owner.

Despite the presented limitations, this study suggests several theoretical implications. The implemented economic, social, and legislative norms are changing how our society is organised. Since physical inaccessibility in tourism is understood as a socially imposed restriction, society should strive to remove all barriers that prevent PWDS' equal inclusion. Fighting inequality is also one of the top priorities of tourism in the 2030 Agenda (World Tourism Organization, n.d.). Accordingly, more research on this topic is needed to ensure that society is maturing regarding respecting human rights.

Moreover, to better understand why restaurant (in)accessibility does not influence sales revenue, more investigations utilising controlled trials are required. An EU cross-national study might offer more conclusive evidence on this matter. A reasonable approach to tackle this issue is to analyse PWDS' expectations using the bottom-up approach, as Cockburn-Wootten and McIntosh (2020) suggested. Accordingly, including these indicators in future research could also help us establish a greater accuracy on this matter. Finally, testing a model that simultaneously considers the importance of different internal and external variables (e.g. by implementing structural equation modelling – SEM) could also provide a deeper insight into the relationship between environmental and managerial characteristics, managers' and PWDS accessibility perceptions, and restaurant business performance.

The findings of this study have several implications for practice. Restaurant managers are responsible for improving accessibility. According to the research results, much will have to be done quickly. Managers should, therefore, understand the legislation well and adjust their offer for PWDS by removing all physical barriers by 2025. Moreover, managers are also recommended to introduce appropriate internal activities, such as accessibility checklists and audits, to enable constant monitoring of restaurant accessibility. A simulation exercise for restaurant staff should also raise awareness of the different problems PWDS face. The purpose of the accessible offer is not to provide care for PWDS but to facilitate their stay by providing freedom of movement and easing the use of services provided. In this view, unique campaigns, such as the promotion of best practices, industry rewards for accessibility, and the development of specialist platforms, could also help to promote inclusion. Calvo-Mora et al. (2015) believe proper communication is crucial as PWDS value accurate accessibility information. Accordingly, online platforms can benefit PWDS, as they conduct extensive research to reduce uncertainties before dining out (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020). Finally, managers should go beyond the legal requirements of providing physical accessibility by eliminating functional and communicational barriers. Eliminating all barriers would present a step towards an accessible restaurant offer and an equal society.

Regarding recommendations for policymakers, it is necessary to have adequate inspection controls. In parallel, this intervention must be accompanied by efficient, informative campaigns and educational support. In the long term, educational programmes about social diversity, human rights, and inclusion should be introduced at all educational levels. In support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, favourable financial loans could be provided for SMEs to adjust the offer to PWDs. Finally, collective empowerment through active cooperation among the restaurant industry, disability organisations, academia, and the public sector seems to be a way towards an equal society. According to this perspective, in the restaurant industry, the distinction between PWDs and customers without disabilities should be considered a common demographic characteristic, similar to how gender, age, education level, and nationality are addressed in accessibility. Finally, with this paper, we hope to further contribute to the development of research in this tourism sector and improve the accessibility of restaurant facilities.

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Understanding a Conceptual Framework of Spa Service Quality: An Overview Approach

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Due to the inadequate literature for fully understanding service quality in the spa industry, this article has the objective to review the related literature to obtain a conceptual understanding of a spa service quality framework. The method is based on a systematic review of related literature by analysing service models/dimensions from past studies and integrating them to obtain a comprehensive framework of spa service quality. Based on the proposed framework, the four themes (dimensions) of spa service quality are identified: (1) spa programmes and products, (2) physical environment, (3) customer-employee interaction, and (4) service outcome. The overview suggests that using a single service model is insufficient to fully understand the spa service quality framework because of its distinct characteristics. The findings can help researchers and spa practitioners to thoroughly understand the overall framework of spa service quality. In particular, the combination of physical environment (technology-based equipment) and better customer-employee interaction can contribute to service innovation for the spa industry. The overview helps to extend the theoretical knowledge (framework) of the traditional SERVQUAL and three-dimensional models (physical, interaction and outcome quality) by adding the product dimension as an additional component of the spa service quality framework.

Keywords: spa service quality, spa industry, spa services, wellness tourism

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Introduction

The spa industry has been gaining in popularity worldwide over the past decades due to the increasing health-awareness of people who seek a better quality of life, the expansion of spa businesses, the growth of wellness tourism, and reasonable prices of services (Han et al., 2017; Sangpikul, 2022a). Generally, spas offer water-based facilities and a wide range of services for health, relaxation and skin beauty (Hashemi et al., 2015). As spas are related to people's health and well-being, many countries are promoting spas as one of the wellness tourism sectors to respond to the global trend as well as to attract more international tourists to increase tourism revenue (Han et al., 2017; Sangpikul, 2022a). Many tourists may spend their free time at destinations to visit spa establishments to experience spa services in a relaxing environment (Hashemi et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012).

Being one of the service-oriented businesses, the spa industry is heavily focused on employee performance to provide customers with personalised services and spa experiences (Lo et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012). Customers generally perceive the quality of spa services through employees' abilities to provide the services that meet their expectations (Lo et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2019). To deliver the services as customers expect, this mainly concerns 'service quality,' which is customers' comparison of service expectations and performances (Parasuraman et al., 1985). A company providing a high level of service quality is likely to deliver the services that meet customer needs and create service satisfaction (Gonzalez & Brea, 2005; Lo et al., 2015).

Given the importance of service quality to the success of spa businesses, there is still inadequate literature to fully understand it within the spa industry, as evidenced by the following arguments. First, many spa studies have examined customer satisfaction and spa service quality through the SERVQUAL model with its five well-known dimensions, namely, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles (e.g. Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Lo et al., 2015; Loke et al., 2018; Vryoni et al., 2017). However, SERVQUAL has been criticised for some weaknesses which prevent it from being fully applicable to a specific service sector as it seems to focus on service process rather than the overall service quality assessment (Ali, 2015; Wu & Ko, 2013). Several scholars argue that SERVQUAL is a generic service quality instrument rather than a specific one for each business category due to its original development within the finance and banking industry (Kurtulmusoglu & Pakdil, 2017; Lo et al., 2015). Consequently, the adoption of SERVQUAL to measure spa service quality may be insufficient to thoroughly understand various distinct attributes of spa services due to different settings (Choi et al., 2015; Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016). This may reflect some weaknesses in the existing literature regarding spa service quality.

Second, given the weaknesses of SERVQUAL, there have been several studies attempting to adopt several models or approaches to measure spa service quality in different contexts (e.g. Choi et al., 2015; Clemes et al., 2020; Tsai et al., 2012). However, these past studies seem to provide an incomplete understanding of overall spa service quality due to the lack of certain important service dimensions. For example, in studies of Choi et al. (2015) and Tsai et al. (2012), responsiveness and employee courtesy were omitted, while assurance and empathy were not included in Clemes et al.'s (2020) study. Likewise, responsiveness and service outcomes were omitted in Albayrak, Caber, and Oz's (2017) study. It is understandable that each study may have its own purpose, scope, and research design to examine spa service quality in different settings with well explained results. However, in terms of literature overview and knowledge advancement, this may affect or limit spa practitioners' opportunities to fully understand their customers' expectations and perceptions of overall spa service quality. This may require further study to fully understand the overall framework of spa service quality.

Third, during the past decades, there have been a number of spa-related studies providing different views or methods regarding spa service quality based on international perspectives (e.g. Albayrak et al., 2017; Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Choi et al., 2015; Clemes et al., 2020; Gonzalez & Brea, 2005; Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016; Lo et al., 2015; Loke et al., 2018; Sangpikul, 2019; Snoj & Mumel, 2002; Tsai et al., 2012; Vryoni et al., 2017). An overview of these studies may provide useful insights or implications to better understand spa service quality within various contexts. Past studies conducting systematic reviews in tourism and hospitality provide useful implications for the tourism and hospitality literature such as the syntheses of knowledge, research framework development, critical discussions, future research directions, and the useful practical implications for hospitality and tourism businesses (Hardy et al., 2002; Pahlevan-Sharifa et al., 2019; Shiwen et al., 2022). In the same way, an overview of spa service quality will provide such contributions.

In terms of spa practitioners, service quality is an important instrument for them to better understand how well a delivered service meets customer expectations (Parasuraman et al., 1988). A thorough understanding of service quality can assist spa practitioners in delivering better services to meet customer expectations, thereby contributing to customer satisfaction, word-of-mouth communication, and repeat visits (Lo et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2022c). However, based on the gaps in the literature as earlier mentioned, there is still a lack of integrated knowledge to assist spa managers to thoroughly understand customers' needs and expectations for overall spa quality. In particular, research discloses that spa customers generally have different health-related needs/concerns, various service motivations and diverse service preferences (Tsai et al., 2012; Sangpikul, 2022c). This suggests that spa managers are required to have a well-rounded knowledge about overall elements of spa service quality to better deliver the services that meet a wide range of customers' needs, preferences and expectations in order to maximise customer satisfaction.

In order to fill the gaps in the literature and enhance a thorough understanding of overall spa service quality, this research note has the objective to analyse and overview the related literature regarding spa service quality within various contexts to provide knowledge advancement and appropriate implementations in the spa industry. The overview approach will yield a greater picture and in-depth understanding of the overall spa service quality framework, helping to strengthen knowledge development in the field. In addition, the study will also assist spa managers to fully understand what customers may expect from spa services, and further develop the services to meet their needs and expectations, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and repeat patronage (Sangpikul, 2019).

Literature Review

Service Quality

In the service literature, an early measurement of service quality was proposed by Gronroos (1984), who conceptualised service quality as a two-dimensional construct: technical and functional quality. Technical quality refers to service outcome, or what customers actually receive from the service, while functional quality refers to the process of service delivery. Expanding Gronroos's model, the concept of service quality based on customer expectations and perceptions was developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985), who originally identified ten service dimensions, and later reduced the overlapping dimensions to five dimensions: reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy, and tangibles. These five dimensions have been widely known as SERVQUAL.

In addition to SERVQUAL, Brady and Cronin (2001) identified three structural dimensions of service quality: physical, interaction and outcome quality. Each has its sub-dimension that defines the basis of service quality perceptions. They argued that the combination of all three dimensions (and sub-dimensions) constituted a customer's overall perception of the quality of service. Given the existing service models, SERVQUAL seems to have gained wide adoption in various service sectors, including the hospitality and tourism industry, due to its generic quality assessment tool with the five different dimensions (Snoj & Mumel, 2002; Lo et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2019). However, it has often been criticised for its weaknesses in several aspects, particularly the lack of specific coverage for service quality assessment in a particular business category (Ali, 2015; Kurtulmusoglu & Pakdil, 2017), including the spa industry. To fully understand the literature of spa service quality, past studies are reviewed in the next section.

Studies of Spa Service Quality

This section aims to review and analyse the existing models of spa service quality based on various settings. Given a number of related studies, they may be classified into two groups, as shown in Table 1. The first group is the studies employing SERVQUAL (i.e. Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Gonzalez & Brea, 2005; Lo et al., 2015; Loke et al., 2018; Vryoni et al., 2017). Despite the usefulness of SERVQUAL, scholars have criticised certain weaknesses of it, as mentioned earlier. This argument is also true in the spa industry. For example, certain attributes of spa service quality were not included in past studies, such as product attribute (e.g. Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Sangpikul, 2019; Vryoni et al., 2017) and service outcome (e.g. Gonzalez & Brea, 2005; Lo et al. 2015; Loke et al., 2018). Product element can be regarded as one of the important attributes in spa service quality as customers can perceive it and be exposed to different spa programme experiences (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016; Tsai et al., 2012). Likewise, service outcome is another important attribute of spa service quality because it is what customers actually expect to receive after the treatments (Choi et al., 2015; Clemes et al., 2020).

Another set of studies (second group) employed modified dimensions (different service models) to examine spa service quality (e.g. Albayrak et al., 2017; Clemes et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2015; Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016; Tsai et al., 2012). Tsai et al. (2012), for example, used five service dimensions to understand male consumers' perceived performance of Hong Kong Hotel spas, namely: environment, service experience, augmented service quality, value, and relia-

Table 1 Literature Analysis and Overview of Research Gaps

Studies	Authors	Dimensions	Country of studies	Overview of research gaps
Studies employing SERVQUAL	Bakirtzoglou et al. (2018); Lo et al. (2015); Loke et al. (2018); Snoj & Mumel (2002); Sangpikul (2019); Vryoni et al. (2017)	SERVQUAL dimensions: Reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy, tangibles	China, Greece, Slovenia, and Thailand	All studies lack certain attributes of spa service quality (e.g. product and outcome attributes).
Studies employing modified models	Albayrak et al. (2017); Choi et al. (2015); Clemes et al. (2020); Lagrosen and Lagrosen (2016); Tsai et al. (2012)	Tangibility, competence & courtesy, credibility & safety. Spa facility, spa programme, staff, uniqueness. Interpersonal quality, environmental quality, administrative quality, technical quality. Process dimension, outcome dimension, specific quality dimension. Environment, service experience, augmented services, value, reliability.	Turkey, Korea, Thailand, Sweden, and China (Hong Kong)	Most studies lack certain important attributes (e.g. responsiveness, empathy, or assurance).

bility. Choi et al. (2015) employed four quality dimensions (spa facility, spa programmes, staff, and uniqueness) to examine the relationships between spa service quality, perceived value, satisfactions, and behavioural intentions. Assessing what attributes of spa and wellness service quality affect customer satisfaction in Antalya's hotels (Turkey), Albayrak et al. (2017) used tangibles, credibility and safety, and competence and courtesy dimensions to understand the factors affecting overall customer satisfaction.

For the second group, although there are various service models being employed to examine spa service quality, these studies still lack certain essential components or dimensions, as earlier mentioned. For instance, responsiveness and employee courtesy were omitted in studies of Choi et al. (2015) and Tsai et al. (2012), while assurance and empathy were not included in Clemes et al.'s (2020) study, and responsiveness as well as service outcome were omitted in Albayrak et al.'s (2017) study.

Following the above analysis, it is understandable that researchers may have different research objectives and frameworks to examine spa service quality from different perspectives. However, in terms of an academic overview, the existing literature seems to be inadequate and may limit the capacity of researchers and spa practitioners to fully understand spa service quality. Importantly, spa practitioners may lack the opportunities to deliver the better services to meet or satisfy customer needs due to the incomplete service assessment. Given the gaps in the literature, it is important for scholars to seek for a better approach to fill them, and to strengthen knowledge development in the field.

Method

In order to review the related literature regarding spa service quality, Google Scholar was employed as a main source of information. A number of studies used Google Scholar for review studies (e.g. Chan & Hsu, 2016; Law et al., 2009). Google Scholar is the world's leading search engine, which indexes scholarly articles from different databases (Law et al., 2009). A preliminary survey found that a number of spa-related studies were indexed in various databases, not limited to only Scopus or a particular database. Google Scholar, therefore, seems to be an appropriate source of information as it has combined a lot of scholarly articles from various databases.

In this study, a systematic review approach from past studies was adopted and modified to provide reliable data collection and analysis, for example, setting selection criteria, article search, screening data, article eligibility, information record, and the analysis/synthesis of the findings/reviews (Gomezelj, 2016; Pahlevan-Sharifa et al., 2019).

This approach was adopted and modified as follows:

- Key words used to search for the data were determined, for example, 'spa service quality,' 'spa service,' 'day spa and service quality,' 'hotel spa and service quality.'
- To search for the target articles, only English full-text articles (from the year 2000 onwards) were included in the analysis. A preliminary survey indicated that studies related to spa services quality have been documented from the year 2000 onwards. In particular, it may be noted that during the years 2010–2020, studies in regard to spa service quality received much attention from international scholars.
- The screening was conducted to search for the studies related to spa service quality. An initial survey found around 42 related studies; however, the researcher had determined article eligibility to choose only the relevant studies for final analysis.
- To determine article eligibility, a qualified article had to contain the details of spa service quality, including (1) service models (e.g. SERVQUAL or other modified models), (2) service dimensions (e.g. reliability, assurance, responsiveness), and (3) measurement items being used. These criteria help to fully understand spa service quality and to further develop an appropriate overall framework.
- Given such eligibility, a total of 25 studies were included in the final analysis. Key information of an article was recorded accordingly (e.g. title, journal name, year of publication, methods, models of service quality, service dimensions, measurement items, and key findings).
- During data analysis, an individual study was reviewed, and later it was combined with other studies to form ideas/concepts regarding spa service quality, and finally, all studies were integrated and synthesised to develop a framework.

In addition to a systematic review approach, content analysis was employed to supplement data analysis (e.g. reviewing past studies) and to group the findings, as it is appropriate for a systematic coding and categorising method used for analysing textual information (Stemler, 2001). It was used to analyse and group the data regarding spa service quality (including service dimensions and items) from past studies. Later, similar concepts of spa service quality were grouped into each construct and, finally, they were integrated to form a framework of overall spa service quality. In this study, a proposed framework was reviewed by two scholars and two spa managers to determine its appropriateness and implementations. Some corrections were made in regard to grouping of service items and clarity of wording. Data were collected during June 2022.

Findings and Discussion

Identifying Themes and Framework of Spa Service Quality

To present the findings, the studies related to spa service quality have been reviewed, analysed and integrated to obtain the comprehensive understanding of the spa service quality framework as shown in Table 2. Consequently, the four themes (dimensions) of spa service quality are identified, namely, (1) spa programmes and products, (2) tangibles and physical environment, (3) customer-employee interaction, and (4) service outcome. Each theme is presented and discussed as follows:

Dimension 1: Spa Programmes and Products

Spa programmes and products are established as the first theme of the spa service quality framework. This theme may be called 'product dimension' because it is a starting point, or the first stage at which customers expect to receive spa experiences. In an international context, there are a variety of spa service providers such as day spas, club spas, mineral spring spas, and resort and hotel spas. These spa service providers may offer different or a variety of spa programmes and products to correspond to customer needs and preferences. According to Table 2, several past studies employ some product attributes in their studies to exam-

Table 2 Identifying Themes and Framework of Spa Service Quality

Categories	Literature	Themes and framework
Dimension 1 Product & service attributes	Dimension 1 • Choices/varieties of spa programs (Choi et al., 2015; Clemes et al., 2020). • Quality of spa products (in-house and retail) (Choi et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012). • Availability of spa retail products (Sangpikul, 2019; Tsai et al., 2012). • Availability of augmented/complimentary services (Sangpikul, 2019; Tsai et al., 2012). • Food & beverage services (Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Vryoni et al., 2017). • Product specialty/uniqueness (Choi et al., 2015).	Dimension 1 • Spa programs & products • Choices/varieties of spa programs and facilities • Quality of in-house and retail products • Availability of retail products • Augmented or complimentary services (including food & beverage services) • Product specialty
Dimension 2 2.1 Tangibles 2.2 Physical assurance	Dimension 2 • Decoration, atmosphere, and environment (Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Clemes et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012; Vryoni et al., 2017) • Availability of facilities/equipment (Albayrak et al., 2017; Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Lo et al., 2015) • Employee appearance (Snoj & Mumel, 2002) • Quality & maintenance of facilities/equipment (Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Clemes et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012) • Cleanliness & hygiene (venue, facilities) (Lo et al., 2015; Loke et al., 2018) • Customer security & safety (Albayrak et al., 2017; Sangpikul, 2019) • Customer privacy (Lo et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2019)	Dimension 2 • Tangibles & physical environment • Decoration, atmosphere, and environment • Appearance of facilities/equipment • Employee appearance • Quality & maintenance of facilities/equipment • Hygiene & cleanliness (physical assurance) • Customer security & safety • Customer privacy

Continued on the next page

ine customer perceptions of spa service quality, for example, product variety (Choi et al., 2015; Clemes et al., 2020), quality of spa products (Choi et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012), availability of spa retail products (Sangpikul, 2019; Tsai et al., 2012), augmented or complimentary services (Sangpikul, 2019; Tsai et al., 2012), and product specialty (Choi et al., 2015). However, the in-depth analysis indicates that most studies merely measure spa product attributes based on a few items, not the dimension or construct. Measuring only a few items may not reveal the complete picture in regard to spa product attributes. Based on the existing literature, there are several product attribute items associated with this theme. These items are argued to be appropriate and sufficient to be established as the product dimension with its relevant items. This suggests that product dimension is important, and it should be incorporated as one of the spa service quality framework themes. Future research may employ the items in the product dimension to further understand customer perceptions of spa programmes and products in order to deliver the services that meet their needs and expectations.

In addition, research indicates that a variety of spa services available to customers can enhance their enjoyment and satisfaction (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016). A thorough understanding of the product dimension may help spa practitioners to better understand how customers perceive and evaluate their product attributes. Researchers may employ the product dimension as a part of the spa service quality framework to examine its relationships with other key variables

Table 2 Continued from the previous page

Categories	Literature	Themes and framework
Dimension 3 3.1 Reliability 3.2 Empathy 3.3 Responsiveness 3.4 Assurance 3.5 Courtesy & friendliness 3.6 Communication	Dimension 3 • Reliability (Albayrak et al., 2017; Clemes et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2015) • Empathy (Lo et al., 2015; Vryoni et al., 2017) • Responsiveness (Clemes et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2015; Vryoni et al., 2017) • Customer service assurance (Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Sangpikul, 2019) • Courtesy & friendliness (Albayrak et al., 2017; Clemes et al., 2020) • Communication (Clemes et al., 2020; Sangpikul, 2019)	Dimension 3 • Customer & employee interaction • Reliability (e.g. knowledge, expertise, performance of promised services, services without mistake) • Empathy (e.g. caring services, personalized services, understanding customers) • Responsiveness (e.g. willingness to help customers, provision of prompt services) • Assurance (e.g. customer confidence/trust in customer services) • Courtesy & friendliness • Communication
Dimension 4 Outcome	Dimension 4 • Physical effect (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016) • Mental effect (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016)	Dimension 4 • Service outcome • Physical outcome • Mental outcome

such as perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioural intention.

Dimension 2: Tangibles and Physical Environment

Tangibles and physical environment are identified as the second theme of the spa service quality framework. Based on the literature, this dimension involves two sub-themes: (1) tangibles, and (2) physical assurance. Tangibles here refer to the SERVQUAL context. According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), tangibles involve the physical surroundings, facilities, and amenities provided in service venues. In the spa setting, when customers are in spa venues, they will be exposed to various aspects of spa tangibles/environment (e.g. beautiful decoration, spa equipment, and treatment rooms). Following Table 2, there are a number of studies which include tangibles as a part of spa service quality. They examined customer perceptions in regard to, for example, spa decoration, atmosphere, and environment (Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Clemes at al., 2020; Lo et al., 2015), availability of facilities and equipment (Albayrak et al., 2017; Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Lo et al., 2015), and employee appearance (Snoj & Mumel, 2002). Importantly, tangibles are argued to be an important element of spa service quality as they have an impact on customer satisfaction and emotions in hotel spas (Lo et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2022a). More research may be needed to further examine the influences of tangibles on customer perceptions and satisfaction in other spa categories to extend the literature.

In addition, physical assurance is also identified and included in this dimension because it is associated with the physical environment, which can inspire customer trust and confidence when using spa services, based on Parasuraman et al. (1988). Physical assurances identified from the literature are, for example, quality and maintenance of facilities/equipment (Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Clemes et al., 2020), cleanliness and hygiene (Lo et al., 2015; Loke et al., 2018), customer security and safety (Albayrak et al., 2017; Sangpikul, 2019), and customer privacy (Lo et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2019). According to the literature, they are the service attributes that can enhance customer confidence during service delivery. Past studies reveal that certain attributes of physical assurance may have impacts on customer satisfaction and repeat consumption. For example, customers experiencing unclean spa venues, poor hygiene standards or lack of service privacy may have negative experiences of spa establishments and may not return to patronise them (Sangpikul, 2019). However, there are still limited studies that specifically examine the role of physical assurance in customer satisfaction, emotions and loyalty in the spa industry. Understanding these relationships may contribute to better service improvement. Furthermore, a recent study (a qualitative method) indicates that perceived hygiene related to physical assurance (e.g. cleanliness and hygiene of spa venues, facilities, equipment) becomes an important factor associated with customer satisfaction and decision making in using spa services during the COVID-19 situation (Sangpikul, 2022b). Quantitative approaches may be appropriate to further examine these relationships to better understand the role of perceived hygiene in the spa industry.

Dimension 3: Customer-Employee Interaction

Customer-employee interaction is established as a third element of the spa service quality framework. This theme is important as it has been integrated based on various SERVQUAL attributes (e.g. reliability, empathy, responsiveness, assurance, courtesy and friendliness, and communication). These attributes are similar to most of the 10 original dimensions as identified by Parasuraman et al. (1985). This suggests that the key elements of spa service quality are closely related to SERVQUAL dimensions. This theme is thus called customer-employee interaction because all service attributes are mainly related to the interaction between employees and customers. For example, when delivering spa services, customers expect to meet courteous and friendly spa employees who provide them with prompt services. They also expect professional spa services from skilful therapists who provide them with personalized services that meet customer expectations. During the delivery of services, employees and customers communicate with each other until the completion of the services. All of these attributes are inseparable characteristics of the hospitality industry, including the spa industry, because employees and customers cannot be separated during the delivery of services (Sangpikul, 2022a). Consequently, all service attributes under this theme play important roles during service delivery because they involve interaction between spa employees and customers. With a number of related studies in regard to customer-employee interaction in the spa industry (e.g. Albayrak et al., 2017; Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Clemes et al., 2020; Gonzalez & Brea, 2005; Lo et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2019; Vryoni et al., 2017), the review of literature indicates that knowledge about customer-employee interaction in the spa industry is well documented.

However, there is still research room for this dimension, for example, spa service experiences and the experience-based economy. As addressed, the spa industry is related to the experience-based economy because customers go to spas to experience the services related to their health benefits. During the customer-employee interaction, the delivery of spa services may lead to the experience-based economy in terms of customers' service enjoyment, customers' personal fulfilment, and customer memory. Thus, there is still room to explore further in this area, for example, the factors of spa services contributing to customers' service enjoyment.

Dimension 4: Service Outcome

Service outcome is identified as the last theme. Service outcome generally refers to what customers receive after their service consumption (Brady & Joseph, 2001; Gronroos, 1984). In the spa setting, this dimension relates to the outcome of spa services or what customers feel after the completion of spa services, for example, relaxation, stress-related relief or skin beauty. Past studies indicate that customers go to spas for specific purposes, and expect to experience a spa service outcome, either physical outcome (effect) or mental outcome (effect) (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016). They may not go to spas if they do not receive the expected service outcome. Service outcome, therefore, is an essential part of spa service quality for a company to understand customer judgments about the overall spa experiences and satisfaction. Service outcome as identified in the current study may have a similar concept to functional quality as defined by Gronroos (1984). According to Gronroos, functional quality is related to what customers receive after the services, which is usually perceived or interpreted in a subjective way. In this regard, functional quality may support the nature or characteristic of spa service outcome as customers may interpret it differently and subjectively regarding mental outcome (e.g. relaxation, stress relief) and/or physical outcome (e.g. skin beauty).

Moreover, the review of literature indicates that there is very limited knowledge about spa service outcome in the international context. Among a few studies, Tsai et al. (2012), for example, employ only one item of spa service outcome (relaxation) in their study to measure customer perceptions of spa services in Hong Kong's hotels, whereas Clemes et al. (2020) employ a modified model with technical and functional quality constructs (with the outcome dimension) in their framework. However, their methods and findings seem to provide very limited information to fully understand spa service outcome due to the lack of attribute items and its measurement.

In addition, the review of literature indicates that service outcome, as defined by Gronroos (1984) and Brady and Joseph (2001), has not been thoroughly examined in the spa industry due to the inadequate literature about it. This suggests that a complete picture in regard to service outcome in the spa industry has not yet been obtained.

Importantly, service outcome may be regarded as a distinct variable as it can be employed either as an independent or dependent variable in the quantitative studies (like satisfaction variable). Past studies reveal that service outcome (as an independent variable) can impact customer satisfaction and loyalty in certain service industries. For example, Hsieh and Hiang (2004) find a positive effect of service outcome on customer satisfaction across two types of service businesses (i.e. banks and hospitals), while Choi and Kim (2013) indicate similar findings in hospital services. In addition, Murti, Deshpande, and Srivastava (2013) find that other independent variables can affect service outcome (as a dependent variable) in healthcare services. Based on the related literature, this suggests that service outcome plays an important role in health-related industries, and requires further studies to specifically examine it in the spa industry to extend the literature.

Table 3 has summarised and compared the current findings with past literature to obtain a better understanding of overall spa service quality. The overview approach helps to extend a better understanding of spa service quality models as adopted from Parasuraman et al. (1988) (SERVQUAL) and from Brady and Cronin (2001) (three-dimensional model) by adding a product dimension (spa programmes and products) as a part of the spa service quality framework. According to Table 3, following Parasuraman et al. (1988), all service dimensions of SERVQUAL are associated with 2 constructs (elements): (1) service process, and (2) tangibles, but no product dimension. In contrast, Brady and Cronin (2001) have proposed a three-dimensional model with 3 constructs: (1) interaction quality element, (2) physical environment quality, and (3) outcome quality, but no product dimension as well. However, the current study has surveyed the existing literature (including the two models), and has integrated them into 4 constructs: (1) employee-customer interaction, (2) tangibles and physical environment, (3) service outcome, and (4) spa programmes and products. In particular, spa programmes and products have been additionally identified as a part of overall spa service quality, given its relevance as earlier discussed. The four constructs being identified are expected to help spa practitioners to fully understand customers' expectations and perceptions of overall spa service quality, and to make appropriate service assessment.

Conclusion and Implications

Conclusion

The overview of related literature has provided the conceptual understanding of the spa service quality framework as shown in Table 3. All four dimensions and their sub-dimensions are well supported by the existing literature and were reviewed by scholars and spa experts. Based on the analysis of literature, it seems that most international researchers are likely to employ dimension 2 (physical environment) and dimension 3 (customer-employee interaction) in their studies (e.g. Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Lo et al., 2015; Loke et al., 2018) to examine spa service quality (see Table 1) because these dimensions are related to SERVQUAL, the well-known service model in the hospitality and tourism industry. However, SERVQUAL has some weaknesses, as earlier discussed (focusing

Table 3 Comparison of Major Service Models and Spa Service Quality Framework

SERVQUAL Parasuraman et al. (1988)	Three-dimensional model Brady and Cronin (2001)	Spa service quality framework (current study: an overview approach)
Service process (i.e. reliability, empathy, responsiveness, assurance)	Interaction quality (i.e. reliability, empathy, responsiveness, assurance)	Employee-customer interaction (i.e. reliability, empathy, responsiveness, assurance)
Tangibles (i.e. tangibles)	Physical environment quality (i.e. tangibles)	Tangibles & physical environment (i.e. tangibles, physical assurance)
–	Outcome quality (i.e. service outcome)	Service outcome (i.e. mental & physical outcome)
–	–	Spa programmes & products (i.e. spa treatments, product specialty)

on service process). Meanwhile, there are several studies employing other modified models, including the three-dimensional model, which still lack certain service dimensions (i.e. product and outcome dimensions).

Theoretical Implications

First, due to the scarcity of research to fully understand service quality in the spa industry, this article has provided a conceptual understanding of the service quality framework for the spa industry. Based on the overview of related literature, the four themes (dimensions) of the spa service quality framework are identified: (1) spa programmes, (2) physical environment, (3) customer-employee interaction, and (4) service outcome. This conceptual framework helps to extend the theoretical knowledge and understanding of the traditional three-dimensional model (physical, interaction and outcome quality) defined by Brady and Cronin (2001) by proposing the product dimension (spa programmes) as the additional component of the spa service quality framework based on the current literature. According to Brady and Cronin, customers perceive the quality of services through three structural dimensions: physical, interaction and outcome quality. However, their model lacks the product dimension due to the examination of different service industries, not the wellness industry (health-related services). Consequently, this article has extended the service literature in regard to the product dimension, specifically for the spa industry. Future quantitative studies are suggested to verify this conceptual framework.

Second, the findings from Table 2 may provide a better approach to thoroughly understand the spa service quality framework when compared to the SERVQUAL model, which mainly focuses on customer-employee interaction or service process but lacks product and outcome dimensions as earlier discussed. In this regard, the current findings help to explain why SERVQUAL is not fully applicable to measure service quality in the spa industry due to the lack of certain service dimensions.

Third, regarding the product dimension (spa programmes), past studies merely measure them based on individual items, not a dimension or a construct, as addressed. However, this article has overviewed a number of product attribute items from the existing literature and has combined them in order to propose the product dimension (spa programmes and products). Adding the product dimension in the spa service quality framework may provide interesting or different findings from what has been documented in the literature due to the distinct characteristics of the spa industry.

Fourth, in regard to service outcome, this dimension helps to better understand the term 'service outcome' in the spa industry because there is limited literature to fully understand it. According to Gronroos (1984) and Brady and Cronin (2001), service outcome (technical quality/outcome quality) is generally defined as what customers expect to receive after the completion of the services. In this regard, the current overview has further explained the characteristics of service outcome in the spa industry in terms of mental and physical outcome. In other words, what spa customers expect to receive after the spa treatments is mental and/or physical outcome (benefit). Research indicates that service outcome is an important factor associated with customer satisfaction (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016; Sangpikul, 2022a). Thus, it is appropriate to establish service outcome as an essential part of spa service quality, thereby rounding out the limited literature about service outcome in the spa industry. In addition, the service outcome dimension may help to generate new findings in the quantitative studies as it may be added or modified as an independent or a dependent variable in the quantitative methods due to its special features (such as satisfaction). Past studies indicate that service outcome (independent variable) can impact customer satisfaction and loyalty in certain service industries, for example, banks and hospitals (Choi & Kim, 2013; Hsieh & Hiang, 2004), whereas Murti et al. (2013) find that other independent variables can affect service outcome (dependent variable) in healthcare services. However, there is a lack of such studies to further examine the impacts of service outcome in the spa context. This is an important clue for future studies to add or modify service outcome as the dependent or independent variable (when appropriate) in the quantitative studies to yield new findings and extend the spa literature.

Finally, all elements of the proposed framework may provide implications for future studies in regard to service quality experience and the experience-based economy in the spa industry. The spa industry is argued to be one of the major experience-based economy sectors in the tourism industry (Lo et al. 2015; Sangpikul, 2022b) because it sells 'experiences' in terms of a variety of spa programmes (1st element) in a beautiful and relaxing environment (2nd element) through professional customer services (3rd element) in order to provide customers with the expected service outcome (4th element). This suggests that all elements of the proposed framework contribute to the experience-based economy, and require further investigation about their relationships.

Managerial Implications

There are several managerial implications for spa practitioners to implement the proposed framework (dimensions and measurement items) to be applicable to various spa categories and business strategies to better understand their customer perceptions and expectations of overall spa services. The following recommendations/implications are made on each service dimension and are based on past literature in regard to the implementation of spa service quality.

For product dimension, the product attributes being identified may help spa managers to fully understand how customers perceive/evaluate their services/products as well as to obtain more information from customer perspectives (Choi et al., 2015; Clemes et al., 2020). The information obtained from the product dimension may contribute to service development as well as to develop a company's marketing strategies or competition purposes such as product specialty, product positioning or product differentiation (Choi et al., 2015; Ekinci, 2002).

In regard to the physical dimension, past research indicates that the characteristics of the physical environment of spa venues play an important role in enhancing customer experiences and satisfaction (Lo et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012; Vryoni et al., 2017). Lo et al. (2015), for example, reveal that the spa environment has a positive impact on customer emotions. Similarly, Tsai et al. (2012) indicate that the physical environment contributes to the attractiveness of the spa venue and customer satisfaction. Given the tangibles and physical environment dimension, spa managers may better understand what customers expect concerning this dimension, and also learn what attributes should be assessed to better satisfy customers, for example, spa atmosphere, venue decoration, quality of facilities, and customer privacy (Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Clemes et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2015).

For customer-employee interaction, this is the most important element of spa service quality, as indicated from past studies, because SERVQUAL belongs to this dimension. Research shows that almost all SERVQUAL dimensions, being examined in various settings, had significant influence on customer satisfactions, emotions and loyalty (Clemes et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2015).

Spa managers can obtain useful information by using the items in the framework to better understand how well their employees deliver the expected services. In particular, the sub-dimensions like reliability, empathy, and responsiveness are often found to be the important determinant factors contributing to customer satisfaction and loyalty (Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Lo et al., 2015). This suggests that spa managers need to pay attention to the development of spa employees, who are the crucial factor to deliver spa services to meet customer expectations. Staff training and supervisory monitoring can help to develop their employees in order to provide better spa services and experiences for customers (Lo et al., 2015).

As for outcome dimension, this is an important element of spa service quality. Customers expect to experience the service outcome either physically or mentally (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016). However, it seems that many spa service providers may overlook evaluating this element by focusing on service process rather than the outcome results due to insufficient literature. The current findings may assist them to better understand spa service outcome for future appropriate implementations. As mentioned, research indicates that service outcome is a significant factor influencing customer satisfaction, emotions, and subsequent behaviour in the service industries (Choi & Kim, 2013; Hsieh & Hiang, 2004). This suggests that the understanding of customer perceptions on service outcome may help spa managers to do appropriate marketing to target those who seek these outcome benefits (Choi et al., 2015; Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016).

Finally, understanding of certain service dimensions may help to generate service innovation in the spa industry, particularly the combination of physical environment (technology-based equipment) and better customer-employee interaction (Sangpikul, 2022c). For example, training professional employees by using high-tech equipment or facilities may help to generate service differentiation or innovation as perceived by customers since these services may lead to product competitive advantages (strength of the business). Skin beauty treatments may be a good example of product differentiation/innovation in the spa industry by delivering excellent customer service together with a high-tech facility to provide customers with the expected service outcome.

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Original Scientific Article

Factors Influencing the Satisfaction and Revisit Intention of Jordanian Medical Tourists

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The study aimed to analyse the factors that impact the satisfaction and revisiting intention of medical tourists in Jordan. A theoretical model consisting of seven variables, namely service quality, risk perception, value for money, destination attraction, tourist-friendly environment, satisfaction and revisit intention was framed based on previous literatures. For testing of the model a methodological approach was followed. First, the survey was conducted among medical tourists visiting the top ten hospitals in Jordan, resulting in the collection of 395 responses. Then a structural equation model was employed to analyse the data. The study found that the independent variables, including service quality, value for money, and destination attraction had a significant impact on the satisfaction and revisit intention of medical tourists. The analysis also revealed that the tourist-friendly environment had a significant influence on satisfaction but did not significantly impact revisit intention. However, the study did not provide evidence of any significant impact of risk perception on satisfaction and revisit intention. Aligning with the findings, the government and private entities of Jordan can prioritize maintaining the quality of services, enhancing the attractiveness of the destination, and ensuring a tourist-friendly environment. They can also consider addressing and mitigating the risk perception of medical tourists, as it was not found to impact the tourist's satisfaction and revisit intention.

Keywords: medical tourism, Jordan tourism, medical tourists, revisit intention, tourist satisfaction, consumer behaviour

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Introduction

The growth of medical tourism has experienced a significant increase in recent decades due to globalization (Mohd Isa et al., 2019). This expansion can be attributed to various pull and push factors in modern times, which have contributed to the rising demand for medical tourism and its robust growth (John & Larke, 2016). The pull factor stems from the presence of advanced and internationally accredited medical care facilities, skilled doctors, high service quality in healthcare units, shorter waiting times, and relatively lower costs of medical treatment in the host destination. On the other hand, the push factor arises from expensive medical treatments, long waiting lists for treatment in home countries, affordable international airfare, foreign economic exchange rates, the desire for privacy and confidentiality in treatment, recommendations from friends and family, and inadequate insurance coverage (John & Larke, 2016). In recent times, people are increasingly travelling to less expensive countries for medical procedures such as organ transplantation, bypass surgery, cosmetic surgery, and dental treatments (Mohd Isa et al., 2019). However, in the 1990s, there was a reverse trend, with people from less advanced nations travelling to more advanced countries due to a lack of facilities and skilled doctors in their home countries (Cham et al., 2021).

Medical tourism involves tourists travelling to and staying in the host country for various medical and non-medical activities, leading to increased tourism revenue, GDP, and foreign exchange reserves (Khan et al., 2020). Medical tourists often engage in leisure and business activities during their stay (Khan et al., 2020). According to published reports, medical tourism is projected to grow at an annual rate of 25%, reaching USD 3 trillion by 2025 (as cited in Cham et al., 2021, p. 2).

Among Middle Eastern countries, Jordan and Lebanon have become top-notch destinations for attracting medical tourists (Al Adwan, 2020). Jordan has also emerged as an attractive and safe medical tourism destination, particularly for Lebanese, Syrian, Yemeni, and Sudanese individuals in the Middle East and North Africa regions (Alsarayreh, Mahasneh et al., 2017; Alsarayreh, Nawaiseh et al., 2017).

Jordan's success in medical tourism can be attributed to factors such as internationally accredited hospitals, a highly competent and qualified medical workforce, advanced medical technology and equipment, a growing pharmaceutical industry, favourable climatic conditions, social security, and convenient transportation facilities (Al-Azzam, 2016). Despite these reasons for celebrating Jordan's success as a medical destination, its full potential in the field of medical tourism remains untapped (Al Adwan, 2020). Medical tourism in the Jordanian region has received less attention from researchers, and some studies have focused on exploring the motivating factors for medical tourists who choose Jordan as their preferred destination for subsequent visits. It is crucial to understand the motivating factors that influence medical tourists' intention to revisit (Al-Azzam, 2016).

The ultimate objective of any tourism-centric organization or tourism-promoting country lies in satisfying the tourists and encouraging them to revisit (Li, 2020; Cakici et al., 2019; Atikahambar et al., 2019). These also apply to the promotion of medical tourism (Jeaheng et al., 2020). Researchers explored the desire of medical tourists to return from many angles, exploring several elements that impact their intention. They have also explored various factors that impact travellers' intention to revisit. Jordan, being a top-notch destination for medical tourism among the Arabian nations, has attracted many researchers to conduct studies on medical tourism (Anshasi & Alsyouf, 2020). As per the report published by Amman Vision Investment and Development (an investment management company in Jordan), a significant percentage of Jordan's GDP, around 8%, comes from medical tourism. Jordan has also been recognized as the best medical tourism destination in 2014 (Alsarayreh, Nawaiseh et al., 2017). Jordan was also found to be the most popular medical tourism destination in the Middle East and North African countries (Alsarayreh, Mahasneh et al., 2017).

Various studies on the promotion of Jordan as a medical tourism destination have been undertaken throughout the years. Significant research has been conducted on destination promotion with digital marketing (Alghizzawi et al., 2020), marketing mix (Al-Azzam, 2016), the government's role in promoting Jordan as a medical tourist hub (Dalbooh, 2015), the contribution of medical tourism to destination promotion (Alsarayreh, Nawaiseh et al., 2017), and a framework for promoting sustainable medical tourism (Darwazeh et al., 2021). Some studies have also looked into the behaviour of medical tourists in Jordan after they have made their purchase.

Alsarayreh, Mahasneh et al. (2017) studied 95 tourists who visited Aqaba, Jordan, for medical reasons to assess customer satisfaction based on medical-related variables such as medical facilities, financial considerations, and service quality. This study's independent variables were all related to medical services. Al-Maaitah (2017) aimed to investigate the degree of satisfaction of medical tourists by utilizing the psychometric features of care instruments. Shriedeh et al. (2017) evaluated the impact of service quality on medical service providers' brand equity. Shriedeh (2019) did a similar study to assess the cause-and-effect connection between service quality and medical tourism service provider brand equity. Previous studies, however, have not considered the success factors of medical tourism in Jordan, nor have they examined the number and scope of research publications that investigate how medical and non-medical factors influence Jordanian medical tourists' satisfaction levels and intent to return.

This study aims to address this research gap and to check the impact of various medical and non-medical factors on the satisfaction and further revisit intention of Jordanian medical tourists. The goal is to investigate the post-purchase behaviour of medical tourists rather than identifying the driving factors for choosing Jordan as a medical tourism destination.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Several researchers reviewed relevant literature to understand the interrelationship effects of various variables in the context of medical tourists' revisit intention, such as medical service quality, destination attraction, tourist-friendly environment, perceived risk, perceived cost, satisfaction, and revisit intention.

Medical Tourist's Revisit Intention

Researchers have paid close attention to the revisit intention of medical tourists, which indicates an individual's readiness to return to a location after their initial visit (Su et al., 2018). Marketers in the tourism business are continually looking for strategies to increase income by enticing customers to return to a place (Cohen et al., 2014). Repeat visits not only result in increased tourist spending but also in recommendations for others to visit (Correia et al., 2015). Repeat visits are important for tourist locations for three reasons: lower marketing expenses involved with acquiring new consumers, an indication of customer satisfaction and the likelihood of referrals via word-of-mouth (as cited in Heydari Fard et al., 2021, p. 9).

In the case of medical tourism, revisiting intention is important (Arici & Güçer, 2018). Host nations and organizations in the medical tourism industry work hard to nurture loyal tourists and encourage return visits (Aljumah et al., 2020; Ahmed et al., 2017). This is why studies focus on return intention, which originates from patient satisfaction and loyalty (Ahmed et al., 2017). Ghosh and Mandal (2019) emphasized the necessity of providing a pleasant customer experience to please medical tourists and entice them to return. As per Um et al. (2006), revisit intention is the extension of tourist satisfaction. Han and Hwang (2018) emphasized the significance of organizations in the medical tourism sector focusing on persuading first-time tourists to return to their facilities.

H1 *The satisfaction of medical tourists positively impacts the tourist's revisit intention.*

Satisfaction

Satisfaction is the post-purchase behaviour of consumers, reflecting their likes and dislikes after experiencing a service (Wijaya, 2015). It is accomplished by the use of certain procedures that bridge the gap between customer expectations and the services offered (Al-Mhasnah et al., 2018). Healthcare service providers prioritize patient satisfaction, as it contributes to their reputation (Lim et al., 2018). Their ultimate objective is to please patients and keep them for future services by providing high-quality, efficient treatment at a fair cost (Suhail & Srinivasulu, 2021). In the healthcare industry, 'patient satisfaction' is a regularly used phrase to evaluate service quality (Ahmed et al., 2017). It measures healthcare professionals' perceived service quality and acts as a performance metric (Shabbir et al., 2016).

Service Quality

The term 'service quality' has been defined in a variety of ways by various scholars (Khan F. et al., 2017).

However, the core definition of service quality measurement is the 'assessment of a person's happiness by comparing their post-service perception with their initial expectations' (Grönroos, 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Webster, 1989; Lee et al., 2006). To evaluate the effectiveness of service-centric organizations, service quality is used as a criterion (Suhail & Srinivasulu, 2021). The service quality evaluation tool should be verified to ensure that it accurately assesses the service quality of the specific service (Papadomichelaki & Mentzas, 2012).

Parasuraman et al. (1988) developed the SERVQUAL scale which is widely used for the evaluation of service quality. Researchers such as Lam (1997), Al-Mhasnah et al. (2018), Meesala and Paul (2018), Qolipour et al. (2018), Amankwah et al. (2019), S. Lee and Kim (2017), and Ahmed et al. (2017) have also used the SERVQUAL scale to evaluate healthcare services. However, the SERVQUAL instrument has come under fire since it exclusively focuses on the process of providing services while ignoring the results of such interactions (de Keyser & Lariviere, 2014). In his research, Abbas (2020) referenced several studies that strongly criticized the generalizability of the SERVQUAL scale for evaluating service quality. Cronin and Taylor (1992) developed the SERVPERF model by replacing the expectation component with the performance measurement component from the SERVQUAL model. Akdere et al. (2020) used the SERVPERF model to assess the service quality in the healthcare industry. In her review article, Endeshaw (2021) cited several studies that assessed the quality of healthcare services, including 'SERVQUAL,' 'SERVPERF,' 'HEALTHQUAL,' 'PubHosQual,' and 'HospitalQual' and highlighted that the previous studies were limited, as they primarily emphasized the functional aspect of healthcare services while giving minimal attention to the technical components and relying heavily on the experience of healthcare service providers. The studies performed by Brown et al. (1993) and Babakus and Mangold (1992), much before the study performed by Endeshaw (2021), also emphasised both the functional and technical aspects of service while evaluating service quality for the health care sector. Technical quality is concerned with the technical outputs of the services, whereas functional quality is concerned with how the technical quality is communicated to the customer, resulting in the recipient's happiness with their service experience (Arora & Stoner, 1996). Technical quality is concerned with the technical outcomes of the services. According to Doyle et al. (2013), patients frequently place a higher priority on the technical and clinical components of the services than on practical factors like the accessibility of the doctors or the doctor-patient interactions. Caruana (2002) referred to the technical component as the 'what' aspect, which considers the outcome of the service process and focuses on output quality. Conversely, the functional component, referred to as the 'how' aspect, considers the process quality and pertains to the method by which the service is provided.

Numerous research has emphasized how crucial service quality is to medical visitors' happiness. According to Silvestri et al. (2017), continuous quality improvement in hospital services is essential for ensuring customer satisfaction. According to Padma et al. (2010), the quality of hospital personnel has a significant influence on patient satisfaction. The study also found that the patients are satisfied with the quality of clinical care, the hospital's reputation, and trustworthiness, while attendants of the patients are influenced by the administration and infrastructure of the hospitals. Similarly, Thawornwiriyatrakul and Meeprom (2020) revealed that the travel motives of health and wellness tourists are strongly influenced by perceived service quality and satisfaction. There is a close association between perceived service quality dimensions and patient satisfaction (Ali et al., 2021). The level of patient satisfaction is influenced by various factors, including the functional, auxiliary, and special administrative features that patients experience.

Lee and Kim (2017) investigated the factors impacting hospital revisit intention and discovered positive correlations between the quality of the medical service, travellers' satisfaction and their subsequent intention to revisit. Additionally, healthcare customers' perceptions of service quality have a major influence on their satisfaction, albeit to varying degrees depending on their socioeconomic attributes (Suhail & Srinivasulu, 2021). Similarly, Li (2020) focused on service quality, corporate image, and self-service technology (SST) as indicators of customer satisfaction and revisit intention, recommending that marketers continuously enhance service quality to improve overall customer satisfaction.

- H2 *The service quality dimensions of medical service providers have a positive impact on medical tourists' satisfaction.*
- H3 *The service quality dimensions of medical service providers have a positive impact on medical tourists' revisit intention with the mediating effect of their satisfaction.*

Destination Attractiveness

The attractiveness of a destination encompasses various non-home elements which attract travellers, such as landscapes, activities, experiences, transportation, accommodation, and other services (Lew, 1987). This includes the natural attractions at the destination such as flora, fauna, waterfalls, beaches, and landscapes, as well as artificial attractions at the destination including heritage, structure, and other tourism services. In addition to medical services, people who travel abroad for medical reasons look for tourist-oriented amenities such as lodging, leisure activities, and shopping (Sultana et al., 2014). The frequency of travel to a certain location reflects the location's ability to attract visitors (Bianchi et al., 2014). Instead of only drawing visitors for their first visit, a location must be able to draw them again to be successful over the long term (Cohen et al., 2014). Positive perceptions of on-site experiences at tourist attractions contribute to tourist satisfaction (Navratil et al., 2012).

Um et al. (2006) performed research in Hong Kong on the factors that influence visitors' intentions to return and their levels of satisfaction while on vacation. They highlighted the significance of perceived destination attraction as a primary factor influencing the revisit intention of travellers, with satisfaction mediating this relationship. In a study by Seetanah et al. (2020), the quality of tourist attractions was identified as a significant attribute affecting destination satisfaction and influencing the revisit intention of travellers. Similarly, research conducted by Sukarno et al. (2019) on Yogyakarta Heritage Tourism in Indonesia indicated that tourism attractions significantly and favourably affect visitors' pleasure and desire to return.

- H4 *The medical tourist destination attraction positively impacts tourist satisfaction.*
- H5 *The medical tourist destination attraction positively impacts tourists' revisit intention with the mediating effect of their satisfaction.*

Tourist-Friendly Environment

Jordan receives approximately 90% of its medical tourists from Middle Eastern countries, while only 10% come from European nations, America, and Asia together (Al Adwan, 2020). Due to religious considerations, travellers from Middle Eastern countries frequently choose to stay in a destination that offers a Muslim-friendly environment such as having halal-friendly restaurants and offering halal-friendly foods (Battour et al., 2011).

Making a destination warm and hospitable to tourists not only improves visitor satisfaction but also draws in more travellers (Nedelea, 2017). The satisfaction of travellers is also increased by having tourist-friendly amenities at the airport, such as duty-free shopping options. This in turn has a favourable effect on their intention to go back to the place (Chuchu, 2020). Furthermore, Kim et al. (2021) conducted a study that identified unethical business practices, regulations, customs, and visitor management as attributes of a destination that can contribute to a negative guest experience. Tourist dissatisfaction is eventually caused by these attributes. However, Lunt et al. (2011) discovered that having cross-border insurance coverage for travellers seeking medical care in another nation increases their satisfaction. Furthermore, according to Salehzadeh et al. (2016), medical tourists who are exposed to the host country's familiar culture, language, and religion report feeling more content and are more likely to return. According to Esiyok et al. (2017), patient satisfaction is significantly influenced by the cultural similarities between the host nation and the patients. A 'medical tourism experience' scale was also suggested by Ghosh and Mandal (2019) to assess the effect of this on visitor satisfaction. The treatment, service quality, costs, medical infrastructure, attraction, culture, and ease of access to destinations are just a few of the seven factors covered by this measure.

- H6 *The tourist-friendly environment of a destination has a positive impact on tourist satisfaction.*
- H7 *The tourist-friendly environment of a destination has a positive impact on tourists' revisit intention with the mediating effect of their satisfaction.*

Perceived Risk

Bauer (1960) introduced the theory of perceived risk. The perceived risk refers to the customer's perception and anticipation of potential adversities and uncertainties related to their probable future (Pathak & Pathak, 2017). According to Zhu and Deng (2020, p. 3), the perception of tourism risk includes several elements, such as operational risk, crisis risk, and cultural conflict risk. Tourists are now seriously concerned about the possibility of lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in light of the virus's first spread and future waves (Gössling et al., 2020). Another dangerous element that discourages travellers is terrorism, particularly in places like the Middle East that are vulnerable to such attacks (Hunter-Jones et al., 2008; Seabra et al., 2020). Natural disasters also discourage tourists from visiting certain destinations (Albu, 2016). The political instability, along with the potential for terrorist attacks negatively affects tourists' intentions (Artuğer, 2015). Travellers are subject to a variety of dangers, such as robbery, bad weather, political upheaval, terrorism, disasters, infections, strikes, and food poisoning. These risks can arise from individual events such as illness, environmental conditions, weather, conflicts, and cultural differences (Cianconi et al., 2020).

Sohn et al. (2016) found that risk perceptions lead to negative satisfaction. The researchers also discovered a cause-and-effect relationship between perception and satisfaction which lead to future visit intention. Travellers with higher perceived risk are more likely to make changes to their trip arrangements (Kozak et al., 2007). According to Tasci and Boylu (2010), the perceived risk for foreign travellers includes safety concerns, cultural conflicts, sanitation issues, language barriers, and transportation challenges. These factors contribute to decreased satisfaction levels among tourists (Tasci & Boylu, 2010).

- H8 *The perceived risk of medical tourists has a negative effect on tourist satisfaction.*
- H9 *The perceived risk of medical tourists has a negative effect on tourists' revisit intention with the mediating effect of their satisfaction.*

Value for Money

The trade-off between the price consumers pay and the goods or service they receive may be viewed from the standpoint of the customer as 'Value for Money' (Nasution & Mavondo, 2008). It depicts the customer's evaluation of a product or service's general qualities in monetary terms (Lee et al., 2019). Travellers give careful consideration to financial aspects while making vacation plans (Chang & Wildt, 1994). Customers are more concerned with the advantages they gain than the costs they pay (Hanif et al., 2010).

The capacity of marketing managers to forecast the degree of consumer satisfaction depends heavily on value for money (Ahmed et al., 2021). According to several sources, including Rajaguru (2016), Kusumawardani and Aruan (2019), Williams and Soutar (2009), Gault (1986), Ahmed et al. (2021), and Nasution and Mavondo (2008), it is regarded as a crucial element of customer satisfaction in a variety of businesses. Customers evaluate the advantages gained against the disadvantages incurred (Zeithaml, 1988). A country can attract wellness tourists from other countries by offering competitive prices (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017). Value for money has been investigated and shown to have a favourable impact on customer satisfaction by several researchers (Chen & Chen, 2010; Gallarza et al., 2013). Customer satisfaction, in turn, leads to intentions to revisit and recommend the products or services (Heydari Fard et al., 2021; Kim & Park, 2017). Additionally, tourists are more satisfied when a place is reasonably priced, which increases their intentions to return and recommend (Mai et al., 2019).

- H10 *The value for money of medical tourism destinations has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction.*

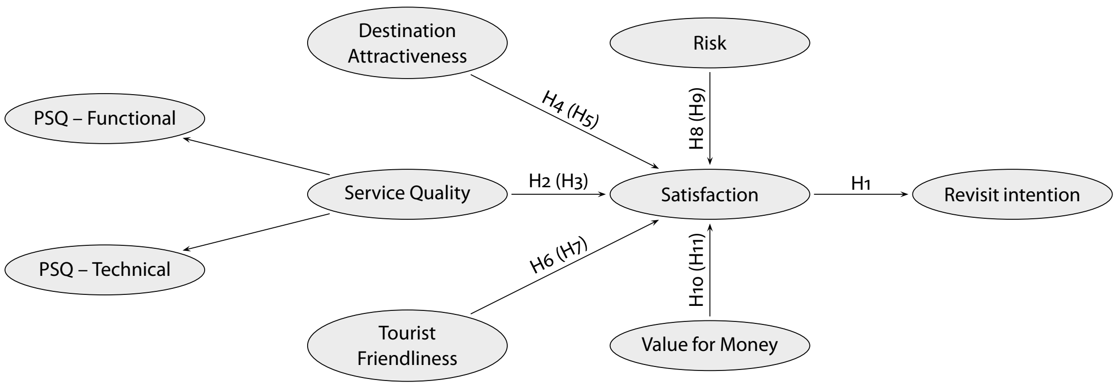

Figure 1 Tentative Model Based on Hypotheses

H11 *The value for money of medical tourism destinations has a positive effect on tourists' revisit intention with the mediating effect of their satisfaction.*

Based on the above theory-driven hypotheses, the following tentative model can be depicted for research (Figure 1).

Methodology

Study Site

Jordan, situated in the Eastern Mediterranean region, holds significance by being geographically close to three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe (Al-Tammemi, 2020). This Middle Eastern country shares its border with Iraq, Israel, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, and Syria (Al-Tammemi, 2020). In 2014, Jordan gained recognition as an appealing destination for medical tourists when it was awarded the title 'medical tourism destination of the year' (Anshasi & Alsyouf, 2020). Since then, the country has attracted medical tourists from numerous countries and has become one of the most sought-after destinations for medical purposes (Anshasi & Alsyouf, 2020).

Research Instrument

The research instrument for this study was framed in the form of a questionnaire, which consisted of seven major factors used to measure the revisit intention of foreign tourists visiting Jordan for medical purposes. These factors included revisiting intention, medical tourist satisfaction, service quality, tourist-friendly environment, destination attraction, value for money, and perceived risk.

The revisit intention was measured with a four-item scale adopted by Mohd Isa et al. (2019), M. J. Khan et al. (2017) and Cham et al. (2021). Similarly, the satisfaction of the medical tourists was measured with a five-item (Before Content Validity) scale adopted by Cham et al. (2021) and Zailani et al. (2016).

For measuring service quality in terms of functional and technical dimensions, a scale with four items for 'functional service quality' and three items for 'technical service quality' was adopted from de Keyser and Lariviere (2014). The tourist-friendly environment was measured using four items (Before Content Validity) and was adopted from various studies, including Ghosh and Mandal (2019) and Zarei et al. (2018). The destination attraction scale included four items taken from Mahmud et al. (2021), and M. J. Khan et al. (2017). The value for money (VFM) scale consisted of four items taken from Kusumawardani and Aruan (2019) and the perceived risk scale included four items from M. J. Khan et al. (2017).

These adopted items were modified to suit the context of this study on medical tourism. A five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree was used for data collection. The questionnaire was reviewed by five industry experts, four officers of the top cadre from the medical council of Jordan, and ten researchers to ensure its relevance, representativeness and precision. After the review, the questionnaire

Table 1 Scale

Category	No.	Item	Source	Action
Revisit Intention	RVST1	I will consider this hospital as my first choice in the future when I need healthcare services.	Mohd Isa et al. (2019)	Adopt
	RVST2	I will visit this hospital in the future if I need healthcare services.	Mohd Isa et al. (2019)	Adopt
	RVST3	If I need medical services in the future outside my country of residence, I would consider this hospital as my first choice.	Cham et al. (2021)	Adopt
	RVST4	I am likely to visit Jordan again for medical purposes.	Khan et al. (2017)	Adapt
Satisfaction	SAT1	I am satisfied with my decision to use the service at this hospital.	Cham et al. (2021)	Adopt
	SAT2	My choice to come to Jordan for a medical facility is a wise decision.	Cham et al. (2021)	Adapt
	SAT3	I am satisfied with the healthcare practices in this hospital.	Zailani et al. (2016)	Adapt
	SAT4	I am not disappointed to use this hospital's service.	Cham et al. (2021)	Adopt
Functional Service Quality	PSQfu1	The overall reliability of the hospital is satisfactory.	de Keyser and Lariviere (2014)	Adapt
	PSQfu2	The services offered by the hospital are optimally managed.	de Keyser and Lariviere (2014)	Adapt
	PSQfu3	I am satisfied with the speed of delivery at the hospital.	de Keyser and Lariviere (2014)	Adapt
	PSQfu4	The customer service of the hospital demonstrates good speed and friendliness.	de Keyser and Lariviere (2014)	Adapt
Technical Service Quality	PSQtch1	The overall quality of the medical service is good.	de Keyser and Lariviere (2014)	Adapt
	PSQtch2	The health information provided by the hospital is perceived to be of high quality.	de Keyser and Lariviere (2014)	Adapt
	PSQtch3	The hospital offers a range of medical services.	de Keyser and Lariviere (2014)	Adapt
Tourist-friendly Environment	TRFD1	The rules and regulations of Jordan are very friendly to me as a medical tourist.	Zarei (2018)	Adapt
	TRFD2	I am feeling secure in Jordan.	Zarei (2018)	Adapt
	TRFD3	The local people are open to welcoming people from other cultures.	Ghosh and Mandal (2019)	Adopt

Continued on the next page

was refined, resulting in elimination of two items (1 each from satisfaction and tourist-friendly environment).

Pilot Testing

Following that, a pilot test was conducted on fifty medical tourists from two prestigious hospitals in the Amman region to establish face validity. This region in Jordan boasts exceptional medical infrastructures and makes a significant contribution to the field of medical tourism. The statements were properly read and understood. The final version of the questionnaire for data collection consisted of thirty items, which can be found in Table 1.

The target population for this study comprises foreign tourists who have either visited or are currently visiting Jordan for medical purposes. In 2019, Jordan received approximately 220,000 medical tourists, a

Table 1 Continued from the previous page

Category	No.	Item	Source	Action
Destination Attraction	DATR1	The medical tourism destination has many exciting events and activities and an attractive landscape for spending quality time.	Mahmud et al. (2021)	Adopt
	DATR2	Jordan offers appealing local food.	Khan et al. (2017)	Adapt
	DATR3	Jordan has beautiful scenery and natural attractions.	Khan et al. (2017)	Adapt
	DATR4	Jordan has good standard of hygiene and cleanliness.	Khan et al. (2017)	Adapt
Value for Money	VFM1	The service of hospital is good for the price paid.	Kusumawardani and Aruan (2019)	Adapt
	VFM2	I see value for the money I paid.	Kusumawardani and Aruan (2019)	Adapt
	FVM3	The price I pay for various facilities and services in Jordan is very reasonable.	Kusumawardani and Aruan (2019)	Adapt
	VFM4	The facilities and services I got is worth what I paid.	Kusumawardani and Aruan (2019)	Adapt
Perceived Risk	RSK1	A medical tour to Jordan involves unexpected extra expenses (such as changes in exchange rates, extra costs in hotels).	Khan et al. (2017)	Adapt
	RSK2	A medical trip to Jordan is more expensive than other international trips.	Khan et al. (2017)	Adapt
	RSK3	There is a possibility of a strike on (airport, railway station, buses) in Jordan.	Khan et al. (2017)	Adapt
	RSK4	Travelling to Jordan involves too much risk.	Khan et al. (2017)	Adapt

figure close to the annual average, as reported by Al Nawas (2020) in *The Jordan Times*. Prior to 2016, the Kingdom consistently welcomed more than 250,000 patients annually, according to the Private Hospitals Association (PHA). Due to the difficulties encountered in gathering data from departing medical tourists in Jordan, the data collection process focused on tourists who were currently undergoing treatment.

Sample Selection

The sample size for the study was determined using the confidence interval method recommended by Burns and Bush (2010). According to this method, the minimum sample size required for an infinite population is 384. To achieve an effective sample, a judgemental sampling method was adopted.

Judgemental sampling was employed in the first stage. This approach was first chosen because the top hospitals in Amman, followed by Ibrid, receive the highest number of medical tourists from foreign countries. Therefore, the top ten reputable hospitals based on world rank were selected for data collection. The list of hospitals was obtained from the website (https://hospitals.webometrics.info/en/aw/jordan). Permission was sought from the management of these hospitals to conduct the study.

Data Collection

Six hospitals allowed collecting of data. The hospitals that permitted data collection are King Hussein Cancer Centre, Specialty Hospital Amman, Islamic Hospital, King Abdullah University Hospital, Alkhalidi Medical Centre, and Jordan Hospital. The medical tourists from each hospital that had permitted data collection were approached randomly. A total of 625 medical tourists from different countries were approached, out of which 395 were available and showed interest in filling in the questionnaire with a rate of 63%. Two researchers collected the data from December 2021 to April 2022.

Data Analysis

The researchers involved in the data collection ensured the avoidance of missing values, which subsequently helped in the data-cleaning process. In the subsequent step, data analysis was performed using SPSS 23.0 and smartPLS 3.3.4. The demographic data were analysed using SPSS 23.0. The structural equation modelling (SEM) was performed with smartPLS software. The analysis of the structural equation model involves a two-step approach which includes the analysis of the measurement model and structural model. The measurement model assesses the relationship between the observed items and their latent constructs. This study analysed the measurement model using the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) method. The application of CFA helped in assessing the fitness of the measurement model, its composite reliability (CR) and construct validity (test of both Convergent and Discriminate validity). Next, the structural model analysis was performed, which helped in testing the hypotheses. The mediating effects were checked using the bootstrapping method with SEM-PLS. PLS enables a researcher to assess latent constructs using small and medium sample sizes and non-normality distributed data (Ali et al., 2018). SEM-PLS is a recommended technique to analyse serial mediation and path coefficients in structural models (Hair et al., 2017).

Theory-driven modelling without exploratory factor analysis (EFA) can be justified based on several compelling arguments put forth by prominent researchers in the field of psychometrics and structural equation modelling. Henson and Roberts (2016) emphasize that EFA is primarily used for theory generation, whereas confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is employed for theory testing. This distinction underscores the notion that when a solid theoretical foundation already exists, there may be little need for EFA. Green et al. (2016) support this by highlighting that EFA is applied when there is limited prior knowledge regarding factor structure and the number of factors, whereas CFA is preferred when there is well-established theoretical knowledge and a desire to confirm the model's fit with the data. Hulland et al. (2018) argue that using both EFA and CFA on the same dataset can be unnecessary and potentially misleading, further reinforcing the idea that theory-driven modelling can be conducted without EFA.

Results

Common Method Bias

Harman's single-factor test was applied in this study to check the issue of common method bias (CMB). According to the rule of Harman's single-factor test, the issue of common method bias would occur if one factor accounts for more than 50% of the total variance. The common method bias is absent in this study as the total variance explained by one component was found to be less than the threshold limit of 50% at just 38.21%.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic data have been depicted in Table 2. The collected data showed that a total of 205 (52%) male and 190 (48%) female respondents filled in the questionnaire, indicating that the respondents were equally distributed by gender. The respondents in the age group of 26 to 35 were the highest with 220 (56%) respondents, followed by the age group 36 to 45 with 102 (26%) respondents, 46 to 55 with 43 (11%) respondents, above 55 with 20 (5%) respondents, and below 25 with 10 (3%) respondents. The majority of respondents were married, comprising 292 (74%) respondents, while fewer were unmarried, accounting for 103 (26%) respondents. Respondents with different levels of educational qualification were found with a higher number being those who had completed postgraduate level (PG) with 186 (47%) respondents followed by undergraduate level with 96 (24%) respondents, M.Phil./Ph.D. with 63 (16%) respondents, and others with 15 (4%) respondents. Out of the respondents, 190 (48%) were employed, 153 (39%) had their own business, 40 (10%) were self-employed, 5 (1%) were students, and 7 (2%) were unemployed.

Due to the differences in currency valuation of the countries the medical tourists belong to, their income level was measured in USD. It was found that respondents with an income group of 1500 to 2500 USD accounted for 145 (37%) respondents, followed by the income group of 2500 USD to 3500 USD with 130 (33%) respondents, more than 3500 USD with 64 (16%) respondents, and less than 1500 USD with 56 (14%) re-

Table 2 Demographic Profile

Category	Item	*f*	%
Gender	Male	205	52
	Female	190	48
	Total	395	100
Age	Below 25	10	3
	From 26 to 35	220	56
	From 36 to 45	102	26
	From 46 to 55	43	11
	Above 55	20	5
	Total	395	100
Marital Status	Married	292	74
	Unmarried	103	26
	Total	395	100
Educational Qualification	Up to 12th	35	9
	UG	96	24
	PG/Masters	186	47
	M.Phil./Ph.D.	63	16
	Other	15	4
	Total	395	100
Occupation	Student	5	1
	Employee	190	48
	Businessperson	153	39
	Self Employed	40	10
	Unemployed	7	2
	Total	395	100
Monthly Income	More than 3500 USD	64	16
	2500 to 3500 USD	130	33
	1500 to 2500 USD	145	37
	Less than 1500 USD	56	14
	Total	395	100
Native Country	ME other than Jordan	315	80
	North America	15	4
	Europe	30	8
	Asian other than ME	12	3
	Africa	23	6

Table 3 Measurement Model Summary

	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR	rho_A	α
(1)	DATR1	0.892	0.785	0.936	0.909	0.909
	DATR2	0.897				
	DATR3	0.895				
	DATR4	0.860				
(2)	PSQfu1	0.914	0.848	0.944	0.915	0.911
	PSQfu2	0.932				
	PSQfu3	0.916				
	PSQfu4	0.929				
(3)	PSQtch1	0.934	0.854	0.946	0.920	0.914
	PSQtch2	0.927				
	PSQtch3	0.911				
(4)	VFM1	0.871	0.783	0.947	0.933	0.930
	VFM2	0.882				
	VFM3	0.890				
	VFM4	0.880				
(5)	RSK1	0.879	0.656	0.788	0.720	0.716
	RSK2	0.840				
	RSK3	0.829				
	RSK4	0.783				
(6)	RVST1	0.772	0.619	0.862	0.799	0.797
	RVST2	0.849				
	RVST3	0.533				
	RVST4	0.936				
(7)	SAT1	0.917	0.854	0.959	0.950	0.943
	SAT2	0.917				
	SAT3	0.932				
	SAT4	0.929				
(8)	TRFD1	0.923	0.842	0.941	0.9155	0.906
	TRFD2	0.922				
	TRFD3	0.907				

Notes Row headings are as follows: (1) Destination Attractiveness, (2) Perceived Service Quality – Functional Aspect, (3) Perceived Service Quality – Technical Aspect, (4) Revisit Intention, (5) Perceived Risk, (6) Satisfaction, (7) Tourist Friendliness, (8) Value for Money.

spondents. The majority of respondents, 315 (80%), were from Middle East countries, followed by 30 (8%) from Europe, 23 (6%) from Africa, 15 (4%) from North America, and 12 (3%) from Asian countries.

Table 4 Discriminant Validity (Fornell and Larker Criterion)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1)	0.886							
(2)	0.841	0.921						
(3)	0.797	0.846	0.924					
(4)	0.218	0.226	0.226	0.787				
(5)	0.107	0.131	0.141	0.042	0.506			
(6)	0.841	0.808	0.812	0.189	0.133	0.924		
(7)	0.882	0.818	0.793	0.183	0.126	0.825	0.917	
(8)	0.882	0.892	0.843	0.249	0.109	0.851	0.868	0.885

Notes Column/row headings are as follows: (1) Destination Attractiveness, (2) Perceived Service Quality – Functional Aspect, (3) Perceived Service Quality – Technical Aspect, (4) Revisit Intention, (5) Perceived Risk, (6) Satisfaction, (7) Tourist Friendliness, (8) Value for Money. The diagonal is the square root of the AVE of the latent variables and indicates the highest in any column or row.

Table 5 Collinearity Issues and Explanatory Power of the Model

Construct	VIF	R^2
Destination Attractiveness	1.157	0.922
Perceived Service Quality – Functional	1.215	0.924
Perceived Service Quality – Technical	1.222	0.836
Risk	1.842	0.783
Satisfaction	1.786	0.720
Tourist Friendliness	1.111	0.820
Value for Money	1.337	0.658

Measurement Model Analysis

Several criteria were employed to assess the measurement model in our study. Firstly, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using a factor loading cut-off value of 0.50 (Hulland, 1999; Kline, 2015). This analysis helps establish the relationship between the observed variables and their underlying constructs, ensuring the validity of the measurement model. Secondly, the internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, rho_A and composite reliability (CR) with a cut-off value of 0.70. The Cronbach's alpha provides a lower bound estimate of internal consistency reliability, while composite reliability (CR) provides an upper bound estimate. Rho_A, on the other hand, typically falls between these bounds and can be a good representation of a construct's internal consistency reliability. All the measures of reliability (i.e. Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, and CR) values were found to be above the cut-off value, hence satisfactory (Table 3). Third, to evaluate construct validity, two measures were employed. The first measure was the average variance extracted (AVE), which should exceed 0.5 (Table 3). AVE indicates the proportion of variance captured by the construct and serves as evidence of convergent validity. The second measure of construct validity was based on Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), which assesses discriminant validity (Table 4). According to this criterion, the square root of the AVE for each latent variable should be greater than the correlation among the latent variables. By satisfying this criterion, the variables in our study demonstrate distinctiveness and provide evidence of discriminant validity. Overall, the measurement model demonstrated satisfactory reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. These results support the robustness of our research and validate the accuracy of the selected measurement items in capturing the intended constructs.

Structural Model Analysis and Hypotheses Testing

The findings of this study, obtained through the PLS-SEM method and the bootstrap technique in Smart PLS, included both direct effects and specific indirect effects. Following the satisfactory findings of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated using PLS-SEM. The collinearity of constructs was evaluated before model evaluation. The VIF value of variables was found to be less than 2.0 (Table 5), indicating that there is no issue of multicollinearity by retaining the threshold of 5.0. (Ringle et al., 2015).

Following the test for multicollinearity, the path coefficients were assessed with a bootstrapping process of 2000 iterations. The investigation utilised the Normed Fit Index (NFI) and the Standardised Root-Mean-Square Residual (SRMR) to assess the fit of the model. The findings indicate that the SRMR value is

Table 6 Path Coefficients with Direct Effects

H	Relationships	β	T	P	Remarks
H1	Satisfaction → Revisit Intention	0.189	4.344	0.000	Accepted
H2	Service Quality → Satisfaction	0.273	3.156	0.002	Accepted
H4	Destination Attractiveness → Satisfaction	0.245	2.811	0.005	Accepted
H6	Tourist Friendliness → Satisfaction	0.171	2.155	0.031	Accepted
H8	Risk → Satisfaction	0.021	0.565	0.572	Not accepted
H10	Value for Money → Satisfaction	0.238	2.459	0.014	Accepted

Table 7 Specific Indirect Effects

H	Relationships	β	T	P	Remarks
H3	Service Quality → Satisfaction → Revisit Intention	0.052	2.433	0.015	Accepted
H5	Destination Attractiveness → Satisfaction → Revisit Intention	0.046	2.236	0.025	Accepted
H7	Tourist Friendliness → Satisfaction → Revisit Intention	0.032	1.846	0.065	Not Accepted
H9	Risk → Satisfaction → Revisit Intention	0.004	0.517	0.605	Not Accepted
H11	Value for Money → Satisfaction → Revisit Intention	0.045	1.977	0.048	Accepted

0.061 (SRMR < 0.08) and the NFI value is 0.918 (NFI > 0.9), indicating a good model fit (Hair et al. 2017). Furthermore, the model's explanatory ability was investigated using the coefficient of determination (R^2). All R^2 values exceeded the proposed cut-off value of 0.10 (Table 5) (Falk & Miller, 1992).

The path coefficients were then evaluated to test the stated hypotheses. Table 6 shows path coefficients with direct impacts of variables with all t-statistics values greater than 1.96 and statistically significant, suggesting the acceptance of hypotheses predicting the direct influence of independent variables on dependent variables. Based on Table 6, hypotheses H1, H2, H4, H6, and H10 were accepted since the p-values were below the significant level of 0.05. The t statistics for H1, H2, H4, H6, and H10 were found to be 4.34, 3.15, 2.81, 2.15, and 2.45, respectively. The satisfaction of medical tourist significantly influenced their revisit intention (H1: $\beta = 0.189$, $t = 4.344$, $p < 0.005$). Similarly, the service quality of medical facilities (H2: $\beta = 0.273$, $t = 3.156$, $p < 0.005$), tourist destination attractions (H4: $\beta = 0.245$, $t = 2.811$, $p < 0.005$) and tourist friendliness (H6: $\beta = 0.171$, $t = 2.155$, $p < 0.005$) significantly impacted medical tourists' satisfaction. Satisfaction was also influenced by value for money (H10: $\beta = 0.238$, $t = 2.459$, $p < 0.005$) significantly. The p-value for H8, which examined the effect of risk on satisfaction (H8: $\beta = 0.021$, $t = 0.565$, $p > 0.005$), exceeded 0.05, indicating insignificance. Hence, hypothesis H8 was not accepted (Figure 2). Service Quality ($\beta = 0.273$) was found to have the highest impact on satisfaction, followed by Destination Attraction ($\beta = 0.245$), Value for Money ($\beta = 0.238$), and Tourist Friendliness ($\beta = 0.171$).

Table 7 represents the specific indirect effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable revisit intention with the mediating effect of satisfaction. The mediating effect of Satisfaction in the relationship between Service Quality and Revisit Intention (H3) was found to be significant (H3: $\beta = 0.052$, $t = 2.43$, $p < 0.05$) with the highest beta coefficient among the other independent variables. Similarly, the mediating effect of Satisfaction in the relationship between Destination Attraction and Revisit Intention (H5) was significant (H5: $\beta = 0.046$, $t = 2.23$, $p < 0.05$). Additionally H11 was accepted, indicating the significant mediation of Satisfaction between Value for Money and Revisit Intention (H11: $\beta = 0.045$, $t = 1.97$, $p < 0.05$).

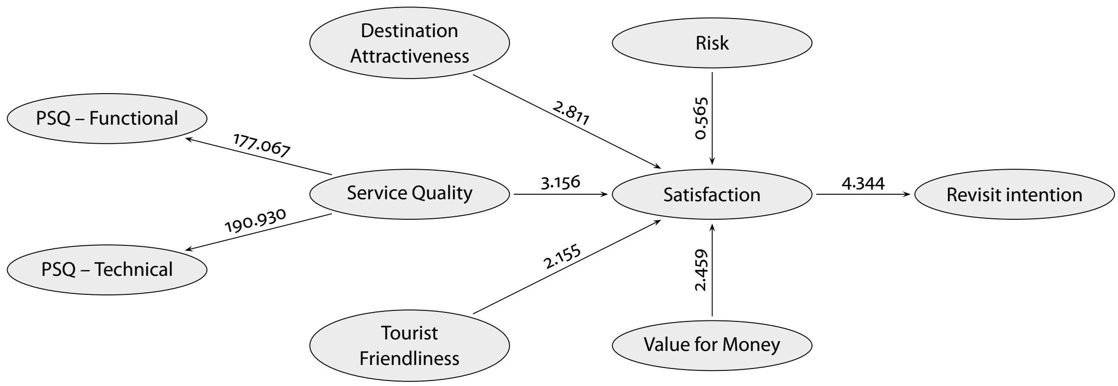

Figure 2 Path Analysis

Service Quality, Destination Attraction, and Value for Money were all found to have a positive impact on tourists' revisit intention, with a mediating effect on their satisfaction. However, these effects were of lower intensity, as indicated by their lower beta coefficient. Conversely, hypotheses H7 and H9 were rejected, indicating insignificant mediation effects of satisfaction between the relationship of Tourist Friendliness (H7: $\beta = 0.032$, $t = 1.84$, $p > 0.05$) and Risk (H9: $\beta = 0.004$, $t = 0.51$, $p > 0.05$) with Revisit Intention.

Discussion and Conclusion

While previous studies in the Jordanian region have focussed on analysing factors influencing the selection of Jordan as a tourist destination, this study examines the influential factors of tourist satisfaction that drive revisit intentions. The study underscores the experiential dimensions as well-established factors that serve as travel motivators. It aligns with a similar study conducted by Ghosh and Mandal (2019), which developed the MTEX construct to measure the service experience. The MTEX construct utilized in this study incorporates and emphasizes three major categories of measures that capture various dimensions of the tourism experience. These categories encompass medical-related, travel-related, and holiday-related aspects. Consideration of these dimensions is crucial for promoting or upgrading the standard of facilities and services, as well as regulating the rules and regulations for medical tourists. According to Nasab et al. (2011), price followed by medical services and the destination-related dimensions are the major factors that contribute to a country's competitiveness in attracting medical tourists.

The findings of the current study reveal the influence of satisfaction on medical tourists' intention to revisit. This is consistent with the findings of Ahmed et al. (2017), Kim et al. (2009), Ghosh and Mandal (2019), and Um et al. (2006), who found satisfaction to be a precursor to a traveller's repurchase intention. According to Ghosh and Mandal (2019), meeting all the essential dimensions outlined in the MTEX scale, including quality medical treatment, accommodation, and local travel experiences, not only leads to the satisfaction of medical tourists but also influences their intention to recommend the destination. Um et al. (2006) found that in the context of international travel, tourist satisfaction plays a crucial role in shaping their intention to revisit a destination, particularly when the destination offers novel experiences or entails lower opportunity costs for the tourists.

Service quality should consider both the functional and technical aspects of medical services provided by hospitals in Jordan (Caruana, 2002). The functional aspects encompass tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, while the technical aspects are about how medical services are delivered. The study found that service quality has a positive influence on tourist satisfaction, which is supported by the findings of Lee and Kim (2017), Padma et al. (2010), Thawornwiriyatrakul and Meeprom (2020), and Ali et al. (2021). Ahmed et al. (2017) conducted a study on patients from healthcare units in Bangladesh, which revealed that patients perceive the service quality of private hospitals to be higher than that of public hospitals, mainly due to their focus on technical and functional aspects. Satisfaction achieved from the quality of service also influences medical tourists' revisit intention, as supported by Lee and Kim (2017) and Thawornwiriyatrakul and Meeprom (2020). According to Padma et al. (2010), the patients and attendants prioritize the interpersonal aspect of care as they have a limited understanding of the technical part of medical services. Hence, to satisfy them, their service needs must be understood properly.

The value for money was found to significantly influence tourist satisfaction, indicating that the satisfaction of medical tourists in Jordan is positively influenced by the value they receive for their money. Furthermore, value for money was found to positively influence medical tourists' revisit intention post-satisfaction. This aligns with the findings of Mai et al. (2019), which reveals that affordable price of services at the destination contribute to visitor satisfaction and their revisit intention. The findings of this study are also supported by Um et al. (2006), which highlights the influence of value for money on satisfaction and revisit intention. The researchers aim to unravel the specific ways in which each of these factors contributes to the overall perception of value for money. For instance, service duration becomes a critical factor as it directly impacts the customer experience, influencing their level of satisfaction. Additionally, the convenience, cost of service, and search cost are explored to shed light on their individual roles in shaping customer perceptions. By explicating how each element intertwines with the concept of value for money, the researchers provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing satisfaction in the context of the services under examination.

In this study, the tourist-friendly environment of Jordan was found to positively influence the satisfaction of the medical tourists with statistical significance. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Darwazeh et al. (2021), which indicates that not-so-stringent government regulations, traveller friendly business practices and relaxed custom charges are influential factors for the success of Jordan as a medical tourist destination. Ghosh and Mandal (2019) also support the cultural acceptance of the local people as a precursor to medical tourists' satisfaction. However, the influence of a tourist-friendly environment on revisit intention, with the mediating effect of satisfaction, was not found to be significant in our study. This suggests that a revisit intention triggered solely by a tourist-friendly environment is not deemed sufficient based on our research findings.

The current study was not found to be aligned with the outcomes of the previous studies conducted by Tasci and Boylu (2010) and Sohn et al. (2016), which highlight the influence of negative risk perception on tourist satisfaction and revisit intention. However, it does not imply the perception of medical tourists regarding Jordan as a riskier destination. The significant effect of perceived risk on satisfaction and revisit intention cannot determine the perception of risk associated with Jordan as a medical tourism destination.

The findings reveal that tourist destination attraction significantly influences the satisfaction of Jordanian medical tourists. This finding is supported by Navratil et al. (2012), who found a significant and positive influence of tourist destination attraction in Jordan on medical tourist satisfaction. The tourist destination attraction of Jordan was also found to significantly influence medical tourists' revisit intentions, with satisfaction mediating the effect. This aligns with the studies conducted by Um et al. (2006), Seetanah et al. (2020), and Sukarno et al. (2019), which found that attractive destinations satisfy the tourists and influence their revisit intentions. Um et al. (2006) emphasize the importance of destination attraction over traveller satisfaction in stimulating revisit intention. Seetanah et al. (2020), and Sukarno et al. (2019) reveal the quality of the destination's attraction results in tourist satisfaction and revisit intention. In the current study, the medical tourists are found to be satisfied by the destination attraction of Jordan and consider a second visit.

The suggested model holds significant value for the global scientific community. First, it has the potential to inform and support researchers working in the area of medical tourists in suggesting important drivers of medical tourists' satisfaction and revisit intention. Second, this research offers a foundation for the other researchers in this area in understanding the role of traveller's risk perception in influencing their satisfaction and revisit intention. Third, this study can help future researchers in conceptualizing various elements of service offerings that have the potential to influence their satisfaction and revisit intention.

This study also has managerial implications for hospitals and destination management companies. First, taking insights from the current study, hospitals can consider maintaining good quality medical services by focusing on both technical and clinical excellence and by ensuring a sound service delivery process which can address the functional aspects. Second, hospitals may consider prioritizing modern and advanced clinical standards and state-of-the-art facilities based on the current findings. Third, the government can consider implementing favourable policies for creating a tourist-friendly environment that may align with the findings of the current study. This study also suggests the destination management companies should consider working on the destination's attractiveness. Fourth, while managing and delivering services, attention can be paid to the monetary aspects for ensuring the services to be perceived as valuable and not overly costly. Fifth, work can be done to reduce the magnitude of risk perception of the tourists by empathizing with the medical tourists. Seventh, the stakeholders like hospitals and destination management companies can consider the findings of this study while making long- and short-term strategies.

This study has some limitations. First, this study was conducted in the top ten hospitals in Jordan, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could include medical tourists from other hospitals to provide a broader perspective. Secondly, the current study did not differentiate between medical tourists visiting government and private hospitals. Future research can consider conducting a cross-sectional study to examine differences in outcomes between tourists utilizing government and private medical facilities. Third, this study focuses on five external factors, namely tourist destination attraction, service quality, value for money, perceived risk, and tourist friendliness of the destination. Future studies could explore additional factors that may influence the satisfaction and revisit intentions of medical tourists.

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Original Scientific Article

Marketing Strategies in Cross-Border Tourist Destinations: A Literature Review

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The basic principle of the operation of a tourist destination as a system of connected stakeholders is the creation of new value that is reflected in the creation of added value for participants in the business process. To create added value, stakeholders need to strategically plan and manage their marketing function. A systematic qualitative review of the latest current literature (last ten years) is carried out in the field of introducing marketing strategies into the wider strategy of developing cross-border tourist destinations. The selected databases were Web of Science and Scopus. We found that cross-border tourist destinations do not take systematic approaches to introduce marketing strategies, but rather identify themselves as a part of broader development strategies of cross-border areas. In rare cases, stand-alone brands are formed to help destinations consolidate their market position and exploit the potential of two or more cross-border destinations at the same time. Despite identifying different synergistic effects and understanding the importance and benefits of integration and coopetition, marketing strategies in cross-border tourist destinations are not yet standardized business practice. The review article contributes to showcasing the important role of cross-border marketing strategies in tourism and paves the way for more detailed research on the topic in the future.

Keywords: tourism, cross-border, tourist destination, strategy, marketing strategy

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Introduction

A tourist destination is perceived by the tourist as a composite set of services, which is marketed in a uniform way. They expect to receive all the necessary information and organized elements of the offer within the tourist destination system in one place (Vodeb, 2010), regardless of where the tourist destination is geographically located. How the tourist destination work is organized is not relevant to the tourist – only the expected experience as a result of the expressed need or interest during their visit. Cross-border destinations, even in those areas where administrative borders are no longer there, such as in the European Union, face many challenges concerning the uncoordinated operation of two or more different tourist systems in one tourist area, which is marketed as a cross-border tourist area or destination (Kozak & Buhalis, 2019). In general, border destinations face poorer economic efficiency and thus also lower competitive advantages than other inland destinations (Vodeb, 2012). Therefore, cross-border integration is an appropriate systemic development approach (Timothy & Tosun, 2003), including for those destinations that are connected across borders for various other interests. To make it easier for companies to overcome modern economic challenges, including economic volatility due to various unforeseen events, such as the recent major health crisis of the Covid epidemic (Šerić et al., 2021), wars, environmental disasters caused by climate change, etc., tourist destinations should develop marketing strategies (Tosun et al., 2005) with targeted branding.

Marketing strategies are all the more important for regions in cross-border areas, as they face many geographical, administrative and socio-cultural differences. These, in turn, raise specific challenges that can be managed with a variety of tools and approaches. Strategic planning in marketing helps regional development planners, management and decision-making bodies and other regional managers to facilitate marketing, management and promotion of economic activity (Gerlitz et al., 2021; Kozak & Buhalis, 2019).

Research and study of cross-border cooperation in tourism are largely subordinated to actual implementation practices and cross-border cooperation projects, as their occurrence is mainly the result of the activation of natural resources or infrastructure in an area that combines or links destinations into mutual partnership cooperation. Cross-border cooperation can be defined within at least four different scopes (Timothy & Saarinen, 2013): at the global level, at the regional level, in bilateral networks, and through cooperation at the local level. Each scope of cross-border (partner) networks has implications for tourist destinations. Different scopes of partnership cooperation require different intensities of integration depending on the level of influence of an individual institution in a certain cross-border tourist destination. This raises the question of how these organizations approach and conduct common marketing strategies and within what scope. Partnership cooperation brings a variety of experience and knowledge to stakeholders that can be revealed in a long period of monitoring the phenomenon in the formation of a pattern or trend that indicates the direction of development in the future.

The purpose of this paper is to examine whether cross-border tourist destinations plan and implement marketing strategies and at what geographical scale. The authors performed a systematic analysis of relevant current literature examining approaches to the design and implementation of marketing strategies in cross-border tourist destinations. The research questions for the purpose of the review article are:

1. At what scope of cross-border cooperation destinations use marketing strategies as a part of the management and development of cross-border tourist destinations?
2. What are the opportunities and obstacles in building joint marketing strategies for cross-border tourist destinations?

The objectives of the paper are to identify the characteristics of strategic marketing approaches of cross-border tourist destinations and to gain insight into the importance and prevalence of the topic in academic research of the tourism industry.

Scopes of Cross-Border Tourist Destinations

The basic principle of cross-border cooperation is the establishment of cross-border connections and contractual relations in border areas to find common solutions to common problems (Vodeb, 2007, p. 37). However, cross-border tourist destinations do not necessarily cover only border areas, but also build cooperation through cross-border partnerships in different geographical and institutional scopes (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2007) or historical scopes (Saarinen & Kask, 2008).

For this review article, we selected Timothy and Saarinen's (2013) concept of four main scopes of cross-border cooperation from a geographical and implicitly organizational perspective:

- global partnerships (e.g. almost all countries in Europe are involved in the United Nations, or under the authority of the World Tourism Organization and UNESCO, global partner chains);
- regional cross-border cooperation is implemented within the European Union through several different programmes and partnerships (e.g. Euroregio, Interreg, European Tourism Organization);

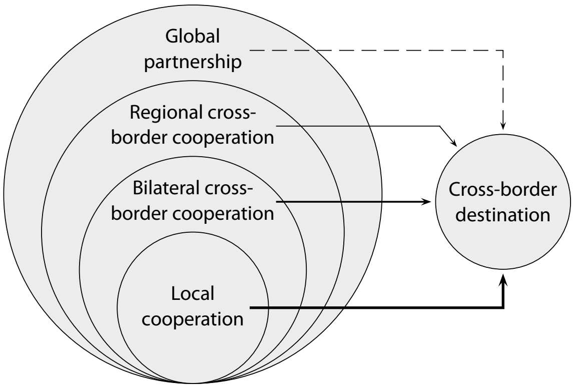

Figure 1 Presentation of the Scope of Cross-Border Cooperation in Relation to a Cross-Border Destination by the Intensity of Integration and Direct Power of the Cross-Border Partnership's Influence on the Destination's Tourism Activity (adapted from Timothy & Saarinen, 2013)

- bilateral cross-border cooperation between two or three countries, not necessarily with countries sharing the same border. These have their own national tourism organizations but can perform together in the market (e.g. Elbe/Labe region);
- local cooperation between countries that share an administrative border, but the area is intertwined with cultural and natural resources. In this case, the border areas form a cross-border tourist destination.

The development of tourism in cross-border destinations is encouraged by various forces, interests and needs (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2007), such as political, socio-cultural, economic, technological, competitive and safety (Timothy & Tosun, 2003; Saarinen & Kask, 2008; Wang & He, 2016). Therefore, how marketing relationships are established, and their intensity, can be aggravated by the fact that local tourism organizations operating in cross-border destinations carry out marketing activities with other stakeholders at different levels and dimensions, and not necessarily with uniform and homogeneous objectives.

Figure 1 shows the extent of cross-border cooperation in relation to a cross-border destination, geographically. The integration of a cross-border destination within an individual scope depends on the intensity of cooperation and integration and the direct power of the cross-border partnership's influence on the destination's tourism activity. Although the supply at the destination strongly depends on local integration, it cannot avoid integration at the global level (Tosun et al., 2005). Concerning stakeholders at the global level, given the influence of the local tourist destination outside the destination area, it can be concluded that its influence is less powerful within the global partnership than at the local level (intensity of arrows in Figure 1). The importance of local authorities in formulating a marketing strategy is crucial as it also represents a starting point for the establishment of new economic initiatives in the field of tourism (Kozak & Buhalis, 2019). Relationships between individual partners can be business or non-business, spontaneous or organized (Vodeb, 2007), which determines the heterogeneous partnership activities in between tourist destinations.

Marketing Strategies of Tourist Destinations

In a traditional market economy, new value is created through a company's business process with two key parts of process planning: manufacturing and sales. In developed economies, value delivery is becoming important, bringing added value to different participants in the process, and is strongly influenced by consumer preferences and choices that dictate market demand (Kotler & Levy, 1969). Creating a strategic market presence is important for both businesses and other stakeholders operating at the country or regional level; it allows them to use new, tailored processes to achieve their objectives more effectively.

Strategic management models differ when applied to destinations as a collection of organizations from public, private, and civil sectors. Marketing of a tourist destination is one of the key development policies or sub-strategies of a comprehensive tourism strategy, on the basis of which it is possible to achieve the desired development of a tourist destination. But it needs to be planned, too. Strategic planning is one of the key aspects affecting the development and success of the tourist destination. Strategic planning in tourism conceptualizes a certain number of steps in the process, where the output of the previous step becomes the input of the next, to the overall final concept of the strategy (Uran Maravić & Juvan, 2009). It is also important that tourist destinations develop marketing strategies with targeted branding. Brand management is the most important distinguishing feature of tourist destinations, as a result of aggressive marketing in competitive markets and information deluge (Šerić & Vitner Marković, 2011). In developing a common brand, it is therefore important to examine the various aspects of market positioning (Brezovec & Nemec Rudež, 2009; Kodrin, 2021), related to cross-border tourist destinations:

- geographical positioning, administrative boundaries and certain territorial diversity and specificities;
- social perception, exchange of information, sharing of experiences, norms in building and establishing relationships, marketing skills;
- understanding cultural characteristics which reduce social and organizational differences;
- creativity and receptivity towards open innovation.

Among other strategic prerequisites, political support, organization of local tourism organizations and tourism associations, management structure and mutual interests are important for successful cross-border tourism cooperation in the field of institutional cooperation, whereas branding, cooperation in the co-design of tourist products, access to the market and combined sales efforts are also important for strategic marketing (Kozak & Buhalis, 2019).

The marketing process is an important part of a company's business process that allows it to trade. Exchange as a part of trade, however, is a fundamental condition and purpose of the operation of companies, which, in basic economic theory, pursues the goal of making a profit (Foxall, 2020). To enter markets with created value, it is necessary that product supply transforms the marketing strategy into a marketing mix. In this case, we must consider also marketing expenditures for the implementation of the selected marketing mix. There are several marketing mix models. The most prevalent is the McCarthy model. It divides the marketing mix into four elements, which it calls 4P: product, price, place and promotion. It later upgraded to 7PS, which additionally includes people, process and physical evidence of the marketing mix (van Waterschoot & van den Bulte, 1992). The model can also be used at tourist destinations.

Methodology

The methodological approach chosen is based on the appropriate selection of methodology and dataset in the chosen databases of scientific publications, based on keyword selection.

We used Cooper's Taxonomy (Cooper, 1988) of literature review which focuses on practices and applications. With a systematic literature review, we strive to synthesize researched evidence, identify main characteristics and issues relevant to the research topic and point out conclusions in a generalized manner. The perspective of the article is based on a qualitative review.

A four-step model (Babbie, 2016) was selected in the methodology selection for preparing the literature review:

1. selection of an appropriate literature base offering the largest set of academic articles and other literature in the field of study,
2. obtaining data based on selected keywords in the field of study,
3. an arrangement of data based on selected assessment criteria and analysis,
4. discussion and conclusion with findings.

The review of the databases covered the period from 1 January 2012 to 20 April 2022.

In the first phase, the methodological approach required an overview of the literature of academic articles and other scientific works within online databases. The dataset of selected keywords was collected in two of the world's most widely used web databases: *Web of Science* and *Scopus*. Validity and reliability of data were assured with several techniques: combining comparative tests of search strings to make a final selection of keywords, finding comprehensive literature to select relevant articles and using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to make a reliable data analysis (Paré

Table 1 Search Results of Literature by Selected Keywords in Selected Databases

Item	Web of Science	Scopus
Keywords	Tourism, cross-border, marketing, strategy	Tourism, cross-border, marketing, strategy
Search Constraints	Topic (title, abstract, keywords)	Topic (title, abstract, keywords)
Type of Publication	All	All
Publication Period	1.1.2012–20.4.2022	1.1.2012–20.4.2022
Language	English	English
Research Area	All	All
Results	47	11

et al., 2015), with a double review approach in the data analysis stage. The first comparative test of choosing several combinations of keywords in both databases was done, as follows. The first selection of keywords was based on generic terms that best describe the field studied: *tourism, cross-border, coopetition, marketing strategy, travel, cooperation.* Since the number of hits was low, the first selection of keywords was refined to the selected keywords: *tourism, cross-border, marketing, strategy.*

When obtaining data from databases of scientific literature, the goal was to obtain all relevant scientific literature, regardless of the type of publication (publications in conference proceedings and other scientific meetings, research articles and book chapters).

For the Web of Science and Scopus databases, we searched for selected keywords in titles, abstracts, and groups of keywords. In addition, a search of the Google Scholar database was performed, but due to a disproportionately large number of results (17,300 hits) compared to the other two databases, the Google Scholar database was subsequently excluded. After the first search string, the most relevant results were found in the Web of Science as shown in Table 1. After reviewing all the search results according to the selected keywords, 8 articles were duplicated in both databases. The final set for further review (processing) of data was reduced to 50 articles.

The results of the selected keywords were studied from several aspects and particular findings have been revealed:

- by number of publications by year (Table 2): a significant increase in interest in the topic studied is evident from 2016 onwards;
- by type of publications (Table 3): both databases show a variety of publication types;
- by number of citations of the publications (Table 4): modus of numbers of citations in both databases is in a range of numbers of citations between 21 and 50.

In regard to the source of publications, we note that articles have been published in different publications and journals, that their number is diverse, and there are no cases when at least two or more articles were published in the same journal, indicating diverse treatment of the research field, despite the inclusion of the keyword 'tourism.'

Among all publications, there are only four journals from the tourism research field, of which only two have an impact factor in the first quartile, namely:

- *Deturope: The Central European Journal of Regional Development and Tourism* (impact factor: Q3),
- *International Journal of Tourism Research* (impact factor: Q1),
- *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights* (not included in the Scimago Journal & Country Rank database),
- *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* (impact factor: Q1).

The weak representation of the topic in research journals in the field of tourism indicates a lower presence of the research topic among researchers in tourism. In the analysis of selected articles, special attention is paid to those that record higher citations, as shown in Table 4.

In the third step, a selection of articles was performed based on the arrangement of data according to selected assessment criteria and in order to identify those articles crucial for our research questions to achieve the goal of this paper.

Table 2 Number of Published Articles from 2012 to 2022, in Web of Science and Scopus

Database	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Scopus	1	0	0	1	1	2	0	1	3	1	1
Web of Science	2	0	3	1	6	9	5	5	7	9	0

Table 3 Type of Research Publications, in Web of Science and Scopus

Type of publication	Web of Science	Scopus
Note	0	9
Conference review	0	9
Conference paper	23	9
Book chapter	0	18
Article	77	55

Notes In percent.

Table 4 Demonstration of the Importance of Articles by Citation, in Web of Science and Scopus

Number of citations	Web of Science		Scopus	
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
>200	1	2	0	0
101–200	3	6	0	0
81–100	3	6	0	0
51–80	12	26	3	27
21–50	19	40	3	27
1–20	9	19	2	18
0	0	0	3	27

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) number of articles, (2) share among all articles (%).

After refining the broad set of literature, abstracts of 50 selected articles were read. Subsequently, 17 articles were selected for a literature review, based on the method of eliminating irrelevant articles, according to the following criteria (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005):

- the content of the article deals with cross-border cooperation, but the field of research is general, e.g. economically oriented and does not address a specific area of tourism,
- the content of the article deals with the field of tourism, but the content does not coincide with the content of research questions and addresses other topics irrelevant to this literature review.

Of the 17 articles, 3 were not freely available, so the authors were asked for direct access via an application in the Research Gate database. Access to those articles was not confirmed by the authors and articles were subsequently excluded from further analysis. One article was published only in Chinese and was excluded due to ignorance of the language. Out of 13 articles, a detailed reading of the entire content of the articles was done. Three articles were subsequently excluded due to inadequate content that did not reflect our research questions. In the final selection of the literature review, 10 articles were discussed 7 of them dealing with cross-border regions or destinations within or along the external borders of the European Union. Most of the articles (7 of them) were published in the last four years, which indicated a greater presence of the research topic in recent years.

Table 5 contains all the articles discussed by author, year of publication, key concepts used, research methods/samples, scientific contribution and scope of cross-border cooperation.

Results and Analysis

Cross-Border Cooperation Scopes and Marketing

The studied articles provide a more detailed insight into the issue of planning and implementing cross-border destination, management and related understanding and approaches in their marketing. The authors largely recognize the importance of the competitive advantages of cross-border cooperation and the relevance of designing and implementing marketing strategies within the institutional organization, mainly as tourist destinations. The implementation of marketing strategies in cross-border destinations is in most cases difficult due to various administrative, political, infrastructural and logistical factors and limited

Table 5 Overview of Selected Articles

Author	Key concepts	Methods/samples	Scientific contribution	Scope
Qi, L., & Xiaoyan, Z. (2014)	Overview of cross-border mergers and acquisitions, brand strategies, and recommendations for China hotel industry, considering B2C and B2B perspectives.	Single case study – a worldwide hotel chain.	Article contributes in its comprehensive analysis of conceptualization of cross-border tourism cooperation and its significance in promoting economic development, international cooperation, and safety issues among border countries. Better understanding of impact on the brand image and using brand equity of the acquired brand to avoid customer loyalty loss, as an essential part of the marketing strategy.	Global
Makkonen, T. (2016)	Article explores economic impact of cross-border shopping on local tourism industry and destination marketing, analysing tourist demand and future cross-border cooperation potential.	Qualitative method. Case study: semi-structured interviews with 5 LTOS and 7 enterprises. Triangulation of data sources was done (webpage content, official tourism guides, personal interviews with managers).	Article builds upon earlier studies and validates existing models of Bygrå (2009) and Timothy and Butler (1995) of promoting and managing cross-border tourism destinations. The research confirmed that tourist visits are in positive correlation with low-price shopping at the border. Lack of a strategic marketing approach by individual border regions leads to weak cross-border collaboration.	Bilateral
Wang, W., & He,Y. (2016)	Establishing new cross-border cooperation in the Xishuangbanna-North Laos regions as a tourist destination considering opportunities and obstacles, and exploring spatial patterns (modes) like 'core-edge' or 'point-axis' development mode and network mode and their derivatives.	Case study, Xishuangbanna-North Laos Crossborder Tourism Cooperation Zone.	Conceptualization of cross-border tourism cooperation and its significance in promoting economic development, international cooperation, and safety issues among border countries. Highlights main attributes of strategic management: research, skilled teams, infrastructure, transport, communication (marketing strategy), and information networks.	Bilateral

Continued on the next page

resources (human, financial, etc.). Following a better understanding of cross-border marketing, different scales of cooperation have been identified through reviewed articles, using the concept of the scope of cross-border cooperation in a tourist destination (in geographical and organizational terms). Most of the articles (7 of them) dealt with bilateral cross-border cooperation, of which 5 addressed cross-border cooperation within the Euroregion or Eurocities. The other three articles were equivalent in terms of the scope of cross-border cooperation: global (1), regional (1), and local (1). All three dealt with both marketing strategies and branding. Only three articles of bilateral scope of cross-border cooperation addressed both marketing and the need for branding of cross-border destinations.

Through the authors' research work, they identify several opportunities as well as obstacles to further development of a cross-border tourist destination as a comprehensive tourist system, and in various ways, include the consideration of marketing strategies in marketplace strategies.

Table 5 Continued from the previous page

Author	Key concepts	Methods/samples	Scientific contribution	Scope
Liberato, D., Alén, E., Liberato P., & Domínguez, T. (2018)	Enhanced conceptualization of tourism in border territories beyond the transnational level, by analysing regional demarcation, geographical, legal, economic scope, and local identity.	Qualitative method. Case study, 11 semi-structured interviews in 2015, with expert stakeholders from various economic fields (including tourism). Includes the concept of data saturation.	Understanding of various dimensions of cross-border tourism, revealing complex relationships between tourists and local communities, capturing individual experiences, and contributing to sustainable tourism growth strategies. Study reveals that creating promotional channels with materialized, organized and implemented tourism marketing strategies in the context of promotion of Euroregions is a pre-condition for success.	Bilateral
Woyo E., & Slabbert, E. (2019)	Analysing Victoria Falls' cross-border marketing opportunities and examining motivations for cross-border partnerships, considering demand side of socio-demographic characteristics and supply-side factors.	Quantitative method, using a demand and supply-based survey questionnaire. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, factor analyses and one-way analysis of variance.	The article's findings contribute to the existing literature and results on four dimensions: experiences of tourists visiting shared border attractions, and potential growth opportunities, challenges and tourist motivations. It proposes a new destination marketing framework which employs all four dimensions from both demand and supply aspect of cross-border marketing.	Bilateral
Hrynokh, N. V., Dmytruk, V. I., Diachenko, A., & Kniazevych, A. O. (2019)	Article explores tourism development in Carpathian Euroregion, focusing on marketing strategy, cross-border cooperation, and key indicators of tourism flow, administrative and territorial distribution.	Desktop research based on existing strategic documents of both regions and official statistics. Data from 2011 to 2017 were studied. Empirical research was excluded.	A contribution of this article lies in the identification and analysis of socio-economic aspects of cross-border tourism destination. Article's key findings are that greater activation in strategic development is needed and an updated marketing strategy for managing domestic, inbound, and outbound tourism in Ukraine.	Bilateral

Continued on the next page

Opportunities for Cross-Border Cooperation

Cross-border cooperation can contribute to many new opportunities that need to be identified first. Cross-border tourist destinations tend to face poorer economic efficiency and have fewer competitive advantages (Novotny, 2020; Liberato et al., 2018). Woyo and Slabbert (2019) consider that the performance of tourist destinations is in most cases measured in terms of competitive advantages rather than cooperation, especially in the context of cross-border cooperation. Šerić et al. (2021), on the other hand, see cross-border cooperation as a basis for brand management and consider cross-border cooperation as valorisation of existing tourism resources that contribute to greater destination competitiveness. Wang and He (2016) emphasize that building cross-border tourism cooperation strengthens relations and cooperation between cross-border regions, stimulates the development of tourism products, and encourages consumption in the cross-border area by visitors and further development of the tourism industry. They see tourism as a bridge and, at the same time, as a carrier for multilateral exchange and cooperation that strengthens trust and creates benefits for all participants.

Table 5 Continued from the previous page

Author	Key concepts	Methods/samples	Scientific contribution	Scope
Jurado-Almonte, J. M., Pazos-Garcia, F. J., & Castanho R. A. (2020)	Research of geographical and institutional framework of regions at the Spanish-Portuguese border, Eurocities' strengths, cross-border cooperation, marketing strategies, and future trends.	Qualitative method. Survey with 34 questions, desktop research (statistics, cartography), by phone and in-person interviews, in 2018 and 2019.	The empirical study outlines the strengths and weaknesses of six Iberian Eurocities, identified by using several critical factors for cross border cooperation from a perspective of being autonomous cross-border cooperation entities, fostering common public services in cross-border areas (common equipment and services within existing infrastructure), and acting as territorial lobbies for obtaining funding for projects (promotion of a strong territorial strategy). Concerning infrastructure and management of cross-border regions a coordinated marketing plan and advertising are an important success factors.	Bilateral
Novotny, L. (2020)	The article discusses the importance of communication in cross-border cultural tourism supply, focusing on media, advertising, and social media, identifying deficiencies and barriers to visitors. It focuses on strategic marketing and concepts of destination competitiveness.	Quantitative method. A questionnaire among students on the Czech-German border (Labe/Elbe Euroregion).	Study synthesizes theories and principles for strategic marketing and management of tourist destinations in Czech-German Borderland. Article provides a deeper understanding of the various dimensions of cross-border tourism (motives, aspirations, beliefs, values, attitudes), explores complex relationships (tourist-local communities), captures the subjective experiences of individuals, and contributes to the development of contextually relevant strategies for sustainable tourism growth.	Bilateral

Continued on the next page

Promotional activities as an essential part of marketing strategies are implemented in cross-border tourism destinations or cross-border tourism products in the form of building a single visibility that combines two or more destinations in one promotional message (Tosun et al., 2005). This way of cooperation brings many advantages:

- the costs of promotion per country or tourist organization are reduced due to the sharing of costs of mutual marketing activities (Liberato et al., 2018),
- the promotional effects multiply as each country further promotes the tourism product through its own digital channels in its own country or abroad (Woyo & Slabbert, 2019),
- increasing business opportunities, including opportunities for additional investment, additional employment and innovation (Woyo & Slabbert, 2019),
- the possibility of joint financing of projects and joint search for sources of project financing by several cross-border destinations, for the same project (Jurado-Almonte et al., 2020),
- greater and more efficient exchange of information between countries, exchange of good practices and greater networking of other providers

Table 5 Continued from the previous page

Author	Key concepts	Methods/samples	Scientific contribution	Scope
Gerlitz, L., Meyer, C., & Prause G. (2021)	The South Baltic Sea region is experiencing a need for a sustainable transition. The article is seeking improvements, focusing on a tailored regional marketing and branding strategy connecting social paradigms with environmental ones and based on sociological theoretical starting points.	Qualitative method. A survey among 130 SME companies in Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden. Additional interviews and field research were undertaken. The research was conducted from July 2017 to December 2020.	The study focuses on research adopting a holistic and processual perspective and innovation-driven transformation perceived from an ecosystem of cross-border stakeholders, contributing to regional development and Blue Growth discourse in the South Baltic Sea Region. Research of marketing and branding strategies using existing resources and innovation opportunities in three pillars: resources, opportunities, and sustainable ecosystem.	Regional
Šerić, N., Bagarić, L., Jakšić Stojanović, A., & Keković, N. (2021)	Post-Covid, tourist behaviour changes, specialized products, and cross-border cooperation are influencing marketing and branding strategies. A new model of expanded content on supply aims to create new specialized tourism products, focusing on cross-border cooperation.	Qualitative method. Internal and external analysis of tourist provider, using SWOT, TOWS, Pestec, Mof and Recoil analysis models. Findings were tested through a survey of a sample of representatives of travel agencies.	A new model for creating specialized tourism products post-Covid by linking core, additional, and expanded content with brand creation using marketing strategy. It contributes also on what to rely on the marketing strategies in the post-Covid time: identifying characteristics of the micro-location, infrastructure upgrades (roads, recreational zone), partnerships with supply entities and resource concessionaires, including sustainable environmental standards, eco gastronomic offer, implementation of digital user platforms.	Local

indirectly involved in the cross-border tourism infrastructure (Makkonen, 2016; Woyo & Slabbert, 2019).

Gerlitz et al. (2021) believe that combining diversity is a potential for development that can be realized if a conceptual framework, financial resources and administrative support are present. Šerić et al. (2021) argue that it is possible to maintain competitiveness by diversifying products, expanding content and improving quality. These also need to be implemented in marketing strategies and communicated through brands, which will contribute to strengthening the global brand awareness of a specialized tourism product. The expanded contents of a specialized tourism product open up opportunities for new outbound tourist markets and attract new segments of tourists.

After cross-border mergers and acquisitions, the brand or tourist brand is more effective as part of the marketing plan because cultural barriers are also overcome (Qi & Xiaoyan, 2014). Connecting companies to clusters and networking creates better business visibility and more marketing opportunities. The principle of cooperation in cross-border regions, based on such integration, is important not only from the point of view of marketing but also from joint brand management. It enables the integration of different institutions into a single framework, including different stakeholders, setting common goals and highlighting key values and initiatives to develop common strategies. Sharing common goals and synchronizing them is key to shared marketing success and branding as a single cluster of interrelated stakeholders (Gerlitz et al., 2021).

The marketing and brand strategy should be based on three pillars and should be seen from the perspective of the ecosystem and processes, considering the following strategic measures (Gerlitz et al., 2021; Hrynokh et al., 2019):

1. the creation of tools for pooling, allocating and (re)combining resources that lead to knowledge excellence and, consequently, to the development of innovation, thus achieving a sustainable organizational (regional) ecosystem;
2. providing key tools related to entrepreneurship and creative discovery;
3. transforming cross-border regions into a brand with a common vision for the future and a common strategic positioning.

Obstacles to Cross-Border Cooperation

Novotny (2020) and Jurado Almonte et al. (2020) consider that the main barriers to effective cross-border marketing are inadequate infrastructure, organizational and information barriers, financial barriers related to visitor costs and logistical barriers. Woyo and Slabbert (2019) perceive the greatest challenges of cross-border cooperation in single marketing. The biggest obstacles are the fear of losing a unique national identity, greater seasonality, budgetary constraints, difficulties in measuring a country's performance, uneven development between destinations, different tourism policies and thus different marketing approaches, and a lack of economic links.

Wang and He (2016) point out that cross-border tourism also faces obstacles that hinder the development of tourism in these areas, such as:

- sensitivity to political influences along the border, from a geopolitical point of view, from international relations, and an economic point of view. It is a question of the free movement of labour, products and finance;
- infrastructure and support resources are usually weaker at the border than further inside the country;
- the problem of the flow of investment and profits across borders inhibits entrepreneurial activity;
- lack of uniform approaches and orientations in the implementation and control of standards in tourism;
- linguistic and cultural differences.

At the same time, stakeholders of tourist destinations involved in the marketing activities of a cross-border destination or tourist product face the challenge of finding a balance between competitiveness and partnership. Beritteli (in Liberato et al., 2018) considers that a principle of collaboration in the communities of tourist destinations is a prerequisite for their planning and development. This makes it easier and also more efficient to market destinations as single locales.

It is necessary to take advantage of both destinations, especially in the case of cross-border cooperation of a wider economic spectrum (Liberato et al., 2018).

Some authors (Woyo & Slabbert, 2019; Makkonen, 2016) find that research into marketing opportunities and challenges related to cross-border attractions is limited due to a number of administrative barriers. As a result, the topic is less researched, which is noted by this literature review. The authors (Jurado-Almonte et al., 2020) point out the following elements as critical factors for the success of cross-border destinations:

- the most critical (marketing and advertising, common equipment and services, access to European funds),
- medium critical (promotion of a strong territorial strategy, development of consolidated strategies, activation of the public),
- less critical (improved urban connectivity, promotional strategies against the flight of young and talented people).

Discussion

The marketing of a cross-border destination differs in comparison to other inland tourist destinations in several factors and restrictions that are conditioned by the administrative border or other economic, social, security, or institutional obstacles. Consequently, the unified management of a cross-border tourist destination is required as an optimal strategy. This marketing approach demands several mutual coordination, legal, administrative and institutional adjustments of various stakeholders involved in the planning, development and implementation of marketing activities. The number of stakeholders involved in the development of a cross-border tourist destination and its products depends at least on the geographical and institutional scope, as shown in the model of Timothy and Saarinen (2013). Global partnerships in cross-border destinations are less likely, and in tourism mostly present as a part of global (hotel) chains. The results of the review article indicate that most partnerships of cross-border destinations are bilateral where two destinations merge at a common frontier. Most cases in the review were located in the European Union.

There is an evident lack of cited references in reviewed articles that would give a clear overview of knowledge maturation on cross-border marketing strategies of tourist destinations. Instead, we tried to uncover some incipient reasons and events that brought a few insights into the genesis of marketing strategies in cross-border tourist destinations:

- Woyo and Slabbert (2019) detailed the first beginnings of cross-border cooperation in tourism back to the second half of the 20th century, mainly due to the overcoming of political barriers in Europe and trends in growing mass tourism. The development of marketing in cross-border destinations emerged at the turn of the millennium;
- Makkonnen (2016) affirmed cross-border shopping as an important advantage in developing tourist destinations, already present in the 1990s in North America (e.g. between the United States and Canada). In several cases, they built a proposal for a detailed action plan at a destination marketing organization including a joint marketing strategy with other nearby destinations. He highlighted a model for cross-border shopping from Timothy and Buttler (in Makkonen, 2016);
- Jurado-Almonte et al. (2020) substantiate the development of cross-border cooperation between Spain and Portugal around 1986 with the integration of both countries into the European Union and later on with inclusion into the so-called Schengen Area and the abolition of customs in 1995.

The review article confirmed that research interest in the topic studied increased in the last decade.

The main focus of the review article above all aims to contribute to a better understanding of scope, opportunities and barriers of collaboration in cross-border destinations and within its usage of marketing strategies. Liberato et al. (2018, p. 1355) show that border regions should move towards mixed 'new governance,' considering that cross-border, as well as interregional and transnational, cooperation only work if administrative levels with different structures and competencies cooperate across borders. They should develop common cultural proximity, mutual relationships and easy communication channels. They think that the identity of a cross-border destination is a key element when it comes to cross-border tourism. Identity is strongly dependent on governance structures and how it is incorporated into cross-border destinations. In such a manner it is an important part of branding. Several authors (Novotny, 2020; Qi & Xiaoyan, 2014; Šerić et al., 2021; Woyo & Slabbert, 2019) believe that the additional and expanded content which is usually promoted in a cross-border tourist destination, while merging individual tourist supply as one unified product (Makkonen, 2016), should have a greater significance in marketing strategy and brand as well. Marketing strategies are closely linked to branding. Brand integration should fully consider local cultural factors and should be in line with the company's other strategies, adjusted to new entering markets (Qi & Xiaoyan, 2014).

Gerlitz et al. (2021) confirm that better recognition of cross-border destination abroad could be achieved by addressing tourism-related and place branding or regional identity-building issues. Strategic positioning is more successful if it is underpinned by the European Union's programmes. Qi and Xiaoyan (2014) connect brand awareness as an image that should be spread through a series of marketing activities, which result not only in a positive product image but also in a quality awareness of the product and customer loyalty.

Some authors (Gerlitz et al., 2021) argue that for successful marketing strategies for cross-border projects aimed at greater market competitiveness, innovative approaches are crucial, which include key elements of the so-called 7ps. Through the innovation process, individual development stages are formed in which stakeholders and beneficiaries combine different processes of innovation approaches and simultaneously design and place the marketing elements. In this way, an innovation ecosystem is created, from the inside out. Thus, innovation competencies and management skills are built for further growth, business transformation, competitiveness and differentiation, where marketing strategies play an important role. All reviewed articles highlight the significance of promotion and product as the main two elements of marketing mix; only a few give importance to the element 'place' as an important international and global integration of products (Qi & Xiaoyan, 2014) and as an important channel of communications to customers with suitable advertising to leverage a destination's attractions (Makkonen, 2016).

In addition to the 4ps marketing approach, an extended 7ps marketing strategy considers also *people, process and physical evidence.* Woyo and Slabbert (2019) consider the process as a big challenge since cross-border destinations often have different institutional structures, policies and marketing strategies and thus reflect that a tight management process will be needed. Makkonen (2016, p. 41) argues that the process of marketing is not without difficulties and depends on a large number of stakeholders involved in tourism destination marketing. Consequently, this distortion of process potentially leads to incoherence in the destination marketing materials produced by different actors, and it is difficult to quantitatively measure the results and return on investment. An additional element in marketing strategy, 'people' involved in the service, distribution, and selling of product are also essential (Kotler & Levy, 1969), providing as high a service quality as possible while achieving strategic organizational goals. Cross-border cooperation is also beneficial in solving challenges such as poor service quality (Woyo & Slabbert, 2019). Some cross-border destinations implement process integration through different European Union programmes and initiatives, such as Eurocities or Euro Regions (Gerlitz et al., 2021; Hrynokh et al., 2019; Jurado-Almonte et al., 2020; Liberato et al., 2018; Wang & He, 2016), with all the benefits of sustainable development and spatial cohesion. Tourism is emerging as an important part of this integration (Liberato et al., 2018). These integrations are followed with several positive outcomes: stimulation of the development of tourism products and improving the local economy (Liberato et al., 2018; Wang & He, 2016), increasing the competitiveness of the destination and creating new market opportunities (Šerić et al., 2021), including with regions beyond cross-border frontiers (Hrynokh et al., 2019), which are usually implemented gradually (Wang & He, 2016).

Conclusions and Implications

Although there are several opportunities for cross-border cooperation found in the literature review results, still the disruptive site of cross-border destinations is evident compared to inland destinations. The study confirms that marketing strategies are implemented sporadically and gradually and are mainly dependent on additional (in Europe mainly the European Commission's) co-financing.

As marketing strategies are only successful in the medium or long term (Uran Maravić & Juvan, 2009), there is a perceived lack of longer-term strategic partnerships between stakeholders in cross-border areas, which consolidate the marketing position and provide a basis for designing and implementing marketing strategies.

Conceptualization of cross-border tourist collaboration and their importance in advancing economic growth, global cooperation, and safety concerns among bordering countries is crucial. It draws attention to the key characteristics of strategic management, including research, upskilled teams, infrastructure, transportation, communication (marketing strategy), and information networks. Understanding the diverse aspects of cross-border travel helps destinations develop plans for sustainable tourism growth. According to this review research, a prerequisite for success in the context of promoting cross-border tourist destinations is the development of promotional channels with materialized, structured, and implemented tourism marketing plans.

Through this literature review, it was found that cross-border tourist destinations do not use systematic approaches to the introduction of marketing strategies; these are identified in the context of broader development strategies of cross-border areas.

In rare cases, stand-alone brands are created to consolidate destinations in the market and exploit the marketing potential of two or more cross-border destinations at the same time.

The literature review reveals interpretable patterns of weak development of joint marketing strategies or their complete lack, and only a gradual understanding of the need for strategic marketing approaches in cross-border tourist destinations and calls for additional (financial) stimulation.

The theoretical value of the article is identification of different perspectives on cross-border tourist destination marketing strategies with additional characterizations in terms of defining the scope of cross-border cooperation, using a model adapted from Timothy and Saarinen (2013). One major insight of this review is also a need for theorization in cross-border tourist destination marketing, since some of the articles reviewed did not utilize theories, frameworks or models (e.g. Qi & Xiaoyan, 2014; Wang & He, 2016; Hrynokh et al., 2019). They were mostly used in articles of the latest dates of publishing, but with modest research of theoretical backgrounds.

Synthesis of reviewed articles could help researchers identify the research areas and methodologies in the future and compare them with past experiences and findings to address the research gaps and unanswered or new questions.

The research showed also a need for further research of the topic with additional keywords in different combinations, such as *brand(ing), destination marketing* and *place* (as a synonym for destination).

All of the articles discussed faced similar limitations. Research in review articles mostly focused on only one cross-border area, so it is not possible to compare opportunities and obstacles between two different cross-border areas, to identify differences or the causes of these differences. The articles also addressed the concepts of marketing strategies weakly. These were mainly part of larger strategies or just one of many elements within the research concept.

Therefore, in general, further research should focus on efforts observing and addressing more cross-border regions in parallel with longer-term observation, and include more detailed concepts of addressing marketing strategies. Furthermore, this paper shows several directions of additional development and research of marketing strategies in cross-border destinations. First, from a geographical perspective, at local, bilateral, or regional and/or global levels, within or in comparison between them and their benchmark. The research focus could be on the perspective of relationship networks, the scope and intensity of ties between partners and their influence on the destination's tourism activities. Second, from a strategic perspective, the managerial aspect of implementing innovation processes and their adoption in the marketing of cross-border destinations, comparison of successful models of strategic management in tourist destinations, and feasibility of implementing those models in cross-border destinations. Third, from a marketing perspective, opportunities and barriers to implementing marketing strategies at cross-border destinations with deeper insight into possible usage of marketing mix elements that influence promotion and communication of cross-border destinations.

However, features and opportunities of marketing strategies in cross-border destinations should be discussed in parallel. In the context of research on marketing strategies, it would be useful to pay special attention to modern communication channels such as different social media networks, which bring different approaches to communication from traditional forms and thus significantly influence the design of marketing strategies. Namely, marketing in the last, especially post-Covid period is experiencing radical changes. It is mainly focused on digital communication channels and is successfully transmitted to social media channels.

Overall, this paper contributes to showcasing the important role of cross-border marketing strategies and paves the way for more detailed research into the topic in the future.

Notes

In this research article terms 'tourist destination' and 'tourism destination' are used depending on the context of the content of articles and according to scientific terminology. The term 'tourist destination' refers to delineated geographical tourist areas, whereas 'tourism destination' reflects also the management of the tourist destination.

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Original Scientific Article

Bibliometric Analysis of Online Collaboration in Travel Agencies

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With the integration of ICT in the distribution channels, the client is increasingly independent and autonomous in obtaining tourist services and products. The COVID-19 pandemic and global physical distancing policies reinforced this, detrimentally for traditional travel agents, who have been forced to migrate totally or partially to an online business model. However, working online is not enough since it is necessary to have online collaboration strategies that facilitate the positioning of each participant in a hostile competitive environment. The research is developed through a bibliometric study, using the information obtained in the Scopus database to establish the state of knowledge about online collaboration in travel agencies. Various Excel, Bibexcel, EndNote X20, Pajeck, SciMath, and VOSviewer software were used to analyse indicators and map bibliometric networks. The results show that the state of cooperation between travel agencies as a factor of advantage in the new tourist environments is characterized by fierce competition and the strong impact of the digital age, which constitute the main innovative contribution of the study. It is also determined that the research topic has not had high productivity in the database. Among the main research gaps identified are online collaboration in traditional travel agencies and the impacts of cooperation on customer perception and cybersecurity. The study identifies the field's most influential authors, journals, publications, key themes and trends that have emerged over time. By identifying the critical success factors and challenges of online collaboration in the travel industry, this study can help organizations to improve their collaboration practices.

Keywords: bibliometric analysis, online collaboration, Scopus, travel agency

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Introduction

The tourism sector is generally immersed in a very complex and dynamic operating environment due to technological innovations, increased consumer demand, intense competition, and distribution systems changes attributable to technology development (Aguiar-Quintana et al., 2016; Ambrož & Omerzel, 2018). For this reason, in the tourism sector, it is necessary that all the actors constantly participate and, at the same time, receive both primary and complementary training to face the challenges imposed by the development of new technologies (Mekinc et al., 2022). The main reason behind this is that the tourism industry supports Internet-based distribution channels more, mainly due to the characteristics of the services it generates: exhaustible and non-storable (Castillo-Manzano & López-Valpuesta, 2010). With the advent of new technologies, consumer behaviour, travel planning, and purchasing products and services have also changed radically (Chang et al., 2018). With the widespread use of media with increasingly intuitive interfaces, users generate and receive information in real time. Each experience, fundamentally those associated with tourism, leisure, and recreation, generates an incredible volume of multimedia information, which most users use as a pre-purchase evaluation criterion. Considering the above and according to the profiles and demand segments, we could speak of intelligent tourists to the extent that they have more knowledge, are more demanding, are connected, and share data (Ivars Baidal et al., 2016).

Information and communication technologies have indisputably been integrated into the tourism industry. Traditional business models have changed substantially. As defined (Liang & Wang, 2011), 'in terms of its characteristics and models of services and content, the tourism industry is much more adaptable for the online process.' The development of these models and their premature integration into tourist activity led to entry into the era of electronic commerce (Guo et al., 2014).

However, this development has undergone a lot of modifications and has acquired actual shape in the last 20 years (Liang & Wang, 2011), although it constantly undergoes changes through the introduction of new technologies such as the development of artificial intelligence (AI) in the so-called industrial revolution 4.0 (Fedorko et al., 2022) and the introduction of crypto-assets as a means of exchange (Aydoğan & Aydemir, 2022).

Considering the above, it is easy to understand that positioning itself in the online environment is a priority task for any tourism company. In this sense, it can be said that for traditional intermediaries, it has been quite tricky. The competition among these tourist actors is at a higher level. Technology has posed an enormous challenge for the traditional forms of intermediation and promotion because its main strength lies in the main weaknesses of these activities: the distance to complete the acts of buying and selling, the greater reach of the public and the reduction of costs for brokerage concepts, which translates into more competitive prices (Chang et al., 2018). New technology, therefore, constitutes one of the variables in the mandatory care environment needed to attain the competitiveness of any company in the environment in which it operates. In addition, 'its future will depend on its correct application in any business model' (Aguiar-Quintana et al., 2016; García & García, 2017).

Being such an essential link in the travel industry has served well for travel agencies for more than 80 years. Initially, travel agencies were just brokers, paid by airlines and other travel players to distribute their products. The role of travel agencies in the tourism industry has been influenced by the consolidation of the sector and the advent of new technologies (Aguiar-Quintana et al., 2016; Kutty & Melwin Joy, 2020).

Technology integration has generated new competitors for travel agencies (Capriello & Riboldazzi, 2021), such as the classic integrated tour operators that dominate their distribution channels. Tour operators restructure their positioning strategies using the Internet's broad spectrum of tools. In this way, they reach more customers who, through the online medium, have access to millions of Internet possibilities. The modern consumer has little free time to plan all the details and review all possible offers, which is a critical factor for companies. Among the main competitors, we can mention the well-known web pages selling tourist products and services, such as Expedia, E-Dreams, Travelocity, and other online travel agencies (OTAs). All these competitors have forced traditional intermediaries to move part of their business to a virtual environment to remain competitive. In doing this, new clients are not limited to making a simple reservation by phone. Instead, they can use extensive resources and e-tools to opt for services and products with a level of personalization which cannot be found otherwise: consult user opinions, compare prices, and find more information regarding the selected destination (Mendoza García, 2018).

According to Slusarczyk et al. (2016), it is not enough for intermediaries to develop the marketing of their offers online since, in this environment, competition is even fiercer. At this point, these actors must adopt online collaboration strategies to form multiple market networks (Liang & Wang, 2011), which allows them to take full advantage of the Internet phenomenon. This will give each of the actors in the collaboration competitive advantages in the face of environmental changes.

Most travel agents around the globe understand the importance of cooperation, which is why they develop competitive and cooperative relationships with their counterparts in search of improving the development performance of their products (Ku et al., 2013). With this in mind, they need to know their positions and roles in the industrial network.

Analogous competitors may share the market and temporarily group customers to organize tour groups (Chang, 2020). There is no doubt that this horizontal collaboration is vital for the competitiveness of travel agencies since the changing market of the travel industry requires strategic formulation based on feedback where collective knowledge is the central repository in which all beneficiaries of the alliance support themselves. However, collaboration with other tourism players is vital for the correct functionality of the travel agency, its existence, and online business model, whose heart is the website. Regarding the first criterion, Aguiar-Quintana et al. (2016) note that: 'the intermediary role of a travel agent requires a high degree of communication and cooperation between consumer and provider;' this element can be observed in the fundamental participation of dissimilar actors in the creation of tourist packages.

The collaboration and formation of strategic alliances have been concepts widely studied, and from different points of view. According to researchers such as Marisol (2019), it is the process of combining efforts, resources, and talents in the achievement of a joint project, which among other benefits, allows the achievement of competitive advantages (Ramírez Orozco & Valencia, 2019; Išoraitė, 2009) from the balance of collective objectives over individual ones (Kazakova et al., 2018). Among the aforementioned competitive advantages is the establishment of a better preparedness to face the insecurities of the environment in the business sector imposed by globalization (Išoraitė, 2009). It is also essential for solving problems for small and medium-sized companies (Mora Castellanos et al., 2019), investment sharing, resources (Hernández Leal et al., 2019), risks, knowledge, and the possibility of entering new markets and reducing costs.

The main differentiating element of this traditional type of collaboration is the use of technological tools applied to these forms of cooperation. These tools are presented to tourism businesses as platforms to join efforts in the marketing process in the online environment (Abou-Shouk, 2022).

The advantages offered by this type of collaboration, specifically in the network in which the travel agency operates, are: reduction of costs for online operations; integrated digital marketing actions, access to new market segments offered by the integration of technologies; improvements in knowledge management applicable to the measurement of consumer behaviour; the creation of online management platforms that standardize operational communication between each of the actors in the collaboration network; as well as the advantages stated above of traditional forms of collaboration.

Virtual collaboration relationships in travel agencies can be summarized in two fundamental aspects, 'Business-Business' (B2B) and 'Business-Consumer' (B2C) relationships. In the B2B e-commerce of the travel market, the wholesaler can develop virtual dynamic transaction platforms where buyers and suppliers are brought together. From the point of view of value chains, to be more efficient, a B2B collaboration model enables travel agencies to improve performance with the offer of electronic services (Huang, 2006).

As in traditional forms of collaboration, the relationships that can be established horizontally and vertically are considered; however, this new medium has generated a unique factor to consider, which is vital for a travel agency and any online business – the consumer. A satisfied customer acts as a powerful ally who will unwittingly serve as a promoter because of the mass feedback they generate about everything they experience. For this reason, a second collaboration model, B2C, focused on the consumer, is necessary (Anas & Wee, 2020).

The integration of Information and Communication Technologies in the collaboration networks of the tourism system, specifically those with which tourism intermediaries interact, has not been deeply studied. This is because it constitutes an emerging topic in the scientific literature closely linked to the development of Information and Communication Technologies and its integration into the tourism industry, specifically the travel industry.

The paper uses bibliometrics (Kresic & Gjurasic, 2023; Demir & Zečević, 2022), an analytical tool for identifying the established online cooperation of travel agencies as a factor of advantage in newer tourism environments characterized by modern ICT tools. The scientific questions that will focus the research process toward the achievement of its general objective are as follows:

- Has the topic investigated been productive?
- How updated is the bibliography available in Scopus?
- Are there authors and impact scientific journals that have systematized research to date?
- Who/which are the authors, journals, and documents with the greatest impact?
- How has authorial collaboration behaved?
- What are the main thematic lines the research topic has moved through?
- What are the main research gaps?

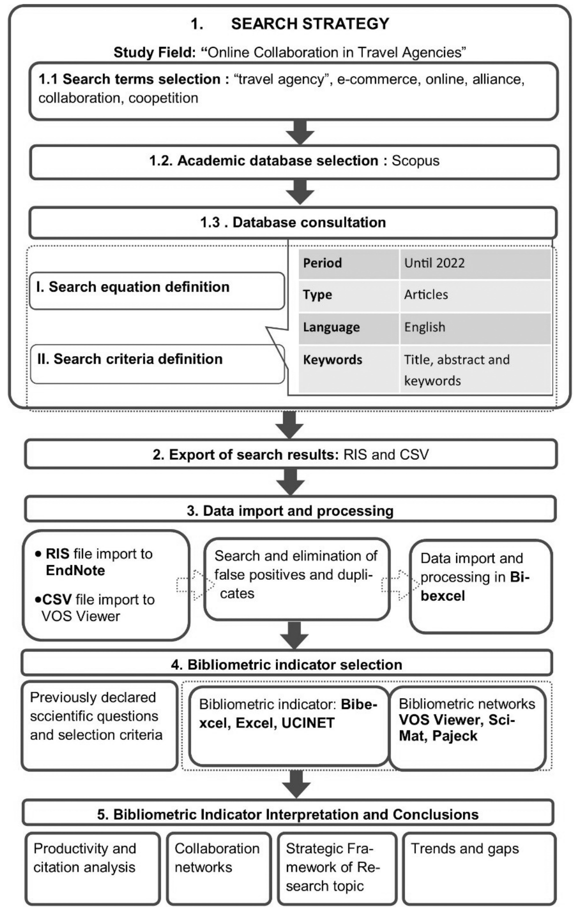

Figure 1 Methodology System for the Development of the Bibliometric Study

Methodology

A methodology composed of logical steps that constitute the common thread for developing the bibliometric analysis was used. It starts with selecting the terms to build the search equation for publications on online collaboration in travel agencies. The equation is defined as follows: 'travel agency' AND (Collaboration OR Coopetition OR Alliance) AND (Online OR e-commerce OR electronic commerce). The articles indexed in the Elsevier Scopus database were selected, coinciding with the criteria of Codina et al. (2020), considering that it constitutes one of the databases with the most significant impact on the social sciences (in 2020, this database had a representative coverage with 38,589 scientific journals in all research areas). The data is exported in RIS and CSV files. Subsequently, these outputs are normalized using the EndNote X20 software. 0 positives and duplicates are recorded, so a total of 25 articles obtained from the Scopus database that meet the search criteria are documented. Bibliometrics has a quantitative character based on the analysis of productivity and citations, and qualitative based on the state-of-the-art mapping and the study of social networks. Figure 1 shows the aforementioned methodological framework of our research.

A set of three bibliometrics was detected (Table 1), whose objective is to know the behaviour of the scientific literature on collaboration in the tourism sector (Ávila-Hernández et al., 2022; Chim-Miki & Batista-

Table 1 A Set of Three Bibliometrics

Category			Chim-Miki and Batista-Canino (2017)	Cruz Aguilera et al. (2018)	Ávila Hernández et al. (2022)
Procedure for development of bibliometrics			Yes	Yes	Yes
Database			Scopus and WOS	WOS	Dimensions
Study period			1995–2015	1988–2009	2010–2020
Systematic Literature Review (SLR)			Yes	Yes	Yes
Methodology for SLR			No	No	No
Bibliometric indicators	Productivity	Per Time	×	×	×
		Per Author	×	×	×
		Per Country			×
		Per Affiliation		×	
		Per Journal		×	×
	Citations	Per Authors		×	×
		Per Institutions			×
		Per Journals			×
		Per Documents	×	×	
		Per Countries	×		×
	Thematic Index				
	Scientific Index				
	Recency	Price			×
		References usefulness			×
		Half-life			×
		Age of references			×
	Impact	Authors H-index			
		Journals H-index			
		G Index			
		Bradford Law			
	Network	Co-authorship		×	
		Co-citation			
		Co-occurrence			
		Citation			×
	Maps	Time			
		Word Clouds			
		Strategic map			
		Tree map			
		Dendrogram			

Canino, 2017; Cruz Aguilera et al., 2018). For this reason, even though their field of research is broader, they are taken as a precedent.

As previously mentioned, the indicators and other elements of analysis are declared based on the scientific questions (Table 2). This corresponds to the final phase of the procedure and is fundamentally aligned with the general research strategy.

Further, a literature review is developed to determine trends and future research gaps to complement the analysis of the strategic framework. This is guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematics Reviews and Meta-analysis) protocol (Moher et al., 2009). This analysis has four phases:

1. Identification

Table 2 A Set of Scientific Questions

Scientific questions	Analysis unit	Software
Has the subject been extensively studied?	Productivity per year	Bibexcel and Excel
Are there authors and impact scientific journals that have systematized research to date?	Productivity per author Most frequent magazines	Bibexcel and Excel
How up-to-date is the bibliography available in Scopus?	Price Index	Bibexcel and Excel
Who/which are the authors, journals and documents with the greatest impact?	Price Index Citations per authors Citations per documents H Index per author	Bibexcel and excel
How has authorial collaboration behaved?	Collaboration between authors (map) Collaboration between countries (map)	Bibexcel, Excel, ucinet 6, Net-Graph, Pajeck, Vos Viewer
What are the main thematic lines through which the research topic has moved?	Strategic chart	SciMat
What are the main research gaps?	Strategic chart Systematic Literature review	SciMat

2. Presentation
3. Eligibility
4. Inclusion

The method proposes the consecutive and gradual application of exclusion criteria in each phase. In the first instance, during identification, articles are usually excluded through false positive and duplicate criteria. In the second phase, quality exclusion criteria are introduced, such as detailed information on the methods used or the results obtained. The appropriate design of the study and the quality of the journals in which they are housed is the third phase. In its last phase, the articles whose content will be completely analysed are defined, resulting from the exclusion in the eligibility phase. The exclusion criteria of this phase consist of the total review of the content and the elimination of articles whose basic focus is not the analysis of online collaboration in travel agencies.

The bibliographic review details the selection process of clinical articles to be analysed and the workflow.

PRISMA is used to determine trends and future research gaps, as defined in the materials and methods section. The workflow is detailed in Figure 2. The first phase of this procedure coincides with the search process and filtering of search results carried out in the bibliometric analysis, so the number of articles remains unchanged (n = 25).

Results

Bibliometric Indicators

Productivity per Year

Although collaboration between competitors is a widely studied topic in industry areas, it has not had the same follow-up in the travel and leisure industry (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2017). For this reason, it can be stated that online collaboration between travel agents to achieve common objectives regarding the management of electronic commerce is a novel subject, as the first article was only published in 2001. It is also necessary to consider that the development of this theme is conditioned by technological innovations and the degree of integration of these into traditional tourism distribution channels.

Figure 3 shows an increasing trend from the date of the first publication. It is observed that until the year 2022, only 25 publications related to the research topic have been registered in the database. The anal-

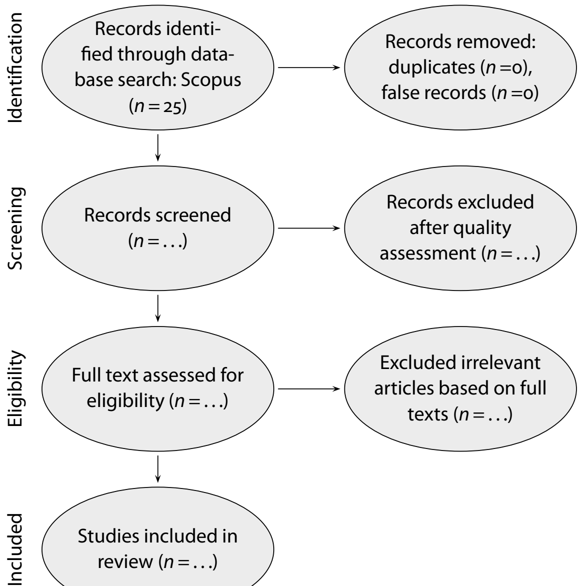

Figure 2 PRISMA protocol

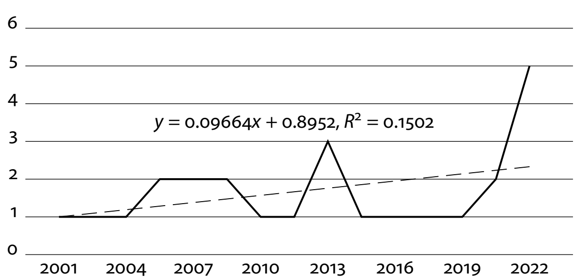

Figure 3 Analysis of Productivity per Year

ysis of Figure 3 shows that despite the importance of the research topic, it did not have the development that would be expected if it were compared with other research topics, at least in this database.

Almost half of the investigations have been published in the last five years. Eleven of the 25 are grouped within the period 2017–2022, meaning that the bibliography available to continue with this line of research has a topicality rate of 44%.

Authorship Analysis

Table 3 shows compliance with the generalization demonstrated by Lotka's law in that at least 60% of the authors of a research field make a single contribution in the period. At the same time, as the number of contributions from a single author increases, the number of authors with that number of publications decreases. It can be calculated using the formula:

$$x^n y_x = c, \quad (1)$$

where y^x is the number of accredited authors with x number of publications, n and c are the constants that need to be estimated (Antoinette Askew, 2008).

Based on the previous analysis focused on the number of authors, the equation that follows the precepts of Lotka's Law is related, but that focuses on the classification of productivity. From the analysis it is obtained that only 3.22% of the authors have a productivity index of 0.33, and the remaining 96.78% have only one publication, so their productivity index is zero. Therefore, no author can be considered prolific,

Table 3 Analysis of Productivity and Systematicity of the Authors

Authors	(1)	(2)	(3)
Guo, X.; Ling, L.	2	2	0.30103
Rose, A. N. M.; Ozdemir, O.; Neysen, N.; Pastor-Ruiz, R.; Rivera-García, J.; Hsu, L.; Ozturk, A. B.; Leung, R.; Kizildag, M.; Knudsen, D.-R.; Huang, C.-C.; Kot, S.; Beldona, S.; Lan, Y.-C.; Belleflamme, P.; Barnett, M.; Ji, J.; Bourmistrov, A.; Ghanem, W. A. H. M.; Fan, Y. W.; Kaarbøe, K.; Lan, Y.-C.; Fernandez-Villaran, A.; Kurth, B. L.; Liang, Z.; Nayar, A.; Mody, M. A.; Huang, L.; Lin, C.-N.; Adi, S.; Saany, S. I. A.; Yang, L.; Yan, H.-L.; Yeh, C.-C.; Zheng, X.; Zhang, T.; Yusoff, M. H.; Xiong, H.; Smolag, K.; Slusarczyk, B.; Shen, C.-C.; Standing, C.; Wang, S.; Tekin Bilbil, E.; Gao, Z.; Abou-Shouk, M. A.; Starosta, K. D.; Ku, E. C. S.; Ching, R. K. H.; Chen, K.; Chen, J.-S.; Chen, J.-S.; Compart, A.; Dogru, T.; Dogru, T.; Delgado-Ballester, E.; Budz, S.; Altin, M.; Hui, A. C.; Hernández-Espallardo, M.	1	60	0.00000

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) number of signatures, (2) number of authors, (3) productivity index.

Table 4 Most Cited Authors

Authors	References	Authors	References
Huang, L.	54	Kizildag, M.	32
Delgado-Ballester, E.	50	Mody, M. A.	32
Hernández-Espal., M.	50	Ozdemir, O.	32
Guo, X.	51	Ozturk, A. B.	32
Ling, L.	51	Zhang, T.	32
Yang, C.	43	Kot, S.	27
Zheng, X.	43	Slusarczyk, B.	27
Barnett, M.	40	Smolag, K.	27
Standing, C.	40	Fan, Y. W.	26
Altin, M.	32	Ku, E. C. S.	26
Dogru, T.	32		

Table 5 H-Index

H-index/authors		Citations	H-index/authors		Citations
1	Huang, L.	54	1	Yang, C.	43
2	Guo, X.	51	1	Zheng, X.	43
2	Ling, L.	51	1	Standing, C.	40
1	Delgado-Ballester, E.	50	1	Barnett, M.	40
1	Hernández-Espal., M.	50	1	53 authors	>40

not equalling or exceeding ten publications (Table 3). The Lotka productivity index is calculated through the relationship: $Ip = \log 10n$ (Cruz Aguilera et al., 2018).

The low productivity values may be due to the high-quality standards required by the journals indexed in the database. Only two authors exceed a single publication: Guo, X. and Ling, L.

The Most Cited Authors and h-Index

Once the most prolific authors have been analysed, local authors (authors appearing in the research references and in the list of researchers who have published on the subject) are analysed.

As shown in Table 4, Guo, X., and Ling, L. are among the most cited authors, with 51 references each, divided between their two publications on the subject. Although having only a single publication, Huang, L., receives 54 citations for a single work; Delgado-Ballester (50), Hernández-Espallardo, M. (50); Zheng, X. (43); Yang C. (43); Barnett, M. (40) and Standing, C. (40) also equal or exceed the 40 citations received.

Table 5 shows the relationship between the h-index and the number of citations. Local authors with 40 or more received quotations are selected. The h-index is a quality indicator that relates the number of sources to the author's productivity. Guo, X. and Ling, L. are essential authors on the quality of scientific production regarding the research topic.

Collaboration Between Authors

This indicator makes it possible to measure the extent of the collaboration between the actors in developing research topics. The collaboration index, which results from the ratio between apparent signatures and the number of articles (Cruz Aguilera et al., 2018), is 2.51, which is equivalent to an average of almost three authors per article. Decomposing this result, it is determined that collaborative investigations predominate since they represent 80% of all studies and over 20% of inquiries done by one author. Figure 4 presents the collaboration network between authors.

Productivity by Country, International Authorial Collaboration

The analysis of this indicator (productivity by country, international authorial collaboration) determines that more than 50% of the research comes from Asian universities, which is presented in Figure 5.

Taiwan has the highest number of contributions in this regard (see Figure 6), with six studies on the research topic. This is due to the environmental conditions that are better for establishing strategic alliances, the growing number of small business travel agencies, and the pressure that e-commerce imposes in such a competitive industry, as expressed by Huang (2006). Next is China with five studies, the United States with three, Spain and Australia with two, and the remaining countries with only one study.

When analysing collaborations between authors, it can be seen that relationships between authors from the same country predominate. Only Taiwan registers international associations with the United States and Australia.

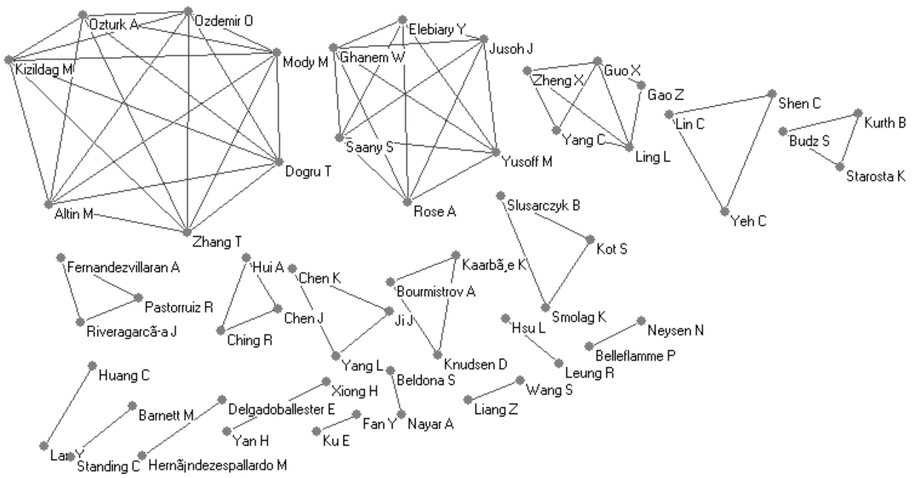

Figure 4 Collaboration Network between Authors

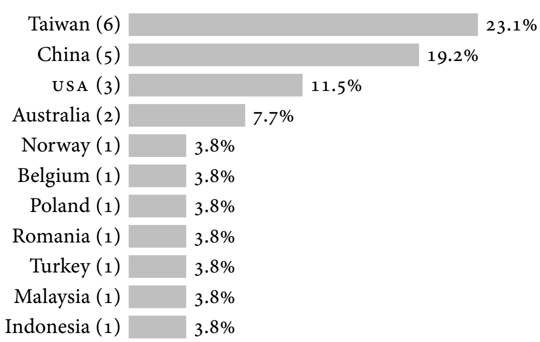

Figure 5 Representation Map of the Distribution of Investigations

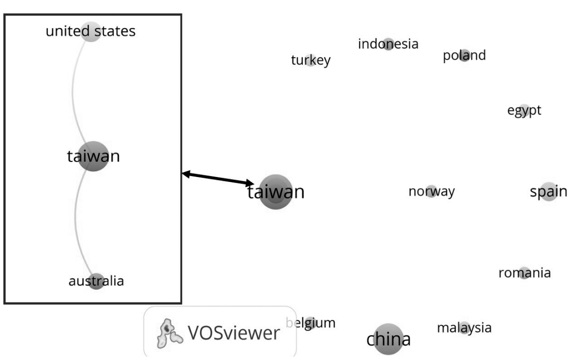

Figure 6 Collaboration Network by Country

The Most Cited Documents

The most important document regarding the level of citations they have received (over 50 sources) are the articles by Huang (2006) with the title: 'Building up a B2B e-commerce strategic alliance model under an uncertain environment for Taiwan's travel agencies,' Delgado-Ballester and Hernández-Espallardo (2008): 'Building online brands through brand alliances in the internet,' and Guo et al. (2014): 'Online coopetition between hotels and online travel agencies: From the perspective of cash back after stay.'

The first investigation starts from the decomposition of the theory of strategic alliances in four dimensions with a specific order:

1. the environmental conditions for the establishment of partnerships,
2. the inter-organizational motivation,
3. the selection of the collaborators, and
4. the evaluation of the performance of the strategic alliances.

Subsequently, Guo et al. (2014) determine the variables that fall within the dimensions previously defined in the context of Taiwan, based on a set of surveys focused on general travel agencies, tour operators, and Internet Service Providers (ISPs). These variables were used to establish the B2B model in the travel agencies of the destination.

The research by Delgado-Ballester and Hernández-Espallardo (2008) focuses on brand alliances. Specifically, it addresses the effect that the online purchase of a product from a new agency that has developed a

Table 6 Most Cited Documents

Authors	Citations
Huang (2006)	54
Delgado-Ballester et al. (2008)	50
Guo et al. (2014)	43
Barnett and Standing (2001)	40
Kizildag et al. (2019)	32
Slusarczyk et al. (2016)	7
Ku and Wen Fan (2009)	26

collaboration with another well-known agency with a brand reputation has on the consumer's perception. The novelty of the research is that this topic had traditionally been studied in the online context.

The study conducted by Guo et al. (2014) values the collaboration established between hotels and online travel agencies to distribute rooms in the same hotel. The pricing policies of both actors are analysed, with the result that, as part of the alliance, online distribution was agreed upon through both channels at the same price. However, due to the guarantee of obtaining rooms, clients prefer to purchase directly with the hotel. For this reason, the OTAs have defined a new pricing strategy: paying a percentage (cash back after stay) to customers who buy through the post-use platform, intending to attract consumers. The research objective is to evaluate consumer behaviour through an economic game analysis. Within Table 6 we can check seven of the most cited documents according to research in the area of online collaboration in travel agencies.

The Most Productive Journals

A total of 24 journals have indexed the 25 publications on the research topic, which are presented in Table 7. Among the related journals, only the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* surpasses a single article.

The Thematic Structure of Online Collaboration Between Travel Agencies and Research Opportunities

Figure 7 shows a strategic diagram resulting from processing the authors' keywords and the words defined

Table 7 The Most Productive Journals

Journal	Articles
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2
Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management	1
Journal of the Operations Research Society of China	1
International Journal of Multimedia and Ubiquitous Engineering	1
Total Quality Management and Business Excellence	1
Tourism Management	1
Tourism Management Perspectives	1
Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	1
Journal of Vacation Marketing	1
Technological Forecasting and Social Change	1
Actual Problems of Economics	1
Advances in Tourism Economics: New Developments	1

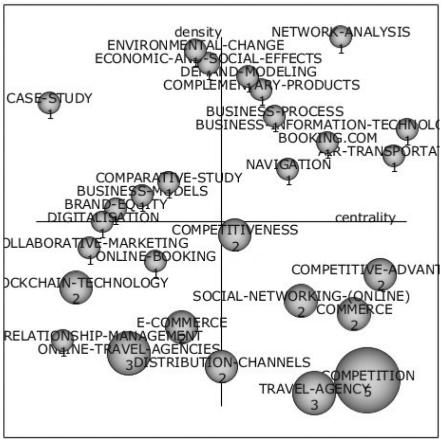

Figure 7 Strategic Chart

by the sources (index keywords) through SciMat. The strategic framework distributes the different thematic groups into four quadrants that delimit the axes of centrality (x) and density (y). Each labelled globe constitutes the central node of particular networks in which other thematic axes are related, in this case, based on conglomeration algorithms. The distribution is defined as follows:

- First quartile ($>x/2$; $<y/2$): Specialized topics
- Second quartile ($<x/2$; $<y/2$): Motor themes
- Third quartile ($<x/2$; $>y/2$): Basic issues

- Fourth quartile (>x/2; >y/2): Emerging or disappearing themes

In quadrant II we can detect the motor themes within the thematic line of study, which are much more easily related to other fields of knowledge (Díaz-Pompa et al., 2022). Within this quadrant are 'Booking.com,' air transport, business information technology, complementary products, demand model, network analysis, and business processes.

The essential underdeveloped topics in the third quadrant constitute research opportunities. Delimited by this quadrant are traditional travel agencies, competition, social networks, competitive advantages, and competitiveness.

Other elements such as environmental changes, economic and social effects, demand models, business models, brand equity, and digitization constitute the peripheral issues since they present trivial importance for the research field. These are in the first quadrant.

Finally, there are electronic commerce, online travel agencies, relationship management, distribution channels, blockchain technology, online booking, and collaborative marketing. These are emerging or disappearing topics, which, if classified as the first group, constitute a potential study gap.

In Figure 7, it can be seen that the transversal themes located in the third quadrant, more than basic themes, are evidenced as the original themes of the selected field of research and constitute the trigger for the need for their study. The reason is that traditional travel agencies with their respective distribution channels are entering an increasingly competitive market heavily dependent on technology. Therefore, they need to focus their strategies on using the numerous and changing tools provided by the Internet to achieve competitive advantages in commercializing the services and products they offer, compared to millions of competitors in the networks, through collaborative ties, but in the online medium.

Online collaboration relationships are studied between the same traditional travel agencies (Barnett & Standing, 2001; Delgado-Ballester & Hernández-Espallardo, 2008; Huang, 2006), and between travel agencies and other actors within the tourism system (Abou-Shouk, 2022). Barnett and Standing (2001) see online collaboration as a massive opportunity in the face of the growing disintermediation trends faced by traditional travel agencies. It also reports other advantages of this type of collaboration. We should consider that it is necessary to adopt online media and channels to carry out marketing. It turns out that the investment for developing web pages in travel agencies is not high when compared to traditional ways of revitalizing their products and services. The authors note, among other things, that online collaboration between traditional travel agencies can improve competitiveness in the market, can increase customer satisfaction and loyalty and efficiency, and reduce costs, leading to increased competition and reduced profitability.

Electronic commerce gives even more dynamism to the environment of tourist activity; therefore, ignoring or underusing the new tools places any tourism company at a clear competitive disadvantage. That is why the competitive space of the tourism industry, specifically the travel industry, is undeniably conditioned by the development of ICTs. For the year 2011, according to Liang and Wang (2011), there was an increase in the number of small and medium-sized travel agencies, which were characterized by the development of their e-commerce model, the lag in the use of online marketing, and underdevelopment of information and lack of understanding of the connection at the enterprise level.

This lag and the underutilization of the competitive advantages offered by the online medium took its toll on many tourist intermediaries. However, it should be noted that travel agencies with a particular market niche have not been so affected (Rodríguez Cid et al., 2015).

External factors such as the development of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic crisis, and inflation at a global level further increased the instability of the environment in which the tourism system develops in travel agencies and further accelerated the paradigm imposed by the new technologies (Hernández Flores et al., 2021).

The truth is that all these external factors are a reminder that the integration of technology in each of the areas of the business models of tourism companies is not just a trend but rather a necessity, as defined by Hosteltur (2022), and clarifies the undeniable need for digitization for travel agencies through e-commerce platforms such as Traveltool that allow, among other things, omnichannel, visibility and presence on the internet, CRM for customer management and portfolio control, and improved knowledge management.

Sadly, the mere involvement of travel agencies in the online environment does not guarantee their success at all; it is necessary to go further based on forward-looking strategies that take into account new forms of closer cooperation with service providers and competing agencies in search of reduced costs for operations, combine efforts in co-marketing campaigns that expand potential markets, and build strong information channels that also make it possible to improve knowledge management, among other benefits. As Barnett and Standing (2001, p. 143) state in their article 'Repositioning travel agencies on the Internet:' 'A rapidly changing business environment, driven largely by the Internet, requires companies to rapidly develop new affiliations and alliances.'

Another of the models analysed by the authors is that of co-alliance. It focuses on collaborative design, engineering, or providing electronic support between companies. This type of cooperation shows the advantages and opportunities that the web offers. A group of agencies can form consortiums and generate more effective transactions for the network. Alliance members would otherwise remain independent. However, they share costs, web development, maintenance, and promotion. Other models are analysed, such as star alliances, value alliances, marketing partnerships, and virtual corridors.

Huang (2006) not only shows the opportunities of strategic alliances between travel agencies to improve tourism competitiveness considering the changing environment; rather, he shows the value of the relationship established between intermediaries and different service providers to grant reciprocal added value to their goods and services through the B2B online business approach. An online B2B transaction mechanism is built on a platform capable of finding the most like-minded partners, establishing ties upstream with suppliers and downstream with distributors and retail agencies to reduce costs. Among the benefits of this type of alliance that the author shows are:

1. Transaction costs decrease for both parties when they are automated or partially online;
2. The convenience of consumers is increased through the decrease in the insufficiencies of tourist products and the reduction of search costs;
3. Sales expenses, marketing, and consumer service costs go down;
4. The efficiency of internal operations is greatly improved through electronic commerce information transfers;
5. The response of the market information is faster, and the feedback on the service received is accelerated through Efficient Consumer Response (ECR).

Professor Leo Huang's study (2006) suggests that it is essential for travel agencies to consider a set of elements to develop the strategic alliance of B2B electronic commerce. In conditions of environmental insecurity, travel agencies venture into strategic partnerships with other organizations to ensure the acquisition of rare market resources. In addition, to seize new resources through alliances, they must incorporate electronic distribution channels in real time to reduce costs per distribution and take control of performance. This can only be achieved through this type of collaboration.

The B2B alliance makes it possible to create a network in which each of its parts responds simultaneously to the most specific needs of the consumer and, therefore, improves their competitiveness.

Finally, control is essential in all processes, and the measurement of the performance of collaboration networks is no exception. Therefore the 'culture of collaboration is a fundamental factor' (Huang, 2006, p. 1319). The central research gap that the professor leaves is that this analysis starts with the travel agencies in Taiwan and ends with these agencies. Hence, it is necessary to know to what level the dimensions, variables, and results can be generalized and shown in this research.

As stated above, collaboration helps improve the competitiveness of entities and networks of entities.

However, in virtualization, the question arises of persuading the client to turn to the agency managed over the competition. In this sense, Delgado-Ballester and Hernández-Espallardo (2008) analyse one of the aspects of the theory of alliances: the effect of co-branding to persuade the consumer. Specifically, it evaluates the impact of this collaboration in the client's mind between agencies of prestigious brands and unknown e-brands.

One of the primary factors for a particular consumer to opt for a specific online business is largely loyalty; therefore, the attitudes that materialize behaviour toward online brands can be analysed through this point. For this reason, the brand alliance between a travel agency whose brand is not recognized with another who has a reputation constitutes a marketing opportunity for the former (Delgado-Ballester & Hernández-Espallardo, 2008). An efficient brand-building strategy consists of both brand-building factors, such as the website, and external third-party factors, such as alliances with well-known brand agencies, since both factors act positively on brand trust and consequently on fairness and on the consumer's willingness to behave favourably.

Up to the time of this study, brand alliances were only analysed from the offline perspective of businesses. Therefore, unlike this type of alliance outside the networks, web pages are the fundamental factor in the online environment. They generate positive perceptions of brands and help the online brand to differentiate itself from competitors and provide added value to consumers.

Regarding what is behind the collaboration, Delgado-Ballester and Hernández-Espallardo (2008) consider a set of implications at the management level. The brand's reputation must be considered while choosing the partners, and the final product's coherence results from integrating the offerings. In addition, due to the benefits these relationships can provide, it is understandable that they want to place the well-positioned brand in a prominent location on web pages to make the connections between their brands and other reputable ones visible. Theoretical results of that research suggest that relationships with parties outside the organization's boundaries may become a perfect way to access critical resources of small and new intercompany unions, especially in internet organizations, where they act as ratifiers that influence the perception of the quality of young organizations when quality measures are ambiguous or do not exist. Delgado-Ballester and Hernández-Espallardo (2008) pave the way for future research that stems from the limitation of the analysis of a single web page. For this reason, they propose replicating these results under different conditions. They also urge the study of other types of co-brand alliances.

Discussions

The study contributes to the existing literature by examining the integration of ICT in the distribution channels of travel agencies. It sheds light on how this integration affects the independence and autonomy of customers in obtaining tourism services and products. This theoretical contribution helps to improve the understanding of the changing dynamics between travel agencies and customers in the digital age. The study explores the state of online collaboration in travel agencies and highlights its importance in a hostile competitive environment. Researching the topic through a bibliometric study contributes to theoretical knowledge about the role and impact of cooperation in the travel industry. This analysis provides insight into the current state of travel agency collaboration and provides a basis for further research and theoretical development.

The investigations into travel agency alliances have developed a coherent methodological evolution with certain similarities that can be grouped into thematic axes. One thematic axis, the base thematic axis (Barnett & Standing, 2001; Huang, 2006), starts from disintermediation trends and the consequent search for competitiveness by travel agencies and the insecurities of the environment to establish alliances, respectively. Another thematic axis focuses on the consumer (Kua & Wen Fan, 2009; Delgado-Ballester & Hernández-Espallardo, 2008) and is generated by the need to analyse the motivation of the parties to share information between the parties of the alliance to obtain a better relationship with the client and to measure the impact of co-branding-type collaboration between agencies, respectively. A third thematic axis focuses on the value chain (product) (Guo et al., 2014; Slusarczyk et al., 2016), specifically on the product, and is generated by the behaviour of the parties involved within the value chain and the changes in its precepts due to the advent of new technologies.

Finally, there is a thematic axis focused on security (Kizildag et al., 2019), which is based on the need for the new distribution channels to have the same transparency as the previous ones. This is where the issue of the security protocol provided by the blockchain arises from eliminating intermediaries for the development of transactions. This last element is an emerging topic with enormous potential in the new online value chains and their players.

According to the research findings, the study has practical implications, especially for travel agencies that want to succeed in the digital age. By revealing competition and the powerful impact of the digital age on collaboration within the industry, the research helps agencies understand the challenges they face and the need for effective online collaboration strategies. This practical input can guide agencies in developing and implementing collaborative practices that strengthen their market position.

The scope of the Scopus database limits this study, as it may not cover all relevant publications in the field. Furthermore, bibliometric analysis may overlook some qualitative aspects of online collaboration that could provide deeper insights.

Conclusions

The development of this research allows us to conclude that online collaboration in travel agencies is an emerging topic in the scientific literature conditioned by the development of information technologies. Only 25 articles were totally or partially related to the topic analysed. Despite the few investigations, there is a growing trend, especially between 2020 and 2021, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, raising the need for research on ITS, crisis, and tourism.

The most critical authors, Guo et al. (2014), only present two publications on the subject; however, these investigations have had an impact, with 51 local references for a quality index (h-index) of 2. Within the subject of study, these two authors have dedicated themselves to a pretty specific topic: 'Coopetition between hotels and online travel agencies when they develop cash back.' On the other hand, only the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* presents more than one publication.

The systematic review of the literature showed that the four levels of integration of the most research-developed literature regarding online collaboration in travel agencies are the meta-level associated with destinations. The most critical issue in this approach is the creation of online collaboration models at the destination level, such as web services for the standardization of information from the various systems of tourism actors.

The main research gaps and also opportunities for future research revealed by the strategic framework are consumer perception regarding forms of co-branding between travel agencies, changes in the value chain towards the purely online environment, security within the online value chain, online collaboration between traditional travel agencies, cybersecurity, and blockchain.

Future studies in the area of bibliometric analysis of collaboration in travel agencies could explore traditional travel agencies' strategies to adapt to the digital environment and encourage online engagement. Furthermore, investigating the impacts of collaboration on customer perceptions and cyber security can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the benefits and challenges associated with online collaboration in the travel industry.

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Original Scientific Article

A Study of Thai Massage Service Quality Effect on International Tourist Confidence

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Wellness tourism is one of the world's fastest growing industries (Global Wellness Institute, 2018). Wellness tourism has developed into a very important tourism market segment around the world over the past two decades or so. This is especially so for Thailand, where wellness tourism has become one of country's most important tourism markets. In addition to attracting high-end tourists from developed and developing countries, wellness tourism also increases the economy of small or developing countries (Jagyasi, 2022). Thai massage has a strong link to wellness tourism as it is a key service for wellness tourism. In terms of the massage business, tourist confidence is the perception of service quality that influences a purchase decision. Service quality and tourist confidence are intertwined, which then leads to income and economic development. Therefore, examining service quality within Thai massage in relation to tourist confidence is important for exploring the crucial factors influencing international tourist confidence in Thai massage. The results of this research may lead to service quality development to encourage confidence among international tourists who are a significant source of foreign revenue. This research aims to examine the effect of Thai massage service quality on international tourist confidence. A survey of 400 international tourists was conducted in Bangkok, Thailand between March and May 2019, using a structured research questionnaire to collect all necessary data, which was then used to test the research hypotheses using multiple regression analysis. The study concluded that three out of five elements of service quality affect international tourist confidence. These elements include 'Empathy,' 'Tangibility,' and 'Responsiveness,' while 'Assurance' and 'Reliability' did not have a significant effect on tourist confidence. The findings of this research establish an empirical relationship between empathy, tangibility and responsiveness of Thai massage businesses and international tourists' confidence. This insight of the study may help the massage business to have a better understanding about the elements of service quality that influence international tourist confidence.

Keywords: service quality, tourist confidence, wellness tourism, massage, Thailand

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Introduction

Wellness tourism has a strong link to the economic system and is a significant source of revenue for many countries, including Thailand. The $4.5 trillion wellness industry and the $2.6 trillion travel and tourism sectors are powerfully intersected by wellness tourism (2017 figures). People today demand to maintain their healthy lifestyles and wellness practices even while they are away from home, with holistic health and prevention at the forefront of consumer decision-making (Global Wellness Institute, 2020). Wellness tourism has experienced rapid growth over the last two decades or so (Huang & Xu, 2014; Lu et al., 2018). Indeed, wellness tourism has developed into an emerging tourism market segment that is not only directed towards those who pursue solely thermal treatments but also for those seeking illness prevention, physical improvement, and spiritual balance, or even for those clients who are eager to experience cultural and relaxation programmes (Costa et al., 2015). Wellness and spa tourism has become an important marketing strategy that is increasingly being used to attract tourists. Wellness and spa tourism now plays a very important role in hotel industry, resorts, and tourist destinations. Local and international tourists are the primary consumers of wellness and spa services (Hashemi et al., 2015). Furthermore, wellness tourism is a form of tourism which can enhance the competitive advantage of a destination (Magdalini & Paris, 2009).

Massage is a major service in the wellness tourism sector, especially in Thailand. Thai massage is diverse, outstanding, unique and has been accepted worldwide since people pay more attention to healthcare and wellness today. The uniqueness of Thai massage is a result of the wisdom and science of traditional healthcare, including service staff who provide friendly and caring service for customers. As a result, the massage business can generate significant revenue for the country. According to Bangkok Biz News (2020), in Thailand, wellness tourism services are a high-value market with continuous growth. From 2017–2019, Thailand recorded 12.5 million wellness-related tourists. Income from wellness tourism was 409,200 million baht and Thailand's wellness tourism sector employs more than 530,000 people. The key mechanism for creating a competitive advantage is service, which is a distinctive feature of Thailand. According to the Department of Health Service Support, Thailand had 1,609 accredited health establishments in 2015, which comprised 509 spas, 1,070 health massage centres, and 30 beauty massage centres. There were 1,265 locations in the regions and 344 in Bangkok (Leelawatananan, 2016).

Service quality plays a crucial role in business related to tourism, and this is especially so for the wellness and massage business sector (Venetis & Ghauri, 2004). The attainment of positive emotions and tourist satisfaction can be enhanced by the quality of service (Wu & Tsai, 2015). According to Unidha (2017), service quality has a strong link to customer confidence and customer loyalty. A study by Tahish and Maftuhah (2015) indicated that service quality has a positive effect on tourist loyalty, and tourist confidence is the most important factor that affects loyalty. Service quality development is fundamental to encouraging tourist satisfaction and confidence, which can then lead to tourist loyalty. Many studies have revealed that good service quality encourages the customer to buy again, to buy more, to buy other services, to become less sensitive, and to make suggestions to other customers about the service (Akbar & Parvez, 2009; Kheng et al., 2010; Parasuraman et al., 1985; Unidha, 2017).

Confidence or trust is significant in the service business because customers tend to buy the service before actually receiving the service. Therefore, confidence is a crucial factor in the purchase decision. Confidence is one of the characteristics of customers' trust, alongside consistency, honesty, fairness, responsibility, helpfulness, and benevolence. Service providers have the opportunity to gain the confidence of clients. Besides giving customers confidence, service providers must have the potential to demonstrate good service and the ability to respond to customers' needs with politeness and clarity to reassure customers that they will receive the best quality service (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Confidence will be assessed once the client has received the service. Then the service will be compared by the client with the agreement before using the service specified by the service provider. If the client receives the service as expected, the client's confidence will increase (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Building confidence with customers is an important factor that leads to customer loyalty. Loyalty is buying or using a service repeatedly, suggesting the service to others, and building a good relationship that will benefit the business in the long run (Akbar & Parvez, 2009; Han & Hyun, 2015; Rasheed & Abadi, 2014).

This research focuses on the contribution of perceived service quality of international tourists and tourist confidence in massage businesses in Thailand. This study extends the existing knowledge by taking a relationship perspective to study the effect of perceived service quality on tourist confidence. This study may contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between service quality elements and tourist confidence, which is a critical factor in the buying decisions of customers.

Literature Review

Service Quality

Service quality is an action that an organization, business, or individual presents so that service recipients achieve both their goals and satisfaction. The nature of service is intangible. Therefore, the client cannot be the owner. The outcomes of the service may or may not be associated with the product. For this reason, businesses need to find a position that shows the effectiveness and benefits of the service, including location, service staff, advertising, equipment, branding, and price (Kotler, 1994).

The characteristics of the service are intangible, time- and place-dependent, and beneficial to the customers; they cannot be stored or moved, and the service provider is part of the service. The consumer and other people may also be part of the service, which may affect the satisfaction that a customer receives from the service (Masterson & Pickton, 2014). The quality of the service is more diverse than the quality of the product because the employees who provide the service are human and they are different (Koter & Keller, 2006; Peter & Donnelly, 2011). Good service is a service that meets the needs of customers without errors, causing customers to be satisfied (Koter & Keller, 2006; Lovelock & Wirtz, 2004; Parasuraman et al., 1988).

From the customer perspective, the quality of service is the satisfaction that has been fulfilled as needed. Each person's satisfaction is different, which means that the quality of service in each person's perspective is different (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Lovelock & Wirtz, 2004). The factors that customers use when evaluating service quality include credibility, security, accessibility, communication, understanding the customer, tangibility, responsiveness, competence, and courtesy (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Lovelock & Wirtz, 2004).

According to Indeed Editorial Team (2022), Parasuraman et. al. (1988) and Lovelock and Wirtz (2004), the factors that customers use when measuring service quality are credibility, security, accessibility, communication, understanding the customer, tangibility, responsiveness, competence, and courtesy. These factors can be grouped into 5 categories which may be applied in massage and spa businesses as follows.

1. *Tangibility* includes massage and spa service shops, location, decoration, facilities, equipment, ventilation, smell, light, sound, advertising media, and staff dress.
2. *Reliability* includes the ability to provide the right service as agreed with customers.
3. *Responsiveness:* responding to customers in terms of hospitality, information, answering questions, helping customers solve problems, enthusiasm and willingness to serve.
4. *Assurance:* the staff is knowledgeable in providing services, reliable, polite, and attentive to the problems and needs of customers, and the service is safe.
5. *Empathy:* the staff have to understand the needs of different customers, be attentive, be able to serve customers with different needs, and value the customer.

Tourist Confidence

Confidence is one of the characteristics of customers' trust, together with consistency, honesty, fairness, responsibility, helpfulness, and benevolence. The study by Unidha (2017) found that the quality of service has a direct effect on confidence, and the confidence directly affects the loyalty of customers. This means that the better the quality of the service, the more confidence on the part of users. The more confident users are, the more they will be loyal customers.

Confidence comes when customers consider service in two ways: (1) credibility and honesty; (2) commitment that is established to maintain customer relationships and customer retention (Moorman et al., 1992). Also, the relationship between the service providers and the clients who use the services provided by a firm continuously results in value to the customers in three ways: it creates more confidence in the service, develops good friendships, and users receive a service at a special price or special service (Gwinner et. al., 1998, in Lovelock & Wirtz, 2004). The confidence measure consists of 4 components, which are business credibility, good quality of products and services, getting customers interested, and keeping promises or one's word as agreed with customers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Building confidence or trust in businesses, products, and services to customers is an important factor that helps businesses achieve higher profits and long-term success. In addition, creating customer confidence gives businesses the ability to charge properly for products and services without needing to reduce the price to compete, and although competitors can reduce the price or offer promotions, customers who have confidence in products, services, and the business will not change their minds (Khera, 2018; Sangprasert, 2015). Building confidence requires time, and customer confidence may only last for a short period of time and quite possibly will not last forever. Therefore, trust-building with customers should be consistent for long-term continuous confidence (DeMers, 2017; Khera, 2018).

Research Framework

The service quality of Thai massage was identified based on previous studies. We identified five independent variables, which are tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, which were considered to affect tourist confidence. The research framework is shown in Figure 1.

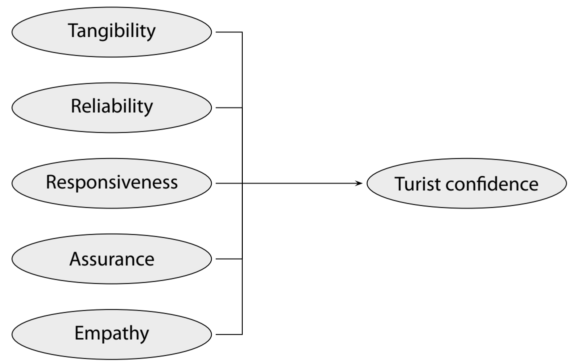

Figure 1 Proposed Research Framework

Hypothesis Development

Based on the preceding theoretical knowledge, the present study examined perceived service quality in the aspects of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy offered by massage and spa services in Bangkok to determine how these attributes affect a tourist's confidence in massage and spa service. The following hypotheses were empirically tested in this study:

- H1 *The perceived service quality in the aspect of tangibility affects tourist confidence.*
- H2 *The perceived service quality in the aspect of reliability affects tourist confidence.*
- H3 *The perceived service quality in the aspect of responsiveness affects tourist confidence.*
- H4 *The perceived service quality in the aspect of assurance affects tourist confidence.*
- H5 *The perceived service quality in the aspect of empathy affects tourist confidence.*

Research Methodologies

Research Instrument

Closed-end questions (Mayo, 2014; Smith, 2017) applied to collect data on the predictors and criterions variables, as well as on specific demographic characteristics, underpinned the research undertaken in this study. Generally, closed-end questions are often used in confirmatory research, when the researchers want to empirically examine specific hypotheses (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

The questionnaire was developed based on previous research emphasizing service quality (Crosby, 1979; Kotler & Keller, 2006; Lovelock & Wirtz, 2004; Metters et. al., 2006; Parasuraman et al., 1988) and tourist confidence (Akbar & Parvez, 2009; Parasuraman et al., 1985; Rasheed & Abadi, 2014). The self-administered questionnaire was used to assess international tourists' perceived service quality and confidence in massage and spa services in Bangkok, Thailand.

The questionnaire consisted of three main sections: demographic characteristics, perceived service quality, and the tourists' confidence in massage and spa services. Service quality consisted of five factors: tangibility with 12 items, reliability with 4 items, responsiveness with 5 items, assurance with 4 items, and empathy with 5 items. In terms of tourist confidence, there were 4 questions: Creditability of the massage and spa service business, Quality of massage/spa, Massage/spa as agreed with the customer, and Provided information about massage/spa is interesting.

The respondents were asked to indicate their level of perceived service quality on a 5-point Likert scale, ranked from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree, and indicate their level of confidence ranked from low (1), moderately low (2), average (3) to moderately high (4), and high (5). The demographic characteristics of the respondents were measured using nominal and ordinal scales.

Data Collection and Study Sampling

The research population were international tourists who had experience using a massage service in Bangkok. The questionnaire survey was carried out between March and May 2019. The target areas of collecting data were popular destinations for international tourists. These areas included Patpong, Silom, Sathorn, Khao-Sarn Road, Sanam Luang, Pratu Nam, and Siam Square. The purposive sampling method was used to collect data. The key advantage of purposive sampling is that it actively aims to enrich the study's data by including participants who have a particular type of experience, characteristic or understanding to share (Macnee & McCabe, 2008).

The questionnaires were collected mainly by the researchers and four research assistants. In addition, questionnaires were left at four massage shops and picked up later. Field editing was also conducted at the survey areas to check for the completeness of the questionnaire (Gunturo & Hui, 2013).

The sample in this study were 400 international tourists who used a massage/spa service in Bangkok. It is generally accepted that 400 is an ideal sample size for a survey (Anjum & Kazmi, 2019; Ghosh, 2018; Naseri et al., 2021).

Data Analysis

To analyse the relationship between independent variable (perceived service quality: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) and dependent variable (tourist confidence in massage services in Bangkok, Thailand), both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied for this research using SPSS Statistics version 26 and AMOS version 24 computer programs. The demographic variables were analysed using frequency and percentage. The mean score and standard deviation were analysed for each independent and dependent variable.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was employed to analyse the components of each factor of the perceived service quality (independent variable) and the relationship between the perceived service quality (independent variables) and tourist confidence (dependent variable).

Results

The research findings can be grouped into the demographic profile of the respondents, the five aspects of perceived service quality, level of tourist confidence in massage and spa service quality, and hypothesis testing.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. The majority of respondents were males. Most of the respondents were in the age range of 21–30 years and single. The majority were from Europe, held a Bachelor's degree, worked as office and sales workers, and had an average annual income of $20,000 USD or lower.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of the Research's Respondents

Category	Item	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	273	68.25
	Female	127	31.75
Age group	Less than 21	33	8.25
	21–30	184	46.00
	31–40	67	16.75
	41–50	59	14.75
	51–60	40	10.00
	>60	17	4.25
Marital status	Single	279	69.75
	Married	121	30.25
Continent of residence	East Asia	100	25.00
	Europe	155	38.75
	America	64	16.00
	South Asia	45	11.25
	Oceania	21	5.25
	Middle East	8	2.00
	Africa	2	0.50
	Others	5	1.25
Education	High school or lower	130	32.50
	Bachelor degree	191	47.75
	Postgraduate or higher	79	19.75
Occupation	Unemployed/not working	71	17.75
	Skilled/semi-skilled worker	32	8.00
	Farmer	9	2.25
	Office and sales worker	143	35.75
	Professional	69	17.25
	Entrepreneur or manager	58	14.50
	Retired	18	4.50
Average annual income	20,000 USD or lower	143	35.75
	20,001–40,000 USD	80	20.00
	40,001–60,000 USD	77	19.25
	60,001–80,000 USD	49	12.25
	More than 80,000 USD	51	12.75

Continued in the next column

Table 1 *Continued from the previous column*

Table 2 Perceived Service Quality in the Aspect of Tangibility

Item	Mean	SD
The massage/spa is in the right place and location.	4.19	0.74
Surrounding areas have proper sanitation.	4.20	0.70
The physical decoration has a clear concept, is appropriate and visually appealing.	4.25	0.75
The space within the massage/spa is well-organized, clean and tidy.	4.29	0.71
Provided faculties in the service place are appropriate and clean (e.g. seat, restroom, lavatory, dressing room).	4.32	0.77
Spa/massage equipment and products are appropriate and available.	4.30	0.73
The service place has good ventilation.	4.29	0.74
The service place has a nice smell and helps me to relax.	4.34	0.70
The lighting in the service place is adequate and appropriate.	4.29	0.73
The service place has nice music and helps me to relax.	4.25	0.82
Advertising media (e.g. shop sign, printing ad, online ad) is interesting and communicates well with customers.	4.21	0.80
The staff dresses properly.	4.31	0.74
Overall	4.27	0.55

Perceived Service Quality Regarding Massage and Spa Service

According to Tables 2–6, international tourists strongly agreed with the overall perceived service quality regarding massage services. The highest mean score is assurance, followed by reliability, empathy, responsiveness, and tangibility, consecutively. In terms of reliability and assurance, the tourists strongly agreed to every variable of them. In the aspects of tangibility, responsiveness and empathy, the tourists strongly agree with almost all of the variables, except one or two variables of each that the tourists agreed with.

Table 3 Perceived Service Quality in the Aspect of Reliability

Item	Mean	SD
The staff can massage/spa according to agreement.	4.32	0.65
There are proper and reliable massage/spa procedures, this includes before, during and after massage/spa.	4.26	0.74
Staff is skilled in massage/spa.	4.39	0.72
Staff massage/spa completes treatments within the agreed time.	4.39	0.70
Overall	4.34	0.59

Table 4 Perceived Service Quality in the Aspect of Responsiveness

Item	Mean	SD
Staff is enthusiastic to welcome and serve customers.	4.29	0.72
Staff can provide information and answer questions clearly.	4.18	0.74
Staff is willing to massage/spa.	4.35	0.71
Staff can provide services and/or solve problems to make customer satisfied.	4.31	0.72
Staff is available at all times of opening hours.	4.29	0.74
Overall	4.28	0.58

Level of Tourists' Confidence in Massage and Spa Service

International tourists were also required to rate their confidence in massage and spa services in Bangkok. It was found that the overall level of tourist confidence is high. When considering each factor, the tourists had high confidence regarding three factors and moderately high one factor according to Table 7.

Hypothesis Testing

Confirmatory Factor Analysis was performed to test the research hypotheses and to quantify the effects of the perceived service quality, including the five factors (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy), on tourist confidence. The five factors, or the independent variables and the dependent variable, tourist confidence, were assessed for the consistency of the model and empirical data. The results of first order confirmatory factor analysis are shown in Table 8. According to the first order confirmatory factor analysis, factor loading of 13 indicators of the five factors of perceived service quality have a value of 0.7 or higher, which is acceptable (Brown, 2015). Four indicators of Tangibility have a loading factor of 0.756–0.789. Two indicators of Reliability have a loading factor of 0.744–0.840. Two indicators of Responsibility have a loading

Table 5 Perceived Service Quality in the Aspect of Assurance

Item	Mean	SD
The healthcare service shows a business license.	4.22	0.83
The staff is polite and courteous.	4.41	0.72
The staff takes care of the problems and needs of the customers.	4.38	0.70
Staff shows sufficient knowledge and skill in massage/spa.	4.36	0.70
Customers feel safe in massage/spa treatments.	4.42	0.71
Overall	4.36	0.59

Table 6 Perceived Service Quality in the Aspect of Empathy

Item	Mean	SD
A variety of massage/spa treatments are available to serve different customer needs.	4.31	0.69
Staff suggests customized massage/spa treatments.	4.28	0.79
Operating hours of the healthcare service are convenient for customers.	4.35	0.70
There is a variety of massage/spa products to choose from (e.g. massage/spa cream, oil, aromatherapy).	4.36	0.70
A variety of herbal drinks after massage/spa to choose from (e.g. ginger, lemongrass, bael, chrysanthemum).	4.18	0.84
There are customer inquiries to improve the service to meet the needs of customers.	4.26	0.76
Overall	4.29	0.58

Table 7 Level of Tourist Confidence in Massage and Spa Service Quality

Item	Mean	SD
Creditability of the massage and spa service business.	4.17	0.73
Quality of massage/spa.	4.30	0.69
Massage/spa as agreed with the customer.	4.34	0.65
Providing information about massage/spa is interesting.	4.22	0.81
Overall	4.26	0.59

factor of 0.683–0.765. Three indicators of Assurance have a loading factor of 0.765–0.798, and two indicators of Empathy have a loading factor of 0.696–0.793.

According to the second order confirmatory analysis (Table 9), factor loading of the five factors of perceived service quality were Tangibility 0.891, Reliability 0.890, Responsibility 0.892, Assurance 0.885, and Empathy 0.902. All of these factors have a value of loading factor 0.7 or higher. This indicates that the five factors of perceived service quality influence tourist confidence. Therefore, hypotheses 1–5 are accepted.

According to Table 9, the model of five components of perceived service quality and tourist confidence was consistent with the empirical data, with p = 0.079 ($p > 0.05$), CMIN/DF = 1.245 (CMIN/DF $\leq$ 2.00), GFI = 0.968 (GFI $\geq$ 0.90), TLI = 0.993 (TLI $\geq$ 0.90), CFI = 0.994 (CFI $\geq$ 0.90), NFI = 0.968 (NFI $\geq$ 0.90) and RMSEA = 0.025 (RMSEA $\leq$ 0.08). When considering the factor loading of each component, it was found that the most important component of service quality was Empathy, which influences the confidence of tourists 81%. The least important component of service quality is Assurance, which influences the confidence of tourists 78%. The effect of the perceived service quality of massage and spa businesses in Bangkok, Thailand on tourist confidence is presented in Figure 2.

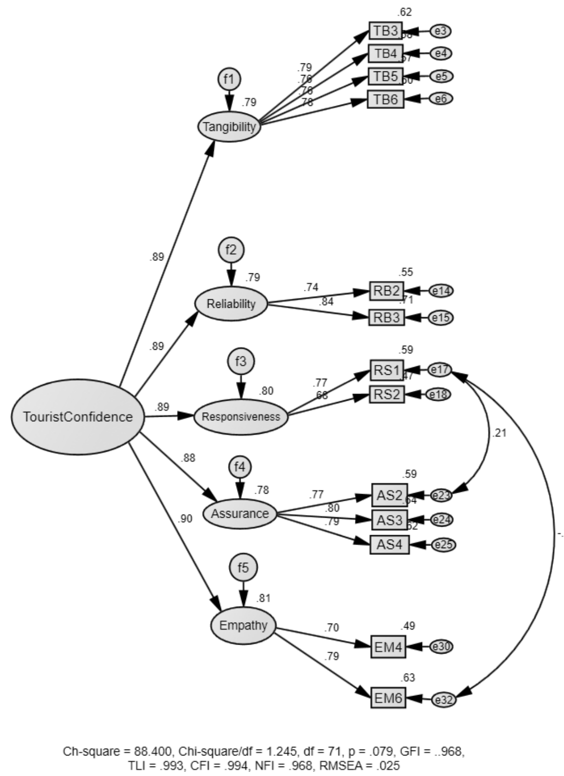

Figure 2 The Effect of Perceived Service Quality of Massage and Spa Businesses in Bangkok, Thailand on Tourist Confidence

Conclusion and Implications

According to a study of Thai massage service quality effect on international tourist confidence, five aspects of perceived service quality were identified, which included tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. This research has illustrated that all of the aspects of the service quality are linked to tourist confidence. It also confirms that service quality in the aspects of empathy is the most important factor, contributing to 81% of tourist confidence and assurance was the least important factor, affecting tourist confidence 78%. Understanding the effects of perceived service quality on tourist confidence may lead to the development of service quality in accordance with tourist confidence, and this can lead to the use of service quality and customer loyalty. From a managerial perspective, it is crucial for those who are in charge of managing massage/spa services to invest in the right elements of service quality in terms of empathy: there should be a variety of massage/spa products to choose from (e.g. massage/spa cream, oil, aromatherapy) and customers should be questioned to improve the service to meet their needs. In terms of responsiveness,

Table 8 Statistics for Evaluating the Consistency of the Model with Empirical Data: The Results of First Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Category	Item		Factor loading	SE	T	R^2
Tangibility	TB3	The physical decoration has a clear concept, appropriate and visually appealing.	0.789	0.057	***	0.622
	TB4	The space within the massage/spa is well-organized, clean and tidy.	0.756	0.062	16.254	0.576
	TB5	Provided faculties in the service place are appropriate and clean (e.g. seat, restroom, lavatory, dressing room).	0.758	0.057	16.242	0.575
	TB6	Spa/massage equipment and products are appropriate and available.	0.777		16.758	0.603
Reliability	RB2	There are proper and reliable massage/spa procedures, this includes before, during and after massage/spa.	0.744	0.065	***	0.554
	RB3	Staff is skilled in massage/spa.	0.840	16.691	0.705	
Respon-siveness	RS1	Staff is enthusiastic to welcome and serve customers.	0.765	0.069	***	0.585
	RS2	Staff can provide information and answer questions clearly.	0.683		13.318	0.467
Assurance	AS2	The staff is polite and courteous.	0.765	0.062	***	0.586
	AS3	The staff takes care of the problems and needs of the customers.	0.798	0.063	16.533	0.637
	AS4	Staff shows sufficient knowledge and skill in massage/spa.	0.785		16.189	0.615
Empathy	EM4	There is a variety of massage/spa products to choose from (e.g. massage/spa cream, oil, aromatherapy)	0.696	0.088	***	0.484
	EM6	There are customer inquiries to improve the service to meet the needs of customers.	0.793		14.237	0.629

Table 9 Statistics for Evaluating the Consistency of the Model with Empirical Data: The Results of Second Order Confirmatory Analysis

Category	Factor loading	SE	T	R^2
Tangibility	0.891		***	0.794
Reliability	0.890	0.073	12.811	0.792
Responsiveness	0.892	0.073	12.959	0.796
Assurance	0.885	0.070	13.135	0.783
Empathy	0.902	0.070	12.134	0.813

staff should be skilled in massage/spa and enthusiastic to welcome and serve customers. In the aspect of tangibility, the physical decoration should have a clear concept, be appropriate and visually appealing, the space within the massage/spa should be well-organized, clean and tidy, provided facilities in the service place should be appropriate and clean (e.g. seat, restroom, lavatory, dressing room), and spa/massage equipment and products should be appropriate and available. In terms of reliability, there should be proper and reliable massage/spa procedures and staff should be skilled in massage/spa. In terms of assurance, the staff should be polite, take care of the problems and needs of the customers and show sufficient knowledge and skill in massage/spa. These should be a priority for wellness tourism because they have a strong link to tourist confidence and this positively affects a purchase decision, which then contributes to increasing revenue from international tourists and wellness tourism. Moreover, tourist confidence also positively affects tourist loyalty to buy or use the service repeatedly, suggest the service to others, and engender a good relationship, and this can benefit the business and the country in the long run.

Limitation and Suggestion for Further Research

The current study provides the model of the influential factors that affect the perceived service quality and tourist confidence of internal tourists in massage and spa businesses in Bangkok, Thailand. It may be necessary to test the model of massage and spa businesses in different countries. This should be undertaken to test and modify the causal relationship model of the influential factors in tourist confidence.

Future research may also test the model with international and domestic tourists to check the model's invariance. Moreover, other variables such as hygiene and COVID-19 or other epidemic prevention standards may be included to better explain influential factors on tourist confidence in massage and spa services.

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Ali boljša fizična dostopnost vodi k večjim prihodkom od prodaje? Primer slovenskih restavracij MSP

Marko Kukanja in Saša Planinc

Kljub pomenu dostopnosti za razvoj trajnostnega turizma je malo znanega o razmerju med fizično dostopnostjo in prihodki od prodaje v prehrambnih gostinskih obratih (PGO). Predhodne raziskave prav tako niso upoštevale dojemanja dostopnosti z vidika menedžerjev PGO, čeprav so ti odgovorni za oblikovanje dostopne ponudbe. Cilja te raziskave sta (1) raziskati, ali menedžerji mikro, malih in srednje velikih PGO obrate dojemajo kot fizično dostopne, in (2) ugotoviti, ali je boljša fizična dostopnost povezana z višjimi prihodki od prodaje. Raziskava je bila izvedena v dveh korakih – analizi relevantne literature in zakonodaje je sledila terenska raziskava. Primarni podatki so bili zbrani s pomočjo vprašalnika, ki so ga so izpolnili menedžerji PGO (n = 149). Sekundarni finančni podatki so bili pridobljeni preko javno dostopnih finančnih poročil. V postopek izdelave vprašalnika so bili vključeni predstavniki invalidskih organizacij. Za analizo podatkov je bila uporabljena opisna in korelacijska analiza. Ugotovitve kažejo, da menedžerji slabo poznajo zakonodajo s področja dostopnosti, da PGO dojemajo kot relativno slabo dostopne ter da fizična dostopnost ni povezana s prihodki od prodaje. Menedžerji so kot najnedostopnejše ocenili sanitarije. Fizična dostopnost ni zgolj trženjska odločitev, temveč tudi zakonska obveznost. Poleg tega bi se menedžerji morali zavedati ekonomskega potenciala dostopnosti ter dejstva, da fizično dostopna ponudba olajša uporabo PGO za družbo kot celoto. Prispevek se zaključi s priporočili za menedžerje PGO, snovalce razvojnih politik in raziskovalce.

Ključne besede: prehrambno gostinstvo, invalidi, menedžerji, fizična dostopnost, prihodki od prodaje
Academica Turistica, 16(3), 257–275

Razumevanje konceptualnega okvira kakovosti zdraviliških storitev: pregledni pristop

Aswin Sangpikul

Zaradi pomanjkljive literature za popolno razumevanje kakovosti storitev v zdraviliški industriji je cilj te raziskave pregledati sorodno literaturo, da bi pridobili konceptualno razumevanje okvira kakovosti storitev v zdraviliščih. Metoda temelji na sistematičnem pregledu sorodne literature z analizo modelov/razsežnosti storitev iz preteklih raziskav in njihovim povezovanjem, da bi dobili celovit okvir kakovosti zdraviliških storitev. Na podlagi predlaganega okvira so opredeljene štiri teme (razsežnosti) kakovosti zdraviliških storitev: (1) zdraviliški programi in izdelki, (2) fizično okolje, (3) interakcija med strankami in zaposlenimi ter (4) (rezultati storitev. Pregled pokaže, da uporaba enega samega modela storitev ne zadostuje za popolno razumevanje okvira kakovosti zdraviliških storitev zaradi njihovih različnih značilnosti. Ugotovitve lahko raziskovalcem in zdraviliškim delavcem pomagajo pri temeljitem razumevanju celotnega okvira kakovosti teh storitev. Zlasti kombinacija fizičnega okolja (tehnološka oprema) in boljše interakcije med strankami ter zaposlenimi

lahko prispeva k inovativnim storitvam v zdraviliški industriji. Pregled pripomore k razširitvi teoretičnega znanja (okvira) tradicionalnega SERQVUAL- in tridimenzionalnega modela (fizična kakovost ter kakovost interakcije in rezultata) z dodajanjem razsežnosti izdelka kot dodatne sestavine okvira kakovosti zdraviliških storitev.

Ključne besede: kakovost zdraviliških storitev, zdraviliška industrija, zdraviliške storitve, turizem wellnessa
Academica Turistica, 16(3), 277–289

Dejavniki, ki vplivajo na zadovoljstvo in namero ponovnega obiska jordanskih zdravstvenih turistov

Malek Bader, Nirmeen Khasawneh, Ramzi Al Rousan, Sami Al Hasanat in Kamakshya Prasad Nayak

Namen raziskave je bil analizirati dejavnike, ki vplivajo na zadovoljstvo in namero ponovnega obiska s strani zdravstvenih turistov v Jordaniji. Teoretični model, sestavljen iz sedmih spremenljivk, in sicer kakovosti storitev, zaznavanja tveganja, vrednosti za denar, privlačnosti destinacije, turistom prijaznega okolja, zadovoljstva in namere ponovnega obiska, je bil oblikovan na podlagi predhodne literature. Za testiranje modela je bil uporabljen metodološki pristop. Najprej je bila izvedena anketa med zdravstvenimi turisti, ki so obiskali deset najpomembnejših bolnišnic v Jordaniji, na podlagi katere je bilo zbranih 395 odgovorov. Nato je bil za analizo podatkov uporabljen model strukturnih enačb. Raziskava je pokazala, da so neodvisne spremenljivke, vključno s kakovostjo storitev, razmerjem med ceno in kakovostjo ter privlačnostjo destinacije, pomembno vplivale na zadovoljstvo zdravstvenih turistov in njihovo namero za ponovni obisk. Analiza je pokazala tudi, da je turistom prijazno okolje pomembno vplivalo na zadovoljstvo, ni pa pomembno vplivalo na namero ponovnega obiska. Vendar pa raziskava ni zagotovila dokazov o pomembnem vplivu zaznavanja tveganja na zadovoljstvo in namero ponovnega obiska. V skladu z ugotovitvami lahko vlada in zasebni subjekti v Jordaniji dajo prednost ohranjanju kakovosti storitev, povečanju privlačnosti destinacije in zagotavljanju turistom prijaznega okolja. Razmislijo lahko tudi o obravnavi in zmanjšanju zaznavanja tveganja zdravstvenih turistov, saj ni bilo ugotovljeno, da bi slednje vplivalo na zadovoljstvo turistov in njihovo namero ponovnega obiska.

Ključne besede: zdravstveni turizem, jordanski turizem, zdravstveni turisti, namera ponovnega obiska, zadovoljstvo turistov, vedenje potrošnikov
Academica Turistica, 16(3), 291–311

Tržne strategije v čezmejnih turističnih destinacijah: pregled literature

Alenka Pahor Žvanut in Ksenija Vodeb

Osnovno načelo delovanja turistične destinacije kot sistema povezanih deležnikov je ustvarjanje nove vrednosti, ki se odraža v ustvarjanju dodane vrednosti za udeležence poslovnega procesa. Za ustvarjanje dodane vrednosti morajo deležniki strateško načrtovati in upravljati svojo trženjsko funkcijo. Opravili smo jpregled aktualne literature (zadnjih deset let) s področja uvajanja trženjskih strategij v širše strategije razvoja čezmejnih turističnih destinacij. Izbrani bazi podatkov sta bili Web of Science in Scopus. Ugotovili smo, da se čezmejne turistične destinacije ne poslužujejo sistematičnih pristopov uvajanja trženjskih strategij, temveč se slednje identificirajo v sklopu širših razvojnih strategij čezmejnih območij. V redkih primerih se oblikujejo samostojne blagovne znamke, s katerimi bi lahko destinacije utrdile svoj položaj na trgu in izkoristile potenciale dveh ali več čezmejnih destinacij hkrati. Kljub prepoznavanju različnih sinergijskih učinkov in razumevanju pomena ter prednosti povezovanja in sodelovalnega tekmovanja trženjske strategije v čezmejnih turističnih destinacijah še niso standardizirana poslovna praksa. Pregledni članek prispeva k predstavitvi pomena čezmejnih marketinških strategij v turizmu in utira pot za podrobnejše raziskave na tem področju v prihodnje.

Ključne besede: turizem, čezmejno, turistična destinacija, strategija, trženjska strategija
Academica Turistica, 16(3), 313–328

Bibliometrična analiza spletnega sodelovanja v potovalnih agencijah

Jorge Raúl Avilas Hernández, Nolberto Cruz Aguilera, Félix Díaz Pompa in Maja Borlinič Gačnik

Zaradi integracije IKT v distribucijskih kanalih je naročnik pri pridobivanju turističnih storitev in produktov vse samostojnejši ter avtonomnejši. Pandemija covida-19 in globalna politika t. i. *fizične oddaljenosti* sta še dodatno okrepili to, kar je škodovalo tradicionalnim potovalnim agencijam. Te so morale za preživetje v celoti ali delno vpeljati spletni poslovni model. Vendar pa delo v spletnem okolju samo po sebi še ne pomeni zagotovljenega uspeha, saj je treba načrtovati strategije spletnega sodelovanja, ki olajšajo pozicioniranje vsakega udeleženca v konkurenčnem spletnem okolju. S pomočjo podatkov, pridobljenih v bazi Scopus, je bila opravljena bibliometrična analiza, ki je ugotavljala stanje povezovanja spletnega sodelovanja potovalnih agencij. Za analizo indikatorjev in kartiranje bibliometričnih omrežij so bile uporabljene različne programske opreme, kot so Excel, Bibexcel, EndNote X20, Pajeck, SciMath in VOSviewer. O stanju sodelovanja med posameznimi turističnimi agencijami največ povesta dva faktorja: prepoznali smo ju v ostri konkurenci ter v močnem vplivu digitalizacije. Prav ta ugotovitev predstavljata glavni inovativni prispevek raziskave. Po drugi strani pa je bilo ugotovljeno, da se z raziskovanjem tematike ne ukvarja veliko znanstvenikov, saj vsebina v bazah podatkov ni bila prepoznana kot predmet raziskav. Med glavnimi vrzelmi, ugotovljenimi v raziskavi, sta spletno sodelovanje v tradicionalnih potovalnih agencijah in učinki sodelovanja na dojemanje naročnikov ter kibernetsko varnost. Raziskava identificira najvplivnejše avtorje, revije, publikacije na tem področju ter ključne teme in trende, ki so se pojavljali skozi čas. Z opredelitvijo ključnih dejavnikov uspeha in izzivov spletnega sodelovanja v potovalni industriji lahko ta raziskava organizacijam pomaga izboljšati njihove prakse sodelovanja.

Ključne besede: bibliometrična analiza, spletno sodelovanje, Scopus, potovalna agencija
Academica Turistica, 16(3), 329–344

Raziskava učinka kakovosti storitev tajske masaže z vidika zaupanja mednarodnih turistov

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Turizem wellnessa je ena najhitreje rastočih panog na svetu (Global Wellness Institute, 2018). V zadnjih dveh desetletjih se je razvil v zelo pomemben segment turističnega trga po vsem svetu. To velja še posebej za Tajsko, kjer je postal eden najpomembnejših turističnih trgov. Poleg privabljanja turistov iz višjih razredov iz razvijajočih se ter razvitih držav turizem wellnessa pripomore tudi k povečanju gospodarske rasti majhnih ali razvijajočih se držav, ki imajo bogato ponudbo tradicionalnih metod ohranjanja zdravja in dobrega počutja (Jagyasi, 2022). Tajska masaža je tesno povezana turizmom wellnessa, saj predstavlja ključno storitev za to vrsto turizma. Kar zadeva dejavnost masaž, zaupanje turistov temelji na dojemanju kakovosti storitve, ki vpliva na odločitev za nakup. Kakovost storitve in zaupanje turistov sta medsebojno povezana in prispevata k donosu ter gospodarskemu razvoju. Zato je pomembno preučiti kakovost tajske masaže v povezavi z zaupanjem turistov, da bi raziskali ključne dejavnike, ki vplivajo na mednarodno zaupanje turistov v tajsko masažo. Rezultati te raziskave lahko vodijo v razvoj kakovosti storitev, da bi tako spodbudili zaupanje mednarodnih turistov, ki predstavljajo pomemben vir tujih prihodkov. Cilj raziskave je tako preučiti vpliv kakovosti storitev tajske masaže na zaupanje mednarodnih turistov. V Bangkoku na Tajskem je bila med marcem in majem 2019 izvedena raziskava, ki je zajela 400 mednarodnih turistov. Uporabili so strukturiran raziskovalni vprašalnik in zbrane podatke nato uporabili za testiranje predpostavk raziskave z metodo večkratne regresijske analize. Raziskava je ugotovila, da trije od petih elementov kakovosti storitve vplivajo na zaupanje mednarodnih turistov. Ti elementi vključujejo »sočutje«, »oprijemljivost« in »odzivnost«, medtem ko »zagotovilo« in »zanesljivost« nimata pomembnega vpliva na zaupanje turistov. Ugotovitve te raziskave vzpostavljajo empirično razmerje med sočutjem, oprijemljivostjo in odzivnostjo v poslovnem modelu tajske masaže ter zaupanja mednarodnih turistov. Ta vpogled lahko pomaga masažnim dejavnostim bolje razumeti elemente kakovosti storitve, ki vplivajo na zaupanje mednarodnih turistov.

Ključne besede: kakovost storitve, zaupanje turistov, turizem wellnessa, masaža, Tajska

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Examples of Reference List

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