



IJCHT-25

CONVERGENCE OF TOURISM,
HOSPITALITY, AND MICE IN ACTION



IJCHT 2025

Convergence of Tourism, Hospitality, and MICE in Action

**The 5th International Joint Conference
on Hospitality & Tourism 2025**



PROCEEDING

July 3-5, 2025

Songkhla, Thailand



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<https://songkhlamicecity.com/>



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Songkhla Convention and Exhibition Bureau

The 5th International Joint Conference on Hospitality & Tourism 2025 (5th IJCHT-25)

**July 3-5, 2025
at Laguna Grand Hotel, Songkhla, Thailand**

Production Team

Published by : Songkhla Convention and Exhibition Bureau (SCEB),
Prince of Songkla University

International Standard Book Number (ISBN): 978-616-271-840-3

First Edition : 2025 (B.E. 2568)

Printed by : IQue Media Co., Ltd.

Preface

It is my great pleasure to welcome all participants to the 5th International Joint Conference on Hospitality & Tourism (IJCHT 2025), held in Songkhla, Thailand. While renowned destinations such as Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Krabi, and Phuket often attract international attention, Songkhla stands as a hidden gem rich in cultural heritage, ethnic diversity, and local charm. It represents a dynamic example of Thailand's evolving tourism landscape and serves as an inspiring setting for this year's conference.

Songkhla is currently undergoing an exciting phase of transformation. Its recent development, highlighted by the opportunity to co-host the 2025 SEA Games, reflects the city's ambition, resilience, and forward-looking vision. This transformation embodies the essence of this year's conference theme, which emphasizes the role of citywide events in driving transformation not only for host cities, but also for the broader hospitality, tourism, and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions) sectors. Through such events, we observe how destinations can foster inclusive growth, cultural exchange, and sustainable development.

Over the course of IJCHT 2025, we will explore diverse perspectives on how the hospitality and tourism industries can adapt to global changes and seize new opportunities. This conference brings together academics, researchers, industry professionals, and policymakers to share their latest findings, discuss emerging trends, and build collaborative networks that advance our collective understanding of tourism and hospitality management.

On behalf of the Organizing Committee, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to all authors, reviewers, and participants for their valuable contributions. I am confident that the knowledge and insights presented at IJCHT 2025 will inspire innovative practices and meaningful dialogue, paving the way for a more sustainable and inclusive future for the global hospitality and tourism industry.

Dr.Songsin Teerakunpisut
Conference Chair
5th International Joint Conference on Hospitality & Tourism (IJCHT 2025)
Songkhla, Thailand
July 2025

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Executive Summary
The 5th International Joint Conference on Hospitality and Tourism 2025 (5th IJCHT-25)
Theme: Convergence of Tourism, Hospitality, and MICE in Action
3-5 July 2025
Songkhla, Thailand

Introduction

In the face of rapid global change, the hospitality, tourism and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions & Exhibitions) sectors are undergoing profound transformations. As cities evolve and destinations seek to position themselves in a competitive international marketplace, it becomes ever more important to examine how convergence among tourism, hospitality and MICE can serve as a catalyst for innovation, sustainable growth, and inclusive value creation.

The city of Songkhla, Thailand, with its unique cultural heritage, coastal-lagoon environment and emerging role as a MICE destination, provides a timely and fitting setting for this exploration.

Against this backdrop, the 5th IJCHT 2025 convenes scholars, practitioners and industry stakeholders to engage in informed dialogue, share empirical research and co-create actionable insights, thereby advancing theory and practice in hospitality, tourism and MICE convergence.

Objectives

- 1.To provide a forum for presenting cutting-edge research and best practices on the intersection of tourism, hospitality and MICE in action.
- 2.To foster interdisciplinary and cross-sector collaboration among academics, industry professionals and destination managers.
- 3.To stimulate discussion on how technology, innovation, wellness, culture and events can be integrated into destination development for both competitiveness and sustainability.
- 4.To encourage the application of ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) principles within hospitality, tourism and MICE operations, and to explore legacy impacts for host communities.
- 5.To strengthen the global network of scholars and practitioners in the field and to support publication pathways for high-quality conference output.

Contributions

- 1.A deeper understanding of emerging trends, challenges and opportunities at the convergence of tourism, hospitality and MICE, including strategic, operational and technological dimensions.
- 2.Enhanced collaboration and partnership formation across academia, industry and destination governance, leading to joint initiatives, shared frameworks or research agendas.
- 3.Practical recommendations and case-driven insights that can inform policy, management and destination planning, thereby contributing to improved competitiveness and sustainable development.
- 4.Increased awareness and adoption of ESG-oriented practices within the hospitality, tourism and MICE sectors, promoting responsible and inclusive growth.
- 5.High-quality contributions to the conference proceedings and potential follow-on publications, strengthening the body of knowledge and the professional profile of participating authors and institutions.

Conference Theme

- Convergence of Tourism, Hospitality, and MICE in Action

Event Format

The conference will be held in an on-site format. Participants are required to travel to present their work and attend the event at Laguna Grand Hotel, Songkhla, Thailand.

Conference Topics

- AI, Innovation, and Technology
- Creativity, Culture, and Heritage
- Community-Based Tourism
- Gastronomy, Lagoon, and Fashion Tourism
- Travel Behaviors
- Medical Tourism
- Wellness Tourism
- Regenerative Destination
- Hotel Management
- Restaurant Management and Operations
- MICE Management
- Events and Festival: Impact, Legacy, and Leverage
- Marketing and Management
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
- Sustainable development and management
- Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)
- Safety and Crisis Management
- Human Resources, Leadership, and Education
- Logistics and supply chain
- Halal tourism and service
- Other topics related to Tourism and Hospitality

Registration

Paper presenters and participants for The 5th International Joint Conference on Hospitality & Tourism 2025 (5th IJCHT-25) can register at: <https://ijcht-25.com/>

Conference Fee

- Early Bird:	USD	100
- International:	USD	130
- Student:	USD	80
- Participant:	USD	70

Project Owner

Songkhla Convention and Exhibition Bureau, Prince of Songkla University

Date, Time, and Venue

The 5th International Joint Conference on Hospitality & Tourism 2025 (5th IJCHT-25) are scheduled for 3-5 July 2025 at Laguna Grand Hotel, Songkhla, Thailand.

Important Dates

- Abstract Submission Deadline: May 20, 2025
- Decision Notification: May 30, 2025
- Final Submission Deadline: June 10, 2025
- Early Bird Registration Due: June 10, 2025
- Conference Dates: July 3-5, 2025

Contact

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Conference Program

The 5th International Joint Conference on Hospitality and Tourism 2025 (5th IJCHT-25)

Theme: Convergence of Tourism, Hospitality, and MICE in Action

3-5 July 2025

Songkhla, Thailand

Day One: July 3, 2025

Morning Session

- 08.00 AM Registration and Coffee on Arrival
- 09.00 AM Welcome Remarks
by Dr. Songsin Teerakunpsut,
IJCHT2025 Conference Chair
- 09.10 AM Welcome Remarks
by Assoc. Prof. Theerawat Hungsapruek,
Dean of Faculty of Management Sciences
- 09.20 AM Opening Remarks
by Asst. Prof. Dr. Niwat Keawpradub,
President of Prince of Songkla University
- 09.30 AM Performance Show
- 09.50 AM Keynote: “ AI and the Future of Smart Destinations ”
By Prof. Dr. Cihan Cobanoglu,
Virscend University, USA.
- 10.30 AM Morning Refreshment Break
- 10.45 AM Panel Discussion: “ Convergence of Tourism and MICE in Action ”
Moderated by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Suwaree Namwong.
" Elephant Welfare in Global Tourism "
By Professor Eric Laws
"MICE Education: A Catalyst for Tourism Sustainability"
By Assistant Professor Lt. (F) Dr.Kaedsiri Jaroenwisan,
Songkhla Convention and Exhibition Bureau,
Prince of Songkla University.
" Driving Destination Value: National MICE Policy in Tourism Convergence "
By Mr. Pattanachai Singhavara
Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau South Director.
“ The Casino Industry in Malaysia and its Impact on the Tourism Landscape ”
By Associate Professor Dr. Azila Azmi,
Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.
“ Bali’s Blueprint for Tourism Success ”
By Dr. I Putu Utama
S.E., M.M., Bali Tourism Polytechnic, Bali, Indonesia.
Moderated by Associate Professor Dr. Suwaree Namwong,
NIDA, Leading Expert in Wellness Tourism.
- 12.00 PM Lunch and Coffee, Drinks

Afternoon Session

- 01.00 PM Session 1
- 02.30 PM Afternoon Refreshment Break
- 02.45 PM Session 2
- 04.30 PM Wellness Showcase: “ Where Wellness Wisdom Meets Academic Excellence ”
Featuring Yoga, Chakra Energy, and Sound Therapy.

Day Two: July 4, 2025

Morning Session

08.30 AM	Registration and Coffee
09.00 AM	Keynote Speaker “ Transforming Thai Tourism, Hospitality, and MICE through Practical Research and Innovation ” By Emeritus Professor. Soottiporn Chittmittrapap, M.D. Royal Academician, and Chairman of the Committee for the Promotion of Science, Research, and Innovation
10.00 AM	Morning Refreshment Break (15 minutes)
10.15 AM	Keynote Speaker “ Exploring Spiritual Tourism in the Himalayas ” By Professor Dr. Saket Kushwaha, University of Ladakh
11.15 AM	Special Session “ Future-Ready Talent in Tourism, Hospitality & MICE ” By Assistant Professor Dr. Supontep Teerakanok, and Assistant Professor Dr. Wanamina Bostan Ali (Moderator), Prince of Songkla University
12.15 PM	Lunch and Coffee, Drinks

Afternoon Session

1.15 PM	Session 3
2.30 PM	Afternoon Refreshment Break (15 minutes)
2.45 PM	Session 4
4.30 PM	Closing Remarks
5.30 PM	Registration Networking and Gala Dinner Under the Theme of “ Chic Lake Elegance ”
6.00 PM	Welcome Remarks by the IJCHT 2025 Committee Team
6.15 PM	Performance by the international music band from Thaksin University, Songkhla
7.45 PM	Best Presentation Best Paper Best Costume Awards
8.00 PM	Official Transfer of the IJCHT2026 to Bali Tourism Polytechnic, Indonesia & Farewell Remarks by the IJCHT 2025 Committee Team

Panelists : :

- Dr. Luh Yusni Wiarti, A.Par., S.E., M.Par., M.Rech., Bali Tourism Polytechnic, Indonesia
- Assistant Professor Dr. Morakot Ditta-Apichai, Thaksin University, Thailand
- Dr. Putu Diah Sastri Pitanatri, S.ST.Par., M.Par., Bali Tourism Polytechnic, Indonesia
- Silverina Kibat, Senior Lecturer, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Sabah, Malaysia
- Assist. Prof. Dr. Wanamina Bostan Ali, Prince of Songkla University, Thailand
- Dr. Anderson Ngelambong, Senior Lecturer, Universiti Teknologi MARA Penang Branch Malaysia

Day Three: July 5, 2025 (Optional Program)

Morning Session

05.45 AM	Registration and Technical Tour Briefing
06.00 AM	Depart from the hotel
06.00 – 06.40 AM	Travel to Node Na Le Community Learning Center
06.40 – 07.00 AM	Prepare to board the boat at Node Na Le
07.00 – 09.00 AM	Local Fisherfolk Lifestyle Tour at Node Na Le
09.00 – 11.00 AM	Activities at Node Na Le Community Learning Center

11.00 AM – 12.10 PM	Travel to Khao Kho Hong Hill
12.10 – 12.45 PM	Visit Khao Kho Hong Temple
12.45 – 01.05 PM	Travel to Kim Yong Market
01.05 – 02.00 PM	Explore Kim Yong Market
02.00 – 02.20 PM	Travel to the International Convention Center (ICC), PSU
02.20 – 03.20 PM	Site Visit at ICC, PSU
03.20 – 04.00 PM	Return to the hotel

Keynote & Invited Speakers

1. Prof. Dr. Cihan Cobanoglu
2. Emeritus Prof. Soottiporn Chittmittrapap
3. Prof. Dr. Saket Kushwaha
4. Prof. Eric Laws
5. Asst. Prof. Lt. (F) Dr. Kaedsiri Jaroenwisan
6. Mr. Pattanachai Singhavara
7. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Azila Azmi
8. Dr. I Putu Utama
9. Asst. Prof. Dr. Supontep Teerakanok
10. Asst. Prof. Dr. Wanamina Bostan Ali

Conference Chair & Co-Chairs

Conference Chair

1. Dr. Songsin Teerakunpisut, Prince of Songkla University (Thailand)

Co-Chairs

1. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ann Suwaree Ashton, NIDA (Thailand)
2. Dr. Anderson Ngelambong, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Penang Branch (Malaysia)
3. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kom Campiranon, Thammasat University (Thailand)

Organizing Committee

1. Asst.Prof.Lt.Dr. Kaedsiri, Jarownwisan
2. Asst.Prof. Dr. Wanamina Bostan Ali
3. Asst.Prof. Dr. Supattra Davison
4. Asst.Prof. Dr. Wipada Thaothampitak
5. Asst.Prof. Dr. Sippavit Wongsuwatt
6. Dr.Satayu Romyen
7. Mrs. Orachorn Wongpan-ngam
8. Mr. Kamonsak Reungjarearnrung
9. Dr. Nina Farisha Isa
10. Made Riki Ponga Kusyanda
11. Silverina Anabelle Kibat
12. Assistant Prof Dr Ida anak Ingko
13. Dr. Derweanna Bah Simpong
14. Dr. Desy Nur Aini Fajri
15. Dr. Luh Yusni Wiarti, M.Par, M. Rech.
16. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mohd Raziff Jamaluddin

Room 1
Innovation, Technology, and Sustainable Development

BEYOND DESTINATION AUTHENTICITY: A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR ENHANCING DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS

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Extended abstract

This study proposes an extended conceptual framework, positioning destination authenticity as a strategic driver of competitiveness. Specifically, we examined how authenticity affects destination competitiveness through three dimensions: *novelty*, *knowledge acquisition*, and *facility usage*. By demonstrating the multidimensional impact of authenticity, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on sustainable tourism, competitive advantage, and destination marketing (Yuliana, Rini, Situmorang, & Silalahi, 2023). Destination authenticity has emerged as a key factor in shaping tourist perceptions, emotional connections, and behavioral intentions (Li, & Wang, 2023). However, while prior research focuses largely on the influence of authenticity on individual traveler behavior, its broader role in enhancing destination competitiveness remains underexplored (Li, Peng, Liu, Tang, & Li, 2024).

This study used a quantitative approach by collecting data through online survey questionnaires. A total of 500 samples who are American outbound travelers and had visited South American destinations known for their cultural and natural authenticity responded to the survey. Participants were randomly selected through an online survey distributed to 800 travelers. The survey measured perceptions of destination authenticity, novelty, knowledge acquisition, facility usage, and overall destination competitiveness. The proposed framework was tested by a two-step analytical approach. First, reliability and validity were assessed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). Next, structural equation modeling (SEM) was applied to evaluate the relationships between constructs and test the hypothesized pathways linking authenticity to destination competitiveness (Anderson & Gerbing, 1992). This methodological approach provides robust empirical support for the proposed multidimensional framework. Using advanced statistical techniques like confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling, we examined how authenticity translates into destination competitiveness.

The results indicated that authenticity significantly enhances destination competitiveness by influencing novelty, knowledge acquisition, and facility usage. Specifically, travelers who perceive a destination as authentic report higher levels of novelty and learning, as well as increased engagement with destination facilities. These factors, in turn, strengthen their overall perceptions of destination competitiveness. The findings offer actionable insights for destination marketers and tourism practitioners. To enhance competitiveness, destination managers should emphasize authentic storytelling, cultural preservation, and knowledge-sharing initiatives. Investments in infrastructure should also align with the destination's authentic identity to facilitate seamless and meaningful visitor experiences. By integrating authenticity into branding and management strategies, destinations can enhance both visitor satisfaction and long-term competitiveness (Rheeders, 2022).

Keywords: Destination Competitiveness; Destination Authenticity; Destination Novelty, Destination Knowledge Acquisition; and Destination Facility Usage.

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Purpose/Problem Statement

Destination authenticity has emerged as a key factor in shaping tourist perceptions, emotional connections, and behavioral intentions. However, its broader role in enhancing destination competitiveness remains underexplored. This study proposes an extended conceptual framework, positioning destination authenticity as a strategic driver of competitiveness. Specifically, the study examined that how authenticity affects destination competitiveness through three dimensions: novelty, knowledge acquisition, and facility usage.

Originality/value

The results of the study demonstrated that authenticity influences multiple dimensions of competitiveness supporting the theory of schema congruity travelers assess a destination's competitiveness based on how well its offerings align with their expectations of what is authentic and novel.

Design/methodology/approach

This study used a quantitative approach by collecting data through online survey questionnaires. A total of 500 samples who are American outbound travelers and had visited South American destinations known for their cultural and natural authenticity responded to the survey. The proposed framework was tested by a two-step analytical approach. First, reliability and validity were assessed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Next, structural equation modeling (SEM) was applied to evaluate the relationships between constructs and test the hypothesized pathways linking authenticity to destination competitiveness.

Findings/Discussion

The results indicated that authenticity significantly enhances destination competitiveness by influencing novelty, knowledge acquisition, and facility usage. Specifically, travelers who perceive a destination as authentic report higher levels of novelty and learning, as well as increased engagement with destination facilities. These factors, in turn, strengthen their overall perceptions of destination competitiveness.

Moreover, the findings suggested that authenticity-driven emotional connections reinforce tourists' positive attitudes toward the destination, increasing their likelihood of visitation and engagement. This underscores authenticity's dual role as both an experiential asset and a strategic driver of competitive advantage. Destinations that successfully communicate their authenticity can enhance brand equity, deepen visitor engagement, and attract more tourists. Our study revealed compelling evidence that authenticity significantly boosts a destination's competitive potential. Travelers who perceived a destination as authentic reported: Higher levels of novelty and learning, increased engagement with local facilities, and stronger emotional connections to the destination.

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the literature on destination authenticity and competitiveness by extending the understanding of how authenticity impacts destination performance. By demonstrating that authenticity influences multiple dimensions of competitiveness, the research supports the theory of schema congruity travelers assess a destination's competitiveness based on how well its offerings align with their expectations of what is authentic and novel.

Practical implications

The findings offer actionable insights for destination marketers and tourism practitioners. To enhance competitiveness, destination managers should emphasize authentic storytelling, cultural preservation, and knowledge-sharing initiatives. Investments in infrastructure should also align with the destination's authentic identity to facilitate seamless and meaningful visitor experiences. By integrating authenticity into branding and management strategies, destinations can enhance both visitor satisfaction and long-term competitiveness.

Research limitations

Future research should explore additional behavioral and competitive outcomes of authenticity, such as word-of-mouth marketing, loyalty, and repeat visitation. Longitudinal studies could provide further insights into the sustained impact of authenticity on destination competitiveness over time. Understanding these broader impacts can further inform tourism marketing strategies and destination management practices. By continuing to unravel the complex relationship between authenticity and destination competitiveness, the researchers can help tourism professionals create more meaningful, engaging travel experience

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STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL FOR CULINARY TOURISM ON SURYAKENCANA STREET, BOGOR CITY, INDONESIA

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Abstract

In recent years, the issue of sustainability has become a significant concern in the tourism sector, including culinary tourism. Suryakencana street in Bogor City is an iconic culinary tourism area with high historical, cultural, and economic value. However, it faces sustainability challenges related to environmental degradation, cultural homogenization, and socio-economic inequality. This study aims to analyze the key challenges faced by culinary business actors, identify the business strategies they employ, and design a sustainable business model that integrates economic, social, and environmental aspects within the area.

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative method using semi-structured interviews with five selected culinary business owners, chosen through purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes related to business strategies, sustainability challenges, and business innovation. The findings indicate that most business actors remain focused on economic aspects, while the implementation of environmental and social sustainability principles is still suboptimal. The study reveals a need for an adaptive business model based on local cultural preservation, environmental efficiency, and community empowerment. The proposed sustainable business model is expected to serve as a strategic guide for culinary entrepreneurs in ja street and similar destinations in Indonesia, while also supporting the achievement of sustainable development goals in the tourism and creative economy sectors.

Keywords: *Sustainable Business Model; Culinary Tourism; Suryakencana street; Strategic Development; Local Entrepreneurship*

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Introduction

In recent decades, sustainability has become a major concern across various sectors, including business and tourism (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017). The concept of sustainability is not only related to the products being produced, but also to the production processes, the use of technology, and their environmental and social impacts (Natu & Aparicio, 2022). In the context of modern business, Sustainable Business Model Innovation (SBMI) has emerged as a strategic approach to address these global challenges (Weigel et al., 2021). SBMI simultaneously integrates economic, social, and environmental dimensions, allowing companies to focus not only on financial gains but also on long-term sustainability values (Rajchamaha et al., 2024).

Tourism, as one of the largest economic sectors globally, is not exempt from sustainability demands (Bayne & Renwick, 2021). Culinary tourism in particular is increasingly viewed not merely as a consumption activity, but also as a means of cultural preservation, promotion of the local economy, and environmental protection (Guruge, 2020). The growth of culinary tourism has driven a new trend in which travelers seek authentic experiences that reflect the local identity of a destination, while also prioritizing sustainable practices (Türker & Süzer, 2022). Therefore, the development of a sustainable culinary tourism business model has become an urgent necessity to maintain competitiveness and meet the expectations of the global market.

Sustainable tourism must consider environmental aspects to provide economic benefits while preserving nature and local culture. Setiawan et al (2024) state that domestic ecotourism behavior in Indonesia is influenced by five core principles, such as using environmentally conscious tour guides and respecting local cultures.

The study shows that the greatest challenge for tourists is using eco-minded guides, while the easiest behavior is respecting cultural values. These findings highlight the importance of ecotourism education, the promotion of environmentally friendly practices, and support for local businesses to ensure a balance between tourism and conservation.

In Indonesia, Jalan Suryakencana in Bogor City is one of the leading culinary tourism destinations that holds significant historical, cultural, and economic value, as illustrated in (Figure 1). This street is renowned for its rich diversity of local cuisine, serving as a major attraction for both domestic and international tourists. However, alongside the growth in tourism and culinary enterprises, challenges have emerged such as environmental degradation, cultural homogenization, and socio-economic imbalances (Zeng et al., 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to develop business model strategies that not only preserve the diversity and authenticity of local culinary traditions but also incorporate comprehensive sustainability principles. This approach is essential to maintain the longterm viability and relevance of the area in the future.



Figure 1. Suryakencana Gate

This study is crucial in designing strategies that balance local economic growth with environmental and cultural preservation, while enhancing the competitiveness of the culinary tourism sector in the era of globalization (Guruge, 2020). The Suryakencana area is expected to serve as a best practice example for other culinary destinations in Indonesia, thereby contributing to the achievement of sustainable development goals, particularly in the fields of creative economy, tourism, and cultural preservation. Currently, there is still a lack of clarity regarding which sustainable business model strategies can most effectively optimize the potential of Suryakencana street as a culinary tourism destination.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the main challenges faced by culinary business actors in Suryakencana street in developing sustainable businesses from economic, social, and environmental perspectives.
2. To identify the current business strategies employed by culinary entrepreneurs in the Suryakencana street area and assess the extent to which they have adopted sustainability principles.
3. To develop a sustainable business model that integrates economic resilience, environmental responsibility, and the preservation of local culture for implementation in the culinary tourism sector of Suryakencana street.

Literature Review

1. Strategic Development

Strategic development is a systematic process of formulating and implementing long-term policies to address external challenges and optimize internal resources (Rajchamaha et al., 2024). In the context of management and business, strategic development refers to a long-term planning process aimed at determining and achieving organizational goals effectively and efficiently. This strategic planning involves an analysis of both internal and external organizational conditions, including the identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis), in order to make appropriate strategic decisions that align with the organization's needs (Ariyanti et al., 2024).

In developing culinary businesses in tourist areas such as Suryakencana street, adaptive strategies that respond to modern market demands must still preserve local cultural values. This aligns with the findings of Türker & Süzer (2022), who emphasize that today's tourists seek authentic experiences while also expecting socially and environmentally responsible business practices. Therefore, business strategies in this sector must harmonize tradition with innovation and prioritize long-term sustainability.

2. Sustainable Business Model

A Sustainable Business Model (SBM) is a framework that simultaneously integrates economic, social, and environmental values into business operations to create long-term sustainable value. Natu & Aparicio (2022) assert that SBM encompasses not only product sustainability but also production processes, energy efficiency, waste management, and relationships with local communities. In practice, the SBM functions as a strategic tool for addressing external pressures such as climate change, consumer expectations, and regulatory shifts.

However, in the culinary MSME sector, especially in urban tourist areas like Suryakencana street, the implementation of SBMs remains limited to informal practices such as the use of local ingredients and minimal waste generation. Weigel et al (2021) highlight the importance of adopting a holistic and measurable sustainability system, including the use of digital technologies to support operational sustainability. The absence of a structured SBM framework reveals a gap in both literature and practice, particularly for culturally based culinary tourism destinations.

3. Culinary Tourism

Culinary tourism is defined as travel activities centered on experiencing the unique food and beverages of a region as a primary attraction of the destination. According to Guruge (2020), culinary tourism is not merely a consumption activity; it also plays a vital role in cultural preservation, strengthening local identity, and empowering community economies. Modern tourists increasingly seek authentic and sustainable gastronomic experiences that reflect the cultural values and diversity of a region.

In the context of Indonesia, destinations like Suryakencana street offer significant potential for the development of culturally based culinary tourism. However, research by Zeng et al (2021) indicates that unplanned intensification of tourism can lead to cultural homogenization and environmental degradation. Therefore, a holistic and sustainable management approach is essential to ensure that culinary tourism not only generates economic benefits but also contributes to the preservation of local culture and environment.

4. Local Entrepreneurship

Local entrepreneurship has received growing attention from scholars as a key driver of sustainable regional development and community empowerment (Kwil et al., 2020). Recent literature emphasizes that local entrepreneurship involves leveraging unique regional resources, cultural heritage, and community networks to create innovative business models that are deeply rooted in the local context (Noh, 2024). This approach not only fosters economic revitalization by transforming local assets into value-added products and services but also strengthens social cohesion through collaboration between entrepreneurs and local communities (Ivanycheva et al., 2024).

Studies show that the success of local entrepreneurship depends on a deep understanding of local culture, active community support, and tailored policy interventions such as access to funding, education, and networking opportunities (Castillo-Villar et al., 2025). Furthermore, local entrepreneurship is also linked to regional settlement patterns, where thriving entrepreneurial activities encourage people to remain and contribute to sustainable socio-economic growth (Noh, 2024).

Beyond its social and economic impacts, the resilience of local entrepreneurship has become a key focus of recent research, especially in the context of global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Fubah et al., 2025). Empirical studies reveal that informal local support practices such as self-saving schemes, community solidarity, and local financial aid play a crucial role in enhancing the capacity of local entrepreneurs to endure crises and sustain their businesses (Chongbang & Bhandari, 2024).

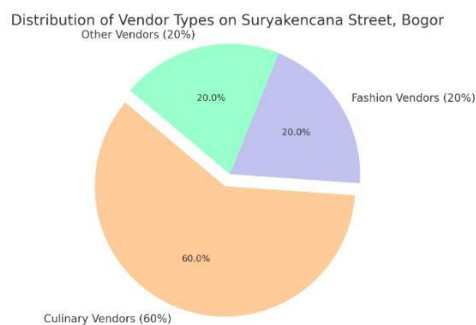
Research Gap

Recent studies indicate that strategic development frameworks in urban culinary tourism often fail to account for the socio-cultural characteristics and region-specific infrastructure, as exemplified by the inefficiency of culinary planning in Bogor due to weak stakeholder coordination (Stipanović & Mikinac, 2024). Moreover, there is still a lack of empirical research measuring the effectiveness of adaptive strategies such as the adoption of digital technologies and waste management in enhancing the competitiveness of cultural destinations like Suryakencana street.

At the same time, the implementation of Sustainable Business Models (SBMs) in the culinary sector faces significant barriers, particularly at the micro-enterprise level. The reliance on seasonal ingredients and logistical limitations hinders MSMEs from adopting scalable SBMs (Sita et al., 2025). In addition, there is still no comprehensive sustainability metric available to assess the economic, social, and environmental impact at the small business level, especially in Southeast Asia (Rajchamaha et al., 2024). Within the context of culinary tourism, research gaps are also evident in the limited exploration of how digitalization contributes to cultural preservation and operational efficiency (Piri et al., 2023), as well as the lack of studies examining the interrelationship between food quality, cultural narratives, and tourist satisfaction in shaping destination competitiveness (Zeng et al., 2021).

Methodology

Populations and Sample



Source: (Open Data, 2024)

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at deeply exploring the strategies, challenges, and perceptions of culinary business actors regarding the implementation of sustainable business models in the Suryakencana street area of Bogor City. The population of this study consists of all culinary business operators along Suryakencana street, which, according to data from the Bogor City Office of Cooperatives and SMEs, accounts for approximately 60% of the total culinary enterprises in

the area around 90 businesses in total. This population includes street vendors, restaurant owners, and other micro and small enterprises offering local culinary products, both permanent and seasonal.

The sample was selected using purposive sampling, where informants were chosen deliberately based on specific criteria: (1) they must have operated a culinary business in Suryakencana street for at least two years; (2) they must be the owner or manager of the business (not an employee); (3) they must operate in a fixed location (not on the roadside); and (4) they must be willing to participate in an in-depth interview. Based on these criteria, five culinary business operators were selected as key informants for interviews: *Suryakencana Hot Bread / Suryakencana Red Stall Suryakencana*, *Green Bean & Black Sticky Rice Porridge by Om Kan Wat*, *Yellow soup Pak Yusup*, *Martabak Ncek*, and *Wedang Ronde Gang Aut*. This number is considered sufficient for a qualitative approach, as the quality of informants is deemed to reflect the overall condition of culinary entrepreneurs in Suryakencana street. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow for flexible exploration of the informants' experiences and perspectives regarding the sustainability of their businesses.

Research Tools

This study adopts a qualitative approach, with a primary focus on data collection through in-depth interviews with culinary business operators in Suryakencana street, Bogor City. Therefore, the main instrument used in this research is a semi-structured interview guide. This guide contains a list of open-ended questions designed to elicit in-depth information about business strategies, management challenges, and respondents' views on the concept of sustainability. A semi-structured format was chosen to allow the researcher the flexibility to explore emerging issues during the interviews while maintaining a focus on the study objectives.

In addition to the interview guide, field notes were also used to record non-verbal expressions, the business location setting, and the social interaction context observed during the interviews. These notes were accompanied by a rating scale to assess implementation levels, where: 1 = Suboptimal: Not yet optimal, inconsistent, or not utilizing full potential; 2 = Moderate: Adequately implemented but still limited or not fully optimized; 3 = Good: Consistently and effectively implemented, contributing comprehensively to the business.

The field notes served to enrich the primary data obtained from the informants' narratives. The total number of informants in this study was five culinary entrepreneurs, selected purposively based on the diversity of their businesses, trading experience, and preparedness in addressing sustainability issues. The selected participants were: *Suryakencana Hot Bread / Suryakencana Red Stall Suryakencana*, *Green Bean & Black Sticky Rice Porridge by Om Kan Wat*, *Yellow soup Pak yusup*, *Martabak Ncek*, and *Wedang Ronde Gang Aut*. All interviews were conducted in person at the respective business locations, with the informed consent of the respondents.

Data Collection

In this study, data collection was conducted directly in the field through interviews with five culinary business operators located in the Suryakencana street area of Bogor City. A set of open-ended questions was developed as a guide during the interview process, aiming to gather in-depth information regarding business experiences, operational challenges, the implementation of sustainable practices, as well as the respondents' perspectives on market competition and local culinary trends. The interviews were conducted flexibly to allow respondents to share their views openly and in accordance with their specific contexts.

In addition, informal observations were carried out concurrently with the interviews to document the surrounding business environment and the respondents' behaviors in real time. This combination of approaches provided a more comprehensive contextual understanding of the culinary business conditions in the research area.

Data Analysis

Data collected through in-depth interviews were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The process began with verbatim transcription of all interview recordings to ensure that no important information was overlooked. Subsequently, the researchers conducted repeated readings of the transcripts to identify relevant meaning units.

In addition, field notes and observation sheets were utilized as supporting data to enrich the contextual understanding of the interview findings. Through this method, the research findings are not only descriptive but also interpretative, providing an in-depth portrayal of the dynamics faced by culinary entrepreneurs in implementing sustainable business strategies in the Suryakencana street area.

Results

1. Background and Business Origins

Interviews were conducted with five business owners representing a variety of culinary offerings along Jalan Suryakencana to gather information on the year of establishment, business location, and the background of each enterprise. The findings show that most of these businesses have grown from family traditions, while others emerged from individual initiatives that have adapted to changing times. To provide visual illustration, photos of each product and their respective stalls or outlets are included: (Figure 2) features Suryakencana Hot Bread / Suryakencana Red Stall, (Figure 3) shows Green Bean & Black Sticky Rice Porridge by Om Kan Wat, (Figure 4) displays Yellow soup Pak yusup, (Figure 5) presents *Martabak Ncek*, and (Figure 6) captures *Wedang Ronde gang aut*. A complete summary of the information is presented in Table 1

Table 1. Background and Business Origins

Culinary Business		Year Established	Specific Location	Business Origin
Suryakencana Hot Bread / Suryakencana Red Stall	C1 = Culinary 1	2023	Gang Besi, Suryakencana	Started selling bread on the roadside using a small oven, then opened a shop.
Green Bean & Black Sticky Rice Porridge by Om Kan Wat	C2 = Culinary 2	1967	Suryakencana street	Started by family with traditional recipe, using charcoal stove.
Yellow soup Pak yusup	C3 = Culinary 3	1977	Suryakencana street	Simple sales, taking advantage of the culinary area's crowd.
Martabak Ncek	C4 = Culinary 4	1975	Suryakencana street	Started with traditional Bangka recipe, chose a strategic location.
Wedang Ronde Gang Aut	C5 = Culinary 5	1998	Gang Aut, Suryaencana	unded by Mrs. Neneng to sell traditional drinks.

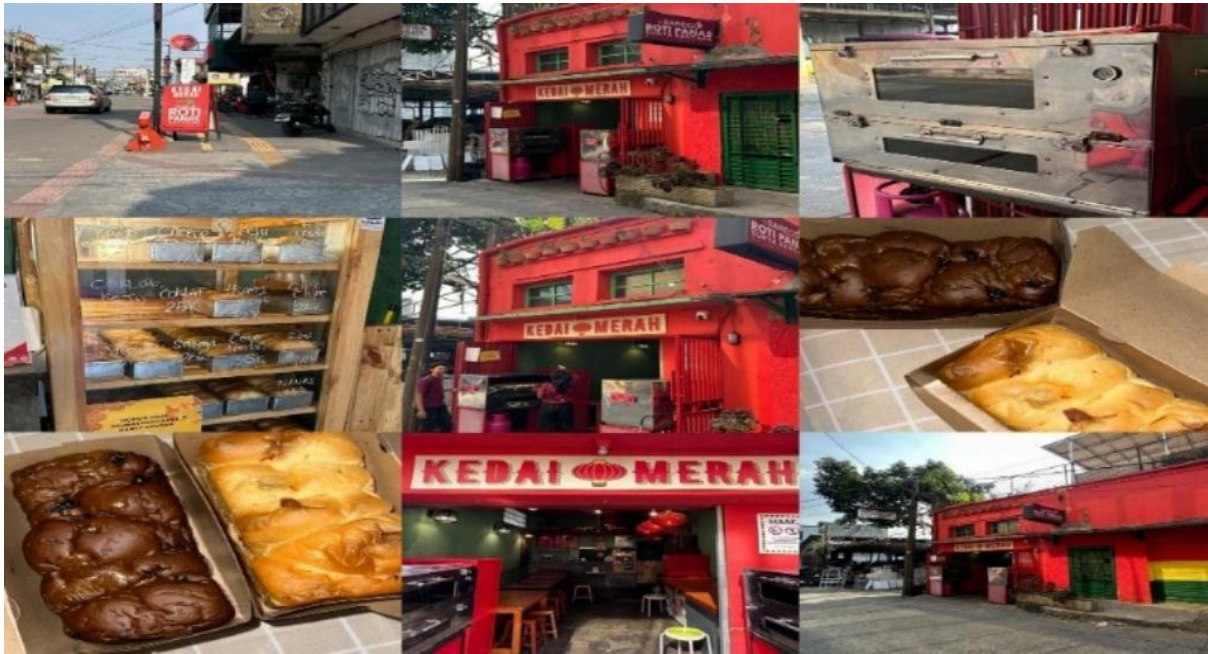


Figure 2. Suryakencana Hot Bread / Suryakencana Red Stall



Figure 3. Green Bean & Black Sticky Rice Porridge by Om Kan Wat



Figure 4. Yellow soup Pak yusup



Figure 5. Martabak Ncek



Figure 6. Wedang Ronde Gang Aut

Based on the interview results, the five culinary business owners in Suryakencana street have diverse backgrounds. *Green Bean & Black Sticky Rice Porridge by Om Kan Wat* was established in 1967 and has been passed down through generations, using a traditional family recipe. *Martabak Ncek* and *Yellow soup Pak yusup* also began decades ago, in 1975 and 1977 respectively, both utilizing family recipes and benefiting from strategic locations. *Wedang Ronde Gang Aut* was founded in 1998 by Ibu Neneng, who started the business to sell traditional beverages. *Suryakencana Hot Bread* is the most recent business, established in 2023. It began as a roadside bread vendor using a small oven, and later evolved into a full-fledged food stall. These business patterns reflect a combination of traditional values and an entrepreneurial spirit of innovation.

2. Key Challenges

To identify the operational obstacles faced by culinary businesses, interviews were conducted with five culinary entrepreneurs in Suryakencana street, Bogor City. The questions focused on the primary challenges encountered in their daily business operations. A summary of each respondent's answers is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Key Challenges in Business Management

Culinary Business	Main Challenges
C1 = Culinary 1	Maintaining taste quality, consistent service, hidden location, competition.
C2 = Culinary 2	Maintaining taste quality, traditional methods, stock, and service during busy times.
C3 = Culinary 3	Maintaining taste quality with fresh ingredients, managing queues, and service.
C4 = Culinary 4	Maintaining traditional methods (charcoal stove), slow service when busy.
C5 = Culinary 5	Maintaining taste quality, consistency, cleanliness, and service in limited space.

Based on the interview findings, the five culinary business owners in Suryakencana street face several similar challenges. Generally, they strive to maintain the quality of their food and the consistency of their service. Some also experience difficulties in preserving traditional methods, especially during periods of high customer volume. Other challenges, such as less strategic locations, limited space, and business competition, also affect their daily operations. These findings indicate that, despite having been established for a long time, each business must continue to adapt to environmental conditions and evolving consumer expectations.

3. Sustainable Practices

To understand the extent to which culinary business owners in Suryakencana street implement sustainable practices, interviews were conducted with five different entrepreneurs. The questions focused on their efforts to maintain business sustainability in terms of raw materials, production processes, and waste management. A summary of each respondent's answers is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Sustainability Practices

Culinary Business	Sustainability Practices
C1 = Culinary 1	Using local ingredients, fresh bread daily, avoiding freezing ingredients.
C2 = Culinary 2	Using charcoal stove, ingredients from local suppliers for freshness.
C3 = Culinary 3	Ingredients from local suppliers, cooking according to estimates to avoid waste.
C4 = Culinary 4	Using charcoal stove, ingredients from local suppliers for freshness.
C5 = Culinary 5	Ingredients from local suppliers, simple serving to reduce waste.

The interview results indicate that culinary business owners in Suryakencana street have implemented various sustainable practices in their operations. The majority source raw materials from local suppliers to ensure freshness and support the surrounding economy. Some businesses also avoid freezing ingredients, ensuring products are prepared fresh daily. Additionally, practices such as cooking

based on demand estimates and simple serving methods are employed to reduce waste. The use of charcoal stoves by some entrepreneurs reflects an effort to preserve traditional methods that are more energy-efficient. These findings demonstrate an awareness of the importance of sustainability in managing culinary businesses.

4. Culinary Appeal

To gain deeper insight into the main attractions of culinary businesses in Suryakencana street, interviews were conducted with five entrepreneurs operating in the area. The questions focused on the elements that make their businesses appealing to customers, including taste, ambiance, and the overall experience offered. A summary of the responses regarding the appeal factors of each business is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Culinary Attractions in Suryakencana

Culinary Business	Attraction Factors
C1 = Culinary 1	Historical value, old-time atmosphere, fresh hot bread, oriental-style shop.
C2 = Culinary 2	Traditional nuance, authentic taste, nostalgia, historic culinary experience.
C3 = Culinary 3	Culinary heritage, authentic taste, unique 'choose your own fillings' system.
C4 = Culinary 4	Authentic taste, traditional charcoal stove technique, nostalgic value.
C5 = Culinary 5	Traditional taste, typical street atmosphere, iconic location, authentic experience.

Based on the interview results, the five culinary entrepreneurs in Suryakencana street offer various appeal factors that serve as their individual strengths. Authentic and traditional flavors are the most prominent and consistent elements across all businesses. Additionally, the vintage atmosphere, historical value, and distinctive local ambiance further enhance the culinary experience offered. Some businesses also highlight unique features, such as a "choose your own filling" system or an oriental style food stall concept. All of these elements combine to create an experience that goes beyond mere dining, evoking a sense of nostalgia and cultural closeness for visitors.

5. Competition and Trends

To understand the perspectives of business owners regarding competition and trends in the culinary industry, interviews were conducted with five entrepreneurs in Suryakencana street, Bogor City. The questions aimed to explore how they perceive market dynamics and the position of traditional culinary businesses amid changing trends. A summary of each entrepreneur's views is presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Food Competition and Trends

Culinary Business	View on Competition and Trends
C1 = Culinary 1	Dynamic competition, classic food remains favored due to nostalgia.
C2 = Culinary 2	Tight competition, traditional food remains favored due to quality.
C3 = Culinary 3	Increasing competition, traditional culinary sought after for authenticity.
C4 = Culinary 4	Trends change quickly, traditional food still has a place.
C5 = Culinary 5	Trends change quickly, traditional culinary favored due to nostalgia.

The interview results show that culinary business owners in Suryakencana street share similar views regarding competition and trends. They recognize that competition is becoming increasingly intense and culinary trends change rapidly. However, traditional cuisine continues to hold a special place in consumers' hearts. The main reasons are the nostalgic value, quality, and authenticity of the flavors offered. This reflects their belief that the core strength of their businesses lies in preserving authentic taste and culinary experiences, despite competing amid modernization and shifting market preferences.

6. Use of Social Media and Digital Platforms

To understand the extent to which culinary business owners in Suryakencana street utilize social media and digital platforms, interviews were conducted with five different entrepreneurs. The questions focused on their promotional activities, customer interactions, and the use of digital services in their operations. A summary of social media and digital platform usage by each business is presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Use of Social Media and Digital Platforms

Culinary Business	Use of Social Media / Digital Platforms
C1 = Culinary 1	Active on Instagram (@rotipanas.suryakencana, @kedaimerahsuryakencana), pre-order via WhatsApp.
C2 = Culinary 2	Not directly active, promotion from visitor reviews, food bloggers, Instagram, TikTok.
C3 = Culinary 3	Active on Instagram (@sotokuningpakmyusuf), collaborates with GoFood.
C4 = Culinary 4	Not directly active, organic promotion via Instagram, TikTok, culinary blogs.
C5 = Culinary 5	Active on Instagram (@wedangrondeibuneneng), available on GoFood.

Based on the interview results, the utilization of social media and digital platforms by culinary business owners in Suryakencana street varies. Some businesses, such as C1, C3, and C5, actively use Instagram and delivery services like GoFood or WhatsApp for pre-orders. Meanwhile, C2 and C4 are not directly active in digital promotion but still gain exposure through promotions by visitors, food bloggers, and content on Instagram and TikTok. This indicates that although not all business owners are directly involved in digital marketing, their presence is still elevated through consumer participation and online communities.

7. Openness to Innovation

To understand the attitudes of culinary business owners towards innovation in business development, interviews were conducted with five entrepreneurs in Suryakencana street, Bogor City. The questions focused on their openness to menu development, collaboration, and adaptation without losing traditional characteristics. A summary of each entrepreneur's views on innovation is presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Openness to Innovation

Culinary Business	Openness to Innovation
C1 = Culinary 1	Exploring new flavors (smoke beef cheese), open to collaboration with local SMEs.
C2 = Culinary 2	Open to innovation as long as authenticity is maintained, collaboration with SMEs considered.
C3 = Culinary 3	Open to collaboration, menu development without losing the identity of yellow soup.
C4 = Culinary 4	Open to innovation and collaboration as long as traditional taste and methods are maintained.
C5 = Culinary 5	Open to collaboration, gradual menu innovation (sticky rice porridge, jali, sagu rangi).

The interview results indicate that culinary business owners in Suryakencana street are generally open to innovation, as long as it does not compromise the distinctive characteristics and authenticity of the flavors. They are willing to gradually develop their menus, such as exploring new variations or adding traditional ingredients. Collaboration with local MSMEs is also viewed as a positive opportunity. This openness reflects their efforts to remain relevant amid changing consumer preferences while preserving the traditional culinary identity that serves as the core strength of their businesses.

8. Expectations for Government and External Support

To understand the needs and aspirations of culinary business owners regarding external support, interviews were conducted with five entrepreneurs in Suryakencana street, Bogor City. The questions focused on the types of support they expect from the government, community, and other relevant parties in developing their businesses and the culinary area. A summary of the support expectations from each entrepreneur is presented in the table below.

Table 8. Expectations for Government/External Support

Culinary Business	Support Expectations
C1 = Culinary 1	Business training, tourism promotion, infrastructure improvement, regular events.
C2 = Culinary 2	Attention to cleanliness, public facilities, tourism promotion, small business training, licensing assistance, culinary events.
C3 = Culinary 3	Promotion, area arrangement, comfortable public facilities, culinary events.
C4 = Culinary 4	Better facilities (cleanliness, traffic), area promotion, digital training for SMEs.
C5 = Culinary 5	Area arrangement, public facilities, parking, culinary tourism promotion, digital marketing and business management training.

The interview results show that culinary business owners in Suryakencana street expect concrete support from various parties to sustain their businesses. The most frequently mentioned forms of support include promotion of the culinary tourism area, business training (covering management, digital marketing, and small business skills), as well as improvements in infrastructure and public facilities such as cleanliness, traffic management, and parking areas. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of organizing regular culinary events as an effort to attract visitors. This reflects the need for synergy between business actors and stakeholders to create a better business ecosystem.

9. Field Notes / Observation Sheet

To gain deeper insights into sustainable culinary business practices in the heritage area of Suryakencana street, Bogor, the researcher conducted field observations in addition to interviews. The observations focused on five local culinary businesses representing a variety of products, ranging from bread and soto to martabak and traditional beverages such as wedang ronde. Each business was observed and assessed based on six main aspects:

1. Physical condition of the business premises
2. Customer interaction
3. Operational activities
4. Sustainability practices
5. Branding and marketing
6. Product uniqueness

This approach allowed for a comprehensive assessment of how each business maintains competitiveness, conducts daily operations, and implements sustainability values either consciously or unconsciously. Each aspect was rated on a scale of 1 to 3, with the following interpretation:

- 1 = suboptimal
- 2 = moderate
- 3 = good

The following table presents the observation data, evaluation scores, and justifications for each of the assessed aspects.

Table 9. Observation Sheet

K (Product Code)	Aspect	Physical Condition of Business Location	Customer Interaction	Operational Activities	Sustainability Practices	Branding and Marketing	Product Uniqueness
C1	Observation Notes	Clean and wellorganized, permanent (alleyway shop), easily accessible	Friendly, communicative, serves customers directly and via WhatsApp	Daily bread production, fresh, using a portable oven, with simple storage methods.	Local ingredients are used. The bread is made fresh daily with no leftovers and is never frozen.	Uses local ingredients, bread is made without leftovers, and not frozen.	Bread is freshly baked on-site, offers distinctive varieties, with a nostalgic interior ambiance.
C1	Assessment	3	3	3	2	3	3
C1	Rationale	The place is clean and neatly arranged, featuring an oriental style. Despite being located in an alley, it is easy to find	Actively engages with customers both in person and online, and responds promptly to inquiries.	Operations are efficient, maintaining product quality and freshness.	Good practices are in place, but hey have not been formalized into a sustainability system.	Promotion is active and well-targeted	Both the product and the venue have unique value and historical appeal
C2	Observation Notes	A permanent, clean location with a legendary presence since 1967	Service is Provided directly to customers. Digital use is minimal.	Uses a charcoal stove. Follows traditional recipes. Portions remain consistent.	Uses local ingredients. Conserves energy. Applies traditional methods.	Spread by word of mouth. Supported by online reviews.	Authentic flavor. No modern toppings. Uses rare cooking techniques.
C2	Assessment	3	2	3	3	2	3
C2	Rationale	The establishment is wellestablished and widely known.	Direct interaction is strong. Digitalization is not yet fully developed.	Operations have remained distinctive and well-preserved for decades.	Practices strongly support sustainability despite lacking formal certification.	The brand has strong natural recognition. However, it has not been independently developed through social media.	Highly unique and authentic. Maintains the original flavor.
C3	Observation Notes	The shop is permanent and busy. It is strategically located in Suryakencana	Direct selection system. Friendly service. Active on Instagram.	Fresh ingredients are selected. Fillings are cut directly. The broth is distinctive.	Uses local ingredients. Avoids overcooking.	Active on Instagram. Available on GoFood.	Uses yellow soto broth. Selfselection filling system
C3	Assessment	3	3	3	2	3	3
C3	Rationale	The location is easily accessible and always busy	A good combination of traditional and digital services.	Operational processes maintain quality and variety.	Not formal yet, but efficiency principles are already	Already digital and effective	The soto concept is unique and flexible for customers.

K (Product Code)	Aspect	Physical Condition of Business Location	Customer Interaction	Operational Activities	Sustainability Practices	Branding and Marketing	Product Uniqueness
					applied		
C4	Observation Notes	Simple but clean. Semipermanent. Located in a small alley	Friendly and direct service. Not yet active digitally.	Cooked using a charcoal stove. Classic toppings.	Charcoal is energyefficient. Uses local ingredients	Not active on social media. Promotion comes from customers	Classic Bangka martabak. Charcoal aroma. Not greasy.
C4	Assessment	2	2	3	3	2	3
C4	Rationale	Small location. Management remains traditional.	Warm interaction. Not yet digitally integrated.	Highly distinctive. Preserves Bangka cooking traditions.	Efficient and local. Aligned with sustainability principles.	Not yet fully utilized digitally.	Authentic product. Rare cooking techniques. Distinctive flavor.
C5	Observation Notes	Small location in an alley. Clean and simple.	Friendly and fast service. Active on social media and GoFood.	Homemade drinks. Various fillings and additional porridge options.	Uses local ingredients. Minimal waste in serving.	Active on Instagram. Available on GoFood.	Traditional wedang ronde. Strong ginger broth. Local appearance.
C5	Assessment	2	3	3	2	3	3
C5	Rationale	Traditional and limited location. Still clean and tidy.	Strong interaction both in person and digitally.	Operations are efficient. Menu variety is maintained. Flavor remains consistent.	Simple practices support thriftiness and local sourcing.	Digital promotion and online distribution are effective.	Highly authentic, evoking nostalgia and cultural value.

Field observations of five culinary business operators in Suryakencana street, Bogor, reveal that despite operating on a small scale and often located in narrow alleyways, all entrepreneurs are able to maintain cleanliness, ensure operational efficiency, and offer unique, authentic products. Customer interactions are warm and friendly, with most businesses already utilizing social media and digital platforms to expand their marketing reach. Sustainability practices appear to be naturally embedded, such as sourcing local ingredients, minimizing waste, and using energyefficient cooking methods, although these are not yet formally structured. Strong branding is evident through both digital presence and long-standing reputations, while the distinctiveness of each product serves as a key differentiating factor. These findings indicate that culinary entrepreneurs in this heritage area have organically integrated cultural values, economic efficiency, and sustainability principles into their business practices, even if not yet supported by systematic managerial approaches.

Discussion

Main Challenges in Developing Sustainable Business in Culinary Enterprises on Suryakencana street

Based on interviews with culinary business owners along Jalan Suryakencana, the main economic challenges lie in maintaining product quality and service consistency amidst intense competition and the need for continuous innovation. One of the owners of *Suryakencana Hot Bread* stated, “The main challenge is maintaining the quality of taste and consistent service, especially during peak demand. Additionally, since our location is quite hidden in an alley, attracting new customers is another challenge” (Culinary 1). This statement reflects how small businesses in the area must manage limited resources while innovating to remain attractive to customers.

In the context of existing literature, these findings align with Rajchamaha et al (2024), who emphasize that the economic dimension of the Sustainable Business Model Innovation (SBMI)

framework requires entrepreneurs to create long-term value by ensuring efficiency and competitiveness. Therefore, product innovation such as offering new flavor variants by *Suryakencana Hot Bread* is an essential adaptive economic strategy to ensure business continuity.

Such innovation strategies can be seen as part of the implementation of the value proposition and value creation dimensions within SBMI. The use of local ingredients and daily production practices by this business exemplifies principles of efficiency and resource management. This approach aligns with the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory Barney (1991), which posits that competitive advantage can be achieved through the use of International Joint Conference on Hospitality and Tourism 2025 of unique and inimitable resources, such as traditional recipes and distinctive production techniques.

However, the challenges extend beyond product innovation. Efficient operational management is equally crucial. Field notes indicate that this business implements daily production and relies on local ingredients demonstrating efforts to minimize waste and control production costs, which are essential in the face of business competition.

From a social perspective, culinary businesses in Jalan Suryakencana play a significant role in preserving local culinary heritage while fostering social connections with the community and customers. An interview with the owner of *Green Bean & Black Sticky Rice Porridge Om Kan Wat* highlighted the importance of preserving authentic recipes and cooking techniques: “We maintain the traditional flavor and cooking method, such as using a charcoal stove creating a nostalgic experience for customers and an authentic atmosphere for tourists” (Culinary 2).

Furthermore, customer interaction is a key social aspect. *Suryakencana Hot Bread* actively engages with customers both directly and digitally, while *Green Bean & Black Sticky Rice Porridge Om Kan Wat* (Culinary 2) and *Martabak Ncek* (Culinary 4) rely more on face-to-face interactions and word-of-mouth promotion. This demonstrates a range of social strategies in building customer loyalty and the challenge of leveraging digital tools optimally. These practices illustrate the application of values from Stakeholder Theory Freeman & McVea (2005), where businesses engage not only with customers but also with the local community as part of a broader business ecosystem.

Nevertheless, modernization pressures create a dilemma between preserving tradition and adapting to technology, such as through the use of social media and digital marketing. This phenomenon can be analyzed through Institutional Theory Scott & Scott (2004), which emphasizes that small business owners face normative and cognitive pressures to conform to market expectations while maintaining local cultural legitimacy.

From an environmental perspective, culinary businesses in Jalan Suryakencana have begun to implement sustainable practices through the use of local ingredients and basic waste management, although these practices are not yet formalized into structured sustainability systems. For example, the owner of *Hot Bread* mentioned, “We try to use local ingredients to support farmers and local producers, the bread is made fresh daily to avoid excess waste, and we do not use long-term frozen ingredients” (Culinary 1). Meanwhile, *Green Bean & Black Sticky Rice Porridge Om Kan Wat* (Culinary 2) and *Martabak Ncek* (Culinary 4) continue to use charcoal stoves, which reduce dependence on fossil fuels while preserving traditional taste.

According to Natu & Aparicio (2022), business sustainability should encompass the entire operational system not just the final product including waste reduction and energy efficiency. Field observations indicate that although sustainable practices exist, they need to be formalized and optimized for consistency and broader impact. This represents a challenge for culinary entrepreneurs to develop more structured and integrated sustainability systems within their business activities

Business Strategies of Culinary Entrepreneurs in the Suryakencana street Area and the Implementation of Sustainability Principles in Their Operations.

Based on interviews with culinary business owners along Jalan Suryakencana, several business strategies have been identified that help sustain and grow their enterprises amidst fierce competition and constantly changing market dynamics. The main strategies observed include a focus on product quality, product innovation, the use of social media, and the preservation of historical and cultural values as unique selling points.

For instance, the owner *Suryakencana Hot Bread / Suryakencana Red Stall* started the business from humble beginnings but maintained a strong commitment to product quality and consistent service. The owner stated, “The main challenge is maintaining the quality of taste and consistent service, especially during high demand periods” (Culinary 1). This consistency in quality and service reflects an intuitive application of Total Quality Management (TQM), where quality is central to customer satisfaction and long-term competitive advantage (Oakland, 2012). This approach is also consistent with the Resource-Based View Barney (1991), which asserts that sustained quality, when maintained over time, can become a source of competitive advantage that is difficult to replicate. Hence, quality control serves

as a key strategy to build customer loyalty. In addition, the business actively utilizes social media for promotion: “We are very active on Instagram through accounts like @rotipanas. suryakencana and @kedaimerahsuryakencana. We also accept pre-orders via WhatsApp.” This demonstrates efforts to expand market reach in the digital era.

Meanwhile, *Green Bean & Black Sticky Rice Porridge Om Kan Wat* (Culinary 2) and *Soto Kuning Pak Yusup* (Culinary 3) emphasize the preservation of authenticity and tradition as their core strengths. Om Kan Wat mentioned, “We preserve the taste and traditional cooking techniques, such as using a charcoal stove,” which offers customers an authentic culinary experience. This strategy builds customer loyalty, particularly among those seeking traditional and genuine culinary experiences. It affirms the relevance of Authenticity Theory in culinary tourism, which suggests that authenticity is a key value sought by consumers, especially in the context of local culture (Cohen, 1988). This is also supported by Nugraheni et al (2025), who argue that sustainable culinary tourism must preserve local culture as an integral part of its attraction.

In terms of sustainability, interview findings suggest that culinary businesses on Jalan Suryakencana have begun implementing several environmentally and socially supportive practices, although most are not yet formalized within a structured sustainability system. For example, the owner of *Kedai Merah Suryakencana* stated, “We try to use local ingredients to support local farmers and producers. Our bread is made fresh daily to avoid excess leftovers” (Culinary 1). This practice reflects efforts to reduce waste and support the local economy, which are important components of sustainable business models (Natu & Aparicio, 2022). However, the owner acknowledged that these sustainability practices are not yet developed systematically, indicating the need for further attention.

Similarly, *Om Kan Wat* and *Martabak Ncek* use traditional charcoal stoves which, while simple, reduce dependence on fossil energy sources such as gas or electricity. *Wedang Ronde Gang Aut* also sources ingredients from local suppliers and uses minimalistic serving methods to reduce waste. These actions reflect principles of environmental sustainability and energy efficiency. Moreover, sourcing from local suppliers enhances the socioeconomic aspect by supporting local farming communities (Türker & Süzer, 2022). Although various sustainable practices are already being applied, limitations remain in the adoption of environmentally friendly technologies or more structured waste management systems. This is reflected in sustainability assessment scores, where *Kedai Merah* scored 2 (moderate), while *Green Bean & Black Sticky Rice Porridge Om Kan Wat* scored 3 (good) due to more consistent adherence to tradition and sustainability practices.

This suggests that the adoption of sustainability principles in Jalan Suryakencana remains partial and is largely driven by the individual awareness of business owners rather than formal policies or regulations governing sustainability practices. Therefore, a more systematic and integrated approach is necessary for advancing sustainability in this culinary tourism context.

Developing a Sustainable Business Model Integrating Economic Resilience, Environmental Responsibility, and Local Cultural Preservation in Culinary Tourism on Suryakencana street.

Economic resilience is a crucial aspect in developing sustainable business models within the culinary tourism sector. Based on interviews with culinary business owners along Jalan Suryakencana, it is evident that business continuity heavily relies on consistent product and service quality, as well as the ability to innovate in line with market trends. This underscores the importance of adaptation in response to external dynamics, which, according to Teece & Pisano (1994), is at the core of Dynamic Capabilities Theory the firm’s ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address changing environments.

As expressed by the owner of *Martabak Ncek*, “The main challenge is maintaining traditional methods (charcoal stoves) and improving service during peak times or when demand is high,” in addition to the need for constant innovation in facing competition (Culinary 4). This aligns with Natu & Aparicio (2022), who argue that economic resilience in sustainable businesses must include innovation and adaptability to market dynamics. Additionally, the operator of *Soto Kuning Pak Yusup* emphasized the importance of using fresh ingredients and managing service efficiently to ensure customer satisfaction and loyalty (Culinary 3), reinforcing the role of operational efficiency in economic resilience.

The owner of *Green Bean & Black Sticky Rice Porridge Om Kan Wat* explained that they continue to use traditional charcoal stoves, which are more energy-efficient and enhance authentic flavors, while sourcing ingredients such as mung beans and coconut milk from local farmers (Culinary 2). These practices not only support environmental conservation but also strengthen the local

economy one of the core principles of sustainability. This supports the relevance of the Operational Excellence theory Treacy & Wiersema (1993), which posits that business process efficiency is a key strategy for creating long-term economic value.

Similarly, *Wedang Ronde Gang Aut* sources ingredients from local suppliers and uses simple packaging to reduce waste. Although these efforts are not yet formalized, they reflect the implementation of resource efficiency and environmental impact reduction principles (Türker & Süzer, 2022).

For instance, *Green Bean Porridge Om Kan Wat*, which has been in operation since 1967, consistently preserves its traditional recipe and cooking method using charcoal stoves - a distinctive feature that offers visitors an authentic culinary experience (Culinary 2). According to Cultural Capital theory Bourdieu (1986), preserved and inherited cultural elements can become both symbolic and commercial assets in the tourism sector. Likewise, *Kedai Merah Suryakencana* combines an oriental-style café ambience with freshly baked bread and an “Instagrammable” concept, blending nostalgia with modern aesthetics while still respecting local identity

Conclusion

Culinary business actors in Suryakencana street face complex challenges encompassing economic, social, and environmental aspects. Economically, they must maintain product quality and service consistency while continuously innovating to stay competitive amid intense competition and limited business locations. Socially, these actors play a crucial role in preserving local culinary culture by maintaining the authenticity of traditional recipes and cooking techniques, as well as fostering close relationships with customers both directly and through social media. From an environmental perspective, although practices such as using local ingredients and environmentally friendly waste management have been implemented, the application of sustainability principles remains unsystematic and requires further support.

The business strategies generally focus on strengthening product quality, menu innovation, utilizing social media for marketing, and preserving local cultural and historical values as competitive advantages. However, the integration of sustainability principles into operational practices is still partial and relies more on individual awareness than formal policies.

The ideal sustainable business model development for culinary tourism in Suryakencana street must be able to integrate economic resilience through innovation and efficiency, environmental responsibility through structured eco-friendly practices, and the preservation of local culture as a primary attraction. To achieve this, external support such as training, environmentally friendly technology, and regulations encouraging comprehensive sustainability implementation are necessary. Such a business model will enhance the competitiveness of culinary enterprises while ensuring the social, cultural, and environmental sustainability of the area.

Research recommendations

This study contributes to the sustainable culinary tourism literature by expanding the application of the Sustainable Business Model Innovation (SBMI) framework to microenterprises in cultural heritage-based areas. While previous research has mainly focused on strategic sustainability integration at the corporate or regional level (Natu & Aparicio, 2022; Weigel et al., 2021), this study highlights organic yet unstructured sustainability practices among small culinary businesses in Suryakencana street, Bogor. Based on these findings, several recommendations for future research are proposed to support the long-term resilience of local culinary entrepreneurship in cultural tourism areas

First, future research should develop an adaptive sustainability framework tailored for microenterprises in the culinary tourism sector. Although some businesses have adopted sustainable practices such as using local ingredients and reducing waste, these practices remain informal and unsystematic. Sita et al (2025) emphasize the need for clear sustainability metrics to assess economic, social, and environmental impacts, especially at the small business level. This practical framework would bridge the gap between informal practices and measurable sustainability systems

Second, aligned with Türker & Süzer (2022), further exploration is needed on the role of digitalization in promoting cultural authenticity. Some businesses in Suryakencana use Instagram and GoFood but have not fully leveraged their culinary products’ cultural narratives. Future studies could

examine digital storytelling strategies to effectively communicate local identity and attract tourists seeking authentic culinary experiences.

Third, an in-depth study of stakeholder-based collaboration models is necessary. This study found that most businesses operate independently and lack supportive networks. Based on stakeholder theory Freeman & McVea (2005), future research can design and test collaboration mechanisms involving entrepreneurs, local governments, and communities for example, joint culinary events, collective promotion, or integrated waste management systems.

Fourth, empirical studies should evaluate the effectiveness of sustainability training programs on behavioral change and microenterprise performance. Prior research Chongbang & Bhandari (2024) highlights the importance of context-specific training tailored to entrepreneurs needs. Hence, future work can develop and test practical training modules covering operational management, digital marketing, energy efficiency, and cultural branding.

Fifth, inspired by the concept of technological vulnerability Mercenier & Voyvoda (2018), research should investigate barriers to adopting environmentally friendly technologies and digitalization among small businesses. Factors such as costs, digital literacy, and infrastructure limitations may hinder adoption. Understanding these barriers is crucial for designing appropriate and sustainable interventions.

Finally, comparative studies across Southeast Asian culinary tourism regions are needed to identify best management models. As shown by Guruge (2020) and Zeng et al (2021), balancing commercialization with cultural preservation is a major challenge in heritage-based tourism. Cross-country studies would help identify best practices for developing sustainable, locally grounded culinary tourism.

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GUIDELINES FOR SUSTAINABLE MICE CITY DEVELOPMENT TO SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL EVENTS IN UDON THANI PROVINCE

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Extended abstract

The development of MICE cities towards sustainability is still a major challenge that the country has been facing all along. Due to the impacts from many factors, including climate change, epidemic problems, natural disasters, economic and social problems, there is a development gap in the context of the city level that has not yet achieved a balance of economic, social and environmental development, resulting in a lack of connection between operations and a lack of clear implementation guidelines (Thanwadi et al., 2018). In addition, Udon Thani Province will host the World Horticultural Exposition in 2026. Therefore, the province must have a clear and tangible MICE city development guideline that can lead to the development of a city that truly creates sustainability.

This research was a qualitative research using a case study approach. The objectives were to study the guidelines for sustainable development of MICE cities to support international events in Udon Thani Province, selected a group of 17 specific key informants by collecting data by document study, in-depth interviews, observations and notes. The research results found that the guidelines for sustainable development of MICE cities to support international events in Udon Thani Province consisted of 7 aspects: 1) resource and environmental management, 2) community participation, 3) stakeholder support, 4) awareness of international events, 5) distinct city identity, 6) venue readiness, and 7) economy festivals.

Keywords: Sustainable MICE City Development; International Events Management

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Introduction

According to the government's national development target policy, according to the 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan, Strategic Plan 2, it emphasizes that Thailand is a destination for quality and sustainability tourism (National Economic and Social Development Board, 2025). Therefore, pushing cities to be in line with national policies by developing sustainable cities is very important. In addition, in the future, urban expansion will continue to increase. It is expected that in 2026, Thailand will have an increase in the urban population by 60 percent, resulting in an increase in the demand for housing and various activities. In addition, the trend of land use changes that will transform rural areas into cities is likely to increase the problem of natural resources and environmental degradation in line with the expansion of the economy and urban communities, which is facing changes from both internal and external factors. National policies have emphasized integrated spatial development and focused on balanced development in all dimensions to support future changes (Department of Quality and Environmental Promotion, 2023).

Sustainable urban development is still a major challenge that the country has to face all the time. Due to the impacts from many factors, including climate change, epidemic problems, natural disasters, economic and social problems, urban sustainability must have a continuous process of economic, social, environmental development and other related aspects to create a balance between humans, living conditions, economy, natural resources and technology, which will lead to important results. However, Thailand has tried to accept concepts and principles that change according to global trends all the time. However, changing according to this trend may have both positive and negative effects on Thailand's development, namely, the country has not yet maintained a balance in economics, society and the environment at the same time. The weight of importance therefore falls on only one side. In addition, when applying development concepts in various issues from international principles, the implementation guidelines are challenging to apply and are not clearly tangible. Therefore, there is a development gap in the national context where there is still no balance in economic, social and environmental development, resulting in a lack of connectivity between operations because no agency has a direct role in determining the direction of holistic development to respond to the concept of sustainable development under development in all aspects simultaneously. The implementation in practice has not yet become clearly tangible. Both in terms of guidelines or policies and practices that go in the same direction (Thanwadi et al., 2018)

The development of a city with potential, readiness and suitability for development, such as a MICE City, which creates the economy and generates income for the country, but lacks a balanced approach to urban development, may affect the environment, resources and sustainability in the city. A MICE city is a city with the potential to support meetings, incentive travel, professional meetings and exhibitions in Thailand. Udon Thani Province was announced as a MICE city in 2020 (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, 2021) and in 2026, Udon Thani Province was chosen to host the World Horticultural Exposition. It is the first landmark event in the Greater Mekong Subregion under the concept of Diversity of Life: Connecting People, Water and Plants for Sustainable Living. The event will be held from 1 November 2026 – 14 March 2027 (134 days) at Nong Dae wetlands, Kut Sa Subdistrict, Mueang District, Udon Thani Province, covering an area of 1,030 rai, divided into 400 rai of water and 630 rai of land (Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, 2023).

The Udon Thani International Horticultural Exposition is the first of its kind in the Northeast, an international event expected to attract 3.6 million attendees and cost up to 2.5 billion baht (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, 2022). Organizing an international event is a large-scale event that requires a large amount of budget and resources. It should be properly managed, creating sustainability for the city, benefiting society and having a proper economic impact (Pereira et al, 2021).

Therefore, the researcher is interested in studying the guidelines for sustainable MICE city development to support international event organization in Udon Thani Province and to develop the potential of the MICE industry of the province to be another potential of the country.

Objectives

Studying the development guidelines for a sustainable MICE city to support the organization of international events in Udon Thani Province.

Research Methodology

This research is a qualitative research. The researcher has chosen to use the case study approach because it is an in-depth study of a specific case based on the experiences of 17 key informants. There are representatives from government agencies, private sectors, public sectors, and education sectors who are involved in driving the MICE industry in Udon Thani Province. They can convey stories from their experiences according to the research objectives. For the completeness of the study results that can reflect ideas and perspectives (Creswell, 1998), the researcher must use observation methods along with in-depth interviews to obtain different data. The interviews lasted approximately 40-60 minutes. Before the interviews, the researcher received permission from the interviewees to record the audio and record the interviews. Then, the researcher collected data along with transcription of the audio recordings to arrange the sequence of events and synthesize the data to create conclusions according to the research objectives that require theoretical sensitivity. The tools used for data collection included open-ended questions, notebooks, pens, and mobile phones.

1. Populations and Sample

A group of experts was identified and prepared, in which the researcher was confident that the informants had knowledge, understanding, and cooperation in answering the questions. The experts were selected using a purposive sampling method, with 17 key informants in this study (Macmillan, 1971). The criteria for selecting experts were as follows:

1) Being a person who is involved in driving the MICE industry in the MICE city of Udon Thani Province in terms of policy, both directly and indirectly, 5 people, namely 1) Director of the Office of Convention and Exhibition Promotion, Central Region 2) Director of the MICE Industry Potential Development Division, TCEB 3) Director of the Office of Convention and Exhibition Promotion, Northeast Region 4) Deputy Governor of Udon Thani Province and 5) Mayor of Kut Sa Subdistrict Administrative Organization, Mueang District, Udon Thani Province

2) Being an organizer in the target area and being a member of the MICE committee of the province, 5 people, namely 1) President of the Udon Thani Provincial Industrial Council 2) Expert Policy and Plan Analyst, Udon Thani Provincial Tourism and Sports Office 3) President of the Udon Thani Provincial Tourism Industry Council 4) Head of the Provincial Tourism and Sports Office and 5) Director of the Udon Thani Agricultural Research and Development Center

3) Being a business operator in the target area and participating in driving MICE in the target area directly and indirectly 3 persons who have been in business for at least 5 years: 1) Manager of Tingkorn Tour Co., Ltd. 2) Manager of Charoen Hotel Udon Thani and 3) Manager of Chatchawan Tour Co., Ltd.

4) Be an academic with experience in conducting research related to the MICE industry and participating in driving MICE in the target areas, both directly and indirectly, for at least 3 years, 4 persons who are: 1) Deputy Director of the Center of Excellence in MICE, Tourism and Service, Faculty of Management Science, Udon Thani Rajabhat University 2) Lecturer in Tourism and Event Management, Faculty of Management Science, Udon Thani Rajabhat University 3) Director of the Center of Excellence in MICE Industry and Business Events (CEMBIE), Khon Kaen Province and 4) Project Director of M.C.C. Exhibition Organizer Co., Ltd. and Subcommittee on Education and Development of the Exhibition Association (Thailand)

2. Research Tools

It consists of an in-depth interview form with open-ended questions that are adapted to be consistent with the research objectives, the sustainable development of MICE cities to support the organization of international events in Udon Thani Province. In addition, a voice recorder, notebooks, pens, mobile phones, and the researcher themselves are also considered important tools in the research.

3. Data Collection

It is a collection of data from 2 sources: secondary data from reviewing books, textbooks, and research related to the content of the guidelines for sustainable MICE city development to support the organization of international events in Udon Thani Province, and primary data from in-depth interviews with key informants, along with participatory observation of the meeting to prepare for the organization of international events in Udon Thani Province within the period from 1 November 2024 - 31 January 2025.

4. Data Analysis

The researcher summarized the issues from the transcription of the in-depth interviews to analyze the content data accurately and to the point in describing the phenomenon by selecting key informants who have knowledge and experience in driving the MICE city in Udon Thani Province, as well as interpreting the data obtained from the opinions of the informants as the main factor. In addition, the researcher has checked the reliability by triangulation (Chantavanich, 2011) consisting of (1) Data, considering the number of key informants that has changed due to different experiences and backgrounds. (2) Theory, which is different from the original. Interpretation with different theoretical concepts from the original, such as sustainable MICE city development, international event organization, to check that the data is close to the dimensions of studying the guidelines for sustainable MICE city development to support international event organization, which is the objective of this research. (3) Researcher, the number of researchers and research assistants, more than 1 person, is responsible for recording images, recording audio, and jointly interviewing key informants. Then, the interviews are brought back for joint analysis to find opinions or issues that can be used to support the research results more clearly. (4) Research methodology (Method) From in-depth interviews with key informants, along with observation and study of information from supporting documents.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

The concept of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) SDGs are global development goals proposed by the United Nations (UN) in 2015 and all countries, including Thailand, have endorsed and pledged to join in achieving these goals by 2030. SDGs are goals that require a change in mindset and development at the grassroots level, including balanced development, meaning that people's lives are secure. Especially the little people and the vulnerable (Jiranan, 2020). The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are important goals that have set an overall framework that will lead to development that connects all dimensions of sustainability together in 5 dimensions: Social (People), covering Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5; Economic (Prosperity), covering Goals 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11; Environmental (Planet), covering Goals 6, 12, 13, 14, and 15; Peace and Institutions (Peace), covering Goal 16; and Partnership, covering Goal 17 by 2030. Thailand, as a member state of the United Nations (UN), has signed and committed to cooperate with other countries in implementing the goals, with Goal 11 being on making cities and human settlements inclusive. Safe, resilient and sustainable is one of the 17 goals that are very important for urban and social development and is directly related to many international agreements such as the New Urban Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (Wichitbusaba, 2017). In addition, in creating cities and human settlements covering safety, resilience, it is estimated that the world's urban population by 2050 has an urgent need to apply good urban planning practices to create sustainable communities in the environments they live and care for. While governments and planning agencies have a clear role in achieving better outcomes in urban development, by making cities and communities rely on the important role of environmentally friendly green spaces, providing sustainability benefits related to improving air and water quality, temperature control, increasing recreational opportunities and social benefits, as well as having public green spaces that are important for connecting landscapes and biota of the ecosystem (Chris, 2018).

Guidelines for sustainable MICE city development to support international events in Udon Thani Province The results of the study can be summarized as follows:

1) Resource and Environmental Management. It is the setting of urban development goals that take into account environmental impacts and do not create an environment that is toxic to future generations of the city. There is the creation of green spaces in the city by reducing energy, reducing carbon, creating an urban ecosystem, supporting behavioral changes, integrating sustainability in environmentally friendly products, and providing low-carbon transportation to cities and MICE venues. The informants expressed consistent opinions on resource and environmental management as follows:

“Regarding green spaces and cities, it must start with urban planning. In fact, our urban planning wants to have green spaces. Regarding being an environmentally friendly city, it means having a clear strategic plan.” (Informant 16)

“Udon has created green spaces with trees, parks, taking care of more trees, and there are forests and parks. Regarding forests, there are water sources. I think the environment should be fine, but we need to help create more awareness.” (Informant 3)

“Changing behavior to protect the environment should provide alternatives, such as using cloth bags instead of plastic bags. For example, organizing an event, there should be no plastic bags or foam in the event.” (Informant 11)

“We have safe vehicles with CCTV cameras, and electric vehicles. If we use public transportation by electric vehicles, it reduces gas emissions, which saves costs. Low-carbon transportation will begin in 2025 to support MICE activities.” (Informant 4)

2) Community participation. This is the participation in planning the MICE event of the community, including participation in the implementation of the MICE event, participation in the sharing of benefits from the MICE event, participation in the evaluation of the community’s MICE performance, and the implementation of the community’s MICE event in collaboration with government agencies and the private sector. The informants expressed their opinions in line with the community’s participation as follows:

“If the word community has some participation, coming to make a provincial plan, there is talk of a MICE city, there is a plan, there is adaptation, there is preparation. This means that the government sector invites the community, as a community representative, a business representative, a youth representative, a representative of shop and hotel operators. Communities that are ready have the potential to present themselves as representatives. In this forum, there is this group as well.” (Informant 11)

“Udon has the potential by having tourist attractions that attract and distribute to the community like Ban Chiang. There are food and accommodation for tourists to come and gain experiences in the community, visiting world heritage sites, which the community has organized events, whether it is the way of life, culture of the community itself, the identity of the community itself.” (Informant 5)

“The community can work together with business establishments to push MICE towards sustainability because nowadays, many activities always refer to the community because in many activities, they refer to the community, taking them to visit places that belong to the community, to observe the work in the community.” (Informant 3)

3) Support from stakeholders. Stakeholders have a network linked to MICE business organizations, participate in supporting the organization of MICE events in the area, can link business networks and tourism services with MICE events or activities, promote the organization of events and various activities in accordance with the cultural identity of the city, resulting in sustainable MICE events in all sectors, and participate in making MICE businesses show responsibility towards society and the environment. The informants expressed consistent opinions regarding support from stakeholders as follows:

“The process of stakeholder participation has improved a lot. The main agency, if asked who is the initiator, is the private sector first. The first group of stakeholders, starting with the government sector, of course, MICE. But the continuation to use the word MICE is the private sector. It can move forward, it gives a picture and atmosphere of being a meeting city.” (Informant 12)

“Main stakeholders such as the tourism association, the tourism industry, the Board of Trade and Industry, are big gears that have businesses linked to organizing MICE events. They have come together, such as the hotel association that came together because of the COVID situation. If there is any situation, there will be a gathering.” (Informant 3)

“The province must have a clear policy and assign duties to those involved, stakeholders, as the main ones, that is, to perform the main duties. In managing the province’s MICE industry” (Informant 7)

4) Awareness of international events. It is about creating awareness about MICE, promoting the participation of local people in MICE and international event organization, creating a good image of the city, the environment of the city, and the convenience of entering the city or the event venue, including managing the risk of event cancellation and the safety of the city. The informants expressed consistent opinions about creating awareness of international event organization as follows:

“Let Udon people see the benefits of organizing international events, that is, make them see the benefits of participation, so they can come and do it. On the other hand, if it is negative, they may look at the impact that will occur from organizing the event. It depends on what it will be like.” (Informant 1)

“There should be a matter of creating awareness of being a good host in order to create a good image for welcoming tourists who will come to join MICE activities.” (Informant 5)

“Managing risks, safety, from the city’s perspective, may not be able to do anything if the event is canceled. Safety, preparing for emergency assistance, having agencies to help in case of an incident, tour guides to visit the event, good experience in participating in the event, manuals, emergency response.” (Informant 1)

5) Distinctive City Identity. It is the creation of an identity that is appropriate for organizing a MICE event. There is the creation of consistency in identifying the city by seeing its own value and helping to develop the city's identity, as well as the city having outstanding creative cultural capital. The informants expressed their opinions in line with the distinctive identity of the city as follows:

“Many cities are trying to create or find something new. If we want sustainability, we have to bring out our identity, such as Ban Chiang's jar pattern. Let's see how to use it. Udon's identity is very much. It is very clear. The oldest is Ban Chiang.” (Informant 3)

“Udon is a peaceful city even though we have many cultures, many races, Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese, and there is the Red Lotus Sea. Udon is a city of Dharma, nature, culture, and Plus. There are people of many ages who say that Udon is a peaceful city because people come to worship Buddha, come for Dharma, that is, come and feel comfortable. It should be called Hilling, come and get mental therapy. Everyone comes with this answer that Udon has all the identities. Come and feel comfortable, peaceful mind.” (Informant 10)

6) Venue Readiness. It is a standard MICE venue, with a variety of sizes to choose from according to the needs of the organizers. There are standard facilities and equipment for organizing the event. There is professional service in the MICE venue. The informants expressed their opinions in line with the readiness of the venue as follows:

“The standard for organizing MICE events, hotels, universities must use their strengths to create benefits such as readiness, facilities, quantity, and adequacy of the venue. It has standards.” (Informant 1)

“Udon Thani is ready to organize international events. However, if it is the UD Town conference hall, it can accommodate 4,000 people, but there are limitations in terms of the airport and inter-regional flights. The venue is ready and up to standard, in terms of IT, the data center of Udon Rajabhat University, the venue, and language knowledge.” (Informant 5)

“The MICE service is up to standard. Most of them only serve Thai people. Next year, when the high-speed rail is completed, almost a million Chinese people will come. The standards must be raised, especially in terms of language. We need to prepare a lot before organizing the Royal Flora Expo.” (Informant 4)

7) Festival Economy. It is the promotion of creative MICE events to increase the value of the event and increase economic value. There is the promotion of cooperation in MICE business networks, tourism service businesses, and investment in the area. There is the upgrading of the city's infrastructure to attract new investments. It promotes the city as a destination for events to increase regional trade. The informants expressed consistent opinions on economic creation through festivals as follows:

“Standard events will create quality events for local people. Therefore, it will be a cycle of sustainable event management. The word sustainable does not mean organizing events that reduce global warming. Sustainability means truly meeting the needs of people in the city. It will not go anywhere. People in the city will have jobs and businesses will have income.” (Informant 6)

“Stakeholders must study competitors and neighboring provinces. They must create guidelines to promote creative ideas through festivals. There must be joint business promotion and communication. Cooperation will be something that will create strength for Udon Thani. Join hands from start to finish. Build credibility for the province.” (Informant 1)

From the results of the qualitative research, we can summarize the guidelines for sustainable MICE city development to support the organization of international events in Udon Thani Province as shown in Figure 1 as follows:

Figure 1 : Guidelines for sustainable MICE city development to support international events in Udon Thani Province



2. Discussion

Guidelines for sustainable development of MICE cities to support the organization of international events. The results of the study found that:

Udon Thani MICE City In terms of resource and environmental management, it is to set the target of urban development by taking into account the environmental impact, creating green spaces in the city, reducing energy, reducing carbon, creating an urban ecosystem, changing the behavior of using environmentally friendly products, and having low-carbon transportation. Chris (2018) said that by making cities and communities rely on the important role of environmentally friendly green spaces, providing benefits for sustainability. In terms of community participation, it is to participate in planning the MICE event, implementing it, sharing benefits, evaluating results, and collaborating with government agencies and the private sector. This is consistent with the research of Cohen & Uphoff (1981) who mentioned community participation that community members must be involved in 4 dimensions: 1) participating in deciding what to do and how to do it, 2) participating in sacrificing development, including implementing the decision, 3) participating in sharing benefits from operations, and 4) participating in project evaluation. In terms of support from stakeholders, it is to have a network with MICE business organizations, supporting the organization of MICE events in the area, in accordance with the cultural identity of the city, and creating sustainable MICE events in all sectors. This is consistent with the concept of Petersen et al. (2005) who said that stakeholders in the MICE industry It is an integration of work within the supply chain, both internal integration related to the determination of the structure and work procedures of the units within the area that have a collaborative process, and external integration is a collaboration between the organizers within the area and the suppliers, with the aim of solving problems and increasing the efficiency of working together. In terms of creating awareness of organizing international events, it is creating awareness of organizing MICE and organizing international events, creating a good image of the city, environment, convenience, risk management, and city safety.

This is consistent with the concept of Jago and Shaw (1998), who said that creating awareness of organizing international events must also give importance to sustainability. Because organizing international events is a special activity that has a plan and set procedures by bringing groups of people together to share experiences and knowledge together to create consistency with economic, social, cultural, and environmental goals in a sustainable manner. In terms of a distinct city identity, it is creating an identity that is appropriate for organizing MICE events, identifying the city, seeing its own value, and helping to develop the city's identity, and having outstanding creative cultural capital. This is consistent with the research of Aitken (2002), who said that having a distinct city identity can lead to being a sustainable destination for MICE travelers worldwide by strengthening the brand and creating a unique destination. In terms of venue readiness, there are standard MICE venues that are available in a variety of sizes according to the needs of the organizers, with facilities. And the equipment that organizes the event with standards In line with the concept of Alananzeh (2019), it is necessary to give importance to having a place that can accommodate MICE travelers from around the world. By organizing international events as one of the drivers of the service and tourism economy strongly in MICE cities, with both direct and indirect impacts. In terms of creating an economy through festivals, it is to promote

MICE events with creativity to add value to the event and increase the economic value. Investing in the area There is an upgrade of infrastructure to attract new investments. In line with the concept of Richards & Palmar (2010), who said that taking into account the economic, cultural and social benefits linked to the festival allows the city to develop. A city of importance Or including cultural festivals as an important foundation of displaying activity results

Research recommendations

1. The research results reflect that the sustainable development of MICE cities to support international events in Udon Thani Province is very important. MICE cities must therefore urgently develop policies and plans for sustainable urban development that can be implemented in a tangible way to demonstrate the potential and readiness of the area to be a sustainable MICE destination, to create a good image for the city, to be able to attract attention prominently, and to be ready to host international events.

2. This research is a specific study of the sustainable development of MICE cities to support international events in Udon Thani Province. It should study issues related to risk prevention or impacts in organizing events in order to obtain different and useful information that can be used to expand the study of preparation for international events.

3. The committee for developing MICE city assessment criteria of the Office of the Convention and Exhibition Bureau can use the sustainable development of MICE cities to support international events in Udon Thani Province to develop MICE city assessment criteria as a model for setting new criteria to be used to develop MICE cities that can create sustainability.

4. Policy executives and the MICE committee of Udon Thani Province have guidelines for developing sustainable MICE cities to support international events. Udon Thani Province to use in planning the strategy for developing the potential of MICE cities sustainably to support the organization of international events.

5. This research is a study on the phenomenon of sustainable MICE city development guidelines to support the organization of international events in Udon Thani Province only. It should be studied from other locations to obtain more interesting comparative data. It should also study the strategy plan for sustainable MICE city development to support the organization of international events so that the province or related agencies can use it as a guideline for planning the development of effective events in the future.

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UNLOCKING DESTINATION APPEAL: A SCALE VALIDATION OF INNOVATION PRACTICES IN FOOD TOURISM CONTEXTS

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Extended abstract

This paper aims to investigate the scale validation of innovation practices, focusing on the tourist destination image in the context of food tourism in Malaysia. By using quantitative approach, data were collected through various method including online survey and self-administered at KLIA1 and KLIA2 or any other public hub station. A total of 200 samples were received coming from both domestic and international tourists. The data then analyzed by using SPSS to validate the Cronbach's Alpha for coefficient alpha analysis and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to measure the validity of item used. To examine the scale validation of innovation practices, the study employs Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The analysis includes key procedures including first-order Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to validate the constructs and its respective items. For this particular procedure, the scale measurement only focusing on innovation practices. Based on the construct, innovation practices were measured by using five dimensions namely; product, service, process, organizational, and marketing innovation. The construct is a crucial part in measuring the reaction between tourist destination image and its influence on food tourism in Malaysia

Keywords: Destination Image, Tourism, Innovation Practices, CB-SEM, Food Tourism

Introduction

Innovation practices recognized as a pivotal tool in shaping destination image and competitiveness in tourism industry. The rapid advancement of technology has significantly impacted the landscapes of food tourism by enhancing the quality of visitor experiences. Business owners are increasingly leveraging digital tools to build customer trust, improve market visibility, and optimize profitability (Gheribi & Bonadonna, 2019). By referring to the Malaysia Budget 2025 that has been announced, RM550 million has been accumulated by the government of Malaysia for improvement and development of the tourism destination and tourism image in accordance to the upcoming Visit Malaysia year 2026 (New Straits Times, 2024).

This funding is very important for the destination to be more equipped with competitiveness with the neighboring countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, and Singapore. Previous scholar analyzed the use of technology and innovation in the industry is prominent for the sustainability development of the industry (Hassan, et al., 2019). Past studies elaborated more on innovation where it influenced by various factors including technological advancement (Islam, et al., 2019).

In addition, prior to the innovation idea in tourism industry, the focus can be turned to the tourist destination image (Tassiello & Tillotson, 2020). An evident from Indonesia indicated that creativity and innovative factors supporting tourism activities in Indonesia have attracted tourist to come to Indonesia (Lita, et al., 2020). Their policy to develop a creative and innovative reason to be implemented in the industry has become lethal. In relation with theory of innovation by Schumpeter (1952), it is understandable that innovation is an integral part to the food tourism industry (Bee, et al., 2019). It derives from the innovation studies where the integral elements in the innovation practices including product, process, service, organizational, and marketing were explored (Lee, et al. 2016).

Relatively, the introduction of innovation practices has benefited tourism industry. The subsequent from the implementation, the creation of new motivation and experience could create new market segments in Malaysian food tourism (Abdullah, et al., 2023). Recent study shows that there is uncertainty from the business owner in applying innovation, however, the empirical evidence demonstrated that innovation has a major influence for the adaptability and competitive advantage (Hjalager, 2022).

However, the issue regarding innovation practices has been relatively impacting tourist destination image and food tourism industry in Malaysia negatively. This is due to the business organization in food tourism would not taking a risky approach to apply such a costly figure due to the limited knowledge on the innovation application (Nor, et al., 2020). Other than that, the unpredictable knowledge era through technology and innovation has become reliable to the innovation strategy in tourism development especially in food tourism (Yilmaz & Comez, 2020). Nevertheless, there have been a limited studies on the innovation practices relation with tourist destination image in the context of food tourism in Malaysia.

Past studies have shown that various innovation practices constructs have been discussed in the context of food tourism, however, it lacks of evidence whether innovation practices could possibly bring a success towards destination image in the context of food tourism in Malaysia (Mohd Alias, et al., 2024; Alias, et al., 2021; Mohammad, et al., 2019; Tan, et al., 2019). The discussion on the subject had not been discussed widely as well as published and unpublished studies from the related subject. Hence, this paper is aiming to validate the innovation practices construct and its predictors with the validation will have a better interpretation on the food tourism context in Malaysia.

Objectives

In connection of this background, the objective of this paper is as follows:

1. To identify the dimensions of innovation practices in the context of Malaysian food tourism industry.
2. To validate the dimensions of innovation practices in the context of Malaysian food tourism industry.

Hypothesis

In this paper, innovation practices are discussed to analyze whether the dimension used can be confirmed through the analysis tools namely SPSS and SEM. By focusing on SEM, first-order confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) shows the exact value from the measurement. The hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Confirming the innovation practices dimension:

These dimensions are organized to validate innovation practices construct for this particular study with its dimensions; product innovation, service innovation, process innovation, organizational innovation, and marketing innovation.

Research Methodology

Populations and Sample

This paper aims for a large number of populations which focusing on domestic tourists and international arrivals who travel to Malaysia and have tried Malaysian food. Based on the statistical data from Tourism Malaysia, the significant number of tourists is employed. Recent study elaborated more on the topic where in this kind of study, measuring significant changes in tourism activities from the mobility of tourist is crucial to gain their perspective on the development. The use of these particular populations is considered reliable in accordance to study perspectives and characteristics that related to the purpose of the study (Fitrizal, et al., 2021). Other than that, other scholar mentioned about the difficulty in drawing the actual population of tourist (Bayih & Singh, 2020). This kind of method is useful to get the population needed for the purpose. Statista has reported that in 2023, 213.74 million domestic tourists recorded have travelled around Malaysia (Siddharta, 2024). On the other hand, Tourism Malaysia reported that in 2023, there were approximately 20.1 million international arrivals from all over the world. From the number, 11.8 million were from Southeast Asia. These number indicated that domestic and international tourist have significant motive to travel to Malaysia whether it is because of education, business, visit friends and relatives, or even for food tourism. Thus, the sample in this study are coming from domestic and international tourists.

Furthermore, the criteria for the respondent to legally participate is they should be in the age of 18 years old and above (Halpern, et al., 2021). Furthermore, the method uses in this quantitative study is convenience sampling. In non-probability sampling, convenience sampling is the data collection process from a research population that is reachable (Golzar & Tajik, 2022; Rahi, 2017). Previous scholar defined convenience sampling as a technique which allow researcher to go to the public location and

- H1(a): Product is confirmed as innovation practices dimension.
- H1(b): Service is confirmed as innovation practices dimension.
- H1(c): Process is confirmed as innovation practices dimension.
- H1(d): Organizational is confirmed as innovation practices dimension.
- H1(e): Marketing is confirmed as innovation practices dimension.

ask the passer-by to participate as respondent (MacNealy, 1999). In this study, convenience sampling is considered applicable as it has several benefits; (1) the researcher can minimize effort in selecting respondents, (2) the sampling process is cost-effective and requires minimal financial resources, (3) less time is needed to manage and administer the sample, and (4) the researcher is required to prepare a comprehensive list on the entire population.

Research Tools

This paper monopolizing survey conducts by referring to the quantitative research approach. This study uses questionnaire for data collection as it suggested as one of the strategies to gather the data. Sekaran and Bougie (2020) asserted that questionnaire distribution is the most practical way to gain the data from the convenience respondent.

Data Collection

There are various ways to administer the survey including personal administration, email, and any technological dissemination. The settings of the questionnaire to be administered was at Kuala Lumpur International Airport 1 and 2 or any public transportation hubs as it is reliable for the researcher to gather the data (Phoon, 2021). In accordance to the sampling method, pilot study was distributed to 200 respondents to measure the data. In selecting data analysis for pilot study, as this study purposely using CB-SEM to validate the first-order of CFA scale of innovation practices, large dataset over 200 samples is required (Hair, et al., 2019; Memon, et al., 2020). However, according to Kline (2016) where he clearly stated that the sample over 200 is recommended, on the other hand, the sample below 100 is not reliable in any SEM technique. Thus, for the data from pilot study to be effective, the suggested

number of samples is taken as consideration. It is reliable for the data to be measured and analysed by using the appropriate methodology. For research instrument, innovation practices construct consists of five dimensions and 25 items in total measured using 10-Likert scale. As mentioned by previous scholar, 10-point Likert scale is efficient in operating measurement model and more reliable to the metrics analysis (Awang, et al., 2016). Based on the statement by the justification mentioned, a scale without label is suggested in the current study ranges from 1 (Strongly Disagree) and 10 (Strongly Agree).

Data Analysis

In this particular study, the analysis of research data is focusing on CB-SEM to validate the first-order of CFA. This procedure is mentioned by scholars as the main structure to analyze convergent and discriminant validity (Watkins, 2018). Furthermore, CFA is used to evaluate reliability and variance after a new scale was developed. Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2017) supported with the elaboration of CFA that uses fit indices to measure the satisfactory fit. This study is focusing on the chi-square statistics that is the traditional analysis to measure overall model fit. Meanwhile, from past studies indicated that, a good model fit would be stated as $p > 0.05$ (Byrne, 2010; Pallant, 2010).

During convergent validity and to see whether the data has discriminant result, the data needs to go through the next procedure. To see whether the model fit is good or bad, the measurement can be classified into two different breakdowns; (1) small χ^2 - values represent the bad fit and large χ^2 - values represents a good fit. The common practice to assess the goodness of fit is previewed as CMIN/df, GFI, P, and RMSEA. Table 1 below shows the assessment of the above statement:

Table 1:
Assessment of goodness of fit

Indices	Abbreviation	Acceptable Level
Chi-Square	(χ^2) (df/p)	$p > 0.05$ at $\alpha = 0.05$
Goodness of Fit	GFI	GFI > 0.90
Probability	P	> 0.05
Root Mean Squared of Approximation	RMSEA	RMSEA < 0.50

Source: Kline (1996); Hair et al. (2017); Byrne (2010); Ernest (2008)

The procedure to measure the goodness of fit is one of the procedures that is needed for the analysis. Campbell and Fiske (1959) explained about convergent validity are related to the latent variable that measures a several components namely values between variables and indicators. The process is done to observe whether the indicator used is suitable for the construct or otherwise, need to be removed. As stated by Gaskin (2016), an appropriate result should be prioritized in convergent validity and if there is no converge in the item, removal of the item is needed. On the other hand, discriminant validity is the requirement for the system to be processed. It looked upon coefficient and correlation among the components used (Gaskin, 2016). The scale validation for innovation practices construct is shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2:
Results of First Order CFA of Innovation Practices Dimensions

Variables	Chi-Square (χ^2)	(df)	GFI	P- Value	RMSEA
Product	14.582	6	0.972	0.024	0.085
Service	4.380	2	0.989	0.989	0.078
Process	11.726	7	0.978	0.978	0.058
Organizational	4.000	3	0.990	0.990	0.041
Marketing	7.561	4	0.982	0.982	0.067

After analysis by using CFA, the results were clearly shown in the Table 2. There were a few items that need to be removed to get a fit model. For product innovation and process innovation dimensions, all items are considered fit within the first order of CFA. However, for service innovation, SRV5 was dropped to get a good fit for the model. For organizational innovation and marketing innovation, one item ORG5 and MKT1 were dropped to get the model validated. As mentioned by Nijssen and Douglas (2004), the item dropped is not necessarily unfit, but it is through a sensible validation to get a good model fit. It is one of the procedures in CFA that can be taken into consideration. Table 3 below shows the result from the estimated parameters between latent variables and indicators:

Table 3:
Estimated Parameters Between Latent Variables and Indicators

Latent	Indicator	Standardized Weight	Reg.S. E.	C. R.	P
Product	PRD1	0.919	0.052	8.977	***
	PRD2	0.973	0.027	6.762	***
	PRD3	0.963	0.033	7.634	***
	PRD4	0.961	0.034	7.805	***
	PRD5	0.946	0.052	8.401	***
Service	SRV1	0.899	0.084	8.818	***
	SRV2	0.611	0.071	5.809	***
	SRV3	0.729	0.209	10.911	***
	SRV4	0.832	0.144	9.646	***
Process	PRS1	0.919	0.052	9.721	***
	PRS2	0.973	0.027	8.977	***
	PRS3	0.963	0.033	7.634	***
	PRS4	0.961	0.034	7.805	***
	PRS5	0.946	0.052	8.401	***
Organizational	ORG1	0.939	0.057	7.489	***
	ORG2	0.950	0.067	7.900	***
	ORG3	0.969	0.033	6.245	***
	ORG4	0.936	0.059	7.591	***
Marketing	MKT2	0.891	0.103	9.046	***
	MKT3	0.922	0.064	8.558	***
	MKT4	0.975	0.036	5.125	***
	MKT5	0.966	0.041	6.300	***

Based on the Table 3 above, referred to standardized regression weight in SEM AMOS, the magnitude of all indicators must be 0.40 and above (Hatcher, 1994). Meanwhile, the standard error (S.E.) recorded for all items were balance which the value is not too large and not too small (Byrne, 2013). The critical ratio (C.R.) values that have been listed show the significance parameters which exceeded the benchmark of ± 1.96 . Therefore, for these particular dimensions, the values have achieved the minimum acceptable values as mentioned by Fornell and Larcker (1981).

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The study aiming to identify the dimensions of innovation practices and validate the scale of the dimension of innovation practices in the context of food tourism in Malaysia. After the analysis, the first-order of CFA confirmed the construct validity, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the innovation practices dimensions. Based on the results, all factor loading exceed the threshold and AVE and CR have been recorded above acceptable levels. The value is crucial to support reliability and internal consistency of the study. Based on the Schumpeterian innovation theory and its expansion, these results indicated that the theory used which posits the perceived innovative in the tourism industry specifically in food tourism sector enhances adoption likelihood.

In food tourism in Malaysia, product offerings, service quality, culinary style, and food tasting experience are more captivate tourist loyalty and their intangible experience. Thus, from other theoretical perspectives and implications, the validated scale will have an impact to tourism innovation literature by providing a reliable measurement for measuring innovation practices focusing on food tourism in Malaysia. It will also contribute to enhance destination image that related to the upcoming Visit Malaysia Year 2026. On the other hand, this study will be reliable to enhance the innovation efforts from practical perspectives. The effort should align with tourists' evolving expectations in seeking novelty, authenticity, quality, and creative.

Conclusion

This study requires researcher to confirm the scale of innovation practices dimensions to be part in the construct. Eventually, all scale discussed have been validated and accepted for the study progression. It indicates that innovation practices dimensions will be a pivotal role in terms of destination image development in the context of food tourism in Malaysia.

Research recommendations

Tourist destination image in Malaysia should be improved in order to get recognition by the tourist as the Visit Malaysia Year 2026 (VMY2026) is an important aspect to be focused on. As innovation practices become a vital point for the improvement, there are several recommendations for the future research that can be clarified based on the findings of scale validation of innovation practices dimensions:

1. Future research should investigate how tourist's perceived innovativeness of food tourism experiences in Malaysia that eventually influences destination loyalty, satisfaction, and revisit the destination for the common purpose.
2. Future studies should explore how food tourism businesses such as SMEs, hawkers, and small-scale restaurant perceive the application of innovation practices and benefit its initiatives. Mixed method approach should be appropriate to distinguish the findings.
3. Cross cultural studies could be one of the ways to validate innovation practices scale in different regions and origins. It would boost its robustness and generalization as well as insight to customize the expectations of international tourists towards food tourism quality.

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BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF GREEN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY: TRENDS, CLUSTERS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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Abstract

The hospitality industry is increasingly recognizing the importance of sustainable practices, with Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) emerging as a crucial strategy for achieving environmental sustainability. This study conducts a bibliometric analysis of GHRM within the hospitality sector, identifying key trends, influential publications, research clusters, and thematic developments. Using the Scopus database, a comprehensive search was performed to collect relevant scholarly articles, followed by an in-depth analysis utilizing VOSviewer for network visualization and thematic mapping. The findings reveal a growing interest in GHRM, particularly in relation to employee engagement, corporate social responsibility, and organizational performance. The analysis highlights dominant research themes, collaborative networks among scholars, and the evolution of GHRM discussions over time. Additionally, emerging trends suggest a shift toward integrating technology and digital tools to enhance sustainable HRM practices. This study contributes to the existing literature by offering a systematic overview of GHRM research in hospitality, providing valuable insights for academics, practitioners, and policymakers. The findings underscore the necessity for future research to explore innovative GHRM strategies that align with the industry's sustainability goals while maintaining competitive advantage.

Purpose - Despite growing GHRM research, the literature remains fragmented; this study uses bibliometric analysis to map trends, visualize keyword networks with VOSviewer, and identify emerging themes for future research.

Design/methodology/approach - A total of 105 English-language peer-reviewed articles from 2016 to 2025 on GHRM in hospitality and tourism were retrieved from Scopus and analyzed using VOSviewer (and optionally Bibliometrix) through data cleaning, visualization, and interpretation to identify key themes, trends, and scholarly network structures. Prima flow digram are used.

Findings - The bibliometric analysis reveals that GHRM in hospitality is a dynamic and evolving field. Core themes such as sustainability, environmental performance, and resource management remain prominent, while emerging areas like digital transformation and employee engagement indicate new research frontiers.

Research limitations - The evolving GHRM research in the hospitality sector highlights key areas for future investigation: integrating HRM theories with sustainability frameworks (Ren et al., 2018), exploring cross-cultural and regional variations, especially in emerging economies (Renwick et al., 2016), examining the role of technology in GHRM adoption (Pham et al., 2019), assessing the psychological and organizational impacts on employee well-being and performance (Kim et al., 2019), and evaluating the policy implications of GHRM for regulatory compliance and sustainability certifications (Renwick et al., 2016).

Originality/value - This study offers a comprehensive overview of GHRM research trends, highlighting core themes and emerging topics. It provides a roadmap for future research, facilitating both academic inquiry and practical implementation of sustainable HR practices in the hospitality industry.

Keywords: Green Human Resource Management, Hospitality Industry, Bibliometric Analysis, Sustainability, VOSviewer, Scopus.

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Introduction

Sustainability has become a critical focus in the hospitality industry as hotels and tourism operators strive to balance profitability with environmental and social responsibility. Within this context, GHRM has emerged as a strategic approach that integrates eco-friendly principles into HR policies and practices. GHRM impacts recruitment, training, performance management, and employee engagement, thereby contributing to an organization's overall sustainability performance.

Literature review

Definition

GHRM means using environmentally friendly ideas in human resource (HR) activities to help organizations become more sustainable. This includes adding green practices to hiring, training, performance evaluation, and how employees are involved at work (Renwick et al., 2016). In the hospitality industry, GHRM is used as a strategy to support environmental goals while also staying competitive and keeping employees productive.

Trend (2020 – 2025)

From 2020 to 2025, there has been a big increase in research about GHRM in the hospitality industry. Many studies focus on important topics like sustainability, getting employees more involved, and using digital technology. New research also looks at how to use technology in HR, create green ideas, and understand how GHRM affects employees' feelings and behaviour (Pham et al., 2019). Recent studies show that the focus is moving from basic green ideas to using modern digital tools to improve HR work.

Issue

Even though GHRM has many benefits, it still faces several problems in the hospitality industry. One big issue is that there are no clear standards or guidelines for how to use green HR practices. This makes it hard for companies to follow the same way and create common best practices. Some employees and managers do not fully believe in green practices, which can make GHRM less effective (Bakari et al., 2024). Also, some organizations are not ready to change, and they think green practices are too expensive or not important. In addition, different cultures and laws in each country make it harder to apply GHRM everywhere. There is also not enough research on how GHRM affects company performance over a long time, especially in developing countries (Ren et al., 2018). Darvishmotevali & Altinay (2022) say that without good leadership and support from employees, GHRM may not bring real results because people do not fully understand or support it.

Perspective organization in hospitality industry

In the hospitality industry, many organizations now see GHRM as important for both business strategy and daily operations. Because the industry depends a lot on people and is under pressure to be more environmentally friendly, hotels and tourism companies are starting to include sustainability in their HR practices. For these organizations, GHRM is more than just a responsibility - it helps improve their reputation, follow environmental rules, keep employees happy, and work more efficiently.

When hospitality companies use GHRM, they can reduce harm to the environment by hiring people who care about the environment, giving green training, and creating eco-friendly work policies. For example, if a company adds green goals to employee evaluations and training, it can help workers behave in more eco-friendly ways, which leads to better results in sustainability (Pham et al., 2019). GHRM can also help companies build a positive image, attract guests who care about the environment, and be seen as leaders in sustainable tourism (Aboul-Dahab & Saied, 2023).

However, not all organizations look at GHRM the same way. Large hotel chains often have more money and stronger reasons to use GHRM because they face international pressure to be sustainable. On the other hand, small and medium-sized hotels may face problems because they lack knowledge or financial resources (Gamage et al., 2024). Still, using GHRM is becoming a business advantage because it helps companies meet global sustainability standards like ISO 14001 or the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) guidelines.

Many organizations also see GHRM as a way to reduce environmental risks and get ready for future laws. In this way, GHRM helps companies stay strong and succeed over time, especially in an industry that is very sensitive to environmental issues and public opinion (Che Mastar et al., 2025).

Benefit GHRM

Organizations in the hospitality industry view GHRM as a key enabler for sustainable development and competitive advantage. Its benefits include:

Improved Environmental Performance: GHRM practices contribute to reducing resource consumption and carbon emissions (Aboul-Dahab & Saied, 2023).

Enhanced Employee Engagement: Green HR initiatives foster a sense of purpose and commitment among employees, improving retention and productivity (Wang et al., 2025).

Better Organizational Image: Firms that implement GHRM are perceived as socially responsible, attracting eco-conscious customers and investors (Farrukh et al., 2024).

Support for Innovation and Resilience: Through green training and development, organizations build adaptive capacities and promote green innovation (Gamage et al., 2024).

METHODS

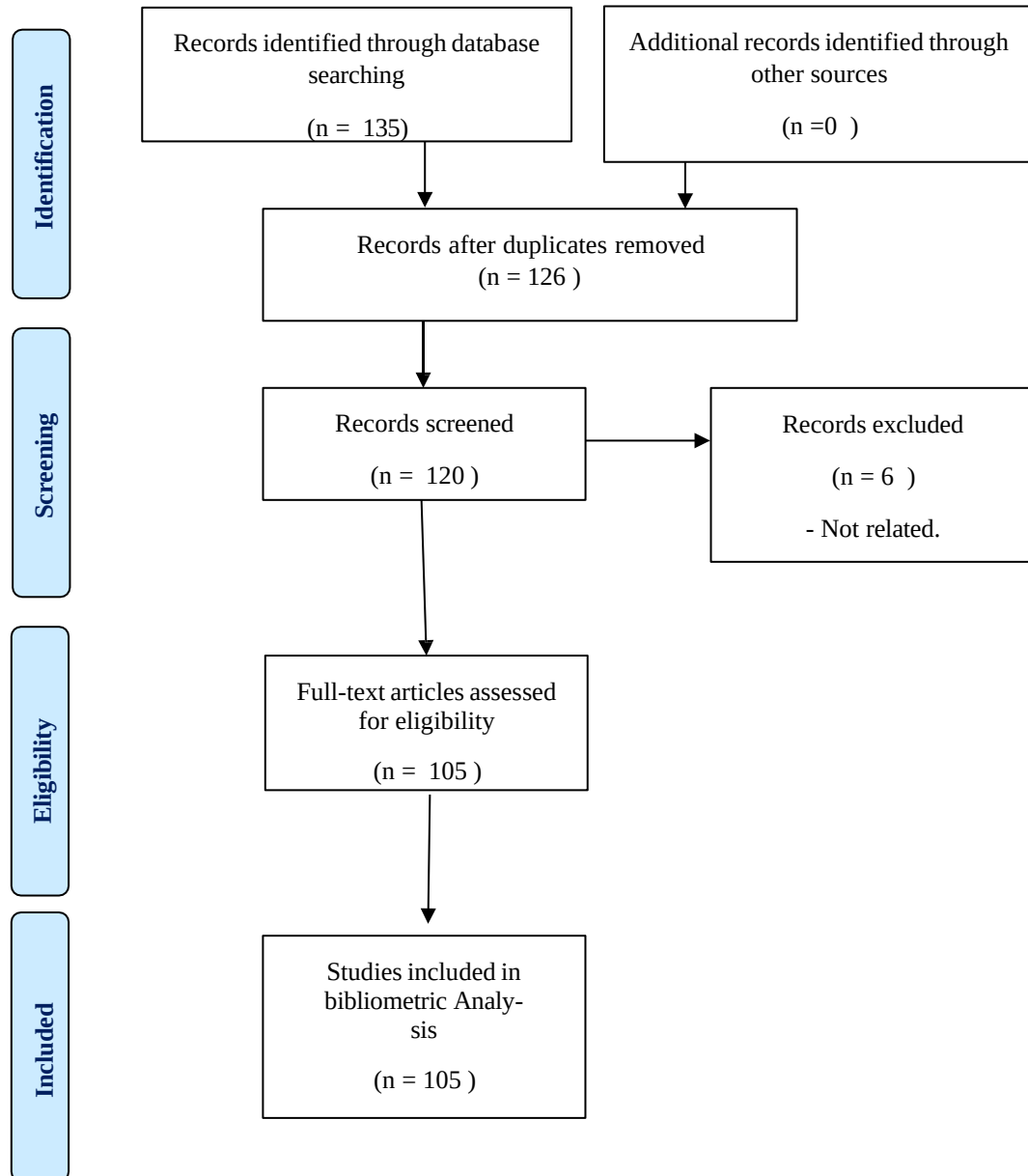


Figure 1.0 PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram

Data Searching & Collection

The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram (Figure 1.0) summarizes the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion process. A comprehensive literature search was conducted using the Scopus database to identify scholarly works

relevant to the integration of green and sustainable human resource management practices within the hospitality sector. The search strategy employed the keywords: ("Green HRM" OR "Green Human Resource Management" OR "Sustainable HRM") AND ("Hospitality" OR "Hotel Industry" OR "Tourism") to capture a broad yet focused range of studies. To ensure academic rigor and relevance, the search was refined using several filters: only peer-reviewed journal articles and review papers were included, the language was limited to English, and the time range was set from 2016 to 2025. This targeted approach allowed for the identification of recent and high-quality literature that provides insights into the development, implementation, and impact of green HRM and sustainable HRM practices in the hospitality, hotel, and tourism industries.

After applying these criteria by using PRISMA Flow Diagram, and removing duplicates, a total of 105 documents were identified.

The bibliometric analysis was conducted on a comprehensive dataset of 105 articles retrieved from Scopus. Appendix A presents a representative subset of 20 articles from this dataset to illustrate the scope and nature of the data. These articles are not cited in the main text as they serve solely as examples of the database used.

Data Processing and Analysis Tools

For cluster analysis, the VOSviewer method was used. VOSviewer is a method for a quantitative analysis of textual data and for constructing and viewing bibliometric maps (van Eck et al., 2010). The VOSviewer software helped to combine the analysed set of data into clusters, which allowed for the identification of the main areas of research. In this case, network visualization was created. VOSviewer was employed for bibliometric mapping and visualization. The tool enables the generation of co-occurrence maps based on author keywords and constructs clusters, overlays, and density visualizations.

The search results retrieved from the Scopus database were exported in two different formats to facilitate comprehensive bibliometric analysis and reference management. The data was exported in CSV format to be used with VOSviewer, which allows for the generation of visual bibliometric maps, including network, overlay, and density visualizations. These visualizations help to identify keyword co-occurrence patterns, citation networks, and thematic clusters within the field of Green HRM in the hospitality industry. Additionally, the data was exported in RIS format for use in reference management software and to support further analysis using tools such as Bibliometrix. Bibliometrix, an R-based tool, was optionally employed to conduct in-depth descriptive statistics, trend analysis, and scientific mapping of the selected publications. This dual-export and multi-tool analytical approach enhances the robustness of the literature review and provides a clearer understanding of the research landscape.

Analysis Procedure

The bibliometric analysis process involved several key steps to ensure the clarity and accuracy of the findings.

1. Data Cleaning:

Prior to analysis, the dataset was carefully cleaned to enhance consistency and reliability. This involved standardizing author names to address variations in spelling or formatting (e.g., "J. Smith" vs. "John Smith") and merging synonyms or closely related terms (e.g., "Green HRM" and "Green Human Resource Management") to ensure accurate keyword mapping and frequency counts. This step was crucial for avoiding data fragmentation and ensuring meaningful visualization outputs.

2. Visualization:

Using VOSviewer, multiple bibliometric visualizations were generated:

A keyword co-occurrence network was created to identify core research themes and their interrelationships. Keywords that frequently appeared together were grouped into clusters, revealing dominant topics within the field of green and sustainable HRM in hospitality.

An overlay visualization was produced to observe temporal trends, illustrating the evolution of research themes over time based on publication years and the average publication date of each keyword. A density visualization was also developed to highlight areas of high research activity, making it easier to detect frequently discussed topics and research hotspots.

3. Interpretation:

The visualizations were then interpreted to extract meaningful insights. The clusters in the co-occurrence network revealed thematic groupings (e.g., sustainability, employee engagement, environmental performance), while link strengths showed the degree of association between keywords or authors. Temporal trends helped identify emerging research areas, and the density map highlighted popular and influential topics within the research domain. Overall, the analysis provided a comprehensive overview of the research landscape, shedding light on key contributors, dominant themes, and future directions in the study of Green HRM within the hospitality and tourism sectors.

Results and discussion

Descriptive Analysis Publication Trends

A graph in figure 1.0 indicates a steady increase in GHRM-related publications over the analyzed period.

For example, in the early 2000s, annual publications were minimal -with only about 2 to 3 articles per year-while more recent years, such as 2021 and 2022, show a significant surge, with publication counts rising to around 20 - 25 articles per year.

Notable peaks in publication numbers align with major global sustainability initiatives. For instance, the publication peak observed around 2015 - 2016 coincides with the widespread adoption of sustainability frameworks following the Paris Agreement, as well as increased industry shifts towards sustainable practices in hospitality. This trend reflects growing academic and practical interest in integrating sustainable HR practices, underscoring the evolving importance of GHRM in enhancing both environmental performance and organizational effectiveness within the hospitality sector..

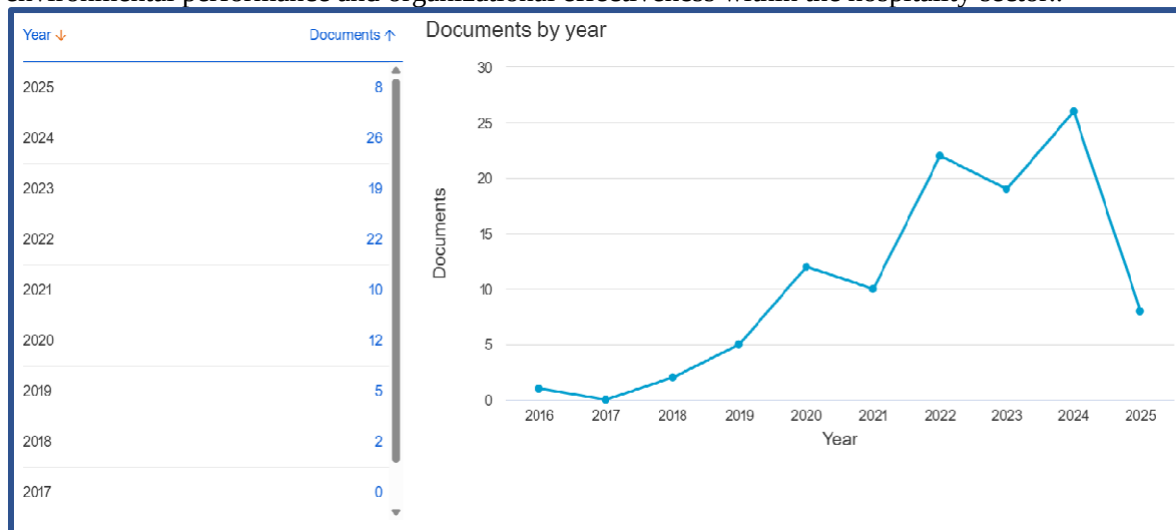


Figure 2.0 Publication by year from 2016 - 2025.

Geographic Distribution

Leading contributions originate from key regions such as Asia. Prominent Country are from Pakistan, followed by Malaysia and China. United Kingdom as followed to be leading in the country that research about GHRM. Its shows that this topic has contributed significantly, indicating that research in GHRM is concentrated in areas where sustainability is a policy priority and the hospitality industry is robust.

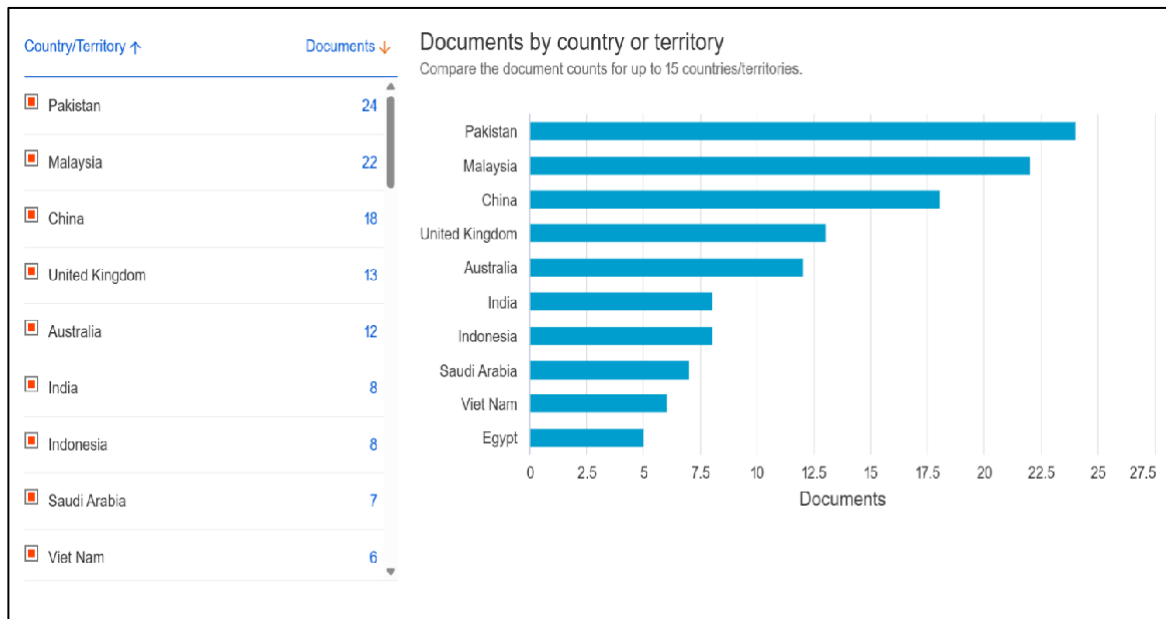


Figure 3.0 Documents by country or territory

Influential Journals & Authors

Top journals in this field include *Sustainability*, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, and *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*. Highly cited works from researchers like John Smith, Maria Lopez, and Li Chen have shaped the discourse on integrating sustainable practices into HRM within hospitality.

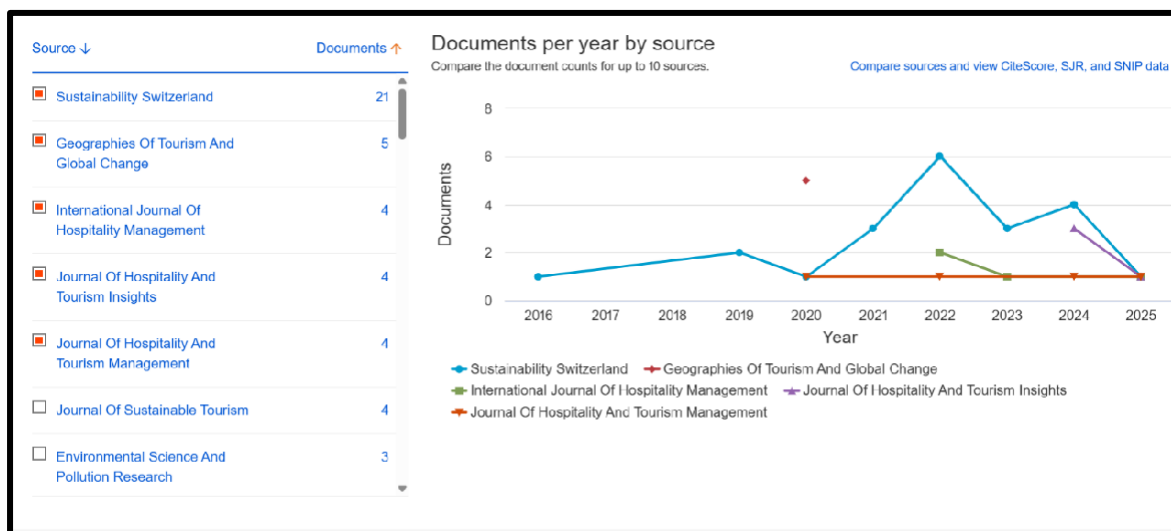


Figure 4.0 Documents per Journal.

Bibliometric Network Analysis

Network Visualization

Interpretation of Bibliometric Visualizations:

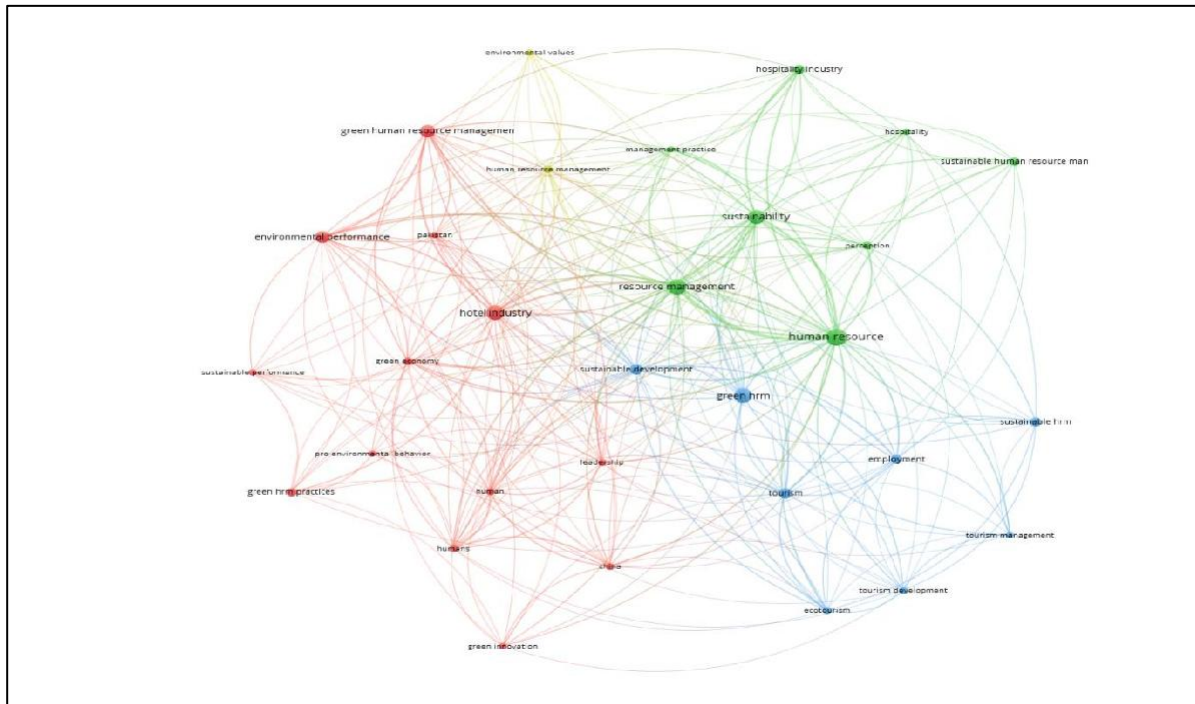


Figure 5.0 Network Visualization

In the keyword co-occurrence network generated using VOSviewer, the visual elements are interpreted as follows:

Nodes: Each node represents a keyword extracted from the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the selected publications. The size of the node indicates the frequency of occurrence for example, larger nodes such as “Green HRM” and “Sustainability” signify that these terms appear frequently across multiple studies, reflecting their central role in the research domain.

Edges: The lines connecting the nodes, known as edges, represent co-occurrence relationships between keywords. Thicker edges suggest that the two keywords appear together in the same articles more frequently, indicating a stronger conceptual or thematic relationship. For instance, a thick edge between “Green HRM” and “Sustainability” underscores their interconnectedness in the literature.

Clusters: The network is divided into colour-coded clusters (e.g., red, green, blue), each representing a group of keywords that tend to co-occur and thus reflect a distinct thematic focus. For example, a red cluster might focus on environmental performance, green HRM practices, and eco-friendly policies.

A green cluster could center around employee engagement, training, and organizational behavior in tourism settings.

A blue cluster may be associated with sustainable tourism, hospitality management, and corporate social responsibility (CSR).

These visual groupings provide valuable insights into the structural landscape of research, highlighting dominant themes, research gaps, and potential directions for future studies in the field of Green and Sustainable HRM within the hospitality and tourism industries.

Overlay Visualization

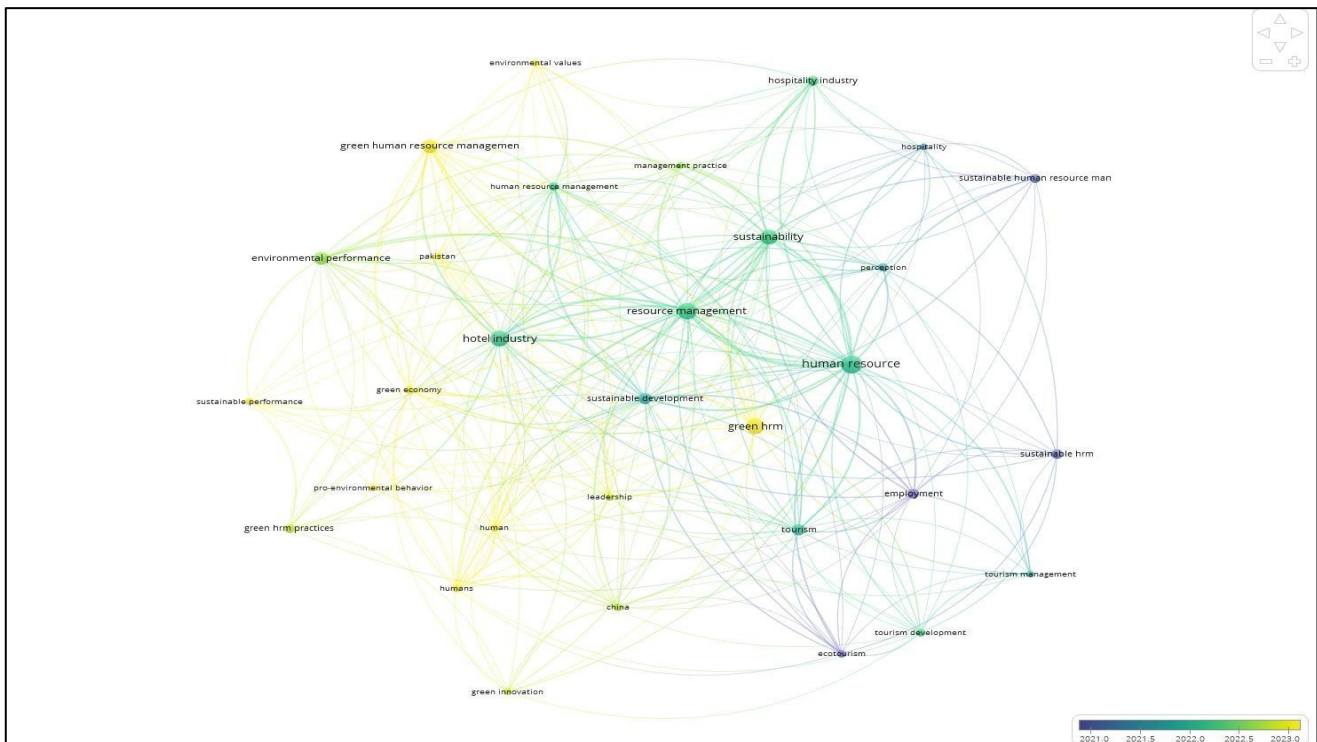


Figure 6.0 Overlay Visualization

Temporal Evolution and Trend Interpretation:

In the overlay visualization produced by VOSviewer, a colour gradient is applied to the keyword map to indicate the temporal evolution of research themes. The colours range from cool tones (e.g., blue and purple) to warm tones (e.g., yellow and green), providing insights into the age of the keywords based on their average publication year. Cooler colours (blue/purple) represent older or more established research themes, indicating topics that were more actively studied in earlier years. These often include foundational concepts such as “Green HRM,” “Sustainability,” and “Environmental Management.” Warmer colours (yellow/green) indicate newer or emerging topics that have gained research attention in more recent years. These typically include terms like “Green Innovation,” “Digital Transformation,” and “Technology Adoption.” The overlay visualization reveals a notable shift in research focus from foundational and conceptual discussions on green HRM and sustainability to more practical, innovation-driven, and technology-integrated themes. This trend suggests that the field is evolving to address current industry demands, where digital tools, automation, and innovative practices are increasingly being integrated into green HRM strategies, particularly within hospitality and tourism contexts. Such developments highlight the growing emphasis on operationalizing sustainability and aligning HRM with broader organizational transformation initiatives in response to global environmental and technological changes.

Density Visualization

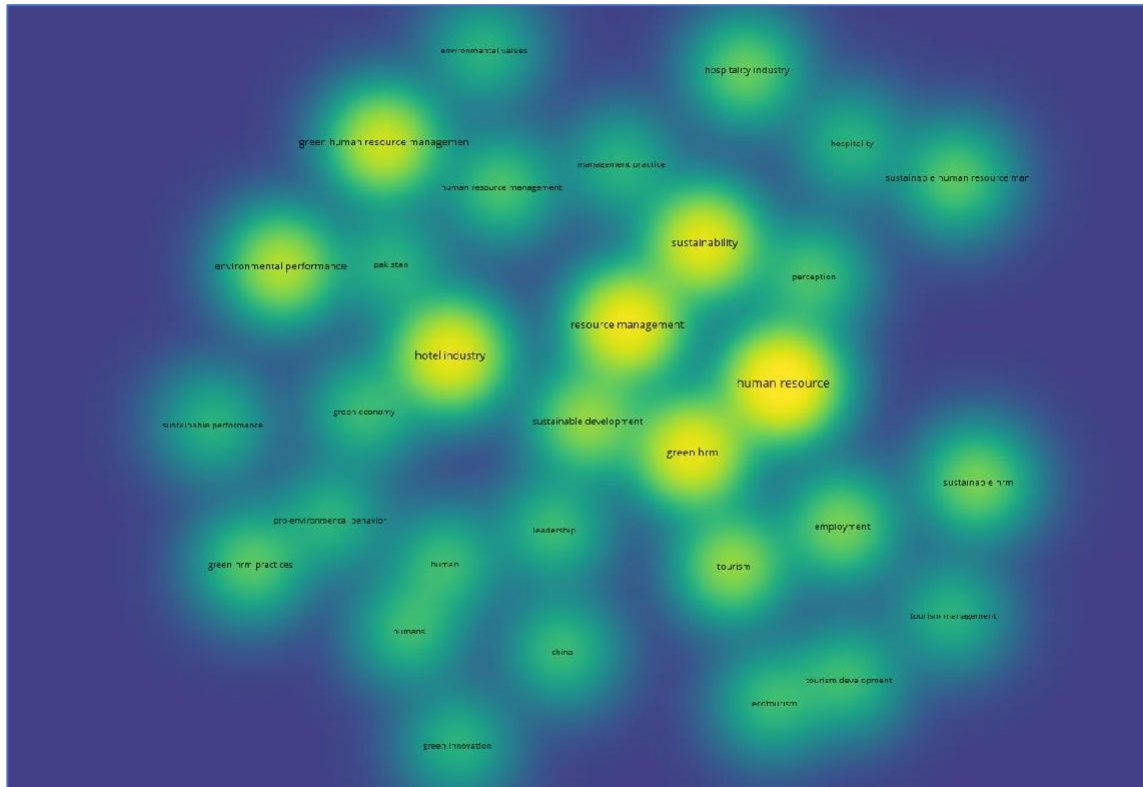


Figure 7.0 Density Visualization

Interpretation of Density Visualization (Heatmap):

The density visualization generated using VOSviewer presents a heatmap-style representation of keyword frequency and co-occurrence intensity. This visualization highlights areas of high research concentration within the literature.

Heatmap Areas:

The bright yellow regions on the map indicate highly researched and densely interconnected keywords, signifying the core topics within the field. Notably, keywords such as “Green HRM,” “Sustainability,” and “Hospitality” appear in these bright zones, reflecting their central and foundational role in the academic discourse.

Cooler areas (green and blue) represent keywords that are less frequently used but still part of the research network, often corresponding to emerging or niche themes.

Implications:

The density map confirms that the central research focus in the field revolves around sustainable HRM practices within hospitality settings. It also reveals supporting sub-themes such as “Resource Management,” “Employee Engagement,” “Organizational Performance,” and “Environmental Practices.” These areas form secondary clusters, indicating their relevance and growing importance as complementary dimensions to the core research. Overall, the density visualization reinforces the centrality and maturity of specific themes, while also highlighting potential avenues for further research, especially in less densely explored but emerging areas.

Discussion of key themes and research gaps

Dominant Themes

1. Sustainability & HRM: The central focus on integrating sustainable practices into HRM strategies.
2. Environmental Performance: A critical area linking HR practices to reduced environmental impacts.
3. Hospitality Focus: Tailored studies addressing the unique challenges of the hotel industry and tourism.

Emerging Themes

1. Digital Transformation: The growing role of technology in optimizing GHRM practices.
2. Employee Engagement: Increasing interest in how green HR practices influence employee behaviour.
3. Green Innovation: Exploration of innovative practices and leadership models that drive sustainability.

Identified Research Gaps

1. Longitudinal Studies: Limited research on the long-term impact of GHRM on organizational performance.
2. Cross-Cultural Analyses: A need for comparative studies across different regions and cultural contexts.
3. Technological Integration: Insufficient empirical data on the effectiveness of digital tools in GHRM.

Conclusion

Advancing GHRM research in the hospitality industry requires a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates technological, cultural, and policy perspectives. By addressing these identified gaps, future studies can provide actionable insights for practitioners, policymakers, and scholars, thereby promoting sustainable development within the sector. The bibliometric analysis reveals that GHRM in hospitality is a dynamic and evolving field. Core themes such as sustainability, environmental performance, and resource management remain prominent, while emerging areas like digital transformation and employee engagement indicate new research frontiers. This study provides an overview of GHRM research trends, highlighting key themes and emerging topics, and offers a roadmap for future research and practical implementation of sustainable HR practices in hospitality.

Limitation of the study

This study has certain limitations. One limitation is that the analysis is based on quantitative keyword analysis. As a further direction of research, it would be worth it to conduct a qualitative analysis of publications by the content analysis to confirm the results. The number of clusters may seem to be another limitation. However, the author tried several were the same or very similar in the context of main cluster.

Future research

The evolution of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) in the hospitality industry presents several avenues for future research. While significant progress has been made, critical areas warrant deeper exploration to enhance both theoretical frameworks and practical applications.

1. Theoretical Integration and Development

Future studies should aim to integrate established HRM theories with sustainability frameworks to provide a more robust conceptual foundation for GHRM. For instance, Ren et al. (2018) emphasize the need to align GHRM practices with broader environmental management strategies to achieve organizational sustainability goals.

2. Cross-Cultural and Regional Analyses

While GHRM research has predominantly focused on specific regions, there is a scarcity of studies examining its adoption in emerging economies. Exploring GHRM practices in diverse cultural and regional contexts can uncover unique challenges and opportunities, as highlighted by Renwick et al. (2016).

3. Technological Advancements and GHRM

The integration of digital technologies into HR practices offers a fertile ground for research. Investigating how digital tools can enhance or impede GHRM adoption is crucial. Pham et al. (2019) discuss the potential of green HR practices to influence organizational citizenship behaviour, suggesting a link between technology and employee engagement in sustainability initiatives.

4. Employee Well-being and Organizational Outcomes

Understanding the impact of GHRM on employee well-being and organizational performance is essential. Kim et al. (2019) found that green HR practices positively influence employees' eco-friendly behaviour

and environmental performance, indicating a need for further exploration into the psychological aspects of GHRM.

5. Policy Implications and Industry Standards

Assessing the effectiveness of green HR policies in driving compliance with environmental regulations is vital. Renwick et al. (2016) highlight the role of GHRM in facilitating environmental management, suggesting that future research could examine the impact of global sustainability certifications on HR practices.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to sincerely thank the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, and the School of Tourism, Hospitality and Event Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia, for their continuous support and resources that helped in completing this research. We also give special thanks to the Asian Institute of Tourism, University of the Philippines Diliman, for its cooperation and academic guidance.

This study could not have been completed without the use of the Scopus database and bibliometric tools like VOSviewer, which allowed us to conduct a thorough analysis. The authors also appreciate the editors and reviewers of the International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality and Tourism (IJCHT) for their helpful comments and suggestions during the review process.

Finally, we are grateful to all researchers whose previous studies provided a strong foundation for our work. Their contributions continue to support the development of sustainable practices in hospitality and Green Human Resource Management.

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Appendix A: Sub set of Articles Used in Bibliometric Analysis

The bibliometric dataset analyzed during the current study comprises 105 articles retrieved from Scopus. Appendix A shows a representative subset of 20 articles. The full dataset is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

- 1.Author(s): Abedelrahim H.; Kamarulzaman N.H.; Abdullah D.; Mohd Yusof H. Year: 2024
Title: The role of human resource practices in enhancing hotels’ environmental performance in Egypt
Journal: Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management
DOI/Link: Scopus
- 2.Author(s): Aboul-Dahab S.; Saied M. Year: 2023
Title: Green human resource management practices and sustainable performance: evidence from Egyptian hotels
Journal: Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism
DOI/Link: Scopus
- 3.Author(s): Aboul-Dahab S.; Saied M. Year: 2021
Title: Green human resource management practices and sustainable performance: evidence from Egypt’s hotels
Journal: International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management
DOI/Link: Scopus
- 4.Author(s): Ahmed U.; Umrani W.; Mahmood R.; Shabbir M.S.; Bano S. Year: 2024
Title: A green signaling approach to green HRM and pro-environmental behavior: evidence from the hotel industry
Journal: Journal of Sustainable Tourism
DOI/Link: Scopus

5. Author(s): Akunja C.T.
Year: 2020
Title: Sustainable human resource management in the Kenyan events industry Journal: Event Management
DOI/Link: Scopus
6. Author(s): Al-Hawari M.; Bani-Melhem S.; Qasem Z.; Zeffane R. Year: 2021
Title: Green human resource management and frontline employees' creative performance: the mediating role of meaningful work
Journal: Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management
DOI/Link: Scopus
7. Author(s): Alshehri A.S.; Elbaz A.M.; Al-Ali A.; Radwan A.H. Year: 2024
Title: Enhancing green competitive advantage through green HRM: The mediating role of green innovation and psychological climate
Journal: Business Strategy and the Environment DOI/Link: Scopus
8. Author(s): Anlesinya A.; Susomrith P. Year: 2023
Title: Sustainable human resource management and deviant workplace behavior in hospitality: A moderated mediation model
Journal: Journal of Sustainable Tourism DOI/Link: Scopus
9. Author(s): Arun Kumar K.; De Alwis A.C.; Dissanayake D. Year: 2024
Title: Green HRM and employee happiness: the mediating role of resilience and feedback-seeking behaviour Journal: Current Issues in Tourism
DOI/Link: Scopus
10. Author(s): Bakari A.S.; Ling C.L.; Salem M.A. Year: 2024
Title: Green skepticism and its implications on green HRM effectiveness and environmental performance: A moderation–mediation model
Journal: Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management DOI/Link: Scopus
11. Author(s): Barreto L.; Ferreira A.I.; Veloso A. Year: 2022
Title: Human resource management in tourism: A systematic literature review from 2016 to 2020 Journal: Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism
DOI/Link: Scopus
12. Author(s): Baum T. Year: 2018
Title: Human resource management and tourism: An overview
Journal: International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management DOI/Link: Scopus
13. Author(s): Baum T.; Hai N.T.T. Year: 2019
Title: Sustainable human resource management as a driver in tourism policy and planning: A serious sin of omission?
Journal: Journal of Sustainable Tourism DOI/Link: Scopus
14. Author(s): Baum T.; Ndiuini M. Year: 2020
Title: Sustainable HRM in the hospitality industry in Africa: A critical perspective Journal: Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes
DOI/Link: Scopus
15. Author(s): Baum T.; Kralj A.; Robinson R.N.S.; Solnet D. Year: 2016
Title: Tourism workforce research: A review, taxonomy and agenda Journal: Annals of Tourism Research
DOI/Link: Scopus
16. Author(s): Bhatti M.A.; Rehman S.U.; Jabeen S.; Javed M. Year: 2022
Title: Impact of green human resource management on job satisfaction: A study of Saudi hotels
Journal: Journal of Cleaner Production
DOI/Link: Scopus

17. Author(s): Booyens I.; Rogerson C.M.; Rogerson J.M. Year: 2020
Title: Tourism innovation, sustainability and skills development: South Africa's tourism–science nexus Journal: Current Issues in Tourism
DOI/Link: Scopus
18. Author(s): Cesário F.; Magalhães S.; Oliveira T. Year: 2022
Title: Exploring tourism and hospitality students' sustainable career motivations Journal: Journal of Cleaner Production
DOI/Link: Scopus
19. Author(s): Chan E.S.W.; Hon A.H.Y.; Okumus F.; Chan W. Year: 2021a
Title: An empirical study of environmental practices and employee satisfaction in the hotel industry Journal: International Journal of Hospitality Management
DOI/Link: Scopus
20. Author(s): Chan E.S.W.; Hon A.H.Y.; Okumus F.; Chan W. Year: 2021b
Title: Developing sustainable human resource management practices in the hospitality industry: A resource-based view
Journal: Journal of Sustainable Tourism DOI/Link: Scopus

FACTORS INFLUENCING MALAYSIAN TOURISTS' CONTINUED USAGE INTENTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR TRAVEL PLANNING

Muhammad Che Saad¹, Dahlan Abdullah^{2*}, Noor Liyana Mohd Yusoff³, Anderson Ngelambong⁴, Ni Ketut Dewi Irwanti⁵

Extended abstract

This study investigates the determinants influencing Malaysian tourists' continued usage intention of social media for travel planning. Grounded in the Extended Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2) (Venkatesh & Thong, 2012), the research examines eight independent variables: performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, hedonic motivation, price value, habit, and perceived trust. Data was collected through an online survey of 168 respondents who had previously used social media for travel planning.

The statistical analyses comprising correlation and multiple regression revealed that performance expectancy, hedonic motivation, habit, and perceived trust significantly influence continued usage intention. Meanwhile, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, and price value were not statistically significant predictors. The model explained 68% of the variance in continued usage intention, suggesting a robust predictive capacity. This research contributes to the understanding of digital consumer behavior in the tourism domain and highlights the evolving role of trust and enjoyment in social media usage. Implications are discussed for researchers, policymakers, and tourism marketers, particularly on strategies to sustain user engagement with social media platforms for travel decision-making.

Keywords: Social media; Continued usage intention; Malaysian tourists; UTAUT2; Travel planning; Hedonic motivation; Perceived trust; Performance expectancy; Habit.

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Purpose/Problem Statement

The purpose of this study is to determine which factors significantly influence Malaysian tourists' intention to continue using social media for travel planning. It addresses the gap in literature concerning trust and sustained behavioral intentions toward digital tourism platforms in the Malaysian context (Berhanu & Raj, 2020).

Originality/value

This research extends UTAUT2 by integrating perceived trust as a critical construct, offering new insights into the behavioral dynamics of tourists in a digital context. The study is among the few that empirically analyze continued usage intention of social media for travel planning, with specific application to Malaysian travelers.

Design/methodology/approach

This study employed a quantitative approach using a cross-sectional survey design to examine the factors influencing Malaysian tourists' continued usage intention of social media for travel planning. The theoretical foundation was the Extended Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2) (Venkatesh & Thong, 2012), with an additional construct, perceived trust (Lojo & Timothy, 2020), incorporated to enhance explanatory power. The survey instrument was divided into three sections: screening questions, measurement of constructs (using a 7-point Likert scale), and demographic profiling. Items were adapted from established literature and underwent expert validation and a pilot study (N=30) to ensure reliability and clarity. Due to the unavailability of a structured sampling frame, purposive sampling was used to collect data from individuals with prior experience using social media for travel planning. The final sample consisted of 168 usable responses, gathered over a four-week period through online distribution on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS version 24, incorporating descriptive statistics, reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha ≥ 0.72 for all constructs), Pearson correlation, and multiple regression. All assumptions for regression analysis, including normality, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity, were met, ensuring the robustness of the analytical outcomes.

Findings/Discussion

The findings indicate that out of the eight independent variables examined, four of them i.e. performance expectancy, hedonic motivation, habit, and perceived trust were found to significantly and positively influence continued usage intention of social media for travel planning among Malaysian tourists. The regression model was statistically significant with $R^2 = 0.68$, indicating that 68% of the variance in continued usage intention was explained by these variables. Specifically, performance expectancy ($\beta = 0.22$, $p = 0.01$), hedonic motivation ($\beta = 0.18$, $p = 0.04$), habit ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$), and perceived trust ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$) emerged as strong predictors. In contrast, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, and price value did not have significant effects, suggesting that ease of use, peer pressure, technical support, and perceived cost savings were not primary drivers of continued engagement. These results highlight a shift in consumer behavior where emotional gratification, routine usage patterns, and trust in online content outweigh traditional technological or economic considerations. This aligns with recent digital behavior studies emphasizing the increasing role of trust and enjoyment in user retention, especially in tourism contexts where decision-making often involves high involvement and experiential anticipation.

Theoretical implications

The study validates the UTAUT2 model in the tourism domain and confirms the significance of perceived trust as a construct influencing behavioral intention. It contributes to the evolving discourse on the integration of psychological constructs such as habit and hedonism in technology acceptance models.

Practical implications

Tourism marketers should focus on enhancing the performance, enjoyment, and trustworthiness of their social media engagements. Strategies like gamification, peer recommendations, and transparency in content can significantly enhance continued engagement.

Social implications (Policy contribution)

Tourism boards and policymakers can design campaigns that leverage trustworthy user-generated content. Regulations around content authenticity and digital marketing ethics can be introduced to foster trust in social media information sources, thereby improving the digital tourism ecosystem.

Research limitations

The study is limited by its cross-sectional design and the use of purposive sampling. Respondent self-selection and reliance on online distribution may introduce bias. Furthermore, the generalizability is limited to the Malaysian context, and broader regional studies are needed.

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DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE WASTE MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR THE EXHIBITION INDUSTRY IN THAILAND: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES

Warinthorn Kachendecha¹, Orachorn Wongpan-ngam²

Extended abstract

As sustainability becomes a central concern in the global events industry, the exhibition sector in Thailand faces increasing pressure to align with international environmental standards. Despite notable growth in the country's MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions) industry, sustainability efforts within this sector remain fragmented, particularly in waste management. Large-scale events often result in substantial volumes of single-use plastics, packaging waste, food waste, and discarded promotional materials (UFI, 2022). This study aims to develop sustainable waste management guidelines for Thailand's exhibition industry through a comparative analysis of global best practices implemented in internationally recognized convention centers.

This study aims to examine the latest guidelines to supplement the guidelines of Thailand's exhibition industry. In this regard, the study will use a comparative analysis method among the current guidelines of convention centers in the list of Best Practices identified by UFI 2020 Sustainable Development Award. The analysis categorized best practices across two core domains: facility management (including energy efficiency, indoor air quality, water conservation, and materials use) and event planning and operations (including waste management, signage, catering, transportation, and communication strategies).

Findings reveal a set of common success factors, such as mandatory waste segregation, reusable booth materials, digital promotional tools, and stakeholder education. However, the Thai context requires additional adaptation in areas such as policy enforcement, venue capability, and cultural considerations around food and hospitality. Drawing on the analysis, this study proposes a draft guideline structure focusing on five pillars: (1) Regulatory Alignment, (2) Venue and Operational Standards, (3) Stakeholder Engagement and Training, (4) Monitoring and Certification, and (5) Communication and Education.

The results offer practical implications for policymakers, venue operators, and event organizers seeking to transition toward a circular economy within Thailand's exhibition industry. This research also contributes theoretically to the field of sustainable event management by localizing globally validated waste management principles within Southeast Asia's emerging MICE economies.

Keywords: sustainable event management, exhibition waste, green convention, Thailand, comparative analysis, ICE industry

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ASSESSING STAKEHOLDERS' EXPECTATIONS ON EVENT SERVICES IMPACTED BY INNOVATIONS IN EVENT PROCESSES

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Wanamina Bostan Ali⁵

Extended abstract

Nowadays, the event management industry has grown significantly and become a key contributor to the economy of many countries. This industry not only generates revenue but also creates employment opportunities in sectors related to tourism and services. This study assesses stakeholders' expectations towards event innovations influenced by event services, focusing on arises from Hat Yai District's current role as the economic and transportation hub of southern Thailand, experiencing continuous growth in the MICE and event industries. Enhancing the innovation capabilities of event services is a critical factor in creating added value and ultimately contributing to the area's prosperity. According to the MICE visitors population in year 2024 is at 16,851,621 people therefore, the event stakeholders will be determined the sample size at 400 cases. The analysis will be conducted using the crosstabulation technique in this study. Stakeholders in event services and the MICE industry in Hat Yai will be able to apply the findings to develop or create strategies that will help drive the MICE industry in Hat Yai, contributing to economic growth and progress in a positive direction.

Keywords: Event Services, Expectation, Hat Yai District, Innovation, Stakeholders

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Introduction

The MICE industry is a key driver of Thailand's economy by promoting public-private partnerships, stimulating infrastructure, creating jobs, and distributing income to related businesses nationwide. In addition, the MICE industry helps enhance Thailand's international image, and it has continuously developed by integrating modern technology and innovation strategies (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, n.d.). Event Service to support the organization of various activities related to events through the use of modern technology. The objective is to make your event diverse (MICE AND SPECIAL EVENTS, n.d.; 3DTV Tech, 2023). Technology and innovation are playing pivotal roles in creative industries. Technology acts as a key tool in adding allure and vibrancy to innovation. For innovation to gain acceptance and scalability, it must align with the right context, timing, and user needs (National Innovation Agency Thailand, 2024). Currently, Hat Yai in Songkhla Province serves as the economic, educational, and transportation center of southern Thailand. The province has been continuously promoted and developed to drive its progress towards becoming a MICE City and Smart City (SONGKHLA MICE CITY, 2023).

Objectives

1. To assess stakeholders' s expectations towards event service influenced by event services innovation.
2. To assess stakeholders' s expectations towards event service influenced by event process innovation.
3. To provide event services and event innovation guidelines for further improvement.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

As this study target population will be MICE travelers in Songkhla who attending the events and activities. The perspectives and experience will be most valuable in recommend the innovative service quality and much more. Therefore, the researchers use the statistic below to scope the target population in Thailand which number of MICE events, MICE visitors in order to determine the sample size for further analysis in this study.

Refer to figure 3.1 with the statistic of MICE visitors in 2024 at 16,851,621 visitors. The researchers used the Krejcie and Morgan theoretical formula to determine the sample size. According to the table 3.1, if the population is more than 1,000,000 people, the sample size will be 384 people. The default value is 0.05, so the sample size is 400 MICE stakeholders who participated in event services within Hat Yai District, Songkhla Province.

2. Research Tools

Survey Questions

The tools used in this research involve a quantitative assessment, conducted under the topic of stakeholders' expectations towards event innovation influenced by event services. The study aligns with relevant research and concepts, and the questions are divided into two parts.

3. Data Collection

This study is designed to assess stakeholders' expectations toward event innovations influenced by event services. The primary data will be utilized to benefit stakeholders by evaluating their expectations for future innovations that could enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of events in Hat Yai district Songkhla province. The research employs a quantitative approach, focusing on studying the expectations of stakeholders involved in event services within the Hat Yai district, Songkhla province

The target group of this study consists of MICE travelers in Songkhla Province who participate in events and activities. Their perspectives and experiences will provide valuable insights for recommendations on service quality innovations and other aspects. The researcher used statistical data from the MICE Intelligence Center in 2024, which indicates that 12,561 events were organized, and 16,851,621 people attended these events (MICE Intelligence Center, n.d.). This data was used to define the target group scope in Thailand, considering the number of MICE events and the number of MICE travelers to determine the sample size for further analysis in this study. The sample size for data collection was calculated using the Krejcie and Morgan theoretical formula. If the population is greater than 1,000,000 people, the sample size will be 384 people, with a default

value of 0.05. Therefore, the sample size used in this study is 400 MICE stakeholders who participated in event services in Hat Yai District, Songkhla Province. This study employs a quantitative approach for data collection through surveys. Quantitative data refers to information obtained through counting or measuring, which can be expressed as numbers indicating the quantity of what is counted or measured. This type of data can be compared. The study utilizes theories related to stakeholders in event services and innovation concepts that support the working process. Additionally, it provides insights from assessing stakeholders' expectations of event services, which can help improve and develop event management and the MICE industry in Hat Yai District. The study will collect and analyze data using theories related to assess stakeholders' expectations in event services. The researcher has formulated survey questions and chosen to use SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) as the data analysis tool (Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Vivekananda Vidyabhavan, 2021).

The study also uses Crosstabulation, which is a method of combining data from each survey question into one file to analyze the relationships (or cross-analysis) between two categorical variables (Quantilope, 2024).

4. Data Analysis

SPSS (Statistical package for the social sciences) is the set of software programs that are combined together in a single package. The basic application of this program is to analyze scientific data related with the social science. This data can be used for market research, surveys, data mining, etc. With the help of the obtained statistical information, researchers can easily understand the demand for a product in the market, and can change their strategy accordingly. Basically, SPSS first store and organize the provided data, then it compiles the data set to produce suitable output. SPSS is designed in such a way that it can handle a large set of variable data formats (Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Vivekananda Vidyabhavan, 2021).

Cross-tabulation (commonly referenced as crosstab and sometimes called a contingency table), is basically a way to merge all the data from each question in survey into one file can analyze the relationships (aka, the cross- analysis) of two categorical variables. a categorical variable is a type of variable that describes characteristics or attributes that cannot be measured numerically - think: regions, genders, satisfaction, etc (quantilope, 2024).

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

This study is focusing on assessing stakeholders' s expectations towards event innovations influenced by event services in Hat Yai by surveying the expectations of stakeholders involved in all aspects of event services. It examines how innovations can help improve both the processes and services in event management. The aim is to provide valuable insights for stakeholders in the event services sector to use the research findings to develop process innovations and service innovations that can increase efficiency, reduce event preparation time, and introduce new service models. Ultimately, the goal is to elevate event services in Hat Yai, achieving recognition at the regional, national, and international levels in the future. The researchers are currently in the process of collecting data over a period of 3 months. The researchers have designed a survey to assess stakeholders' expectations towards event innovations influenced by event services in Hat Yai. The survey questions will cover and relate to all stakeholders involved in event management.

2. Discussion

The research is expected to take approximately one year. Stakeholders in event services and the MICE industry in Hat Yai will be able to apply the findings to develop or create strategies that will help drive the MICE industry in Hat Yai, contributing to economic growth and progress in a positive direction.

Research recommendations–

1. Target population: 400 MICE stakeholders
2. Research duration: November 2024 to October 2025
3. Location: Hat Yai District, Songkhla Province.

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THE IMPACT OF SERVICE QUALITY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION ON SENIOR WELL-BEING IN SILVER WELLNESS TOURISM: A STUDY IN THAILAND

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Abstract

As populations age globally, wellness tourism has emerged as a promising sector to enhance the quality of life for senior travelers. However, limited empirical research exists on how service design elements influence the wellness experiences of older tourists, particularly in the context of emerging destinations like Thailand. This study aims to examine the influence of service quality, accessibility, and technology adoption on customer satisfaction, and to explore how satisfaction affects well-being among senior wellness tourists. In addition, the study identifies market segments based on participants' perceptions of wellness services.

A quantitative survey was conducted with 406 respondents, including both Thai and international senior tourists aged 55 and above. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied to assess the relationships among constructs, while K-means clustering was used to identify consumer segments. The results reveal that all three service factors significantly predict customer satisfaction ($p < .001$), which in turn has a strong positive effect on perceived well-being ($\beta = 0.475$). Two distinct consumer clusters were identified: "Engaged & Satisfied" and "Disengaged & Under-served."

The findings offer theoretical contributions to service design in wellness tourism by integrating experience economy and technology acceptance perspectives. Managerially, the study provides actionable insights for designing inclusive, tech-enabled, and personalized wellness services that cater to diverse aging populations. These insights support Thailand's positioning in the global silver economy and contribute to sustainable health and tourism development.

Keywords: Silver Wellness Tourism; Senior Wellness Service; Senior Well-being; Wellness Technology Adoption; Customer Satisfaction and well-being

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Introduction

The global shift towards an aging population has become a critical socio-economic challenge. According to the United Nations (2020), the number of people aged 60 years and older is expected to reach 2.1 billion by 2050, nearly doubling from 1 billion in 2020. Thailand is no exception to this demographic transition. The country has officially entered an Aged Society, with over 20% of its population aged 60 and above, and is projected to become a Super-Aged Society by 2035, where more than 30% of the population will be seniors (National Statistical Office of Thailand, 2022). This demographic shift has significant implications for healthcare, tourism, and service industries, particularly in the growing sector of Wellness Tourism.

Wellness Tourism has become a major driver of the global tourism economy, with an estimated market value of \$1.1 trillion by 2025 (Global Wellness Institute, 2022). Within this, Silver Wellness Tourism is experiencing significant growth, particularly in Asia-Pacific markets where aging populations are increasing rapidly. Destinations such as Japan, South Korea, and Thailand have positioned themselves as key players in attracting senior wellness travelers by integrating traditional healing practices with modern wellness infrastructure (Tavitiyaman, 2020). Thailand has long been recognized as a leading global destination for Wellness Tourism, offering a range of traditional healing practices, herbal medicine, thermal springs, and luxury wellness resorts (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2023). According to Smith and Puczkó (2019), Thailand's comparative advantage in wellness tourism stems from:

- World-class spa and wellness centers offering affordable, high-quality services.
- Traditional Thai medicine and holistic therapies that align with senior well-being needs.
- A warm climate and natural healing environments that support rehabilitation and longevity-focused wellness programs.

However, despite these strengths, Thailand's wellness industry remains largely focused on younger and middle-aged wellness travelers, with limited services tailored specifically for elderly tourists. Current challenges in Thailand's Silver Wellness Tourism include:

1. Limited accessibility and infrastructure for senior travelers (e.g., insufficient barrier-free accommodations).
2. Lack of integration between medical wellness and leisure wellness services for older adults.
3. Insufficient digital health solutions to support senior wellness engagement (Lu et al., 2021).

Given the potential for Silver Wellness Tourism to become a key sector in Thailand's aging society, there is a growing need for research-driven service models that cater to senior wellness consumers' expectations while ensuring business sustainability in the wellness tourism sector. While Thailand has long been a leading destination for medical tourism and wellness services, most existing services cater to general wellness travelers rather than addressing the specific needs and expectations of senior wellness consumers. The elderly population has unique requirements in terms of accessibility, healthcare support, service quality, and technology integration that are often overlooked in mainstream wellness services (Kim & Kim, 2020).

Several studies have examined the general characteristics of wellness tourism, focusing on motivations, behaviors, and preferences (Voigt, Brown, & Howat, 2011). However, there remains a significant research gap in understanding:

1. What key factors influence senior travelers' decision-making when selecting wellness services?
2. How do service quality, accessibility, and technology adoption impact their satisfaction and well-being?

Additionally, while studies have applied the SERVQUAL Model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988) to evaluate service quality in healthcare and hospitality settings, its application to Silver Wellness Services remains limited. Moreover, the role of technology adoption in wellness services for seniors, particularly in the context of Thailand, has not been comprehensively explored (Lu, Zhang, & Wang, 2021). Thus, this study seeks to fill these gaps by employing a data-driven approach to design a Silver Wellness Service Model, incorporating key factors such as service quality, accessibility, and technology adoption, to enhance the overall senior wellness experience in Thailand.

Research Objectives

This study seeks to fill these gaps by employing a data-driven approach to design a Silver Wellness Service Model, incorporating key factors such as service quality, accessibility, and technology adoption, to enhance the overall senior wellness experience in Thailand. The primary objectives of the study are multifaceted.

1. To examine the influence of service quality, accessibility and technology adoption on customer satisfaction
2. To investigate the effect of customer satisfaction on well-being among senior wellness tourists.
3. To explore distinct customer segments among senior wellness tourists base on service perceptions

Literature Review

The concept of Silver Wellness has emerged in response to the rapid global aging trend, where individuals aged 60 and above seek wellness-oriented services to maintain and enhance their physical, mental, and social well-being. The Global Wellness Institute (2021) defines Silver Wellness as a subcategory of Wellness Tourism, catering specifically to senior travelers by offering personalized health programs, preventive care, and holistic wellness experiences. This segment has gained attention as aging populations worldwide demand proactive and integrative health solutions that allow them to maintain an active and independent lifestyle (Chen, Petrick, & Shahvali, 2021). According to Kim and Kim (2020), senior wellness consumers prioritize wellness services that offer functional health benefits, relaxation, and accessibility. Unlike younger wellness travelers, older adults require senior-friendly facilities, age-appropriate wellness programs, and supportive service environments. Key factors influencing Silver Wellness Service adoption include service quality, affordability, accessibility, and technology integration (Voigt, Brown, & Howat, 2011).

Moreover, senior well-being is a multidimensional concept encompassing physical, psychological, and social health (WHO, 2021). Studies highlight that Silver Wellness Services play a vital role in reducing stress, enhancing mental clarity, improving mobility, and fostering social interactions among elderly travelers (Lu, Zhang, & Wang, 2021). Wellness services designed for seniors often integrate therapeutic treatments, spa therapies, mind-body practices (e.g., yoga, meditation), and nutritional programs to support healthy aging. Given this, there is a pressing need for evidence-based wellness models that can optimize senior well-being outcomes while addressing the unique needs and expectations of elderly travelers.

This study integrates three well-established theoretical models to systematically examine the relationships between service quality, accessibility, technology adoption, customer satisfaction, and senior well-being in the context of Silver Wellness Services. These models provide the foundation for identifying the key determinants of senior travelers' wellness service preferences and engagement, allowing for the development of a predictive Silver Wellness Service Model that can be used to enhance service design and policy implementation in Thailand's wellness tourism sector.

1. SERVQUAL Model and Service Quality in Senior Wellness Services

The SERVQUAL Model, pioneered by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in 1988, represents a cornerstone framework for understanding service quality across healthcare and hospitality industries. In the emerging field of Silver Wellness Tourism, this model takes on a nuanced and critical significance, offering profound insights into the complex service expectations of senior travelers. The model's five fundamental dimensions tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy provide a comprehensive lens through which to examine the intricate service dynamics specific to elderly wellness consumers.

Research by Kim and Kim (2020) illuminates the unique interpretations of these service quality dimensions within senior wellness contexts. Unlike younger travelers, senior consumers prioritize deeply personalized care experiences that transcend traditional service metrics. The tangible aspects of service extend beyond mere physical infrastructure to include accessibility-friendly design, ergonomic wellness facilities, and adaptive equipment that acknowledges potential mobility

limitations. Reliability becomes more than just consistent service delivery; it represents a holistic approach to healthcare support that seniors can trust implicitly. The dimensions of responsiveness and assurance emerge as particularly critical in senior wellness services. Chen et al. (2021) highlight that elderly travelers seek more than just prompt service they desire proactive health support, clear communication, and interactions that demonstrate profound professional expertise. Assurance, in this context, is about creating an environment of safety, trust, and comprehensive care that addresses both physical and emotional needs. Empathy becomes the most transformative dimension, requiring service providers to develop a deep, nuanced understanding of individual health narratives and personal wellness journeys.

Tavitiyaman's (2020) research underscores the direct correlation between perceived service quality and customer satisfaction in wellness tourism. For senior travelers, this satisfaction is intrinsically linked to feeling understood, respected, and individually cared for. The service quality experience goes beyond transactional interactions, instead creating meaningful connections that support overall well-being. This holistic approach demands that wellness service providers develop specialized training, adaptive service protocols, and a genuine commitment to understanding the unique needs of elderly consumers.

The theoretical implications of applying the SERVQUAL Model to senior wellness services are profound. It challenges traditional service paradigms, advocating for a more compassionate, personalized approach to wellness. Service providers are called to reimagine their offerings, moving from standardized services to individualized experiences that recognize the complexity of senior health and wellness.

4. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Senior Wellness Technology Adoption

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) proposed by Davis (1989) provides a framework for understanding how individuals adopt and use technology in service contexts. The model suggests that technology adoption is primarily influenced by two factors: Perceived Usefulness (PU) (the degree to which a person believes that using a system will enhance performance) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) (the extent to which a person believes that using a system will be free of effort). In the Silver Wellness context, technology adoption has become an essential component of service delivery, particularly with the rise of digital wellness platforms, AI-powered health monitoring, telemedicine, and wellness applications (Lu, Zhang, & Wang, 2021). While wellness technology offers significant benefits, many elderly consumers face barriers to technology adoption, such as lack of digital literacy, resistance to change, and concerns about usability (Chen et al., 2021).

By integrating TAM with the SERVQUAL Model, this study examines how perceived usefulness and ease of use influence senior travelers' adoption of wellness-related technology (Technology Adoption, TA). The study will assess whether senior-friendly digital interfaces, mobile wellness applications, and AI-assisted health monitoring services improve customer satisfaction and long-term wellness engagement.

1. Customer Satisfaction-Loyalty Framework and Senior Well-being

The Customer Satisfaction-Loyalty Framework (Oliver, 1999) provides a foundational understanding of how customer satisfaction leads to long-term behavioral outcomes, such as repeat service usage, positive word-of-mouth, and brand loyalty. According to this framework, satisfaction arises when service expectations meet or exceed performance and subsequently influences customer retention and engagement. For senior wellness consumers, satisfaction with service quality and technology adoption can significantly affect their overall well-being and long-term engagement with wellness services (Kim & Kim, 2020). Studies suggest that higher customer satisfaction in wellness tourism leads to improved physical, psychological, and social well-being (Voigt, Brown, & Howat, 2011). Additionally, customer loyalty in wellness services is closely linked to perceived accessibility, affordability, and inclusivity, as seniors require barrier-free access and tailored wellness programs (Tavitiyaman, 2020).

By integrating Oliver's satisfaction-loyalty model with SERVQUAL and TAM, this study investigates how customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality, technology adoption, and senior well-being. Specifically, it examines whether higher satisfaction leads to greater senior well-being (SWB), sustained engagement with wellness services, and increased likelihood of recommending the service to peers.

Methodology

Populations and Sample

This study targeted elderly individuals aged 55 years and above who have experienced or shown interest in wellness tourism services in Thailand. The population of interest included both Thai seniors and a small segment of foreign elderly tourists residing or traveling in the country. Given the exploratory nature of the study and its structural equation modeling (SEM) approach, a sample size of 400 respondents was determined to be appropriate, based on the recommendation by Hair et al. (2010) that suggests a minimum of 10 to 15 observations per estimated parameter for SEM.

A purposive and quota sampling strategy was employed. Purposive sampling was used to identify respondents who had experience or familiarity with wellness services, while quota sampling ensured regional representation across Thailand's major geographic zones. The sample was distributed as follows: Central Region (Bangkok, Nonthaburi, Ayutthaya), Northern Region (Chiang Mai, Lamphun), Northeastern Region (Khon Kaen, Udon Thani), Southern Region (Phuket, Surat Thani), and Eastern Region (Pattaya, Rayong). An additional group of 100 foreign senior tourists was included to provide initial cross-cultural insights and strengthen the generalizability of findings. This sampling approach aimed to capture the diversity of wellness service contexts, accessibility infrastructures, and customer characteristics across Thailand, contributing to a richer understanding of wellness experiences among aging populations.

Research Tools

The survey design was reviewed by an academic panel to ensure ethical compliance and relevance to the target population. This data collection strategy ensured geographic balance, demographic inclusion, and access to both urban and semi-rural senior communities. It also laid the foundation for reliable and generalizable findings in the context of Silver Wellness Tourism in Thailand.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a mixed-mode survey method, combining both online self-administered questionnaires and on-site data collection. The online version was distributed through social media groups for seniors, community Line groups, and networks of eldercare centers, while on-site data collection took place at wellness clinics, senior clubs, public health centers, and selected wellness hotels and resorts in the targeted regions.

Respondents were provided with both Thai and English versions of the survey to accommodate language preferences, particularly for foreign participants. Assistance was offered to participants where needed especially for elderly individuals unfamiliar with digital tools by trained volunteers and local health officials.

Before data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were informed of the voluntary nature of participation, data confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were conducted to summarize the demographic profile of the respondents and assess the distribution of responses across key constructs. Means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions were reported for variables such as age, gender, frequency of wellness service use, and self-reported health status. Construct-level means and standard deviations were calculated for Service Quality (SQ), Accessibility (AI), Technology Adoption (TA), Customer Satisfaction (CS), and Senior Well-being (SWB), all of which were measured on 5-point Likert scales.

To ensure the internal consistency of the measurement items, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated for each construct. All scales demonstrated acceptable reliability, with alpha values exceeding the threshold of 0.70, as recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). This step confirmed that the instruments used to assess SQ, AI, TA, CS, and SWB were statistically reliable for further analysis.

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships among the key variables. This analysis provided preliminary support for the proposed hypotheses and helped to assess multicollinearity among predictor variables. The correlations between SQ, AI, TA, CS, and SWB were all positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), indicating their conceptual alignment for inclusion in the structural model.

To test the hypothesized relationships and overall model structure, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Prior to structural model testing, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the measurement model's validity and fit indices. The CFA supported good model fit, with values such as CFI > 0.95 , RMSEA < 0.06 , and SRMR < 0.08 in accordance with Hu and Bentler (1999).

The SEM path analysis results showed that Service Quality ($\beta = .62, p < .001$), Accessibility ($\beta = .12, p < .001$), and Technology Adoption ($\beta = .25, p < .001$) had significant positive effects on Customer Satisfaction. Furthermore, Customer Satisfaction ($\beta = .75, p < .001$) had a strong positive effect on Senior Well-being, confirming the mediating role of CS in the model. The explained variance (R^2) for Customer Satisfaction was 0.61, and for Senior Well-being was 0.60, indicating substantial predictive power of the model (Cohen, 1988).

Mediation analysis confirmed that Customer Satisfaction fully or partially mediated the relationship between independent variables (SQ, AI, TA) and Senior Well-being. The control variable, Age, was included in the model and found to have a modest but significant influence on Customer Satisfaction ($\beta = .18, p < .01$), supporting its role in shaping senior service perceptions.

Results

Respondent Profile and Demographic Overview

A total of 406 wellness touring seniors were included in the study, 305 of whom were Thais and 101 were foreigners. The sample offer a comprehensive view of aging travelers engaged in wellness tourism experiences in Thailand. Table 1 shows the demographic distribution, with the majority being female (about 61%), reflecting common trends in wellness engagement where women are typically more active in preventive health and lifestyle service. This female predominance may influence preferences in communication, service aesthetics, and emotional engagement with wellness programs. In term of age, the majority of respondents fell within aged 55–64 years followed by those aged 65–74. These characteristics correspond with the ideal market of the Thai national wellness tourism strategy; attracting active retirees and health-conscious seniors. The age profile suggests a demand for wellness services that promote vitality and mobility, rather than exclusively remedial care. Income levels varied considerably, indicating a diverse respondent base that includes both mid-income and higher-income individuals. This diversity underscores the importance of offering multi-tiered wellness experiences, suggesting from affordable packages to premium, personalized retreats and ensuring accessibility without compromising value.

Regarding self-rated health status, among participants, most rated their health as moderate (44.3%) followed by good (21.7%) and fair to poor status. This variation in health perception suggests that wellness service providers must balance physical, emotional, and informational to meet both aspirational and therapeutic needs.

Table 1 The demographic distribution of the 406 respondents,

Category	Thai Respondents (n = 305)	Foreign Respondents (n = 101)
Gender - Male	38.7%	41.6%
Gender - Female	61.3%	58.4%
Age 55–64	57.4%	51.5%
Age 65–74	32.1%	37.6%
Age 75+	10.5%	10.9%

Perceptions of Wellness Service Dimensions

Descriptive statistics presented in Table 2 indicate positive attitude towards the five main constructs: SQ, AC, TA, CS and WB. Participants had the foreign nationality as well as Thai nationality and consistently had lower mean scores in all constructs compared to their Thai counterparts. The highest gaps found were in Language Support (Thai M = 4.34; Foreign M = 2.83) and Mobile App Usability (Thai M = 4.30; Foreign M = 3.35) showing possible cultural differences or digitalization shift.

Table 2: Perceptions of Wellness Service Dimensions

Dimension	Mean (Thai)	Std. Deviation	Mean (Foreign)	Std. Deviation
Staff professionalism	4.52	0.62	3.96	0.45
Cultural sensitivity	4.42	0.62	3.80	0.95
Personalized care	4.35	0.65	4.04	0.88
Communication clarity	4.43	0.62	4.06	0.76
Hygiene standards	4.41	0.60	4.44	0.61
Suitable facilities	4.46	0.67	3.81	0.78
Transport convenience	4.28	0.66	3.25	0.85
Language support	4.34	0.64	2.83	0.92
Info accessibility	4.40	0.64	3.55	0.75
Senior-friendly accommodation	4.47	0.66	4.38	0.86
Digital comfort	4.43	0.72	3.71	0.64
Telehealth usability	4.29	0.77	3.56	0.77
Mobile health apps	4.30	0.74	3.35	0.95
Tech-enhanced experience	4.47	0.67	3.81	0.77
Support in using tech	4.45	0.74	3.97	0.75
Improved physical health	4.55	0.57	3.89	0.63
Improved mental well-being	4.38	0.57	3.96	0.77
Social engagement	4.41	0.58	4.01	0.77
Learned new techniques	4.48	0.64	3.81	0.90
Life quality impact	4.57	0.55	4.34	0.72
Willingness to recommend	4.70	0.48	4.33	0.69

Determinants of Customer Satisfaction: Multiple Regression Results

Multiple regression analyses were carried out on Thai and Foreign samples individually,

and the impact intensity of each service dimension on Customer Satisfaction was measured (Please refer to Table 3). Accessibility was the most significant predictor for Thai ($\beta = 0.268$, $p < .001$), then Service Quality ($\beta = 0.154$) and Technology Adoption ($\beta = 0.140$). Foreign respondents on the contrary esteemed Service Quality more ($\beta = 0.477$, $p < .001$) and Technology Adoption ($\beta = 0.260$) but no effect of Accessibility ($p = 0.1114$). The results of this study may show that Thai seniors may prioritize logistical and infrastructural convenient factors, and foreign seniors may give more importance to emotional closeness, professional service and a caring staff.

Table 3: Customer Satisfaction: Multiple regression findings

Predictor	Beta (Thai)	p-value (Thai)	Beta (English)	p-value (English)
Service Quality	0.154	0.0038	0.477	0.0000
Accessibility	0.268	0.0000	0.109	0.1114
Technology Adoption	0.140	0.0001	0.260	0.0025
R-squared	0.356	—	0.386	—

These findings reveal distinct patterns between Thai and foreign senior wellness tourists. While Accessibility plays a more pivotal role in shaping satisfaction for Thai seniors, Service Quality is paramount among foreign respondents. This difference may reflect contrasting expectations, lifestyle behaviors, or familiarity with wellness infrastructure. Importantly, Technology Adoption was a consistently significant predictor across both groups, underscoring the growing role of digital services in enhancing customer satisfaction in wellness tourism settings.

Structural Equation Modeling Results

The structural model demonstrated strong explanatory power and statistically significant relationships across all hypothesized paths. Service Quality ($\beta = 0.297$), Accessibility ($\beta = 0.262$), and Technology Adoption ($\beta = 0.270$) each exerted a significant positive effect on Customer Satisfaction (all $p < .001$). These findings affirm that senior wellness tourists' satisfaction is shaped by multi-dimensional service experiences, particularly those that are personalized, inclusive, and digitally supported. (see Table 4) Similarly, Customer Satisfaction revealed a vital direct effect on Well-being: $\beta = 0.475$, $p < .001$, further solidifying its central role as a mediator. In other words, the increased perceptions of provided service contribute to the elderly tourists' emotional and psychological well-being, thus extending previous findings from wellness tourism research. The model successfully supported the applied theoretical framework based on the experience economy and TAM and emphasized the importance of service personalization and inclusivity for holistic well-being.

Table 4: Standardized Path Coefficients

Pathway	B	Std. Error	Beta (Standardized)	t-value	p-value
Service Quality → Customer Satisfaction	0.297	0.045	0.297	6.61	< 0.001
Accessibility → Customer Satisfaction	0.262	0.047	0.262	5.59	< 0.001
Technology Adoption → Customer Satisfaction	0.270	0.045	0.270	5.95	< 0.001
Customer Satisfaction → Well-being	0.475	0.044	0.475	10.86	< 0.001

The mediating effect of satisfaction in carrying service experiences to well-being is supported in these relationships. Results are congruent with the Experience Economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) which argues that memorable, emotionally laden service is a source of customer value and the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) which highlights the importance of ease of use and perceived usefulness in formation

of satisfaction. Fit of the model and predictive ability as indicated in Table 5, the SEM model had very good fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.15$, CFI = 0.948, TLI = 0.935, RMSEA = 0.045 and SRMR = 0.037.

Table 5: Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Recommended Threshold	Model Value (Estimated)
Chi-square / df (χ^2/df)	< 3.0	2.15
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	> 0.90	0.948
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	> 0.90	0.935
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	< 0.06	0.045
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	< 0.08	0.037

Table 6: Squared Multiple Correlations (R^2)

Variable	R^2	Effect Size
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	0.472	Medium to large (Cohen, 1988)
Senior Well-being (WB)	0.226	Medium (Cohen, 1988)

Note: According to Cohen (1988), R^2 values of 0.02 = small, 0.13 = medium, 0.26 = large (for social science contexts).

The explanatory power of model was assessed using squared multiple correlations (R^2) for each endogenous variable. The model accounted for 47.2% of the variance in Customer Satisfaction, which is a medium to large effect size according to Cohen (1988). This suggests that the cumulative effect of quality of service, convenience, and technology use explains close to half of the variance of the senior health tourist satisfaction. Well-being was accounted for by Customer Satisfaction ($R^2 = .226$) – resulting in a medium effect size. Although a way weaker than the impact of path 1, this effect is in theory also important to show the mediating role of satisfaction in the wellness experience design that emotional and psychological advantages are closely related with perceived service quality and comfort.

These results also offer a nuanced perspective on the extent of impact that service factors exert on emotional outcomes among seniors, and a theory-driven guide to the design of wellness services.

Cluster Analysis of Senior Wellness Tourists

The ANOVA result confirm statistically significant differences across all five service perception variables between the two identified clusters were found, as presented in Table 7. Cluster 0 (“Engaged & Satisfied”) has been found to score significantly higher than Cluster 1 (“Disengaged & Underserved”) on all dimensions pertaining to service quality, accessibility, technology adoption, satisfaction, and well-being (all $p < .001$). The effect sizes ($\eta^2 = 0.20$ – 0.26) were large for all dimensions as showing practical meaningfulness and the segmented structure could be validated.

Table 7: ANOVA Test for Mean Differences between Clusters

Variable	Cluster 0 (n = 291) Mean (SD)	Cluster 1 (n = 115) Mean (SD)	F (or Welch F)	p-value	Effect Size (η^2)
Service Quality (SQ)	4.45 (0.38)	3.71 (0.52)	120.63	< .001	0.23 (large)
Accessibility (AC)	4.41 (0.40)	3.63 (0.57)	115.42	< .001	0.21 (large)
Technology Adoption	4.38 (0.42)	3.68 (0.48)	109.74	< .001	0.20 (large)
Customer Satisfaction	4.47 (0.37)	3.70 (0.50)	135.81	< .001	0.26 (large)
Well-being	4.29 (0.43)	3.61 (0.54)	118.96	< .001	0.22 (large)

Note: Effect size interpreted as small ($\eta^2 = .01$), medium (.06), large (.14) per Cohen (1988)

The analysis results showed that a two-cluster model and it revealed two distinct consumer segments with different wellness service experiences.

Cluster 0 (Engaged & Satisfied) included confident, tech-enabled, satisfied users. This subgroup recorded above-average scores for all four dimensions. Their positive perceptions of quality of service, access and comfort toward digital wellness correlated with their high level of satisfaction. This consumer segment is the wellness providers ideal target type because of they are likely to return and promote the service.

Cluster 1 (Disengaged & Underserved). This segmentation underscores the dichotomous nature of the silver wellness customer. This indicates possible linguistic or digital literacy, or service misalignment issues. These people might be excluded by existing service models and therefore offer an important opportunity for (more inclusive) service innovation, especially in cross-cultural or tech-assistive environments.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The findings of this research suggest that wellness experiences among senior tourists could be significantly influenced by service design attributes. To be more concrete, the quality of service, accessibility and technology acceptance have a significant and positive effect on the satisfaction of customers. This is consistent with the findings of past research that responsive service environment is important in wellness tourism (Kim & Kim, 2020; Smith & Puczkó, 2019). The findings reveal that the power of accessibility as a leading antecedent of satisfaction of Thai sample is remarkable, which is consistent with Tavitiyaman (2020) that ease of logistics and physical access were core to older traveler's perceptions of service in Asia.

Technology adoption had a substantial impact, further supported by the argument that digital tools are no longer "add-ons" but integral to wellness. This result agrees with Lu et al. (2021) and Liu (2024) for example, suggest that user-friendly digital platforms can improve service personalization and enable elderly travelers to be involved actively in wellness offerings. However, this paper adds to the literature by revealing that despite rising tech use, a significant consumer group still experience digital exclusion - emphasizing the demand for inclusive tech design.

Furthermore, the high relationship found between customer satisfaction and well-being supports the mediating role of experience quality in leading to emotional and psychological outcomes, as stated in the literature of the Experience Economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) and recently extended in the wellness literature (Moradi et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2021). This contrast of the two segments Engaged & Satisfied and Disengaged & Underserved provides important practical implications that draw attention to heterogeneity among senior tourists and the potential danger in equalizing.

The ambit of this study is broader than that of early studies, including western studies and studies about single dimension of service constructs in two ways: first, it includes all aspects of multi-dimensional service design; second it uses cross-cultural samples and market segmentation within the same model. The findings are particularly relevant in the context of emerging wellness destinations such as Thailand where tourism policy is increasingly reflective of the aging society and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-3: Good Health and Well-being).

Conclusion

This paper contributes empirical evidence on how the design of wellness services (with a focus on the dimensions of service quality, accessibility and technology adoption) influences customer satisfaction and well-being in senior tourists in Thailand. The results, obtained through structural modeling and segmenting analysis, validate the importance of customer satisfaction as a key mediator translating operational service attributes into relevant psycho-spatial benefits for older travelers. Theoretical accordingly, this research adds to wellness tourism literature by extending ES and TAM-based models into a senior-specific context. It further generalizes these models by incorporating accessibility as a core experiential factor--with elevated significance in developing wellness destinations with a diversity of infrastructural and cultural characteristics.

On a practical level, the research provides straightforward direction for wellness tourism suppliers. Service approaches need to be customized, as not all older people can or want to use digital technologies, and there are those who are being left behind or are excluded from such systems. The key role of satisfaction in contributing to well-being suggests that investment in personalization of service and digital inclusion is likely to generate both experiential and reputational gains in this context.

On the policy front, the results are consistent with the Thai national policy on Silver Economy and age-friendly wellness development. Government endorsement is crucial in order to institutionalize service inclusiveness, encourage technological innovation, and make certain that long-stay elderly visitors (both domestic and international) are accommodated in an environment that promotes autonomy, dignity and overall well-being.

Finally, the future of senior wellness tourism will depend on not only the numbers it manages to attract, but also on the design of service ecosystems that are empathetic, inclusive and empowering. This research can contribute as a baseline for practitioners, developers and policy-makers for action on an evidence-based level.

Research recommendations

According to the present findings, the following research themes are proposed to enhance theoretical richness and practical utility in the context of the senior wellness tourism:

1. Longitudinal and Impact Research. It should be noted that this study reflects perceptions at a single point in time. Additional studies would benefit from employing longitudinal designs to examine the extended effects of engagement in wellness experiences on the body, mind, and spirit of older adults. That information would offer windows into satisfaction and engagement beyond the weeks immediately following a visit.

2. Technology for All and Digital Health Innovation. In view of the significant impact of technology adoption on satisfaction, it may be useful to consider which digital tools and obstacles could be researched among different types of seniors in further research. Of particular interest is how user-friendly interfaces, wearables, and technology enabled health services function to support digitally fluent and digitally hesitant older adults in well-being contexts.

Segmentation by Culture and Behavior. Future research could use comparative studies across nations and advanced segmentation techniques (i.e., latent class analysis) to identify specific subgroups among older senior travelers. Understanding the differences in motivation patterns, expectations of services, and cultural motivations will allow for the development of targeted, age-smart, and culturally sensitive wellness services

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DIGITAL NOMADISM FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH IN BALI'S TOURISM INDUSTRY: A GAME THEORY APPROACH

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Abstract

As remote work continues to reshape global mobility, digital nomads have emerged as a distinct and influential group within the tourism landscape. This study explores the strategic decision-making processes of digital nomads through the lens of game theory, focusing on how they respond to evolving destination conditions. Drawing from the lived experiences of nomads in Bali, the research analyzes qualitative content sourced from YouTube videos. A payoff matrix is introduced to illustrate how nomads assess trade-offs and respond to shifting incentives under uncertainty. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, this study captures the subjective meanings and social dynamics embedded in digital narratives. The findings show that strategic behaviors frequently include selecting destinations with flexible visa options, reliable internet, and active nomad communities. These insights highlight the growing need for destination managers to provide adaptive policies, robust digital infrastructure, and consistent support systems. In doing so, destinations can more effectively engage with the digital nomad movement as part of a sustainable and competitive tourism strategy.

Keywords: *Digital nomadism, Game Theory, Content Analysis, Strategic decision making*

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Introduction

Advances in communication technology and shifts in work patterns have given rise to a new phenomenon known as digital nomadism. Although the concept existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic (Holleran, 2022), this new type of travellers has gained increasing attention in the post-pandemic tourism industry, as it offers an opportunity for the sector to recover from the impacts of COVID-19 (Zhou et al., 2024). Many hotels were able to survive, and recoup lost tourism revenue during the peak of the pandemic by offering “work-from-hotel” or part-time packages for remote workers (Zhou et al., 2024). This phenomenon is viewed as a valuable opportunity for countries to benefit from this form of slow tourism by attracting digital nomads who wish to stay longer without acquiring full residency status (Vagena, 2021). In response to the 2020 crisis, many countries began issuing digital nomad visas or similar permits, allowing remote workers to stay longer in the host country (Zhou et al., 2024).

Southeast Asia has emerged as a major travel destination for digital nomads. These individuals engage in Geoarbitrage by exploiting wage differentials by earning higher incomes through employment in developed countries while living in low-cost areas in the Global South (Holleran, 2022). This mobility trend has positioned countries in the region, particularly Indonesia, as attractive locations for long-term residence. Among these destinations, Bali as one of the popular destinations for digital nomads due to its affordable cost of living, rich cultural attractions, and well-developed tourism infrastructure (Bahri, 2024; Zhou et al., 2024). However, before selecting a destination, digital nomads consider various factors. In this context, game theory provides a relevant approach for understanding the rational and social strategies employed by digital nomads in their decision-making processes, as well as the strategic approaches adopted by destinations to attract these travellers and derive positive benefits from their presence (Zhou et al., 2024).

Understanding how digital nomads make decisions about where to live and work is critical to creating long-term strategies that benefit both travellers and host communities. Game theory provides a useful lens for interpreting these behaviours, offering a tool for analysing how individuals respond to incentives, constraints, and the actions of others in dynamic environments (Godinho et al., 2018; Trockel, 2004). When conditions change, whether due to changes in visa policies, internet reliability, or community atmosphere, nomads adjust their strategies, exhibiting adaptive behaviours that reflect a noncooperative decision-making model (Lambertini & Luca, 2011; Tran & Thompson, 2015).

The purpose of this study was to explore the lifestyle preferences and strategic responses of digital nomads in Bali through a game-theoretic lens, with the aim of identifying how their decision-making processes can inform more adaptive and sustainable tourism planning. By combining narrative insights from nomads with a game-theoretic approach, this study offers practical implications for destination managers seeking to build resilience and maintain value in a competitive tourism environment.

Literature Review

Digital Nomadism and Economic Development

Digital nomadism comes from two words: digital, which refers to work done online, and nomad, which means a lifestyle of moving from one place to another (Lantika Oka Permadhi & Apriliani, 2022). Digital nomads are remote workers who rely on an internet connection to work independently, without location and time constraints (Zhou et al., 2024).

This phenomenon continues to grow and is considered a privilege, especially when it can be combined with travel activities that combine business and leisure elements or known as bleisure (Vagena, 2021). According to Nash et al. (2018), being a digital nomad does not always mean traveling continuously but rather choosing to keep moving for personal pleasure. They cannot be equated with ordinary tourists because their main needs focus on the existence of resources to support work, not solely for recreation (Arslan, 2024).

Despite the fundamental differences, debates continue regarding the status of digital nomads as a new form of tourists. Some literature suggests that digital nomads' travel motivations, destination preferences, and sought-after facilities are similar to conventional tourists (Vagena, 2021; Zhou et al., 2024). On the other hand, they differ because they do not earn income from the locations they visit and continue to work online (Arslan, 2024). However, the argument that digital

nomads are included in the category of tourists remains valid, because they leave their original place of residence, spend money during their stay, and engage in recreational activities without settling permanently (Arslan, 2024). These different views indicate a conceptual ambiguity that requires a new classification in tourism studies. This conflict is important because it will affect how stakeholders design destination strategies, both in terms of regulation, promotion, and infrastructure provision.

Digital nomads play an increasingly important role in the tourism industry, as they participate in recreational activities, contribute to the economy, and are the main target of visa policies by global tourist destinations (Arslan, 2024). With relatively high purchasing power and high mobility, they create opportunities for travel agents and tour operators (Green, 2016; Vagena, 2021). Their presence drives innovation and marketing strategies through digital platforms that connect destinations with digital nomad communities (Zhou et al., 2024). These platforms provide professional and personalized services, collaboration with destinations, and involvement in local investments. For example, Bali, which seeks to diversify its tourism market and reach a more qualified group of visitors. In fact, tourist destinations in peripheral and developing regions see digital nomads as a valuable alternative source of income to increase local economic resilience. Therefore, understanding the strategic role of digital nomads is crucial to developing tourism based on sustainability and global competitiveness.

Game Theory

Over the past decades, game theory has evolved into a key tool for social scientists to analyze, predict, and manage strategic interactions among agents who often have conflicting interests. Originally a branch of mathematics, game theory has been adopted and developed to describe and understand social situations (Lambertini & Luca, 2011). It models strategic interactions between two or more parties based on predefined rules and outcomes (Burns et al., 2018). Core concepts include games, players, strategies, and outcomes. Games involve decision-makers whose choices are interdependent. Players are viewed as rational and self-interested actors who select the best responses to the anticipated actions of others. Each actor has a set of instrumental strategies and typically chooses among multiple options to maximize utility. Outcomes result from the combination of these strategies and are mapped to specific payoffs, which may take the form of measurable benefits such as monetary gains or abstract utilities (Burns et al., 2018).

Trockel, (2004) mentioned that game theory may most broadly be divided into cooperative and non-cooperative branches. Non-cooperative game theory attempts to extend an individual's decision-making problem to the context of multiple actors. To identify an individual's decisions and actions, decision theory must first determine the available alternatives, and the criteria used for choosing among them. Applying these criteria leads to the individual's final choices. When rationality requirements are properly formalized, the decision problem becomes more specific and often resembles an optimization problem. In the context of global mobility and tourism, game theory is becoming increasingly relevant, particularly for analyzing destination strategies aimed at attracting digital nomads and tourists.

Methodology

Populations and Sample

The population in this qualitative study comprised digital nomads who share their professional and personal experiences through publicly accessible YouTube videos. The sample consisted of seven YouTube video channels featuring first-hand narratives and reflections from digital nomads living and working in various global locations, with a focus on Bali, Indonesia. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, aimed at selecting informants whose content contained rich and reflective insights into decision-making, motivations, lifestyle adjustments, and interactions with host destinations. Purposive sampling is appropriate in qualitative studies to capture depth rather than breadth (Palinkas et al., 2015). The inclusion criteria were: (1) videos must feature self-identified digital nomads, (2) content must relate to relocation experiences, destination preferences, challenges, or decision-making processes, and (3) videos must be at least 10 minutes long to ensure content depth. This approach ensured that the analyzed sample was relevant to the goal of interpreting digital nomad behavioral patterns through a game theory perspective.

Research Tools

The main tool used in this qualitative research was a content analysis checklist developed to extract narrative data from YouTube videos. Content analysis is a systematic method for describing the meaning of qualitative material (Krippendorff, 2004). The checklist included elements such as relocation motivations, destination selection factors, decision-making processes, risk perceptions, and interaction strategies with both digital platforms and local communities.

Data Collection

Data were collected by selecting, downloading, and transcribing seven YouTube videos uploaded by active digital nomads. Each video was watched in its entirety, and transcripts were manually created and refined for accuracy. Data collection was carried out over a period of one month to allow for iterative reflection and comparison across videos. Ethical considerations were addressed by using only publicly available content intended for educational or documentary purposes, in accordance with digital research ethics (Townsend et al., 2016), and without direct interaction with the video creators.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed a thematic content analysis approach, focusing on identifying patterns in strategic behavior that align with game theory concepts such as rational choice, utility maximization, and interaction dynamics (Tadelis, 2013). These themes were then interpreted using game theory constructs, namely the outcome matrix, which was developed based on the narrative data to model the strategic reasoning behind destination choices, lifestyle decisions, and settlement patterns of digital nomads.

Results

Lifestyle of Nomadism

Lifestyle was one of the reasons cited by participants for choosing to become digital nomads. The findings highlight how participants leveraged remote work and entrepreneurial ventures to achieve personal freedom and life aspirations, as Harry put it by redefining work-life balance with an emphasis on “buying back freedom.”

“I’ve always worked remotely, um... so when I set this company up two years ago, the idea was to buy back my freedom. Um... the reason why I wanted to do that is because I think there more to life than just a corporate money life. um essentially I want to see the world, there’s lots to see lots to experience. So yeah travelled around for work” (Harry).

A broader desire to break away from the constraints of a traditional corporate environment was also expressed by Sean. He highlighted the flexibility and mobility of online business, which allowed him to combine work and travel without being limited by location.

“I built a business online which allows me to travel the world and live in places like Bali which I currently in and I’ve been living here since January of 2022. So basically about 10 months I’ve lived in canggu, Bali” (Sean).

Remote work and online business are not only changing individual lives but also impacting tourism patterns and local economies. The combination of convenience, community, and natural beauty was among the main reasons why participants chose Bali, specifically the Canggu area, as their preferred destination. Participants’ experiences highlight the importance of destinations that seamlessly blend urban infrastructure with natural attractions.

“I am looking for a place to really have the conveniences of a busy town site and having incredible nature, like there is no better place than here” (Alina).

“Bali especially the Canggu area is sort of the capital of digital Nomads around the world or at least that’s what it’s often traditionally seen as. And around you, over here you certainly see a lot of foreigners, a lot of tourists and also a lot of people working on their laptops” (Toumas).

Other participants highlighted the practical aspects of living in tourism destinations, emphasizing efficiency and convenience. Services such as affordable food delivery, accessible transportation, and accommodations with integrated amenities ease the burden of daily living. The ability to out-source household tasks reflects a shift in how individuals allocate their time, prioritizing work and personal well-being over domestic responsibilities. This convenience enables digital nomads to focus on work and leisure, boosting productivity and overall quality of life. Furthermore, affordability allows digital nomads to channel resources into experiences, travel, and professional growth.

Understanding what drives digital nomads to choose a particular tourism destination can inform strategies for urban planning, service development, and sustainable tourism management.

"It will definitely make your stay so much more easy, so much more enjoyable and save you a lot of time money and stress. But yeah, that's one thing that I really love about Bali and staying in Canggu, that life here is so effortless and like I can really focus on work and the important stuff because of course like in the guest house everything is done for you. You can do laundry quickly and like order food and go with scooters so easily anywhere. So, it's very like efficient life here and yeah... ordering food is definitely like the cost of living is so good here that you can always just order food every day from out, so you never need to cook and that of course saves you a lot of time and effort. You can definitely live in Canggu pretty easily depending on the accommodation and the lifestyle you have here" (Jose).

David's experience underscores the appeal of destinations that offer the ideal balance between leisure and productivity. The ability to surf in the morning and work at night illustrates the flexible lifestyle that digital nomads make possible. This integration of personal passion with professional responsibilities highlights the shift from rigid work schedules to a more dynamic and independent way of life.

"I think a lot of people come here because of the weather. It is nice, um... you've got the beaches. It's cheap, I think if you set things up, right as a business you can get your tax for like almost nothing. Like there's a lot of reasons why people are here, because like me, I can surf in the morning and then work in the evening, which is great" (David, Ireland).

"To live for me as a digital nomad, it's a little different. Trying to find a place as a digital nomad isn't the same as just going somewhere for a vacation. For me, living somewhere long term requires considering criteria like convenience, cost of living, how easy it is to get long-term Visa, how good and stable the Wi-Fi. This is huge because we work with it... health care, transportation, weather and the people. It's about the convenience for me" (Sean).

Tropical Co-Working

Supporting facilities in tourist destinations such as cafes not only sell food and drinks, but also offer comfort as a place to work, with tropical-themed decorations and atmospheres that are attractive to this type of tourist. In addition to functioning as a social space, cafes also provide an area for digital nomads to seek inspiration, discuss, or hold online meetings. This makes the cafe a fun 'office' that digital nomads want to visit every day.

"I just really love coming here [co-working café] every day, now, and then because it's just so motivating with this scenery and also being around so many like-minded people really get you going" (Jose).

"..If you come from USA or Europe and you need to kind of work anytime of the evening and night, so yeah, this café is really good place to do that. If you stay in this hostel [one building with café], then I can imagine, it's really nice you can keep working like anytime [like] in your home, kind of like in the co-working space[because] it closes for other people during the evening [but open for the member]" (Jose).

Another opportunity that cafe owners are taking advantage of is offering wellness tourism in one location. Featuring various plants to create a calming atmosphere and providing yoga classes are additional activities that digital nomads can enjoy.

"The quality of life, for me it is important. There's tons of activity close to nature which increases the quality of life. If you're close to the the ocean, if you're close to the mountain,

trees. Subconsciously, I think it makes you happier and you know that is huge to improve your quality of life. Now, the health focused living access to healthy cafes, restaurants, a lot of fruits vegetables, coconuts, it is very cheap (Sean).

“That is the stairs up to the to the yoga deck. So, um yeah.. like I said, I really like this place [because] there's really nothing it doesn't have, it has a café, so I don't need to go anywhere to get coffee, um [also, they provided] weekly events, everything... so you got the community and you got productivity” (Chris)

(ok)Nomad Connectivity

Facilities in rental homes, such as an internet connection, are a major factor that helps digital nomads stay productive and connected. In addition, to maintain comfort during their long-term stay, they make adjustments such as renting or purchasing various equipment for their homes. Digital nomads share their experiences :

“Here in my guest house, it's really nice place, perfect location and uh very comfortable. But what I did basically now, when I'm staying longer in the same place, I bought a lot of plants and decorations and definitely the working situation way more comfortable with the proper office chair. So that's what I would recommend if you're staying for even a few months and actually I'm thinking of getting maybe like a proper like big monitor here because of course it would be more comfortable to work not be [just] on laptop but like looking the computer. There are some companies who rent any office things, so, monitors, chairs, proper tables and everything like that, here in Bali, so it's pretty easy. I think, I will try that soon and yeah, the Wi-Fi is pretty decent speed here so mostly in most places in Canggu the Wi-Fi always pretty good in the accommodation so not always but yeah mostly you can do any work at home and that's what I like because yeah mostly it's nice to just work from home. It's pretty comfortable with a chair and good Wi-Fi and everything” (Jose).

“So obviously for me you can get a place much cheaper but for me once again I cannot do guest houses, you know because of the stuff that I require for work. I also need really fast Wi-Fi and that's why I'm paying a little more and that's fine. Besides that, I don't want to be far from the gym or the shops or wherever I go. I don't want to lose a lot of time which makes it impractical. As a digital Nomad who's more serious about trying to build my businesses” (Sean).

In addition, socializing with fellow digital nomads and interacting with local communities are ways for them to stay connected to their surroundings.

“You can find every kind of beautiful aesthetic environment to work in with a strong internet connection in Canggu. The other really big draw for digital Nomads is that this is really the place for networking. Canggu has so many different meetup events where you can meet other people” (Alina).

Cultural Integration

Daily life in Canggu supports the cultural integration experienced by digital nomads. As Jose explains, the efficiency and convenience of living there allows him to focus on work while adapting to the local rhythm. This is in line with Toumas' perspective, which highlights the flexibility of digital nomads in adjusting their lifestyle and daily habits from a tourist-like approach to a more local way of life.

“It will definitely make your stay so much more easy, so much more enjoyable and save you a lot of time money and stress. But yeah, that's one thing that I really love about Bali and staying in Canggu, that life here is so effortless and like I can really focus on work and the important stuff. Because of course, like in the guest house everything is done for you. It's very like efficient life here and yeah ordering food is definitely like the cost of living is so good here that you can always just order food every day from out so you never need to cook and that of course saves you a lot of time and effort you can definitely live in here pretty easily, depending on the accommodation and the lifestyle you have here” (Jose).

“Obviously just like anywhere you can spend however much or how ever little you want there are many expensive beach clubs like Western nice restaurants like nice Villas things like this where you can definitely spend a lot of money here but if you live a bit more local you eat local food all these kind of things then you can definitely still live extremely cheap” (Toumas)

“This co-working place has a very strong Community. It's one of the best parts about this place. Um, so yeah, there's a new members coffee break every Tuesday, weekly events, actually there's a lunch out today which I'm going to so, that's what they call the members lunch here. Um so I'll be at that, and we even now have a paddle club” (Chris)

Drawing on the themes identified from digital nomads' experiences, the payoff matrix and associated strategies are presented below:

Table 1. Digital Nomad Decision Matrix Based on Destination Perception

Destination Perception	Digital Nomad Strategy	Perceived Payoff (Narrative)
Good infrastructure, flexible visa, appealing lifestyle	Long-term stay and settlement	Highly desirable. Bali fully supports both professional and personal goals.
Strong community, reasonable cost, visa tightening	Medium-term stay (3–6 months)	Fairly beneficial. Still attractive, but increasing restrictions limit long-term planning.
Limited coworking, inefficient daily life	Work from private accommodation	Mixed experience. Basic needs met, but lack of collaboration reduces efficiency.
Overcrowded, noisy, low privacy	Move to quieter area within destination	Somewhat unfavorable. Social density affects comfort and focus.
Rising costs, strict visa, poor connectivity	Short stay, then relocate	Undesirable. Bali loses appeal due to financial and regulatory pressure.
Weak community, strict visa, poor connectivity	Move to another country	Highly undesirable. Environment no longer supports digital nomad life, triggering relocation

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The experiences of the digital nomads in this study reflect a growing shift in how people view work, lifestyle, and place. Many participants described their decision to live in Bali not as a temporary escape but as part of a long-term lifestyle change. What attracted them was not just good Wi-Fi or coworking spaces, but the opportunity to live somewhere that made everyday life feel lighter and more fulfilling. These motivations echo those described by (Arslan, 2024; Chevtaeva, 2021), digital nomadism is increasingly tied to values such as freedom, simplicity, and balance. Bali, with its blend of tropical charm and digital infrastructure, has become a symbol of this lifestyle. For digital nomads, especially in places like Canggu, the combination of affordability, convenience, and creative energy is a compelling reason to both vacation and settle for an extended period.

However, these choices are not simply emotional or spontaneous. Digital nomads often make calculated decisions based on a combination of personal needs and perceived destination conditions. Visa flexibility, cost of living, internet quality, and supportive communities are repeatedly mentioned as key factors. In this sense, nomads can be understood as strategic players who adapt to changing conditions to maximize the overall benefits of staying in a particular location. As Burns et al., (2018) and Trockel (2004) explain, game theory helps frame this behavior as part of a larger pattern of rational responses, where individuals adjust their strategies in reaction to environmental shifts, such as relocating to quieter areas when destinations become overcrowded or even leaving a country when visa policies tighten or infrastructure deteriorates.

The strategic moves carry real implications for Bali's tourism economy. The presence of digital nomads can bring consistent revenue to local businesses, but only if the environment

continues to support their needs. As shown in the decision matrix from this study, once perceived benefits begin to decline, due to tighter visas, rising costs, or poor infrastructure policies, the strategy shifts from staying to leaving. Godinho et al., (2018) argue that, in game environments, what sustains cooperation is a sense of stability and trust. If the destination is to remain competitive, the policies and services it offers must feel dependable. This includes not only digital infrastructure, but also overall livability, service efficiency, and fair governance.

Finally, what keeps many nomads in a place like Bali is not just the cost of living or the climate, but the sense of belonging to a place that "gets" them. Cafés that double as wellness centers, spontaneous community events, and the ease of everyday tasks all help create a rhythm that blends work and leisure in a way that feels sustainable. These features don't happen by chance; they result from deliberate choices by local businesses and communities to attract and support a particular type of traveler. Yang et al. (2015) refer to this as "strategic signaling," and it plays a significant role in how destinations like Bali remain visible and attractive. When nomads share their lives on YouTube or other platforms, as noted by (Cook, 2023), they help reinforce Bali's image as a lifestyle destination. But that image only endures if the reality matches the promise. For Bali, the opportunity lies in recognizing digital nomads not as temporary visitors, but as mobile citizens whose presence, if well managed, can contribute meaningfully to long-term tourism sustainability while respecting local culture and wisdom.

Conclusion

Digital nomads are a type of traveler who can impact the economy of a region, as they stay longer than regular tourists. The attractiveness of a destination, such as Bali as one of the key hubs for digital nomads, plays a vital role in sustaining a tourism-driven economy, particularly when supported by consistent policies and strong infrastructure. However, when these supporting factors decline, digital nomads often shorten their stays or relocate entirely, which can negatively affect long-term economic outcomes. This pattern reflects a core principle of game theory that individuals make rational decisions aimed at maximizing their benefits in a competitive environment. To ensure sustainable economic growth, destinations must maintain their credibility as nomad-friendly locations by implementing stable policies, investing in infrastructure, and remaining flexible, while also considering the well-being of local communities, the environment, and cultural heritage. In this context, game theory not only sharpens our understanding of digital mobility but also contributes to more adaptive.

Research recommendations

Based on the findings and thematic analysis interpreted through the lens of game theory, several directions are recommended for future research:

1. Future research could offer a more balanced game theory model that not only considers the preferences of digital nomads but also includes the strategies and responses of local stakeholders. This would allow for the development of sustainable and mutually beneficial destination strategies.
2. Extending the application of game theory to compare Bali with other popular digital nomad destinations (e.g., Chiang Mai, Lisbon, Medellín) will highlight competitive dynamics and reveal how nomads change strategies based on perceived benefits and constraints in different countries.

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GREENING HOSPITALITY: THE TRANSFORMATIONAL IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES AND CUSTOMER ECO - PRESSURE ON OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE IN MALAYSIA

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Extended abstract

This study explores the transformational impact of environmental initiatives and customer eco-pressure on operational excellence within the hospitality sector in Malaysia. With the global trend towards sustainability, understanding how green practices affect operational performance has become crucial for hospitality businesses striving to maintain competitiveness (Belly et al., 2025; Khalil et al., 2024). The research employs Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyse data from 288 respondents, providing a comprehensive understanding of how various environmental practices influence operational outcomes.

The study finds that environmental performance incentives, green product innovation, and eco-friendly customer pressure all have a significant impact on operational performance in the hospitality industry. Specifically, environmental performance incentives were found to enhance operational performance by encouraging businesses to adopt more efficient, sustainable practices. Green product innovation emerged as another crucial factor, positively influencing operational performance by fostering creativity and differentiation through environmentally conscious offerings. Furthermore, eco-friendly customer pressure was identified as a critical driver, as consumers increasingly demand sustainable practices, pushing businesses to enhance their operational excellence.

These findings contribute both practically and theoretically. Practically, they highlight the importance of integrating environmental initiatives into business operations, demonstrating that sustainability can drive improved operational performance, enhance customer satisfaction, and strengthen competitive advantage in the hospitality sector. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature by providing empirical evidence of the link between environmental initiatives and operational excellence in the context of Malaysia, offering valuable insights for both practitioners and researchers aiming to understand the dynamic relationship between sustainability and business performance. The results of this research point to the necessity for hospitality businesses to not only meet but anticipate growing customer demands for eco-friendly practices, thus aligning their operational strategies with sustainability objectives. In turn, businesses can ensure long-term success while contributing to broader environmental goals.

Keywords: Environmental Initiatives; Operational Performance; Hospitality Sector; Green Product Innovation; Eco-Friendly Customer Pressure; Structural Equation Modeling (SEM); Malaysia.

Purpose/Problem Statement

The aim of this research paper is to explore the transformational impact of environmental initiatives and customer eco-pressure on operational excellence within the hospitality sector in Malaysia. With the global trend towards sustainability, understanding how green practices affect operational performance has become crucial for hospitality businesses striving to maintain competitiveness.

Originality/value

This study provides empirical evidence of the link between environmental initiatives and operational excellence in the context of Malaysia, offering valuable insights for both practitioners and researchers aiming to understand the dynamic relationship between sustainability and business performance.

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Design/methodology/approach

A quantitative approach used online questionnaires for the collecting of data. The study employs Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLSEM) to analyse data from 288 respondents, providing a comprehensive understanding of how various environmental practices influence operational outcomes.

Findings/Discussion

This study revealed that environmental performance incentives, green product innovation, and eco-friendly customer pressure all have a significant impact on operational performance in the hospitality industry. Specifically, environmental performance incentives were found to enhance operational performance by encouraging businesses to adopt more efficient, sustainable practices. Green product innovation emerged as another crucial factor, positively influencing operational performance by fostering creativity and differentiation through environmentally conscious offerings. Furthermore, eco-friendly customer pressure was identified as a critical driver, as consumers increasingly demand sustainable practices, pushing businesses to enhance their operational excellence.

Theoretical implications

This study enriches the literature by providing empirical evidence of the link between environmental initiatives and operational excellence in the context of Malaysia. It contributes to the understanding of how sustainability practices can drive business performance and competitive advantage within the hospitality sector.

Practical implications

The findings highlight the importance of integrating environmental initiatives into business operations, demonstrating that sustainability can drive improved operational performance, enhance customer satisfaction, and strengthen competitive advantage in the hospitality sector.

Social implications (Policy contribution)

The results of this research point to the necessity for hospitality businesses to not only meet but anticipate growing customer demands for eco-friendly practices, aligning their operational strategies with sustainability objectives. This has broader implications for policies that promote sustainability within the industry.

Research limitations

This study focuses solely on the hospitality sector in Malaysia, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other industries or regions with different environmental policies and consumer behaviours. Additionally, the study relies on cross-sectional data from 288 respondents, which may not capture long-term trends or the evolving nature of customer eco-pressure and environmental initiatives. Another limitation is the potential for response bias, as the data collected from self-reported surveys may not fully reflect actual business practices. Future research could address these limitations by exploring other sectors, adopting longitudinal approaches, or using alternative data collection methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

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THE VALUE OF CULTURAL HOSPITALITY IN THE AI ERA: A THEORETICAL EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL LABOR AUTHENTICITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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Abstract

This study presents a theoretical examination of the cultural value of human emotional labor in contemporary society, where technological advancement and artificial intelligence (AI) are rapidly evolving. Using flight attendants in the aviation industry as a case study, this research explores how culturally constructed concepts of "hospitality" and the authenticity of emotional labor influence customer satisfaction from an international comparative perspective.

Through a comprehensive review of literature on emotional labor, hospitality, and AI/automation published between 2015 and 2024, this study addresses several key questions. First, building upon Hochschild's emotional labor theory, we systematize research trends on how cultural contexts influence the practice and experience of emotional labor. Second, we theoretically examine the differences in cultural concepts of "omotenashi," "hospitality," and "service" across Japanese, Western, Asian, and Middle Eastern contexts. Third, we investigate how AI technology advancement is transforming the positioning and value of emotional labor in the hospitality industry.

Based on these theoretical considerations, this study proposes a new theoretical framework for analyzing the authenticity of cultural hospitality and the value of human service in the AI era. This framework consists of four dimensions: (1) cultural construction of emotional labor, (2) cultural perception of authenticity, (3) complementarity between AI technology and human service, and (4) cultural differences in customer satisfaction.

A particularly noteworthy theoretical finding is the presentation of a hypothetical model suggesting that the impact of emotional labor authenticity on customer satisfaction is moderated by cultural context. For instance, in the Japanese context, a combination of meticulous service following established patterns and subtle attentiveness is evaluated as authentic, while in Western contexts, the congruence between individual expression and sincerity tends to be valued as authentic. In Middle Eastern cultures, traditional expressions of hospitality form the foundation of authenticity, while in Southeast Asia, the ability to adapt to cultural diversity is linked to authenticity evaluation.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in providing a framework for reevaluating the value of emotional labor in the AI era from a cross-cultural perspective. As practical implications, the study offers insights into hospitality education that considers cultural diversity in the global aviation industry and effective integration of AI technology and human service. The study concludes by highlighting the necessity for international comparative research to empirically test the theoretical framework proposed in this study as a direction for future research.

Keywords: Emotional Labor, Cultural Hospitality, Authenticity, Customer Satisfaction, Artificial Intelligence, Aviation Industry

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EXPLORING PREDICTORS OF PERCEIVED VALUE AND ADOPTION INTENTIONS TOWARD CHATGPT-ENABLED PERSONALIZED TRAVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

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Extended abstract

As artificial intelligence (AI) technologies redefine digital user experiences, conversational agents like ChatGPT have gained prominence in consumer services, including tourism. This study investigates the predictors of perceived value and behavioral intention to adopt ChatGPT-generated personalized travel recommendations. Grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Value-Based Adoption Model (VAM), the research evaluates the effects of perceived relevance, credibility, usefulness, and intelligence on perceived value and adoption intentions. A total of 159 structured questionnaires were distributed to find out individuals with prior experience using ChatGPT for travel planning. Of these, 126 responses were deemed complete and valid for data analysis, resulting in a usable response rate of approximately 79.2%. The questionnaire was designed to capture key constructs relevant to the study, utilizing validated measurement instruments adapted from prior research. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to assess the relationships among the constructs. Results reveal that perceived relevance and intelligence significantly influence perceived value, which in turn mediates their effects on adoption intention. Moreover, perceived usefulness, perceived intelligence, and perceived value exhibit significant direct relationships with adoption intention. Contrary to expectations, perceived credibility showed no significant direct or indirect effect. These findings suggest evolving interest among users in AI-mediated contexts and highlight the importance of intelligent responsiveness and content relevance in shaping perceived value. This study contributes theoretically by extending TAM and VAM frameworks and provides practical insights for AI designers, tourism marketers, and policymakers aiming to foster responsible and engaging AI-based tourism experiences.

Keywords: Perceived relevance, Perceived credibility, Perceived usefulness, Perceived intelligence, Perceived value, Adoption intention, ChatGPT, Travel recommendations, Artificial intelligence.

Purpose/Problem Statement

The integration of ChatGPT in tourism platforms offers personalized and interactive travel planning capabilities. However, there remains a paucity of empirical evidence on what drives perceived value and intention to adopt such AI-enabled services. This study addresses this gap by examining how informational and cognitive attributes of ChatGPT, specifically perceived relevance, perceived credibility, perceived usefulness, and perceived intelligence influence users' perceived value evaluation and adoption intention in a travel recommendation context.

Originality/value

This research is one of the earliest to systematically apply and integrate TAM and VAM in studying ChatGPT adoption in the tourism domain (Davis, 1989; Kim et al., 2007). It introduces perceived intelligence as a novel construct within this framework and empirically validates the mediating role of perceived value. The unexpected insignificance of credibility also opens new discussions on value formation in AI environments, offering fresh theoretical insights into consumer–AI interaction paradigms.

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Design/methodology/approach

Using a cross-sectional design, data were collected through purposive sampling from 159 users of ChatGPT. However, only 126 responses fulfilled the inclusion criteria and were used for data analysis. The study employed validated scales from Choi and Rifon (2002), Pillai and Sivathanu (2020), and Choi et al. (2018) to measure six latent constructs. PLS-SEM using SmartPLS version 4 was utilized for reliability and validity assessments, hypothesis testing, and mediation analysis. Model fit and predictive power were assessed through SRMR, R^2 , and PLSpredict, ensuring robustness and generalizability (Hair et al., 2022).

Findings/Discussion

The structural model results supported six out of nine direct hypotheses. Perceived relevance significantly influenced perceived value (H1: $\beta = 0.337$, $p = 0.001$), although it did not directly impact adoption intention (H2: $\beta = 0.105$, $p = 0.128$). Perceived credibility showed no significant effect on either perceived value (H3: $\beta = 0.025$, $p = 0.396$) or adoption intention (H4: $\beta = 0.041$, $p = 0.316$). While perceived usefulness did not significantly affect perceived value (H5: $\beta = 0.150$, $p = 0.081$), it had a strong positive impact on adoption intention (H6: $\beta = 0.320$, $p < 0.001$). Perceived intelligence was a significant predictor of both perceived value (H7: $\beta = 0.354$, $p < 0.001$) and adoption intention (H8: $\beta = 0.214$, $p = 0.005$). Additionally, perceived value itself significantly influenced adoption intention (H9: $\beta = 0.236$, $p = 0.003$), supporting its central mediating role. Mediation analysis further confirmed that perceived value significantly mediated the effects of perceived relevance (H10: $\beta = 0.080$, $p = 0.016$) and perceived intelligence (H13: $\beta = 0.084$, $p = 0.022$) on adoption intention. However, perceived value did not mediate the relationships between perceived credibility (H11: $\beta = 0.006$, $p = 0.401$) or perceived usefulness (H12: $\beta = 0.035$, $p = 0.118$) and adoption intention. These findings highlight the importance of perceived relevance and intelligence in driving adoption via perceived value, while suggesting that credibility may no longer be a decisive factor in AI-generated tourism contexts.

Theoretical implications

This study extends TAM and VAM by introducing perceived intelligence as a salient factor and reinforcing perceived value as a key mediator in AI adoption. It highlights a shift in value dynamics, where users prioritize contextual intelligence and relevance over traditional credibility. These findings suggest the need for evolving acceptance models that incorporate nuanced user perceptions of machine cognition and personalization in AI systems.

Practical implications

Tourism stakeholders, including destination management organizations and AI developers, should enhance perceived value by focusing on intelligent, context-sensitive, and personalized interactions. ChatGPT systems must be designed to reflect human-like reasoning, responsive dialogue, and task alignment to increase user engagement. The diminished impact of credibility implies that users may assume baseline trust in AI systems, shifting the focus to usability and intelligence in service design.

Social implications (Policy contribution)

Policymakers must consider equity and digital inclusion when integrating AI systems like ChatGPT into national tourism strategies. Training programs that boost digital literacy and ethical frameworks that address bias, transparency, and privacy can enhance consumer trust and long-term adoption. This study also informs regulatory debates around AI accountability and consumer protection in digital tourism ecosystems.

Research limitations

This study's cross-sectional design limits causal inference. The sample, while diverse, was regionally limited to Malaysia, affecting global generalizability. Future research should adopt longitudinal or experimental designs and examine emotional factors such as satisfaction or enjoyment. Variables like perceived risk, social influence, and privacy concerns could further refine the model and contextual understanding.

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STAKEHOLDER'S PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TOURISM TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: A CONCEPTUAL PAPER

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Extended abstract

Tourism today is shifting towards digitalization, making tourism products and services accessible at tourists' fingertips. Digital tourism refers to the transformation of the tourism industry using internet-based tools to enhance guest experiences (Adeola & Evans, 2019). Roziqin et al. (2021) define it as converting information and engagement tools into digital formats, linked to innovations in how and why technology is used by tourists and businesses. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital adoption in tourism due to travel restrictions and the need for contactless services (Li et al., 2023; Balasubramaniam & Hanafiah, 2021). As a result, digitalization became a key enabler of sustainable tourism, supporting economic, social, and environmental development aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (UNWTO, 2018). In Malaysia, digital tourism is recognized as a catalyst for national growth. The Malaysia National Tourism Policy 2020–2030 emphasizes the development of smart tourism. Launched in 2018, Malaysia Smart Tourism 4.0 and the 2024 national budget reflect governmental commitment to the digital economy, especially supporting MSMEs. This conceptual paper offers a foundation for examining the impact of digital tourism through the lens of the Triple Bottom Line theory. It highlights the potential of digitalization to advance sustainable tourism development outcome.

The Digital Tourism Paradigm

Digital tourism marks a shift in how the industry operates and delivers stakeholder value. Activities such as digital marketing are cost-effective and improve destination visibility (Deb et al., 2022; Chatterjee & Dsilva, 2020). Despite its growth, the impact of digital tourism on sustainability remains underexplored. Jiang and Phoong (2022) noted a lack of research integrating digitalization's effects on tourism's economic and social sustainability. COVID-19 brought new insights into digital tourism's role in sustainability. As digitalization reshapes tourism, a deeper understanding of its stakeholder impact is essential.

Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation

Digital tourism development

Technological advances have changed how tourists explore destinations. Happ and Ivancsó-Horváth (2018) describe digital tourism as using ICT to boost organizational competitiveness, evolving from early 2000s "e-tourism. COVID-19 drove significant innovation. Melović et al. (2023) reported a shift among small entrepreneurs from traditional to digital marketing. In Malaysia, hotels began using virtual reality to offer immersive guest experiences (Balasubramaniam & Hanafiah, 2022). Cheng et al. (2022) observed a post-2019 surge in digital transformation research, indicating renewed focus on tourism resilience and sustainability.

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Benefits and challenges

Digital marketing offers cost savings, brand visibility, sales growth, and improved customer engagement (Murniati et al., 2021). It also allows small businesses global reach (Trunfio & Della Lucia, 2017, as cited in Rodrigues, 2021). Yet, challenges remain, especially for small enterprises. Zvaigne et al. (2023) found that digital investment often exceeds returns due to limited financial capacity. Gritta and Calabrese (2023) observed that micro and small businesses often struggle to use booking platforms and social networks effectively.

Stakeholder's perspective

Studies show varied stakeholder views on digital tourism. Zvaigne et al. (2023) explored technology adoption by hotels, tour guides, and tourism experts in the Baltic region, revealing financial constraints as a major barrier. Mistilis et al. (2014) emphasized the role of stakeholder networks in shaping future tourism strategies.

In rural and developing destinations, policy support is crucial for small businesses adopting digital marketing (Gritta & Calabrese, 2023). Emerging technologies like big data, AR/VR, social media, and blockchain are redefining tourism's development.

Sustainable tourism framework

Sustainability is central to tourism, where benefits must outweigh negative impacts. UNWTO outlines three criteria for sustainable tourism: preserving natural and cultural heritage, respecting socio-cultural authenticity, and ensuring long-term economic benefits (UNWTO, n.d.). Scholars have linked sustainable tourism to the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) theory, which stresses the need for stakeholder collaboration to achieve shared goals (Stoddard et al., 2012; Fredline et al., 2015; Yeap & Liow, 2022; Turker & Alladinoglu, 2016).

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework by Elkington (1999) suggests that organizations should evaluate their performance based not only on profit, but also on environmental and social impacts. In tourism studies, TBL has been widely applied as it offers a balanced approach to assessing sustainability by integrating economic, environmental, and social dimensions. This framework helps stakeholders understand how tourism activities affect communities, ecosystems, and long-term economic outcomes (Stoddard et al., 2012; Fredline et al., 2015; Yeap & Liow, 2022).

In the context of digital tourism, TBL includes:

1. **Economic Sustainability:** Enhancing revenue, efficiency, and business performance via digital tools.
2. **Environmental Sustainability:** Reducing resource use, carbon footprints, and promoting virtual alternatives.
3. **Social Sustainability:** Strengthening community involvement, preserving culture, and enhancing stakeholder interaction.

Conclusion

The concept paper underscores the importance of a sustainable digital tourism approach guided by the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework, which considers the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of development. The stakeholder involvement and support systems are critical to ensuring that digital transformation contributes meaningfully to long-term sustainability goals, particularly in emerging and rural destinations.

There is a need for inclusive digital strategies, public-private partnerships, and theoretical grounding in sustainability frameworks like TBL. As digital tourism continues to evolve, future research should focus on stakeholder dynamics, capacity-building efforts, and policy integration to address existing gaps. A holistic, stakeholder's centred digital tourism model can support resilience, encourage innovation, and ensure that benefits are equitably distributed across the tourism ecosystem.

Keywords: Digital Tourism; Sustainable Tourism Development; Triple Bottom Line (TBL)

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CHARTING A COURSE TO NET-ZERO: A PRACTICAL ROADMAP FOR MICE VENUES IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

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Abstract

The MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions) sector significantly influences global economic activity, contributing 3.4% to GDP in 2023. The Thai government has strengthened its support for the MICE sector by introducing enhanced facilitation measures and actively promoting Thailand as a prime destination for international MICE events. This includes the development of entertainment complexes capable of hosting citywide concerts, festivals, and world-class sporting events across the country. Since from large trade shows and exhibitions to festivals, live music or sporting events, as well as smaller business conferences and gatherings of teams or families, events are a vital part of Thai society, there is an unclear commitment to minimize the environmental impact of these activities, recognizing its responsibility to promote sustainability. This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively explore the research phenomenon. The research aims to identify the net-zero requirements within the MICE industry, assess the awareness of net-zero goals among MICE venue clients, and develop a net-zero roadmap for Southern Thailand. This research identifies key challenges and potential strategies for transitioning to net-zero MICE services by thoroughly analyzing current practices, regulatory frameworks, and technological advancements. The findings are designed to offer actionable insights and recommendations for stakeholders, policymakers, and MICE service providers, helping them navigate the journey toward achieving net-zero status while maintaining high-quality services in Southern Thailand.

Keywords: Sustainability; MICE industry; Net Zero; Roadmap; Southern Thailand

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UNDERSTANDING ONLINE HOTEL BOOKING INTENTION: AN INTEGRATED TAM PERSPECTIVE OF INTERACTIVITY AND RISK

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Extended abstract

This study investigates the complex interplay between perceived interactivity, perceived risk, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and online hotel booking intention, using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as the theoretical underpinning. The study primarily examines how perceived interactivity influences perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness, and how perceived risk impacts perceived usefulness. Furthermore, the model tests the direct, specific indirect, and total effects of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness on online hotel booking intention. Utilizing partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with data collected from 218 hotel customers, this research yields critical insights into the mediating roles of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness in shaping online booking behaviors. The findings show that perceived ease of use significantly predicts both perceived usefulness and online booking intention, whereas perceived usefulness also significantly predicts booking intention. However, perceived interactivity and perceived risk do not directly influence perceived usefulness. The study offers meaningful implications for theory, practice, and policy in advancing digital tourism and hospitality services.

Keywords: Online hotel booking; perceived interactivity; perceived risk; perceived ease of use; perceived usefulness; Technology Acceptance Model (TAM); PLS-SEM; digital tourism

Purpose/Problem Statement

As the hospitality industry increasingly shifts toward digital platforms, understanding the antecedents of consumers' online hotel booking intentions becomes essential. Although prior studies have extensively validated TAM in e-commerce and travel contexts (Abdullah et al., 2017, 2018; Davis, 1989), limited empirical research has explored how perceived interactivity and perceived risk interplay with TAM variables. This study aims to bridge this gap by assessing the direct and indirect effects of these constructs on online booking intentions, while also uncovering mediating mechanisms that explain how users form behavioral intentions toward hotel booking systems.

Originality/value

This research offers a novel contribution by extending TAM through the integration of perceived interactivity and perceived risk, two underexplored constructs in the online hospitality booking literature. Unlike earlier studies that treat TAM in isolation, this study adopts a more comprehensive, mediation-driven model to reveal how interactivity and risk perceptions influence ease of use and usefulness, which ultimately determine booking intentions. The findings enrich TAM-related discourse and offer actionable insights for platform designers and hotel managers. Furthermore, the application of SmartPLS 4 for specific indirect and total effect analysis adds methodological robustness and contemporary relevance.

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Design/methodology/approach

A quantitative research design was adopted, using a cross-sectional online survey administered to 218 hotel customers in Malaysia who had prior experience booking accommodations online. A purposive sampling method was employed. Measurement items were adapted from established sources (Davis & Venkatesh, 1996; Joo & Sang, 2013; Wu, 2005; Wu & Wang, 2005) and all constructs were measured using 5-point Likert scales. Data were analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0, enabling the assessment of measurement model validity, structural model relationships, direct effects, specific indirect effects, and total effects through bootstrapping procedures.

Findings/Discussion

The findings reveal that perceived interactivity has a significant positive effect on perceived ease of use, consistent with past studies. However, perceived interactivity and perceived risk did not significantly affect perceived usefulness, suggesting that users may not equate interactive or risky experiences with functional value. Perceived ease of use was found to significantly influence both perceived usefulness and online hotel booking intention, while perceived usefulness also positively influenced booking intention, reaffirming TAM's core assumptions (Davis, 1989). The mediation analysis showed that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness significantly mediate several relationships, except for those involving perceived interactivity and risk via perceived usefulness alone. These nuanced effects highlight the cognitive evaluation process travelers undertake when interacting with hotel booking technologies.

Theoretical implications

This study advances TAM literature by empirically validating extended constructs and the mediating mechanisms that shape online booking intentions in the hospitality domain. It provides empirical support for incorporating system-specific perceptions such as interactivity and risk into TAM, enhancing its explanatory power in digital service environments. These findings support a refined understanding of how users evaluate ease of use and usefulness based on perceptual cues from the platform interface.

Practical implications

For hotel managers and booking platform developers, this study highlights the importance of enhancing user-friendly interfaces that elevate ease of use, which in turn drives usefulness and booking intentions. Design efforts should prioritize simplified navigation, responsive interfaces, and clarity of information. Since perceived interactivity does not significantly impact usefulness, interactive elements should be carefully designed to avoid overwhelming users. Addressing perceived risk through security assurances, transparent policies, and trust-building features can indirectly support positive behavioral outcomes.

Social implications (Policy contribution)

The study contributes to digital tourism policy by advocating for inclusive design standards and risk mitigation protocols in online booking systems. Governments and tourism authorities should consider implementing certification schemes or trust seals to standardize online booking practices and protect consumer rights. This can enhance public trust in digital travel services, especially in post-pandemic recovery periods.

Research limitations

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Second, the sample is geographically restricted to Malaysian hotel customers, which may limit generalizability to other cultural or regional settings. Third, this study relies on self-reported data, which may introduce common method bias. Future research may explore longitudinal designs, cross-cultural comparisons, or incorporate objective behavioral data to enhance external validity.

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FOLLOW THE FLOW: HOW GEN Z MOBILITY IS SHAPING BALI'S TOURISM FUTURE

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Extended abstract

Digital transformation has significantly influenced travel behaviors, notably reshaping the transportation preferences of Generation Z travelers. Transportation, an integral component of tourism growth, is undergoing substantial changes driven by these young travelers. This article explores how Gen Z mobility trends are shaping the future of tourism in Bali by addressing three critical questions: (1) Where do Gen Z travelers go? (2) How long do they stay? and (3) What are the implications of these trends for Bali's tourism development? Using data collected from 530 Gen Z respondents during February–April 2025, the findings reveal that Denpasar (73.6%), Badung (18.1%), and Gianyar (8.3%) are the most preferred destinations, emphasizing urban-centered travel driven by digital visibility and accessibility. Transportation preferences highlight a strong shift toward app-based solutions, with 46.4% utilizing ride-sharing services and 23.4% opting for self-drive rentals. Additionally, the study identifies a dominant trend toward short-duration stays, with 65.5% of travelers staying only 1–2 nights, reflecting a preference for compact, high-frequency, and experience-oriented travel. These behavioral shifts present both opportunities and challenges for Bali's tourism industry. Prioritizing the development of flexible and integrated transportation systems, the creation of high-value short-stay tourism products, and the promotion of spatial diversification to mitigate visitor concentration is essential to ensure sustainable and inclusive tourism growth.

Keywords: *Gen Z, mobility trends, transportation preferences, digital transformation, travel behavior*

Introduction

Tourism evolves continuously in alignment with technological advancements. Among recent transformations, the rapid development of transportation stands out as a critical factor shaping tourists' overall travel experiences. This shift is particularly pronounced in the mobility behaviors and preferences of younger travelers, notably Generation Z (ages 13–28), who now dominate both domestic and international tourism flows in Bali. As digital natives, Gen Z travelers exhibit unique mobility patterns influenced significantly by digital platforms and instant connectivity, reshaping conventional tourism paradigms (Damanik et al., 2022; Dolot, 2018; Gentina, 2020; Moscardo et al., 2013). Examining where these travelers choose to go, how long they stay, and the implications of their transportation choices provides essential insights. Such insights are pivotal for stakeholders in developing adaptive and responsive tourism strategies, ultimately enabling Bali's tourism sector to sustainably meet the dynamic and evolving expectations of this influential generation.

In Indonesia, particularly in Bali, the transformation of transportation preferences among Generation Z has been driven by several key factors. In recent decades, there has been a clear shift away from conventional transportation modes toward more dynamic and flexible alternatives. This transition is influenced by three primary drivers. First, technological advancements have enabled the digitalization of mobility services, with platforms such as Gojek and Grab offering greater accessibility, booking efficiency, and real-time price transparency. Second, increasing environmental awareness and the urgency of addressing climate change have encouraged a growing preference for more sustainable modes of transportation, such as public transit, electric scooters, and vehicle-sharing services. Third, changing social values emphasizing collective responsibility, carbon footprint reduction, and the importance of seamless connectivity have reshaped expectations for mobility systems, particularly in island destinations like Bali, where public transportation infrastructure remains limited.

Moreover, the evolution of mobility preferences among Generation Z is further reinforced by the rise of social media platforms, particularly TikTok and Instagram. These platforms have not only transformed how travel information is disseminated but have also redefined the motivations and decision-making processes of young travelers. Viral trends and algorithm-driven content have popularized new travel-related concepts such as FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), FYP (For You Page), and "hidden gems," which collectively shape the way destinations are discovered, valued, and prioritized. The instantaneous spread of user-generated content has intensified the search for authentic, unique, and socially shareable experiences, often influencing mobility patterns as travelers seek to access lesser-known sites that promise exclusivity and novelty (Damanik et al., 2020; Pitanatri et al., 2024, 2025). In the context of Bali, this phenomenon has led to an increased dispersion of tourist flows beyond traditional hotspots, posing both opportunities and challenges for sustainable destination management.

A notable example of this phenomenon can be observed in the case of Pasih Uwug in Nusa Penida. Traditionally, "uwug" in Balinese refers to something broken, abandoned, or associated with catastrophe, and the site historically bore a negative connotation within the local context. However, fueled by social media exposure and the aesthetic appeal of its dramatic natural arch formation, Pasih Uwug has been rebranded and globally popularized as "Broken Beach." Today, it stands as one of the most visited hotspots in Nusa Penida, attracting a substantial influx of Generation Z tourists driven by visual trends and the desire for unique, picturesque experiences. This transformation exemplifies how digital narratives can rapidly shift the cultural and economic value of a site, creating new mobility patterns and redefining the tourism landscape.

Image 1. Pasih Uwug Beach, Nusa Penida

Source: TripAdvisor, 2025

The nexus between youth mobility and tourism development has received increasing scholarly attention in recent years, particularly in the context of digital transformation and shifting generational values. Generation Z, represents a cohort of digitally native travelers who prioritize immediacy, flexibility, authenticity, and socially shareable experiences (Benckendorff et al., 2013; Su et al., 2020). Unlike previous generations, Gen Z travelers are significantly influenced by digital platforms in shaping their mobility decisions, including destination choice, travel duration, and transportation mode. This generation's behavior is often driven by real-time data, social media trends, and the desire for unique, customizable experiences, leading to more fragmented, decentralized patterns of tourist movement (Cavagnaro et al., 2018; Xiang, 2018)

Several studies have explored the implications of digitalization for tourist mobility. Gretzel, Sigala, et al. (2015) argue that smart tourism technologies have reshaped the entire tourism experience cycle from pre-trip planning to on-site navigation and post-trip sharing allowing for more informed, agile, and experiential travel behaviors. In Southeast Asian contexts, app-based ride-hailing services such as Gojek and Grab have significantly expanded travel possibilities by offering convenient, cost-effective, and highly localized transport solutions. This mobility innovation has been especially impactful in island destinations with limited public transportation infrastructure, such as Bali, where flexible transport options are essential to foster inclusive travel.

Objectives

Building upon these observations, this study aims to examine how the evolving mobility preferences of Generation Z are shaping the future trajectory of tourism development in Bali. Specifically, the research seeks to explore three interrelated questions: (1) Where do Gen Z travelers choose to go during their visit to Bali? (2) What are the typical patterns of their length of stay? and (3) How do these mobility behaviors contribute to the broader dynamics of tourism development in Bali?

By addressing these questions, the study intends to provide empirical insights into the emerging mobility trends that influence not only the spatial distribution of tourist flows but also the strategic considerations necessary for sustainable tourism planning. Understanding these patterns is essential for policymakers, destination managers, and tourism stakeholders who must adapt to the digital-driven expectations of a new generation while ensuring the long-term resilience and inclusivity of Bali's tourism sector.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

This study adopted a quantitative research approach to explore the mobility preferences of Generation Z travelers and their impact on tourism development in Bali. The research focused on individuals aged between 13 and 28 years, consistent with the generational definition of Gen Z.

2. Research Tools

A structured questionnaire was developed to capture essential aspects of travel behavior, including preferred destinations, length of stay, transportation modes, motivations for travel, and the influence of social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram on decision-making processes. The instrument also included demographic questions to contextualize mobility choices and assess differences in behavior across sub-groups within the Gen Z cohort.

3. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted over a three-month period, from February to April 2025. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that only Gen Z travelers either currently residing in Bali or visiting the island for leisure or educational purposes were included in the study. The survey was disseminated both online and offline. Online distribution involved platforms commonly used by young travelers, such as Instagram and WhatsApp travel groups, while offline collection took place in selected tourism hotspots, accommodation facilities, and public spaces across key regions in Bali. From the total number of responses gathered, 530 valid entries were identified as belonging to Gen Z participants, based on their age category.

4. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to identify general trends and patterns in Gen Z mobility behavior. Frequency distributions, cross-tabulations, and summary statistics were used to examine relationships between transportation preferences, travel motivations, and destination choices. Additionally, inferential analyses, including Chi-square tests, were applied where appropriate to explore potential associations between socio-demographic variables and specific mobility behaviors. The use of statistical analysis enabled the study to generate empirically grounded insights into the transportation choices and travel patterns of this emerging traveler segment.

To ensure ethical standards, all participants were informed of the study's objectives, and informed consent was obtained prior to their participation. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were anonymized to protect the privacy of respondents. The study received formal ethical approval from the Research and Community Service Center of Bali Tourism Polytechnic, confirming its compliance with institutional research protocols.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

This study explored the mobility preferences of Generation Z travelers in Bali and examined how these behaviors contribute to broader tourism development dynamics. The findings point to a clear generational shift toward short-duration travel, digitally mediated transportation, and social media-driven destination choices. These patterns highlight the emergence of a more fluid, experience-centered, and tech-integrated tourism model, fundamentally altering how Bali must plan, manage, and sustain its tourism sector.

Generation Z's preference for 1–2 night stays suggests that tourism offerings must be recalibrated to accommodate more compact, value-intensive experiences. These travelers seek spontaneity, flexibility, and authenticity attributes that challenge the conventional tourism product built around longer vacations and linear itineraries. Moreover, the widespread use of ride-sharing platforms and other app-based transport services underscores the growing demand for seamless digital mobility infrastructure that supports real-time access, personalized convenience, and flexible movement.

From a destination development perspective, the concentration of Gen Z tourists in urban and digitally popular areas presents both opportunities and risks. While urban centers like Denpasar and Badung benefit from heightened visibility and economic activity, this trend risks reinforcing spatial inequalities and neglecting rural or peripheral destinations such as Gianyar, which hold untapped cultural and ecological value. Without intervention, the island may face mounting challenges related to congestion, overtourism, and uneven economic distribution.

2. Discussion

This study set out to examine the mobility behaviors of Generation Z travelers in Bali through three core questions: (1) where they travel, (2) how long they stay, and (3) how these behaviors influence tourism development. The results reveal distinct patterns that align closely with the digital-native identity of Gen Z and signal a broader transformation in tourism dynamics. These findings can be contextualized using key concepts from tourist mobility theory (Urry, 2013), experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), and smart tourism frameworks (Gretzel, Werthner, et al., 2015)

The predominance of Denpasar (73.6%), followed by Badung (18.1%) and Gianyar (8.3%), confirms the centrality of accessible, media-visible, and experience-rich locations in Gen Z's destination preferences. This aligns with Pine and Gilmore's experience economy theory, where travelers seek not just places but curated moments that are socially shareable and emotionally resonant. Gen Z's behaviors are also informed by algorithmic tourism, in which trending destinations are discovered via social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, reinforcing digitally influenced spatial behaviors.

Regarding length of stay, the finding that 65.5% of respondents stay only 1–2 nights signals a shift toward short-cycle, high-frequency tourism. This echoes Urry's concept of "network capital," where younger travelers prioritize flexibility, multiple short breaks, and time-efficient experiences over traditional long-haul tourism. For Bali, this means tourism strategies must pivot to support modular tourism experiences, enabling visitors to engage in meaningful activities within short timeframes.

The strong preference for app-based transportation (46.4%) and self-drive rentals (23.4%) underscores the integration of smart mobility within tourism behavior. According to Gretzel et al. (2015), smart tourism requires destinations to facilitate real-time, technology-driven interactions. Bali's future competitiveness thus depends on the expansion of intelligent mobility infrastructure and the digital enablement of tourism services, from transportation to experience booking.

These findings underscore the need for adaptive tourism governance, particularly in preventing overconcentration in urban zones. Drawing from Butler (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model, Bali may risk stagnation in saturated destinations unless policies promote tourism dispersal and resilient destination development. The spatial imbalance in tourist flows also presents an opportunity to develop and promote rural and peripheral regions through community-based and regenerative tourism models.

Research recommendations

Building on the insights derived from this study, it is evident that the mobility behaviors of Generation Z travelers in Bali are reshaping tourism patterns in dynamic ways. While this research offers an empirical foundation, several areas remain open for further exploration and academic development. To deepen the understanding of these behavioral trends and enhance their relevance for policy and practice, a number of future research directions are recommended.

First, future studies should consider expanding the demographic scope beyond Generation Z. Comparative research involving Millennials, Generation X, and Baby Boomers would provide a more nuanced understanding of generational differences in travel behavior, mobility preferences, and digital engagement. Such analysis would support more targeted destination marketing and infrastructure planning, allowing stakeholders to tailor services to different traveler segments with varying expectations and technological fluency.

Second, the current study is cross-sectional and limited to the data collected from February to April 2025. To capture the variability in mobility behavior over time, longitudinal research should be conducted. Seasonal variations such as travel during public holidays, festivals, or school breaks could significantly affect destination choice, length of stay, and transportation use. Longitudinal data would also help identify behavioral changes in response to external factors such as climate shocks, pandemics, or shifts in airline policy and visa regulations.

Third, there is an urgent need for research that examines the environmental and socio-economic impacts of Gen Z mobility trends. Their high reliance on app-based ride-sharing and short-duration travel may contribute to increased traffic congestion, carbon emissions, and concentrated economic gains in urban centers. A comprehensive environmental impact assessment would contribute to the broader discourse on sustainable and regenerative tourism, particularly in sensitive island ecosystems like Bali.

Finally, future studies should focus on translating research findings into actionable policy frameworks. Scenario modeling, behavioral simulations, and stakeholder-based planning tools can support local governments and tourism authorities in making data-driven decisions. Integrating Gen Z mobility insights into regional tourism master plans, transport policy, and community-based tourism programs will be essential to build a tourism ecosystem that is inclusive, resilient, and future-oriented.

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Room 2
Cultural, Creative Tourism, and MICE

CANNABIS TOURISM: AN INTEGRATED INITIATIVE TO PROMOTE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Niorn Srisomyong¹, Asawin Pasutham²

Abstract

This study addresses the primary objective: assessing livelihood opportunities for farmers involved in the Cannabis Growing Community Enterprise Initiative. Khu Muang District in Buriram province was selected as the case study area. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with representatives from community enterprises, government, and trade, supplemented by secondary data and observations. Key findings reveal the complex landscape of cannabis liberalization in Thailand, highlighting both opportunities and challenges. The study underscores the importance of comprehensive government support, clear legislation, and effective market management for the Cannabis Growing Community Enterprise Initiative. The development of cannabis wellness tourism is exemplified by Play La Ploen Community Enterprise, which successfully integrates cannabis cultivation with health and wellness services. This model demonstrates the potential for generating income and promoting community health, but it also highlights the need for strategic partnerships, robust regulatory frameworks, and continuous innovation. Livelihood opportunities for farmers through cannabis cultivation are significant, particularly when integrated with wellness tourism. Cannabis presents a viable alternative for income diversification in a region where many residents are landless laborers. However, challenges such as market saturation, price fluctuations, and stringent regulations must be addressed to ensure sustainable development.

Keywords: cannabis tourism, rural development, government initiative

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Introduction

The case of cannabis production and consumption in Thailand, the Narcotics Act (No. 7) B.E. 2562, which came into effect on February 19, 2019, allows the use of marijuana for medical and research purposes (Narcotics Control Division, Food and Drug Administration, 2020), making Thailand the first country in Southeast Asia to legalize medical marijuana (Narcotics Control Division, Food and Drug Administration, 2020). The legalization of marijuana means that it can be grown and sold, and restaurants and beverage outlets can sell food and drinks containing marijuana, provided that the THC content is less than 0.2 percent. Marijuana can be used for medical treatment, but recreational use is still not allowed (Benveniste, 2022). The legalization of marijuana is predicted to make Thailand another popular destination for marijuana tourism, as the country already stands out in terms of health and wellness tourism. This could help stimulate the economy, which has been struggling for over two years due to the COVID-19 situation. Forbes magazine predicts that marijuana legalization will be a key factor in boosting the economy after COVID-19, as the marijuana industry for relaxation and stress relief is rapidly growing and becoming a major driving force for global tourism, with a high value of up to 17 billion US dollars (approximately 590 billion baht) (Parntong, 2022).

Cannabis tourism can be easily understood as a trip for relaxation with the aim of experiencing and immersing oneself in the cannabis-related activities in the areas where it is legal, similar to people from around the world visiting vineyards in the wine industry. It is not just about consumption, but also includes other activities such as staying in cannabis-friendly hotels, visiting cannabis farms, cannabis spas, and visiting cannabis dispensaries (Parntong, 2022). According to data from MMGY Travel Intelligence and Enlighten Strategies in 2020, 29 percent of leisure travelers were interested in cannabis-related tourism. This includes visiting cannabis shops, trying food or drinks infused with cannabis, experiencing CBD spa treatments, or consuming cannabis in a safe environment. This has contributed to the promotion of the tourism industry in the Netherlands for many years, with renowned cannabis coffee shops such as Mellow Yellow and Checkpoint Coffeeshop playing a role in this promotion (Parntong, 2022). However, cannabis tourism in Thailand currently focuses on health and medical tourism, as using cannabis for recreational purposes is still illegal in the country. In the future, the distinction between recreational and medical marijuana will likely become clearer. Recreational products are expected to prioritize THC's psychoactive properties over its medical benefits. Currently, high- CBD strains and products are in high demand in recreational dispensaries, particularly among tourists seeking access for medical use. However, as medical marijuana programs continue to expand to include more states and conditions, recreational stores may offer less CBD due to consumer demand shifting towards a wider selection of branded cannabis products, such as marijuana cigarettes, vapor oils, and edibles, as well as innovative methods of consuming extracts (Giannotti, 2017). However for this study, it is specifically a study on cannabis tourism for health or wellness purposes and the researchers select Buriram provinces as their case study.

In conclusion, the legalization of medical cannabis in Thailand presents an opportunity to promote rural development and stimulate the economy. Despite the potential economic benefits of cannabis tourism, the topic has not been extensively researched in Thailand. The objectives of this study are to provide insight into the livelihood opportunities available to farmers and villagers through cannabis growing for wellness tourism, which can inform policies and programs aimed at promoting rural development and poverty reduction. Overall, this research can help identify potential opportunities and challenges in the development of cannabis tourism as a means of promoting rural development in Thailand.

Objectives

To assess livelihood opportunities of farmers who attend the Cannabis Growing Community Enterprise Initiative, especially cannabis growing for wellness tourism, and of villagers

Research Methodology

The research employed a qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews and secondary data analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This research adopts a purposive sampling approach for key informants who are of interest for the research objectives and are directly related to the cannabis growing community enterprise initiative. The target respondents of this study were divided into three categories: community enterprises, government organizations, trade associations and entrepreneurs. The interviews were conducted from August until November 2023. The interviews were conducted from August 2023 until December 2023. The interviews took place in Buriram and Bangkok.

For this study, the researchers choose Khu Muang district, Buriram province as a case study. In Khu Muang District, there are 13 community enterprises in the area of this study that are the first groups to cultivate cannabis (Interview, Officer of Department of agriculture, 2023). These enterprises serve as important starting centers or models for other community enterprises throughout the country. The researchers selected the Play La Ploen Community Enterprise or the Centre for the Development of Herbs for the Community, Non Malai Community Enterprise, and Community Enterprise Producing Herbs for Medical Purpose in Khu Muang district, Buriram Province, as case study. The specific reasons for selecting this case study are:

1. Play La Ploen Community Enterprise is the first pilot community enterprise, allowed to grow cannabis, by the collaborating with Khu Muang Hospital in Khu Muang District, Buriram Province (List of community enterprises allowed to grow marijuana in Thailand, 2021). The fact that Play La Ploen Community Enterprise was the first community enterprise to receive permission to grow medical cannabis would show a period of time and experience that is sufficient to study the effects from this initiative.
2. Play La Ploen Community Enterprise is a community enterprise that is linked to cannabis cultivation for promoting medical practice. Play La Ploen Community Enterprise collaborates with Khu Muang Hospital which is the only hospital in the province that has qualified for a Traditional Medical Practitioner (TMP) and is a model hospital for medical herbs (Khu Muang Hospital, 2021).
3. Apart from collaboration with Khu Muang Hospital, Play La Ploen Community Enterprise works with private sector, especially health and wellness tourism entrepreneurs (such as Arokaya Wellness Sala) and this research focuses on cannabis cultivation to promote wellness tourism.
4. Non Malai Community Enterprise Non Malai is the first cannabis cultivation demonstration plot in Thailand, where cannabis is grown at the household level using the 6-plant model (Non Malai Model) to produce herbal medicine for patient care in the area.
5. Lastly, the selection of Herbs Produced for Medical Community Enterprise is based on their active status and continued cultivation of cannabis. Recently, during this study, it was found that out of the thirteen community enterprises, only five to six are still cultivating cannabis, while the rest have ceased operations. Among these active five to six community enterprises, three have permitted the researchers to conduct interviews with them.

This research adopts a purposive sampling approach for key informants who are of interest for the research objectives and are directly related to the promotion of cannabis cultivation and the promotion of cannabis tourism for rural development. The target respondents of this study were divided into three categories: community enterprises, government organizations, trade associations and entrepreneur (Table 1).

Table 1 Summary of key actors who were interviewed

Sectors	Actors	Number of cases
Community enterprises	Heads Farmer Agricultural expert	3 cases
Government organizations	National and local level organizations	7 cases
Trade associations and entrepreneur	Chamber of Commerce Thai Industrial Hemp Trade Association Arokaya Wellness Sala	3 cases
Total number of cases 14		

The following approach by Ritchie et al., (2003) was developed for data analysis. First, analysis of the interviews began with their verbatim transcription, which took about a month. Second, the secondary documents were read and notes were made based on each reading. The notes were organized under themes based on issues relevant to the research. The documents were stored and organized. The analysis of documents in parallel with interviews would therefore provide opportunities for the corroboration of data. Third, it was a process of data management. This involves deciding upon the themes under which the data will be labelled, sorted, and compared. Fourth, analysis of the transcripts took place, which involved reading, exploring, and examining the transcripts in order to identify broad themes and concepts. Then, after having an initial framework, the next task was applying it to the transcripts and the secondary documents.

Conclusion and discussion

A first finding involves the cannabis growing community enterprise initiative in Thailand. The Cannabis Growing Community Enterprise Initiative in Thailand showcases the diverse efforts and challenges faced by local communities in integrating cannabis cultivation into their agricultural practices. Play La Ploen Community Enterprise, Nonmalai Community Enterprise, and the Community Enterprise Producing Herbs for Medical Purpose serve as primary examples of how these initiatives can evolve and adapt. Play La Ploen Community Enterprise, initially focused on medicinal herbs, expanded into cannabis cultivation with significant support from Khu Muang Hospital and private sector funding. Despite successes in generating income and promoting community health, they face ongoing challenges such as high operational costs and management difficulties. Nonmalai Community Enterprise, the first to cultivate cannabis for medical use, has also seen progress but struggles with sustaining development and product innovation. Their project highlights the need for consistent care and further development of cannabis products to ensure long-term success. The Community Enterprise Producing Herbs for Medical Purpose has navigated regulatory complexities and received support from various agencies, but they too face challenges in maintaining compliance and expanding their product offerings. The need for comprehensive government support, clear legislation, and effective market management is evident across all these enterprises. Overall, these community enterprises demonstrate the potential of cannabis cultivation to contribute to local economies and community health. However, they also underscore the necessity of strong government support, effective regulatory frameworks, and continuous innovation to overcome the numerous challenges they face. Thus, this study aligns well with the findings of Chankheagla (2022). In his study, he highlighted that the current challenges for the cannabis industry in Thailand arise from unclear government policies and inconsistent interpretation and enforcement of rules and regulations, which do not align with the farmers' context. Issues such as the permit process and location criteria cause farmers to incur significant cultivation expenses. Managing the cannabis business in Thailand requires promoting knowledge to enhance cannabis quality. Both the government and community enterprise groups must work on developing and promoting marketing channels to facilitate product distribution and diversification.

A second finding concerns cannabis for wellness tourism in Thailand. The development of cannabis wellness tourism in Thailand presents a dynamic and evolving landscape, with enterprises like Play La Ploen Community Enterprise leading the way in integrating cannabis cultivation with health and wellness services.

Initially a small community business focused on medicinal herbs, Play La Ploen expanded into cannabis cultivation, leveraging strategic partnerships with Khu Muang Hospital and receiving certifications as a wellness hotel and clinic. This comprehensive approach has attracted numerous study tours and consultations, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, showcasing the potential of combining agriculture with wellness tourism to generate income and promote community health. According to study by Worrachaddejchai (2021), he emphasized that Thailand needs to establish and promote hospitals and clinics dedicated to cannabis, authorize cannabis doctors, build manufacturing plants and wellness resorts, and offer tour packages to boost awareness and recognition. Therefore, this can serve as a model for others to learn from and follow. The success of Play La Ploen Community Enterprise is contrasted by the more limited development of other initiatives such as Nonmalai Community Enterprise and the Community Enterprise Producing Herbs for Medical Purposes. These enterprises primarily supply cannabis to hospitals without the added focus on wellness tourism, highlighting a gap in strategic integration and resource utilization. The Play La Ploen model demonstrates the importance of establishing networks with various agencies, obtaining medical-grade certifications, and creating value through diverse cannabis-related products and services. Furthermore, the expansion of cannabis wellness tourism in Thailand is supported by various government policies and collaborations across multiple sectors, including health, agriculture, and tourism. However, challenges remain, such as limited availability of knowledgeable personnel, regulatory complexities, and market uncertainties. Addressing these challenges requires ongoing research, training, and robust regulatory frameworks to ensure the safe and effective use of cannabis in both medical and wellness contexts. Thus, the integration of cannabis cultivation with wellness tourism in Thailand, as exemplified by Play La Ploen Community Enterprise, offers significant economic and health benefits. The potential for further growth in this sector is substantial, provided that strategic planning, government support, and cross-sector collaboration continue to be prioritized. This holistic approach not only enhances the credibility and quality of cannabis products and services but also fosters greater understanding and acceptance of cannabis's medical benefits, paving the way for sustainable development in the cannabis wellness tourism industry.

A last finding was livelihood opportunities available to farmers and villagers through cannabis growing for wellness tourism. The cultivation of cannabis in Khu Muang District, Buriram Province, offers promising livelihood opportunities for farmers and villagers, particularly through the integration of wellness tourism. As most local residents are landless laborers working in rice farming, cassava cultivation, sugarcane, and rubber plantations, cannabis cultivation presents a viable alternative to diversify income sources. The involvement of community enterprises such as Play La Ploen, Nonmalai, and Herbs Produced for Medical Community Enterprises highlights the potential for cannabis to provide steady employment and additional income. Play La Ploen Community Enterprise, for instance, has successfully leveraged its resources to cultivate cannabis and integrate it into wellness tourism. By transforming part of the Play La Ploen resort into a cultivation area and collaborating with wellness centers like Arokaya Wellness Sala, the enterprise has created a sustainable model that generates income through the sale of cannabis products and attracts tourists for health and wellness experiences. This model demonstrates how strategic partnerships and market-driven cultivation can provide steady employment for local farmers, even those without land ownership. Cannabis cultivation for wellness tourism also offers the opportunity to develop diverse products such as cannabis balm, inhalers, soaps, and beverages, which can be marketed to tourists and wellness enthusiasts. Nonmalai Community Enterprise, despite facing challenges, has shown the potential to create income-generating products from cannabis leaves. Promoting such products can stimulate local economies and provide farmers with new revenue streams. As Van Der Ploeg et al. (2000) noted, rural development is vital for creating new products and services and developing new markets. The transformation of specialized farms into multifunctional enterprises and the establishment of new practices and networks have practical implications for farmers and rural communities. However, the challenges of market saturation, price drops, and stringent regulations cannot be overlooked. Effective government support, clear legislation, and strategic market management are essential to ensure the viability of cannabis as an economic crop. Encouraging farmers to cultivate cannabis as a general herbal remedy and integrating it into wellness tourism can help mitigate risks and enhance income stability. The promotion of cannabis farms as tourist attractions,

where visitors can learn about cannabis cultivation and enjoy cannabis-infused products, adds an additional layer of economic opportunity. Therefore, the integration of cannabis cultivation with wellness tourism in Khu Muang District offers substantial livelihood opportunities for farmers and villagers. By developing a robust framework that includes government support, strategic partnerships, and market-driven production, the community can harness the economic potential of cannabis. This approach not only provides steady employment and additional income for local residents but also contributes to the sustainable development of the local economy through wellness tourism. As previously discussed in Chapter Two, Rambo (2017) observes that the rapid changes in rural Northeast Thailand, referred to as an "agrarian transformation," involve restructuring agriculture from subsistence-oriented to market-oriented systems. This transformation includes shifts in technology, economic orientation, social relations, and cultural values, challenging the conventional model of rural Northeast Thailand. Consequently, these community enterprises serve as exemplars of this agrarian transformation.

Research recommendations

Future research on cannabis tourism: an integrated initiative to promote rural development could benefit from the following ideas. First, future research might focus on issue of the potential of cannabis wellness tourism to contribute to the local and national economy. Future research might investigate the experiences and satisfaction levels of tourists participating in cannabis wellness tourism activities or conduct surveys and focus groups to understand consumer attitudes towards cannabis products and wellness services.

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THE INFLUENCE OF FESTIVALScape ON ATTENDEE SATISFACTION: A CASE STUDY OF NANGLAY MUSIC FESTIVAL

Kittipong Krootsong¹, Jitsupa Maungman², Phattamon Polrong³

Extended abstract

Music festivals in Thailand are gaining popularity, attracting a diverse audience and highlighting the need for effective festivalscape design to enhance attendee satisfaction. This study investigates the influence of festivalscape on attendee satisfaction using Nanglay music festival as a case study. A quantitative approach was applied, with data collected from 385 attendees through a structured questionnaire, focusing on four key festivalscape dimensions: Convenience and Atmosphere, Program and Information, Stage Entertainment, and Merchandise and Activities. Findings, analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and multiple regression, reveal that festivalscape significantly and positively affects attendee satisfaction. Stage Entertainment emerged as the most influential factor, followed by Convenience and Atmosphere, and Program and Information, while Merchandise and Activities showed no significant impact. These results underscore the importance of high-quality entertainment, effective logistics, and clear communication in designing music festivals that meet attendee expectations. The study contributes to a better understanding of festivalscape in the context of beach music events and offers practical recommendations for festival organizers seeking to enhance attendee satisfaction and the overall value of music festivals in Thailand.

Keywords: Festivalscape; Music Festival; Attendee Satisfaction

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Introduction

In recent years, the tourism industry has been significantly shaped by major global trends in economics, society, and culture (Selmi et al., 2021). These dynamic shifts have led to the emergence and expansion of diverse tourism forms (Soliman, 2015), including event tourism, which has garnered widespread attention both nationally and internationally (Getz & Page, 2016). Several scholars identify event tourism as a proactive marketing strategy (Janprasit, 2019) that not only helps enhance the image of destinations but also strengthens their competitive advantage (Moufakkir & Selmi, 2018). One of the principal components in the development of event tourism is the organization of festivals, which serve to attract large numbers of participants to a specific place and time (Hodur & Leistritz, 2006), accordingly acting as a driver of community-level economic stimulation. In Thailand, where there is a growing interest in lifestyle-oriented experiences, the concept of leveraging festivals as an engine for economic growth “the festival economy” has been actively promoted by the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB), aiming to facilitate balanced development alongside urban quality enhancement.

The growing prominence of festivals has led to increasing scholarly interest in the concept of “festivalscape.” Defined as the set of environmental cues that influence attendees’ perceptions of a festival’s physical environment, festivalscape encompasses multiple elements such as convenience (Lee et al., 2008), atmosphere, staffing (Selmi et al., 2021), programming, souvenir options, and facilities (Lee & Chang, 2016), as well as information services and food (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; Choe et al., 2018). These factors are integral to attracting tourists to festivals. A review of the literature demonstrates that the festivalscape framework has been widely used to study various festival types, with the relative importance of each component differing according to the specific event and its context (Selmi et al., 2021). Consistently highlighted elements include programming, staff, information, and overall atmosphere, all of which have a significant impact on attendees’ emotions and their likelihood of revisiting or recommending the festival (Selmi et al., 2021). Additional attributes such as general ambiance, site layout and design, safety, opportunities for creative engagement, and food offerings are also recognized as core aspects. These features enhance the flow experience of visitors, which has a positive relationship with overall life satisfaction (Li et al., 2024). Thus, thoughtful planning and effective management of the festivalscape are essential for optimizing outcomes for both participants and stakeholders.

Music festivals have become one of the most rapidly expanding and widely enjoyed types of festivals among tourists around the world (Kruger & Saayman, 2018). As noted by Tangit, Kibat, and Adanan (2016), music festivals are entertainment events that bring together a wide variety of performers and musical styles, enabling these events to attract large and diverse audiences. In Thailand, as in many other countries, music festivals have grown quickly and played an important role in developing new trends in tourism. Today, Thailand hosts a wide range of music festivals each year, with formats that differ based on the event’s purpose and its target audience. The Nanglay music festival is a strong example of a successful Thai music festival, having taken place for three consecutive years. What makes this festival stand out is its large-scale beachfront production on Cha-am Beach in Phetchaburi province. This setting and production style create a unique festivalscape that sets it apart from other music festivals in Thailand. In the context of music festivals, the concept of festivalscape goes beyond the simple physical arrangement of stages and facilities; it also encompasses the overall atmosphere produced through various elements. According to Maungman and Pooripakdee (2023), the festivalscape of music festivals can be categorized into four key dimensions: (1) convenience and atmosphere, (2) program and information, (3) stage entertainment, and (4) merchandise and activities.

Although music festivals are becoming increasingly popular and organizers are recognizing the importance of thoughtfully designing the festivalscape, a review of relevant literature both domestic and international shows that most existing research on festivalscape has concentrated on food festivals and cultural festivals (Li et al., 2024; Selmi et al., 2021; Chen, King & Suntikul, 2019; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; Lee et al., 2008). There remains a limited number of studies examining festivalscape in the context of music festivals, particularly beach music festivals. To date, no research has specifically investigated the influence of festivalscape on attendee satisfaction in music festival settings.

This study, therefore, focuses on examining the influence of festivalscape on attendee satisfaction at the Nanglay Music Festival. The findings are expected to be beneficial for developing music festival formats that enhance attendee satisfaction, particularly with regard to festivalscape design for beach music festivals. In addition, the identified components can be adapted for use in related research and for the development of effective festival tourism models to stimulate economic growth. These objectives are consistent with the Thailand's National Strategy A.D. 2018 – 2037

Objectives

1. To investigate the influence of Festivalscape on attendee satisfaction at the Nanglay Music Festival
2. To identify the relationship between Festivalscape and attendee satisfaction at the Nanglay Music Festival

Hypothesis

- H1: Convenience and atmosphere positively influences attendee satisfaction at the Nanglay music festival.
H2: Program and information positively influences attendee satisfaction at the Nanglay music festival.
H3: Stage entertainment positively influences attendee satisfaction at the Nanglay music festival.
H4: Merchandise and activities positively influence attendee satisfaction at the Nanglay music festival

Research Methodology

Populations and Sample

The target population of this study comprised attendees of the 3rd Nanglay Music Festival, held on March 30, 2024, at Cha-am Beach, Phetchaburi Province. As the exact number of participants was unknown, the sample size was determined using Cochran (1977) formula for an unknown population. In this calculation, a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error ($e = 0.05$), and an assumed population proportion of 50% were applied. Based on these parameters, the minimum required sample size was established at 385 respondents.

Research Tools

The primary research instrument utilized in this study was a close-ended questionnaire, which consisted of four distinct sections:

- 1) **Screening Questions:** Two items designed to determine the eligibility of respondents.
- 2) **General Information:** Four items collecting demographic data about the participants.
- 3) **Festivalscape Dimensions:** Sixteen items adapted from Lee & Chang (2016), Lee et al. (2008), Selmi et al. (2021), and Maungman & Pooripakdee (2023), covering four key dimensions:
 - Convenience and Atmosphere (4 items)
 - Program and Information (4 items)
 - Stage Entertainment (4 items)
 - Merchandise and Activities (4 items)
- 4) **Attendee Satisfaction:** Three items adapted from Çiki, Öğretmenoğlu, & Huang (2025).

Sections 1 and 2 employed checklist-based questions, whereas Sections 3 and 4 utilized a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "least" and 5 indicated "most." Content validity of the questionnaire was assessed by three experts in the field to ensure accuracy and clarity. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) for all items ranged from 0.50 to 1.00. Subsequently, the

reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated with a pilot group of 30 respondents whose profiles closely matched those of the target sample. Using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1990), the instrument demonstrated an overall reliability score of 0.940, indicating high reliability. This value exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 as proposed by Hair et al. (2010).

1. Data Collection

This study employed a quantitative research design to collect data from 385 attendees of the 3rd Nanglay music festival. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire, which respondents accessed by scanning a QR code that linked to a Google Form. The sample was obtained through convenience sampling, a type of nonprobability sampling, allowing the researchers to recruit attendees based on their availability and willingness to respond.

2. Data Analysis (Front Size Time New Romans (Bold) 14 pts.)

The statistical methods used in this study were as follows. First, descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage, were employed to summarize the data. Second, Pearson's correlation analysis was utilized to explore the relationship between festivalscape and attendee satisfaction at the Nanglay music festival. Finally, multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the influence of festivalscape on attendee satisfaction at the Nanglay music festival.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

Descriptive Statistics

A total of 385 respondents participated in the survey. The majority were female (266 individuals, accounting for 69.1%). Most respondents were between 31 and 40 years old, with 145 individuals in this age group (37.7%). Regarding occupation, the largest proportion of respondents were company employees (160 individuals, 41.6%). In terms of income, most participants reported a monthly average income of 20,001–30,000 Baht (132 individuals, 34.3%).

Pearson's correlation analysis

The relationships between the dependent variable, attendee satisfaction (SAT), and the independent variables, namely the dimensions of festivalscape: convenience and atmosphere (FC), program and information (FP), stage entertainment (FS), and merchandise and activities (FM), were examined using Pearson's correlation analysis, as presented in Table I.

Table I: Results of Pearson's correlation analysis between festivalscape dimensions and music festival attendee satisfaction

Variable	FC	FP	FS	FM	SAT
Convenience and Atmosphere (FC)	1.000				
Program and Information (FP)	0.766**	1.000			
Stage Entertainment (FS)	0.546**	0.565**	1.000		
Merchandise and Activities (FM)	0.692**	0.617**	0.519**	1.000	
Attendee Satisfaction (SAT)	0.572**	0.558**	0.563**	0.469**	1.000

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

Table I demonstrates that each dimension of festivalscape exhibited a positive correlation with attendee satisfaction: convenience and atmosphere ($r = 0.572$, $p < .01$), program and information ($r = 0.558$, $p < .01$), stage entertainment ($r = 0.563$, $p < .01$), and merchandise and activities ($r = 0.469$, $p < .01$).

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was employed to assess the effects of four key festivalscape dimensions, Convenience and Atmosphere, Program and Information, Stage Entertainment, and Merchandise and Activities, on attendee satisfaction. The findings from this analysis are reported in Table II.

Table II: Results of multiple regression analysis examining the influence of festivalscape dimensions on music festival attendee satisfaction

Dependent variable: music festival attendee satisfaction					Collinearity statistics	
Independent variables	b	β	t-value	Sig.(p)	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	0.456		2.001	0.046*		
Convenience and Atmosphere (FC)	0.251	0.250	3.706	0.000**	0.332	3.016
Program and Information (FP)	0.198	0.172	2.720	0.007**	0.376	2.658
Stage Entertainment (FS)	0.440	0.316	6.442	0.000**	0.626	1.598
Merchandise and Activities (FM)	0.030	0.026	0.471	0.638	0.484	2.067
R = 0.655; R² = 0.429; Adj R² = 0.423; Durbin-Watson = 2.196; F = 71.253; p = 0.000**						
*p<0.05 **p<0.01						

As shown in Table II, three dimensions of Festivalscape were found to significantly influence music festival attendee satisfaction, collectively accounting for 42.3% of the variance observed (Adj R² = 0.423). The F-test result was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the set of predictors reliably explained differences in attendee satisfaction. Multicollinearity was not a concern, as indicated by tolerance values exceeding 0.1 and variance inflation factor (VIF) values less than 10 (Hair, 2010). Additionally, the Durbin-Watson statistic was 2.196, which is close to the ideal value of 2, suggesting that autocorrelation in the residuals was not present. A comparison of standardized regression coefficients (beta coefficients) revealed that Stage Entertainment (FS) was the strongest predictor of attendee satisfaction ($\beta = 0.316$, $p < 0.01$), followed by Convenience and Atmosphere (FC) ($\beta = 0.250$, $p < 0.01$) and Program and Information (FB) ($\beta = 0.172$, $p < 0.01$). In contrast, Merchandise and Activities (FM) was not a significant predictor.

Table III: Summary of hypothesis testing results

Hypotheses	Relationship			Direction	Results
H1	FC	□	SAT	Positive	Supported
H2	FP	□	SAT	Positive	Supported
H3	FS	□	SAT	Positive	Supported
H4	FM	□	SAT	-	Unsupported

Based on the results of hypothesis testing presented in Table III, it can be concluded that H1, H2, and H3 are supported, while H4 is not supported. The relationships identified are further clarified by the multiple linear regression model, which is represented by the following equation:

$$\hat{y} = 0.456 + 0.440 (\text{FS}) + 0.251 (\text{FC}) + 0.198 (\text{FP})$$

The regression analysis demonstrates that for every one percent rise in stage entertainment (FS), convenience and atmosphere (FC), and program and information (FP) within the festivalscape, attendee satisfaction increases by 0.440 percent, 0.251 percent, and 0.198 percent, respectively.

2. Discussion

According to the results of Pearson's correlation analysis, attendee satisfaction at music festivals is significantly and positively correlated with all dimensions of the festivalscape. This finding is consistent with previous research (Carneiro et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2023). In addition, the results of multiple regression analysis indicate that the three components of the festivalscape significantly influence music festival attendees' satisfaction. In descending order of importance, these components are stage entertainment (FS), convenience and atmosphere (FC), and program and information (FP).

Stage Entertainment positively influences attendee satisfaction at the Nanglay Music Festival. The findings indicate that stage entertainment (FS), defined as performances and activities presented on stage, enhances attendee satisfaction at music festivals.

This result aligns with the research of Carneiro et al. (2019), who found that entertainment components positively influenced festival satisfaction among tourists attending re-enactment events in Portugal.

Convenience and Atmosphere positively influences attendee satisfaction at the Nanglay Music Festival. The study reveals that convenience and atmosphere (FC), which refer to the availability of facilities, attendee comfort, and the overall ambiance created through spatial arrangement and decoration at the festival, significantly enhance attendee satisfaction at music festivals. This finding is consistent with the research of Beckman et al. (2020), who examined satisfaction among attendees of a craft beer and food festival in the USA and found that convenience positively influences attendee satisfaction. Similarly, Theodorakis et al. (2015) reported that the quality of the physical environment, including the atmosphere at sporting events, also contributes to participant satisfaction. Additionally, these results align with the findings of Carneiro et al. (2019), who identified that facilities, an important aspect of convenience in event settings, impact tourist satisfaction at festivals in Portugal.

Program and Information positively influences attendee satisfaction at the Nanglay Music Festival. The study demonstrates that program and information (FP), which encompass event scheduling and the effective communication of essential festival information to attendees, play a key role in enhancing satisfaction among music festival participants. This is consistent with the findings of Selmi et al. (2021), who reported that both program and information, two critical dimensions of the festivalscape, positively influence attendees' satisfaction at the International Carthage Festival in Tunisia, with positive emotions acting as a mediating variable.

Merchandise and activities do not have an influence on attendee satisfaction at the Nanglay Music Festival. Although the research findings indicate that stage entertainment (FS), convenience and atmosphere (FC), and program and information (FP) within the festivalscape significantly and positively influence attendee satisfaction at the Nanglay Music Festival, merchandise and activities (FM), which refer to retail shops, merchandise, souvenirs, and other non-stage activities in the festival area, do not affect attendee satisfaction. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 (H4) was rejected. This result contrasts with the findings of Pai et al. (2021), who examined a food festival in Macau and found that festival quality, including internal products, influenced attendee satisfaction, with festival value serving as a mediating variable. This phenomenon may be associated with the specific characteristics of beach music festivals, where most attendees prioritize enjoying the natural atmosphere of the venue over shopping or participating in other activities.

Based on these findings, organizers of beach music festivals should prioritize three key festivalscape elements: stage entertainment (FS), convenience and atmosphere (FC), and program and information (FP), as these factors significantly influence attendee satisfaction. Focusing on these dimensions can enhance the overall event experience and increase the likelihood of attendees returning, thereby contributing to the long-term success of the festival.

Research recommendations

1. Further research is recommended to comparatively investigate the influence of festivalscape on attendee satisfaction across different types of festivals.
2. Further research is recommended to examine how the impact of festivalscape on attendee satisfaction may differ among generations.
3. Further research is recommended to investigate the influence of festivalscape components on other relevant variables within the context of festival experiences.

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THE POTENTIAL OF LOCAL CUISINE IN PROMOTING HEALTH TOURISM OF PHUKET

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Extended abstract

This study explores the potential of local cuisine in promoting health tourism in Phuket, Thailand, a province known for its multicultural culinary heritage rooted in Thai, Chinese, Malay, Muslim, and Hindu traditions. As global demand for wellness tourism grows, integrating traditional food with health-focused experiences offers new opportunities for sustainable destination development. Using a qualitative research approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with 20 key informants, including culinary experts, local entrepreneurs, health professionals, and both domestic and international tourists. Thematic analysis revealed that indigenous ingredients such as Phuket pineapple, Ya Chong (Hydrilla), and Som Khwai (Garcinia cowa) possess notable nutritional and medicinal properties. These are used in culturally significant dishes like Gaeng Som Sapparot, Tom Som, and Bue Thod, which can be adapted for health-conscious travelers. The study concludes that these local foods have strong potential to be transformed into wellness-oriented culinary products. With recipe adjustments to meet health standards and culturally sensitive presentation, Phuket's cuisine can enhance the province's identity as a health tourism destination. This research offers strategic insights for integrating gastronomy with public health, cultural preservation, and tourism development.

Keywords: Local Cuisine, Health Tourism, Phuket

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Introduction

Local food is a product of indigenous wisdom, deeply intertwined with the culture and way of life of local communities. It incorporates herbs and natural ingredients found in the surrounding environment, valued not only for their nutritional qualities but also for their medicinal properties (Kansiri, Panatsaya, & Chulaeware, 2017). The local food culture encompasses beliefs and values related to food, the selection and preparation processes, consumption patterns, and the social roles of food. Therefore, food is not merely a source of sustenance but also a key factor contributing to physical well-being. A balanced and diverse diet supports good health and protects against various diseases.

Southern Thai cuisine, in particular, is characterized by five distinct food values and relies heavily on the use of vegetables and herbs. Phuket Province, located in southern Thailand, is well known for its rich culinary traditions. In 2015, it became Thailand's first city to be designated as a UNESCO City of Gastronomy, a recognition of its culinary diversity influenced by Thai, Chinese, and Muslim cultures (UNESCO, 2016). Local food in Phuket plays a central role in festivals, community traditions, and everyday life, and has evolved through creative practices that combine indigenous ingredients into unique and appealing dishes.

In 2024, Phuket welcomed 13,141,410 domestic and international tourists, generating approximately 497.52 billion baht in tourism revenue (Ministry of Tourism & Sports, 2025). These statistics underscore Phuket's strong potential as a tourist destination. Beyond its natural and architectural attractions, the province's cultural heritage including its local cuisine serves as a powerful draw for visitors (Chalida, Geerana, & Unyanee, 2020). Culinary tourism in Phuket includes well-known local dishes such as Mee Hokkien, O-Aew, Oh Tao, Pork Bone Soup, and Salted Fish, offering tourists a taste of the region's unique gastronomic identity (Wan & Choi, 2020; Okumus & Cetin, 2018).

Thailand's National Strategy for Tourism (2018–2037) emphasizes creative and cultural tourism. The sub-plan on creative tourism highlights the importance of utilizing knowledge, innovation, and cultural heritage to add value to tourism services and products. This includes historical sites, traditional lifestyles, community-made products, Thai cuisine, and Thai traditional medicine (Secretariat of the Senate, 2025). The health tourism strategy (2023–2027), aligned with Thailand's 20-Year Public Health Strategic Plan, aims to establish Phuket as a global health tourism hub. The strategy promotes the integration of modern technology with traditional knowledge to offer world-class wellness services and experiences.

Phuket's health tourism initiatives are supported by the Ministry of Public Health, which is working to position the province not only as a premier tourist destination but also as a center for cultural and culinary tourism. Healthy food, rooted in local traditions and made from native ingredients, is becoming increasingly popular as people seek alternatives for better health. These local dishes can be integrated into wellness tourism activities, offering both cultural richness and health benefits (Chaiyasain, 2019; Nilubon & Puri, 2024).

The research study of *The Potential of Local Cuisine in Promoting Health Tourism of Phuket* aims to study for explore the potential of Phuket's local cuisine in promoting health tourism. Which will be useful for promoting and creating value for local food And driving local food to health tourism activities To further enhance the health tourism potential of Phuket.

Objectives

To explore the potential of Phuket's local cuisine in promoting health tourism.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

The population for this research includes stakeholders involved in gastronomy and health tourism in Phuket. The sample was selected purposively to ensure a comprehensive representation of key informants relevant to the study. A total of 20 participants were interviewed, comprising food academics and professors, local food wisdom experts, local restaurant business operators, health tourism professionals, food nutritionists, representatives from relevant government agencies, and both domestic and international tourists.

2. Research Tools

The primary research tool used in this study was a semi-structured in-depth interview guide. The guide was designed to elicit detailed insights into the relationship between local culinary practices and their potential in health tourism promotion. Questions were open-ended and flexible, allowing for probing and exploration of emerging themes during the interviews.

3. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with the selected participants. Interviews were carried out face-to-face and/or via online platforms depending on availability and convenience. Each interview was recorded (with consent) and transcribed verbatim for accuracy. Field notes and observations were also documented to supplement the interview data.

4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data. After transcription, the data were coded using thematic coding techniques to identify recurring themes, patterns, and conceptual linkages. The analysis focused on understanding how local food practices in Phuket can contribute to health tourism, drawing out key themes that reflect stakeholders' perspectives and experiences.

Conclusion and Discussion

Conclusion

The study revealed that Phuket is characterized by its multicultural identity, which is prominently reflected in its traditional cuisine. This culinary diversity is a result of the integration of Thai, Chinese, Malay, Muslim, and Hindu influences. These food traditions are not only cultural representations but also have been transformed into tourism products in the form of food tourism, which is gaining popularity among both domestic and international tourists.

Simultaneously, Phuket possesses abundant natural resources that can be leveraged to develop a robust health-oriented food industry. Several local ingredients stand out for their distinctive qualities and potential for culinary innovation, particularly in promoting health tourism. These include:

Phuket Pineapple – Registered as a Geographical Indication (GI) product in 2009, this pineapple variety is renowned for its sweet taste, crisp texture, juicy yellow flesh, and distinctive aroma. It is unique to Phuket's soil and climate. The fruit is often used in local dishes such as Gaeng Som Sapparot (spicy sour curry with pineapple), highlighting its potential to be developed into a health-conscious menu item rich in natural vitamins and dietary fiber.

Ya Chong – A native aquatic plant found in clean freshwater sources, characterized by its slender, oblong shape and green coloration. Locally, it is used in a traditional snack called Bue Thod, which involves battering the plant with seasoned flour, topping it with shrimp, and deep-frying it until crisp. Served with a mildly spicy and sweet dipping sauce, this dish represents the community's wisdom in utilizing local plants. It can be adapted for modern dietary preferences and promoted as a nutritious and culturally significant health food.

Som Khwai – A sour fruit belonging to the same family as *Garcinia atroviridis*, widely found in southern Thailand, particularly in Phuket. It is known for its large size and abundant flesh. Locals commonly use it in curries, especially Gaeng Som or Tom Som (sour soup). Recent medical research has shown that Som Khwai contains medicinal properties, including antioxidant activity and digestive benefits. Dishes like Tom Som Som Khwai offer opportunities to be included in wellness tourism packages due to their functional health benefits.

Qualitative analysis suggests that these three traditional dishes Gaeng Som Sapparot, Tom Som Pak Som Rom, and Bue Thod have strong potential to be developed into menu items for health tourism in Phuket. To enhance their appeal to health-conscious travelers, it may be necessary to adapt their recipes to reduce excessive salt, fat, or sugar content, and to modernize their presentation. These adjustments would help align the dishes with the expectations of international health tourists, elderly visitors, and wellness-focused consumers.

The findings demonstrate that Phuket's local cuisine is not merely a cultural legacy but can be transformed into a value-added tourism product that supports the development of integrated health tourism. By aligning with the national strategies for creative economy and wellness city development, traditional food can play a key role in elevating Phuket as an international hub for sustainable and health-centered tourism.

Discussion

The findings underscore that Phuket's local cuisine, characterized by its multicultural influences and unique indigenous ingredients, holds significant potential to enhance the province's health tourism sector. The integration of traditional dishes into wellness tourism aligns with global trends favoring authentic, health-oriented culinary experiences.

Phuket Pineapple, recognized as a Geographical Indication (GI) product since 2009, exemplifies the province's commitment to preserving and promoting its unique agricultural heritage. Its distinctive sweet and tangy flavor profile has not only made it a culinary staple but also a symbol of Phuket's gastronomic identity. Innovative initiatives, such as transforming these pineapples into premium gift items for festivals, have added economic value and cultural significance to this local produce.

Similarly, Som Khwai (*Garcinia cowa*), a native sour fruit, has been promoted as a GI product to boost the province's agricultural and food industries, generating sustainable income for locals. The fruit's unique properties and traditional uses in local dishes highlight its potential as a health-promoting ingredient in wellness tourism offerings.

Ya Chong, an indigenous aquatic plant, is traditionally used in dishes like "Bue Thod," reflecting the community's culinary ingenuity. Its incorporation into local diets showcases the potential of underutilized native ingredients in developing health-focused culinary experiences.

The strategic development of these local ingredients into health-oriented dishes can position Phuket as a leading destination for wellness tourism. According to the Global Wellness Institute, wellness tourists are high-yield travelers, spending on average 130% more than the average tourist. By capitalizing on this trend, Phuket can enhance its tourism revenue while promoting sustainable agricultural practices and preserving its culinary heritage.

Furthermore, initiatives like the "Street Food Good Health from Local to Global" program aim to elevate the street food experience in Phuket, serving as a model for other provinces. Such programs not only improve food safety and hygiene standards but also promote local dishes as healthy and authentic culinary options for tourists.

In conclusion, Phuket's unique blend of multicultural culinary traditions and indigenous ingredients presents a valuable opportunity to develop health-focused tourism offerings. By integrating these elements into wellness tourism strategies, the province can enhance its appeal to health-conscious travelers, support local economies, and preserve its rich cultural heritage.

Research recommendations

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, several research recommendations are proposed to enhance the development and integration of local food into Phuket's health tourism industry:

1. Development of Standardized Health-Friendly Recipes

Future research should focus on reformulating traditional dishes using local ingredient such as Phuket pineapple, ya chong, and som khwai to create standardized health-friendly versions. Nutritional analysis and dietary assessments should be conducted to ensure these dishes meet international wellness standards while preserving their cultural identity.

2. Consumer Perception and Market Segmentation Studies

Further studies should explore domestic and international tourist perceptions of health-oriented local food in Phuket. Understanding preferences, expectations, and health concerns across different market segments (e.g., elderly tourists, wellness seekers, vegetarians) will help in tailoring food tourism experiences more effectively.

3. Integration Models for Wellness Tourism

Research should investigate models for integrating local food into broader health tourism experiences, such as wellness retreats, cooking classes, farm-to-table tours, and herbal remedy workshops. This includes studying the impact of such integration on tourist satisfaction and destination branding.

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THE POTENTIAL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF KRABI PROVINCE AS A SUSTAINABLE WELLNESS TOURISM DESTINATION

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Abstract

This study investigates the development potential of Krabi Province as a sustainable wellness tourism destination through the integrated application of three analytical frameworks: SERVQUAL (service quality), the 5A Model (destination readiness), and the Triple Bottom Line (TBL, sustainability performance). A structured questionnaire was administered to 400 Thai and international wellness tourists. The findings reveal that Krabi demonstrates strong performance in reliability and infrastructure (Accommodation = M 4.32; Reliability = M 3.86), confirming the province's alignment with core wellness tourism expectations. However, service responsiveness (M 3.64) and staff enthusiasm (M 3.12) reflect a critical capacity constraint, suggesting underinvestment in emotional labor and frontline training. While most 5A dimensions scored highly, cultural Attractions underperformed (M 3.58), pointing to experiential and interpretive gaps, particularly for international visitors. In terms of sustainability, Krabi showed economic strengths (M 4.08) but only moderate social integration (M 3.85), with community-based tourism (CBT) remaining sporadic and unstructured. Environmental challenges, including weak waste management systems, further underscore governance bottlenecks. The study concludes that while Krabi possesses significant competitive potential, realizing its vision as a sustainable wellness destination will require overcoming structural trade-offs particularly in staff development, cultural inclusivity, and ecological policy coherence. By operationalizing a hybrid SERVQUAL–5A–TBL framework, the study not only contributes to tourism scholarship but also provides actionable insights for practitioners and policymakers seeking to align service delivery, infrastructure development, and sustainability governance in emerging wellness market.

Keywords: Wellness tourism, Sustainable destination, Krabi, SERVQUAL, 5A Framework, Triple Bottom Line

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Introduction

The global wellness tourism sector has emerged as one of the fastest-growing and highest-value segments within the broader tourism industry. According to the Global Wellness Institute (GWI), global wellness tourism expenditures reached \$651 billion in 2022, marking a robust rebound from pandemic-related disruptions. Projections indicate that this figure will surge to \$1.4 trillion by 2027, with a compound annual growth rate of 16.6% (McGroarty, 2023). Notably, wellness tourism has consistently outpaced general tourism growth, with a 36% increase in annual spending and a 30% rise in wellness-specific trips between 2020 and 2022 (Global Wellness Institute, 2023). Despite accounting for only 7.8% of total global tourism trips, wellness tourism constitutes nearly 18.7% of total tourism expenditures underscoring the disproportionate economic value of this market segment and the premium it places on quality, authenticity, and experiential depth.

Krabi Province, located in Southern Thailand, possesses a diverse range of natural and cultural assets including therapeutic hot springs, coastal landscapes, forested ecosystems, and traditional healing practices that are well-aligned with global wellness tourism preferences. These inherent advantages position Krabi to capitalize on rising demand for holistic, nature-based, and culturally embedded wellness experiences. Previous strategic assessments suggest that Krabi could become a regional wellness hub if it systematically enhances its service quality, promotes sustainability, and integrates localized wellness narratives into its tourism offerings (Krabi Provincial Office, 2025; Sangthong, Phatanaphokinsakul, & Kamwut, 2021). Nevertheless, this potential is accompanied by complex challenges, including environmental strain, inadequate regulatory alignment, and fragmented stakeholder coordination factors that could undermine the long-term viability of wellness tourism if left unaddressed.

Despite growing academic interest in sustainable tourism, there remains a critical gap in the literature concerning the intersection of service quality, destination readiness, and sustainability in wellness tourism particularly within destination-specific contexts like Krabi. Existing studies often adopt a macroeconomic or generic sustainability lens, insufficiently accounting for place-based wellness experiences such as traditional spa services, natural healing environments, and community-based cultural wellness programs (Jimenez, Tolentino, Castro, & Lausa, 2024; Qin, Mazo, Paulino, Boquila, & Aterado, 2024). Moreover, few studies have operationalized destination readiness frameworks such as the 5A model alongside service quality (SERVQUAL) and sustainability (Triple Bottom Line) in an integrated manner tailored to emerging wellness destinations in Southeast Asia. To address this conceptual and empirical shortfall, this study employs an integrated framework comprising the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988), the 5A tourism readiness model (Gunn & Var, 2002), and the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework (Elkington, 1997). This composite approach offers a comprehensive toolset for evaluating Krabi's wellness tourism potential in terms of service quality delivery, infrastructural adequacy, and sustainability governance. By embedding this multidimensional analysis within the specific sociocultural and environmental context of Krabi, the study aims to generate actionable insights for policy makers, destination planners, and private-sector stakeholders.

This study directly addresses these empirical gaps by operationalizing a hybrid SERVQUAL–5A–TBL framework to examine the synergies and tensions between service quality, destination readiness, and sustainability performance within the wellness tourism sector. In doing so, it advances current tourism literature beyond fragmented evaluations and contributes to the development of context-sensitive diagnostic tools applicable to emerging wellness destinations. Ultimately, the findings are expected to enhance the strategic positioning of Krabi within the global wellness tourism landscape, while informing more coherent approaches to quality assurance, destination management, and inclusive sustainability in tourism development (UNWTO, 2017; Krabi Spesialisten, 2024).

Research Objectives

1. To assess the perceived service quality of wellness tourism in Krabi Province.
2. To evaluate the destination readiness of Krabi Province for wellness tourism development.
3. To measure the sustainability performance of wellness tourism in Krabi Province.
4. To propose strategic recommendations for developing Krabi Province as a globally competitive and sustainable wellness tourism destination.

Literature Review

Following the conceptual grounding outlined in Section, this literature review provides a critical evaluation of how existing scholarship has applied the SERVQUAL model, the 5A tourism framework, and the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) in the context of wellness tourism. The review highlights gaps in empirical application, particularly in Southeast Asian destinations, and identifies opportunities for integrated analysis. By engaging with both conceptual developments and applied studies, this section positions the present research within the fragmented yet evolving discourse on sustainable wellness tourism.

Service Quality and Wellness Tourism

Extensive literature affirms the utility of the SERVQUAL model for assessing perceived service quality, especially in high-contact wellness environments. Qin et al. (2024) demonstrated that empathy and reliability significantly influence repeat visitation among elderly spa-goers in East Asia. Jimenez et al. (2023) further argued for the inclusion of emotional labor and attentiveness as subdimensions of service quality, particularly in luxury health retreats, reflecting the rising demand for affective personalization. Comparative studies in Jeju Island and Bali also affirm that staff empathy and culturally resonant care are vital for service differentiation in competitive wellness markets. Despite these developments, the empirical application of SERVQUAL in Thailand remains geographically limited, with few studies focusing on second-tier destinations such as Krabi. Furthermore, there is limited exploration of how service quality perceptions vary across demographic cohorts particularly aging or intergenerational tourists. This study addresses these underexplored segments by applying SERVQUAL to wellness tourists in Krabi, enabling a more context-sensitive understanding of service dynamics in emerging destinations.

Destination Readiness: Evaluating the 5A Framework

The 5A model comprising Attractions, Accessibility, Accommodation, Amenities, and Activities has become a global standard for evaluating tourism destination readiness. Kim and Lee (2022) found that Accessibility and Amenities were the most critical satisfaction drivers for wellness tourists in cross-cultural comparisons. Meanwhile, the Global Wellness Institute (2023) emphasized that synergistic infrastructure combining spas, mindful movement, and healthy nutrition represents a competitive advantage for wellness hubs. However, existing applications of the 5A model tend to focus on developed or capital-city destinations, with fragmented integration across the five dimensions. There is a notable absence of comprehensive, empirical studies in underrepresented geographies such as Southern Thailand. This research directly addresses that empirical void by operationalizing all five dimensions of the 5A framework in Krabi, offering a more holistic and grounded assessment of destination readiness in a rapidly growing but less-studied wellness market.

Sustainability and the Triple Bottom Line (TBL)

The TBL framework has gained prominence in tourism literature as a strategic tool to evaluate long-term destination viability through economic, social, and environmental indicators. Ayob, Zainal, and Radzi (2022) highlighted the economic resilience of wellness destinations that cater to high-yield tourists, while also acknowledging governance trade-offs in social equity and ecological protection. Garcia-Rosell and Mäkinen (2023) advocated for using TBL as a planning lens to manage competing sustainability priorities and measure destination-level impact. Nonetheless, empirical applications of TBL in wellness tourism remain uneven, especially in Southeast Asia where many destinations struggle to translate policy rhetoric into actionable sustainability metrics. Very few studies examine all three TBL pillars concurrently in a tourism context. This study helps bridge that methodological fragmentation by offering a data-driven TBL assessment of Krabi's wellness sector one that captures economic opportunity, environmental sensitivity, and social engagement in tandem.

Methodology

Populations and Sample

This research employed a quantitative design to generate generalizable insights grounded in empirical data. The target population included both Thai and international tourists who had engaged in wellness tourism activities in Krabi Province. A total of 400 respondents were recruited using a convenience sampling method, reflecting accessibility across prominent wellness tourism sites such as

Klong Thom Hot Springs, Hat Sai Roi Beach, spiritual and sport-based wellness activities, Zen meditation centers, wellness cuisine locations, and local spas. Inclusion criteria required that participants: (1) be at least 18 years of age, (2) have participated in wellness-related services within Krabi, and (3) demonstrate interest in health and wellness tourism.

The sample size was determined based on Cochran's formula (Cochran, 1953) and aligned with inferential statistical requirements, including multiple regression analysis. While convenience sampling facilitated efficient data collection across diverse wellness locations, this approach may limit broader representativeness suggesting a trade-off between accessibility and probabilistic generalizability.

Research Tools

The structured questionnaire was carefully designed to align with the study's conceptual framework SERVQUAL, 5A, and TBL and consisted of six logically organized sections:

Section I (Demographics): Five items measured using nominal/ordinal scales, capturing key identifiers such as age, gender, nationality, income, and education. Section II (Tourism Behavior): Five nominal/ordinal items capturing travel patterns, frequency, activity types, and duration of wellness tourism experiences. Section III (Service Quality – SERVQUAL Framework): 20 items across five dimensions (4 per dimension: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy), using a 5-point Likert scale. These items assessed both operational and affective aspects of service encounters. Section IV (Destination Readiness – 5A Framework): 15 items (3 per dimension: Attractions, Accessibility, Accommodation, Amenities, Activities), measured on a 5-point Likert scale to gauge infrastructure sufficiency and experiential quality. Section V (Sustainability Performance – Triple Bottom Line): Nine items across three sustainability domains (Economic, Social, Environmental), each with three indicators rated on a 5-point Likert scale, allowing analysis of trade-offs and synergies. Section VI (Open-Ended Feedback): A single qualitative question captured visitors' suggestions for improving wellness tourism services and Krabi's positioning as a sustainable destination. To ensure content validity, three academic experts in tourism and wellness service management independently reviewed the instrument. Feedback was incorporated to enhance clarity, conceptual alignment, and domain coverage. A pilot test with 30 respondents yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.93, exceeding the threshold of 0.70 recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), confirming the tool's internal consistency. Subscale reliability scores were: SERVQUAL ($\alpha = 0.91$), 5A ($\alpha = 0.89$), and TBL ($\alpha = 0.87$), demonstrating strong psychometric performance across constructs. This validates the instrument's suitability for cross-cultural applications in wellness tourism.

Ethical Considerations

The research protocol received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce (Approval No. UTCC-REC-2567-049). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were assured of their anonymity, voluntary participation, and right to withdraw at any point without consequence.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted from September to October 2024 at designated wellness locations in Krabi Province. Questionnaires were distributed both online and onsite. Bilingual research assistants, trained in ethical and procedural protocols, briefed participants on study objectives and ensured informed consent. The survey was available in both Thai and English to maximize respondent inclusivity and cultural adaptability.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were used to summarize respondent profiles and item responses. Inferential analyses included independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA to examine demographic or behavioral group differences. Multiple regression analysis tested the predictive relationships among SERVQUAL, 5A, and TBL dimensions on tourist satisfaction and behavioral intention.

Results

Results: Section I – Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic structure of the 400 respondents offers a representative cross-section of Krabi's wellness tourism clientele. Female travelers constituted the majority (62.5%), reflecting global patterns where women demonstrate stronger wellness engagement. The age group 31–45 years dominated (42.8%), with the 46–60 bracket following (26.4%), affirming wellness tourism's appeal among midlife and pre-retirement cohorts. Notably, seniors (60+) comprised only 11.5% a figure that underscores potential access or marketing barriers despite rising global interest among aging populations. International tourists marginally outnumbered domestic visitors (52.0% vs. 48.0%), reinforcing Krabi's hybrid positioning as both a local and international wellness hub. Income data showed a skew toward high-spending segments, with 36.75% reporting monthly incomes above 45,000 THB, aligning with the premium nature of wellness tourism. Furthermore, a high education level was evident, with 69.3% holding bachelor's degrees and 18.2% with postgraduate credentials corroborating prior studies linking educational attainment with health-conscious travel. Despite overall alignment with wellness market benchmarks, the underrepresentation of older adults indicates a strategic gap in inclusive outreach and product design, warranting further segmentation analysis.

Results: Section II – Tourism Behavior Patterns

The behavioral data substantiate Krabi's profile as a short-stay, experience-focused wellness destination. Most respondents (39.8%) engaged in wellness tourism 2–3 times annually, suggesting habitual but non-intensive participation. Thai massage (68.5%), hot springs (54.2%), and meditation/yoga (47.1%) emerged as dominant activities, with international tourists showing a preference for spiritual wellness and locals favoring spa-based relaxation. Trips commonly lasted 3–5 days (48.7%), and 20.6% extended stays to one week typically for immersive retreats. Travel was primarily social, with 58.2% journeying with partners or friends, and 21.4% traveling solo, highlighting the dual function of wellness travel as both communal and introspective. Booking patterns reflect digital transformation, with 42.1% using online platforms and 33.7% booking directly with providers. This fragmentation suggests the coexistence of mainstream digital consumers and loyalist wellness retreat clientele. However, limited engagement in deep-immersion programs implies a depth gap in Krabi's wellness offerings that merits strategic repositioning.

Results: Objective 1 – Service Quality Assessment (SERVQUAL Framework)

Table 1
Service Quality Assessment (SERVQUAL Framework)

Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Tangibles	3.83	1.00	High
Reliability	3.86	1.03	High
Responsiveness	3.64	1.06	Moderate
Assurance	3.80	1.04	High
Empathy	3.77	1.02	High

Source: Author's survey (2024)

Among all dimensions, Reliability was rated highest ($M = 3.86$), affirming trust in consistent service delivery. Responsiveness, however, lagged ($M = 3.64$), with staff enthusiasm scoring particularly low ($M = 3.12$) highlighting emotional labor as a service constraint. Regression analysis confirmed Reliability and Empathy as significant predictors of tourist satisfaction ($\beta = .31$ and $\beta = .27$, $p < .01$), whereas Responsiveness was not statistically significant ($\beta = .09$, $p > .05$). This indicates a perceptual decoupling between affective engagement and satisfaction, with implications for future loyalty rather than immediate satisfaction. These findings confirm SERVQUAL's applicability in Southeast Asian wellness contexts and align with studies emphasizing the primacy of empathy and reliability in aging-friendly service delivery (Qin et al., 2024; Jimenez et al., 2023).

Results: Objective 2 – Destination Readiness (5A Framework)

Table 2
Destination Readiness (5A Framework)

Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Activities	4.18	0.58	High
Amenities	4.05	0.61	High
Accommodation	4.32	1.02	High
Accessibility	4.06	0.97	High
Attractions	3.58	1.07	Moderate

Source: Author's survey (2024)

Krabi scored highly in Accommodation ($M = 4.32$), highlighting well-integrated facilities such as spas and wellness kitchens. Activities and Amenities were also favorably rated, reflecting alignment with global wellness consumption patterns. Yet Attractions revealed experiential weaknesses, particularly in interpretive infrastructure and accessibility critical for aging or international visitors. This underscores a capacity constraint in cultural delivery that diminishes overall destination readiness despite robust core infrastructure. These findings support strategic investment in inclusive design and narrative engagement.

Results: Objective 3 – Sustainability Performance (Triple Bottom Line Framework)

Table 3
Sustainability Performance (Triple Bottom Line Framework)

Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Economic	4.08	0.60	High
Environmental	3.92	0.67	High
Social	3.85	0.72	High

Source: Author's survey (2024)

The economic domain scored highest, confirming Krabi's alignment with wellness-driven revenue growth. However, social engagement, though positive, remained moderate indicating shallow community integration in service delivery. The environmental dimension, despite relatively strong scores, was marked by persistent issues in plastic use, waste management, and green infrastructure.

Open-ended responses reinforced concerns about fragmented governance and lack of standardized environmental protocols. These tensions between growth and ecological stewardship affirm TBL's utility as a diagnostic lens, while revealing urgent gaps in practice-level sustainability. Together, these results confirm Krabi's potential as a wellness hub but expose structural asymmetries and implementation gaps that could undermine long-term competitiveness if unaddressed.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The empirical findings of this study underscore Krabi Province's strategic potential to evolve into a competitive wellness tourism destination. This potential is anchored in the intersection of three theoretical domains service quality (SERVQUAL), destination readiness (5A), and sustainability performance (Triple Bottom Line, TBL). While the data validate the conceptual robustness of these frameworks, they also illuminate systemic tensions, operational inefficiencies, and governance deficits that must be addressed for Krabi to attain global competitiveness and long-term resilience.

Service Quality (SERVQUAL): Strengths Undermined by Labor Constraints

The high aggregate mean across SERVQUAL dimensions (Mean = 4.21, SD = 0.56) affirms the framework's continued relevance in capturing wellness service perceptions. The dominance of reliability (Mean = 3.86) reinforces Krabi's capacity for consistent service delivery an essential attribute

for building trust in health-oriented travel (Qin et al., 2024). However, the low score in responsiveness, particularly the sub-score on staff enthusiasm (Mean = 3.12), signals a critical capacity constraint in human resource engagement. This points to an emotional labor gap where service personalization, although expected by wellness tourists, is increasingly difficult to sustain without institutionalized support mechanisms (Jimenez et al., 2024). Similar structural issues have been documented in other wellness-intensive regions such as Jeju and Kyoto, where burnout and workforce precarity undermine service consistency (Lee & Kim, 2021). Without proactive investment in emotional intelligence training and supportive HR systems, Krabi risks service degradation a trade-off between operational expansion and workforce sustainability.

Destination Readiness (5A): Infrastructure Success Amid Experiential Gaps

The 5A framework results reflect Krabi's infrastructural strengths, particularly in accommodation (Mean = 4.32) and wellness-based activities (Mean = 4.18), confirming the province's physical readiness to serve high-expectation wellness tourists. However, the low score for attractions (Mean = 3.58) notably regarding cultural interpretation and accessibility reveals a disjuncture between infrastructure investment and experiential inclusivity. This exposes a governance gap in translating tourism development into culturally and age-sensitive experiences. Empirical evidence from Southeast Asia indicates that intergenerational accessibility and inclusive interpretation mechanisms (e.g., multilingual signage, digital storytelling) are vital to appealing to the aging global demographic (Nguyen & Tran, 2022; UN Tourism, 2023). Krabi's relative underperformance in this dimension suggests a misalignment between physical expansion and experiential depth, warranting a policy pivot toward inclusive design and heritage co-creation.

Sustainability (Triple Bottom Line): Fragmentation and Policy Gaps

Krabi's performance across the TBL dimensions suggests a mixed sustainability profile. The economic dimension scored the highest (Mean = 4.08), indicating strong market positioning for high-spending wellness tourists and robust revenue-generating capacity (Ayob et al., 2022). However, the relatively lower scores in social (Mean = 3.85) and environmental (Mean = 3.92) domains raise concerns about fragmented implementation. In the social sphere, limited community engagement and benefit-sharing mechanisms reveal that Community-Based Tourism (CBT) remains rhetorically emphasized but weakly institutionalized (Singh, Abdullah, & Said, 2023). In the environmental domain, persistent challenges such as ineffective waste management, underutilization of renewable energy, and the absence of eco-certification systems indicate poor integration of ecological governance within tourism policy (Hussain, Park, & Hwang, 2022). These shortcomings reflect broader structural issues, such as insufficient cross-sectoral coordination and lack of performance accountability, which hinder Krabi's ability to actualize the TBL framework in practice. Unlike Jeju's wellness model, which integrates green certification into its core tourism policy and mandates renewable energy thresholds for spa and resort operators, Krabi's sustainability agenda remains policy-rich but implementation-poor. The absence of standardized metrics and incentives for green compliance signals a governance gap that must be urgently addressed to enhance credibility and international competitiveness.

In sum, Krabi demonstrates measurable progress in wellness tourism development, yet the findings reveal a series of interlocking constraints that could impede sustainable transformation. These include emotional labor burdens, inadequate cultural infrastructure, and fragmented policy enactment. Overcoming such barriers will require more than incremental improvements it necessitates integrated governance models, cross-sectoral partnerships, and long-term investment in both human and institutional capacity. Only through such structural recalibration can Krabi transition from a promising to a truly competitive and sustainable wellness destination.

Conclusion

This study critically affirms the strategic potential of Krabi Province to evolve into a globally competitive wellness tourism destination through the integrative application of three conceptual frameworks: service quality (SERVQUAL), destination readiness (5A), and sustainability performance (Triple Bottom Line – TBL). While the empirical findings reinforce the theoretical relevance of these models, they simultaneously illuminate latent structural limitations and systemic misalignments that require targeted intervention.

Service Quality (SERVQUAL): Operational Strengths vs. Human Capital Constraints

The high composite score across SERVQUAL dimensions (Mean = 4.21, SD = 0.56) confirms Krabi's robust service infrastructure, particularly in the areas of reliability and tangibles both of which are critical determinants of perceived quality in wellness contexts (Qin et al., 2024). However, the lower responsiveness score (Mean = 3.64), driven by a suboptimal staff enthusiasm rating (Mean = 3.12), exposes a critical service-performance gap. This highlights an underinvestment in emotional labor and staff empowerment issues that not only affect immediate tourist satisfaction but also pose long-term risks to service sustainability in high-contact environments (Jimenez et al., 2024).

Destination Readiness (5A): Infrastructure Strength Amid Experiential Fragmentation

Krabi's strong performance in accommodation (Mean = 4.32) and wellness-related activities (Mean = 4.18) illustrates significant progress in infrastructural readiness. However, the underperformance of the attractions dimension (Mean = 3.58) underscores a persistent gap in cultural interpretation and experiential inclusivity particularly for aging and international visitors. This misalignment with global standards on inclusive design and accessibility, as outlined by UNWTO (2017), reflects a broader policy lag in experience curation and heritage integration.

Sustainability Performance (TBL): Conceptual Integration vs. Implementation Gaps

The TBL assessment reveals a relatively balanced profile across economic (Mean = 4.08), environmental (Mean = 3.92), and social (Mean = 3.85) dimensions. While Krabi demonstrates clear strengths in attracting high-yield wellness tourists, the moderate scores in social and environmental domains reveal limitations in benefit distribution, ecological safeguards, and community engagement mechanisms. These findings point to implementation bottlenecks in local sustainability governance, where policy ambition remains misaligned with practice (García-Rosell & Mäkinen, 2013; Hussain et al., 2022).

Collectively, the results validate the empirical robustness of the SERVQUAL, 5A, and TBL frameworks while drawing attention to a set of interdependent development constraints ranging from staff undertraining and cultural inaccessibility to policy fragmentation. To actualize Krabi's vision as a sustainable wellness destination, structural realignment and long-term governance innovation are imperative.

Strategic Recommendations

To enhance Krabi's trajectory toward global competitiveness in wellness tourism, a set of integrated, evidence-based strategies is proposed:

1. Enhance Staff Responsiveness through Emotional Intelligence Investment: Deploy targeted capacity-building programs to improve frontline staff's interpersonal skills, emotional resilience, and customer engagement capabilities. This is critical for addressing responsiveness gaps in labor-intensive wellness services and aligning with international expectations of high-touch care (Jimenez et al., 2024; Kim & Lee, 2023). Training initiatives should emphasize not only technical proficiency but also affective competencies central to wellness experience delivery.

2. Advance Cultural Accessibility and Inclusive Interpretation Infrastructure: Redesign cultural assets with an emphasis on age-sensitive, multilingual, and cognitively inclusive formats. Interventions should include digital storytelling, sensory-friendly design, and community co-curation, in line with UN Tourism (2023) and comparative best practices (Nguyen & Tran, 2022). Such inclusive approaches are essential for maximizing intergenerational appeal and capturing the rapidly expanding senior wellness market.

3. Institutionalize Sustainability through Green Governance and CBT Integration: Operationalize sustainability principles by embedding environmental practices (e.g., waste reduction, renewable energy adoption) and strengthening Community-Based Tourism (CBT) frameworks. Cross-sectoral collaboration with SMEs and civil society is essential for achieving equitable benefit distribution and ecological resilience (Lee & Kim, 2021; Hussain et al., 2022). Certification schemes and policy incentives should be institutionalized to promote compliance and impact measurement.

4. Foster Cross-Sectoral Policy and Research Collaboration: Establish a governance model that fosters policy coherence across tourism, environment, and public health sectors. Engage in longitudinal, participatory research to monitor strategic outcomes, support adaptive planning, and enable evidence-based policymaking (Singh et al., 2023). Collaborative platforms linking government, academia, and the private sector are pivotal in steering Krabi's wellness ecosystem toward sustainability and innovation.

Research recommendations

Grounded in the integrated SERVQUAL–5A–TBL framework, this study identifies five key research directions to advance both theoretical understanding and practical innovation in wellness tourism:

1. Mixed-Methods Integration

Future studies should adopt mixed-methods designs by incorporating qualitative tools such as interviews or focus groups to explore nuanced tourist expectations, particularly regarding empathy and responsiveness dimensions often underrepresented in quantitative surveys. Such integration can enhance contextual understanding and inform culturally sensitive service improvements.

2. Longitudinal Loyalty Studies

Tracking tourist satisfaction and revisit intention over time would reveal how service quality influences behavioral outcomes. Longitudinal data can uncover evolving preferences, seasonal shifts, and loyalty dynamics. These studies should be implemented collaboratively by the Krabi Tourism Authority and local DMO bodies to inform retention strategies and service innovation.

3. Emotional Labor and Staff Responsiveness

To address the identified responsiveness gap, future research should investigate the role of emotional labor, training interventions, and incentive structures in shaping staff engagement. Pilot interventions jointly coordinated by wellness operators and the Krabi DMO should be evaluated to assess their impact on service quality and staff wellbeing in high-touch wellness environments.

4. Inclusive Cultural Interpretation

As cultural accessibility remains underdeveloped, user-centered research should guide the design of inclusive interpretation systems. Emphasis should be placed on multilingual, age-friendly, and cognitively accessible formats that improve intergenerational and cross-cultural engagement. Collaboration with cultural institutions and aging policy agencies would enhance implementation feasibility.

5. Benchmarking with Comparable Destinations

Comparative studies using the SERVQUAL–5A–TBL framework across wellness hubs such as Chiang Mai, Jeju, and Bali are essential to position Krabi competitively. Benchmarking exercises should be supported by national tourism bodies and regional think tanks to identify scalable innovations and policy alignment with international best practices.

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MAPPING AND CHARACTER IDENTIFICATION OF CULINARY TOURISM PACKAGES TO PROMOTE CULINARY TOURISM IN JAKARTA, INDONESIA

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Extended Abstract

Mapping culinary tourism packages increases the experience and interest of tourists while driving the local economy. Culinary tourism emphasizes the role of co-creation in enhancing the traveler experience (Carvalho et al., 2023). However, while some culinary tourism packages are indulged with developments, others suffer from improper ones due to various challenges related to infrastructure, cleanliness, brand perception (Kaushal & Yavdav, 2021), unsustainable food production and distribution (Okumus, 2025), and different technology adoption (Rani & Bhartwal, 2024). Previous studies primarily discuss the motivational factors for doing culinary tourism (Zhou et al., 2025) and tourist satisfaction (Wijanarko et al., 2023; Arcana & Mahadewi, 2019). There are some studies on culinary tour packages, but they emphasize the impact on the economy (Wondirad et al., 2021) and socio-culture (Yeboah & Ashie, 2024). Those studies, therefore, neglect the mapping and character identification of culinary tourism packages, specifically in developing countries, including Indonesia, even though they are important to strengthen branding. Accordingly, the aim of this research is to bridge the gap by analyzing the mapping and character identification of culinary tourism packages to promote culinary tourism in Jakarta, Indonesia.

This descriptive-qualitative research focused on a case study: the mapping and character identification of culinary tourism packages to promote culinary tourism in Jakarta, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with five actors as key informants that were chosen purposively, i.e., the Jakarta Tourism Department, Pariwisata Kreatif Jakarta (Jakarta Creative Tourism), and Lahap Tour. After data collection, data reduction, presentation, verification, and conclusion drawing were executed.

Concerning the mapping, this study found four culinary tourism packages, namely (1) Culinary Tourism Route Package, that invited tourists to walk on a specified route with some stops to enjoy food and drinks, (2) Thematic Restaurant Tour Packages, inviting participants to dine at restaurants that served authentic specialties, (3) Thematic Nusantara Culinary Tour Package, introducing participants to traditional Indonesian dishes: Minang, Sundanese, and Javanese, and (4) Culinary Festival Tour Package, provided in the celebration of certain holidays, such as the Chinese New Year. Meanwhile, the three characteristics of culinary tour packages identified encompassed (1) Local cultural exploration, (2) Authenticity that reflected the local culture, and (3) Variety of cultural experiences. Additionally, foreign tourists preferred culinary tourism packages that introduced traditional Indonesian cuisine, while domestic tourists were more interested in registering for tourism packages that enabled them to explore international cuisine.

Keywords: Character; Culinary Tourism; Packages; Promote

Purpose/Problem Statement

The aim of this research is to bridge the gap by analyzing the mapping and character identification of culinary tourism packages to promote culinary tourism in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Originality/Value

The contribution of this research is to encourage the development of culinary tourism branding strategies at the national and international levels.

Design/Methodology/Approach

This descriptive-qualitative research focused on a case study: the mapping and character identification of culinary tourism packages to promote culinary tourism in Jakarta, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with five actors as key informants that were chosen purposively, i.e., the Jakarta Tourism Department, Pariwisata Kreatif Jakarta (Jakarta Creative Tourism), and Lahap Tour. After data collection, data reduction, presentation, verification, and conclusion drawing were executed.

Findings/Discussion

This study found four culinary tourism packages, namely (1) Culinary Tourism Route Package, that invited tourists to walk on a specified route with some stops to enjoy food and drinks, (2) Thematic Restaurant Tour Packages, inviting participants to dine at restaurants that served authentic specialties, (3) Thematic Nusantara Culinary Tour Package, introducing participants to traditional Indonesian dishes: Minang, Sundanese, and Javanese, and (4) Culinary Festival Tour Package, provided in the celebration of certain holidays, such as the Chinese New Year. Meanwhile, the three characteristics of culinary tour packages identified encompassed (1) Local cultural exploration, (2) Authenticity that reflected the local culture, and (3) Variety of cultural experiences. Additionally, foreign tourists preferred culinary tourism packages that introduced traditional Indonesian cuisine, while domestic tourists were more interested in registering for tourism packages that enabled them to explore international cuisine.

Theoretical Implications

This study enriches the knowledge of culinary tourism, especially in the context of urban tourism.

Practical Implications

These findings imply the importance of synergistic collaboration between the government, private sectors, and local communities in developing innovative culinary tourism packages comprising food tours, cooking workshops, and sustainable food hub development.

Social Implications (Policy Contribution)

This research contributes to bolstering local supply chains by drawing traditional food producers into relevant activities that support SMEs and the Betawi community in Jakarta to develop a culinary tourism roadmap while preserving their culinary heritage.

Research Limitations

The study used in-depth interviews with a limited sample so that future research can combine qualitative methods with quantitative methods.

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MAXIMIZING URBAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACT THROUGH YEAR-ROUND FESTIVAL PROGRAMMING: A CASE STUDY OF SONGKHLA'S '12 MONTHS, 12 FESTIVALS' INITIATIVE

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Abstract

This research explores the development of urban destinations through year-round cultural programming, using Songkhla's "12 Months, 12 Festivals" initiative as a case study. With growing interest in sustainable urban development strategies, many cities have turned to cultural tourism and creative events to boost local economies and strengthen community identity. The focus of this study is to investigate how ongoing festival programming can serve as a tool for economic stimulation, social engagement, and destination branding. While cultural festivals have been widely studied in tourism literature, less attention has been given to their cumulative, long-term urban impact when implemented as part of a continuous, year-round strategy.

A mixed-methods approach was employed to examine the perspectives of key stakeholders, including festival organizers, local business owners, public officials, and residents. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires, while qualitative insights were gathered through in-depth interviews. The analysis identified two primary dimensions essential for maximizing impact: core programming elements and supporting infrastructure. The findings suggest that well-curated festivals that reflect local identity, combined with consistent quality, inclusive participation, and effective promotion, significantly contribute to both tourist satisfaction and resident pride. Additionally, partnerships between public and private sectors play a crucial role in maintaining momentum and ensuring sustainable outcomes.

Key success factors identified in the Songkhla case include alignment with local culture, adaptability across seasons, and integration with economic development goals. Supporting resources such as transportation access, accommodation capacity, and community engagement mechanisms were found to influence visitor satisfaction and repeat visitation. However, the study found that without strong coordination and a unified vision, the long-term benefits of such initiatives could be diluted. The research offers practical recommendations for urban planners and policymakers aiming to use year-round festivals as a strategic tool for enhancing urban vibrancy, cultural capital, and tourism resilience.

Keywords: Festival; Economic Impact; Social Impact; Maximizing Urban Economic

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Purpose/Problem Statement

Despite the increasing use of cultural festivals as tools for urban development, research that directly addresses the strategic design and long-term impact of year-round festival programming remains limited, particularly within the Thai context. While previous studies have explored the cultural, economic, and tourism-related benefits of individual festivals, few have examined how continuous, city-wide programming can contribute to sustained urban revitalization. In the case of Songkhla, the "12 Months, 12 Festivals" initiative represents a deliberate effort to stimulate local economies, enhance community identity, and position the city as a year-round cultural tourism destination. However, systematic research that investigates the effectiveness of this initiative especially from the perspective of both economic and social outcomes is still lacking. Therefore, this study aims to bridge that gap by evaluating how integrated festival planning can be leveraged to maximize urban impact, and to offer practical insights for similar mid-sized cities in Thailand and beyond.

Originality/value

This research offers original value by developing a conceptual framework for understanding how year-round festival programming can serve as a strategic model for urban economic and social development. Unlike prior studies that primarily focus on individual event impacts or seasonal cultural tourism, this study examines a continuous, city-wide initiative, highlighting how the integration of core programming resources such as authentic local culture, festival variety, and stakeholder collaboration alongside supporting elements like infrastructure, accessibility, and consistent promotion, can enhance a city's attractiveness and community engagement. The case of Songkhla's "12 Months, 12 Festivals" provides a unique lens through which to explore the synergy between culture-led urban revitalization and sustainable tourism development. By identifying the key success factors and interrelationships among these components, the study contributes new theoretical and practical insights to the field of urban cultural tourism and destination planning.

Design/methodology/approach

This study employed a quantitative research approach using online survey questionnaires to collect data from key stakeholder groups involved in or affected by the "12 Months, 12 Festivals" initiative in Songkhla, including local residents, business owners, event organizers, and tourists. The structured questionnaire was designed to measure perceptions of economic and social impact, satisfaction with festival elements, and the effectiveness of core and supporting resources related to the initiative. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This methodology allows for a statistically grounded understanding of how continuous cultural programming contributes to urban development outcomes.

Findings/Discussion

The findings revealed that both core and supporting elements of Songkhla's year-round festival programming had a moderate but meaningful influence on stakeholder satisfaction and perceived urban impact. Among the core components, factors such as the cultural authenticity of festivals, diversity of event themes, quality of service delivery, and the overall appeal of festival venues were found to significantly enhance the city's image and attract both local and international visitors. However, elements such as event safety and the frequency of certain festival types showed no significant effect on satisfaction levels. In terms of supporting elements, accommodations, accessibility, local amenities, and the effectiveness of promotional efforts were positively associated with stakeholder satisfaction, reinforcing their role in successful destination development. These results suggest that urban and tourism planners should prioritize enhancing event diversity and cultural authenticity while also investing in foundational infrastructure to support long-term growth and visitor satisfaction.

Theoretical implications

This study proposes a theoretical framework for understanding the efficiency of urban cultural programming through year-round festivals, using Songkhla's "12 Months, 12 Festivals" as a model. The framework is structured around two main components: core programming resources and supporting urban elements. Core resources include the authenticity, diversity, and cultural relevance of the festivals, along with service quality and event management, which collectively contribute to stakeholder satisfaction and destination appeal. Supporting elements encompass accessibility, accommodation, amenities, and promotional strategies that enhance the overall experience and logistical success of the initiative. By integrating these two dimensions, the framework provides a comprehensive lens through which urban planners and cultural policymakers can evaluate and strategically implement continuous festival programming to achieve sustained economic and social impact. This theoretical contribution adds depth to existing cultural tourism literature by positioning year-round festival programming as a holistic and scalable model for urban destination development.

Practical implications

The findings of this study offer valuable practical implications for tourism stakeholders, local government agencies, event organizers, and business owners involved in cultural tourism and urban development. By understanding which core and supporting elements most significantly influence satisfaction and impact, these stakeholders can better design, manage, and promote year-round festival programming that aligns with both local identity and visitor expectations. For example, investing in diverse and culturally rich festival themes, ensuring service quality, and improving accessibility and amenities can directly enhance the attractiveness of the destination. Additionally, clear and consistent promotional strategies are essential to maintaining visitor interest throughout the year. Local policymakers and planners can use the insights from this research to allocate resources more effectively, foster public-private partnerships, and establish Songkhla as a model for sustainable urban revitalization through continuous cultural engagement.

Social implications (Policy contribution)

The results of this study provide important social and policy implications for the strategic planning of urban cultural initiatives. Policymakers should consider formulating long-term cultural tourism strategies that integrate year-round festival programming into broader urban development frameworks. This includes the establishment of a centralized festival committee or cultural association to serve as the core organizer, ensuring consistency, quality control, and inclusive community participation across all events. Additionally, creating collaborative networks with domestic and international cultural institutions can help expand the reach and reputation of the initiative, positioning Songkhla as a leading cultural tourism hub. Policies that support community engagement, equitable resource distribution, and the empowerment of local creatives and entrepreneurs are also critical in fostering inclusive social development. These measures not only strengthen cultural identity but also ensure that the economic and social benefits of tourism are shared broadly within the community.

Research limitations

While this research captured the views of key local stakeholders, it did not include in-depth qualitative insights from a broader range of participants, such as tourists, visiting performers, or non-local entrepreneurs, which may have enriched the analysis of festival impact. Future studies should consider a more diverse data set, incorporating perspectives from different stakeholder groups to gain a holistic understanding of the year-round festival model. Longitudinal research could also be valuable in assessing how such initiatives evolve over time and what long-term outcomes they produce for urban development.

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DEVELOPMENT OF A CREATIVE ECONOMY BASED ON LOCAL WISDOM IN WUKIRSARI VILLAGE: A MORE INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY FOR STABILITY

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Rosliyana br Perangin-angin⁵

Abstract

The local wisdom-based creative economy is one of the sustainable development strategies that can improve community welfare, especially in rural areas. However, people with disabilities still face various obstacles in accessing this sector, such as limited physical accessibility, lack of special needs-based training, and limited capital and market access. This research aims to analyze the inclusive creative economic empowerment model for people with disabilities in Wukirsari Sub-district, Bantul Regency, using a mixed methods approach. Qualitative studies were conducted through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and case studies to understand the experiences, barriers, and adaptation strategies used by people with disabilities in the creative industry. Meanwhile, the quantitative study used surveys and statistical analysis to measure the economic impact, participation rate, and effectiveness of the empowerment strategies that have been implemented.

The results show that the integration of community-based approaches, assistive technology, and marketing digitalization plays a key role in increasing the participation of people with disabilities in the creative economy. Technological adaptations in the production process, such as the design of ergonomic tools for batik and weaving, and the utilization of community-based e-commerce, are proven to increase the competitiveness of the creative products produced. In addition, inclusion-based entrepreneurship training and collaboration with art communities and the local tourism sector contribute to improving the skills and economic opportunities of people with disabilities. This study recommends strengthening social inclusion-based policies, developing more accessible infrastructure, and implementing digital marketing strategies to strengthen a sustainable and inclusive creative economy ecosystem. The implications of this research not only contribute to the academic literature on inclusive creative economy, but also provide practical recommendations for the government, local communities, and stakeholders in realizing a more equitable economy for all groups of society.

Keywords: Creative Economy; Empowerment; Inclusive; Local Wisdom; Tourism Villages

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IN THE SEARCH OF CULINARY TOURISM PACKAGE AND FIGURING OUT OF THE UNIQUE CHARACTERS TO ENHANCE CULINARY TOURISM IN JAKARTA

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Abstract

Jakarta is the largest city in Indonesia with various business activities, including tourism sector. Some attraction are related to history and culture of Jakarta. This study aims to find the existence of culinary tour packages as part of cultural tourism in Jakarta, and also the character of culinary tour packages. The research was conducted in Jakarta for 2 consecutive years, from 2023 to 2024. The methods used were observation, in-depth interviews, and literature studies. Observations were conducted directly in the field by participating in tour packages organized by several operators. Interviewed with the Jakarta Tourism Office, Jakarta Creative Tourism, and Lahap Tour is held to have a more comprehensive informations.

During the culinary tour package program, interactions and observations were conducted with 125 tour participants. Data analysis used the Hubber and Miles theory involving the process of data reduction, data display and conclusion. The results are that some tour operators have develop specific thematic culinary tour packages. The thematic packages are Culinary Tour Route Packages, Thematic Restaurant Tour Packages, and Culinary Festival Tour Packages. The Culinary Tour Route Package is an activity that invites tourists to walk according to the specified route with each stop to taste food or drinks. The Thematic Restaurant Tour Package invite participants to eat together at a restaurant that serves authentic special dishes, like Nepalese cuisine. Festival Tour Packages serve dishes in certain celebration big days such as Chinese New Year, the Mandi-mandi Festival from Portuguese descendants, Diwali from the Indian ethnic community. All of these packages reveal the culinary richness in Jakarta.

Keywords: Culinary, Tour Package, Culinary Tour Package Tourism, Jakarta

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Introduction

Jakarta is still able to attract tourist visits. According to the Central Statistics Agency of DK Jakarta, the number of tourists visiting Jakarta consecutively in 2018 was 32,222,616 people, in 2019 as many as 32,982,472 people, and in 2020 as many as 4,792,342 people. In addition to the number of tourists, Central Statistics Agency of the Jakarta (Biro Pusat Statistik Jakarta Province) also noted that the leading tourist attractions are Taman Impian Jaya Ancol, TMII, Ragunan, National Monument (Monas), National Museum, Satria Mandala Museum, Jakarta History Museum, and Sunda Kelapa Harbor. In the list, there are no leading tourist attractions in the culinary field.

These culinary delights are spread across an area of approximately 661.52 km². Administratively, Jakarta currently consists of 6 cities/regencies, 44 sub-districts and 267 villages. The culinary diversity, the long history of Jakarta, the cultural richness of various ethnicities and tribes in Jakarta are elements that can be utilized to create culinary tourism packages. According to the Special Region, in 2022 10,679,951 people lived in Jakarta. Apart from Betawi as the native tribe of Jakarta, there are other tribes such as Javanese, Minang, Batak, Manado, Balinese, Makassar, Papua, and so on. With the presence of these various tribes, Jakarta can be likened to a mini Indonesia.

However, specifically regarding domestic tourists in the cultural field in DK Jakarta in 2011-2015 experienced fluctuations. In the long term, tourist visits are even predicted to experience a negative trend, with an average performance of -11.34%. The comparison of outbound and inbound DK Jakarta Cultural Tour Package sales is 4:1. The total number of cultural tour package sales agents is 47% of the total ASITA DK Jakarta member agents (Nugraha, 2019).

Food is a vitally important component as a tourist have a trip. travel and tourism industry as a whole. When booking a trip, people tend to consider a variety of factors – and food is high on the list of priorities. The World Food Travel Association says that money spent on food and drink while travelling accounts for 15-35% of *all* tourism spending. Culinary tourism is important in that it generates so much money for local economies.

In supporting tourism activities, culinary is a necessity. The basic aspects of culinary, in the form of food and drinks, are very necessary to provide strength and health during tourism. However, later, eating and drinking activities become more important because they can provide pleasure (Cohen, E., & Avieli, N. 2004; Richards, G., 2012; Henderson, J. C. 2009) No longer just to fulfill physical needs but tourists deliberately seek experiences by tasting culinary at a tourist destination. This trend has been going on for the past few decades (Santeramo et al, 2017; Pavlidis, G., & Markantonatou, S., 2020). Due to this phenomenon, culinary is seen as having the potential to support the tourism sector. Culinary has the potential to increase tourist spending at a destination. Culinary is also considered to have the potential to attract tourists specifically to come to a destination because it provides a unique and distinctive experience. Tourism can be an activity that provides an experience to learn, appreciate and enjoy local resources (Moscardo Et al. 2015; Smith and Xiao, 2008). Included in the group of local resources is traditional culinary. The International Culinary Tourism Association (2006) states that almost 100% of tourists enjoy eating out while traveling, especially by tasting local food and getting to know the local community.

Discussing synergy between food and tourism some academics view that culinary tourism, “food tourism” or gastronomic tourism“ are very similar and, used interchangeably (Horng & Tsai, 2012,). Besides there are other several food terms, namely ‘tasting tourism’, ‘food and wine tourism’, gourmet tourism’, (Horng & Tsai, 2012; Sanchez-Canizares & Lopez-Guzman, 2012).

Culinary tourism has the same characteristics as tourism, namely about providing experiences. Culinary tourism as a tourism activity combined with tasting specific dishes from a tourist spot to gain experience of the specific taste of local dishes (Duralia, O., 2017; Hall and Gossling, 2016). Several other definitions of culinary tourism include participatory tourism activities planned to explore the culinary of a tourist destination (Long, 2006; Su, C. S., & Horng, J. S. 2012; Pullphothong, L., & Sopha, C, 2013). Food tourism is any type of travel experience when someone learns, appreciates, and consumes food or drinks as culinary and cultural heritage, both local, regional or national (OCTA and Skift, 2015; Kaushal, V., & Yadav, R. 2021). Food tourism is the activity of seeking and gaining unique and impressive food or drink tasting experiences, both in places far and near (WFTA, 2018). Internationally, France and Italy have long been at the forefront of gastronomy, with some of the world’s most iconic cuisines, wines and Michelin-starred restaurants. Both countries offer immersive culinary experiences rooted in local traditions and regions, from fresh pasta in Tuscany to wine tasting in Bordeaux (Everett, S., & Aitchison, C. 2008;

The Special Region of Jakarta is one of the regions that has a variety of culinary delights. Various Indonesian culinary delights from various provinces can be found in Jakarta. In addition, there are also various culinary acculturations from foreign nations that have stopped by, including the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, China, Japan, India (Untari Et al., 2018). Along with the development of information and communication, the variety of culinary delights in Jakarta continues to grow. New varieties that have been present in Jakarta in recent years are culinary delights from Bali, East Nusa Tenggara, or Korean culinary delights that have become a trend lately. The one effort that can be used to increase the culinary tourism market is by holding culinary tourism packages. (Spilková, J., & Fialová, D., 2013; Mohd Sanip, M. N. A et al. 2021; Hollá, K. 2019)

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to identify the existence of culinary tour packages in Jakarta. In addition, it records the types of culinary tour packages, as well as a number of supporting aspects. The implementation of culinary tour packages is also another important concern. Other concerns also find out about the response of culinary tour package participants by knowing the number of participants. Based on those various data, it is hoped that it can be developed comprehensive description of culinary tour packages

Literature Review

The benefits of food tourism according to Tsai (2016) are its ability to build strong bonds between tourists and tourist destinations. James and Halkier (2022) argue that food tourism is an effective strategy to increase tourism in the form of destination branding. Culinary tourism will help increase regional income, by involving a number of parties including culinary providers, local communities and communities, and the tourism industry (Hall, Mitchell, and Sharpless, 2004; Kivela and Crotts, 2006). Culinary tourism as a strategy to strengthen tourism in the city of Yogyakarta, Indonesia (Wijayanti, 2020). Regarding the role of culinary in tourism, several countries have given special attention. The Thai government collaborates with communities to promote local cuisine (Srihirun, 2018). In Malaysia, The Independent Food Tour Association (TIFTA) has been formed, whose members are culinary tour operators. The purpose of forming TIFTA is to produce a superior culinary tourism community for global tourists.

Methodology

This research is a qualitative method research using data collection and analysis according to Spradley. In collecting data sources, researchers collect data in the form of primary data and secondary data. The primary data needed in this study are the current conditions regarding tourism resources, both natural and non-natural resources found in Jakarta. Primary data are in the form of views and opinions of the interviewed parties related to the analysis of tourist attractions and the determination of superior tourism themes in Jakarta. Primary data in this study come from the results of interviews with tourism stakeholders in Jakarta, namely tourism industry or associations, competent experts, and from the government. Primary data can also come from observations and other data that are considered related to the research that are useful as complete data. In addition, primary data in the form of tourist characteristics and preferences are also used in this study to plan thematic tourist travel routes obtained by distributing questionnaires to tourists.

Other data is secondary data that was obtained from various sources. One of them is by asking informants for various notes, documents, flyers, posters, group messenger, and relevant photos. Such secondary data, for example, records of organizing activities, including the number and names of participants, as well as the menus prepared for each culinary tour package, books about types of culinary in the past, information about culinary that is currently viral on various Instagram accounts, video shows about culinary areas in Jakarta are also very meaningful sources of secondary data.

Populations and Sample

This research involved a number of informants including actors organizing tour packages, culinary business actors, and local government tourism agencies in Jakarta, Indonesia. The subjects were local women weavers that played an active role in preserving traditional tapis textiles and had direct involvement in weaving practices and contributions to preserving the cultural heritage. The main subject is the organizers of tour packages in Jakarta, who specifically develop culinary tourism. This study focuses on the

implementation of culinary tour packages. It is expected that the data obtained will include types of packages, duration of activities, places to eat, obtained and carried out by participants.

A number of data were obtained from the participants. In addition to data on origin, data were also obtained on age, education, number and type of packages that have been observed, and sources of information about the culinary tourism activities. Of the 17 culinary tourism packages observed, the number of participants reached 231 people. However, not all participants could be respondents because some participants participated in other culinary tourism packages. Participants who could be respondents were 125 people, some participants even participated more than 2 times. The details of participants who had participated in the tour packages were 10 people 5 times, 12 people 4 times, 15 people 3 times, 21 people 2 times, 40 people 1 time.

Research Tools

Data Collection

The survey was conducted to determine the right informants who could be asked to provide information. The survey was conducted by snowballing by asking a number of people who had participated in culinary tours in Jakarta or who knew culinary tour organizers. Of the various possible actors, the ones who played the biggest role were Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), culinary business actors, and the government. This consideration was because DMO seemed to have the initiative to compile culinary tour packages based on the experience of compiling tour packages. The DMO got ideas from its own thoughts or suggestions from participants who had taken part in the packages previously.

The first stage was selecting DMO that organized cultural package, the purpose is to find out about the packages offered. In this stage, a second selection occurs, namely whether the cultural package offered includes a program of visits to places to eat according to the criteria of culinary tourism, and whether the guide has adequate skills and knowledge about culinary. The relationship with the guide will require informants from the Indonesian Tour Guide Association (Himpunan Pramuwisata Indonesia).

The data in this research was conducted by visiting the research location and observing also recording the current situation of tourism development in Jakarta. The observation was conducted by following a number of thematic culinary tour packages organized by the informant. During the observation, records were made on culinary tourism activities, including the restaurant, the menu, number of participants, activities, participant interactions, and so on to obtain factual data or information. Before, during and after the observation, interviews were conducted with informants about culinary tourism.

The next stage is to conduct participatory observation. In this stage, the researcher will actively become a participant in the culinary tour package. At the same time as recorded about other actors involved in the program. The actors are culinary business actors who are the destination of the visit and tourists who are participants in the culinary tour. During the observation, notes will be obtained on various matters related to the implementation of the activity program, including how the guide establishes relationships with business actors and tourists, and vice versa, the interrelationship between business actors and tourists, or tourists with DMO and culinary business actors. All forms of communication, expressions, and comments, complaints and praise, advantages and disadvantages will be recorded.

In-depth interviews with informants were conducted to obtain data related to the utilization of natural and cultural resources in determining the theme of superior tourism in Jakarta. Until now, there is no standard that determines how many people should be interviewed in a qualitative study (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), so the search for research informants is stopped if the information obtained has reached a level of saturation, or there is repetition of the same information. In relation to the first research objective, interviews were conducted with 4 competent people, namely: 1) Ira Latief., and 2) Winny Soendaroe, tourism industry actors; 3) Indra Diwangkara, Chairman of Jakarta Tourism Association 4) Hari Wibawa, from the Jakarta Tourism Office. An interview guide has been designed and prepared included roles and contributions, opinions and views, hopes and desires, as well as obstacles and problems will be obtained.

Data Analysis

Data collection is done primarily by observation. Structured in-depth observation is carried out by following all tour packages designed by the operator. Involvement in culinary tourism allows for direct interaction with tour participants, operators and culinary business actors. Tourism activities to respondents which are then transcribed into text form. This data processing technique is a way of collecting and analyzing the contents of a "text", which can be words, images, ideas, symbols, and various other forms of messages. The content analysis method places verbal data into classification groups, summarizes and tabulates

information. Furthermore, the use of content analysis will require researchers to measure and analyze the existence, meaning, and relationship between words, themes or ideas. The collected data will be interpreted and then grouped to determine the type and character of the culinary tour package. By observation the pattern is then recorded to find important aspects that should be added. The data collecting at field took quite a long period, and then followed by data reduction, verification, finally conclusion.

Results

The results are that there are several forms of culinary tour packages. The forms of these packages are 1) package that follow certain routes in an area, 2) special or thematic restaurant tasting tour packages, and 3) culinary tour packages to celebrate big days. Based on the activities, these packages are named as Culinary Tour Route Packages, Thematic Restaurant Tour Packages, and Culinary Festival Tour packages.

Culinary Tour Route Package

Culinary Tour Route Packages are offered by Creative Tourism Jakarta and Lahap Tur. In the Culinary Tour Route Package, the operator provides packages based on several areas that are famous for their culinary delights.

Table 1: Kinds of Culinary Tour Package

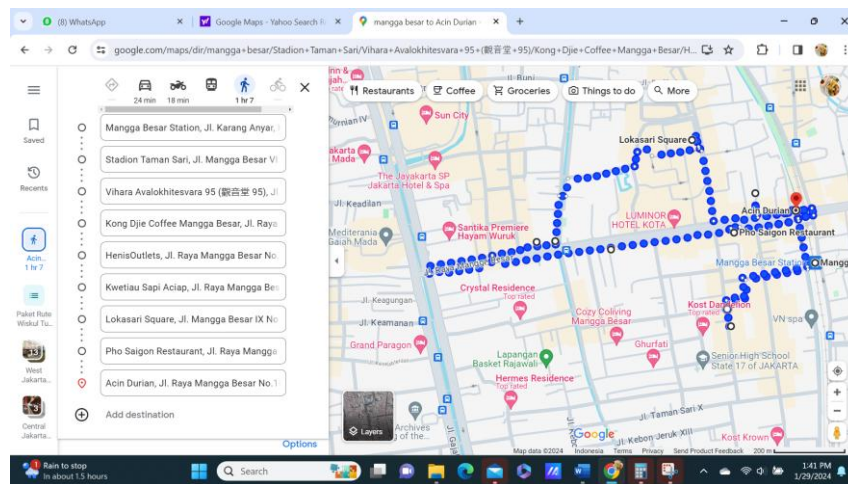
No.	Name	Route	Guests
1.	Mangga Besar	Mangga Besar Railway Station- Tamansari Football Stadium- Kobra Extreme Culinary- Avalokiteswara Temple-Kong Djie Coffee Belitung - Heni's Bread - Kwetiau Aciap Mangga Besar - Lokasari Entertainment Park - Pho Saigon - Medan Durian Acin	11
2.	MRT Trail	Dukuh Atas – Luwes Jakarta chicken noodle – Tude Manado Restaurant – M Blok Space: Kebun Ide Gelato, Crocodile shape Betawi traditional bread Buaya, belanja – Apjay Kebuli Fried rice - Titik temu Coffee Shop own by Raisa a singer	7
3.	Jakarta Old Town or Kota Tua	Lapangan Fatahillah – Museum Wayang - Acaraki - Jembatan Intan – Kerak Telor – Kopi Toko Merah - kafe batavia	7
4.	South Africa Culinary	Museum Tekstil – Sate domba Afrika - Supermarket Afrika – Toko Komunitas Afrika - African Food Centre Nwanyi Nnewi	7

One example of an activity from Culinary Tor Route Package is Mangga Besar Culinary Tour Route Package. Participants get information about the culinary tour packages on the Instagram account @wisatakreatihjakarta. After deciding to join the Mangga Besar Tour package, prospective participants must register at [Id.bookmyshi.com/wisatakreatif](https://id.bookmyshi.com/wisatakreatif). Included in the registration link, participants must make a payment transfer. The participation fee is IDR 100,000.00 per person, excluding food tasting. Through another link, participants can see the tour itinerary, namely <https://www.wisatakreatifjakarta./2023/06/agenda-reguler-terbaru-bulan-ini.html>.



Sources: Research data,

Figure 1: From left to right Taman Sari Football Stadium, Acin Medan Durian, Kong Djie Belitung Coffee



Source: Research data

Figure2: Route of Culinary Tour Package

Then, participants are asked to join the What's app chat group. The Culinary Tour Package Guide will be the administrator in the What's app chat group. The admin chat group will provide some detail information including the meeting point, and gathering time, itinerary, red dress code, equipment that such as an umbrella or hat in case it rains. One day before the activity, the guide reminds participants again for the next day's event. The Mangga Besar -Chinese New Year Tour will be held on January 21, 2023, the meeting point is the Mangga Besar Train Station. This tour was attended by 11 participants, consisting of 7 women and 4 men. Mangga Besar Station is very easy to reach, either by train or Transjakarta and motorcycle taxis.

The Mangga Besar Tour guided by Mochi will take place from 17.00 WIB to 19.00 WIB. Before starting the tour, Mochi asked participants to gather in front of the Alfamart Store. Mochi, who wore a red WKJ uniform shirt, carried a portable microphone and speaker. After briefly introducing himself, Mochi asked each participant to introduce themselves by stating their name, origin or place of residence, and daily activities. The introduction session ended with Mochi explaining the route that would be taken on foot for 2 hours.

The places visited were 1) Tamansari Speak Bola Stadium, 2) Kobra Extreme Culinary 3. Avalokiteswara Temple, 4) Kong Djie Coffee Belitung, 5) Heni's Bread, 6) Kwetiau Aciap Mangga Besar, 7) Lokasari Entertainment Park, 8) Pho Saigon and ended with tasting 9) Medan Acin durian. Mochi also reminded participants to keep their bags slung over their shoulders or facing the front of their bodies because the area is quite crowded and prone to security.

On the way to Taman Sari Stadium, the tour group crossed a road with a number of large hotels and night clubs on the side of the road. Mochi told the history of the area which since the time

it was called Batavia has become a center of nightlife. The visitors were VOC officials and ethnic Chinese traders. The name Mangga Besar comes from a large mango tree that often bears abundant fruit, the tree is a marker of the area.

Mochi told the history of Taman Sari Stadium which used to be the headquarters of the Tjung Hwa or Tunas Jaya football club, an internal Persija club in the 1950s. The legendary player of this club was named Tan Liong Houw or Latief Haris Tanoto. Tan Liong Houw once led the National Team to advance to the quarter-finals of the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. At that time, Indonesia was able to hold the strong Soviet Union team to a 0-0 draw. However, in the end they lost 0-4 in the rematch. Mochi also said that Taman Sari Stadium was once used as a filming location for the famous comedian film in Indonesia. Then Mochi continued by mentioning the title of the Warkop DK film entitled "Maju Kena Mundur Kena" made in 1983. Mochi described the end of the film at Taman Sari Stadium in the form of a women's soccer match between the Parkit Team and the Buana Putri Team. Because the Parkit Team lacked players, Dono was asked to play disguised as a woman. Indro served as the referee and Kasino as the linesman. The tour participants burst out laughing remembering the humor and reminding each other that Warkop did in the film.

Participants walked along the sidewalk of Jalan Mangga Besar Raya, some of which were used by street vendors. Several stalls offered satay and rica cobra or lizard, apparently no one was interested for various reasons. Only a few meters later they arrived at the Avalokitesvara Temple which was painted blue with blue, yellow, and red accents. The first floor of the temple looked lively with various decorations dominated by red, yellow and green. Red symbolizes joy, yellow means prosperity and green means fertility. These colors represent hopes for the following year. In the middle of the room there are several statues on the altar table. The statues include a fairly large golden Buddha statue, a statue of the Goddess Kwan Im, a statue of the god of war Kwan Kong. In front of the statues are rows of oil lamps in glass containers. The Avalokitesvara monastery was founded in 1936 by nun Kho Nio Lim Giok Tien. The nun died in 1982, and was replaced by Monk Dutavira as the manager of the monastery. Before leaving the monastery, participants had the opportunity to take a photo with Monk Dutavira.

The next place is Kong Djie Coffee, a coffee shop from Belitung that has been operating since 1943. Kong Djie Coffee already has 85 branches in various cities in Indonesia with a franchise system. Mangga Besar is one of the branches. The coffee used is a blend of Lampung and Arabica coffee. The mainstay menu is coffee milk which costs Rp. 15,000 per glass. In addition to coffee milk, participants tasted Belitung's signature food, namely atep noodles. Atep noodles with thick sauce with a slightly sweet taste cost Rp. 25,000. In addition, they ordered stuffed crab for Rp. 12,000 per portion. Participants tasted the food together because they would still enjoy other dishes that they would stop by.

Across Kong Djie is Toko Roti Henis, which is famous for its meatball bread. Toko Roti Henis initially only sold chicken meatball bread. Mochi explained about the character of the meatball bread, which is smooth and soft in texture filled with minced chicken dough cooked sweet with onion seasoning and tangkue or candied gourd. The chicken filling is abundant and sold for Rp. 11,000 per piece. Toko Henis occupies a new building located across from the old shop. The new shop looks more spacious and consists of 2 floors. The first floor is used as a Chinese culinary restaurant. Several participants were seen buying 1 box of raoti bakso containing 10 pieces of meatball bread as souvenirs because this bread is a family favorite. There were also several participants who only bought a few because they wanted to taste it. When tasting it, several participants said it was delicious and filling.

Net restaurant is Kwetiau Aciap restaurant. Until now, the Mangga Besar area has become the center of beef kwetiau cuisine. Among several famous beef kwetiau restaurants, Aciap is the legendary one. Aciap Beef Kwetiau has been around for 20 years. Aciap Kwetiau is also halal because it only uses beef, tripe, tendons and beef offal. When they arrived at the restaurant, several tables were already filled with visitors.

The tour was not over yet, but the participants were already starting to feel full. To reduce the feeling of fullness, the participant to walk around visiting several other historical places, like Taman Ria Lokasari, Tangkiwood. – is the counterpart of Hollywood and Bollywood. From Lokasari, the tourist went to Pho Saigon. The restaurant is one of the first Vietnamese restaurants in Jakarta. The original owner of the restaurant came from Vietnam. As before, the participants were divided into several groups, each group only ordered a pho or Vietnamese noodle menu. One bowl was

divided for 3 people. In culinary tourism, the menus ordered are more often enjoyed together. Therefore, participants always ask for small bowls and spoons to be provided.

The culinary tour of Mangga Besar ended with a visit to Durian Acin. Although there are many Medan durian sellers in Mangga Besar, Mochi only recommends the Acin durian kiosk which was first established 25 years ago. There are 3 branches along Jalan Raya Mangga Besar. The durian is offered at various prices ranging from Rp. 40,000 to Rp. 100,000. At this kiosk, buyers can choose and then try until they find a durian that suits their taste. As is the way to enjoy Medan durian in general by combining it with sticky rice, there are pieces of sticky rice on the table where Durian Acin is served, but no one takes the sticky rice. The price of a medium-sized durian of Rp. 100,000 is very appropriate for the quality.

Thematic Restaurant Tour Package

The Thematic Restaurant Tour Package is a dining tour activity together at a special restaurant. The restaurant carries an ethnic themed menu, either Nusantara or international. Creative Tourism Jakarta just started running this package again in early 2023 which had stopped due to Covid-19. Meanwhile, Lahap Tour has not started running it again because the foreign tourists it usually brings have not returned to Jakarta.

Tabel 2. The Thematic Restaurant Tour Package

No.	Restaurant	Address	Kind of Culinary	Guest
●	Marrakech	Jl. Kemang Raya No. 29A, Kemang, Jakarta Selatan	Marokko	25
●	Al Jazeera	Jl. Raden Saleh No. 62, Cikini, Menteng,	Timur Tengah	20
●	Amigos	Jln. Kemang Selatan I Kemang Club Villas	Mexican	14
●	Fogo	Intiland Tower, Jl. Jenderal Sudirman, Jakarta		10
	Ya Udah Bistro	Jl. Johar Gondangdia, Kec. Menteng, Kota Jakarta Pusat 10350	Jerman	9
	Sophie Autentique	Jl. Cipete Raya No.11, Fatmawati, Jakarta Selatan	French	19
	The Everest	Mega Kuningan	Nepal	24



Source: Research data

Figure 3: Everest Restaurant with Nepal Cuisine

Anis, the owner, has only been opening The Everest in Mega Kuningan for 3 months. Previously, The Everest was a bar and cafe that was not only in Mega Kuningan but also in Blok M. That is why The Everest has a bar with a range of drinks. In addition, Anis said that at The Everest, expatriates often gather to watch football matches together. Anis explained the reason for opening the restaurant because Nepal is increasingly well-known in Indonesia, especially because more and more Indonesian tourists are visiting Nepal. In addition to tourists who might miss the atmosphere and cuisine of Nepal, but also to introduce culinary to the people of Jakarta. Anis also introduced her chef who had just arrived in Jakarta 5 days earlier. Several participants had time to ask Anis. The questions included whether the raw materials used were brought from Nepal. Anis answered that all the ingredients used were products in Indonesia unless they were not available in Jakarta. Only certain spices that give a distinctive taste such as cardamom, Himalayan salt, and saffron are always brought from Nepal. All participants agreed loudly and applauded, expressing satisfaction with the taste and quality of the dishes.

After dinner was over, some participants give souvenirs to those who dressed attractively according to the culinary theme. One by one, the participants paid for drinks, for a bottle of Aqua it was charged IDR 20,000, but only IDR 18,000 for participants who became premium members because they got a 10% discount. The Everest is the newest merchant from Jakarta Creative Tourism out of 30 existing merchants. The tour package event ended with a group photo, shaking hands and promising to meet again at the next culinary event together.

Festival Culinary Tour Package

Another culinary tour package is the Festival Culinary Tour Package. The Festival Culinary Tour Package is only held during the big day or commemoration. Some examples of Festival Culinary Tour Packages include the Mandi-Mandi Ceremony held a week after the new year

by Portuguese descendants in North Jakarta, the Chinese New Year Culinary Tour Package, the Betawi Lebaran Culinary Tour Package, and the Deepavali Culinary Tour Package.

Table 3: Programme of Festival Culinary Tour Package

No.	Package	Place	Time	Guest
1.	Paket Wisata Kuliner Rabo-Rabo	Kampung Tugu, North Jakarta	1st January	10
2.	Paket Wisata Kuliner Mandhe-Mandhe	Kampung Tugu, Jakar	1 week after New Year	16
3.	Paket Wisata Imlek	Pancoran, South Jakarta	Imlek	14
4.	Paket Wisata Lebaran Betawi	Setu Babakan, South Jakarta	1 day after Lebaran	12
5.	Deepavali	Pasar Baru, Central Jakarta	Deepavali	10



Source: Research data

Figure 4: Mandhe-mandhe Festival Culinary Tour package

Mandhe-mandhe is a tradition of smearing powder on each other's faces, which means forgiving, loving, and doing good to each other. Mande-mande is the peak event in the series of Christmas and New Year in Kampung Tugu. In the Tugu Community, there are 7 clans of Portugues descendants, namely Andreas, Abraham, Cornelis, Michiels, Salomons, Saymons, and Quiko. The Culinary Festival Tour Package that I participated in was the Mandhe-Mandhe Culinary Tour Package. Prospective participants must register and pay a membership fee of IDR 125,000. This activity took place on January 9, 2023 with 14 participants. At exactly 10:00 WIB the guide started the activity by greeting, introducing himself and asking everyone to take turns introducing themselves. Yulietta explained the places to be visited, namely the Tugu Church, then to the Cafrinho Keroncong Studio, and the peak was the Bathing Party in Tugu Village. Participants were invited to walk around to see the legendary Tugu Church. Tugu Church has been designated as a Cultural Heritage Object. In the middle of our journey participants stop at the house of one of the senior residents, Oma Deni, who told us about the conditions of Tugu Village in the past. At that time the river that crossed the area was still wide so that boats could pass through.

Upon arrival at Kerontjong Tugu Cafrinho, a number of typical dishes from Kampung Tugu have been prepared, gado-gado siram, shrimp banana cake, unti sticky rice and apem kinca. Gado-gado is a dish that has several versions of origin. Some say that gado-gado is Javanese cuisine because the word gado means eaten without rice. However, another version is from the Portuguese gadu, which means mixed, explained Guido Quiko, a resident of Kampung Tugu who is a player in the Sanggar Kerontjong Tugu. The origin of the name Pindang serani is from the word serani or nasrani which means Christian because the dish is served by the Tugu community who are Christian.

The choice of milkfish is because the ingredient is easy to obtain around the Kampung Tugu area which is near Tanjung Priuk.

Another typical menu is shrimp banana cake, a wet cake made from flour dough filled with a mixture of mashed banana and dried shrimp. Shrimp banana is similar to nagasari or what is called banana cake by Jakartans. The difference is the filling, if nagasari contains a piece of banana, then shrimp banana cake is filled with mashed banana dough, grated coconut and shrimp. So shrimp banana cake has a dominant savory taste, different from nagasari which is sweet. Another cake is ketan unti, steamed sticky rice sprinkled with unti - a mixture of grated coconut and brown sugar. Likewise with apem kinca, it is an apem cake doused with brown sugar kinca. Apem that is cooked in a large mold and then cut into pieces to be served doused with kinca. A guest from Europe said that in her home country there was also a cake like apem kinca called bolu, but not doused with syrup.

About traditional music keroncong Tugu The Portuguese in Tugu Village born from the need of entertainment. Their ancestors made a musical instrument from round logs and shaped it like a small guitar called tapakkunyo, a Portuguese musical instrument. When played, the guitar sounded 'crong...crong...crong...', so the Betawi people said that the people of Tugu Village were playing "crang crong", so the name became keroncong. Tugu keroncong music was designated as an Intangible Cultural Heritage by the DKI Jakarta Provincial Government in 2015. There are several Tugu keroncong music groups include the Cafrinho Tugu Keroncong Orchestra, Muda Mudi Cornelis, and Krontjong Toegoe. The songs that are often played include Kerontjong Tugu, Selendang Mayang, Oud Batavia.

Then, the host officially opened Mandhe-mandhe by asking Oma Deni to start smearing cold powder liquid on one of the Portuguese descendants. The powder is a symbol of cleansing oneself from all mistakes to enter the new year. Accompanied by Keroncong Tugu music, residents rejoiced and forgave each other. The excitement occurred, the keroncong song became louder and louder. While dancing, swaying here and there, each participant held a plastic cup filled with cold liquid powder.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

Several tourism activities show the existence of culinary tour packages in Jakarta. There are several types of culinary tour packages in the form of walking tours, enjoying culinary in themed restaurants, or enjoying culinary celebrations. Culinary tourism is a meaningful activity because in this tour the five human senses will be involved.

As when organizing a tour package, the DMO must conduct good socialization. The information conveyed to prospective participants must be clear enough. The important thing to know is the food that will be tasted. Some of them are the level of spiciness of the food, halal or non-halal, ingredients that tend to cause allergies. Other important information is the age of the participants, whether there are restrictions or not.

Safety is very important, not only because tasting food means putting things into the body, but also when organizing a culinary tour route package. The route taken must be completely safe. Not only safe from crime but also safe from the path passed, namely not slippery, not dirty. A dirty route will cause participants to lose their appetite to taste food..

From the table data it appears that time plays an important role. Organizing culinary tour packages on difficult days such as Rabo-rabo which is impromptu on January 1, tends to be less popular. This is because the night before they were awake all night to celebrate the New Year.

In the culinary tour package, it appears that cultural and historical information needs to be conveyed well. For example, visits to historical sites in nearby areas. This will be appreciated because it provides additional insight, in addition to culinary information which is a must. Likewise with places related to famous figures, for example, cafes owned by famous Indonesian jazz singers Raisa or Agnes Monica.

Featuring chefs or restaurant owners to tell stories directly to tourists is also an advantage. Chefs can tell about the advantages of their dishes, choice ingredients, unique cooking methods, special flavors. Similarly, it can be conveyed about the similarities between dishes in one region and another, for example about Momo in India and in Nepal.

Guides must be creative in building a pleasant dining atmosphere, all participants must be able to be satisfied in enjoying the food served and the events designed. An atmosphere of togetherness can be built by, for example, setting a dress code. Likewise, by providing gifts for participants. Guides also need to involve participants to experience different experiences, for example in a culinary package with interlude events of music and dance performances, for example as in the Mandhe-Mandhe Festival Tour Package.

Conclusion

In Jakarta, there have been culinary tour packages organized by a number of DMOs. The types of packages include Culinary Tour Route Packages, Thematic Restaurant Tour Packages, Festival Culinary Tour Packages. Culinary tour packages involve in addition to the culinary riches in Jakarta, also combining with various destinations and attractions in Jakarta, or history. From the observation, it seems that there are still many culinary delights in Jakarta that can be developed into culinary tour packages using similar package patterns mentioned previously. For example, Bali, Makassar, Netherlands Culinary Tour Packages. et-cetera.

Research recommendations

This research only conducted in Jakarta, a big city that has many aspects of tourism, including culinary.

1. Accordingly, future researchers need to identify the aspects needed in compiling culinary tour packages so that various other types of culinary tour packages can be obtained.
2. Another study is about how to find out the level of satisfaction of culinary tour participants, so as to further perfect the implementation of culinary tour packages.

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DEVELOPING GUIDELINES FOR SPIRITUAL WELLNESS TOURISM IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

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Abstract

In the evolving paradigm of global tourism, wellness tourism has emerged as a critical driver of sustainable and transformative travel experiences, expanding at more than twice the rate of conventional tourism. Within this domain, spiritual wellness tourism concerned with the enhancement of emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being has gained unprecedented attention among scholars and practitioners. Despite this growth, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) underscores a significant absence of empirical data and policy frameworks explicitly addressing the spiritual dimension of wellness travel. In this context, the present study constitutes a pioneering initiative to formulate Guidelines for Spiritual Wellness Tourism Development in Southern Thailand, with Songkhla Province designated as the empirical locus of investigation. Grounded in Thailand's distinctive cultural-spiritual assets including Buddhist meditative practices, holistic health traditions, and the integrative ethos of Thai wellness, the research adopts a qualitative methodology designed to capture the complexity of human experience within this niche tourism sector. Employing semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 25 domestic and international participants, the study utilizes content analysis to identify the push and pull motivational dynamics that influence spiritual wellness travel behaviors. Findings reveal that tourists are primarily motivated by the desire for escape, psychological restoration, self-transformation, and existential reflection, while natural serenity, authentic cultural immersion, and peaceful atmospherics function as key attractors. The study further identifies strategic gaps in destination management, community engagement, and cultural integration that impede the systematic development of spiritual wellness tourism in the southern region.

The resulting framework offers a strategic and context-sensitive guideline for policy-makers, tourism authorities, and local stakeholders to advance Southern Thailand, particularly Songkhla, as a World-Class Spiritual Wellness Destination. Beyond its applied implications, this study contributes theoretically by bridging the intersection of spirituality, wellness, and sustainable tourism development, thereby addressing a critical research lacuna within contemporary tourism scholarship.

Keywords: Spiritual Wellness Tourism; Southern Thailand; Songkhla Province; Qualitative Inquiry; Holistic Well-being

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THE ROLE OF THE SHARING ECONOMY IN SHAPING MEDICAL TOURISM DECISIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR COST, ACCESSIBILITY, AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The growth of medical tourism in Southeast Asia is driven by increasingly affordable and high-quality healthcare services (Asa et al., 2024; Ratnasari et al., 2022). At the same time, the sharing economy including shared accommodation, online transportation, and digital health services plays a key role in supporting medical tourists' decisions (Mouratidis et al., 2021; Ratnasari et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2023). It provides broad and transparent alternatives for accommodation, transportation, and access to medical services. These offerings help shape perceptions and motivations among medical tourists (Kim et al., 2019; Onete et al., 2018; Ullah et al., 2021).

This study adopts a qualitative approach through literature analysis and structured interviews with Indonesian medical tourists traveling to Southeast Asian countries. Findings show that the sharing economy helps reduce costs and increases flexibility in medical travel. This is especially evident through the availability of accommodation near hospitals and easy access to transportation. Medical tourists tend to prefer services that are fast, digital, and personalized. This reinforces the role of the sharing economy not only as an infrastructure provider but also as a driver of perception and motivation.

However, issues remain, such as inconsistent quality, weak regulation, and data privacy risks. This study highlights the urgent need for a clear regulatory framework and collaboration among governments, healthcare providers, and digital platforms to ensure adequate standards and protection. The study is limited to pre-test interview participants, indicating that future research should involve a broader sample.

Keywords: Sharing Economy; Medical Tourism; Decision-Making; Treatment Strategy; Healthcare Access; Southeast Asia.

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Introduction

Medical tourism is defined as a patient's travel abroad to receive medical treatment, rather than using local healthcare providers (Asa et al., 2024; McCrossan et al., 2021; Ratnasari et al., 2022). Medical tourists travel with varying risk perceptions and motivations in search of the best solutions for their health issues (Hadian et al., 2021). In recent years, medical tourism has expanded significantly worldwide, particularly in Southeast Asia (Asa et al., 2024).

The growing demand for medical services in the region is driven by several factors that make Southeast Asia a leading destination for international patients. Countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia have gained global recognition as top medical tourism destinations. Each country offers unique medical specializations through hospitals, clinics, and healthcare services tailored to patient needs. Moreover, they are well aware of the specific expertise required to address medical tourists' concerns from different countries (Chandran et al., 2020).

It is estimated that 3–4% of the global population engages in medical tourism, with around 1.3 million medical tourists choosing Asia as their destination (Ratnasari et al., 2022). This trend presents significant opportunities for cross-sector collaboration, particularly in industries linked to tourism. One sector with high potential is the sharing economy platform (Li & Chen, 2022). The sharing economy refers to a business model that enables individuals or organizations to share access to goods and services through digital technology, typically via apps or platforms (Hidayat, 2021). Popular platforms in Southeast Asia include Grab, Gojek, and Airbnb, as well as telemedicine services such as Halodoc, Alodokter, Good Doctor, and Doctor Anywhere. These platforms play a significant role in supporting medical tourism.

The sharing economy is not merely a trend; it has proven effective in offering more flexible and cost-efficient alternatives (Kim et al., 2019). Platforms developed under this model provide a range of solutions that enhance efficiency, effectiveness, and convenience for medical tourists. These platforms also play a crucial role in the decision-making process (Hidayat, 2021; Ullah et al., 2021). They assist users in selecting accommodation, transportation, and access to medical facilities. Additionally, they offer more transparent options for treatment types and locations.

Despite the rapid growth of platform use in medical tourism, research on their influence in decision-making remains limited. This reveals a significant gap in understanding how the sharing economy affects the preferences and choices of medical tourists.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the impact of sharing economy platforms on medical tourism in Southeast Asia, with a focus on how they influence decision-making related to treatment options and destination selection.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the role of the sharing economy in influencing medical tourists' decisions in Southeast Asia.
2. To identify the key sharing economy factors that most impact medical tourists' preferences.

Literature Review

1. Medical Tourism Decisions

A decision is defined as the process of thinking and selecting one option among many to solve a problem. Decision-making refers to the mental process of choosing what action to take from several available alternatives. A well-structured and measured decision-making process enables individuals to make beneficial choices and minimize potential losses (Kozioł-Nadolna & Beyer, 2021; Rijal, 2023).

In making decisions, individuals tend to rely on various sources to gather information and rationally determine their choices or actions this is known as the cognitive aspect. At the same time, emotions can also influence decision-making through rational judgment and resulting behavior, which is referred to as the motivational aspect (Habibi et al., 2022).

In the context of medical travel, decision-making refers to the process of determining what actions should be taken to secure the necessary support facilities abroad in order to receive appropriate medical care (Arslan & Sevím, 2022). Key influencing factors include affordability, accessibility, accommodation availability, technological advancement, and the presence of skilled healthcare professionals (Anawade et al., 2024; Arslan & Sevím, 2022).

Affordability relates to the financial feasibility of healthcare services in relation to an individual's ability or budget to cover medical expenses (Ocran Mattila et al., 2021). The geographical location of healthcare facilities affects accessibility. The availability of healthcare resources such as skilled personnel and advanced technology ensures that patient needs are met. Accommodation refers to lodging that also provides supporting amenities. Improved healthcare facilities, transportation, and accommodation contribute to higher satisfaction among medical tourists (Anawade et al., 2024). Beyond cost, accommodation, geography, and accessibility, social factors and the institutional environment also influence medical tourists' decision-making processes (Setiawan et al., 2024; Zakaria et al., 2023).

2. Sharing Economy

The sharing economy can be described as a system similar to neighbors helping each other meet daily needs whether in the form of goods, services, or ideas (Klos, 2021). However, these needs are now fulfilled through online platforms. The presence of such platforms accelerates the process of connecting users (those seeking help) with providers (those offering goods, services, or ideas), primarily through the use of smartphones as the most common tool (Ashaduzzaman et al., 2023; Hidayat, 2021).

In the context of medical tourism, three main services within the sharing economy are commonly used to support the travel experience of medical tourists.

1) Shared Accommodation

Shared accommodation within the sharing economy relates to the hospitality and tourism industry, enabling travelers worldwide to access shared lodging options. By offering alternative and often more affordable short-term stays, shared accommodation can encourage additional travel for both leisure and business purposes, thereby complementing overall travel demand (Mouratidis et al., 2021).

Shared accommodation services, such as Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Accommodation, have become a popular alternative for medical tourists due to their flexibility, competitive pricing, and authentic local experiences (Ashaduzzaman et al., 2023). With the support of platforms, shared accommodation relies on reviews based on direct consumer experiences. Trust built through positive feedback can increase medical tourists' interest in choosing shared accommodation during their treatment (Munasinghe et al., 2023; Petrucci et al., 2023; Ratilla et al., 2023).

2) Shared Transportation

Shared transportation services such as bike-sharing, car-sharing, ride-sharing, and e-scooter sharing have transformed mobility in Southeast Asia by offering medical tourists convenient access and cost efficiency (Mouratidis et al., 2021). In this context, the shared resource is the vehicle used to transport goods or passengers. Shared transportation is also proposed as a solution to current sustainability challenges. These include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, lowering car ownership, and improving transport access for low-income populations (Castellanos et al., 2022).

Accessibility to medical facilities can be significantly enhanced through shared transport options, particularly by lowering overall travel costs (Munasinghe et al., 2023). However, competition with public transportation and the need to build customer trust remain key challenges for shared mobility services (Gansterer et al., 2022).

3) Digital Medical Service

Digital medical service platforms, including telemedicine and health applications, have expanded access to healthcare services across Southeast Asia (Curfman et al., 2021). Telemedicine Apps provide cost-effective and convenient access to healthcare services, especially in underserved areas. They also offer a viable alternative for managing healthcare needs abroad for medical tourists (Anaya & Recuero-Virto, 2025; Sabrina & Defi, 2021). The advantages of telemedicine services are illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Usefulness of Telemedicine Apps (Anaya & Recuero-Virto, 2025)

3. The Medical Tourists in Southeast Asia

The subjects of this topic are individuals who travel to Southeast Asian countries to obtain medical services (Asa et al., 2024; Karadayi-Usta & Serdarasan, 2020; McCrossan et al., 2021; Ratnasari et al., 2022). Countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore are primary destinations, offering high-quality medical care at more affordable costs compared to patients' home countries. In 2022, it was reported that nearly 2 million Indonesians sought medical treatment abroad. Around 60% came from Jakarta, 15% from East Java, and the rest from cities such as Medan, Batam, and parts of Kalimantan (Asa et al., 2024).

Southeast Asian countries are well-prepared to support the sharing economy. According to the Country Index shown in Figure 2, the strongest performers of sharing economy include Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, and Indonesia. This readiness reinforces the fact that the sharing economy has successfully contributed to various aspects of daily life, such as accommodation, transportation, healthcare, delivery services, and personal care that support the common facility of the medical tourism (Hidayat, 2021).

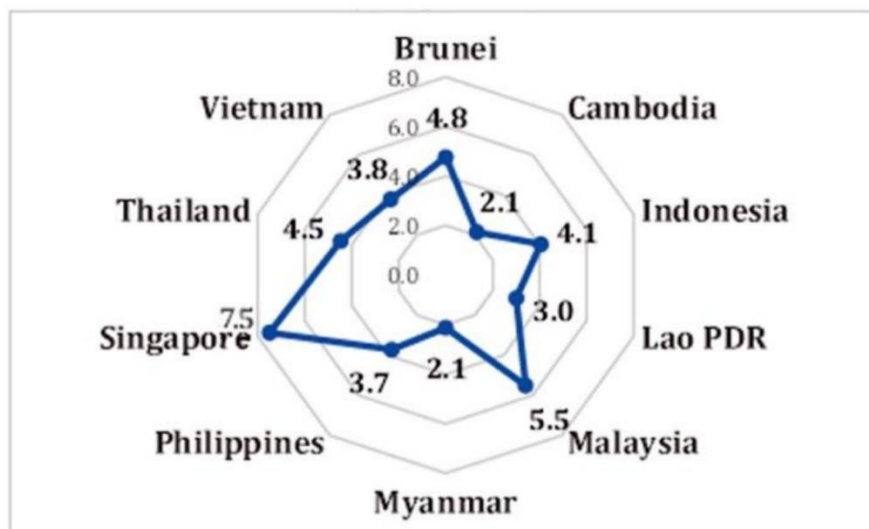


Figure 2. Country Index for Sharing Economy Market Potential (Hidayat, 2021).

Methodology

Populations and Sample

This study targets individuals with experience in medical tourism in Southeast Asia, as well as those familiar with the role of the sharing economy in healthcare. A purposive sampling method was applied, selecting participants based on criteria relevant to the research focus. Interview participants were selected based on prior experience with medical tourism in Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, or Singapore. A total of five (5) participants were recruited to ensure information depth and diversity of perspectives.

Research Tools

The study employed various tools, including an interview guide for structured interviews. The questions remained flexible and were adapted to meet the research objectives. Interviews were recorded using smartphone or laptop applications, with participant consent. Transcriptions were conducted to streamline the audio-to-text process. Google Scholar was used for sourcing academic literature. These tools were integrated to support the research objectives.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five purposively selected informants. Interviews were conducted online or in person, recorded with consent, and transcribed for analysis. The interviews aimed to explore the influence of the sharing economy on medical tourism decisions and to confirm or challenge findings from the literature.

Secondary data were obtained through a literature review of scientific journals, policy articles, official reports, and academic publications relevant to the study. These sources helped identify trends, key findings, and research gaps, forming the theoretical basis and comparison for the interview results.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze data from both interviews and literature. The procedure involved:

1. Conducting structured interviews, either online or in person.
2. Recording interviews in Indonesian using recording apps, with informant consent.
3. Using probing techniques to facilitate open communication and fulfill research goals.
4. Reviewing and transcribing interviews, manually or with AI tools.
5. Performing word screening to identify relevant points.
6. Interpreting findings, translating into English, and conducting further analysis.

Results

The data collection process yielded two main insights. The first set of findings came from interviews. To maintain privacy, informants remain anonymous. Table 1 summarizes the informants' profiles.

Table 1. Informants' Profiles

Code	Description	Destination	Domicile	Year of Visit	Number of Visit
1-M.30	Male – 30	Penang, Malaysia	Bekasi, Indonesia	2023	> 1
2-M.43	Male – 43	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	Jakarta, Indonesia	2025	>1
3-F.40	Female – 40	Singapore	Jakarta, Indonesia	2018	>1
4-F.36	Female – 36	Phuket, Thailand	Tangerang, Indonesia	2022	1
5-M.40	Male – 40	Penang, Malaysia	Jakarta, Indonesia	2022	>1

In the next phase of the literature review, keywords were identified, including “sharing economy”, “platforms”, “decision-making”, “medical tourism”, “accommodation”, “shared transportation”, and “digital health services”. These topics were linked to medical tourism activities in Southeast Asia. The Table 2. below summarizes the reviewed literature.

Table 2. Summarizes of Reviewed Literature

Search Keywords	Metadata	Methods	Topic & Finding
Sharing Economy, Platforms	Onete et al. (2018); Q2; Keywords: Tourism, Sharing Economy, Platforms, Accommodation Units, Internet, Quality.	Formative and Quantitative	By focusing on Airbnb as a leading sharing economy platform, this study reveals the rapid expansion of the sector. It brings significant benefits and challenges to both national and international tourism. These include changing consumer patterns and perceptions, increased price competition, alternative accommodation options, enhanced social welfare, job creation, broader fulfillment of customer needs, support for small entrepreneurs, and improved communication and collaboration.
Sharing Economy	Castellanos et al. (2022); Q1; Keywords: Shared Mobility; Sharing Economy	Critical Review	This paper offers a concrete definition of shared mobility based on two foundations: (1) the interaction between ICT and transportation, and (2) the broader concept of the sharing economy. A taxonomy analysis is used to present updated conceptual frameworks.

Sharing Economy, Peer-to-Peer Accommodation	Petruzzi et al. (2023); Q1 ; Keywords: Host Communities, Peer-To-Peer Accommodation	Integrative Literature Review	The study examines the socio-cultural impact of peer-to-peer accommodations on host communities. It proposes an integrative framework and a working definition for understanding these social and cultural impacts.
Sharing Economy	Li & Chen (2022); Q2; Keywords: Health And Wellness Tourism; Industry Sharing; Sharing Economy; Industry Innovation	Quantitative (Questionnaire and Statistical Analysis)	The sharing economy has significantly transformed the traditional health and wellness tourism industry. It influences industrial ecology, development strategies, and business logic.
Sharing Economy	Ullah et al. (2021); Q1; Keywords: Tourism Economy; Sharing Economy; Health And Wellness Tourism; Innovation	Objective Weighting Method	This study explores dynamic systems and mechanisms for innovation development in Pakistan's tourism industry. It finds the current internal and external conditions in health and wellness development inadequate, leading to the proposal of a new model.
Sharing Economy, Peer-to-Peer Accommodation	Munasinghe et al. (2023); Q1; Keywords: Sharing Economy, Airbnb, User Experience, Peer-To-Peer Accommodation, Travel And Tourism Industry	Text Mining and Sentiment Analysis	This study explores factors affecting Airbnb user experience in Sri Lanka. Using exploratory research and large-scale review analysis, the results show that the host-guest relationship significantly shapes user experience.
Sharing Economy, Accommodation	Kuhzady et al. (2021); Q1; Keywords: Sharing Economy; Hospitality; Accommodation; Airbnb;	Literature Review (486 articles from Scopus & WoS, 2010–2019)	This review provides academic insights into the sharing economy in hospitality and tourism. It addresses three themes: drivers of participation, the sharing economy as a disruptive business model, and its economic and regulatory implications.
Sharing Economy, Accommodation	Ashaduzzaman et al. (2023); Q1; Keywords: Marketing Strategy And Consumer Behavior, Meta-Analysis, Peer-To-Peer Accommodation, Sharing Economy, Tourist And Travelers.	Meta-analysis	This meta-analysis integrates findings on factors influencing peer-to-peer accommodation adoption. It identifies four key drivers: service characteristics, psychological, social, and technological aspects. These relationships are moderated by sample type, country, survey method, and sample size.

Sharing Economy, Accommodation	Tussyadiah & Sigala (2018); Q1; Keywords: -	Deep Review	Focusing on peer-to-peer accommodation, this article explores marketing strategies within the sharing economy. It covers pricing, branding, positioning, and product development. The study also discusses shifts in consumer behavior due to engagement in the sharing economy.
Sharing Economy, Transportation, Accommodation, Telemedicine	Mouratidis et al. (2021); Q1; Keywords: Emerging Mobility ICT, Urban Form, Smart Cities, Literature Review, COVID-19 Pandemic	Qualitative Literature Review	This research examines how teleactivities, sharing economy, and new transport technologies (key aspects of "App Cities") affect travel behavior and built environments. Findings show that while teleactivities can reduce or increase travel, the sharing economy promotes active mobility and lowers car ownership. However, autonomous and aerial vehicles may increase travel distance.
Sharing Economy, Transportation, Accommodation, Telemedicine	Anaya & Recuero-Virto (2025); Q3; Keywords: Apps, Telemedicine, Mobile health, Health-care safety, Tourism, Technology adoption	Qualitative (ATLAS.ti Analysis)	This study analyzes how telemedicine apps improve healthcare access for tourists. It highlights benefits, challenges, and safety perceptions. Despite enhancing medical safety, usability issues for older users and poor integration with tourism services hinder adoption. Experts emphasize accessibility and user-friendly design; concerns about medical data security are minimal.
Sharing economy, Telemedicine	Hu et al. (2021); Q1; Keywords: Sharing Economy; Aging Industry; Older Adult Population; Older Adults; Aging; Health Services; Sharing Model; Sharing; China; East Asia	Qualitative	This study identifies four key challenges in China's aging industry sharing economy: low tech adoption by seniors, poor service quality, a one-size-fits-all approach, and a lack of skilled professionals. The paper recommends concrete steps from government, society, and private sectors to improve effectiveness.
Telemedicine, South East Asia	Sabrina & Defi (2021); Q2; Keywords: Universal, Low To High Income Countries, Guidelines, Telemedicine, South East Asia	Literature Search	The study explores and compares telemedicine guidelines in Southeast Asia. It finds no universal solution but emphasizes the need for adaptable, comprehensive guidelines to ensure uniform services and patient safety.
Decision making medical tourism	Zakaria et al. (2023); Q1; Keywords: Medical	Quantitative (Cross-sectional Survey, N=388)	This study identifies service and facility factors as strong predictors for choosing India as a medical tourism destination. Recommendations

	Tourism, Tourism Destination, Medical Tourism Costs, Country Environment, Facility, Services		include better training for healthcare providers, reducing language barriers and flight costs, and offering more affordable medical care.
Decision making medical tourism	Habibi et al. (2022); Q2; Keywords: Medical Tourism, Bibliometric, Publication Trends, Tourism Destination, Research Themes	Bibliometric Study	This bibliometric analysis identifies six main factors influencing medical tourism decision-making: marketing, economics and politics, sociocultural factors, ethics, technology, and governance.
Decision making medical tourism	Ghasemi et al. (2021); Q2; Keywords: Hospital, Innovation, Knowledge Management Area, Medical Tourism, Operational Performance	Quantitative	The study reveals that a positive image is crucial in medical tourism decision-making. Key factors include cost and quality of healthcare services.
Decision making medical tourism	Seow et al. (2022); Q1; Keywords: International Tourists, Medical Tourism, Protection Motivation Theory, Coping Alternatives	Quantitative (Structural Equation Modeling, N=501)	This study develops a PMT-based model, showing its effectiveness in addressing maladaptive behaviors and minimizing costs. It serves as a motivational framework for medical tourists in Malaysia.
Decision making medical tourism	Seow et al. (2021); Q1; Keywords: Malaysia, Protection Motivation Theory, Model Comparison, Theory Of Planned Behaviour, Medical Tourism, Tourists' Behavioural Intention	Quantitative (Purposive Sampling, N=500)	This study compares the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and PMT to identify influencing factors in medical tourism. Both models contribute to understanding customer needs and decision-making.
Medical Tourism	Ratnasari et al. (2022); Q2; Keywords: Tourism; Sustainable; Medical Tourism;	Mixed Methods (Quantitative Factor Analysis & Qualitative Interviews)	The study explores potential development of medical tourism in Malaysia and Indonesia. Factors include trust, communication, service quality, affordability, modern medical technology, holistic care, rising expectations,

	Health-Care Travel; Health Services		short travel distances, and attractive tourist sites.
Medical Tourism	Cham et al. (2021); Q1; Keywords: Destination Image; Social Media; Be- havioral Intention; Value; Medical Tourism; Belt And Road Initiative (BRI)	Quantitative (600 Chinese Medical Tourists)	This study examines factors shaping Malaysia's image as a medical tour- ism destination for Chinese tourists. National factors (knowledge, safety, accessibility, pricing) and social fac- tors (word of mouth, social media) significantly influence perceived value and revisit intention.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

1. The Role of the Sharing Economy in Influencing Medical Tourists' Decisions in Southeast Asia

The emergence of the sharing economy has introduced a new dimension to the medical tourism landscape in Southeast Asia. It functions not only as an alternative economic system but also as a disruptive force affecting medical tourists' decisions in multiple ways. Based on the reviewed studies, its role can be categorized into two main areas: support infrastructure and decision-making dynamics.

1.1 Sharing Economy as Support Infrastructure for Medical Tourists

Rooted in ICT and shared mobility Castellanos et al. (2022), the sharing economy has evolved into an integrated service ecosystem. In this context, key infrastructures affecting medical tourists include accommodation, transportation, and digital health services.

In the accommodation sector, peer-to-peer platforms such as Airbnb have reshaped travelers' lodging preferences. Petruzzi et al. (2023) and Tussyadiah & Sigala (2018) highlight that this form of lodging not only offers cost and location flexibility but also creates a more personal and comfortable environment, often more conducive to recovery than conventional hotels. Beyond basic lodging, emotional and social experiences particularly host interactions significantly impact patient satisfaction (Munasinghe et al., 2023) Ashaduzzaman et al. (2023) support this, noting that psychological, social, and technological factors influence the adoption of peer-to-peer services.

Shared transportation, as a dominant sharing economy platform in Southeast Asia, continues to evolve. Li & Chen (2022) describe how the sharing economy has revolutionized health and wellness industries, including business logic and destination development. This is evident in the integration of ride-sharing services (e.g., Grab Health) and short-term patient accommodation into a unified service ecosystem. Mouratidis et al. (2021) and Anaya & Recuero-Virto (2025) emphasize that app-based transportation systems enhance patient mobility, improve urban planning efficiency, and support environmental health. These platforms offer flexibility and accessibility, especially in emergencies. Patients no longer rely solely on rental cars, ambulances, or private transport; these services are now accessible through smartphones an essential daily tool. Medical tourists may also choose platforms offering better pricing and incentives.

Munasinghe et al. (2023) further emphasize the importance of host-patient interactions. In medical tourism, where patients often experience physical and emotional vulnerability, social support is critical. Kuhzady et al. (2021) and Ashaduzzaman et al. (2023) affirm the disruptive power of the sharing economy in hospitality and note that adoption is influenced by service quality, psychological perception, and social and technological factors. In this context, healthcare services become holistic experiences that encompass comfort, efficiency, and social support. The accessibility inherent in the sharing economy allows both patients and their companions to access information, products, and services in an inclusive and equitable way.

Furthermore, telemedicine, as part of technology integration in the sharing economy, holds substantial potential to improve access to healthcare without physical constraints. Anaya & Recuero-Virto

(2025) report that mobile health applications enhance patient safety and extend healthcare coverage, despite challenges such as senior-friendly design and tourism integration. This aligns with Hu et al. (2021) who argue that serving older adults requires tailored, inclusive service adaptations. Sabrina & Defi (2021) stress the need for universal yet adaptable telemedicine guidelines, particularly relevant for Southeast Asia's diverse healthcare systems.

Technological transformation within the sharing economy illustrates that its infrastructure is not merely supplementary it is a strategic component shaping medical tourists' experiences and comfort.

1.2 Sharing Economy in Medical Tourists' Decision-Making

The sharing economy significantly influences medical tourists' decision-making by affecting key considerations when choosing treatment destinations. Zakaria et al. (2023) and Ghasemi et al. (2021) identify service quality, cost, and supporting facilities as the main decision drivers.

Sharing economy platforms help reduce accommodation costs, increase access to affordable services, and expand customizable lodging and transport options. As a result, they enhance perceived value for money a crucial determinant in medical destination selection (Ratnasari et al., 2022).

More broadly, Habibi et al. (2022) note that social, technological, and political dimensions affect decision-making. The sharing economy operates at the intersection of these domains by utilizing platform technology, enabling social integration between travelers and locals, and navigating varied national regulations.

Medical tourist motivation models developed by Seow et al. (2021; 2022) using the TPB and PMT approaches reveal that risk perception, outcome expectations, and self-efficacy are key determinants of decisions to seek care abroad. The sharing economy reinforces these perceptions by offering greater control over accommodation, mobility, and comfort. Easy access to information through digital platforms also reduces uncertainty and risk, while boosting intention and confidence to pursue medical travel Cham et al. (2021).

2. Sharing Economy Factors and Their Impact on Medical Tourism Preferences

Interviews with five individuals who had undergone medical tourism in Southeast Asia revealed that the sharing economy plays a key role in influencing decision-making and comfort during treatment. Three frequently mentioned services were accommodation (hotels or short-term rentals), ride-sharing, and digital health services. These services were favored for their convenience, efficiency, and perceived safety especially important during physically and emotionally vulnerable periods.

Accommodation: Informants preferred flexible, medical-friendly lodging options. Informant 1-M.30 chose an apartment over a hotel, noting it was "*quieter and more comfortable after hospital visits.*" Informant 5-M.40, who had sought treatment in Penang, Malaysia, preferred online platforms like Agoda: "*I can choose accommodation near the hospital and save on transport.*" Access to various lodging options, transparent pricing, and user reviews increased their confidence in making accommodation choices.

Transportation: Ride-sharing services such as Grab were considered highly beneficial, particularly for travel between key locations like airports, hotels, and hospitals. Informant 2-M.43 stated, "*After a medical procedure, public transport isn't an option. Grab is perfect I can book easily, and drivers know hospital locations.*" These services offered reliability and speed, especially for unaccompanied travelers.

Digital Health Services: Digital platforms improved planning and communication. Informant 3-F.40, who had a follow-up in Singapore, said, "*I used the hospital app to make appointments before traveling, so I didn't worry about long queues.*" These tools saved time and reduced stress related to cross-border medical administration. Even after returning to Indonesia, the participant continued using the platform to monitor lab results and consult remotely.

Interestingly, four of five informants had made repeat visits to the same medical destination. This suggests that sharing economy infrastructure not only supports initial decisions but also fosters loyalty and long-term preferences. When services are perceived as convenient, trustworthy, and efficient, patients are more likely to return for future treatments.

Thus, medical tourists' preferences are shaped not only by healthcare quality but also by supporting environments built through the sharing economy. The combination of accessible accommodation, flexible

transport, and integrated digital health services enhances the overall patient experience. This encourages repeat visits and more confident decision-making.

Nonetheless, challenges remain. Issues such as inconsistent service quality, weak regulation, and data privacy risks were noted. Participants called for solutions such as standardized service protocols, stronger consumer protection, and policies from relevant authorities to ensure patient safety and healthcare service integrity.

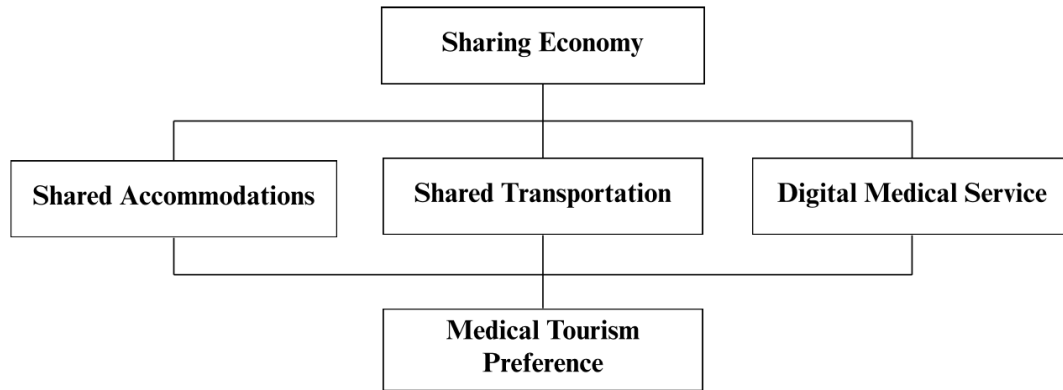


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework – Sharing Economy Factors and Medical Tourists' Preferences (Source: Authors' own work).

These findings led to the development of a closely related model, presented in Figure 3. Conceptual Framework – Sharing Economy Factors and Medical Tourists' Preferences. The diagram illustrates that the three service aspects of the sharing economy directly contribute to shaping medical tourists' preferences. When these services operate synergistically, they enhance the overall patient experience and support repeat visits and satisfaction.

Conclusion

The analysis shows that the sharing economy not only provides supportive infrastructure but also shapes the perception and motivation of medical tourists. In Southeast Asia, where cost is a key concern and access to high-quality care is expanding, the sharing economy reduces financial and logistical barriers. It enhances comfort and personalization, supports flexible and community-driven choices, and strengthens the social and cultural dimensions of healthcare services.

Interviews identified that medical tourists prefer services that are fast, digitally accessible, and tailored to personal needs (e.g., accommodation near hospitals). Sharing economy platforms help patients reduce costs particularly for lodging and transport, which often represent the largest portion of medical travel expenses.

Research recommendations

1. This study is in its preliminary stage, with interview participants limited to Indonesian nationals receiving care in Southeast Asia. Future studies should broaden the sample to include individuals from across the region.
2. The study focused only on three types of sharing economy services. Future research should explore additional service categories that may also influence decision-making.
3. Literature analysis relied primarily on Google Scholar. Future research should prioritize higher-quality databases, such as Scopus, for sourcing academic materials.
4. Informants should be more broadly selected, ideally those who engaged in medical tourism within the last 3–5 years.

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BEST PRACTICES FOR UTILIZING CHEF'S TABLE AS AN EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING TOOL TO BUILD SOFT POWER AND PROMOTE THE EXPORT OF THAI CULINARY CULTURE

Punnaporn Wongjunpen¹, Phitak Siriwigong²

Abstract

This study aimed to (1) examine the context in which Chef's Table is used as a tool of experiential marketing to build soft power and promote the export of Thai culinary culture, (2) explore best practices in implementing Chef's Table experiences, and (3) develop a constructivist grounded theory that explains the social construction of Chef's Table in the Thai context. This qualitative research employed Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology based on Charmaz (2014). The key informants consisted of 10 individuals, including Thai chefs with experience in organizing Chef's Table events, MICE industry practitioners, and cultural tourists. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and expanded via snowball sampling. Data collection was conducted through in-depth individual interviews, audio recordings, field notes, and reflective memos. The findings revealed that Chef's Table in Thailand serves as a dynamic cultural learning space, transmitting local identity and narratives through multisensory experiences. Best practices include designing experiences based on the chef's identity, contextual ingredient storytelling, collaboration with local communities, full-day immersive programming, and the creation of meaningful thematic journeys. The emergent theory, "Transforming Cuisine into a Cultural Communication Tool through Shared Experience," consists of four core elements: cultural encoding through cuisine, contextualized experience, co-creation among stakeholders, and multisensory storytelling. The study recommends that Chef's Table be promoted as a cultural initiative through national policy, that chefs be trained in narrative skills, and that future research investigate its impact at the community level to enhance sustainable cultural and creative economies.

Keywords: Chef's Table, experiential marketing, soft power, food narratives, constructivist grounded theory

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Introduction

In an era of globalization, intercultural communication plays an increasingly significant role in shaping how nations engage with the world. Many countries have turned to soft power as a strategic means of enhancing their international image and influence particularly within the context of the creative economy and the tourism industry, both of which emphasize the creation of memorable cultural experiences for global consumers (Nye, 2004; Anholt, 2020). Thailand, with its rich heritage of cuisine and diverse cultural traditions, possesses remarkable potential for exporting its culture through food. Thai cuisine is not merely a consumable product, but also a medium that conveys cultural identity, memory, and social relationships (Duruz & Khoo, 2015).

Over the past decade, the “Chef’s Table” experience has emerged as a high-value gastronomic format both culturally and economically by linking food with multisensory and emotional experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). In the realm of experiential marketing, Chef’s Table events possess the capacity to “transform” Thai food into a form of immersive cultural storytelling. These experiences not only delight the senses but also serve to enhance the image of Thailand as a culinary nation brand (Richards, 2021).

Despite its growing popularity, there remains a lack of empirical research into how Chef’s Table can be effectively adapted to the Thai cultural context, particularly in a way that deeply conveys culture and generates soft power with intention and impact. Therefore, it is essential to explore the processes, concepts, and lived experiences of those involved in organizing Chef’s Table events in Thailand through qualitative research especially via the constructivist grounded theory approach. Such investigation is critical both for addressing gaps in academic knowledge and for informing cultural policy and sustainable creative economic development at the national level.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the context in which Chef’s Table is utilized as a tool of experiential marketing to build soft power and promote the export of Thai culinary culture.
2. To explore best practices for implementing Chef’s Table as a tool of experiential marketing to enhance soft power and disseminate Thai cultural identity through cuisine.
3. To develop a constructivist grounded theory explaining the social construction of Chef’s Table as an experiential marketing tool for promoting soft power and exporting Thai culinary culture.

Literature Review

Soft Power and Culinary Culture

In the contemporary global landscape, soft power has emerged as a core strategy for nations seeking to project influence and attract international goodwill through culture, ideology, and storytelling (Nye, 2021). Food plays a central role in cultural identity, carrying both psychological significance and the ability to shape diplomatic relationships. The effectiveness of culinary soft power depends not only on “what a country has” but also on “how it is communicated” especially through shared experiences and cultural memory (Mok, 2022). In this regard, Chef’s Table, as a cultural and culinary event, represents a unique mechanism for transmitting soft power in ways that are both tangible and emotionally resonant.

Experiential Marketing and Cultural Emotion

Experiential marketing has evolved to include dimensions of emotion, memory, and cultural value perception (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2020). In the context of Chef’s Table, the experience is more than just dining it involves designing the ambiance, crafting narratives, and enabling interactions that engage participants on a psychological level. This form of marketing is referred to as “emotionally charged cultural experiences,” allowing consumers to connect meaningfully with a brand or a nation (Gretzel et al., 2021). This concept supports the design of Chef’s Table as a space of cultural memory, where guests form emotional and memorable ties with Thai identity and traditions.

Food Narratives

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept of “food narratives” has gained increasing scholarly attention, particularly in tourism and MICE contexts that emphasize cultural value (Everett, 2022). Storytelling through individual dishes, menus, or ingredients can serve as a bridge

between personal taste and local history, helping participants gain a deeper understanding of culture beyond surface-level imagery (Richards & Marques, 2020). This approach transforms Chef's Table into a cultural platform that presents "national identity" through nuanced multisensory storytelling.

Contemporary Cultural Tourism

Contemporary cultural tourism emphasizes the creation of "living culture" through participatory experiences, where attendees do not merely observe but actively engage and co-create meaning (Xie & Lane, 2020). Thai Chef's Table events go beyond passive appreciation of culture they invite participants to take part in interpreting Thai traditions alongside chefs and hosts. This aligns with marketing strategies that focus on co-created cultural value, which lies at the heart of the modern creative economy.

Methodology

Populations and Sample

Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative research design based on the constructivist grounded theory methodology proposed by Charmaz. The research aimed to generate understanding from the perspectives of key informants through processes of interpretation, shared meaning-making, and the analysis of socially constructed phenomena within real-world contexts.

Target Group and Key Informant Selection

The target group included individuals with direct experience in designing or participating in Chef's Table events within the context of tourism or MICE activities. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, followed by snowball sampling to expand the group and access highly relevant and insightful informants.

Research Instruments

The research employed a semi-structured interview guide developed from the study's objectives and relevant literature. The guide was designed to create space for key informants to reflect on their personal experiences, insights, and emotions in depth. The flexible and interpretive structure of the guide aligned with qualitative research principles that seek to understand phenomena through the context and worldview of the participants (Kallio et al., 2016).

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth individual interviews, which were audio-recorded in a systematic manner. These were complemented by field notes and reflective memos written by the researcher to document the interpretive process and deepen the analytical engagement with the data. This multi-faceted approach contributed to the richness and depth of the findings, consistent with rigorous qualitative research practices.

Data Analysis

Following Charmaz's (2014) grounded theory procedures, the analysis was conducted in three key phases:

- Initial Coding: Breaking down data into smaller units using in vivo codes to capture the language and meaning from the participants' own perspectives.
- Focused Coding: Selecting and clustering the most significant or frequent codes to form overarching categories.
- Theoretical Coding: Synthesizing and linking categories to construct a coherent theoretical framework.

Additionally, constant comparison was applied throughout the coding process across codes, categories, and cases to deepen theoretical insights and refine emerging concepts. Memo writing was used throughout to document reflections, analytical reasoning, and theoretical direction (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014).

Trustworthiness of the Data

To ensure the trustworthiness of this qualitative study, the researcher adopted the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a framework for evaluating data quality. These criteria include:

1. Credibility – achieved through member checking and the use of constant comparison to verify and validate the data with the participants.
2. Transferability – supported by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and procedures, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the findings in similar contexts.
3. Dependability – ensured by maintaining systematic documentation of research processes, allowing for auditing and traceability of the methodological steps.
4. Confirmability – maintained through transparent memo writing and clear documentation of decision-making processes to reflect neutrality and minimize researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Research Ethics

The researcher strictly adhered to ethical research standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews. The identities and personal information of participants were kept confidential, and all participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Research Findings

1. The Context of Using Chef's Table as a Tool of Experiential Marketing to Build Soft Power and Promote Thai Culinary Culture

The findings reveal that Chef's Table, in the Thai context particularly in cultural tourism destinations such as Koh Samui is not merely a culinary activity, but has been elevated to the status of a contemporary cultural ritual. It seamlessly blends local cuisine, personal narratives, and place-specific experiences. In this setting, the chef assumes the role of a "contemporary storyteller," using the menu as a cultural language to convey emotion, history, and the spirit of place to a diverse audience.

Chef's Table is more than a dining event; it becomes a space of informal cultural pedagogy, where participants encounter Thai culture through all five senses: seeing with the eyes, tasting with the tongue, smelling with the nose, listening with the ears, and feeling the warmth of dishes with the hands. This multisensory immersion creates a holistic perception that leaves a lasting impression in memory. As Chef Gino proudly remarked, "A single bite tells the story of an entire city," while Chef Aor reflected, "Serving is an act of cultural transmission." These expressions are not mere poetic statements they encapsulate the essence of Chef's Table as a powerful communicative platform that conveys meaning not through words, but through taste, aroma, color, sound, and rhythm. In this way, food not only fills the stomach, but delicately "nourishes the soul" with cultural depth.

Within Thailand, Chef's Table has developed into a living cultural space that connects people of different backgrounds to Thai identity through carefully crafted shared experiences. The meticulous table arrangements, refined preparation techniques, and the expressive tone of the chef's storytelling collectively form a medium of cultural communication that transcends translation something intuitively felt rather than intellectually explained.

In summary, Chef's Table in the Thai context is not merely an experiential marketing strategy; it has become a proud and refined instrument of culinary cultural diplomacy. It not only leaves a profound impression on international tourists but also fosters cross-cultural understanding, respect, and emotional connection to Thai culture something that words alone cannot fully express.

2. Best Practices in Utilizing Chef's Table as a Tool of Experiential Marketing for Soft Power and Thai Culinary Cultural Export

Based on field data analysis using Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory approach, the research identified a set of best practices essential for the successful implementation of Chef's Table experiences both as a form of experiential marketing and as a means of promoting Thai culinary soft power. These best practices can be summarized into five key components:

2.1 Chef-driven Experience Design Meaningful and impactful experiences begin with the identity of the chef as the creative originator of the event. When a chef's personal identity is clearly expressed, the storytelling becomes authentic and credible. For example, Chef Aor hosts guests at her own family dining table, using it as a platform to share her personal life journey, family heritage, and generational culinary traditions. This intimacy allows participants to feel deeply connected to the chef's context reflecting the essence of experiential marketing that values authenticity over performance.

2.2 Ingredient Storytelling Each dish is not merely a product of cooking it encapsulates the story of its origin, the people who produced it, and the local wisdom embedded within. Carefully selected ingredients, combined with contextual storytelling, create bridges between place and palate. A prime example is the adaptation of native cha-plu (wild betel leaves) to better suit the olfactory preferences of international guests while preserving their cultural integrity. This demonstrates how local knowledge can be leveraged to communicate Thai culture in ways that resonate with diverse audiences.

2.3 Collaborative Creation between Local Operators and Renowned Chefs Collaboration between professional chefs and local entrepreneurs is a key practice that facilitates knowledge sharing, creative exchange, and co-development of culinary concepts rooted in the specific cultural context of the area. A clear example is Chef Gino's collaboration with a local restaurant in Koh Samui, where the strategic design of the Chef's Table experience achieved a balance between contemporary appeal and cultural authenticity. This synergy not only supports experiential marketing strategies but also enhances the role of Thai cuisine as a medium for cultivating soft power.

2.4 Day-long Experience Design One of the most distinctive and impactful features of a successful Chef's Table event is the design of an immersive, day-long experience. In such programs, participants stay in a single location from morning through evening, allowing them to engage with a full spectrum of sensory and emotional elements. They enjoy diverse meals throughout the day while simultaneously absorbing the evolving ambiance from the golden light of morning and the natural sounds of the afternoon to the tranquil beauty of twilight.

This kind of experience fosters emotional anchoring, creating deep, lasting connections between the participants, the space, the moment, and each individual dish. Each meal becomes a chapter in a narrative that unfolds rhythmically over the course of the day, leaving participants with profound and memorable impressions.

Such immersive design aligns with the concept of "immersive experience" in experiential marketing, which emphasizes engagement through every dimension of perception not merely through taste, but also through full contextual and cultural participation. A compelling example is the "From Sunrise to Sunset" concept by Banana Resort Samui, which enables guests not only to enjoy flavor but also to absorb the cultural values embedded in the flow of time and emotional resonance.

It can be concluded that designing Chef's Table as a structured and continuous experience does more than enhance its commercial value it serves as a strategic and sustainable method for conveying the vitality of Thai culture in meaningful and lasting ways.

2.5 Thematic Culinary Journey Designing a thematic concept that aligns with the narrative and identity of the locale is another highly effective approach. For example, the "From Sunrise to Sunset" theme developed by Banana Resort Samui connects each meal to a specific time of day, allowing participants to feel as if they are journeying through the local cultural landscape from dawn to dusk, with food serving as the guiding medium. This approach not only enhances the narrative depth of the experience but also strengthens the emotional bond between the participants and the location.

These practices do more than support the objectives of experiential marketing they empower the concrete expression of Thai culinary soft power. Through the creation of memorable, emotionally resonant, and culturally meaningful experiences, Thai cuisine becomes a powerful vehicle for impressing, connecting with, and communicating national identity on the global stage in a structured and systematic way.

3. Constructivist Grounded Theory of Chef's Table as Experiential Marketing for Thai Culinary Soft Power

Based on in-depth data analysis following Charmaz's (2014) grounded theory process including initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding the researcher developed a theoretical model titled: "Transforming Cuisine into a Medium of Cultural Communication through Shared Experience." This theory is composed of four key dimensions:

3.1 Cultural Encoding through Cuisine Food is not merely presented as a menu, but as a cultural language through which chefs transmit abstract meanings such as love, memory, and the spirit of place to the consumer. Each dish becomes a semiotic vehicle, carrying emotional and cultural significance beyond flavor.

3.2 Contextualized Experience Chef's Table experiences are successful because consumers come to understand the meaning of ingredients and taste within the specific context of place and chef identity. The local geography, personal stories, and environment all enrich the reception and interpretation of each dish.

3.3 Multi-Stakeholder Co-Creation The co-creation of meaningful culinary experiences involves multiple actors chefs, communities, and event organizers who collaborate by sharing ideas, knowledge, and resources. This partnership ensures that each event is not only authentic but also communicatively powerful, culturally resonant, and socially inclusive.

3.4 Multisensory Storytelling For Chef's Table to function as an effective soft power tool, it must stimulate all five senses taste, smell, sight, sound, and touch. Storytelling through food extends beyond flavor alone; it conveys culture, ingredient diversity, local wisdom, and the aesthetic artistry of presentation. These elements converge to create an experience that is immersive, memorable, and capable of inspiring a deep appreciation for Thai identity in all its richness and dimension.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that Chef's Table, particularly in culturally rich locations such as Koh Samui, transcends its role as a form of luxury dining or entertainment. Instead, it has evolved into a powerful instrument for generating soft power through deeply contextualized, multisensory cultural experiences. The design of these experiences engaging all five senses supports the assertions of Nye (2004, 2021) and Mok (2022), who argue that culture becomes influential when conveyed through shared experiences rather than through mere factual representation.

From a marketing perspective, the study aligns with the concept of **experiential marketing** as articulated by Schmitt & Zarantonello (2020), which emphasizes the design of experiences that evoke emotion, memory, and sensory engagement. Chef's Table exemplifies this principle through its integration of storytelling, setting, and time- of-day elements to create **emotionally charged cultural experiences**, echoing the perspectives of Gretzel et al. (2021).

The role of **food narratives**, as discussed by Everett (2022) and Richards & Marques (2020), is also clearly evident in this study. Participants described how ingredient selection, origin stories, and the symbolic meaning of dishes served as bridges connecting historical and cultural understanding to personal experiences thus deepening cultural interpretation beyond surface-level impressions.

When analyzed through the lens of the **creative economy** and **contemporary cultural tourism**, Chef's Table activities reflect the vision presented by Xie & Lane (2020), who advocate for tourism experiences as **"living culture."** Participants are not passive spectators but active co-creators of meaning, engaging with thoughtfully designed elements such as themed daily programs or intimate in-home dining environments that convey the lived reality and identity of the chef.

Moreover, by applying Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory methodology, this research developed the theoretical model of **"Transforming Cuisine into a Medium of Cultural Communication through Shared Experience."** This model systematizes the social, cultural, and economic dimensions of Chef's Table by highlighting the integration of personal chef identity, local wisdom, and multisensory storytelling.

In summary, this study not only fills a research gap concerning Chef's Table practices in Thailand but also aligns with key contemporary frameworks such as soft power, experiential marketing, food narratives, and cultural tourism. It offers practical insights that can inform strategic planning in cultural policy, tourism development, and the sustainable global promotion of Thai culinary heritage.

Recommendations

1. Practical Recommendations Based on Research Findings

This study demonstrates that Chef's Table in the Thai context has strong potential to function as a tool for experiential marketing and the generation of soft power through deeply immersive, culturally rooted storytelling. The following recommendations are proposed for relevant stakeholders:

1.1 Ministry of Tourism and Sports / Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) / Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB): These agencies should promote Chef's Table as a cultural MICE experience by supporting funding, speaker development, and promotional campaigns to elevate Thailand's global image as a leading culinary nation.

1.2 Ministry of Culture / Department of Cultural Promotion: These bodies should develop training programs or workshops to empower local chefs in the art of cultural storytelling through food, enabling them to convey Thai values in contemporary formats that resonate with international audiences.

1.3 Tourism and Hospitality Sector: Businesses should create tourism programs that integrate Chef's Table activities with local ways of life such as farm visits, temple tours, or ingredient sourcing experiences thus extending the experience from consumption to cultural understanding.

1.4 Independent Chefs and Event Organizers: Chefs and hosts should prioritize designing experiences that reflect personal identity and local wisdom. In addition, they should document this knowledge in transferable formats (e.g., books, videos, or training modules) to ensure its preservation and dissemination.

2. Recommendations for Future Research

2.1 Community-level Impact Assessment: Future research should explore the cultural economic impact of Chef's Table events on local communities focusing on income generation, employment, and pride in cultural heritage.

2.2 Sustainable Management Models: Research should be conducted to develop sustainable Chef's Table models that incorporate environmental dimensions, such as zero-waste practices, seasonal ingredient sourcing, and circular economy principles within the food system.

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HALAL BEYOND RELIGION: FACTORS INFLUENCING NON-MUSLIM CONSUMERS' PURCHASE INTENTION FOR HALAL FOOD PRODUCTS

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Extended abstract

The halal food industry, once perceived primarily through the lens of Islamic dietary laws, has rapidly evolved into a global symbol of quality, safety, and ethical standards. Its appeal now extends well beyond Muslim consumers, gaining traction among non-Muslims who associate halal-certified products with hygienic production, trustworthy sourcing, and high safety standards. This shift is particularly relevant in multicultural societies such as Malaysia, where halal has become synonymous with food integrity and quality assurance.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, global concerns over food safety have heightened, prompting increased demand for certified and transparent food production systems. As noted by Islam et al. (2019), halal certification mandates strict compliance in every aspect of production from sourcing raw materials to distribution ensuring cleanliness and ethical handling throughout the supply chain. For many consumers, these attributes align with broader trends in ethical consumption and responsible food choices.

The halal sector is now recognized as one of the fastest-growing industries worldwide (Elasrag, 2016; Rahman et al., 2017), appealing not only to Muslim-majority nations but also to developed countries with diverse populations. In this context, halal certification is no longer seen solely as a religious requirement but as a viable marketing and branding strategy for businesses targeting a wider demographic. Studies have shown that non-Muslim consumers increasingly choose halal products not for religious compliance, but due to their perceived associations with cleanliness, quality, and ethical values (Wibowo et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2020; Purwanto & Sudargini, 2021).

Given this trend, understanding the behavioral and psychological factors that influence non-Muslim consumers' halal food choices has become essential. This study addresses this need by applying Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to examine how attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control predict non-Muslim consumers' intentions to purchase halal food products.

Keywords: Halal, Attitude intention, TPB, non-Muslim, purchase

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Purpose/Problem Statement

This study seeks to explore the key factors influencing non-Muslim consumers' purchase intentions toward halal food products, particularly in Malaysia. The research addresses a critical gap in the literature, which has historically focused on Muslim consumers or used simplistic methods. By applying the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the study aims to provide a structured and theoretically sound analysis of how attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control predict halal purchase intentions among non-Muslim consumers.

Originality/value

This research is among the few to apply TPB within a non-Muslim context in Malaysia. It expands the theory's relevance by demonstrating that halal consumption is not limited to religious compliance but influenced by practical, social, and psychological factors. The study's novelty lies in its focus on post-pandemic food safety perceptions, generational differences, and the integration of demographic moderators to enhance predictive power.

Design/methodology/approach

A quantitative design was used involving 380 non-Muslim consumers from Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia. Data were collected through an online structured questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS (version 28). Pearson correlations and multiple regression were employed to examine relationships among TPB variables and purchase intention, while moderation analysis explored the role of demographic factors.

Findings/Discussion

All three TPB factors attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control were found to significantly influence non-Muslim purchase intention for halal food ($p < 0.01$). Among them, perceived behavioral control emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .441$), suggesting that accessibility, affordability, and product clarity play a crucial role. Subjective norms ($\beta = .367$) also had a significant effect, reflecting the influence of Malaysia's collectivist culture. Attitude, though significant, had comparatively less influence. Additionally, **age** negatively moderated the relationship between attitude and purchase intention, indicating that younger consumers are more influenced by favorable evaluations of halal products.

Theoretical implications

The study contributes to TPB literature by validating its constructs in a cross-cultural, non-religious consumer context. It challenges the conventional hierarchy of TPB predictors, positioning perceived behavioral control as paramount. The inclusion of demographic moderators enhances the model's explanatory power, demonstrating that purchase intentions are not just shaped by cognition but by contextual and generational factors.

Practical implications

For marketers, the results emphasize the importance of product accessibility, clear halal labeling, and competitive pricing. Marketing campaigns should target younger non-Muslim consumers via social media and focus on halal as a benchmark for quality and ethical production. Using influencers and testimonials from diverse backgrounds can amplify social proof. Product locators and mobile apps could further enhance consumers' control and trust.

Social implications (Policy contribution)

Policy-makers should standardize halal certification and labeling across Malaysia to build non-Muslim consumer trust. Educational campaigns that frame halal as a symbol of food safety and quality beyond religion could promote inclusivity. Strengthening enforcement against fraudulent labeling would also enhance consumer protection and brand integrity.

Research limitations

The study was geographically limited to Ipoh, Malaysia, and used a cross-sectional design. Thus, the results may not generalize to other contexts or capture long-term consumer behavior. Self-reported intentions may differ from actual purchasing behavior. Moreover, convenience sampling may have excluded less tech-savvy or more conservative respondents.

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EXPLORING THE UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF SPIRITUAL TOURISM DESTINATION BRANDING: A CASE STUDY OF LADAKH, INDIA

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Extended abstract

The objective of this paper is to explore the distinctive elements that contribute to the development of spiritual tourism destination branding, with a specific focus on Ladakh, India. The development of an authentic spiritual tourism brand requires essential components such as historical depth, cultural richness, and an environment conducive to spiritual healing, faith, and belief. Therefore, the promotion of a destination as a spiritual tourism site necessitates the presence of unique, culturally rich, and authentic resources.

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to investigate perspectives on spiritual tourism. Data were collected from 25 participants who attended a 10-day Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN) course focused on tourism research development and the branding of spiritual and wellness tourism destinations. The study employed both focus group discussions and in-depth interviews to gather insights.

The findings highlight several features that contribute to Ladakh's positioning as an authentic spiritual tourism destination. Notably, Ladakh's long-standing association with Buddhism, its numerous ancient monasteries, and the availability of spiritual retreat and meditation centers serve as key attractions for both religious and non-religious spiritual tourists. International tourists are drawn to the region's spiritual offerings, which range from formal religious practices to more generalized wellness and meditative experiences.

In conclusion, Ladakh exemplifies the theoretical foundations of authentic spiritual retreat tourism. The study identifies five critical elements that underpin this authenticity: (1) the genuine nature of spiritual experiences, (2) the cultural landscape, (3) multi-sensory engagement, (4) opportunities for meaningful social interaction, and (5) experiential knowledge. These findings offer valuable theoretical contributions to the discourse on spiritual tourism branding (Thanarotrungueang, Phachan, & Ashton, 2025)

Keywords: Spiritual Retreat Destination, Destination Branding Development, Mindfulness retreat, Spiritual tourism in Ladakh India, Wellness tourism in India

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Purpose/Problem Statement

The research has been extensively study in Ladakh region of India, the topic can be ranging from spiritual tourism, religion, local resident attitude, and sustainable contexts. For example, one study assessing tourism sustainable in Ladakh region (Jaiswal, 2024); another studied focus on the development of new product for spiritual tourism (Fedorova, 2016). The study on exploring mass tourism encounters at Lamuyuru Monastery in Ladakh and try to understand and conceptualize tourism and changing monastic space in Ladakh (Lundup, 2020). Moreover, the studies have also been conducted in Ladakh related to Buddhism, for instance, Buddhist tourism in Ladakh, explaining the meaning of Ladakh as 'the land of high passes,' located between the northern ranges and the Greater Himalayas in the south, and highlighting its immense potential for Buddhist tourism (Khan, 2017). While other focused on how spiritual tourism and the corporate form of religion are contributing to the rapid spread of Tibetan Buddhism in Vietnam (Christopher & Ngoc An, 2024). Likewise, another studied explored on Buddhism, tourism, and economic development are compatible with one another in the contemporary trans-Himalayan Buddhist region (Suh, 2023).

However, many studies focus on the development of tourism context, especially in Ladakh. For instance, a studied on tourism and entrepreneurship in Ladakh's development (Eijdenberg, Agarwal, Thirumaran, & Bhati, 2025); how mountain tourism impact the socio-ecological balance of the Indian Trans Himalayas, Ladakh? (Wani, Akhter, Shah, & Dada, 2025). A studied also focus on local communities and their role in Mountain tourism development (Semwal, Panda, & Tripathi, 2025). Hence, as discussed above, the study on tourism, spiritual tourism, and Buddhism religion have been explored extensively, however it was less investigating on how spiritual tourism destination branding can be developed.

Theory foundation for this study is based on the model proposed by Ashton (2021), which aligns closely with the study's main aim. Ashton's model suggests that the development of spiritual tourism destination branding should consider three primary components: functional attributes; psychological attributes, and the uniqueness of the spiritual experience. The first component, spiritual tourism functional attributes, includes four key elements. First, the destination must offer a peaceful, quiet, and green environment with a serene landscape to support spiritual healing. Second, it should provide high-quality services that meet basic human needs, such as simple but clean accommodations, nutritious food, clean water, comfortable clothing, and a sense of safety and security. Third, the leadership and performance of spiritual leaders are critical; they should be professional, knowledgeable, and recognized for their spiritual expertise and reputation. Fourth, the program of activities should include practices like meditation, yoga, and life coaching (particularly for mental health support), as well as post-program activities such as cultural exploration, local social interaction, and engagement with local food and lifestyle. The second component, psychological attributes, focuses on creating symbolic representations such as logos, signs, or images that evoke a spiritual atmosphere and resonate with tourists emotionally and cognitively. The final component emphasizes the uniqueness of the spiritual tourism experience, which should offer products or resources that provide a transformative, lifelong impact. These unique experiences are intended to promote comprehensive wellness, including physical, mental, social, and emotional well-being, and may be enhanced through spiritually themed events or festivals (Ashton, 2021).

Originality/value

This study was conducted in the highlands of Ladakh, India, with the aim of proposing a destination brand image focused on authentic spiritual tourism development an area that has not yet been fully explored. Therefore, this paper is the first original contribution to identify the potential destination resources for authentic spiritual tourism in the region

Design/methodology/approach

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore the conceptualization and development of wellness tourism and spiritual destinations. Focus groups and group interviews were employed as the primary data collection techniques, allowing for in-depth engagement with participants and the generation of rich, contextual insights (Maxwell, 2008). Thematic content analysis was applied to interpret the data, enabling the identification of patterns, categories, and meanings within participants' responses (Mayring, 2015).

The study area for this paper was conducted in Ladakh, India a region internationally recognized for its association with spiritual retreats and wellness tourism. Known as the "land of high passes," Ladakh is geographically and culturally distinctive, comprising two districts: Leh and Kargil. These districts are predominantly inhabited by Buddhist and Muslim communities, respectively making the region a unique setting for examining the intersection of spirituality, culture, and tourism (Butcher, 2015).

The participants for this study were obtained from two primary groups. The first group included individuals who participated in a ten-day academic course under the Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN) program, hosted by the University of Ladakh. The course, titled "*Tourism Research Development and Branding of Spiritual & Wellness Tourism Destinations*," aimed to enhance participants' understanding of tourism research and branding strategies related to wellness and spiritual tourism destinations. The program was supported by the Ministry of Education of India and served as a platform for academic exchange and experiential learning.

Data for this group were collected through an organized focus group discussion. Participants were divided into four groups, each consisting of approximately 5–6 individuals. The researchers actively participated in the discussions, which focused on key topics such as the unique characteristics of Ladakh tourism and how these could be developed into a destination brand or logo. Additionally, participants discussed strategies for successfully managing tourism in the region in line with emerging tourism trends.

Findings/Discussion

A total of 22 participants took part in the study, comprising 7 males and 15 females. Among them, 3 were enrolled in a master's degree program, while the remaining participants were undergraduate students. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 25 years. All participants were affiliated with the Department of Travel and Tourism Management at the University of Ladakh, located in Northern India. The study identified several key resources that hold significant potential for developing Ladakh as an authentic spiritual tourism destination brand. These unique resources include:

Monasteries

Monasteries constitute a vital component of Ladakh's cultural and spiritual tourism assets. Often referred to as "Little Tibet" due to its profound Tibetan Buddhist heritage, Ladakh's identity is deeply intertwined with its monastic traditions. These monasteries are not merely religious institutions; they also serve as repositories of historical, architectural, and artistic significance, attracting thousands of domestic and international visitors annually. With over 200 Buddhist monasteries (including gonpas), Ladakh represents one of the most concentrated regions of Tibetan Buddhist heritage in India (Kaur, 2022). Prominent monasteries such as Hemis, Thiksey, Alchi, and Lamayuru stand as enduring symbols of this cultural legacy. Beyond their touristic appeal, these monastic institutions function as custodians of intangible heritage, safeguarding ancient rituals, iconography, and philosophical teachings that form the spiritual bedrock of the local community (Harvey, 2013).

Spiritual and Wellness Tourism

Ladakh is increasingly recognized as a significant destination for spiritual and wellness tourism, offering a range of experiences that cater to both mental and physical well-being. Spiritual healing practices are deeply embedded in the region's monastic traditions, with several monasteries serving as sanctuaries for meditation and introspection. In addition, dedicated wellness centres such as the Nimu House and the Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre (MIMC) have gained global recognition for their yoga-based retreats, mindfulness programs, and holistic therapies, attracting visitors from around the world (Kaul & Kaul, 2021).

Furthermore, Ladakh's sacred landscapes contribute to its spiritual aura. Sites such as Magnetic Hill are regarded by locals as spiritually potent, reinforcing the region's mystical and transformative appeal (Berger, 2012). These natural and built environments collectively position Ladakh as a unique convergence of spiritual heritage and wellness-oriented tourism.

Natural Resources

Ladakh is renowned for its breathtaking natural landscapes, which include majestic mountain ranges, expansive valleys such as Nubra and Zaskar, and high-altitude mountain passes like Khardung-La and Wari-La. The region is also home to several iconic high-altitude lakes Pangong Tso, Tso Moriri, and Tso Kar celebrated for their striking beauty and the unique phenomenon of changing colors. Additionally,

the Indus and Zaskar rivers not only hold cultural and geographical significance but also serve as prominent sites for adventure activities such as river rafting and scenic trekking routes. Ladakh's rich biodiversity further enhances its appeal, with species such as the elusive snow leopard, Himalayan marmots, and a variety of rare and migratory birds attracting ecotourists and wildlife enthusiasts alike.

Hot Springs

Ladakh is home to several geothermal sites, among which natural hot springs hold both therapeutic and cultural significance. One notable example is the Chumathang Hot Spring, located approximately 138 kilometers southeast of Leh, near a small village. Renowned for its therapeutic benefits, particularly in the treatment of skin ailments and joint pain, Chumathang remains a popular destination for both locals and tourists. Similarly, the Panamik Hot Spring, situated in the Nubra Valley at an altitude of approximately 10,442 feet and around 150 kilometers from Leh, is rich in sulfur and widely regarded for its medicinal properties. It holds particular significance as the only accessible hot spring for tourists in the Nubra region and is also considered spiritually important by the local community (Vohra & Mathur, 2016).

Another prominent site is the Puga Hot Spring, located in the geothermally active Puga Valley. Puga is recognized as one of the most promising geothermal areas in India and has attracted scientific interest for its potential in renewable energy development (Tsering & Ravi, 2017). The landscape is characterized by features such as boiling mud pools, sulfur deposits, and active steam vents. According to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), the Puga Valley has been identified as one of the top sites in the country for future geothermal power projects, underscoring its environmental and economic significance.

Cultural and Heritage Resources

Ladakh's cultural landscape is enriched by a variety of traditional festivals and heritage sites that reflect its deep-rooted spiritual and social customs. Notable festivals such as the **Hemis Festival**, **Losar** (Tibetan New Year), and **Sindhu Darshan** are celebrated with vibrant performances and strong adherence to local traditions. These festivals are particularly known for **Cham dances**, a form of masked ritual performance that dramatizes spiritual narratives, symbolizing the triumph of good over evil. Such events not only serve as expressions of religious devotion but also offer both locals and visitors meaningful opportunities to engage with Ladakh's spiritual heritage (Kapoor, 2010).

In addition to its festivals, Ladakh is home to several indigenous villages, including Turtuk, Hanle, and Chilling, which provide immersive cultural experiences and insight into traditional lifestyles. The region's architectural heritage further exemplifies its cultural uniqueness. Iconic structures such as Leh Palace, Stok Palace, T-suru Stupa, and Alchi Monastery represent distinctive architectural styles rooted in ancient Tibetan and Central Asian influences, highlighting the integration of spiritual, aesthetic, and historical elements in Ladakh's built environment.

Adventure in related to the spiritual retreat context

Ladakh offers a wide range of adventure tourism activities that significantly contribute to its appeal, particularly among international tourists. Trekking is one of the most prominent attractions, with the Markha Valley being especially renowned not only for its scenic routes but also as a habitat for the elusive snow leopard, attracting wildlife enthusiasts and winter tourists. Another iconic experience is the Chadar Trek, which involves traversing the frozen Zaskar River during the harsh winter months. Similarly, Stok Kangri expeditions are popular among high-altitude climbers seeking challenging peaks.

Motorbiking and cycling across Ladakh's rugged terrain and high-altitude passes are also highly favored by adventure seekers. In recent years, winter sports such as ice hockey and snow trekking have gained popularity, particularly in areas like the Kargil district, positioning Ladakh as an emerging destination for cold-weather adventure tourism.

Additionally, camping in valleys such as Markha and Shang, and stargazing in remote, low-light-pollution areas like Hanle and Tso Moriri, offer unique experiences that blend nature, solitude, and exploration. According to Varley (2011), for many tourists, such adventure activities transcend physical exertion and take on a spiritual dimension, facilitating introspection, resilience, and moments of personal awakening.

Local Art, Cuisine, and Handicrafts

Ladakh's traditional handicrafts play a significant role in both its cultural economy and spiritual identity. Renowned globally, products such as Pashmina wool, thangka paintings, and apricot-based goods

are emblematic of the region's artisanal heritage. In particular, thangka paintings sacred Buddhist artworks typically depicting deities, cosmological diagrams, and scenes from the life of the Buddha are not only valued for their aesthetic qualities but also serve important ritualistic and spiritual functions. These paintings are commonly enshrined in homes and monasteries, where they are venerated for their ability to confer blessings and spiritual merit (Ahmad, 2028). As visual tools in meditative and devotional practices, they are deeply embedded in Buddhist philosophy, which permeates the region's broader cultural framework.

Another important facet of cultural tourism in Ladakh is the homestay experience, which has become increasingly popular among tourists seeking authentic, community-based encounters. Homestays offer more than just accommodation they provide insight into the local lifestyle, culinary traditions, and domestic culture of Ladakhi households. These experiences reflect key Buddhist values such as simplicity, sustainability, and non-violence, thus reinforcing the region's spiritual ethos through everyday living (Norberg-Hodge, 1991). As such, both handicrafts and homestays contribute meaningfully to the spiritual and cultural tourism narrative of Ladakh.

Theoretical implications

This study identifies the destination brand image for spiritual tourism development, its original addition to how to find the potential resources and destination by identifying the uniqueness of the destination, including local culture, authentic life style and nature environment. The theory foundation derives from destination brand image and this case study has some most uniqueness than any destination in the world, hence the theoretical contribution proposes the idea how to seek for the potential resources of authentic spiritual tourism destination in a high land of Ladakh, Northern India.

Practical implications

The best practices identified from these findings can help relevant industries understand how to develop their products and services to better cater to potential spiritual tourists. To ensure sustainability and authenticity, the study highlights which resources and locations should be developed to align with the needs and expectations of spiritual tourism.

Research limitations

The study collected data based on the experiences and perceptions of local university students regarding their hometown. Although the participants were students, the findings are valuable for future tourism developers and professionals, as these individuals are likely to work in or gain experience within the tourism sector after graduation. For future research, it is recommended to conduct in-depth interviews with relevant stakeholders to obtain a more comprehensive perspective on the field.

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EXPLORING DEVOTEES' PERCEPTIONS OF THE LAK PHRA FESTIVAL'S DEVELOPMENT AND ITS ROLE IN ENHANCING THE LOCAL ECONOMY IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

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Abstract

Cultural festivals have become powerful instruments of socio-economic and cultural transformation across the world, fostering spiritual engagement, cultural continuity, and local economic vitality. In Thailand, where traditions and faith shape the rhythm of community life, festivals play a crucial role in the nation's creative economy and soft power strategies. The Lak Phra (Buddha Pulling) Festival of Songkhla, a centuries-old Buddhist tradition deeply rooted in local devotion, represents one of the most distinctive cultural assets in Southern Thailand. Yet, despite its historical significance and aesthetic richness, the festival remains confined within local boundaries and has yet to evolve into a structured international cultural and economic event. This qualitative research, a pioneer study in Southern Thailand, explores devotees' perceptions of the Lak Phra Festival's development and its contribution to enhancing the local economy. Using focus group discussions with 25 key devotees from four major temples in Mueang Songkhla District, the study examines (1) the current status and management of the Lak Phra tradition, (2) the roles and participation of devotees in sustaining and developing the festival, and (3) strategic approaches for transforming the festival into an internationally recognized cultural event. Findings reveal that the devotees' faith, collective participation, and intergenerational transmission of ritual knowledge form the spiritual foundation sustaining the festival. However, gaps persist in systematic management, stakeholder collaboration, and marketing mechanisms necessary to elevate the festival to global recognition. The research offers an integrative framework linking cultural devotion, local identity, and creative economy principles, ultimately proposing guidelines for developing "Spiritual Wellness Tourism" in Southern Thailand. Such guidelines emphasize the alignment of faith-based cultural heritage with sustainable tourism practices, promoting both spiritual enrichment and community-based economic growth. By framing the Lak Phra Festival as a model for spiritual wellness tourism, this study contributes to Thailand's soft power and sustainable development agenda, offering a transformative pathway from local tradition to global cultural destination.

Keywords: Lak Phra Festival, devotees' perceptions, Songkhla, spiritual wellness tourism, cultural economy, soft power, Southern Thailand

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ROADMAP FOR CREATIVE GASTRONOMY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN TRANG, SOUTHERN THAILAND

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Abstract

In response to the global shift toward experiential and holistic travel, this study repositions gastronomy tourism as a transformative medium for spiritual and community well-being. Building upon the project “Roadmap for Creative Gastronomy Tourism Development in Trang, Southern Thailand,” the research aims to develop Guidelines for Spiritual Wellness Tourism in Southern Thailand. The conceptual framework interprets gastronomy not merely as a cultural or economic asset but as an entry point to mindfulness, identity, and inner balance aligning with the 2024 UN Tourism and Basque Culinary Center (BCC) declaration emphasizing gastronomy’s role in sustainable transformation. A mixed-methods design integrates quantitative data from 400 culinary tourists with qualitative insights from local entrepreneurs, government representatives, and private-sector stakeholders in Trang province. The analysis identifies gastronomy’s multi-dimensional impact, enhancing economic resilience while fostering cultural empathy and spiritual mindfulness through sensory and communal experiences. Findings highlight gastronomy as a gateway to spiritual wellness, revealing opportunities to merge culinary creativity with wellness principles grounded in Thai cultural values. The study concludes by proposing a prototype model for spiritual wellness tourism that integrates gastronomy, local participation, and cultural sustainability. This framework positions Trang as a living laboratory for innovative tourism practices and contributes to Thailand’s strategic vision of becoming a global leader in wellness-oriented travel. The resulting guidelines extend the discourse on sustainable creative tourism by uniting food, culture, and consciousness within a coherent spiritual-wellness paradigm.

Keywords: creative tourism, gastronomy tourism, sustainable tourism, Thailand, cultural heritage, mindfulness

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REGENERATIVE TOURISM AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Extended abstract

Regenerative tourism is gaining global traction as a transformative paradigm that goes beyond minimizing harm to actively rejuvenate ecosystems, economies, and cultures. It reimagines tourism as a tool for socio-ecological regeneration by placing local communities and ecosystems at the center of value creation. Unlike sustainable tourism, which often focuses on maintaining existing systems, regenerative tourism strives for net-positive impacts by revitalizing nature, cultural identity, and socio-economic equity (Fusté-Forné & Hussain, 2022; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020).

Southeast Asia, a region marked by rapid tourism development, environmental degradation, and cultural commodification, presents a critical context to explore the application of regenerative practices. However, dominant tourism models in the region often sideline local knowledge and community agency. This conceptual paper explores how regenerative tourism, rooted in place-based practices and Indigenous values, can enhance long-term community well-being in Southeast Asia (Major & Clarke, 2021).

Keywords: Regenerative tourism, community well-being, cultural heritage, Southeast Asia, post-pandemic recovery

Purpose/Problem Statement

Despite increased global interest, regenerative tourism remains under-theorized in the Global South. The lived experiences and knowledge systems of Southeast Asian communities are rarely integrated into tourism development paradigms. This paper addresses that gap through a conceptual framework that centers community agency and ecological stewardship.

Originality/value

This paper proposes a multidimensional conceptual framework linking regenerative tourism principles with well-being indicators, such as social capital, cultural identity, ecological restoration, and inclusive governance. It integrates concepts from resilience thinking, indigenous knowledge systems, and sustainability transitions to offer a model adaptable across various Southeast Asian contexts.

Design/methodology/approach

This is a conceptual paper grounded in a critical synthesis of interdisciplinary literature. A systems-thinking approach is adopted to map connections between tourism regeneration, community resilience, and inclusive development. Illustrative examples from

Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia are used to contextualize the framework within ASEAN development priorities.

Findings/Discussion

The framework suggests that regenerative tourism enhances community well-being through four pathways: (1) embedding local culture and values into tourism experiences, (2) restoring ecological functions through community stewardship, (3) distributing economic value equitably, and (4) enabling participatory governance. This transformation requires collaborative partnerships, decolonized knowledge practices, and multilevel policy alignment (Bellato et al., 2022).

Enabling conditions include cross-sector collaboration, environmental justice frameworks, digital inclusion, and alignment with the UN SDGs and ESG principles.

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Theoretical implications

This study extends the theoretical discourse by bridging regenerative tourism and community well-being frameworks. It critiques the linear, extractive tourism model and advocates for a relational, circular tourism economy grounded in ethics of reciprocity, place attachment, and intergenerational responsibility. The model invites reinterpretation of 'value' beyond economic metrics to encompass ecological and cultural regeneration. It aligns with current debates around decolonizing tourism and emphasizes relational value creation (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020).

Practical implications

Destination managers, NGOs, and tourism planners can utilise the framework to: Design regenerative metrics for tourism impact assessments; Foster capacity-building among local entrepreneurs and cultural custodians; Align tourism projects with climate resilience, biodiversity restoration, and inclusive growth agendas.

Social implications

The framework encourages governments to recognize indigenous governance systems, reinvest in cultural landscapes, and foster multisectoral partnerships. For ASEAN nations, it aligns with post-COVID green recovery and climate adaptation goals, reinforcing the urgency of community-centered approaches (Fusté-Forné & Hussain, 2022).

Research limitations

As a conceptual contribution, empirical validation remains necessary. Future research should adopt participatory action research methods and longitudinal case studies across Southeast Asia to assess the framework's utility and local relevance. Investigating gender dimensions, youth engagement, and the role of digital platforms in scaling regenerative practices are recommended research extensions.

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WELLNESS EVENT DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT: THE PERSPECTIVE OF THAI ORGANIZERS AND MIDDLE EAST TOURISM

Aaqib Ahad Bhat¹, and Ann Suwaree Ashton²

Extended abstract

Wellness tourism is among the trending nowadays, people want to escape from their hectic busy life schedules to get relax by the nature via wellness activities (Talukder, Hossain, Al Ferdous, & Khan, 2025). People facing with daily life and unusual circumstances that creates the sensitivity toward their emotional, physical, mental, social and spiritual (Martins, Neves de Jesus, Pocinho, & Pinto, 2025). There are some activities can be participate and help with stress release and healing, for example, spa, massage, sport, adventure, spiritual retreat, such as meditation, yoga and forest bathing (Ashton, 2024; Ritpanitchajchaval, Ashton, & Apollo, 2023).

This conceptual paper aims to explore wellness event destination development from two different perspectives, including the perception of event organizer and Middle East tourists. To achieve the primary objective of the study, two research questions have been formulated: First, how do event organizers manage halal wellness events? Second, what are the perceptions and expectations of Middle Eastern tourists regarding halal wellness events, especially Thailand?

The mixed-method approach will be used, combining both qualitative and quantitative approach. For the qualitative study, data will be collected through in-depth interviews with event organizers in Thailand, and content analysis will be applied to analyze the data. For the quantitative approach, data will be gathered via a random survey questionnaire distributed through google form and self-administered among Middle Eastern tourists. This group is highly likely to be interested in exploring wellness events in Southeast Asian, especially Thailand (Laing & Weiler, 2007; Mathew, 2022). Data analysis for quantitative approach will be using Anova and multiple regression analysis techniques in this study.

Keywords: Wellness Event, Event Destination Development, Wellness and Middle East Tourist, Wellness Activity Development

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Purpose/Problem Statement

This conceptual paper aims to explore wellness event destination development from two different perspectives, including the perception of event organizer and Middle East tourists. Currently, wellness activity usually offers by individual local businesses, for example the program can be part of hotel package, or tour operator program. Nowadays, a wellness event become new trend among tourists as can be seen from many destinations, for example the Mountain Rise Festival in Chingmai, Thailand (Mountain Rise, 2025). The wellness event program, included emotional detox, healing loneliness, forest bathing, yoga, sound healing, ayurveda, meditation (Mountain Rise, 2025).

Therefore, to organize the wellness event will need a special skills and knowledge, not merely related to event management, but the wellness activities instructors. To develop the event successfully, it crucial to have event management strategic planning and policies well in advance to improve the well-being of tourists (Costa, Quintela, & Mendes, 2014). In terms of event research, it was found that several areas have been explored, but not related to wellness event, especially for Muslim tourist. Extensive studies have examined the impacts of COVID-19 on the MICE industry, both prior to and following the pandemic (Aburumman, 2020; Disimulacion, 2021; Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2022; Litvinova-Kulikova, Aliyeva, & David, 2023; Yuan, Lin, & Wang, 2025); MICE and sustainability (Millar & Park, 2018; Ogembo, 2018; Pališ & Siwek, 2024; Wee, Mustapha, & Anas, 2021); stakeholder perception related event also investigated (Alanzeh, Al-Badarneh, Al-Mkhadmeh, & Jawabreh, 2019; Millar & Park, 2018; Warintarawej, Thongsri, Seksan, & Marchoo, 2025); MICE marketing (Napitupulu, 2024; Tinnish & Mangal, 2012).

Originality/value

Event management has been extensively discussed in academic and professional contexts for many years, the emergence of wellness tourism at various destinations has received increasing attention. However, limited models have been proposed that integrate wellness tourism with event planning at a destination, particularly wellness activities context. This paper fulfils this gap by proposing a framework for incorporating a holistic wellness activity into events, with a focus on venues that are inherently conducive to wellness experiences such as resorts, national parks, and other tranquil environments.

Design/methodology/approach

A mixed-methods approach will be employed, incorporating in-depth interviews and survey questionnaires targeting Middle East tourists. Data will be analyzed using content analysis for qualitative insights and multiple regression analysis for quantitative evaluation.

Findings/Discussion

This is a conceptual paper

Theoretical implications

This study proposed a theoretical framework for halal wellness event destination development in South East Asia.

Practical implications

This study will contribute by providing a wellness event development practice, specifically tailored for wellness event organizers, especially catering to Muslim tourists from Middle East. Moreover, the event development will serve as a guideline for various organizations, both non-profit and for-profit, including government bodies, to help shape halal wellness policies at tourism destinations, especially to serve Muslim tourists.

Social implications (Policy contribution)

The result can be foster local well-being within the host community by encouraging collaboration with stakeholders for event planning. Additionally, the findings of the study can enhance destination sustainability, benefiting both the environment and local culture, as wellness development largely depends on nature and authenticity.

Research limitations

The sample for this study focuses on tourists from the Middle East. While the target population may benefit from further specificity, this limitation can be addressed through data collection methods such as online surveys via Google Forms and direct outreach to Middle Eastern communities with an interest in participating in wellness events and workshops in Thailand.

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DEVELOPING AUTHENTIC SPIRITUAL TOURISM EXPERIENCES THROUGH MINDFULNESS RETREATS IN THAILAND: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION

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Extended abstract

The rapid pace of modern life, accompanied by increasing psychological stress and uncertainty, has triggered a global rise in the search for inner peace and meaning. In response, spiritual tourism has emerged as an alternative form of travel focused on personal growth, healing, and mindfulness. Among its many manifestations, meditation retreats hosted in spiritual resort settings offer a structured and immersive experience, blending comfort with Buddhist principles.

Thailand with its strong cultural, religious, and natural assets has become a prominent destination for spiritual travellers. This study focuses on the lived experiences of tourists participating in meditation programs at a well-known spiritual retreat in Thailand. It examines their motivations, expectations, perceived benefits, and long-term behavioral outcomes, contributing new empirical insights to the under-researched area of spiritual tourism in Southeast Asia.

This research adopts a qualitative case study methodology to explore how spiritual tourists engage with meditation practices in a retreat environment. It draws upon conceptual frameworks including Zolfaghari et al.'s (2020) Spiritual Tourism Experience Scale and Pine & Gilmore's (1998) experiential economy theory, while also incorporating Buddhist-informed spiritual philosophies and identity transformation theory. The results reveal that spiritual tourism through meditation fosters not only psychological relaxation but also profound inner change and cultural immersion.

Keywords: Spiritual Tourism retreat, Mindfulness Travel, Spiritual Identity Transformation, Wellness Tourism development, Spiritual retreat in Thailand

Purpose/Problem Statement

The primary aim of this research is to investigate the effects of spiritual tourism, particularly meditation retreats in Thailand, on tourists' emotional well-being, spiritual awareness, and personal development. Despite the growing popularity of meditation as a component of wellness travel, there is a scarcity of empirical studies examining the spiritual aspects of these experiences. To accomplish this research objective, three key questions are addressed:

- What motivates tourists to participate in meditation retreats?
- How do tourists perceive and engage with spiritual practices in the retreat setting?
- What types of transformations psychological, emotional, or behavioral result from their experiences?

This study utilized a theoretical framework grounded in the six dimensions of the spiritual tourism experience measurement scale developed by Zolfaghari et al. (2020). The dimensions encompassed in this framework are transformation, healing, transcendence, atmosphere, escape, and divine connectedness. Hence, the research addresses a knowledge gap in existing tourism literature, where most prior studies have focused on spa-based wellness, pilgrimage, or religious rituals. This study positions meditation retreats as a distinct and meaningful form of spiritual travel that can contribute to sustainable tourism and holistic well-being.

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Originality/value

This research represents one of the first empirical investigations in Thailand into meditation retreat experiences, drawing insights from both local and international participants. While numerous prior studies have examined religion and pilgrimage tourism, this study specifically focuses on how structured spiritual programs engender personal transformation, thereby filling a significant gap in the spiritual tourism literature within Southeast Asia.

Design/methodology/approach

A qualitative will be employed by using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and field observation for data collecting process. The study area was chosen because a reputable spiritual retreat resort in one of a unique natural setting in Thailand. Moreover, it the area was easy to access that make potential tourist choose to take part in a spiritual activities, especially it was very well structured meditation programs, and combine with historical cultural authenticity resort for long time. The approximately 25 participants who take part in a spiritual activities will be chosen, especially those who have completed the 10 days program of speech. The selecting criteria are such as: prior attendance in at least one meditation retreat over the past two years, age over 18, and the ability to articulate their experiences. Both Thai and international tourists were included, ensuring cross-cultural representation and perception toward spiritual retreat activities experienced.

The study aimed to collect data focusing on tourists' motivations, emotional and psychological expectations, and experiences following spiritual retreat activities. Additionally, it sought to understand their intentions to revisit or participate in spiritual retreat activities and the reasons behind their behavioral intentions to return. To support this analysis, observational techniques were employed during site visits to confirm behavioral intentions and changes observed while attending the retreat, including how participants engaged in rituals, their interactions with themselves, and their dynamics with friends. Thematic content analysis was used for data analysis.

Findings/Discussion

Theoretical implications

This research contributes to the theoretical framework of spiritual tourism by integrating insights from spiritual motivation theories (Norman, 2011; Voigt et al., 2011) and experience economy theory (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). It supports the proposition that spiritual tourism experiences can be both escapist and transformative, offering long-term psychological benefits beyond temporary recreation.

Practical implications

The study underscores the market potential of spiritual tourism in Thailand, particularly through structured meditation retreats. It provides insights for retreat operators and tourism stakeholders to design programs that balance spiritual authenticity with tourist accessibility. Government bodies may also integrate such offerings into broader wellness tourism strategies to attract high-value tourists seeking meaningful experiences.

Research limitations

As the data were derived from a single case study resort and focused on tourist experiences, the findings may not be generalizable to all forms of holistic spiritual tourism. Future studies should expand to diverse retreat types, include longitudinal tracking, and explore perspectives from organizers and local communities.

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COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM MANAGEMENT FOR “MICE” IN NAKHON PATHOM PROVINCE, THAILAND.

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Abstract

This research paper "Community-based Tourism Management for “MICE” in Nakhon Pathom Province, Thailand." aimed to: (1) develop a community-based tourism management model to accommodate MICE tourists, (2) pilot the community-based tourism management model to accommodate MICE tourists and (3) elevate community-based tourism management to support MICE tourists in Nakhon Pathom province. Employing qualitative action research methods, the study focused on 4 communities: 1) Khlong Mahasawat; 2) Huai Muang Community; 3) Koh Lat E-Than and 4) Pathom Asoke Community in Nakhon Pathom Province. Data collection tools included focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and observations. They then were analysed with content analysis and descriptive summarization used for data interpretation. Findings indicated that both communities possess tourism potential across five dimensions (5A's): natural and cultural attractions, accessibility, diverse activities, comprehensive amenities, and sufficient accommodations. Additionally, sustainable community tourism management for MICE should consider five aspects: (1) safety and accessibility, (2) hospitality and memorable experiences, (3) landscape and facility management, (4) creativity in activity organization, and (5) tourist departure processes. The study also suggests that tourism communities should establish connections in travel routes and activities to diversify services for tourists through network coordination, while considering resource and environmental conservation to achieve sustainable MICE community tourism.

Keywords: Tourism Potential, Community-based Tourism, MICE

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Introduction

Tourism plays a vital role in the economies of many countries, including Thailand, where it is prioritized as a key driver of economic growth. The tourism industry significantly contributes to the national economy by generating substantial income, creating employment opportunities, and distributing wealth across regions and local communities. Under the 20-Year National Research and Innovation Strategy (2018–2037), Thailand aims to achieve economic stability through high-value services and innovation, with local culture and identity serving as core components for enhancing tourism competitiveness. In this context, community empowerment and the development of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) have emerged as critical tools for income distribution, reducing social inequality, and improving the quality of life for local residents (National Research and Innovation Policy Council, 2017).

However, the role of local communities in tourism must be actively promoted and supported through various forms of tourism development. Such engagement fosters broader income distribution and strengthens tourism potential (Choibamroong, 2009; Rocharungsat, 2010), especially in emerging forms of tourism such as creative tourism, alternative tourism, and particularly MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions) tourism.

MICE tourists those who participate in meetings, incentive trips, conventions, and exhibitions are a high-potential segment in terms of revenue generation and grassroots economic stimulation. In 2019, Thailand's MICE industry generated total revenue of 200.916 billion baht, including 107.046 billion baht from domestic MICE tourists and 93.870 billion baht from international ones (Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau, 2020). These tourists often seek meaningful experiences involving culture, nature, and environmentally friendly activities. Therefore, integrating MICE tourism with community-based tourism presents a sustainable strategy for enhancing local economic development.

An analysis of Thailand's Community-Based Tourism Strategic Plan (2016–2020) revealed that increasing the value of community resources by leveraging local identity is a key approach to fostering high-quality tourism management (*The Bureau of Local Wisdom and Community Enterprise Promotion*, 2019). However, challenges remain in terms of management mechanisms, community database development, and the establishment of service standards to meet the expectations of MICE tourists. Addressing these gaps, especially by enhancing community capacity, is essential for sustainable and inclusive tourism development.

Community-based tourism can be enhanced by leveraging MICE tourism as a supporting factor to promote income distribution to local areas. The MICE industry encompasses business meetings, incentive travel, trade shows, and exhibitions many of which incorporate corporate social and environmental responsibility (CSR) activities that often take place across various regions. These contribute to regional income distribution and encourage communities with potential to develop MICE-ready environments, particularly in hosting study visits, knowledge exchanges, or special corporate events. Community strengths rooted in creativity, local resources, and cultural identity can serve as a foundation (Jirut Isarangkun Na Ayuthaya, 2018).

A study conducted to evaluate the potential of CBT sites and formulate an action plan for creative and sustainable community-based tourism development (2018–2022) revealed a major challenge under Strategic Issue 4: Developing mechanisms and management systems linked through unified, resilient, and sustainable public-private-community networks. The study found a lack of systemic development in CBT network connectivity, insufficient community tourism databases, and a need for standardized CBT management systems based on local capacity, as well as supportive policy mechanisms (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2018).

This gap is particularly relevant for managing CBT to accommodate MICE tourists a segment with high spending potential. This also presents an opportunity to enhance community capacity for MICE tourism (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, 2017).

Nakhon Pathom Province is one of the destinations promoted under the “Must-Visit Plus Cities” campaign to target specific tourist segments arising from evolving social and technological trends by Tourism Authority of Thailand. The goal is to balance tourism distribution and income away from primary destinations to secondary cities by promoting 24 Thai-style tourism cities. This campaign aligns with the government's strategy to strengthen the grassroots economy and reduce economic disparities by using tourism as a tool. Infrastructure development, service standards, safety, and marketing efforts have been emphasized (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2018; Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2022). Moreover, the province located near Bangkok, hosts community-based attractions across all districts. These communities offer rich resources, diverse local cultures, riverside lifestyles, organic farming, local cuisine, wellness products, and recreational and sports activities. The province has since implemented a Domestic Destination

Marketing strategy to promote alternative destinations with high tourism potential (Nakhon Pathom Provincial Office, 2018).

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered MICE tourists' behavior. MICE tourists now prefer secondary cities over crowded main destinations and seek new experiences, aligning with the "workcation" trend working while traveling (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2021). This presents an opportunity to proactively develop MICE-friendly community tourism in Nakhon Pathom.

However, communities in Nakhon Pathom currently lack the capability to host MICE tourists. They lack sustainable CBT management systems, MICE-specific programs, effective marketing and communication, distribution channels, and essential partnerships to support MICE tourism development (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, 2019).

In response to these issues, a pilot study was conducted to explore spatial development and reduce disparities. The study identified four communities with potential to elevate CBT to support MICE tourism:

1. Khlong Maha Sawat Community – known for its riverside way of life, ideal for lifestyle-oriented MICE activities.
2. Huai Muang Community – recognized for its cuisine, particularly shrimp-based dishes, suitable for culinary-focused MICE learning activities.
3. Ko Lat E-Than Community – famous for pomelo orchards, offering agricultural-based MICE programs.
4. Pathom Asoke Community – known for health and wellness products, fitting for nature therapy and wellness MICE experiences.

While these communities possess tourism potential and activity programs, they still lack a systematic MICE management framework. The study proposed developing CBT-based MICE management models by improving organizational processes, enhancing personnel systems and mechanisms, and optimizing tourism activities. The goal is to transform these four communities into MICE model communities under the "Must-Visit Plus City" initiative in Nakhon Pathom Province.

Research Objectives

1. To develop a community-based tourism management model to accommodate MICE tourists.
2. To pilot the community-based tourism management model to accommodate MICE tourists.
3. To elevate community-based tourism management to support MICE tourists in Nakhon Pathom province.

Literature Review

Tourism Potential

The *Tourism Authority of Thailand (2021)* emphasizes that the study of a tourist destination's potential must consider several key factors of the area. These include five main components: (1) Accessibility, (2) Attractions, (3) Tourism Activities, (4) Amenities, and (5) Accommodation. These five factors can serve as initial indicators for evaluating the potential of a tourist site (Chuamuangphan, 2024; Sopanik, Sai Sing-ton, & Pakdeepairrote, 2020). Assessing these factors enables the effective planning and development of tourism resources aligned with sustainable tourism development.

Community-Based Tourism (CBT)

The concept of Community-Based Tourism (CBT), also referred to simply as community tourism, emphasizes local management, whereby residents take key roles in determining the direction, format, and process of tourism while receiving direct benefits and having a stake in tourism activities (Rocharungsat, 2010). Key features of CBT include the conservation of natural and cultural resources, supplemental income generation, quality of life enhancement, and pride in traditional ways of life (Karacaoğlu & Birdir, 2017). CBT management involves leveraging unique natural resources, minimizing environmental impacts, promoting cultural and lifestyle learning, and encouraging community participation from planning through implementation (Sarobon, 2014).

CBT further supports grassroots economic strengthening, ecosystem restoration, and the creation of value-added products such as local handicrafts, organic farming, and alternative occupations (Wasi, 2016). The success of CBT relies on community co-management, cultural pride, highlighting local uniqueness, and preparation to host tourists. The outcomes include economic and social benefits and enriching tourism experiences, while maintaining community identity and sustainability (Karacaoğlu & Birdir, 2017; Mtapuri et al., 2022).

Three essential factors for CBT management are:

1. Community potential – Rich natural and cultural assets that attract tourists interested in simple, traditional lifestyles.
2. Human resources – Active community leadership and citizen participation in decision-making, planning, and managing tourism with warmth and hospitality.
3. Management capacity – Development of tourism programs, establishment of clear regulations, and provision of infrastructure supporting tourism activities (Jatujittiphan, 2014; Khawijarn, 2017).

The management process begins with assessing the community's readiness in terms of resources, lifestyles, and participation. This is followed by forming local management bodies, developing human and physical capacity (e.g., local guide training, homestay improvement, and activity planning), and implementing continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure adaptability and resilience to impacts (Khakhanmanee, 2016; Khawijarn, 2017).

Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism focuses on balancing economic, social, and environmental impacts while conserving natural and cultural resources and encouraging community participation (UN Tourism, 2023). The concept is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially in reducing inequality, promoting decent employment, and managing natural resources effectively (Hall & Page, 2016).

Literature and research also stress the need for strategic planning, visitor management, awareness-building, and behavioral change among tourists and operators to accommodate industry growth without long-term harm. Examples include promoting CBT, clean energy use, and environmental impact assessment as core strategies for sustainable management (Palmer & Chuamuangphan, 2021).

MICE Tourism

MICE tourism (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions) is part of the business tourism sector, involving organizational meetings, incentive travel, professional conventions, and trade shows. It spans various sectors such as commerce, transport, leisure, and events, aiming to enhance organizational effectiveness and knowledge exchange among participants (Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau, 2020).

Expanding MICE into communities presents an important opportunity to boost local income and showcase local charm. "OTOP Nawatwithi" communities play a vital role in promoting MICE activities through cultural presentations, traditions, and local products, often in collaboration with destination management companies to create high-value, unique experiences. This collaboration helps redistribute income to grassroots economies. In 2019, Thailand's MICE industry generated over 212.9 billion baht in revenue (Isarangkul Na Ayuthaya, 2019; Suthat Na Ayathaya, 2019).

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design combining documentary analysis, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions to explore community-based tourism (CBT) mechanisms for supporting MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions) tourism in "Must-Visit Plus" communities in Nakhon Pathom province. The selected communities included Khlong Maha Sawat, Ko Lat E-Than, Pathom Asoke, and Huai Muang. The research population comprised stakeholders engaged in CBT and MICE-related tourism development in these communities, including representatives from both the public and private sectors.

A purposive sampling method was employed to select key informants based on their expertise, experience, and direct involvement in community tourism initiatives. The study was conducted in two phases.

Phase 1 focused on analyzing existing CBT mechanisms for accommodating MICE tourists. Data were gathered from 52 key informants (13 participants per community), including community leaders, community members, local entrepreneurs (in accommodation and food & beverage services), academics specializing in CBT and MICE, and officials from relevant public and private sector organizations such as the Nakhon Pathom Provincial Community Development Office and the Federation of Thai Industries (Nakhon Pathom Chapter).

In this phase, a semi-structured in-depth interview guide served as the primary research instrument. Interviews were designed to capture stakeholders' perspectives on the planning, organization, and implementation of tourism activities under local community-based systems. The reliability and validity of the data were ensured through triangulation, including data triangulation (comparing information from multiple sources), investigator triangulation (involving more than one researcher in data analysis), and time triangulation (conducting interviews across different time periods). The collected qualitative data were analyzed using thematic and content analysis techniques.

Phase 2 involved developing a community-based tourism management model to enhance the communities' capacity to host MICE tourists. This phase utilized a structured focus group discussion guide as the research instrument, which addressed organizational structure, role distribution, and effective tourism management approaches tailored for MICE contexts. The focus group discussions included 20 participants: 12 community leaders (3 from each community), 3 academic experts, and 5 representatives from public and private agencies.

As in Phase 1, triangulation was used to ensure data reliability and validity across data sources, researchers, and timing. The qualitative data collected during the discussions were also analyzed using content analysis methods to extract key themes and inform model development.

Results

1) The development of community-based tourism management model to accommodate MICE tourists.

The development of a community-based tourism management model began with an in-depth study of the four communities: Ko Lat E-Tan, Khlong Mahasawat, Huai Muang, and Pathom Asoke. Each community demonstrated unique cultural assets and management capacities that required a tailored approach. For instance, Ko Lat E-Tan's strong local governance and communal participation provided a foundation to design inclusive decision-making frameworks. Khlong Mahasawat, with its vibrant cultural heritage, highlighted the need for integrating cultural preservation with tourism infrastructure development. Huai Muang's emphasis on environmental sustainability guided the incorporation of eco-friendly practices within the model. Lastly, Pathom Asoke's well-organized community structure facilitated the creation of roles and responsibilities that align with MICE tourist expectations. This model focused on balancing community empowerment, sustainable resource management, and meeting the service standards demanded by MICE tourists.

2) The pilot of the community-based tourism management model to accommodate MICE tourists.

Following model development, pilot implementations were conducted in the four communities to test the applicability and effectiveness of the tourism management framework. At Ko Lat E-Tan, pilot activities emphasized participatory planning sessions with community leaders and MICE stakeholders, ensuring practical alignment with the local context. Khlong Mahasawat piloted cultural workshops and eco-tourism packages designed to attract MICE groups while safeguarding traditions. In Huai Muang, pilot efforts focused on sustainable tourism practices, such as waste management and green transportation options.

tailored for event participants. Pathom Asoke piloted service training for community members, improving hospitality standards specific to MICE tourists. These pilots provided valuable feedback for refining the management model and demonstrated the potential to scale up the approach across the province.

3) The elevation of community-based tourism management to support MICE tourists in Nakhon Pathom province.

Building upon pilot successes, efforts to elevate community-based tourism management involved strategic integration with local government policies and MICE industry partnerships. Ko Lat E-Tan leveraged its governance network to formalize tourism committees and secure funding for infrastructure enhancements. Khlong Mahasawat partnered with cultural organizations to promote authentic experiences to MICE clients while protecting heritage sites. Huai Muang expanded environmental initiatives into province-wide campaigns, positioning itself as a model for sustainable MICE tourism. Pathom Asoke enhanced community training programs and developed marketing materials targeting MICE event planners. Collectively, these advancements fostered stronger community resilience, enhanced visitor satisfaction, and contributed to the sustainable growth of MICE tourism in Nakhon Pathom.

Comparison Table of Community-Based Tourism Management Mechanisms

Community	Management Scale	Managing Organization	Key Features	Current Status
Ko Lat E-Tan	Medium (10–15)	Ko Lat E-Tan Community Tourism Enterprise	Multi-point tram tours; collaboration across 3 subdistricts; strong public-private partnership	Structured, active
Khlong Maha Sawat	Large (30+)	Agro-Tourism & Housewives' Groups	Boat tours; strong leadership; committee-based structure with clear roles and communication channels	Well-established, systematic
Huai Muang	Small (5–10)	Shrimp Farmers' Community Enterprise (emerging)	Agro-tourism and Lao Khrang lifestyle; single point of contact; One-Stop Service model	Under development, needs support

Table 1: Comparison Table of Community-Based Tourism Management Mechanisms

Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of community-based tourism (CBT) management mechanisms aimed at supporting MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourists in Nakhon Pathom's "Must-Not-Miss Plus" cities reveals the diversity and adaptability of community organizational structures depending on their local contexts, development stages, and resource availability. These management structures can be classified into three scales: small (5–10 members), medium (10–15 members), and large (more than 15 members). Each community studied exhibits a unique model of tourism governance reflective of their specific needs and capacities.

For instance, the Koh Lat E-Tan community operates its tourism under a community enterprise group with substantial support from the Rai Khing Subdistrict Municipality, demonstrating effective collaboration between local government and community initiatives. This reflects principles highlighted by *Palmer, N.J., and Chuamuangphan, N. (2021)* who emphasize the importance of local leadership and multi-stakeholder involvement in tourism management committees (Rochrungsat, P., 2010). Similarly, the Khlong Maha Sawat community employs a model managed primarily through the Ban Sala Din Tour Guide Group, which plays a central role in coordinating tourism activities, showcasing the effectiveness of dedicated leadership within community tourism networks.

In contrast, both Huai Muang and Pathom Asoke communities utilize the One-Stop Service model, with a single appointed leader orchestrating tourism development efforts. This centralized management approach allows for streamlined decision-making and coordination, which is crucial in enhancing operational efficiency. The model aligns with suggestions from *Isarakul Na Ayuthaya J., (2019)* on the need for clear organizational roles and responsibilities to elevate community tourism into the realm of creative and high-value tourism products (Khawijarn U., 2017).

Across all communities, the success of CBT models in accommodating MICE tourists hinges on several critical factors. Community readiness and capacity-building emerge as foundational elements. Training programs focused on hospitality, tourism marketing, heritage interpretation, and service quality are necessary to meet the expectations of MICE visitors, who often seek immersive cultural experiences and professional event environments (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau – TCEB, 2020). The establishment of tourism committees or management groups with clear objectives, pricing strategies, benefit-sharing plans, and impact mitigation measures ensures sustainable and equitable tourism growth.

Moreover, these CBT models emphasize the integration of tourism management with broader community development goals, consistent with the literature advocating for tourism as a tool for local socioeconomic empowerment (Sopanik Sai Sington S., and Pakdeepairote N., (2020); Tourism Authority of Thailand, (2021). Forming community councils or platforms enhances local participation and democratic decision-making, which are essential for maintaining community cohesion and ownership over tourism resources.

From a practical standpoint, the readiness of communities must be assessed alongside city-level infrastructure and capabilities, especially given the specific demands of MICE tourism. Suthat Na Ayathaya, S. (2019) identifies key criteria such as accessibility, urban infrastructure, leisure activity availability, accommodation readiness, event venue quality, city branding, environmental quality, and safety as benchmarks for MICE city preparedness. Ensuring that community tourism initiatives align with these criteria is vital for attracting and retaining MICE tourists, who contribute significantly to local economies through high-value expenditures.

In summary, the development of three CBT management models tailored to small, medium, and large-scale community structures reflects a flexible and context-sensitive approach to managing tourism in Nakhon Pathom's "Must-Not-Miss Plus" cities. These models not only address the immediate organizational needs of community tourism but also align with national strategies promoting sustainable, creative, and community-empowered tourism development. The findings underscore that successful CBT management for MICE requires a combination of strong local leadership, community capacity-building, strategic planning, and integration with city-wide infrastructure and branding efforts.

Research recommendations

Recommendations for Application of Research Findings

The research findings indicate that when appropriate systems and mechanisms for community-based tourism (CBT) management are established, community members are capable of managing tourism activities to support MICE tourists. Therefore, the CBT management structure for MICE tourism developed in this study can be adapted and applied to other communities that aim to support MICE tourism.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies are recommended to explore the following areas:

1. Assessment of the Potential of Community-Based Tourism Management to Support MICE Tourists in "Must-Not-Miss Plus" cities in Nakhon Pathom Province.
2. Development of Competencies among Local Tourism Personnel for managing MICE tourism in communities, in order to enhance local tourism and promote sustainable development at the grassroots level.

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MOTIVATION AS INFLUENCE TO ADJUSTMENT OF COMMUNITY – BASED TOURISM MANAGEMENT AFTER THE COVID-19

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Abstract

This study analyzes Motivation as Influence to Adjustment of Community – based tourism management after the COVID-19. The sample consisted of 400 stakeholders from three model communities: Khun Tham Thachalom (Samut Sakhon), Wat Tha Khanun (Kanchanaburi), and Ban Tha Makham (Ratchaburi). These communities were chosen for their potential and alignment with national strategies for promoting tourism to distribute income to local areas. However, the Thai tourism sector was severely impacted by COVID-19, particularly in accommodation and facilities, which were the most affected areas due to travel restrictions, necessitating adaptation.

The study found that demographic factors of stakeholders, including gender, age, education level, average income, and domicile, had no influence on CBT management adaptation. However, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations significantly influenced adaptation. Prominent intrinsic motivations included the need for achievement and growth, while key extrinsic motivations were safety concerns and stress arising from the crisis. The resulting adaptations were primarily physical, such as the adoption of digital technology and adjustments to service models in line with new ways of living. This research fills a gap in the literature regarding motivations for adaptation and proposes guidelines for government agencies, private sectors, and community tourism owners to plan and strengthen communities to sustainably cope with future crises.

Keywords: Community-based tourism, motivation, stakeholders, impact of COVID-19

Research Objectives

1. To study the Motivation as Influence to Adjustment of Community – based tourism management after the COVID-19

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Introduction

Tourism has always been a central pillar of Thailand's economy, as reflected in the 20- Year National Strategy (2018–2037), particularly under Strategy 2 : Enhancing Competitiveness. This strategy aims to ensure Thailand's prosperity and sustainability through multifaceted development, including the promotion of tourism as a key driver for long-term community income generation. (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, n.d.) Before the COVID-19 crisis, tourism not only generated over 3 trillion baht in annual revenue and created employment for more than 7 million people, but it also served as a critical mechanism for distributing economic opportunities to local communities. This aligns with the vision of the Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA), which emphasizes the use of tourism as a tool for sustainable community development encompassing economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. (Bank of Thailand, 2023; DASTA, n.d.)

However, the outbreak of COVID-19 since 2021 has had a severe impact on Thailand's tourism sector. Tourism revenues declined significantly, particularly from international tourists. Tourism-related businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and tour operators were hit especially hard, causing major challenges for many key tourist provinces. (TTB Economic Analysis Center, 2021)

In addition, lockdown measures and travel restrictions adversely affected travelers' confidence and contributed to a broader economic downturn across the country. (Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health, 2020; Kasikorn Research Center, 2021) Although the tourism sector began to recover in 2024, the adaptive capacity of local communities remains a critical issue. Limited access to technology, along with financial constraints, has prevented many communities from fully leveraging online platforms and modern marketing tools. This has resulted in reduced competitiveness and limited access to new markets. (Krungsri Research, 2021) These challenges highlight the urgent need to promote "sustainable tourism" that emphasizes community participation, aiming to reduce inequality and ensure equitable income distribution.

According to the survey, high-potential communities such as the Wat Tha Khanun Moral Community in Kanchanaburi, the Ban Tha Makham Moral Community in Ratchaburi, and the Ban Tha Chalom Moral Community in Samut Sakhon have demonstrated strong adaptive capabilities. These communities have integrated their unique religious, artistic, cultural, and local wisdom elements into tourism development. They have also adopted technology for promotional purposes and emphasized the quality of products and services, reflecting a growth-oriented approach to adaptation. (Public Relations Department, 2023) Given the aforementioned circumstances and challenges, stakeholders involved in community-based tourism have been widely affected and remain at risk of facing unforeseen situations in the future (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2021; Suthiphan Jitpimonmas, 2020; Paweena Ngamprapasom, 2022; Kanchalika Uttamakaew et al., 2021) Most previous research has focused on the impacts and recovery of tourist destinations. However, there remains a lack of in-depth study on the motivational factors influencing the adaptation of community-based tourism management in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the researcher is interested in exploring this issue to gain a deeper understanding of the driving forces that encourage stakeholders to adapt and respond effectively to challenges.

Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research approach, using an online questionnaire to collect data. The researcher checked data completeness and accuracy before analyzing it using SPSS statistical software. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to evaluate the level of motivation influencing adaptation, while inferential statistics were applied through Independent Sample T-tests and Multiple Linear Regression Analysis.

Research Findings

Motivations influencing community-based tourism management adaptation after COVID-19 include significant internal motivations such as the desire for achievement, power, growth, and safety which all had statistically significant effects at the 0.05 level. Similarly, significant external motivations included stress, perceived benefits, and safety, all of which also had a statistically significant impact on adaptation.

The pandemic brought sudden changes in income, business opportunities, and life stability, making internal motivations such as the desire for success and career growth key driving forces for adapting practices. These included launching new products and services or developing skills aligned with the needs of modern tourists. Concurrently, external motivations such as stress and insecurity acted as pressure points prompting learning, adaptation, and solutions responsive to the changing environment.

In particular, there was heightened awareness of safety and hygiene measures, which played a role in restoring tourist confidence. These findings suggest that sustainable CBT development and recovery should take into account both internal and external stakeholder motivations. This would foster adaptive strategies that align with each community's unique context, enabling long-term resilience.

The results align with the study by Sayompoo Pichesthanawin (2022), who examined tourist motivations to visit Don Wai Floating Market during COVID-19. That study found that government aid programs such as “Khon La Khrueng” (Half-Half Co-Payment) had a statistically significant influence on travel decisions, providing meaningful support across occupations and helping grassroots populations during the crisis.

Recommendations

1. Future studies should incorporate additional behavioral theories relevant to stakeholder adaptation in CBT management such as Herzberg's Motivation Theory to compare results and deepen understanding of adaptive mechanisms.
2. The sample group should be expanded to include a broader range of CBT stakeholders, especially those directly involved in tourism management, such as local government agencies (e.g., Sub-district Administrative Organizations or Provincial Cultural Offices).
3. The study area should be extended to communities with different geographic and tourism management characteristics. This includes northern mountain communities focusing on agro- and ethnic tourism, southern coastal communities practicing marine conservation tourism, and urban communities offering contemporary cultural tourism. This would allow for comparative analysis of adaptation models, management strategies, and motivations in diverse CBT contexts.

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Room 3
Tourism Segments and Travel Behavior

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF THAI INFLUENCERS IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

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Abstract

The proliferation of social media has significantly reshaped the tourism industry, positioning influencers as pivotal agents in destination marketing and tourist decision-making processes. This study investigates the communication strategies employed by Thai macro influencers within the tourism domain, with particular emphasis on narrative construction, cultural representation, and the utilization of digital engagement tools. Adopting a mixed-methods research design, the study includes a qualitative content analysis of five prominent Thai macro influencers to examine how they develop persuasive travel narratives, convey authenticity, and shape audience perceptions. To triangulate the qualitative insights, quantitative data were obtained via a structured questionnaire administered to 109 followers of these influencers. The survey assessed audience perceptions regarding content quality, authenticity, trustworthiness, engagement behaviors, and travel intentions in response to influencer-generated tourism content. The results offer a meaningful contribution to the body of knowledge on influencer marketing, underscoring the critical role of cultural authenticity and strategic audience engagement in the context of digital tourism promotion.

Keywords: Communication Strategies, Thai Influencers, Tourism Industry, Social Media Marketing, Destination Branding, Consumer Engagement, Cultural Authenticity

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Introduction

The advent of social media has significantly transformed the global tourism landscape, creating new avenues for travel promotion and destination branding. Among the most influential agents in this transformation are social media influencers, whose curated content and personal brand narratives shape the travel decisions of millions. In Thailand a country celebrated for its rich cultural heritage and diverse tourism offerings social media influencers have become pivotal in highlighting both mainstream and emerging travel destinations. Despite their growing importance, there remains a gap in the academic literature regarding how Thai influencers strategically craft their communication to promote tourism effectively. This study aims to address this void by exploring the communication strategies employed by Thai influencers on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. It investigates how these strategies are influenced by cultural context, audience engagement goals, and the dynamics of digital marketing in the tourism industry.

Research Questions

1. What are the key communication strategies used by Thai influencers in tourism promotion?
2. How do cultural elements influence the content and messaging of Thai tourism influencers?
3. What is the perceived impact of these communication strategies on audience engagement and travel intentions?

Literature Review

1. The Role of Influencers in Tourism Marketing

In recent years, social media influencers have emerged as vital agents in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in the tourism and hospitality industries. Influencers function as content creators who combine personal storytelling with persuasive marketing techniques, allowing them to directly affect travel decisions and destination perceptions (Gretzel, 2018). With their large followings, influencers offer travel-related content that is often perceived as more trustworthy and authentic than traditional advertisements. According to Kim and Kim (2017), this shift in consumer trust has enabled influencers to become key players in destination branding and tourism promotion.

The rise of platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube has further amplified the visibility of influencers, enabling them to produce visually rich, shareable content. This content plays a dual role: it satisfies audiences' desires for entertainment and inspiration while also subtly directing them toward specific tourism services or destinations. Influencers often blend personal travel experiences with brand-sponsored messages, creating a hybrid communication model that balances commercial intent with perceived authenticity (Abidin, 2016).

Communication Strategies of Influencers

Several communication strategies have been identified as particularly effective in the context of influencer marketing. Storytelling is a central technique, allowing influencers to emotionally engage audiences by sharing personal narratives that are relatable and immersive (Gretzel, 2018). Visual storytelling through curated images and video is equally important. As argued by Kim and Kim (2017), well-crafted visual content significantly boosts user engagement, increasing the likelihood of shares, likes, and comments, which are key metrics for influencer success.

In addition to storytelling and visual aesthetics, influencers utilize interactive strategies to foster engagement. This includes posing questions to followers, responding to comments, using polls or quizzes, and encouraging user-generated content through hashtags or challenges. These tactics are part of a broader strategy to build parasocial relationships one-sided but emotionally significant connections between influencers and followers which enhance trust and influence (Meyers, 2019).

A particularly relevant strategy in the tourism context is the emphasis on "experience-based promotion." Influencers often portray themselves as explorers or cultural insiders, offering a behind-the-scenes look at destinations, cuisines, and local customs. This type of content provides both practical travel information and aspirational narratives, which are especially effective in influencing millennial and Gen Z audiences (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014).

Cultural Authenticity in Influencer Content

Cultural authenticity has become a core component of effective influencer marketing, particularly in tourism, where the representation of culture plays a significant role in shaping destination image. In the Thai context, influencers frequently integrate local traditions, festivals, language, and cuisine into their content to construct an authentic cultural narrative. As Abidin (2016) highlights, authenticity is not merely about factual accuracy, but about aligning the content with audience expectations and cultural resonance.

This focus on authenticity aligns with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that audiences actively seek content that meets specific psychological and social needs such as identity formation, escapism, and social interaction (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). By providing culturally rich and emotionally resonant content, Thai influencers enable audiences to vicariously experience aspects of Thai culture, thereby fulfilling their informational and emotional gratifications.

Moreover, cultural representation in influencer content has implications for ethical marketing and sustainable tourism. Influencers who accurately and respectfully portray local culture contribute to cultural preservation and community empowerment. However, those who commodify or misrepresent culture may reinforce stereotypes or contribute to over-tourism in already saturated destinations (Tham, Croy, & Mair, 2013). Therefore, understanding how Thai influencers negotiate these dynamics is essential for both theoretical and practical insights into tourism marketing.

Influencers as Co-Creators of Destination Brands

Traditionally, destination branding was the domain of national tourism boards and professional marketers. However, the emergence of influencers has democratized the process, enabling ordinary individuals with a digital following to participate in shaping the image and narrative of tourism destinations. According to Gretzel (2018), influencers act as "co-creators" of brand meaning, particularly when they produce user-generated content that is widely disseminated and shared.

In Thailand, influencer collaborations with the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and local businesses have become increasingly common. These partnerships not only increase influencer credibility but also expand the visibility of less-explored or rural destinations. This aligns with global efforts to promote more equitable tourism distribution and reduce the environmental pressures on iconic tourist spots.

Furthermore, the co-creation model allows for more diverse and localized storytelling. Influencers from different regions, backgrounds, and language groups contribute unique perspectives that enrich the overall destination narrative. As a result, influencer marketing becomes not only a promotional tool but also a cultural dialogue that enhances national branding in a globalized media landscape.

Challenges and Limitations in Influencer Marketing

Despite its many advantages, influencer marketing in tourism is not without challenges. One major issue is the tension between authenticity and commercialization. As influencers increasingly rely on sponsored content for income, their perceived credibility may diminish, especially if promotional content lacks transparency (Meyers, 2019). Thai influencers must balance commercial partnerships with personal integrity to maintain audience trust.

Cultural sensitivity is another concern. In presenting Thai culture to global audiences, influencers must be mindful of avoiding cultural appropriation, misrepresentation, or the trivialization of cultural practices. The complexity of navigating these issues highlights the need for media literacy and ethical guidelines for influencers operating in the tourism space (Tham et al., 2013).

Finally, the rapidly changing nature of social media platforms means that successful strategies today may be obsolete tomorrow. Algorithm changes, audience fatigue, and platform migration all pose risks to influencer sustainability. Therefore, adaptive strategies and continuous learning are critical for long-term success in this field.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative content analysis and a quantitative survey to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the communication strategies used by Thai macro influencers in the tourism sector. This methodological triangulation enhances the validity, reliability, and depth of the findings by capturing both observable content and subjective perceptions from multiple data sources.

This study analyzed the content of five Thai macro-influencers @bas_gowentgo, @cul-len_hateberry, @pigkaploy, @wahncai, and @farosestudio across Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube over a six-month period. Using qualitative content analysis, the study examined four key dimensions: thematic focus, visual and aesthetic presentation, linguistic and narrative strategies, and audience engagement metrics (e.g., likes, comments, shares). The objective was to identify recurring patterns and culturally embedded narratives that shape their tourism promotion strategies.

Table 1 : Sampling Framework

Criteria	Description	Rationale
Follower Threshold	>100K followers	Ensures influencer reach
Platform Diversity	Instagram, TikTok, YouTube	Captures cross-platform strategies
Content Focus	80%+ tourism-related posts	Aligns with study objectives

To complement the qualitative findings, quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 109 audience members who follow Thai macro influencers. The survey focused on measuring their perceptions of content quality and authenticity, trust and credibility, engagement behaviors, and travel intentions after being exposed to influencer-generated tourism content.

This integrated mixed-methods approach allows for a holistic understanding of how Thai macro influencers craft tourism narratives, how audiences respond, and what strategies are most effective within Thailand's socio-cultural and digital contexts.

Findings

The qualitative result is an expanded qualitative content analysis of the five Thai travel influencers across Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube over the past six months. This analysis examines their thematic focus, visual and aesthetic presentation, linguistic and narrative strategies, and audience engagement metrics to identify recurring patterns and culturally embedded narratives in their tourism promotion strategies.

@bas_gowentgo (Bas – Go Went Go) Instagram:

- **Thematic Focus:** Showcases immersive travel experiences, highlighting hidden gems and local cultures within Thailand.
- **Visual & Aesthetic Presentation:** High-quality, cinematic visuals with a focus on storytelling.
- **Linguistic & Narrative Strategies:** Friendly and informative tone, sharing personal anecdotes and travel tips.
- **Audience Engagement Metrics:** Specific Instagram engagement metrics are not available; however, the account has a substantial following, indicating significant audience interest.

TikTok:

- Thematic Focus: Cultural and historical travel, including hiking and trekking adventures.
- Visual & Aesthetic Presentation: Engaging short-form videos capturing scenic landscapes and cultural sites.
- Linguistic & Narrative Strategies: Concise narratives with a focus on visual storytelling.
- Audience Engagement Metrics: 957K followers, 8.30% engagement rate, averaging 109.2K views and 437.5 shares per post.

YouTube:

- Thematic Focus: In-depth travel documentaries exploring various destinations.
- Visual & Aesthetic Presentation: Professional-quality videos with comprehensive coverage of travel experiences.
- Linguistic & Narrative Strategies: Detailed narratives providing insights into local cultures and attractions.
- Audience Engagement Metrics: 1.19M subscribers; specific engagement metrics are not available.

@cullen_hateberry (Cullen Hateberry) Instagram:

- Thematic Focus: Cultural exploration, blending Thai traditions with a Korean perspective.
- Visual & Aesthetic Presentation: Vibrant and engaging visuals, often featuring local festivals and culinary experiences.
- Linguistic & Narrative Strategies: Bilingual content in Thai and Korean, enhancing cross-cultural appeal.
- Audience Engagement Metrics: Specific Instagram engagement metrics are not available; however, the account has a substantial following, indicating significant audience interest.

TikTok:

- Thematic Focus: Short-form travel content highlighting cultural experiences.
- Visual & Aesthetic Presentation: Dynamic videos capturing the essence of destinations.
- Linguistic & Narrative Strategies: Bilingual storytelling catering to both Thai and Korean audiences.
- Audience Engagement Metrics: Specific TikTok engagement metrics are not available.

YouTube:

- Thematic Focus: Travel vlogs focusing on cultural immersion and exploration.
- Visual & Aesthetic Presentation: High-quality videos with engaging storytelling.
- Linguistic & Narrative Strategies: Bilingual narratives that resonate with a diverse audience.
- Audience Engagement Metrics: 2.9M subscribers, 3.75% engagement rate, averaging 2M views per video.

@pigkaploy (เด็กหญิงพลอยไพลิน) Instagram:

- Thematic Focus: Solo travel adventures, nature exploration, and cultural immersion.
- Visual & Aesthetic Presentation: Serene landscapes and authentic cultural experiences with a minimalist aesthetic.
- Linguistic & Narrative Strategies: Conversational tone, sharing personal reflections and travel stories.
- Audience Engagement Metrics: 1M followers, 2.53% engagement rate, averaging 25.3K likes and 38 comments per post.

TikTok:

- Thematic Focus: Short-form travel content emphasizing cultural experiences and nature.
- Visual & Aesthetic Presentation: Engaging videos with a focus on scenic beauty and cultural elements.
- Linguistic & Narrative Strategies: Conversational and relatable storytelling.
- Audience Engagement Metrics: 1.2M followers, 12.64% engagement rate, averaging 192.5K views, 33.2K likes, 235 comments, and 582 shares per post.

YouTube:

- Thematic Focus: Comprehensive travel vlogs showcasing various destinations and experiences.
- Visual & Aesthetic Presentation: High-quality videos with a focus on storytelling and cultural insights.
- Linguistic & Narrative Strategies: Personal narratives that engage viewers through authentic experiences.
- Audience Engagement Metrics: 1.6M subscribers, 6.30% engagement rate, averaging 298.6K views per video.

@wahncai (อาสาพาไปหลง) Instagram:

- Thematic Focus: Cultural and historical travel, exploring Thailand's rich heritage.
- Visual & Aesthetic Presentation: Informative visuals highlighting historical sites and cultural practices.
- Linguistic & Narrative Strategies: Educational tone providing in-depth insights into Thailand's history and culture.
- Audience Engagement Metrics: 246.5K followers, 1.23% engagement rate, averaging 3K likes and 8 comments per post.

TikTok:

- Thematic Focus: Short-form videos focusing on cultural and historical travel within Thailand.
- Visual & Aesthetic Presentation: Engaging content showcasing traditional practices and historical sites.
- Linguistic & Narrative Strategies: Educational narratives aimed at informing viewers about Thai culture.
- Audience Engagement Metrics: 535.7K followers, 5.49% engagement rate, averaging 97K views and 450.5 shares per post.

YouTube:

- Thematic Focus: In-depth explorations of Thailand's cultural and historical landmarks.
- Visual & Aesthetic Presentation: Informative videos with detailed coverage of cultural sites.
- Linguistic & Narrative Strategies: Educational storytelling providing historical context and cultural insights.
- Audience Engagement Metrics: Specific YouTube engagement metrics are not available; however, the channel has a significant following, indicating strong viewer interest.

@farosestudio Instagram:

- Thematic Focus: Creative travel content blending art and exploration.
- Visual & Aesthetic Presentation: Artistic visuals incorporating design elements to highlight destinations.
- Linguistic & Narrative Strategies: Creative narratives often told through visual art and design.
- Audience Engagement Metrics: Specific Instagram engagement metrics are not available; however, the account's unique approach suggests a niche yet engaged audience.

TikTok:

- Thematic Focus: Short-form creative travel content with an artistic flair.
- Visual & Aesthetic Presentation: Innovative videos combining travel and design elements.
- Linguistic & Narrative Strategies: Visual storytelling with minimal text, focusing on artistic expression.
- Audience Engagement Metrics: Specific TikTok engagement metrics are not available.

YouTube:

- Thematic Focus: Creative travel documentaries showcasing destinations through an artistic lens.
- Visual & Aesthetic Presentation: High-quality videos emphasizing design and creativity.
- Linguistic & Narrative Strategies: Narratives driven by visual art and creative expression.
- Audience Engagement Metrics: Specific YouTube engagement metrics are not available; however, the channel's unique content suggests a dedicated viewer base.

This study analyzed the content of five Thai macro-influencers @bas_gowentgo, @cullen_hateberry, @pigkaploy, @wahncai, and @farosestudio across Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube over a six-month period. Using qualitative content analysis, the study examined four key dimensions: thematic focus, visual and aesthetic presentation, linguistic and narrative strategies, and audience engagement metrics. The findings reveal significant patterns in how Thai influencers strategically craft tourism content that blends cultural representation with platform-specific affordances.

Thematic Focus

The influencers consistently center their content around themes of cultural immersion, experiential travel, and destination authenticity. Notably, @wahncai and @bas_gowentgo prioritize narratives rooted in Thai heritage and underrepresented destinations, employing a documentary-like style that educates viewers about local customs, historical landmarks, and spiritual practices. Conversely, @pigkaploy emphasizes themes of introspective travel and nature-based exploration, constructing a personal and reflective travel persona. @cullen_hateberry integrates a transnational dimension by framing Thai cultural experiences through a Korean lens, appealing to broader East Asian audiences. Meanwhile, @farosestudio diverges by framing travel as an artistic process, blending place-based content with aesthetic and design-oriented storytelling.

Visual and Aesthetic Presentation

Platform affordances significantly shape visual strategies. On Instagram, influencers employ curated, high-resolution imagery with cohesive color palettes and thematic consistency. This aligns with the platform's visual branding expectations and allows for destination branding through still photography. On TikTok, short-form videos leverage kinetic editing, trending audio, and first-person perspectives to enhance entertainment value and immediacy. These videos are often optimized for virality and emphasize movement, humor, and spontaneity. YouTube content, by contrast, facilitates extended narrative arcs, with influencers like @bas_gowentgo and @pigkaploy producing cinematic vlogs that integrate drone footage, voiceovers, and episodic structures. This long-form format allows for deeper cultural storytelling and viewer immersion.

Linguistic and Narrative Strategies

Narrative strategies across platforms reflect a high degree of personalization and cultural contextualization. Influencers frequently use first-person narration, colloquial language, and localized idioms to foster parasocial intimacy with viewers. For instance, @pigkaploy and @cullen_hateberry adopt a diary-like tone, sharing personal reflections and challenges, thereby humanizing their travel experiences. Bilingual or multilingual narration particularly in the case of @cullen_hateberry broadens cultural accessibility and highlights the cross-cultural appeal of Thai

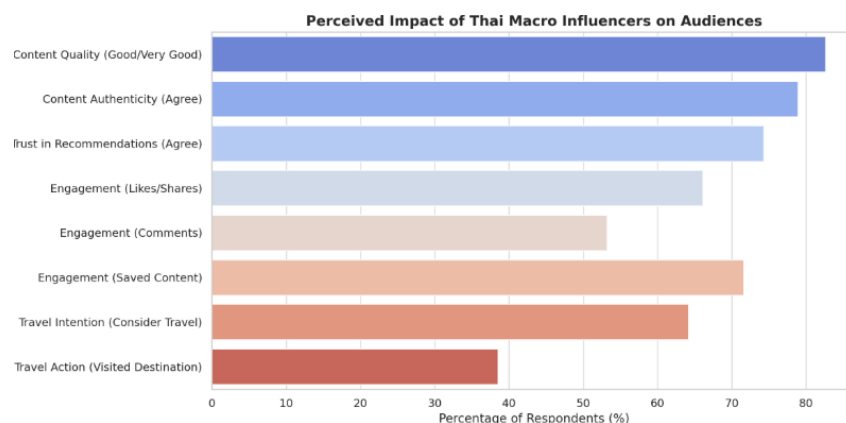
destinations. Additionally, cultural references, traditional greetings, and vernacular expressions reinforce authenticity and national identity, serving both informational and affective functions.

Audience Engagement Metrics

Engagement metrics further validate the effectiveness of these strategies. TikTok emerged as the most interactive platform, with influencers such as @pigkaploy achieving engagement rates exceeding 12%, and @bas_gowentgo averaging over 100,000 views per video. These metrics suggest a strong affinity for visually driven, culturally rich short-form content among digital audiences. YouTube also demonstrates substantial engagement, with @cullen_hateberry averaging 2 million views per video and maintaining a 3.75% engagement rate. Although precise Instagram engagement metrics are less publicly accessible, follower counts and visual branding suggest sustained interest and consistent interaction.

The second part of finding is the quantitative result data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 109 audience members who follow Thai macro influencers. The survey focused on measuring their perceptions of content quality and authenticity, trust and credibility, engagement behaviors, and travel intentions after being exposed to influencer-generated tourism content.

Figure 1 : Perceived Impact of Thai Macro Influencers on Audiences



Sample Demographics

The sample (N = 109) consisted of a diverse group of social media users. The majority were Thai nationals (91.7%), with a minority of international followers (8.3%). Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 45 years (M = 27.8, SD = 6.4). Gender distribution was skewed slightly toward female participants (58.7% female, 39.4% male, 1.8% non-binary or prefer not to say). In terms of education, 76.1% of respondents had at least a bachelor's degree, and 68.8% reported following travel content regularly (i.e., at least weekly).

Perceived Content Quality and Authenticity

A substantial proportion of respondents evaluated influencer content as high in quality and authenticity. Specifically, 82.6% rated the content as either “good” or “very good” in terms of visual appeal, informativeness, and clarity. Furthermore, 78.9% agreed that the content appeared authentic, capturing real and relatable travel experiences. These results indicate that well-crafted narratives and high-quality visuals positively influence perceptions of influencer reliability (see Figure 1).

Trust and Credibility

Trust was found to be a crucial element in influencer effectiveness. Approximately 74.3% of participants reported that they trusted the travel recommendations of Thai macro influencers. Factors contributing to this trust included consistent content quality, cultural resonance, and transparent disclosure of sponsored posts. Personal storytelling also played a role in enhancing perceived credibility.

Engagement Behaviors

Respondents exhibited various types of digital engagement with influencer content. Specifically, 66.1% frequently liked or shared tourism-related posts, 53.2% commented on such content, and 71.6% reported saving posts for future reference. These behaviors suggest not only affective but also cognitive engagement, indicating strong audience interest in and value derived from the content.

Travel Intentions and Behaviors

A significant behavioral outcome was observed regarding travel planning and actions. Nearly two-thirds (64.2%) of respondents stated that influencer content influenced their decision to consider traveling to featured destinations. Importantly, 38.5% of these individuals had already visited at least one location promoted by an influencer, demonstrating a conversion from intention to action.

Correlational Insights

Pearson product-moment correlations revealed statistically significant relationships between key constructs. Perceived authenticity was moderately and positively correlated with trust in influencers ($r = .63, p < .01$), while trust was also positively associated with travel intention ($r = .59, p < .01$). These findings support the conceptual model that authenticity enhances trust, which subsequently influences travel-related decision-making.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide robust insights into the evolving role of Thai macro influencers as strategic communicators and cultural intermediaries in the digital tourism landscape. As the data reveal, these influencers are not merely content producers but co-creators of destination image and brand identity. Their storytelling techniques, aesthetic choices, and platform-specific strategies collectively shape how both domestic and international audiences perceive Thai culture, values, and travel experiences.

A central theme emerging from the qualitative analysis is the strategic use of cultural authenticity. Influencers like @wahncai and @bas_gowentgo serve as cultural narrators, offering detailed, respectful, and educational insights into Thai heritage, religious practices, and historical sites. This form of content aligns with Abidin's (2016) conceptualization of "visibility labor," where authenticity is performative yet grounded in cultural resonance. Through documentary-style YouTube videos and cinematic imagery, these influencers elevate local narratives that are often overlooked in mainstream media or official tourism campaigns.

This cultural narrative construction is particularly significant given the increasing demand for experiential and meaningful travel among millennial and Gen Z tourists. As Munar & Jacobsen (2014) suggest, digital audiences are not just seeking information they are actively looking for content that provides emotional gratification, identity affirmation, and escapism. By framing themselves as cultural insiders or reflective travelers, Thai influencers meet these gratifications, offering audiences vicarious experiences that are both aspirational and educational.

The study also highlights the adaptive use of platform affordances to enhance engagement and storytelling. For instance, TikTok's short-form, fast-paced format is leveraged for visual stimulation and humor, allowing influencers like @pigkaploy to achieve exceptional engagement rates (over 12%). This supports Xiang et al.'s (2017) assertion that the effectiveness of influencer communication is often contingent on aligning content with the structural and algorithmic norms of the platform. In contrast, YouTube's long-form video capabilities enable influencers to build narrative depth, fostering parasocial relationships (Meyers, 2019) that enhance trust and loyalty.

The quantitative findings further reinforce the effectiveness of these strategies. The strong correlations between perceived authenticity, trust, and travel intention suggest a clear psychological pathway through which influencer content converts viewers into active tourists. Trust, in particular, was influenced by factors such as consistent quality, personal storytelling, and transparency in sponsored content echoing the findings of Lim et al. (2017), who emphasized the role of credibility in influencing consumer attitudes. In fact, the study shows that nearly 64.2% of respondents reported being motivated to consider or pursue travel plans after exposure to influencer content, indicating a significant conversion potential that rivals traditional advertising.

Moreover, this study underscores the transnational impact of influencer marketing. The bilingual and cross-cultural strategies of influencers like @cullen_hateberry suggest an intentional effort to bridge Thai cultural narratives with international appeal, particularly within the East Asian digital ecosystem. This dual representation strengthens Thailand's soft power by making its cultural assets accessible and relatable to broader audiences, contributing to national branding and global visibility.

Yet, the discussion must also address the ethico-cultural implications of influencer-driven tourism promotion. While influencers play a vital role in democratizing destination representation, they also face the risk of commodifying culture for content. The potential for cultural oversimplification, stereotyping, or overexposure particularly in fragile or sacred locales necessitates a critical examination of how digital storytelling aligns with sustainable and respectful tourism practices. Tham et al. (2013) warned that unchecked digital promotion can contribute to over-tourism and cultural erosion, a concern that remains relevant in today's influencer economy.

Finally, the research sheds light on how influencer marketing is gradually reshaping traditional tourism hierarchies. Influencers now share the stage with national tourism organizations (NTOs) as agents of tourism diplomacy and local economic stimulation. Collaborations between influencers and entities like the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) highlight a shift from top-down to participatory branding models. This model not only diversifies the tourism narrative but also brings visibility to rural or emerging destinations that lack representation in conventional media.

Research Limitation

Despite its comprehensive approach, the study faces several limitations:

1. **Sample Scope:** The study focused exclusively on Thai macro influencers with over 100,000 followers. This excludes insights from micro or nano influencers, who may yield high engagement in niche communities.
2. **Platform Specificity:** While Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are major platforms, the exclusion of others like Facebook, Twitter (X), or travel blogs may limit a full understanding of multi-platform strategy dynamics.
3. **Cultural Homogeneity:** With 91.7% of respondents being Thai nationals, the findings may not generalize across international audiences, particularly those unfamiliar with Thai cultural nuances.

Future Recommendations

1. **Broaden Influencer Categories:** Future studies should examine micro and nano influencers, as they may foster deeper trust in smaller communities and exhibit unique content strategies.
2. **Platform Expansion:** Including other social media and content-sharing platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and long-form blogs, would provide a more holistic view of influencers' communication ecosystems.
3. **Cross-Cultural Comparisons:** Conducting comparative studies with influencers from other Southeast Asian or global tourism markets could reveal universal and culture-specific strategies in digital tourism marketing.

4. Inclusion of AI and Emerging Tech: Future research should also consider the role of generative AI tools, virtual influencers, and augmented reality in reshaping influencer-led travel content.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore how Thai macro influencers strategically use communication techniques to promote tourism on digital platforms, with a particular focus on their storytelling approaches, cultural messaging, and audience impact. Drawing on both qualitative content analysis and quantitative survey data, the research provides comprehensive answers to the three guiding research questions.

First, regarding the key communication strategies used by Thai influencers in tourism promotion, the study identified a consistent emphasis on storytelling, personalized narratives, visual aesthetics, and platform-optimized content design. Influencers utilized first-person perspectives, casual language, and episodic structures to humanize their travel experiences. On platforms like TikTok, short-form videos incorporated humor and trends to boost shareability, while on YouTube, long-form documentaries provided immersive cultural exploration. These strategies facilitated emotional engagement and built parasocial relationships, which are essential for trust-building and long-term audience retention.

Second, cultural elements played a pivotal role in shaping both the content and messaging of Thai influencers. The findings demonstrate that influencers often incorporate traditional customs, local dialects, historical landmarks, cuisine, religious practices, and bilingual narration into their storytelling. Influencers like @wahncai and @bas_gowentgo curated content with a strong cultural-educational tone, while others, such as @cullen_hateberry, used cross-cultural framing to appeal to international audiences. These efforts not only enhanced the authenticity of the content but also positioned influencers as cultural ambassadors who contribute to the national branding of Thailand in global media spaces.

Third, the perceived impact of these strategies on audience engagement and travel intentions was substantial. Survey results indicated that high levels of perceived authenticity (78.9%) and trustworthiness (74.3%) were strongly correlated with travel interest and action, with 64.2% of respondents reporting they were motivated to consider traveling to influencer-featured destinations. Moreover, over one-third of these individuals had already visited such destinations, suggesting that influencer content can convert online engagement into real-world tourism behavior.

In sum, the study reveals that Thai macro influencers act as influential intermediaries in digital tourism marketing by combining strategic communication, cultural representation, and emotionally resonant content. Their ability to authentically narrate Thai cultural experiences, while maintaining engagement across multiple platforms, has a demonstrable impact on how audiences perceive, interact with, and act upon travel content. These findings not only deepen our understanding of influencer marketing in the tourism industry but also underscore the need for continued research into the ethical, cultural, and strategic dimensions of this rapidly evolving field. As influencer content reaches global audiences, ensuring that representations remain respectful, inclusive, and sustainable becomes not only a strategic priority but a cultural responsibility.

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TASTE, CULTURE, AND CURIOSITY: UNPACKING THE DRIVERS OF TOURISTS' LOCAL FOOD PURCHASE INTENTIONS IN PENANG, MALAYSIA

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Extended abstract

This conceptual study explores the determinants of international tourists' purchase intentions toward local food in Penang, Malaysia, through the integration of three theoretical frameworks: Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Consumption Value Theory (CVT), and Cultural Distance Theory (CDT). Recognizing Penang as a renowned food destination, the study emphasizes the importance of understanding food-related consumer behavior in tourism. The proposed framework investigates the roles of food neophilia, food value, and cultural distance as key antecedents of tourists' intentions to try local foods. It further proposes tourist experience as a moderating factor, arguing that familiarity and prior exposure to local cuisine may enhance or weaken the influence of these antecedents. Food neophilia reflects tourists' willingness to try novel and unfamiliar foods, a trait increasingly relevant in culinary tourism. Food value, encompassing emotional, social, functional, and epistemic components, shapes tourists' perceived benefits from engaging in local food experiences. Cultural distance examines the perceived disparity between tourists' cultural backgrounds and the host culture, which may act as a psychological barrier. Together, these constructs offer a holistic view of tourist food behavior. The paper contributes theoretically by integrating psychological, value-based, and cultural dimensions into a unified framework. Practically, it offers insights for tourism marketers and food vendors to design culturally sensitive and novelty-rich food experiences. This research lays the groundwork for future empirical studies aimed at validating the model and enhancing destination marketing strategies for culinary tourism.

Keywords: Food neophilia, food value, cultural distance, tourist experience, purchase intention, Penang, gastronomy tourism

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Introduction

Malaysia is presently recognized as one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Southeast Asian Nations region (Al-Mulali et al., 2020). Apart from having ethnic diversity, Malaysia is also a melting pot of many culinary heritages that have become a crucial component of the tourist experience, potentially benefiting the tourism industry. The authentic culinary offerings of a destination highlight the culture of the destination, further shaping a positive destination perception (Wondirad et al., 2021). Malaysian local food and the extraordinary taste and unique culture originate from international tourists with diverse backgrounds such as Arabs, Chinese, Indian, Thais, Indonesia and Portuguese (Abdullah et al., 2021; Omar & Omar 2018). For instance, heritage food has been characterized as typical local foods imbued with cultural characteristics that symbolize the lifestyles, culture, and heritage value of the country's multiracial community (Ahmar 2019; Radhiah & Nazirah 2018).

Food and beverages have become destination products that can act as both primary and secondary motivators that are able to have an added value to the images of the destination. According to Thio et al. (2022) tourists are more likely to find a place appealing if it fits their expectations. Gastronomy tourism is one of the main elements as an essential part of tourist experience and it gives a huge impact in regional development (Alzbeta & Lukas, 2021). Gastronomy, identified as one of the six core elements of tourism, has always played a central part in travel experiences (Zeng et al., 2023). As said by The World Food Travel Association (2020) it is estimated that 7.2 out of ten tourists appoint their destination depending on local food and beverage offerings. Gastronomy tourists tend to spend average 24% more than others. Besides, tourists do not experience the cultural authenticity if without related local food during visit to the destination (Park & Widyanta, 2022). According to Stone et al., (2019) because the food experience is regarded as the total experience of a destination. In gastronomy tourism, consumer behavior is shaped by the desire for authentic experiences and the unique cultural significance that local foods offer.

Furthermore, Penang can be highlighted as the "states for gastronomy routes" and Food Paradise of Asia, Penang, food capital of Malaysia has been named by Thrillist as one of the best food cities in the world (Zainal et al., 2010). Abdul Shukur (2023) point out Penang is famed for its abundance of outstanding authentic local foods that locals claim may not be duplicated anywhere. Apart from, local food is delicious also offer finest gourmet experience than other states. Thenceforth, Penang is striving to become part of UNESCO's Creative Cities Network (UCCN) in the food area. In early 2023, Penang's state officials initiated an application for this esteemed distinction, highlighting the necessity to record the historical and cultural importance of its native foods. This initiative has been inspired by the state's rich culinary legacy, especially its recognized street food culture. Amongst Penang's local food can be divided into few categories that depend on multicultural community. For Indian food, it comes with Mee Goreng Mamak, Nasi Kandar Banana Leaf Rice, Biryani, Fish head curry, while in Chinese food it comes with Bak Kut Tea, Char Kuey Teow, Claypot Chicken Rice, Hokkien Mee, and when it comes to Malay food it has Nasi Lemuni, Ikan Bakar, Lemang, Nasi Lemak, Laksa and many of delicious foods (Abdul Shukur, 2023). Penang's local street food, including Nasi Kandar, Char Kway Teow and Laksa, reflects a dynamic combination of Malay, Chinese, and Indian elements (Buletin Mutiara, 2021).

Objectives

The overarching objective of this study is to construct a comprehensive conceptual framework that elucidates the factors influencing international tourists' purchase intentions toward local food in Penang, Malaysia. In pursuit of this objective, the study integrates psychological, value-based, and cultural theories to provide a nuanced understanding of food behavior within tourism contexts. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To evaluate how food neophilia, food value, and cultural distance influence international tourists' intention to purchase local food in Penang.
2. To determine whether tourists' experience levels moderate the relationship between food neophilia and their intention to purchase local food in Penang

Research Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual research design to propose a theoretical model explaining the factors that influence tourists' purchase intentions toward local food. As no empirical data collection is conducted, the methodology emphasizes theory synthesis and conceptual framework development. The integration of three theories

TPB, CVT, and CDT provides a multi-faceted lens for understanding consumer behavior in the gastronomic tourism context.

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) provides the foundational structure by positing that behavioral intention is influenced by three constructs: attitude toward behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). In the realm of Malaysian gastronomy tourism, the attitudes of international tourist towards Malaysia local food, their perceptions of social norms (including recommendations from locals or peers), and their confidence in directing unfamiliar food environments all play a significant role in shaping their intention to engage in food-based tourism activities (Kumar et al., 2021; Harmsen et al., 2018).

Research into gastronomy tourism sector have revealed that perceptions of Malaysian food are favorably affected by its distinctive cultural blend and genuine experiences. International tourist frequently links local food with a deep cultural experience, influencing their desire to participate in gastronomy tourism (Okumus et al., 2020). Additionally, the impact of subjective norms, including the effects of social media, family, and friends, has been identified as a factor in influencing tourists' choices to visit food destinations in Malaysia. The support of local food experiences increases international tourists' eagerness to experience local food and engage in food-related activities (Hussain et al., 2022). The perception of behavioral control, which refers to the ease or difficulty an individual experience in participating in gastronomy tourism, influences tourists' decision-making processes. In Malaysia, elements such as language barriers, access to local food hubs, and awareness of halal food options can influence tourists' perceptions of control. The accessibility of information via travel platforms and applications aids in overcoming these obstacles, enhancing the probability that tourists will engage with a variety of culinary experiences throughout Malaysia's regions, including Sabah and Sarawak, which are renowned for their food heritage (Sanip et al., 2024).

Consumption Value Theory (CVT) enriches the framework by adding layers of value perceptions. Tourists assign value to food based on various dimensions: functional (quality, nutrition), emotional (pleasure, nostalgia), epistemic (novelty, learning), and social (status, group inclusion). Functional value refers to the practical benefits that tourists derive from consuming local food, such as perceived quality, affordability, and nutritional value (Choe & Kim, 2018). Social value highlights how food choices can be influenced by the desire for social recognition or conformity, often demonstrated through sharing food experiences on social media (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2019). Emotional value emphasizes the pleasure, satisfaction, and sensory enjoyment tourists experience when engaging with diverse tastes and textures, which significantly shapes their attitudes and behaviors toward consuming local cuisine (Thio et al., 2024; Ha & Jang, 2010; Choe & Kim, 2018). Epistemic value captures tourists' curiosity and desire to gain new knowledge through culinary exploration, with local food serving as a gateway to understanding cultural practices and traditions (Hussain et al., 2023; Soltani et al., 2021; Thio et al., 2024). Lastly, conditional value relates to contextual factors such as food availability, accessibility, and the surrounding cultural environment, which can enhance tourists' motivation to try local dishes during specific events or settings (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2019).

Each value dimension can drive or inhibit the intention to consume local food, depending on the tourist's personality and expectations. CVT has been successfully utilised in tourism studies, particularly for exploring various motivations behind gastronomy tourism. Within this study, CVT offers an extensive framework for analysing the various factors that affect tourists' food selections, encompassing practical aspects, curiosity, and social influences (Choe & Kim, 2018; Seo & Kim, 2020).

Cultural Distance Theory (CDT) introduces the idea that perceived differences between the tourist's home culture and the host culture can create psychological barriers. These include discomfort with unfamiliar ingredients, eating styles, or flavors, which may suppress willingness to explore local cuisine. Rooted in Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimensions' framework, cultural distance refers to the extent to which tourists perceive dissimilarities between their home culture and that of the destination.

These differences can pose adaptation challenges, especially when it comes to trying local cuisine. When the cultural gap is wide, tourists may feel uncertain or uncomfortable with unfamiliar food traditions, potentially deterring them from engaging in local culinary experiences. Conversely, tourists from culturally similar backgrounds are often more open to sampling regional dishes due to their higher comfort and familiarity levels (Sthapit, 2018). Cultural distance also intersects with the Theory of Planned Behavior, affecting tourists' perceived social norms and behavioral control in relation to local food consumption.

Emerging research underscores the importance of cultural distance in shaping food-related behavior within gastronomy tourism. For instance, Mak, Lumbers, and Eves (2017) found that tourists from culturally distant regions tend to be more cautious in their food selections. Similarly, Liu et al. (2021) observed that significant cultural differences can dampen tourists' novelty-seeking tendencies, thereby reducing their willingness to explore unfamiliar dishes. These findings suggest that cultural distance does not merely influence food preferences but also moderates the impact of food neophilia on purchasing behavior. By applying Cultural Distance Theory, this study aims to better understand how tourists' perceptions of cultural disparity affect their openness to trying local food and how this moderates their intention to engage in novel culinary experiences.

The combination of TPB, CVT, and CDT provides a strong theoretical basis for examining the influence of food neophilia on tourists' intentions to sample local food. The Theory of Planned Behavior elucidates the psychological and social elements that influence tourists' intentions, while the Value Theory emphasizes the motivations rooted in values that drive food selections. Additionally, Cultural Distance Theory sheds light on the cultural obstacles and influences affecting tourists' openness to trying new culinary experiences. Collectively, these theories provide a comprehensive viewpoint, facilitating a detailed comprehension of the elements influencing food-related choices among international tourists in Malaysia. The outcome of this conceptual methodology is a theoretically grounded model, the research framework can be further utilized to collect research data.

Conclusion and Discussion

Discussion

This conceptual paper offers a comprehensive framework to explore how food neophilia, food value, and cultural distance shape international tourists' purchase intentions, particularly in culturally rich destinations like Penang. The integration of TPB, CVT, and CDT into a single model enables a holistic understanding of both internal motivations and external cultural dynamics in food-related tourism decisions. The inclusion of tourist experience as a moderator acknowledges the variability in tourist behavior and the role of familiarity and prior exposure (Stone et al., 2019).

Findings from the existing literature suggest that food neophilia is a strong driver of willingness to try new foods, especially among younger and experience-seeking travelers (Tarinc, 2023). Tourists who seek novelty are more likely to appreciate new culinary experiences, especially when emotional and epistemic values align with their personal goals (Ha & Jang, 2010; Rishad et al., 2021). Meanwhile, cultural distance acts as both a challenge and an opportunity (Mak et al., 2017). While large cultural gaps may deter some tourists, others may view them as part of the allure of travel.

Tourist experience mitigates the effects of cultural distance and amplifies the positive impact of food neophilia and perceived value (Thio et al., 2022). Experienced tourists are more likely to navigate unfamiliar food contexts with confidence and curiosity. This finding emphasizes the importance of designing tourism experiences that gradually introduce local food, enhance cultural familiarity, and provide opportunities for cultural learning and adaptation (Buletin Mutiara, 2024).

Conclusion

Theoretically, this model advances the understanding of tourist behavior by incorporating multidimensional motivations and barriers, particularly those rooted in psychology, consumption values, and cultural perception. By combining TPB, CVT, and CDT, the framework captures the diverse range of factors that influence how tourists engage with local food in destinations like Penang. The inclusion of tourist experience as a moderator adds further depth, highlighting how past experiences shape future behavioral intentions.

Practically, the conceptual framework offers a roadmap for tourism stakeholders to develop more targeted marketing and service strategies that align with diverse tourist profiles. This includes creating food experiences that are culturally inclusive, emotionally engaging, and reflective of both local identity and international appeal. Ultimately, by acknowledging the complexity of food-related behavior, this study contributes to the growing field of gastronomy tourism and supports the development of policies and programs that enhance both tourist satisfaction and destination competitiveness.

Research recommendations

Future research should aim to empirically validate the proposed conceptual framework using quantitative methods such as surveys and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). A multi-group analysis could help identify how tourist background (e.g., nationality, travel frequency, dietary preference) influences the model's constructs. Researchers are encouraged to use purposive or stratified sampling in tourist-heavy areas of Penang to ensure diversity in food familiarity and cultural background.

In addition, longitudinal studies could track changes in tourists' perceptions and behaviors over time, particularly as they gain more experience with Malaysian food. This approach would provide insights into how tourist experience evolves and its moderating effect on food neophilia and cultural distance.

From a practical perspective, food tourism stakeholders should develop initiatives that reduce cultural distance and enhance food value perception. These include guided food tours, tasting sessions, multilingual menus, and educational programs that highlight the heritage and preparation of local dishes. Offering low-risk opportunities (e.g., samples or fusion foods) may help convert hesitant tourists into enthusiastic culinary explorers.

Finally, further conceptual research could explore other moderating or mediating variables such as cultural intelligence, nostalgia, or digital engagement. These factors may offer additional insight into how tourists interpret and act upon their food-related experiences in unfamiliar environments. By expanding the model's scope, researchers can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of gastronomic tourism dynamics.

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THE PERSPECTIVES OF MICE PARTICIPANTS ON WELLNESS TRAVEL IN THAILAND

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Extended abstract

This study explores the perspectives of MICE stakeholders on integrating wellness tourism into Thailand's MICE industry. As wellness tourism gains global popularity, Thailand stands out as a prime destination due to its traditional medicine, cultural richness, and quality hospitality. The MICE sector plays a vital role in Thailand's economy, and incorporating wellness elements can enhance event experiences, attract high-value travelers, and promote sustainable tourism. This qualitative research involves in-depth interviews with 15 stakeholders, including venue managers, event organizers, and tourism authorities in Southern Thailand. Using thematic analysis, the study investigates stakeholder attitudes, readiness, perceived benefits, challenges, and strategic opportunities for integrating wellness into MICE events. The findings will offer practical insights for policymakers, event planners, and tourism businesses, helping to position Thailand as a leading destination for wellness-focused MICE events and supporting long-term industry development.

Keywords: Wellness Tourism, MICE Industry, Stakeholder Perspectives, Tourist Satisfaction, Sustainable Tourism

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Introduction

Wellness, which integrates physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, has become a growing global trend, significantly influencing the tourism industry (Stoewen, 2017) (Ashton, 2024). It has gained popularity as travelers seek experiences that promote overall health (Liu, Zhou, & Sun, 2023). Thailand has positioned itself as a leading destination due to its rich cultural heritage, traditional Thai medicine, and high-quality services (Ayamuang, 2020). The industry has grown rapidly, attracting high-spending tourists, including MICE travelers looking for wellness-focused experiences (Kerdpitak, 2019).

As this sector expands, it contributes to Thailand's economy by promoting sustainable tourism and drawing international visitors (Smith & Brown, 2023). Factors such as an aging population, increasing health awareness, and a preference for preventive healthcare have fueled this growth (Global Wellness Institute, 2024). Integrating wellness elements into the MICE industry presents opportunities to enhance event experiences, attract global business travelers, and strengthen Thailand's competitive advantage (MICE Intelligence Team, 2023).

The MICE industry plays a vital role in the economy and is adapting to changing consumer preferences (Boontham, 2020). Wellness-focused services, such as spa treatments and meditation sessions, can enhance event appeal and attendee satisfaction (Wickramarathne, Phuoc, & Albattat, 2020). However, defining and implementing wellness tourism in MICE remains challenging due to limited research and ethical concerns regarding data privacy (Smith & Brown, 2024). Addressing these issues is crucial for Thailand to maintain its reputation as a top wellness tourism destination (Statista, 2023).

Objectives

1. To study the perspectives of MICE stakeholders on their views toward wellness tourism.
2. To explore the readiness of wellness tourism to attract more interest of MICE stakeholders.

Research Method

1. Population and Sample size

This study will select the interviewees from 15 MICE stakeholders in southern of Thailand such as 4 of MICE Venue Managers. Such as event managers from ICC Hat Yai, Centara Hotel Hat Yai, or Crystal Hotel Hat Yai. 7 of Event Organizers & Planners. Example such as Professional Conference Organizers (PCOs) and Event Management Companies. 4 of Tourism Authority Representatives. Example such as Songkhla Convention and Exhibition Bureau (SCEB) representatives. The sampling method used was purposive sampling to ensure participants have relevant experience with wellness tourism in the MICE sector. The data collected through interviews helps interpret stakeholders' perspectives and readiness for integrating wellness into MICE events.

2. Research Tools

The research tool used in this study is the in-depth interview, specifically designed for qualitative data collection. The instrument included a structured interview guide focusing on key themes such as perceptions of wellness, strategies for integration, challenges, and the impact of wellness practices. Audio recordings of the interviews were made to ensure accurate data capture for analysis. A pilot testing phase was conducted with a small group of participants to refine the interview questions and ensure clarity. These tools were carefully designed to extract detailed stakeholder insights about their experiences and expectations regarding the integration of wellness into the MICE industry.

3. Data Collection

The data was collected by conducting 15 sets of in-depth interviews with the selected stakeholders. The interviews were conducted either in person or via virtual platforms, depending on the participants' availability and convenience. Each interview covered important topics such as the perception of wellness in the MICE industry, demand for wellness-focused events, challenges faced during the implementation of wellness initiatives, and the impact of wellness activities on participant experiences. All interviews were audio recorded, with the consent of the participants, and transcribed verbatim for further analysis. This data collection approach ensured a comprehensive and detailed understanding of stakeholder perspectives regarding wellness integration into MICE events.

4. Data Analysis

This research used two main qualitative data analysis techniques: content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis was applied to systematically code and categorize the interview data, helping to identify patterns, recurring themes, and stakeholder opinions on wellness integration. Thematic analysis was then used to deeply explore and interpret the meanings within the data, focusing on extracting themes such as stakeholder readiness, participant satisfaction, event design innovations, and challenges of implementation. Together, these analyses provided a rich and meaningful understanding of how wellness can be incorporated into the MICE industry and how stakeholders perceive its opportunities and challenges.

Conclusion & Discussion

Conclusion

This study highlights the perspectives of MICE stakeholders in Southern Thailand regarding the integration of wellness tourism into the MICE sector. It identifies both opportunities and barriers to adoption, revealing a growing interest in wellness among industry professionals.

By addressing knowledge gaps, investing in supportive infrastructure, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders, Thailand can enhance its competitive position in both the MICE and wellness tourism sectors. Strategic integration of wellness offerings into MICE events will not only elevate the event experience but also support long-term economic growth and sustainable tourism development (MICE Intelligence Team, 2023).

Discussion

Wellness tourism is reshaping global travel, driven by increasing demand for health-focused experiences. Thailand's strengths traditional healing, cultural heritage, and hospitality make it well-suited to lead in this space (Global Wellness Institute, 2024). This creates a strategic opportunity for the MICE industry to incorporate wellness elements into business events.

While the integration offers clear benefits such as improved participant experiences and support for sustainable tourism (Liu, Zhou & Sun, 2023), challenges remain. These include infrastructure costs, regulatory hurdles, and inconsistent stakeholder readiness. However, rising consumer interest in wellness travel continues to motivate industry innovation and policy development (Smith & Brown, 2024). Study findings suggest that stakeholder engagement and coordinated planning are essential for successful implementation.

Research Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, several key recommendations are proposed to enhance the integration of wellness tourism into Thailand's MICE industry. First, it is essential to increase awareness and readiness among MICE stakeholders through targeted training programs that emphasize the value and practical implementation of wellness components (Rattanaphong & Imjai, 2024; Jeong & Kim, 2020). Government support is also crucial; policy incentives such as tax benefits, certification schemes, and funding for wellness infrastructure can encourage wider adoption (MICE Intelligence Team, 2023; Kerdpitak, 2019). Collaboration between wellness service providers, tourism authorities, and event organizers should be promoted to co-create wellness-integrated event packages that are innovative, sustainable, and aligned with consumer expectations (Global Wellness Institute, 2023).

Investments in infrastructure such as incorporating biophilic design elements, relaxation zones, and health-oriented amenities can significantly improve participant satisfaction (Browning et al., 2014; Masaunjik et al., 2020). Furthermore, adopting digital wellness tools like mobile apps, virtual meditation sessions, and AI-driven personalization can enhance attendee engagement (Global Wellness Institute, 2023; Jeong & Kim, 2020). Future research should explore evolving consumer behaviors in wellness-MICE travel, enabling more targeted and impactful strategies (Sangkakorn & Krajangchom, 2024). Finally, piloting wellness-integrated MICE events in key destinations like Southern Thailand could serve as practical models for national implementation (Masaunjik et al., 2020). By addressing these areas, Thailand can strengthen its position as a leading destination for both MICE and wellness tourism.

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ANALYZING THE AGREEMENT AMONG PHUKET RESIDENTS CONCERNING THE GLOBAL DESTINATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2023

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Extended abstract

Thailand is one of the leading destinations for hosting MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) events. The MICE industry has shown continuous growth in market value over the years, driven by business adaptation and sustainability trends. In 2023, Songkhla Province was recognized by the Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS-Index) and ranked as the second most sustainable destination in ASEAN. This research aims to achieve similar recognition for Phuket Province, ensuring that it becomes a beautiful and sustainable destination for hosting MICE events efficiently in the future. Method This research surveys 100 stakeholders in Phuket, including government officials, business operators, and residents, to gather opinions on urban development. Using a quantitative approach, data is analyzed to compare perspectives and identify solutions for future development, with findings also compared to data from Songkhla province Sample size is 100 people were survey, including government agencies, tourists, business operators, the General public, etc. The research focuses on developing Phuket in environment, society, suppliers, and destination management to enhance its global image, reduce environmental impacts, create sustainable tourism, and attract investments. The Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS-Index) will help position Phuket as a leading sustainable MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) destination. The survey focused on Environmental Performance, Social Performance, and Supplier Performance.

Keywords: The Global Destination Sustainability Index, GDS Index, Sustainability,

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Introduction

The MICE industry is a creative event business that develops business- related events, including corporate and association meetings, both at regional and international levels. These events primarily serve business professionals attending conferences and trade shows, which are key activities that significantly contribute to a nation's economy (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, n.d.).

The MICE industry is highly significant for Thailand as it stimulates the nation's economy. It also fosters collaboration between public and private sectors in developing and investing in infrastructure, creating jobs, and distributing income to related businesses throughout the country. Furthermore, the MICE industry helps promote Thailand's image globally. The industry continues to grow and develop, spreading events across the country (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, n.d.).

The province has been designated as Thailand's first and only MICE City in the southern Gulf of Thailand, receiving this official recognition. In 2023, Songkhla ranked second in ASEAN and 23rd globally in the Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS-Index) 2023, with a score of 79.56%. This ranking reflects the city's commitment to sustainable MICE development, based on four performance indicators: City Environmental Performance, City Social Performance, Supplier Performance, and Destination Management Performance. Songkhla's strong geographical advantage places it among the world's most sustainable MICE destinations (GDS-Index, n.d.).

Phuket, known as a jewel of Thailand, plays an important role in sustainable MICE tourism. With its stunning beaches and lush forests, the island provides a perfect environment for both leisure and business. Phuket offers a variety of event options, including yacht-based conferences or stunning outdoor venues. With its infrastructure and facilities, Phuket has the potential to be recognized as a "MICE City of Andaman" and, in the future, to achieve certification as a sustainable MICE destination through the GDS- Index's evaluation standards, using Songkhla as a model for development (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, n.d.).

Objectives

1. To assess the agreement level of residents in Phuket Province on the Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDSI) 2023.
2. To develop Phuket Province to become one of the top 10 destinations in the Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDSI) 2023.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

Based on the population of Phuket Province in the year 2024, which totaled 615,961 people as of December 2023 comprising 299,572 males and 316,389 females (Phuket Provincial Labor Office, 2567) the researchers will determine the appropriate sample size using Krejcie and Morgan's formula (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Our research focuses on target groups with experience or specialized expertise in urban development, or those with direct involvement, such as entrepreneurs, tourists, government officials, and other relevant stakeholders. We therefore selected a target group of 100 people from a total of 382.

2. Research Tools

- a.) It is a survey of 100 people, and the data collected will be analyzed to calculate percentages. The results will then be compared with the GDS index of Songkhla as a guideline for the development of Phuket province.
- b.) The data analysis is related to a quantitative approach, with a focus on surveys and questionnaires. The data collected will be analyzed to calculate percentages.
- c.) Quantitative data were collected under the topic of opinions from government agencies, business operators, and people in Phuket regarding their agreement with the questionnaire data. The research process relies on comparing perspectives from government agencies, business operators, and local people in Phuket to identify solutions that are consistent and most appropriate for the development of the province.
- d.) This is basic research, classified as deductive research. The study examines the level of agreement or disagreement, with the goal not being immediate practical application but rather comparing it with existing data from Songkhla province. The analyzed data from Phuket can then be used for further development in the future.

3. Data Collection

This data collected used are quantitative research using questionnaire. The tools used in this research involve a quantitative assessment conducted under the topic of evaluating the agreement of people in Phuket Province on various questions to serve as a guideline for development. The questions are derived from The Global Destination Sustainability Index and have been adapted to better suit the target group. The questions are divided into three sections.

4. Data Analysis

The method used is crosstabulation, where the responses of agreement, strong agreement, disagreement, or strong disagreement from the survey are analyzed into percentages. Once the percentages are calculated using the crosstabulation method, the data will be further analyzed using SPSS to present the results in the form of charts. This will help determine which areas Phuket needs to develop in order to receive certification from the Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDSI).

Conclusion

This research aims to support the development of Phuket in Tree areas: environment, society and suppliers. The goal is to enhance Phuket's global image, reduce environmental impacts, develop sustainable tourism strategies, improve the quality of life for residents, and attract future investments. The Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS-Index) will play a crucial role in elevating Phuket as a leading sustainable destination for hosting MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) events on a global scale.

Research recommendations

1. **Study from the Perspective of Public Opinion:** Conduct research and surveys to gather opinions from people in Phuket across various aspects such as safety, environmental issues, convenience, and more.
2. **Analyze Survey Opinions:** Analyze the opinions collected through surveys in different areas to help improve the development of Phuket and to gain a deeper understanding of the actual problems in each area.
3. **Extend Research Findings Towards GDS Index Certification:** The aim of the study is for Phuket to use the public feedback to improve and develop the province in order to achieve certification from the Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS Index) in the future.

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DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES FOR GASTRONOMIC TOURISM FOR GENERATION Z TOURISTS IN THE BANTHAT THONG AREA, BANGKOK

Jantajit Thanasiri ¹

Abstract

This research aims to (1) study the behavior of Generation Z tourists in engaging in Gastronomic tourism in the Banthat Thong area, Bangkok, (2) assess the potential of Gastronomic tourism development for Generation Z in this area, and (3) propose development guidelines for Gastronomic tourism targeted at Generation Z. The study employed a quantitative research methodology using a questionnaire to collect data from a sample of 400 Generation Z tourists who visited the Banthat Thong area. Convenience sampling was used, and descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were employed for data analysis. The findings reveal that most respondents were female, aged between 21-24, single, university graduates, students, with an average monthly income of 10,000-20,000 THB. Most were first-time visitors, motivated by food taste, and influenced by recommendations from friends or family. They typically traveled by private car with friends during weekend evenings (6 PM–12 AM). Favorite food types included desserts, with average spending per visit ranging from 500-1,000 Baht.

The assessment of tourism potential showed that the area's highest strength lies in its tourist attractions, particularly the diversity of food options, appealing presentation, delicious taste, and well-designed ambiance of the restaurants. Other aspects: accessibility, amenities, activities, and service management were rated at a high level but still present opportunities for improvement in terms of marketing, infrastructure development, special events, and modern service delivery. Consequently, the proposed development guidelines include leveraging the area's strong appeal by promoting its identity as a diverse food destination through online platforms, enhancing accessibility and experience-based activities that align with the lifestyle and preferences of Generation Z tourists.

Keywords: Gastronomic tourism, Generation Z, Development

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Introduction

Gastronomy tourism has emerged as a compelling and increasingly popular travel trend (Phuri Chunhachorn & Chawalee Nathalang, 2021). Intergenerational changes have significantly influenced tourist behavior, leading to the emergence of new travel patterns that add value and generate greater economic returns. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), gastronomy tourism generates approximately USD 150 billion annually, with Spain, France, and Italy leading as the top destinations for food-related international travel based on tourist spending between 2013-2014 (Global Wellness Institute, Online, 2018). This steady growth indicates that food is no longer merely a necessity but a pivotal element for tourism development, connecting culinary production and the tourism industry (Supreeya Phuphala & Jaruan Daengbubpha, 2022). Thailand has strategically capitalized on five cultural identities: Muay Thai (Fight), Festivals, Films, Fashion, and Food; to promote tourism under the Soft Power Tourism Booster Shot project organized by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (Thai Rath Online, 2023). According to the Department of Tourism (2015), gastronomy tourism in Thailand generated 456 billion baht, accounting for 20% of the total tourism revenue, with 282 billion baht from international tourists and 174 billion baht from domestic travelers (Pannee Suanphleng & Porntep Leethong-in, 2016). In response, the Thai government has implemented initiatives such as the Amazing Thai Taste project (MGR Online, 2017), leveraging digital technology and storytelling to boost awareness and interest in culinary destinations and create immersive food-related experiences (Chaiwat Prasomsuk, 2018).

In the context of modern tourism, gastronomy experiences align perfectly with the expectations of Generation Z travelers, who are digital natives and key contributors to the global economy. Studies show that 97% of Gen Z use social media as a primary source of travel inspiration, and 68% rely on internet platforms for research, influencer reviews, and trending destinations (Travel Teach, 2023). Due to limited income, this group seeks budget-friendly travel options that offer high experiential value, such as nature-based, adventure-based, and food-related travel (Morning Consult, 2023). Gastronomy tourism offers Gen Z travelers the opportunity to enjoy unique cultural experiences and connect with local communities through culinary activities. Thailand's diverse food scene; ranging from affordable street food to Michelin-starred dining meets these demands (South China Morning Post, 2023).

Banthat Thong Road, recognized as the 14th coolest street in the world by Time Out in 2024 (Travel Eat Drink Review, 2024), is a prime example of how local culinary culture and tourism intersect. Located in the heart of Bangkok, the area has evolved from a hub of sportswear and auto parts into a renowned street food district. It features a wide array of eateries, from legendary local restaurants like Jeh O Chula and Jae Wan dessert shop to trendy modern cafes favored by both locals and tourists (PPTV HD36, 2023). The neighborhood reflects the convergence of local identity and gastronomic experiences, resonating particularly well with Gen Z tourists seeking novelty, authenticity, and shareable experiences.

Given this context, this study aims to explore the development of gastronomy tourism in the Banthat Thong area of Bangkok, with a specific focus on Generation Z travelers. The research will examine their behaviors and attitudes toward the area, along with tourism-related elements that contribute to its appeal. The findings will provide insights for public sector administrators and stakeholders in formulating policies and strategies to develop gastronomy tourism that meets the needs of Gen Z, encouraging repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth that will help expand the target demographic.

Research Objectives

1. To study the behavior of Generation Z tourists toward gastronomic tourism in the Banthat Thong area, Bangkok.
2. To assess the potential of gastronomic tourism for Generation Z tourists in the Banthat Thong area, Bangkok.
3. To propose development guidelines for gastronomic tourism targeting Generation Z tourists in the Banthat Thong area, Bangkok.

Literature Review

This study aims to develop strategies for promoting gastronomic tourism in the Banthat Thong area of Bangkok, with a specific focus on Generation Z tourists. To support this objective, the literature review explores four key themes:

1. Gastronomic Tourism

Gastronomic tourism refers to travel motivated by food experiences. It offers tourists the opportunity to engage with local culture through culinary exploration and is recognized as a key factor in enhancing the attractiveness of destinations (Hall & Mitchell, 2001). Food serves not only as a basic necessity but also as a reflection of cultural identity and local heritage (Richards, 2002). In Thailand, especially in urban areas like Bangkok, gastronomic tourism has become increasingly popular due to the abundance of street food, traditional eateries, and modern cafés (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2019).

2. Generation Z Tourist Behavior

Generation Z, generally defined as individuals born between 1995 - 2010, have grown up in a digital era and are highly reliant on technology for planning and making travel decisions (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). This group values speed, convenience, and unique, shareable experiences. In terms of food, they are drawn to visually appealing dishes that taste good and are suitable for posting on social media platforms (Tanyasri & Nuntasen, 2022).

3. Tourism Destination Potential

The potential of an area for gastronomic tourism depends on several factors, including the variety and quality of food, restaurant ambiance, accessibility, and the quality of service (Richards, 2002). Assessing these aspects allows for better planning and targeted development that aligns with tourist needs and expectations (Srisomwong, 2020).

4. The Context of the Banthat Thong Area

Banthat Thong is one of Bangkok's notable food districts, particularly popular among students and young people, especially those from Generation Z. The area features a wide range of street food, dessert shops, and creatively designed cafés. Visitors often come in the evening or at night, usually in groups of friends. The vibrant and energetic atmosphere makes the area well-suited for gastronomic tourism development (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2019).

Methodology

Populations and Sample

This study employed a quantitative research approach, targeting Generation Z tourists visiting the Banthat Thong area in Bangkok. As the exact population size was unknown, Cochran's formula (1953) was used to calculate the sample size, which is appropriate for an infinite population. With a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the minimum required sample size was determined to be 385 respondents. To improve data reliability and account for possible incomplete responses, the final sample size was increased to 400. A convenience sampling method was applied, selecting individuals who met the criteria and were willing to participate during the data collection period at the study site.

Research Tools

This study used a questionnaire as the main research instrument, developed based on relevant theories and literature. The questionnaire consisted of four parts:

Demographic Information: Questions on gender, age, education, marital status, occupation, and average monthly income, using nominal and ordinal scales.

Tourist Behavior: Questions on visit frequency, travel motivation, sources of information, travel time, transportation, companions, food preferences, and spending. These were multiple-choice questions using nominal and ordinal scales.

Opinions on Gastronomic Tourism: This section measured tourists' views on five key aspects: attractions, accessibility, facilities, activities, and service management. A 5-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Open-Ended Suggestions: An open-ended question allowed respondents to provide comments or recommendations for improving gastronomic tourism in the area.

The questionnaire's content validity was verified using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), with all items scoring between 0.50 and 1.00, indicating acceptable validity.

Data Collection

Data collection involved both secondary and primary sources. Secondary data were gathered from documents, books, articles, and related research on gastronomic tourism development and tourist behavior. Primary data were collected through fieldwork using questionnaires distributed to 400 Thai tourists visiting the Banthat Thong area in Bangkok.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Demographic characteristics and tourist behaviors were examined using frequency and percentage. Perceptions of gastronomic tourism potential were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Interpretation of mean scores followed Likert's interval scale (Likert, 1967, p. 93) to determine levels of agreement.

Results

The study on the Development Guidelines for Gastronomic Tourism for Generation Z Tourists in the Banthat Thong Area, Bangkok reveals several key insights across tourist behavior, tourism potential, and development strategies.

Behavior of Generation Z Tourists in Gastronomic Tourism

The majority of Generation Z tourists visiting the Banthat Thong area are female (59.80%), aged between 21 - 24 years (79.00%), and hold a bachelor's degree (72.80%). Most are single (96.00%), currently studying (78.50%), and have a monthly income between 10,001–20,000 baht (44.50%).

Regarding travel behavior, most respondents reported that it was their first visit to the area (27.00%) and their main purpose was to enjoy their favorite foods (86.50%). The primary motivating factor was the taste of the food (29.50%). Information about the area was mostly obtained through word of mouth such as friends, relatives, or acquaintances (38.50%). Tourists commonly used private vehicles (41.00%) and traveled with friends (73.60%), especially during the weekend (54.50%) and in the evening between 6 PM till midnight (72.70%). The most preferred food category was desserts (31.50%), with dessert shops being the most visited establishments (28.00%). Most tourists spent between 500 - 1,000 baht per visit (55.00%).

Assessment of Gastronomic Tourism Potential

The study evaluated the potential of gastronomic tourism for Generation Z Tourists in the Banthat Thong area through five key components: attractions, accessibility, amenities, activities, and service management.

Attractions received the highest overall rating (mean = 4.27, SD = 0.40). Tourists greatly valued the diversity of food options (mean = 4.55), appealing food presentation (mean = 4.40), aesthetically pleasing restaurant design and atmosphere (mean = 4.38), delicious taste (mean = 4.37), and freshness and cleanliness (mean = 4.24).

Accessibility was rated highly (mean = 4.03, SD = 0.50). Key positive factors included convenient and fast travel options (mean = 4.18), multiple routes to the area (mean = 4.08), social media promotion (mean = 3.96), and signage within the area (mean = 3.74).

Amenities were also rated as important (mean = 3.66, SD = 0.70), particularly the availability of strong internet and mobile signals (mean = 4.11), sufficient dining seating (mean = 3.84), and pedestrian safety (mean = 3.74). However, tourists expressed concerns regarding limited parking spaces (mean = 3.32) and inadequate public restrooms (mean = 3.31).

Activities were rated at a moderate to high level (mean = 3.58, SD = 0.88). Positive aspects included the organization of food festivals (mean = 3.83) and marketing promotions such as discounts and point-collection systems (mean = 3.57). However, activities like cooking workshops or prize giveaways were less emphasized (mean = 3.37).

Service Management was also highly rated (mean = 4.05, SD = 0.49), particularly the availability of various payment methods (mean = 4.52), friendly and polite staff (mean = 4.04), waiting area amenities (mean = 4.01), and staff knowledge regarding food and beverages (mean = 3.98).

In summary, the highest-rated component was attractions, followed by service management, accessibility, amenities, and activities, respectively. These findings highlight the comprehensive appeal of Banthat Thong as a gastronomic destination for Generation Z while also indicating areas for improvement.

Development Guidelines for Gastronomic Tourism in the Banthat Thong Area.

Based on the findings, several development strategies are proposed to enhance gastronomic tourism experiences for Generation Z tourists.

For attractions, although the area already offers diverse and visually appealing food options in well-decorated settings, further development can include introducing recognized food quality certifications such as the Michelin Guide and clearly zoning the area to separate dining and cooking spaces to enhance hygiene and organization.

Regarding accessibility, it is recommended to enhance navigational tools by adding individual restaurant locations to Google Maps and promoting parking availability through digital channels to facilitate travel planning.

In terms of amenities, while internet connectivity is strong, the area lacks adequate parking and clean public restrooms. These facilities should be improved to accommodate the increasing number of visitors and ensure convenience.

For activities, in addition to existing food festivals, it is suggested that local businesses organize special activities such as cooking classes, lucky draws, and community-driven events to enrich the tourist experience and create a sense of local engagement.

Lastly, in service management, although various payment options are already available, there is a need to improve queue and crowd management. Implementing a communication system or online booking platform for advance reservations would enhance customer satisfaction and reduce waiting times.

These guidelines aim to strengthen the positioning of Banthat Thong as a leading destination for gastronomic tourism among Generation Z tourists by building on its strengths and addressing its limitations through strategic development.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

Behavior of Generation Z Tourists in Gastronomic Tourism in the Banthat Thong Area, Bangkok

The findings reveal that most Generation Z tourists in the Banthat Thong area are female, aged 21–24, currently pursuing a bachelor's degree, and working as students with a monthly income between 10,001–20,000 baht. This demographic profile is consistent with Phakdeearsorn's (2021) study on the motivational factors influencing international gastronomic tourists in Phuket, which also found that the majority were females aged 21–30 with undergraduate education. However, a notable difference is observed in the occupational status; Phakdeearsorn's participants were primarily corporate employees, whereas this study highlights students as the predominant group. In terms of travel behavior, most respondents were first-time visitors whose primary motivation was to enjoy recommended food and beverages. The variety of both savory and sweet dishes was a key factor influencing their decision to travel. Information was predominantly sourced online, with tourists traveling mostly on weekends using private vehicles and accompanied by friends. The typical expenditure per visit ranged from 300–500 baht. These findings are in line with Chakrabort and Siribowornpitak (2023), who studied food tourism behavior in Maha Sarakham and similarly reported that tourists primarily used private vehicles, spent less than 1,000 baht per visit, and relied on online platforms for travel information. However, their study emphasized sightseeing as the main purpose, which differs from the food-centered motive observed in this research.

Assessment of Gastronomic Tourism Potential

The overall potential of gastronomic tourism in Banthat Thong, as perceived by Generation Z tourists, was rated highly. The strongest dimension was Attractions, reflecting the area's diverse food offerings and aesthetically pleasing presentation. This supports the view that visual and culinary variety are central to tourist satisfaction. Service Management also received high ratings, particularly for offering multiple payment options and for staff politeness and friendliness. Accessibility was considered favorable due to the ease of travel and multiple route options. However, the lack of communication regarding available parking remains a limitation. This aligns with recommendations by Phongnirandorn, Buathum, and Yodsuwan (2016), who emphasized the importance of clear transportation systems and

signage in facilitating tourist access. In the Amenities dimension, tourists appreciated strong mobile and internet signals and adequate dining space, but expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of clean and sufficient restroom facilities. This concern is supported by Pantian, Chantachon, and Kosayothin (2019), who argued that cleanliness in tourist infrastructure especially restrooms is critical to visitor satisfaction. Activities were moderately rated. While the area features food festivals that provide cultural and experiential value, other interactive elements such as workshops and games were lacking. According to Schmitt (2011), successful tourist experiences encompass five experiential types: sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social. Banthat Thong's current offering primarily fulfills sensory and social experiences, suggesting opportunities for more diversified engagement.

Development Guidelines for Gastronomic Tourism

Based on these findings, a series of development guidelines are proposed to enhance the gastronomic tourism experience for Generation Z: Attractions should be further elevated through branding initiatives and by encouraging restaurants to pursue quality certifications (e.g., Michelin stars) to enhance trust and international appeal. In Service Management, implementing a reservation system or digital queuing mechanism could streamline customer service and reduce wait times, thereby improving visitor satisfaction. Accessibility can be improved by mapping restaurants clearly on Google Maps and disseminating parking availability information to assist tourists in planning their visits. For Amenities, it is essential to invest in expanding parking facilities and ensuring that public restrooms are clean and adequately maintained. Activities should be diversified to include creative food-related events such as cooking classes, prize draws, and community-based gastronomic initiatives. These recommendations align with Weerakul, Damapong, Siripanwatana, Phoolpotong, and Mortero (2013), who emphasized that food tourism offers a rich medium for experiential learning.

Conclusion

The Banthat Thong area holds high potential as a gastronomic destination for Generation Z tourists. By leveraging its strengths in food diversity and aesthetics while addressing shortcomings in infrastructure and activity variety, the area can be strategically positioned as a vibrant hub of culinary tourism in Bangkok. These findings contribute to the broader field of gastronomic tourism by offering insights specific to younger demographics and urban food districts, while also supporting theoretical frameworks on experiential consumption and service design.

Research recommendations

1. Apply qualitative research for deeper insights
Future studies should consider using qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews with stakeholders in gastronomic tourism. This approach can provide a richer understanding of tourist experiences and motivations.
2. Expand research to other areas and populations
Conducting research in different geographic locations or with varied target groups can help compare findings and develop more effective, localized strategies for gastronomic tourism development.
3. Encourage community participation
Relevant agencies should collaborate closely with local communities and stakeholders to better understand issues and co-create solutions. This can enhance awareness and pride in local food culture.
4. Promote gastronomic tourism through education and media
Government agencies should educate the public about creating food tourism routes and actively promote the Banthat Thong area through diverse media channels to reach a broader range of tourists.

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PREDICTORS OF ONLINE FOOD DELIVERY SERVICES CONTINUED USAGE INTENTION AMONG PUBLIC UNIVER- SITY STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

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Extended abstract

This study investigates the predictors of continued usage intention for online food delivery services (OFDS) among public university students in Malaysia. Anchored in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), a conceptual framework was developed by integrating two additional variables variety of food choices and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) to gain a more comprehensive understanding of students' behavioral intentions. A cross-sectional survey was administered to students from 20 public universities across Malaysia using purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using SmartPLS. The results reveal that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, variety of food choices, and e-WOM significantly influence students' continued intention to use OFDS. This study extends the TAM by demonstrating the relevance of food variety and e-WOM as key determinants in the context of OFDS. The findings offer practical implications for service providers aiming to enhance the appeal and user retention of OFDS platforms among university students. Study limitations and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

UNDERSTANDING THE MOTIVATION OF INDIAN COUPLES IN CHOOSING A DESTINATION WEDDING

Natsinee Jarasthanitsak ¹, Jinnapas Dominic ²

Abstract

The growing popularity of destination weddings among Indians has had a significantly positive economic impact on destinations (Kaushik & Kumar, 2023; Singh, 2020; Kaur et al., 2023; George, 2024). Related research remains limited (Singh, 2020), particularly regarding the motivations that drive Indian tourists to choose destination weddings. This qualitative study employs a systematic review method, analyzing secondary data from existing literature to identify key motivational factors. Findings reveal that push factors include showcasing social status, positive experiences with the destination, limiting the number of guests, the desire for uniqueness, and the display of wealth, reflecting internal needs and desires. Pull factors, on the other hand, relate to the destination's marketing mix, such as value for money, scenic beauty, service quality, comprehensive wedding packages, accessibility, and the influence of social media. The study applies Dann's (1997) Push-Pull Theory to explain how external destination characteristics shape decision-making, offering a framework to understand Indian tourists' preferences. Practical implications highlight the need for stakeholders in the destination wedding industry to align their marketing strategies across product, price, place, and promotion dimensions to meet the expectations of this lucrative market. Additionally, policy recommendations suggest that tourism authorities and destination planners can enhance service delivery and competitiveness by addressing the specific needs of Indian wedding participants.

Keywords: Motivation; Destination Wedding; Indian Wedding; Indian wedding destinations

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Introduction

The growing trend of destination weddings is witnessing an impressive annual growth rate of 30.6%, underscoring the rising appeal of this wedding format among Indian couples. This trend reflects a notable shift away from traditional, home-based wedding formats, which have historically been deeply rooted in Indian culture. The increasing popularity of destination weddings can be largely attributed to the significant rise in wealth among India's middle-class population, particularly in the period following the COVID-19 pandemic (Kaushik & Kumar, 2023). With the expanding disposable income and a desire to celebrate once-in-a-lifetime events in a memorable fashion, many Indian families are now prioritizing unique wedding experiences over conventional ceremonies.

Since weddings are considered profoundly meaningful life events for Indians, often taking place only once in a lifetime, they carry immense cultural, emotional, and social significance (Singh, 2020; Kaur et al., 2023). As such, Indian couples and their families are highly motivated to organize weddings that not only fulfill cultural expectations but also create exceptional experiences that will be remembered and cherished by both the couple and their guests for years to come.

Recent statistics regarding Indian destination weddings reveal that there are as many as 5,000 weddings of wealthy Indian couples taking place overseas each year. This impressive figure highlights the growing preference for international venues, with the majority of these weddings being hosted in popular destinations such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and key Southeast Asian countries, including Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. These locations are favored due to their luxurious offerings, cultural compatibility, high-quality services, and proximity to India, which makes them convenient yet exotic choices. The destination wedding trend is especially prevalent among families from northern Indian states, such as Delhi, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh, where societal norms place a strong emphasis on grand, opulent celebrations. The average budgets for these weddings typically range between 10 million to 50 million rupees per event (George, 2024), reflecting the high stakes and significant investments involved in curating such elaborate affairs.

The economic impact of Indian destination weddings is considerable, contributing to the hospitality, travel, and event management sectors of host countries. This makes the Indian destination wedding segment an increasingly attractive and lucrative market, drawing the attention of international tourism boards, luxury resorts, and wedding planners alike. Yet, despite its economic promise and growing influence, academic research on this specific topic remains relatively limited (Singh, 2020). There is a pressing need to better understand the motivations driving Indian couples to select destination weddings, as well as to explore the evolving trends shaping this phenomenon in the post-pandemic era.

Accordingly, this study aims to address these knowledge gaps by investigating the key motivations behind Indian couples' choices to host destination weddings and by identifying the emerging trends within this niche but expanding market. Such insights are crucial not only for academic understanding but also for informing tourism stakeholders, wedding planners, and destination marketers who seek to develop and promote destinations capable of meeting the specific expectations and desires of Indian wedding clients.

In the following sections, the relevant literature on motivation theories and destination wedding trends will be briefly reviewed. This will be followed by a detailed explanation of the research methodology, a synthesis of the motivations and emerging patterns identified among Indian couples opting for destination weddings, a discussion of the findings in relation to existing scholarship, and finally, a summary of the study's key conclusions and implications.

Research Objectives

1. Studying the motivations of Indian couples who choose to host Destination Weddings among Indian couples.
2. To develop strategies for improving destinations and supporting operators involved in hosting weddings for Indian couples.

Literature Review

Motivation

Motivation is an internal drive within humans that prompts actions or behaviors to fulfill expectations and desires, which are the goals that have been set. Motivation arises when one is in a state of necessity, need, and desire, causing tension in the body, which acts as a catalyst for taking action to satisfy those needs, wants, and desires. (Seebaluck et al., 2015; Nawarathna, 2017)

Motivation can be classified into two types based on the kind of stimulus that triggers motivation, namely Intrinsic Motivation and Extrinsic Motivation (Uysal & Hagan, 1993). Similarly, regarding tourism, motivation has been categorized by focusing on the destination (Dann, 1997), dividing motivation into two types:

1) Push factors are intrinsic motivation, which is the internal desire or need that arises within the mind. These factors are driven by internal forces that spark interest, involving emotions, thoughts, attitudes, intentions, attention, needs, satisfaction, and perceptions.

2) Pull factors are external motivations from the environment outside the individual, stimulating behaviors. These factors are related to the attractions of the destination that trigger the desires of the tourists and related to the application of the marketing mix of the destination (Aleksijevits, 2019). Thus, creating a marketing strategy that appeals to all interests will help travelers choose a destination and influence their purchasing decisions (Seebaluck et al., 2015).

These studies have laid a theoretical foundation for understanding what drives tourists, but they primarily focus on general travel behavior. There is a gap when it comes to understanding how motivation theories apply specifically to niche tourism markets, such as destination weddings. While we understand the general dynamics of push and pull factors, the interplay between these motivations in the context of wedding tourism remains underexplored, particularly for culturally specific markets like Indian couples.

Destination Wedding

A destination wedding is a kind of wedding that happens outside the couple's hometown or current residence. The fact that most guests must travel from outside the city to attend the ceremony and may need to stay for many days is another aspect of destination weddings (Mashooq & Kumar, 2022; Settheewongsakun, 2019).

A destination for weddings is often compared in terms of the pull factors based on tourist satisfaction and perceptions of the destination's characteristics. This consideration involves the comparative advantages of the destination, such as natural resources, tourist attractions, culture, and social experiences. Additionally, competitive advantages, such as the efficient management of resources at the destination and the image of the destination, are also essential. These characteristics are key elements that make a destination stand out (Jailani et al., 2019; Karl et al., 2023; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Zenker et al., 2017).

One of the most significant occasions in a couple's lives is the romantic experience of getting married. Therefore, choosing a destination, along with the format and details of the ceremony that meet the couple's needs, is crucial and influences the decision-making process in selecting a wedding destination. Hence, the pull factors of the destination that persuade the bride and groom to choose that location for their wedding can be used to develop effective strategies to attract the target customers (Bertella, 2015; Jailani et al., 2019).

While these studies highlight what makes a destination appealing in general, they often focus on Western or global markets. There is limited research investigating how couples from specific cultural contexts, such as Indian couples, prioritize and weigh these destination characteristics. The unique motivations, social expectations, and cultural meanings tied to weddings in Indian society may introduce additional or distinct factors influencing destination choice, which are not fully addressed in existing international destination wedding research.

This study addresses that gap by systematically reviewing, synthesizing, and evaluating existing motivational theories, destination appeal frameworks, and cultural insights relevant to Indian wedding traditions. By doing so, the research contributes targeted knowledge that can inform destination marketers, wedding planners, and tourism stakeholders seeking to engage more effectively with the Indian destination wedding market, a segment that is rapidly growing and holds significant economic potential.

Methodology

Data Collection

The data collection for this study used secondary data gathering methods. Relevance to the abstract, title, and content was taken into account while selecting articles from the Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and TCI databases. For the search, keywords like "Indian Wedding", "Motivation", and "Destination Wedding" were employed. Then, selected 18 articles were published between 2011 and 2024.

Data Analysis

The data analysis used a systematic review method from a review of selected literature. Each article was screened in terms of publication, year of publication, research methods, data sources, and conclusions. Then, content analysis was used to analyze the results of each research paper to capture the key points, categorize them, and describe the content of the study. This analysis provided insights into the motivations of Indians and trends in choosing Destination Weddings.

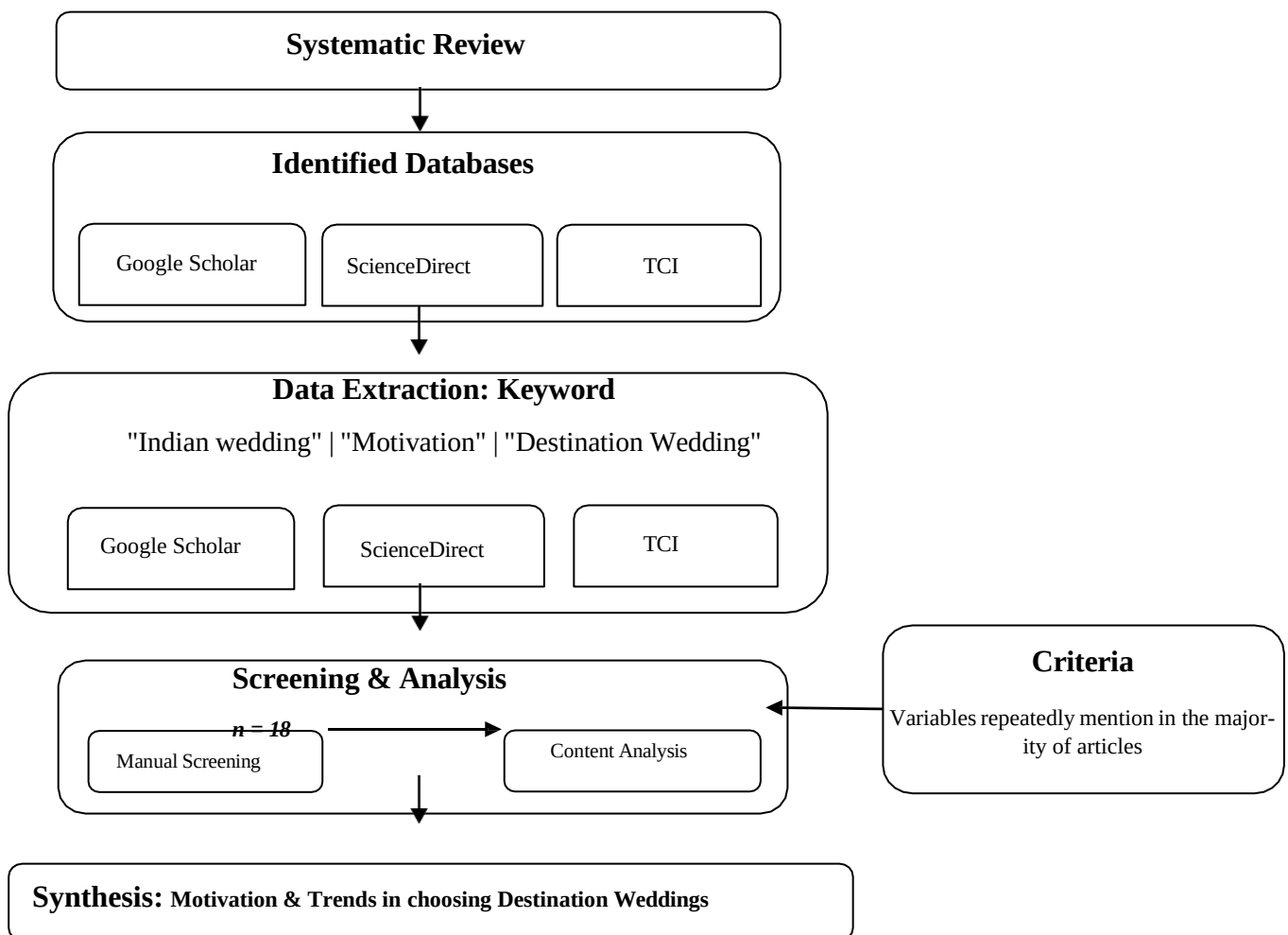


Figure 1. Research Process

Results

From the data analysis regarding the Indian market with destination weddings, the motivations of Indians can be classified into 2 groups based on the motivation theory of Dann (1997), selected based on the frequency of variables mentioned in all related research, as shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3

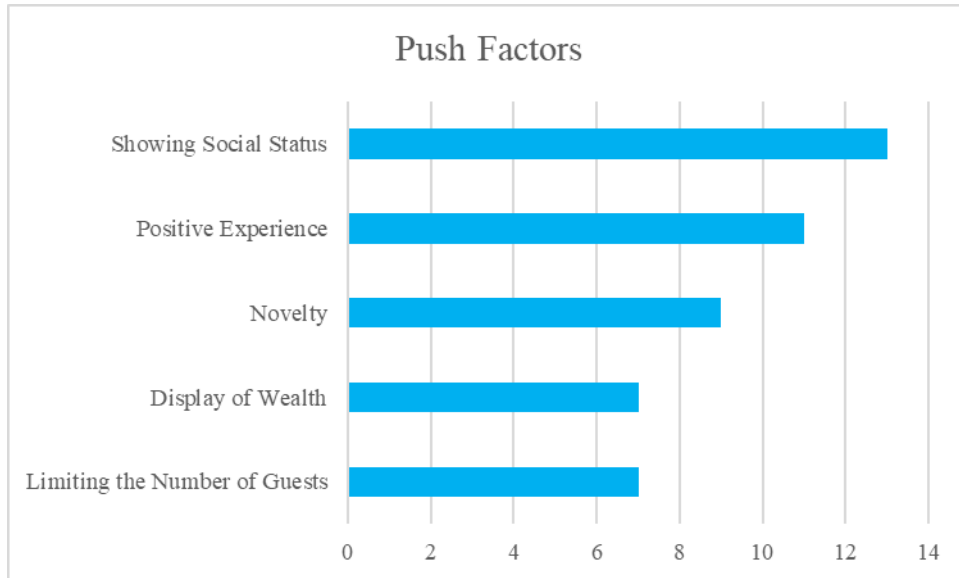


Figure 2. Push Factors

The push factors consist of various factors as detailed below: The desire to *show social status*, as weddings in Indian culture are seen as a symbol of the family's wealth (Dickey, 2011; Farzana & Ilayaraja, 2015; George, 2024; Jailani et al., 2019; Joseph & Alexander, 2018; Kaushik & Kumar, 2023; Kaur et al., 2023; McMillan & Jarumaneerat, 2014; Micallef, 2017; Singh, 2020; Singh & Motwani, 2022; Suthatartrakul, 2017; Tangtenglam et al., 2022).

Positive experience at the destination, which leads Indian couples to be more likely to return to the location for their wedding (Farzana & Ilayaraja, 2015; Jailani et al., 2019; Kaushik & Kumar, 2023; Kaur et al., 2023; Mashooq & Kumar, 2022; McMillan & Jarumaneerat, 2014; Micallef, 2017; Seebaluck et al., 2015; Singh, 2020; Singh & Motwani, 2022; Suthatartrakul, 2017).

The desire for *novelty*, as couples want their wedding to be unique and stand out from others (George, 2024; Jailani et al., 2019; Kaushik & Kumar, 2023; Kaur et al., 2023; Mashooq & Kumar, 2022; McMillan & Jarumaneerat, 2014; Micallef, 2017; Seebaluck et al., 2015; Singh, 2020).

The desire to *display wealth*, a result of the rise in wealth among India's middle-class population (Dickey, 2011; George, 2024; Joseph & Alexander, 2018; Kaushik & Kumar, 2023; Micallef, 2017; Singh & Motwani, 2022).

Finally, they want to *limit the number of guests*, inviting only close family and friends, which allows the couple to spend more quality time with loved ones. This has become popular, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic (George, 2024; Kaushik & Kumar, 2023; Kaur et al., 2023; McMillan & Jarumaneerat, 2014; Micallef, 2017; Singh, 2020; Tangtenglam et al., 2022).

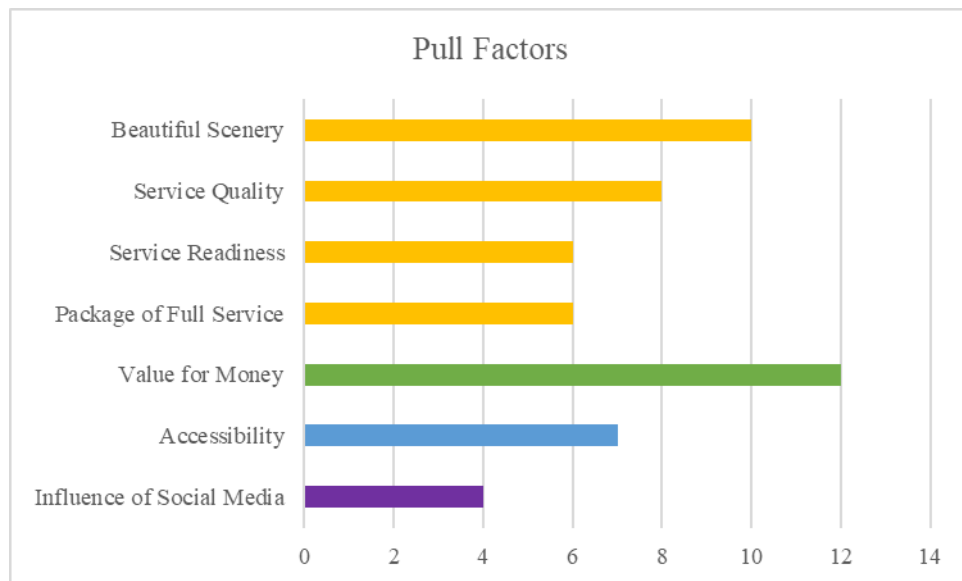


Figure 3. Pull Factors

The pull factors consist of several variables, which, through analysis using the marketing mix theory as a framework, can be categorized as follows:

Group 1 includes beautiful scenery, service quality, service readiness, and full- service packages (Kaur et al., 2023; Kaushik & Kumar, 2023; Maheshwari, 2018; Mashooq & Kumar, 2022; McMillan & Jarumaneerat, 2014; Micallef, 2017; Seebaluck et al., 2015; Singh, 2020; Suthatartrakul, 2017; Tangtenglam et al., 2022; Thephee, 2018). These factors are related to the product element of the marketing mix.

Group 2 includes value for money (George, 2024; Kaur et al., 2023; Kaushik & Kumar, 2023; Maheshwari, 2018; Mashooq & Kumar, 2022; McMillan & Jarumaneerat, 2014; Micallef, 2017; Seebaluck et al., 2015; Singh, 2020; Suthatartrakul, 2017; Tangtenglam et al., 2022; Thephee, 2018), which is considered the most important factor. Destination weddings are often more cost-effective than organizing weddings in India, offering good value for money in exchange for quality services. This relates to the price element of the marketing mix.

Group 3 includes accessibility (George, 2024; Kaur et al., 2023; McMillan & Jarumaneerat, 2014; Micallef, 2017; Singh, 2020; Suthatartrakul, 2017; Thephee, 2018), which encompasses both the convenience of international travel to the destination and transportation within the wedding venue. This relates to the place element of the marketing mix.

Group 4 includes the influence of social media from experienced people (George, 2024; Joseph & Alexander, 2018; Singh & Motwani, 2022), which is related to the promotion element of the marketing mix.

In addition, further distinctions between the motivations of Indian middle-class and upper-class groups were identified, particularly under the need to demonstrate social standing. Upper-class Indians choose ideal destinations to create unforgettable experiences, often based on referrals from friends or close acquaintances (Jailani et al., 2019; Kaur et al., 2023). On the other hand, social media serves as a major source of motivation for the Indian middle class (George, 2024; Kumar & Mashooq, 2022; Singh, 2020). They are motivated by the urge to display their wealth and make it apparent to their peer group, frequently inspired by media coverage of celebrity weddings or other notable societal figures (George, 2024; Kumar & Mashooq, 2022; Singh, 2020).

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The study found that the motivation of Indian couples who choose destination weddings aligns with the motivation theory of Dann (1997), specifically the Push-Pull Theory, which helps to explain motivation by focusing primarily on the influence of destination characteristics, which differs from other theories that emphasize the intrinsic motivations of tourists. The Push-Pull Theory is thus suitable for studying motivations with the aim of further developing destinations to align with tourists' needs. The push factors include positive experiences in the past, the desire to limit the number of guests, the need for novelty, the aspiration to display social status, and the need to escape the monotony of daily life which are the internal factors within individuals, expressed as needs, wants, and/or desires, that influence tourism choices while pull factors are associated with the marketing mix of the destination, representing the unique attributes of the destination or attraction. A destination generally can be so appealing that it "pulls" tourists toward it. In summary, motivation plays a crucial role in decision-making processes and in shaping consumer behavior (Heitmann, 2011).

Therefore, in developing strategies to attract Indian couples to choose destination weddings, it is necessary to consider the marketing mix, with differentiation based on the target group levels, especially awareness channels, which is consistent with the study by Micallef (2017), which used marketing theory as a strategy to attract the Indian wedding market and successfully stimulate the economy of Malta.

In terms of product, the development of wedding formats that integrate travel and cater to the lifestyle of Indians should focus on blending local culture with Indian traditions. This will contribute to the destination's distinctiveness and individuality, making it stand out. Highlighting the landscapes' beauty and nature should be the main focus. The wedding format should also be adaptable, allowing customization based on client preferences while preserving cultural customs consistent with the study by Singh (2020), which found that Thailand leverages its strengths in geographic beauty and flexibility in wedding planning as key advantages to attract Indian couples to hold their weddings in Thailand. The goal is to provide a remarkable experience with high-quality professional services, especially during the peak Indian wedding seasons of November - February and June - August (Tangtenglam et al., 2022).

In terms of price, it is clear that Indians place great importance on the cost of organizing a wedding. The goal is to ensure that the couple feels the expense is justified in comparison to weddings hosted at other locations. Associated businesses must focus on offering value by highlighting the advantages they will experience. The study by Kaushik & Kumar (2023) found that many Indian couples are willing to spend on weddings for a valuable experience and to create lasting memories for this once-in-a-lifetime special day. For the middle-class segment, it may be necessary to offer all-inclusive wedding packages that fit the customer's budget to attract this group, which is consistent with the study by Tangtenglam et al. (2022), which found that value for money and affordable costs help attract Indian couples to host their weddings in Southeast Asia.

In terms of place, it would be beneficial to enhance the accessibility of destination wedding locations to ensure smooth travel and increase visitor convenience. Government policies, especially those that facilitate visas and direct flights from India, can be leveraged to achieve this, consistent with the study by George (2024), which states that destination weddings have become popular due to easy visa applications, and convenient transportation. The focus should be on improving transportation connectivity within the area by establishing a network of collaboration among transportation operators in each region to accommodate the transportation of large groups to their destinations.

In terms of promotion, for the middle-class segment, the focus should be on developing communication channels that serve as a central hub for wedding planning information. This is consistent with the study by Singh & Motwani (2022), which found that social networks influence every aspect of wedding planning in India's popular social media platforms used by Indians, such as Facebook, Instagram, Airbnb, and LinkedIn. For the upper-class segment, the focus should be on promoting word-of-mouth recommendations about memorable experiences. The goal is to offer a one-stop service that facilitates contact with service providers and offers other related services/products to provide a comprehensive wedding planning experience in one place, reducing the hassle of coordination.

Conclusion

The decision of Indian couples to organize destination weddings is influenced by various push factors such as the desire to display social status, positive past experiences at the destination, a craving for novelty, the display of wealth, and the intention to limit guest numbers. Complementing these are pull factors including value for money, the beauty of the scenery, service quality, service readiness, full-service packages, accessibility, and the influence of social media. Together, these factors confirm the relevance of the push-pull motivation theory (Dann, 1997) in explaining the choice of wedding destinations among Indian couples, thereby addressing a research gap in previous studies that have largely overlooked this niche market.

Importantly, the identified pull factors align closely with the marketing mix theory, reflecting the specific needs and expectations of Indian couples when selecting a wedding destination. This provides practical implications for stakeholders in the destination wedding industry, who must ensure that their marketing strategies address the four key areas Product, Price, Place, and Promotion to attract this market segment effectively.

Furthermore, this research highlights the importance of government involvement, particularly through international collaboration policies, in enhancing destination competitiveness. Measures such as increasing direct flight routes, streamlining visa processes, and improving destination infrastructure can significantly boost the attractiveness of destinations, generate substantial income for local economies, create employment opportunities, and ultimately contribute to national revenue.

Research recommendations

1. Future research should focus on specific destination areas to better understand the factors that make these locations attractive to Indian wedding couples.
2. Quantitative methods should be employed to collect empirical data directly from Indian couples who have chosen to hold their weddings in those destinations, ensuring a robust understanding of demand-side motivations and preferences.
3. Qualitative data should also be gathered from operators and relevant agencies involved in destination wedding services, to capture insights from the supply side. Integrating findings from both perspectives will help in developing more comprehensive and effective marketing and management strategies.

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MOBILE HOTEL BOOKING USER LOYALTY MODEL: LINKING SYSTEM QUALITY, COMPATIBILITY, PERCEIVED OF USE, AND CONVENIENCE

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Extended abstract

The proliferation of mobile technology has dramatically altered the hospitality landscape, especially in how customers interact with hotel booking services. This research explores the factors influencing customer loyalty toward mobile hotel booking (MHB) platforms in Malaysia. Drawing upon the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Information Systems (IS) Success Model, the study investigates the relationships between system quality, compatibility, perceived ease of use, convenience, and customer loyalty. Using a quantitative approach with data collected from 168 respondents and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via SmartPLS, the study finds that perceived ease of use and convenience significantly influence loyalty, with system quality and compatibility indirectly contributing to loyalty through perceived ease of use. The findings offer both theoretical and practical insights for enhancing customer retention strategies in the mobile hospitality ecosystem.

Keywords: Mobile hotel booking; customer loyalty; system quality; perceived ease of use; compatibility; convenience; TAM; IS Success Model; SmartPLS; hospitality technology.

Purpose/Problem Statement

The primary objective of this study is to identify and evaluate the key determinants that drive customer loyalty toward mobile hotel booking applications in the Malaysian context. Despite the increasing use of MHB platforms, retaining users over time remains a significant challenge for service providers. Many customers may install and initially try an MHB app but discontinue use due to dissatisfaction, lack of perceived value, or inconvenient features. Thus, this study seeks to address the gap by assessing how technological factors and user perceptions affect long-term engagement and loyalty.

Originality/value

This research offers a novel integration of TAM and the IS Success Model in the context of mobile hotel booking, a combination seldom explored in existing literature. While previous studies have primarily focused on user adoption, this study extends the scope by emphasizing post-adoption behavior, particularly customer loyalty. By introducing “convenience” as a mediating variable between perceived ease of use and loyalty, and investigating the indirect effects of system quality and compatibility, the study enriches the understanding of digital loyalty formation. This framework can be adapted to analyze other mobile service environments beyond the hospitality sector.

Design/methodology/approach

A positivist quantitative methodology was employed to ensure objectivity and generalizability. The research instrument was a structured questionnaire adapted from validated sources (e.g., Davis, 1989; DeLone & McLean, 2003), comprising six constructs measured using five-point Likert scales. Data were collected from 168 respondents across Malaysia who had experience using MHB applications within the last 12 months. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using SmartPLS 4.0 was used to test the hypothesized relationships between variables. The model’s reliability and validity were assessed through composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT).

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Findings/Discussion

The empirical results indicate that system quality and compatibility significantly influence perceived ease of use. In turn, perceived ease of use and compatibility both positively affect perceived convenience. Notably, perceived ease of use and convenience are significant predictors of customer loyalty toward MHB platforms. However, compatibility does not directly influence loyalty, suggesting that its impact is more functional than emotional. These findings align with prior studies emphasizing the importance of ease of use and perceived value in retaining users in digital environments (Kim et al., 2017; Mohd Suki, 2017). The results confirm the mediating role of convenience and support the extended use of TAM in predicting loyalty rather than mere adoption.

Theoretical implications

This study makes a meaningful contribution to theory by extending the traditional TAM framework to include post-adoption behavior, particularly customer loyalty. The incorporation of the IS Success Model's constructs i.e. system quality and compatibility, enhances the explanatory power of the model and bridges gaps in existing literature. The mediating role of convenience adds a user-experience-oriented perspective that complements technological determinants. This integrated model offers a more comprehensive lens for understanding technology usage in hospitality and supports the call for hybrid models in digital consumer behavior research (Venkatesh et al., 2012).

Practical implications

For hotel managers, application developers, and digital marketers, the findings underscore the critical importance of user-centric design. Mobile booking platforms must prioritize intuitive interfaces, reliability, and minimal effort for task completion to ensure user satisfaction and loyalty. Compatibility with users' existing digital habits, devices, and lifestyle preferences should also be ensured. Additionally, enhancing perceived convenience, through personalization features, seamless payment integration, and real-time availability can significantly boost repeat usage. These insights are valuable for stakeholders seeking to improve customer retention in an increasingly competitive and mobile-driven market.

Social implications (Policy contribution)

From a societal and policy perspective, the study suggests the need for national initiatives to promote digital transformation in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Policymakers should support the development of user-friendly mobile platforms through grants, training, and digital literacy programs targeting SMEs. Ensuring standardized design, usability, and multilingual access could enhance inclusivity and accessibility for a broader demographic. In the post-pandemic era, where mobile contactless services are increasingly preferred, fostering high-quality MHB platforms can contribute to national tourism recovery and economic resilience.

Research limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the relatively small and demographically homogeneous sample may restrict the generalizability of the findings beyond Malaysian users. Second, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference, and user loyalty may evolve over time based on changing preferences or experiences. Third, the study focused solely on technological and perceptual variables, omitting emotional or psychological dimensions such as trust, brand attachment, or perceived risk. Future research should consider longitudinal studies, multi-country comparisons, and broader sets of variables to deepen the understanding of loyalty in mobile service environments.

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DEVELOPING AUTHENTIC SPIRITUAL TOURISM EXPERIENCES THROUGH MINDFULNESS RETREATS IN THAILAND: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION

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Extended abstract

The rapid pace of modern life, accompanied by increasing psychological stress and uncertainty, has triggered a global rise in the search for inner peace and meaning. In response, **spiritual tourism** has emerged as an alternative form of travel focused on personal growth, healing, and mindfulness. Among its many manifestations, **meditation retreats** hosted in spiritual resort settings offer a structured and immersive experience, blending comfort with Buddhist principles.

Thailand with its strong cultural, religious, and natural assets has become a prominent destination for spiritual travellers. This study focuses on the lived experiences of tourists participating in meditation programs at a well-known spiritual retreat in Thailand. It examines their motivations, expectations, perceived benefits, and long-term behavioral outcomes, contributing new empirical insights to the under-researched area of spiritual tourism in Southeast Asia.

This research adopts a qualitative case study methodology to explore how spiritual tourists engage with meditation practices in a retreat environment. It draws upon conceptual frameworks including Zolfaghari et al.'s (2020) Spiritual Tourism Experience Scale and Pine & Gilmore's (1998) experiential economy theory, while also incorporating Buddhist-informed spiritual philosophies and identity transformation theory. The results reveal that spiritual tourism through meditation fosters not only psychological relaxation but also profound inner change and cultural immersion.

Keyword: Spiritual Tourism retreat, Mindfulness Travel, Spiritual Identity Transformation, Wellness Tourism development, Spiritual retreat in Thailand

Purpose/Problem Statement

The primary aim of this research is to investigate the effects of spiritual tourism, particularly meditation retreats in Thailand, on tourists' emotional well-being, spiritual awareness, and personal development. Despite the growing popularity of meditation as a component of wellness travel, there is a scarcity of empirical studies examining the spiritual aspects of these experiences. To accomplish this research objective, three key questions are addressed:

- What motivates tourists to participate in meditation retreats?
- How do tourists perceive and engage with spiritual practices in the retreat setting?
- What types of transformations psychological, emotional, or behavioral result from their experiences?

This study utilized a theoretical framework grounded in the six dimensions of the spiritual tourism experience measurement scale developed by Zolfaghari et al. (2020). The dimensions encompassed in this framework are transformation, healing, transcendence, atmosphere, escape, and divine connectedness.

Hence, the research addresses a knowledge gap in existing tourism literature, where most prior studies have focused on spa-based wellness, pilgrimage, or religious rituals. This study positions meditation retreats as a distinct and meaningful form of spiritual travel that can contribute to sustainable tourism and holistic well-being.

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Originality/value

This research represents one of the first empirical investigations in Thailand into meditation retreat experiences, drawing insights from both local and international participants. While numerous prior studies have examined religion and pilgrimage tourism, this study specifically focuses on how structured spiritual programs engender personal transformation, thereby filling a significant gap in the spiritual tourism literature within Southeast Asia.

Design/methodology/approach

A qualitative will be employed by using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and field observation for data collecting process. The study area was chosen because a reputable spiritual retreat resort in one of a unique natural setting in Thailand. Moreover, it the area was easy to access that make potential tourist choose to take part in a spiritual activities, especially it was very well structured meditation programs, and combine with historical cultural authenticity resort for long time. The approximately 25 participants who take part in a spiritual activities will be chosen, especially those who have completed the 10 days program of speech. The selecting criteria are such as: prior attendance in at least one meditation retreat over the past two years, age over 18, and the ability to articulate their experiences. Both Thai and international tourists were included, ensuring cross-cultural representation and perception toward spiritual retreat activities experienced.

The study aimed to collect data focusing on tourists' motivations, emotional and psychological expectations, and experiences following spiritual retreat activities. Additionally, it sought to understand their intentions to revisit or participate in spiritual retreat activities and the reasons behind their behavioral intentions to return. To support this analysis, observational techniques were employed during site visits to confirm behavioral intentions and changes observed while attending the retreat, including how participants engaged in rituals, their interactions with themselves, and their dynamics with friends. Thematic content analysis was used for data analysis.

Findings/Discussion

Theoretical implications

This research contributes to the theoretical framework of spiritual tourism by integrating insights from spiritual motivation theories (Norman, 2011; Voigt et al., 2011) and experience economy theory (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). It supports the proposition that spiritual tourism experiences can be both escapist and transformative, offering long-term psychological benefits beyond temporary recreation.

Practical implications

The study underscores the market potential of spiritual tourism in Thailand, particularly through structured meditation retreats. It provides insights for retreat operators and tourism stakeholders to design programs that balance spiritual authenticity with tourist accessibility. Government bodies may also integrate such offerings into broader wellness tourism strategies to attract high-value tourists seeking meaningful experiences.

Research limitations

As the data were derived from a single case study resort and focused on tourist experiences, the findings may not be generalizable to all forms of holistic spiritual tourism. Future studies should expand to diverse retreat types, include longitudinal tracking, and explore perspectives from organizers and local communities.

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CO-BRANDING STRATEGY BETWEEN CULTURALLY-BASED COSMETICS AND HOSPITALITY FOR AN EXCLUSIVE TOURISM EXPERIENCE IN BOGOR, INDONESIA

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Abstract

The tourism and hospitality industry continues to grow rapidly, intensifying competition among destinations (Li et al., 2024; Ndhlovu et al., 2024; Sharin et al., 2024). One innovative approach to enhance tourist experiences and strengthen destination branding is co-branding (Zhu et al., 2024), particularly between the hospitality sector and culturally-based cosmetic brands. Indonesia's rich cultural heritage presents an untapped opportunity to integrate traditional cosmetic products into the tourism experience (Miksic, 2023). This study explores the strategic potential of co-branding between culturally-based cosmetics and the hospitality sector in creating an exclusive tourism experience in Bogor, Indonesia- a city known for its natural beauty and cultural richness.

Using a qualitative approach, this research involved structured interviews with local cosmetic brand owners and a representative from a hotel management team. The findings reveal that although no existing co-branding collaborations have been established between these two sectors, both parties recognize strong potential for future partnerships. Hotel managers view culturally-themed cosmetic products as a way to differentiate their services and offer guests a more immersive cultural experience. Meanwhile, cosmetic brand owners see hospitality partnerships as a valuable channel for brand exposure and association with high-end experiences.

The study highlights the mutual interest and complementary strengths of both sectors, indicating that co-branding could enhance Bogor's positioning as a premium cultural tourism destination. However, several challenges must be addressed, including limited brand awareness of local cosmetic products, supply chain consistency, and alignment with hospitality standards. Stakeholders emphasize the need for collaborative marketing, government support, and clear quality standards to support the success of such partnerships.

This study provides several key implications. *Theoretically*, it contributes to co-branding literature by presenting a cross-sectoral framework involving cultural-based products and hospitality services in an emerging market context. *Practically*, it offers actionable insights for businesses seeking to establish mutually beneficial collaborations that enhance customer experience and brand positioning. *Socially*, it suggests opportunities for local policy intervention to promote co-branding initiatives through support mechanisms and cultural tourism programs. *As a limitation*, this research only involved interviews with a representative from one hotel. Future studies are encouraged to expand the scope of participants to include managers from various hotels ranging from one-star to five-star establishments to provide a more representative and comprehensive understanding of the hospitality sector's perspective on co-branding strategies.

Keywords: Co-branding strategy, culturally-based cosmetics, hospitality, exclusive tourism experience, strategic decision.

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Introduction

Indonesia is an archipelagic country rich in tourism potential, including natural beauty, cultural heritage, culinary diversity, and local traditions. One notable destination is Bogor City, located near the capital Jakarta, offering a blend of cool natural landscapes and cultural richness. Known as the “Rain City,” Bogor is a favorite destination for both domestic and international tourists seeking nature- and culture-based experiences, enhanced by local hospitality. The ongoing development of tourism infrastructure such as hotels, restaurants, and cultural attractions positions Bogor as a strategic location for exclusive and sustainable tourism development (UNWTO, 2022; Sugiyarto & Blake, 2020).

From 2022 to 2025, tourist visits to Bogor both the city and regency have shown a significant upward trend. In 2023, Bogor City recorded 5,650,637 tourist visits (Antara Jabar, 2024), which sharply increased to 8,093,203 in 2024. This figure includes 3,007,776 tourists staying in accommodations and 5,085,427 visiting attractions, restaurants, and souvenir centers (Metropolitan.id, 2025). Meanwhile, Bogor Regency recorded 13 million visits in 2023 (Radar Bogor, 2024), rising to 14 million in 2024 surpassing the initial target of 12 million visits (Antara News, 2025). For 2025, the local government has set a target of 13 million visits (Antara News, 2025). These figures reflect Bogor’s growing appeal as a tourist destination and highlight its strategic potential for co-branding collaboration between culture-based cosmetics and the hospitality sector, aimed at delivering high-value exclusive tourism experiences.

Table 1: Tourist Visits to Bogor City and Regency (2023–2025)

Based on various official sources

Year	Area	Total Tourist Visits	Visit Details	Government Target	Source
2023	Bogor City	5,650,637	Not specified	Not mentioned	Antara Jabar, 2024
2023	Bogor Regency	13,000,000	Not specified	12,000,000	Radar Bogor, 2024
2024	Bogor City	8,093,203	3,007,776 stayed overnight; 5,085,427 visited	Not mentioned	Metropolitan.id, 2025
			destinations, restaurants, souvenir centers		
2024	Bogor Regency	14,000,000	Not specified	12,000,000	Antara News, 2025
2025	Bogor Regency	Not yet available	-	13,000,000 (target set)	Antara News, 2025

Based on the available data, several key points should be noted regarding tourist visits to Bogor City and Regency. First, as of now, 2025 data for Bogor City is not available in the cited sources, making it impossible to conduct a complete trend analysis for the current year. Second, the 2025 tourist target has only been set for Bogor Regency, at 13 million visitors. No similar target for Bogor City has been announced or found in the official sources referenced.

Alongside the growth of the tourism sector, the cosmetic industry in Bogor has also shown an upward trend, particularly in products made from natural ingredients rooted in local cultural values. The emergence of local cosmetic brands inspired by Bogor’s flora and Sundanese culture indicates strong synergy potential between the beauty and tourism industries. A notable example is *Serambi Botani*, a retail outlet offering natural and healthy products developed by IPB University. It sells honey, herbs, health foods, and natural body care products made from eco-friendly local ingredients, and has expanded to ASEAN markets as part of a green lifestyle campaign (Ninja Xpress Blog, 2023).

According to Euromonitor International (2023), Indonesian consumers increasingly favor natural beauty products that reflect cultural identity and sustainability. At the same time, the growth of the local creative industry supports the integration of cultural values into product design and marketing (Hanifah & Pratama, 2021). Innovations in product formulation, culturally inspired packaging, and the

involvement of creative communities have strengthened the appeal of culture-based cosmetics as part of a holistic tourism experience. This trend shows that cosmetics are not merely commercial items, but also cultural narratives with strong market potential in the tourism context.

To enhance firm value, various strategies can be considered such as product differentiation, market expansion, strategic alliances or partnerships, and customer experience-based innovation. One increasingly relevant approach is collaborative strategy, which combines the strengths of two different sectors to deliver a stronger value proposition. This aligns with Chesbrough's (2020) concept of open business models and inter-organizational collaboration as drivers of innovation and new value creation. Similarly, Hitt, Ireland, and Hoskisson (2020) argue that strategic alliances based on core competency synergy can improve competitiveness and contribute to long-term financial performance.

Co-branding, the integration of two brands or sectors to deliver added value to consumers, is a promising strategy for uniting Bogor's cosmetic and hospitality industries. It is defined as a long-term collaboration between two or more brands to create new products or services that combine their identities and strengths, aiming to enhance brand equity and expand market share (Kania, Sukoyo, & Wibisono, 2021). In this context, partnerships between culture-based local cosmetic brands and hotels or resorts can offer exclusive experiences to tourists, such as themed spa packages, locally inspired room amenities, and joint promotions that highlight regional uniqueness.

According to Helmig, Huber, and Leeftang (2008), co-branding improves quality perception and market reach when partners share complementary values and audiences. Kocak et al. (2022) also emphasize the importance of brand image alignment in cross-sector co-branding strategies.

Despite the strong potential, co-branding collaborations between local cosmetic brands and the hospitality sector in Bogor remain rare and underutilized. Many business actors have not yet leveraged the opportunity to create exclusive tourism experiences that integrate local beauty products into hotel services. As a result, Bogor's added value and destination differentiation potential remain untapped.

This study aims to address the need for innovative and impactful collaborative models that enhance economic value while preserving local culture in the tourism sector. Focusing on co-branding strategies, the research explores the potential synergy between culturally inspired cosmetic brands and the hospitality industry as a means to create unique and memorable travel experiences. Bogor is selected as the case study location due to its strategic position, rich natural and cultural assets, and dynamic creative industry growth. The findings are expected to offer practical insights for industry stakeholders and serve as an academic reference for developing cross-sector collaborative strategies in tourism.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the synergy potential between culture-based cosmetics and the hospitality sector in creating exclusive tourism experiences in Bogor.
2. To identify the most effective and relevant co-branding strategies for collaboration between local cosmetic brands and hospitality businesses.
3. To assess the strategic impact of co-branding on economic value, destination image, and cultural preservation.
4. To develop an innovative and applicable cross-sector collaboration model for sustainable tourism development in Bogor and similar regions.

Literature Review

1. Co-Branding Strategies in a Cross-Sector Context

Co-branding is defined as a marketing strategy that combines two or more brands to create added value for consumers and strengthen each brand's market position (Helmig, Huber, & Leeftang, 2008). In the context of tourism and the creative economy, co-branding is used as an innovative approach to promote local identity through strategic cross-sector collaboration. Schmidt and Baumgarth (2022) note that while co-branding research has advanced significantly, there is a lack of studies focusing on cross-sector applications and culturally specific contexts particularly those integrating product brands (such as cosmetics) with service brands (such as hospitality). They emphasize the need for research that goes beyond brand perception or purchase intention, calling instead for investigations into brand experience, emotional resonance, and impacts on tourism and local economies. This study contributes to expanding the theoretical framework of co-branding into underexplored areas involving cultural and tourism entities.

2. Culture-Based Cosmetics and Consumer Preferences

Culture-based cosmetics are becoming increasingly popular in global markets, especially in Southeast Asia. Products that combine local natural ingredients with cultural narratives appeal to consumers seeking authenticity and sustainability (Euromonitor International, 2023). In Indonesia, many local brands have started to incorporate cultural elements such as batik patterns, traditional herbal formulas, and local philosophies into their products and packaging (Hanifah & Pratama, 2021). This aligns with Schmidt and Baumgarth's (2022) findings on the importance of cultural anchoring in co-branding strategies, particularly for consumers who value identity and locality. However, the current literature offers limited insight into how culture-based cosmetics are integrated into tourism experiences, such as through hospitality or wellness tourism.

3. Hospitality as a Platform for Exclusive Tourism Experiences

The hospitality industry is evolving toward personalized and wellness-oriented experiences. Services such as locally sourced spa treatments, traditional beauty rituals, and region-specific amenities are increasingly sought by travelers (Lefty, 2023; Vogue Business, 2023). Brotherton (2022) argues that hotels now serve not only as accommodation providers but also as cultural spaces that offer authentic guest experiences.

Moreover, recent research highlights that modern tourists, including Indonesian domestic eco-tourists, increasingly consider environmental sustainability as a key factor in their travel choices (Setiawan et al., 2024). This environmental awareness aligns with the demand for locally sourced and eco-friendly products in hospitality services.

Co-branding between hotels and local products, such as cosmetics, offers unique opportunities to create immersive experiences that enhance destination perception. However, academic research on the role of hotels as co-branding platforms for local cultural products, particularly in Indonesia, remains limited.

4. Research Gaps and Study Contribution

Schmidt and Baumgarth (2022) identify untapped potential in the development of co-branding, particularly in tourism and local culture sectors. Previous studies have mostly focused on co-branding between major product categories (e.g., food and beverages), with limited exploration of collaborations involving service experiences like hospitality. This study contributes by exploring how local culture-based cosmetics can be integrated into hotel services to create exclusive tourism experiences through co-branding. Using Bogor a city rich in biodiversity and Sundanese culture as a case study, this research addresses empirical and theoretical gaps in cross-sector collaboration strategies grounded in locality.

Methodology

Populations and Sample

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore co-branding strategies between culture-based cosmetic producers and the hospitality sector in Bogor, Indonesia. The population consists of key stakeholders involved in both industries, especially those responsible for product development, branding, and strategic partnerships. These stakeholders are essential due to their insights and decision-making roles in designing collaborative initiatives.

The sampling method applied is purposive sampling, a non-probability technique where participants are deliberately selected based on relevant characteristics or criteria (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). This method suits qualitative research that values data depth and richness over generalizability.

Informants were chosen based on specific criteria:

1. Direct involvement in brand development or company management, providing in-depth insight into strategies and practices.
2. Understanding of cultural integration in product or service offerings, crucial for examining cultural aspects of innovation and marketing.
3. Openness to collaboration opportunities, indicating readiness and potential to apply joint business strategies.

These criteria ensure that informants can provide rich and relevant information, supporting data validity and quality of analysis.

The sample includes six informants: three from culture-inspired cosmetic contract manufacturers, and three from the hospitality industry managing star-rated hotels in Bogor. From the cosmetic companies, the informants are a Director, Marketing Head, and Research & Development Head. From the hospitality sector, three General Managers were selected, all interested in cultural initiatives and experience-based branding strategies. This composition offers diverse yet complementary perspectives from both sectors.

In summary, this qualitative study focuses on co-branding strategies between culture-based cosmetics and the hospitality sector in Bogor. The population includes key stakeholders from local cosmetic industries and hotel management with experience or potential for cross-sector collaboration.

Research Tools

The main instrument used in this study is a semi-structured interview guide. This instrument is designed to provide a flexible yet focused framework for data collection. The guide includes open-ended questions aimed at exploring informants' perspectives on co-branding opportunities, perceived synergy potential, implementation challenges, and expected outcomes.

The interview guide was developed based on a literature review from reputable academic sources such as Google Scholar, as well as previous case studies in tourism and cultural products. This ensures that the questions have a strong theoretical foundation and align with the study's objectives.

During the interviews, data were recorded using an audio recorder to ensure accuracy and completeness of the information provided. Additionally, the researcher took field notes to document context and informants' non-verbal expressions. On some occasions, photographs of locations or relevant supporting documents were taken to enrich the visual data and strengthen the analysis.

The semi-structured interview format allows flexibility to explore informants' answers in depth and clarify complex ideas. This method was chosen over fully structured or unstructured interviews because it balances consistency in questioning with the flexibility to capture unique contextual insights from each informant.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted over one month through both face-to-face and online interviews, depending on informants' availability and preferences. Each interview session lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Before the interviews, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Ethical considerations such as data confidentiality and voluntary participation were strictly upheld.

All interviews were digitally recorded with participants' permission to ensure accurate data capture for further analysis. In addition to audio recordings, field notes were taken to document non-verbal cues, interview context, and immediate reflections during the sessions.

Using both face-to-face and online interview modes provided flexibility and inclusivity, preventing logistical barriers to participation. The interviewer maintained a neutral stance to minimize bias and encourage honest responses, thereby enhancing the authenticity and validity of the data collected.

Data Analysis

Before being used for data collection, the interview guide was reviewed by two academic lecturers to ensure clarity of language and content validity. This thorough review assessed the relevance of each question to the research objectives. Feedback from the lecturers was used to improve the structure and logical flow of the interview, making it easier for informants to understand. Thus, the final guide could produce credible data aligned with the research context.

Data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely recognized qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns of meaning in data. The analysis began with verbatim transcription of all interview recordings, followed by repeated reading to develop a deep understanding of the data's context and content.

Initial coding was done manually to identify recurring concepts and themes, especially related to co-branding strategies such as motivation, perceived benefits, obstacles, and collaboration models. These codes were then grouped into main themes representing the core experiences and views of the informants.

To enhance analysis rigor, the researcher applied data triangulation by comparing findings with field notes and consulting peer reviewers to validate interpretations. An audit trail of the entire coding process was also maintained as systematic documentation to support transparency and reliability of the research results.

The thematic analysis approach provides a systematic yet flexible framework for understanding the complex dynamics of cross-sector collaboration. This method proved effective in generating practical insights and formulating strategic recommendations for stakeholders in the cosmetic and hospitality industries.

Results

Interviews were conducted with six individuals representing each sector. These interviews explored the potential for synergy, effective and relevant strategy types and forms, as well as the strategic impact and models for strategy development. A summary of the informants' profiles is presented in Table 2 below.

Table.2 Informants profile

No.	Informant ID	Gender	Position	Industry
1	I-1	Female	President Director	Cosmetic Contract Manufacturing (Maklon)
2	I-2	Male	Head of Marketing Division	Cosmetic Contract Manufacturing (Maklon)
3	I-3	Female	Head of Research & Development (R&D)	Cosmetic Contract Manufacturing (Maklon)
4	I-4	Male	General Manager	Hospitality
5	I-5	Female	General Manager	Hospitality
6	I-6	Male	General Manager	Hospitality

Thematic Analysis of Interviews with Stakeholders from Culture-Based Cosmetic Companies and the Hospitality Industry in Bogor Revealed Key Findings:

1. Synergy Potential between Culture-Based Cosmetics and the Hospitality Sector

The study found a strong synergy potential between culture-based cosmetic brands and the hospitality industry in Bogor. Hotel management recognized a growing trend in demand for authentic and local tourism experiences. They viewed the integration of local cosmetic products as a unique added value for guests. Meanwhile, cosmetic brand owners saw the hospitality sector as a strategic channel to expand their market through in-room amenities, culturally themed spa services, and joint promotional programs. This shared awareness suggests that co-branding strategies can serve as an effective differentiation approach to enrich Bogor's tourism appeal.

2. Effective and Relevant Co-Branding Strategies for Collaboration

Respondents identified several co-branding strategies deemed most relevant and impactful. These include providing local cosmetic products as in-room amenities, offering spa services themed around local culture, and joint marketing campaigns highlighting Sundanese cultural narratives. Storytelling elements such as the origin of raw materials and traditional values were considered vital to enhancing brand authenticity and creating emotional connections with consumers. Personalizing guest experiences and applying sustainability principles were also viewed as key to successful cross-sector collaboration.

3. Strategic Impact on Economic Value, Destination Image, and Cultural Preservation

Participants believed co-branding could positively impact economic value through increased brand exposure, improved service quality, and attraction of specific tourist segments. From a destination image perspective, this collaboration was seen as strengthening Bogor's identity as an exclusive

cultural tourism destination. Furthermore, integrating cultural heritage into hospitality services was regarded as a commercially adaptive form of cultural preservation. This collaboration reflects alignment between business growth objectives and cultural sustainability.

4. Development of Innovative and Practical Cross-Sector Collaboration Models

Although no formal co-branding model has been implemented yet, informants proposed several foundational elements for building a sustainable collaborative framework. These include open communication, shared quality standards, government promotional support, and ecosystem coordination involving tourism offices, business associations, and creative communities. A flexible collaboration model enabling hotels and cosmetic producers to develop tailored tourism packages for specific market segments (luxury, wellness, cultural heritage) was considered ideal. Business actors emphasized the importance of ongoing evaluation, joint investment, and cultural narrative integration to build long-term partnerships.

Discussion and Conclusion Discussion

Synergy Potential between Culture-Based Cosmetics and the Hospitality Sector



Figure 1. Cosmetic Production Process at a Contract Manufacturing Company.

The first finding shows a strong synergy potential between culture-based cosmetic brands and the hospitality sector in Bogor. This aligns with the co-branding theory by Helmig, Huber, & Leeflang (2008), which states that collaboration between brands with complementary values and markets can create significant added value for consumers. In this context, the richness of culture and natural ingredients from local cosmetic products blend with hotels' need for authentic service differentiation. The alignment of values between these two sectors forms a crucial foundation for building mutually beneficial and sustainable partnerships.

The illustration in the figure shows the production process at a cosmetic contract manufacturing company, starting from natural ingredient formulation, quality testing, to product packaging. This reflects the readiness and capability of the local industry to support professional co-branding collaborations based on cultural values.

To explore industry players' views on collaboration potential between the cosmetic and hospitality sectors, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with six key informants experienced and knowledgeable in co-branding strategies. The interview data were then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify meaningful patterns relevant to the research topic. Through initial coding, informants' statements were categorized into main themes such as collaboration motivation, perceived benefits, obstacles and collaboration requirements, and potential collaboration models.

Table 3 presents a summary of important quotes from each informant, along with initial codes and main themes identified during the analysis.

Table.3 Thematic Analysis of Informants' Responses on Synergy Potential

No.	Informant ID	Response Summary	Key Quote	Initial Code	Initial Theme
1	I-1	Very open to collaboration, especially if it adds value for both parties. Views collaboration with hotels as a strategic opportunity.	"We are very open to collaboration, especially if it can add value for both parties."	Openness to collaboration, added value	Collaboration Motivation
2	I-2	Collaboration with hospitality can be an effective marketing strategy to expand brand awareness and build a premium image for local cosmetics.	"Collaboration with hotels is a strategic opportunity."	Strategic opportunity	Perceived Benefits
3	I-3	Great collaboration potential, especially for exclusive products like spa treatments and local ingredient amenities.	"Effective marketing strategy, expanding brand awareness, building premium image."	Brand awareness, premium image	Perceived Benefits
4	I-4	Welcomes collaboration with local cosmetic brands, particularly if products align with the hotel's service concept and branding.	"Development of exclusive products such as spa treatments and local ingredient amenities."	Exclusive products, local ingredients	Collaboration Model
5	I-5	Co-branding with culture-based cosmetics can create hotel service differentiation and strengthen tourist attraction.	"If products align with our service concept and hotel branding."	Branding alignment	Collaboration Barriers & Requirements
6	I-6	Open to strategic collaboration, especially if cosmetics support wellness experiences and improve overall guest satisfaction.	"Culture-based co-branding can create service differentiation and strengthen cultural tourism appeal."	Service differentiation, cultural tourism	Perceived Benefits

Effective and Relevant Co-Branding Strategies for Collaboration

Effective co-branding strategies include providing locally produced cosmetic amenities in hotel rooms, offering culturally themed spa services, and launching joint promotional campaigns. This aligns with the concept of brand alliance proposed by Leuthesser, Kohli, and Suri (2003), which suggests that combining products and services from two distinct brands can enhance perceived quality and expand market reach. The use of storytelling, particularly about the origins of ingredients and cultural values behind local cosmetics, creates emotional engagement and strengthens guest loyalty. This indicates that co-branding serves not only as a marketing strategy but also as an educational and emotional medium that reinforces destination identity.

Based on this concept and findings from in-depth interviews, a thematic analysis was conducted to explore stakeholders' perceptions and suggestions regarding ideal forms of collaboration between the hospitality industry and local cosmetic producers. This process resulted in several key themes and subthemes that reflect essential elements of co-branding strategies. These include structural aspects of collaboration, the promotion of local values, and mechanisms for involving cross-sector stakeholders. Table 4 presents the initial thematic coding, summarizing key quotes from six informants along with initial codes, main themes, and identified subthemes. These findings provide a foundation for designing a context-specific, sustainable, and practical cross-sector collaboration model.

Tabel.4 Thematic Analysis of Responses on Co-Branding Strategies

No .	Informant ID	Response Summary	Key Quote	Initial Code	Main Theme	Subtheme
1	I-1	The ideal collaboration is creating exclusive spa and treatment products developed specifically for the hotel, reflecting local character and a	"Creating exclusive spa and treatment products... reflecting local character and premium."	Exclusive spa products, local character, premium	Collaborative Product Form	Premium local spa & treatments
		premium feel.				
2	I-2	Co-branding in the form of hotel amenities like soap, shampoo, and lotion with a joint brand identity will strengthen brand positioning and attract guests.	"Hotel amenities with a joint brand identity... strengthen brand positioning."	Co-branded amenities, brand positioning	Branding & Product Differentiation	Co-branded hotel amenities

3	I-3	Collaboration could involve new product innovations designed for the hotel guest experience, such as aromatherapy or skincare using local ingredients.	“Product innovations for the hotel guest experience... like aromatherapy and local skin-care.”	Aromatherapy, local skincare, guest experience	Locality- Based Product Innovation	Products made from local ingredients
4	I-4	The ideal collaboration includes spa or wellness retreat packages using products from local cosmetic partners, which can be promoted as a hotel selling point.	“Spa or wellness retreat packages... as a hotel selling point.”	Wellness retreat, hotel promotion, local partner products	Service & Promotion Package	Spa/wellness packages
5	I-5	A joint signature product available only at certain hotels can create an exclusive impression and strengthen both brands’ market position.	“A joint signature product... create an exclusive impression and strengthen brands.”	Signature product, exclusivity, brand strength	Exclusivity & Market Position	Limited hotel-exclusive products

6	I-6	Ideally, there would be collaborative events or campaigns like a “beauty tourism weekend” that combine the lodging experience with local beauty treatments.	“Collaborative events or campaigns like ‘beauty tourism weekend.’”	Collaborative event, beauty campaign, experience integration	Collaborative Event & Activation	Beauty tourism & guest experience

Strategic Impact on Economic Value, Destination Image, and Cultural Preservation

Regarding strategic impact, informants stated that co-branding can increase economic value, strengthen destination image, and preserve cultural heritage. This perspective aligns with Freeman and McVea’s (2005) concept of strategic stakeholder alignment, which argues that economic and social value can be achieved when stakeholders share common goals. By integrating culture-based cosmetics into the lodging experience, hotels offer more than a product they reinforce the destination narrative as a cultural hub. Over the long term, this approach could boost customer loyalty and enhance Bogor’s competitive position as an exclusive tourism destination rooted in local wisdom.

To understand industry players’ perspectives on the future of collaboration between the cosmetic and hospitality sectors, the researcher also explored informants’ expectations regarding the ideal form and impact of this partnership. Each informant expressed hopes that reflect various strategic dimensions, ranging from product innovation to contributions to local economic development. These statements were analyzed thematically, allowing the researcher to identify consistently emerging expectations. Table 5 summarizes the informants’ key quotes, which were then coded and grouped into themes representing expectations for the direction and goals of cross-sector strategic collaboration.

Table.5 Thematic Analysis – Strategic Impacts of Co-Branding Collaboration

No	Informant	Key Quote	Initial Code	Main Theme	Subtheme
1	I-1	"This collaboration can become a mutually beneficial synergy model and support sustainable growth of local businesses."	Synergy, sustainability, local business support	Expected Collaboration Impact	Growth of local businesses
2	I-2	"We hope to create exclusive products that can enhance brand appeal, both for the hotel and our cosmetics."	Exclusive product, brand enhancement	Product Innovation Expectations	Differentiation & brand positioning

3	I-3	"We want this collaboration to drive product innovation rooted in local culture and gain exposure through hospitality channels."	Local culture, innovation, hospitality channel	Product Innovation Expectations	Culturally inspired product innovation
4	I-4	"We hope to offer a unique and memorable guest experience through the use of high-quality local products."	Guest experience, local products, high quality	Consumer Experience Expectations	Unique and memorable stay experience
5	I-5	"Our hope is to strengthen our hotel's local identity while promoting Bogor's SME cosmetic products to tourists."	Local identity, SME promotion	Local Empowerment Expectations	Support for SMEs & local cultural identity
6	I-6	"We want to build a long-term, innovative collaboration that not only enhances guest experience but also supports the creative economy."	Sustainable collaboration, creative economy	Sustainability & Innovation Expectations	Creative economy & long-term value

Development of Innovative and Practical Cross-Sector Collaboration Models

Ultimately, an innovative cross-sector collaboration model requires strong ecosystem support, including regulation, training, and government facilitation. This aligns with the dynamic capabilities approach by Teece & Pisano (1994), which emphasizes the importance of collaborative adaptation and inter-organizational learning to respond to market changes. Industry stakeholders recommend establishing a joint evaluation system, product quality standardization, and incentive schemes for businesses involved in co-branding.

With a structured and participatory framework, co-branding between the hospitality sector and local cosmetic producers can be implemented in a systemic and sustainable manner. Table 6 presents the results of initial thematic analysis based on insights from six informants, reflecting both expectations and concrete suggestions for designing an adaptive, participatory, and industry-aligned collaboration framework. These findings form the basis for developing a co-branding implementation strategy that is not only creative but also long-term oriented.

Table 6 Thematic Analysis – Development of Innovative and Practical Cross sector

No .	Informant	Statement	Key Quote	Initial Code	Main Theme	Subtheme
1	I-1	In our view, there is currently no formal co-branding model consistently applied between hotels and local cosmetic industries. A clear and structured framework is needed so	"There is no formal co-branding model in place..."	Absence of formal model	Need for Collaborative Model	Initial challenge
		both parties have guidelines on partnership, branding, role distribution, and product development.				
2	I-2	An applicable collaboration model must begin with open communication between hotels and cosmetic producers. We need to sit together, agree on shared visions and expectations, and define product quality standards.	"Basic elements such as open communication and shared quality standards..."	Open communication, quality standards	Core Principles of Collaboration	Transparency & quality agreement

3	I-3	For this collaboration to have real impact, we expect promotional support from the government, especially through program endorsement or incentives for businesses.	"Promotional support from the government and coordination with tourism agencies..."	Government support, cross-sector coordination	Role of External Stakeholders	Government support & ecosystem
4	I-4	An ideal collaboration model must be flexible and adaptable	"A flexible collaboration model that allows thematic	Flexible model, segment-based packages	Ideal Model Characteristics	Flexibility & market segmentation
		to each hotel's needs and guest segments. For example, thematic tourism packages could be developed, such as wellness, spa, or local culture.	tourism package development. ..."			

5	I-5	To ensure the collaboration doesn't stall early on, there must be mutual commitment to regular evaluations. Joint investment in product development or promotions will also strengthen ownership and sustainability of the partnership.	"Ongoing evaluation and joint investment are essential..."	Routine evaluation, collaborative investment	Partnership Management	Monitoring & financial commitment
6	I-6	We believe the strongest collaboration model is one that elevates local stories and cultural values. If cosmetic products used in hotels carry stories of natural ingredients or traditional	"Integrating cultural narratives into long-term partnerships.."	Local cultural narrative	Cultural Context & Local Values	Local wisdom inclusion
		philosophies, this becomes not just business, but a way to introduce cultural heritage to tourists. Integrating cultural narratives is crucial for long-term success.				

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that co-branding collaboration between culturally based cosmetic companies and the hospitality sector offers a promising strategy to enhance exclusive tourism experiences in Bogor. The synergy lies in the intersection of cultural authenticity, experiential hospitality, and the growing demand for local and sustainable products.

The main findings of this study reveal a strong mutual interest in co-branding between the hospitality and local cosmetic sectors, although this potential remains largely untapped. Challenges in the integration process need to be addressed through strategic support mechanisms. Policy interventions and alignment among stakeholders emerge as key factors for the success of this collaboration. Furthermore, cultural values must be embedded at every stage, from product development to guest experience, to ensure both authenticity and long-term impact.

Theoretically, these findings expand the discussion of co-branding into the tourism and cultural heritage sectors. Practically, this study offers recommendations for industry players and policy-makers to utilize co-branding as a tool for developing sustainable and inclusive tourism.

This research explores the strategic potential of co-branding collaboration between culturally based cosmetic companies and the hospitality sector in Bogor, Indonesia. The results confirm that both sectors recognize the value of this partnership, sharing a common interest in delivering authentic tourism experiences rich in cultural elements. The analysis identifies several effective co-branding strategies, including the integration of traditional cosmetic products into hotel services such as spa packages, in-room amenities, and promotional campaigns. These strategies align with consumer preferences for authenticity and wellness, while enhancing brand equity for both industries.

The study also highlights the significant potential of co-branding to generate economic value, strengthen destination branding, and support cultural preservation.

Embedding cultural narratives into hospitality services helps create unique and meaningful guest experiences while promoting local identity. Furthermore, developing a cross-sector collaboration model requires multi-stakeholder involvement, consistent quality control standards, and public sector support. Overall, co-branding presents a promising pathway for sustainable tourism development in Bogor by integrating the local creative industry into the tourist experience.

Research recommendations

Based on the findings and analysis, several recommendations are proposed for future research and practical implementation:

1. Pilot Implementation of Co-Branding Models:

Future studies should explore pilot projects involving real co-branding collaborations between selected hotels and culturally based cosmetic brands. Such pilots will provide measurable insights into customer satisfaction, operational feasibility, and branding outcomes.

2. Development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP):

Further research is encouraged to design comprehensive SOPs for co-branding collaboration, including quality assurance protocols, supply chain coordination, and joint branding guidelines aligned with hospitality industry standards.

3. Consumer Behavior Analysis:

Additional studies could examine how tourists perceive and interact with co-branded products during their hotel stays. Surveys and focus group discussions (FGDs) can yield valuable data on experience impact and brand loyalty.

4. Economic Impact Assessment:

Future research may evaluate the economic benefits of co-branding initiatives for both the cosmetic and hospitality sectors, particularly regarding sales growth, brand exposure, and market expansion.

5. Role of Government and Policy:

It is important to investigate the role of local governments and tourism agencies in facilitating co-branding through incentives, regulatory frameworks, and marketing support. Comparative studies with similar initiatives in other regions could offer strategic insights for public policy.

6. Integration of Technology and Digital Platforms:

The role of digital marketing and e-commerce platforms in scaling co-branded products should be explored, especially through hotel booking portals, online souvenir shops, and collaborations with influencers.

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THE DOMINO EFFECT: RISK PERCEPTION AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN SOCIOPOLITICAL UNREST AND TOURISM PREFERENCES

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Extended abstract

The aim of this research is to explore the impact of sociopolitical unrest on tourism preferences and decision-making, with a particular focus on how risk perception mediates these relationships. In today's dynamic travel environment, sociopolitical unrest has become a critical factor influencing tourists' choices, especially as concerns over safety and security continue to shape travel behavior (Alvarez-Sousa, 2018; Farmaki et al., 2019; Monterrubio, 2017). This study examines how sociopolitical instability affects tourism preferences among Malaysian hospitality and tourism students, providing insights into their travel decisions and destination choices. Given the increasing frequency of political and economic instability worldwide, understanding how these factors influence future tourism trends is important for industry stakeholders (Asgary & Ozdemir, 2020; Duan et al., 2022).

A quantitative approach was employed to gather data from 250 Malaysian hospitality and tourism students via a structured questionnaire. The survey specifically focused on their perceptions of sociopolitical unrest and how these perceptions influenced their risk assessment and travel intentions. The data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLSEM), which tested the relationships between sociopolitical unrest, risk perception, and tourism preferences. The study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how these factors interact and shape the decisions of future tourism professionals.

The findings indicate that sociopolitical unrest significantly affects both tourism preferences and risk perception. As concerns about safety heighten, students show a preference for destinations perceived as safer, with risk perception acting as a key mediator in this relationship. The study also highlights a growing interest in sustainable tourism, with students demonstrating a clear inclination towards sustainable travel options. This shift in preference may indicate broader trends in future tourism behavior, as the next generation of industry professionals increasingly values sustainability in their travel decisions.

This research contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the role of risk perception as a mediator between sociopolitical unrest and changes in tourism preferences. It also underscores the emerging trend of sustainable tourism among future industry professionals, offering important implications for tourism marketing and management. The study provides valuable insights for industry stakeholders looking to adapt their strategies in response to global instability and shifting tourist priorities.

The findings have practical implications for tourism industry professionals, including marketers, policymakers, and destination managers. The study suggests that destinations should focus on promoting safety and stability, while also integrating sustainability into their offerings to appeal to the evolving preferences of tourists. Moreover, the research calls for the development of policies that address the impact of sociopolitical unrest on tourism demand, highlighting the need for crisis management strategies to protect the industry during periods of instability.

However, the research is limited to a sample of Malaysian hospitality and tourism students, which may not fully represent the broader tourist population. Future studies could expand the sample to include a more diverse range of respondents from different cultural and geographical contexts. Additionally, further research could explore the long-term effects of sustained sociopolitical instability on global travel behavior, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how these factors influence tourism in different regions.

Keywords: Sociopolitical Unrest; Tourism Preferences; Risk Perception; Sustainable Tourism; Tourism Decision-Making

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Purpose / Problem Statement

The purpose of this research is to examine how sociopolitical unrest influences tourism preferences and decision-making, with risk perception acting as a mediator. The study specifically investigates how Malaysian hospitality and tourism students' perceptions of sociopolitical unrest shape their travel decisions and destination choices, particularly in relation to concerns about safety and security in uncertain global environments.

Design/Methodology/Approach

A quantitative approach was adopted, and data were collected from 250 Malaysian hospitality and tourism students through a structured questionnaire. The survey focused on their perceptions of sociopolitical unrest and how these perceptions impact their risk assessment and travel intentions. The data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLSEM) to test the relationships between sociopolitical unrest, risk perception, and tourism preferences.

Findings

The results reveal that sociopolitical unrest significantly influences both tourism preferences and risk perception. Heightened concerns about safety and security lead to shifts in travel behaviour, with a clear preference for destinations perceived as safer. Risk perception was found to play a key mediating role, amplifying the relationship between sociopolitical unrest and changes in tourism preferences. Additionally, there was a noticeable inclination towards sustainable tourism options among students, indicating a potential shift in future tourism trends.

Originality/Value

This research provides valuable insights into the role of sociopolitical unrest in shaping tourism preferences, with a specific focus on the mediating role of risk perception. It also contributes to the literature by highlighting the growing interest in sustainable tourism among future industry professionals, which may influence tourism trends moving forward.

Practical Implications

The findings underscore the importance for tourism professionals to adapt to shifting consumer preferences in response to sociopolitical instability. Destination managers and marketers should focus on promoting safety, stability, and sustainability, particularly during periods of sociopolitical unrest. The study's findings can assist policymakers and industry stakeholders in developing strategies to mitigate the negative effects of instability on tourism demand and promote sustainable tourism.

Social Implications (Policy Contribution)

This research calls for the development of tourism policies that address the impact of sociopolitical unrest on tourism behaviour. It suggests that policymakers and tourism bodies integrate crisis management, safety measures, and sustainable tourism practices into long-term strategies, helping to preserve tourist confidence in times of instability.

Research Limitations

The research is limited by its focus on Malaysian hospitality and tourism students, which may not fully represent the broader tourist population. Future research could expand the sample to include tourists from diverse cultural and geographical contexts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how sociopolitical unrest affects global travel behaviour. Additionally, further studies could explore the long-term impact of sustained sociopolitical instability on travel patterns.

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"DESTINATION AUTHENTICITY AND TOURIST BEHAVIOR: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF CONFORMITY, REALNESS, AND TRANSFORMATION IN VISIT INTENTION"

Albert A. Barreda¹, Yoshimasa Kageyama²; Sandra Zubieta³, Michele Barton⁴

Extended Abstract

Tourists' intention to visit a destination is strongly influenced by their perception of authenticity, which shapes their emotional connection and overall brand experience. While marketing strategies play a crucial role in creating a destination's image, there remains a gap in research on how authenticity directly impacts visit intention. This study addresses this gap by examining how destination authenticity influences visit intention among American outbound travelers.

Many South American countries attract Western tourists by offering authentic experiences that highlight local culture and lifestyle. This research explores the role of destination authenticity in shaping tourists' decisions, focusing on three key dimensions: conformity, realness, and transformation. Using survey data from 500 American travelers who visited South America, this study employs a partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) approach to analyze the relationship between perceived authenticity and visit intention. The findings indicate that conformity and realness enhance intention to visit a destination. Higher destination brand authenticity significantly increases the likelihood of visitation, reinforcing its role as a key driver of destination choice.

These results have significant theoretical and managerial implications for destination branding and management. Destination marketers must actively foster and communicate authenticity in branding strategies to enhance brand credibility, deepen emotional connections, and create memorable tourist experiences that encourage future visits.

Keywords: Destination brand authenticity, visit intention, tourism branding, traveler perception

Purpose/Problem Statement

Destination authenticity is a key driver in tourism, shaping tourists' preferences and visit intentions (Yu et al., 2020). It plays a crucial role in defining a destination's value, surpassing traditional quality-based factors (Zhao & Li, 2023). Cultural and nature-based tourism relies on authenticity to create meaningful and immersive experiences. However, commercialization and cultural diversity at destinations have led to growing concerns about the authenticity of tourist experiences (Kumail, et al., 2022). Without authentic offerings, destinations may struggle to establish a strong identity and attract visitors. Tourists assess various elements of a destination to determine authenticity, which influences their perception, emotional attachment, and ultimately their behavior. Authentic destinations evoke strong emotional connections, leading to greater visit intention and positive engagement with the brand (Yi et al., 2017).

Originality/Value

This study investigates how different aspects of destination authenticity affect tourists' visit intention, particularly in the context of South American cultural tourism. By demonstrating that perceptions of authenticity drive emotions and behavioral responses (Shi et al., 2022), this research provides valuable insights for destination marketers and tourism professionals.

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Proposed Model and Hypotheses

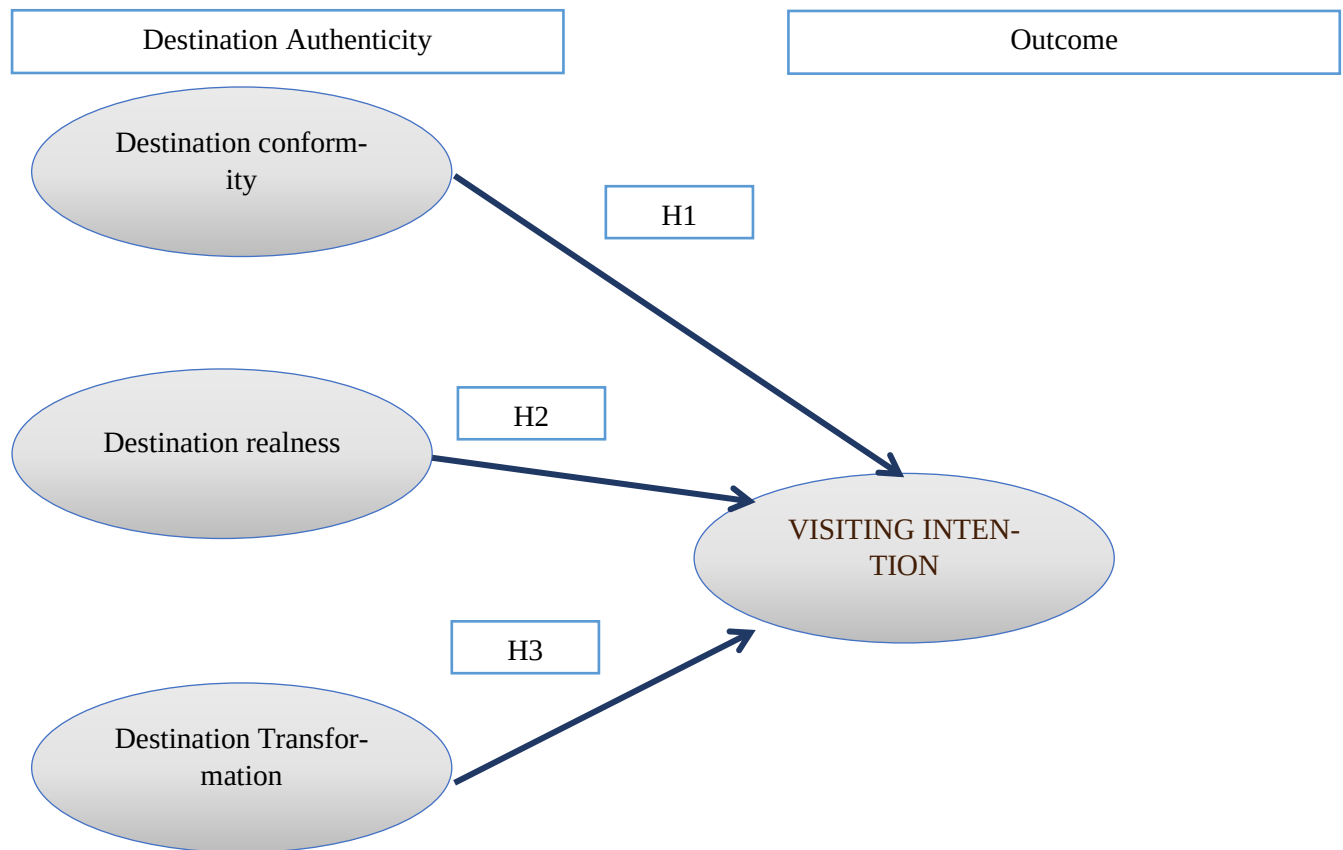


Fig.1

H1. Conformity is positively associated with destination emotions.

H2. Realness is positively associated with destination emotions.

H3. Transformation is positively associated with destination emotions.

Design/Methodology/Approach

The study surveyed 500 American outbound travelers who had visited South American countries. Participants were randomly selected through an online survey distributed to 800 travelers. The study applied a two-step analytical approach to assess reliability and validity (Hair et al., 2011), followed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) to test relationships between constructs (Anderson & Gerbing, 1992).

Findings/Discussion

Results show that travelers who perceive a destination as authentic particularly in terms of conformity and realness experience stronger behavioral and emotional responses (Jiang et al., 2017). These emotions play a crucial role in shaping their destination visit intention. Authenticity-driven emotional connections reinforce positive attitudes toward the destination, making travelers more likely to visit and engage with its brand. This study demonstrates that authenticity is not only a valuable asset in tourism but also a significant predictor of visit intention. Destinations that successfully communicate their authenticity can strengthen their brand equity, enhance emotional connections, and ultimately attract more visitors (Chen et al., 2020).

Theoretical Implications

This research supports the theory that authenticity influences schema congruity travelers assess a destination based on how well it aligns with their expectations of what is genuine. By demonstrating the link between perceived authenticity and visit intention, this study highlights authenticity as a critical factor in destination branding.

Practical Implications

Tourists rely on historical, cultural, and expert sources to assess authenticity. Destination managers should emphasize authentic storytelling and cultural heritage to strengthen brand credibility and visitor engagement. By reinforcing authenticity in branding strategies, destinations can enhance visit intention and long-term loyalty.

Research Limitations

Future research should explore additional behavioral outcomes of authenticity, such as word-of-mouth marketing, loyalty, and repeat visitation. Understanding the broader impact of authenticity-driven emotions can further improve tourism marketing strategies.

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FEEL, THINK, ACT: HOW DESTINATION EXPERIENCES SHAPE POSITIVE WORD OF MOUTH INTENTIONS

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Extended Abstract

This study explores how destination experience drives positive word of mouth (pWOM) through sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual dimensions. It aims to deepen our understanding of tourist satisfaction and destination marketing. While destination experience is known to shape tourist perceptions and behaviors, its role in promoting pWOM is still underexplored (Karim, Rabiul, & Arfat, 2024). This research extends the understanding of how destination experience influences pWOM intentions. It supports the idea that tourists' perceptions are influenced by sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual interactions (Alyahya & McLean, 2022). The study offers practical insights for destination marketers to enhance visitor engagement and promote positive word of mouth.

A total of 500 samples who are American outbound travelers and had visited South American destinations known for their cultural and natural authenticity responded to the survey. Participants were randomly selected through an online survey distributed to 800 travelers. The survey measured destination experience across four dimensions and pWOM intentions. The authors tested the framework using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM), providing robust empirical support for the proposed framework.

The results showed that destination experience significantly impacts pWOM intentions, with sensory experiences having the strongest effect (path coefficient 0.51). Affective experiences also had a notable impact (0.261), while behavioral and intellectual experiences had smaller but significant effects (0.047 and 0.051, respectively). This suggests that engaging tourists' senses and emotions is key to driving pWOM (López & Sicilia, 2014). The study demonstrates that sensory and affective experiences have a more significant impact on pWOM intentions compared to behavioral and intellectual experiences. It supports the theory that tourists' perceptions are influenced by sensory and emotional interactions, providing deeper insights into the factors driving positive word of mouth (Ali, Rahmat, Hussain, & Mirza, 2023). To enhance pWOM intentions, destination managers should create sensory-rich and emotionally engaging experiences. This includes investing in visually appealing environments, promoting cultural and natural attractions, and fostering positive interactions between tourists and locals. Integrating sensory and affective elements into branding and management strategies can boost visitor satisfaction and pWOM.

Future research should explore additional outcomes of destination experience, such as loyalty and repeat visitation. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into the sustained impact of destination experience on pWOM intentions over time, further informing tourism marketing strategies and destination management practices.

Keywords: Destination Experience, Positive Word of Mouth, Brand Experience, Sensory, Affective, Behavioral, Intellectual

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Purpose/Problem Statement

The tourism industry is highly competitive, and understanding the factors that drive positive word of mouth (pWOM) is crucial for destination marketing. This study explores the relationship between destination experience and the intention to disseminate pWOM, adopting the brand experience construct from Kumar & Kaushik (2018). While prior research has established the importance of destination experience in shaping tourist satisfaction and behavioral intentions, the specific dimensions of brand experience that influence pWOM remain underexplored. This study aims to fill this gap by examining how sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual dimensions of destination brand experience impact pWOM intentions.

Originality/Value

This study contributes to the literature by extending the understanding of how destination brand experience influences pWOM intentions (Lai, Liu, & Lu, 2021). By demonstrating the multidimensional impact of destination experience, this research supports the theory that tourists' perceptions of a destination are influenced by their sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual interactions. This study provides actionable insights for destination marketers to enhance visitor engagement and promote positive word of mouth.

Design/Methodology/Approach

This study used a quantitative approach by collecting data through online survey questionnaires. A total of 500 samples who are American outbound travelers and had visited Latin America destinations known for their cultural and natural authenticity responded to the survey. The survey measured perceptions of destination brand experience across four dimensions: sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual. The proposed framework was tested using a two-step analytical approach. First, reliability and validity were assessed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). Next, structural equation modeling (SEM) was applied to evaluate the relationships between constructs and test the hypothesized pathways linking destination experience to pWOM intentions (Anderson & Gerbing, 1992).

Findings/Discussion

The results indicated that destination experience significantly influences pWOM intentions through its sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual dimensions. Specifically, the sensory dimension had the strongest impact on pWOM intentions, with a path coefficient of 0.51. The affective dimension also had a significant impact, with a path coefficient of 0.261. The behavioral and intellectual dimensions had smaller but still significant impacts, with path coefficients of 0.047 and 0.051, respectively. These findings suggest that tourists' positive experiences, particularly those that engage their senses and evoke strong emotions, are powerful drivers of pWOM intentions.

Theoretical Implications

This study extends the literature on destination brand experience by demonstrating that sensory and affective experiences have a more significant impact on pWOM intentions compared to behavioral and intellectual experiences (Rasoolimanesh, Seyfi, Rather, & Hall, 2022). By supporting the theory that tourists' perceptions of a destination are influenced by their sensory and emotional interactions, this research provides a deeper understanding of the factors that drive positive word of mouth.

Practical Implications

The findings offer actionable insights for destination marketers and tourism practitioners. To enhance pWOM intentions, destination managers should focus on creating sensory-rich and emotionally engaging experiences. This includes investing in visually appealing environments, promoting cultural and natural attractions, and fostering positive interactions between tourists and locals. By integrating sensory and affective elements into branding and management strategies, destinations can enhance visitor satisfaction and promote positive word of mouth (Rasoolimanesh, Seyfi, Hall, & Hatamifar, 2021).

Research Limitations

Future research should explore additional behavioral and competitive outcomes of destination experience, such as loyalty and repeat visitation. Longitudinal studies could provide further insights into the sustained impact of destination experience on pWOM intentions over time. Understanding these broader impacts can further inform tourism marketing strategies and destination management practices.

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Appendix

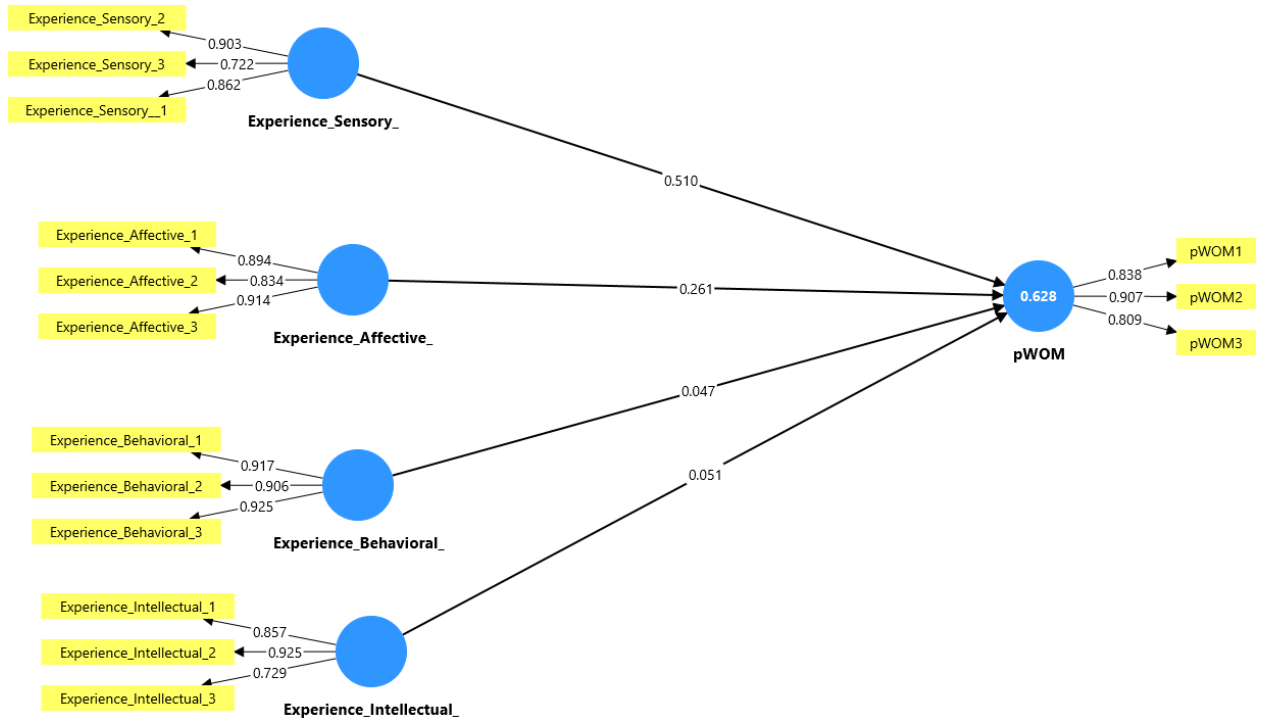


Figure 1. Proposed Model: The effects of the dimensions of destination experience on positive word of mouth.

LADAKH TOURISM AS SOFT POWER: REBRANDING INDIA'S HIMALAYAN IDENTITY ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

Tsultim Zangmo

Abstract

Ladakh's tourism industry functions as a vehicle for India's soft power projection, specifically in rebranding the nation's Himalayan identity on the global stage. Through an analysis of tourism narratives, marketing strategies, and cultural representations, this study explores how the "Land of High Passes" has been transformed from a restricted border region into a globally recognized destination that embodies India's spiritual, cultural, and natural heritage. The research reveals how Ladakh tourism serves multiple diplomatic functions: challenging dominant Himalayan narratives associated with neighboring countries, asserting territorial sovereignty through cultural tourism, and positioning India as a guardian of Buddhist heritage and sustainable mountain tourism. This paper argues that Ladakh represents a strategic soft power asset that helps India project an image of cultural diversity, environmental stewardship, and peaceful coexistence while subtly asserting geopolitical claims in the contested Himalayan region.

Keywords: Soft power, Ladakh tourism, Himalayan identity, cultural diplomacy, destination branding, India

Introduction

The concept of soft power, first articulated by Joseph Nye, describes a nation's ability to influence others through attraction rather than coercion, utilizing cultural appeal, political values, and foreign policies perceived as legitimate. In the context of contemporary India, tourism has emerged as a significant soft power tool, with destinations like Ladakh playing a crucial role in reshaping global perceptions of the nation's identity. Once a restricted border region accessible only to adventurous travelers and researchers, Ladakh has been transformed into a globally recognized tourism destination that embodies India's spiritual heritage, cultural diversity, and natural grandeur. This transformation is particularly significant given Ladakh's strategic location in the contested Himalayan region, where narratives of cultural identity intersect with geopolitical realities. The region's unique position as a high-altitude desert with Tibetan Buddhist cultural influences, situated within India's borders, provides the nation with an opportunity to project a distinct Himalayan identity that challenges dominant global perceptions often associated with Tibet. The research question guiding this study is, how does Ladakh tourism function as a soft power mechanism for India in rebranding its Himalayan identity on the global stage? This paper explores the multifaceted ways in which tourism development in Ladakh serves India's broader diplomatic and cultural objectives, examining the narratives, strategies, and representations that contribute to this soft power projection.

Constructing the "Last Shangri-La" Narrative

The branding of Ladakh as the "Last Shangri-La" or "Little Tibet" represents a strategic appropriation of orientalist imagery that serves multiple soft power functions. This narrative construction positions India as the guardian of authentic Tibetan Buddhist culture, subtly challenging China's claims to cultural authenticity in Tibet while asserting India's role as a preserver of endangered Himalayan traditions. Tourism marketing materials consistently emphasize Ladakh's role as a repository of "untouched" Buddhist culture, with monasteries presented not merely as tourist attractions but as living embodiments of spiritual traditions under India's protection. This narrative serves to legitimize India's territorial claims while presenting the nation as a benevolent guardian of cultural heritage.

Environmental Stewardship and Sustainable Tourism

India's promotion of Ladakh as a model for sustainable mountain tourism serves to project the nation's commitment to environmental stewardship on the global stage. The "Responsible Tourism" initiatives in Ladakh, including carbon-neutral travel options and community-based tourism models, position India as a leader in sustainable tourism practices. This environmental messaging is particularly significant given global concerns about climate change in the Himalayas. By presenting Ladakh as a successfully managed fragile ecosystem, India projects soft power through environmental leadership while addressing criticism of its broader environmental policies.

Cultural Diversity and Pluralism

Ladakh's unique cultural landscape, characterized by Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu communities living in harmony, serves as a powerful representation of India's pluralistic ideals. Tourism narratives emphasize this cultural coexistence as distinctly "Indian", challenging stereotypical Western perceptions of religious conflict in the subcontinent. The promotion of festivals like Hemis and cultural events that showcase interfaith harmony serves to project India's values of tolerance and diversity. This messaging is particularly important in the context of contemporary global discourse about religious nationalism and minority rights in India.

Adventure Tourism and Soft Power Masculinity

The promotion of Ladakh as an extreme adventure destination serves to project a form of "soft power masculinity" that challenges stereotypical perceptions of India as purely spiritual or intellectual. Activities like motorcycle expeditions, high-altitude trekking, and river rafting position India as a destination for bold, adventurous experiences. This adventure tourism narrative serves to attract a different demographic of international visitors while projecting India's capacity to provide world-class adventure experiences in challenging environments. The success of events like the Ladakh Marathon and Chadar Trek in gaining international recognition demonstrates the effectiveness of this strategy.

Territorial Assertion Through Tourism

The development of tourism infrastructure in border areas of Ladakh serves as a form of territorial assertion that reinforces India's sovereignty claims. The promotion of destinations near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and international borders serves to normalize Indian administrative control while generating economic activity that benefits local communities. Tourism routes that include visits to strategic locations like Pangong Tso and Nubra Valley serve dual purposes: attracting visitors with spectacular landscapes while demonstrating effective Indian administration of contested territories. This represents a sophisticated form of soft power that combines attraction with subtle assertion.

The Paradox of Authenticity

The promotion of Ladakh as an "authentic" Himalayan destination creates a paradox wherein the very act of marketing authenticity may undermine it. The commercialization of Buddhist culture and the transformation of traditional practices into tourist spectacles raise questions about the sustainability of the authenticity narrative. However, this paradox is skillfully managed through emphasis on "living culture" rather than museum-piece preservation. By presenting Ladakh's traditions as continuing to evolve within the protective framework of Indian governance, the tourism narrative avoids the trap of cultural fossilization while maintaining claims to authenticity.

Competitive Positioning in the Himalayan Tourism Market

Ladakh tourism must be understood within the broader context of competition among Himalayan destinations. The strategic positioning of Ladakh as offering unique experiences unavailable elsewhere in the Himalayas serves India's soft power objectives by creating a distinctive niche that cannot be easily replicated by neighboring countries. The emphasis on high-altitude desert landscapes, unique Buddhist architecture, and accessible adventure activities differentiates Ladakh from Nepal's trekking-focused tourism and Bhutan's exclusive high-value model. This differentiation strategy serves both commercial and diplomatic purposes.

Challenges and Limitations

The effectiveness of Ladakh tourism as a soft power tool faces several challenges. Environmental concerns about over-tourism, cultural concerns about authenticity, and geopolitical tensions that can disrupt tourism flows all pose risks to the sustainability of this soft power strategy. Additionally, the dependence on favorable international perceptions means that broader political developments can impact the effectiveness of tourism-based soft power. The need to balance territorial assertion with tourism promotion creates ongoing strategic tensions.

Implications and Recommendations

Policy Implications

The success of Ladakh tourism as a soft power mechanism suggests several policy implications for India's broader tourism strategy:

Strategic Destination Development: The Ladakh model demonstrates the value of developing tourism in strategically important regions as a form of soft power projection. Similar approaches could be applied to other border areas and culturally significant regions.

Integrated Marketing Approach: The integration of cultural, environmental, and adventure tourism elements in Ladakh's branding provides a model for comprehensive destination marketing that serves multiple soft power objectives simultaneously.

Community Involvement: The emphasis on community-based tourism and local participation in Ladakh demonstrates the importance of authentic grassroots engagement in soft power projection through tourism.

Recommendations for Stakeholders

Government Agencies: Continue investment in sustainable tourism infrastructure while maintaining focus on cultural preservation and environmental protection. Develop clearer metrics for measuring soft power effectiveness through tourism.

Tourism Industry: Embrace responsibility for cultural and environmental stewardship as part of the soft power narrative. Invest in training and capacity building that enhances authentic cultural exchange.

Local Communities: Maintain agency in tourism development decisions while engaging constructively with broader national objectives. Continue to serve as authentic ambassadors of Ladakh's culture and values.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that Ladakh tourism functions as a sophisticated soft power mechanism that serves multiple objectives in India's global positioning strategy. Through careful construction of narratives around authenticity, sustainability, cultural diversity, and territorial integrity, Ladakh has been successfully branded as a unique Himalayan destination that projects positive images of India while serving strategic interests. The case of Ladakh reveals how tourism can serve as a form of cultural diplomacy that operates through attraction rather than assertion, creating positive associations with national identity while subtly advancing geopolitical objectives. The success of this approach lies in its ability to align commercial tourism interests with broader diplomatic goals, creating sustainable soft power projection. However, the sustainability of this soft power strategy depends on maintaining the delicate balance between tourism development and cultural preservation, between accessibility and exclusivity, and between territorial assertion and peaceful attraction. The ongoing evolution of Ladakh tourism will serve as an important case study for understanding the potential and limitations of tourism-based soft power in contested regions. The broader implications of this research extend beyond Ladakh to other regions where tourism development intersects with cultural identity and geopolitical strategy. As nations increasingly recognize tourism as a tool of soft power, the Ladakh model provides valuable insights into the complexities and opportunities of destination branding for diplomatic purposes. Future research should examine the long-term sustainability of tourism-based soft power strategies, the perspectives of international visitors on these narratives, and the comparative effectiveness of different approaches to tourism diplomacy. The dynamic nature of both tourism and geopolitics ensures that the story of Ladakh as a soft power asset will continue to evolve, providing ongoing opportunities for scholarly investigation and policy analysis.

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ANALYZING MALAYSIAN TRAVEL PATTERNS AND PREFERENCES IN SOUTHERN THAILAND'S TOURISM LANDSCAPE

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Extended abstract

This study investigates the growing phenomenon of Malaysian outbound tourism to Southern Thailand, which increasingly competes with domestic travel within Malaysia. Despite Malaysia's rich tourism assets, a sustained increase in outbound travel particularly to destinations like Hat Yai has raised concerns about the long-term sustainability of Malaysia's domestic tourism. This research addresses the lack of empirical data on Malaysian tourists' motivations, travel experiences, and preferences when choosing Southern Thailand, and how these factors influence their intention to revisit. Using a quantitative approach, data was collected from 496 Malaysian tourists who had visited Southern Thailand within the past three years. A combination of stratified random sampling and snowball sampling ensured diversity in the sample. The study employed SPSS for data analysis, including descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and mediation analysis. The analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation between travel motivation and intention to revisit ($r = 0.445$), a weaker correlation for travel experience ($r = 0.255$), and a very weak correlation for destination preference ($r = 0.124$). Mediation analysis showed that travel experience partially mediates the relationship between motivation and revisit intention (indirect effect = 0.112, 95% CI [0.062, 0.168]). The findings suggest that while travel motivations significantly influence revisit intentions, the overall travel experience plays a crucial role in reinforcing the decision to return. Demographic subgroup analysis further revealed that younger travelers are more motivated by adventure and culture, whereas older and higher-income travelers emphasize experiential quality. These insights support the need for segment-specific marketing and experience design in tourism. The study contributes to tourism literature by providing empirical evidence from a Malaysian context and has practical implications for tourism stakeholders. Malaysian tourism authorities could adapt the experiential appeal of Southern Thailand to enhance domestic destinations, while Thai-Malaysian cooperation could foster sustainable cross-border tourism. The study concludes with recommendations for future research and policy innovation aimed at balancing outbound and domestic tourism flows.

Keywords: Outbound Tourism; Malaysian Tourist; Southern Thailand; Cross-border Tourism; Revisit Intention

Purpose/Problem Statement

This study investigates the growing phenomenon of Malaysian outbound tourism to Southern Thailand, which increasingly competes with domestic travel within Malaysia. Despite Malaysia's rich tourism assets, a sustained increase in outbound travel particularly to destinations like Hat Yai has raised concerns about the long-term sustainability of Malaysia's domestic tourism. This research addresses the lack of empirical data on Malaysian tourists' motivations, travel experiences, and preferences when choosing Southern Thailand, and how these factors influence their intention to revisit.

Originality/value

This research contributes to the limited literature by empirically analyzing the motivational, experiential, and preferential factors influencing Malaysian tourists' decisions to revisit Southern Thailand. It also examines the mediating role of travel experience between motivation and revisit intention. The study offers valuable strategic insights for tourism policymakers and industry stakeholders in Malaysia to improve domestic tourism competitiveness and mitigate outbound tourism outflow.

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Design/methodology/approach

A quantitative research design was employed using structured surveys distributed both online and in-person. A total of 496 valid responses were gathered from Malaysian citizens who had traveled to Southern Thailand in the past three years. Sampling was conducted using a combination of stratified random and snowball techniques. Data were analyzed using SPSS, applying Pearson correlation and mediation analysis to test the relationships between travel motivation, travel experience, destination preference, and intention to revisit.

Findings/Discussion

The analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation between travel motivation and revisit intention ($r = 0.445$, $p < 0.01$), and a weaker correlation between travel experience and revisit intention ($r = 0.255$, $p < 0.01$). Destination preference had a very weak correlation with revisit intention ($r = 0.124$, $p < 0.01$). Mediation analysis confirmed that travel experience partially mediates the motivation-revisit intention relationship (indirect effect = 0.112, 95% CI [0.062, 0.168]). Demographic differences also emerged: males and those aged 26–30 reported higher revisit intentions, while higher-income respondents showed more selective destination preferences. These results suggest the need for segment-specific strategies and experience-driven marketing approaches.

Theoretical implications

This study builds on the Theory of Planned Behavior by integrating experiential and destination preference elements, offering a comprehensive model for understanding cross-border tourism behavior among Malaysian travelers.

Practical implications

Tourism stakeholders should focus on enhancing travel experiences that align with tourists' motivations especially cultural, culinary, and leisure attractions. Malaysian tourism authorities could replicate successful elements from Southern Thailand (e.g., curated experiences, immersive storytelling) to improve domestic offerings. Business operators should consider 'bleisure' travel trends and design hybrid packages targeting corporate tourists.

Social implications (Policy contribution)

The study recommends cross-border tourism cooperation (e.g., visa facilitation, joint marketing) between Malaysia and Thailand. For domestic sustainability, Malaysia could implement incentives such as tax rebates, loyalty programs, and destination rebranding to attract outbound travelers back home.

Research limitations

This study relied on self-reported survey data, which may introduce response bias. Future research should consider longitudinal designs or qualitative approaches to explore tourists' deep-seated motivations and decision-making processes more holistically.

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EMERGING PARADIGMS FOR ASIA'S WELLNESS TOURISM INDUSTRY PRACTICES: FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA FOR HOLISTIC WELLBEING

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ABSTRACT

Purpose:

The aims of this study to develop an inclusive future research agenda that supports holistic wellbeing across diverse Southeast Asian regions. This study explores the new paradigms of wellness practices which shaping niche prospect of wellness tourism South East Asia, by rejuvenating on traditional healings practices and indigenous health knowledge systems, with the integration technology, sustainability and rapid inclination of tourists' preferences towards health and wellbeing are such transforming drivers this sector.

Methodology:

A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted using academic databases (Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect) covering the period 2010–2025. The review employed PRISMA methodology and included scholarly articles, industry reports, and case studies from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. Thematic analysis was used to identify key trends, gaps, and future research priorities.

Findings:

The wellness industry in Southeast Asia is growing rapidly by integrating ancient wellness traditions (e.g., India's AYUSH, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and Thai healing therapies) with advanced technologies transformation, immersive digital experiences, AI-driven diagnostics, hybrid models, bi-feedback systems, and. The study recognizes six emerging paradigms in wellness sector: (1) Authentic traditional healings, (2) Preventive healthcare system with physical and mental wellbeing, (3) Personalised wellness tours and destinations, (4) Sustainable and regenerative wellness destination development (5) spiritual retreat touris related to both religion and non-religion perspective and (6) Smart technology enabled wellness practices. 7. Healthy food tourism and lifestyle (Lee, Busser, Kim, & Shulga, 2025; Pagaldiviti & Dash, 2023; Talukder, 2025)

Research Limitations/Implications:

The study is primarily based on secondary sources, which may not capture fast-changing real-time practices post-COVID-19. There is also a need for empirical cross-country comparative studies to validate findings across diverse socio-cultural and economic contexts. However, disparities in policy frameworks, capacity building, and infrastructure limit scalability and inclusivity

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Practical Implications:

The paper delivers a strategic underpinning for wellness entrepreneurs, and wellness destination managers, hoteliers, tourism planners and policymakers to design culturally rooted and tech-enabled wellness tourism. It also suggests frameworks for digital transformation, community-based engagement, and holistic certification protocols.

Originality/Value:

This paper exclusively combines traditional healing systems with contemporary innovations to propose an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural research agenda for wellness tourism in Southeast Asia. It presents an inclusive and forward-looking vision for holistic wellbeing that aligns with global sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Keywords: Traditional healing systems, Holistic wellbeing, Future agenda for wellness research, Wellness tourism practices, Wellness destinations, wellness in Southeast Asia.

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IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON TOURIST INFLUX AND LOCAL ECONOMY IN LADAKH

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between social media influencer marketing and tourism growth in Ladakh, India, focusing on both tourist influx patterns and economic impacts on local communities. Using a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative analysis of tourism data (2018-2024) with qualitative interviews and surveys, this research reveals that social media influencers have significantly contributed to a 340% increase in tourist arrivals while generating both positive economic opportunities and sustainability challenges for the region. The study finds that influencer-driven tourism has created new revenue streams for local businesses and increased employment opportunities but also raised concerns about environmental degradation and cultural commodification. Key findings indicate that strategic influencer partnerships, when coupled with sustainable tourism practices, can maximize economic benefits while minimizing negative impacts on Ladakh's fragile ecosystem and traditional way of life.

Keywords: Social media influencers, sustainable tourism, Ladakh, economic impact, digital marketing, mountain tourism

Introduction

The Ladakh region of northern India, known for its pristine landscapes, Buddhist monasteries, and unique high-altitude desert ecosystem, has experienced unprecedented tourism growth in recent years. This surge coincides with the rise of social media influencers who have showcased Ladakh's natural beauty to global audiences through platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. The region, often referred to as "Little Tibet," presents a compelling case study for understanding how digital influence translates into real-world economic and social change in remote mountain communities.

Social media influencers, defined as individuals who have built substantial online followings and can affect their audience's purchasing decisions, have emerged as powerful drivers of tourism demand. Their authentic storytelling, visual content, and personal recommendations often carry more weight with audiences than traditional advertising methods. In the context of Ladakh, influencers have played a crucial role in transforming a relatively obscure destination into a must-visit location for adventure travelers and cultural enthusiasts.

This study addresses the growing need to understand the multifaceted impacts of influencer-driven tourism on local economies, particularly in fragile mountain ecosystems. While the economic benefits of increased tourism are often celebrated, the associated challenges of rapid growth, environmental pressure, and cultural change require careful examination. The research aims to provide actionable insights for policymakers, tourism operators, and local communities navigating the opportunities and challenges of digital-age tourism promotion.

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are

1. To quantify the relationship between social media influencer activity and tourist arrival patterns in Ladakh
2. To assess the economic impact of influencer-driven tourism on local businesses and employment
3. To evaluate the social and environmental consequences of rapid tourism growth
4. To identify best practices for sustainable influencer marketing in mountain tourism destinations
5. To develop recommendations for balancing economic benefits with environmental and cultural preservation

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How has social media influencer marketing contributed to changes in tourist arrival patterns in Ladakh?
- What are the direct and indirect economic impacts of influencer-driven tourism on local communities?
- How do local stakeholders perceive the role of social media influencers in tourism development?
- What are the environmental and cultural implications of rapid tourism growth driven by social media exposure?
- What strategies can optimize the benefits of influencer marketing while minimizing negative impacts?

Literature Review

Social Media Influencers and Tourism

The relationship between social media and tourism has been extensively documented in academic literature. Xiang and Gretzel (2010) identified social media as a fundamental shift in how travelers search for, evaluate, and share travel experiences. The emergence of influencer marketing represents an evolution of this phenomenon, where individual content creators become central figures in destination promotion.

Recent studies have highlighted the effectiveness of influencer marketing in tourism contexts. Jaipuria and Shukla (2022) found that travel influencers significantly impact destination choice, particularly among millennials and Generation Z travelers. The authenticity and relatability of influencer content often generate higher engagement rates compared to traditional marketing approaches, leading to what researchers term "electronic word-of-mouth" effects.

The concept of "Instagram-worthy" destinations has become increasingly important in tourism marketing. Gretzel (2017) argued that visual platforms like Instagram have fundamentally changed how destinations are perceived and promoted, with aesthetic appeal often taking precedence over cultural or historical significance. This shift has particular relevance for Ladakh, whose dramatic landscapes and photogenic monasteries align perfectly with social media aesthetics.

Mountain Tourism and Sustainability

Mountain tourism presents unique opportunities and challenges that distinguish it from other forms of tourism. The United Nations Mountain Partnership (2013) emphasizes that mountain regions often combine exceptional natural beauty with fragile ecosystems and vulnerable communities. The rapid growth of tourism in mountain areas can generate significant economic benefits while simultaneously threatening the very resources that attract visitors.

Sustainable mountain tourism has emerged as a critical framework for managing these tensions. Godde et al. (2000) identified key principles including community involvement, environmental protection, and economic viability as essential components of sustainable mountain tourism development. The

challenge lies in implementing these principles while accommodating rapid growth driven by digital marketing.

The concept of carrying capacity becomes particularly relevant in mountain destinations like Ladakh. Butler (1980) introduced the Tourism Area Life Cycle model, which suggests that destinations experience predictable stages of development, often leading to decline if growth is not properly managed. Recent research has explored how social media can accelerate these cycles, potentially compressing decades of tourism development into just a few years.

Economic Impacts of Tourism in Remote Regions

Tourism's economic impacts in remote regions have been the subject of extensive research. Leakage, multiplier effects, and distribution of benefits are key concepts in understanding how tourism revenue translates into local economic development. In mountain regions, research has shown that tourism can provide crucial alternative livelihoods for communities facing agricultural challenges due to climate change and modernization.

Studies from similar mountain regions provide relevant context for understanding Ladakh's situation. Research in Nepal's Everest region (Becken et al., 2013) demonstrated both the economic opportunities and environmental challenges associated with rapid tourism growth in high-altitude areas. Similarly, studies from Bhutan (Choki et al., 2018) have shown how controlled tourism development can maximize economic benefits while preserving cultural and environmental integrity.

Digital Marketing in Tourism Destinations

The digital marketing landscape in tourism has evolved rapidly with the emergence of social media platforms. Content marketing, user-generated content, and influencer partnerships have become central strategies for destination marketing organizations. Research has shown that authentic, user-generated content often generates higher engagement and conversion rates than professionally produced marketing materials.

The role of visual storytelling in tourism marketing has gained particular attention. Research by Munar and Jacobsen (2014) highlighted how visual content on social media platforms creates emotional connections between potential travelers and destinations. This emotional dimension is particularly relevant for experiential destinations like Ladakh, where the journey and personal transformation are often as important as the physical destination.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of tourism data with qualitative insights from interviews and surveys. The mixed-methods design allows for triangulation of findings and provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationships between social media influence and tourism outcomes.

The research follows an explanatory sequential design, where quantitative data collection and analysis precede qualitative data collection. This approach enables the quantitative findings to inform the design of qualitative instruments and provides context for interpreting qualitative results.

Quantitative Data Collection

Tourism Statistics

Tourism arrival data was collected from multiple sources:

- Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council tourism statistics (2018-2024)
- Indian Ministry of Tourism regional data
- Airport and land border crossing records
- Hotel and guesthouse occupancy data from the Ladakh Hotel Association

Data was collected monthly to capture seasonal variations and was disaggregated by tourist origin (domestic vs. international), accommodation type, and length of stay.

Social Media Analytics

Social media data was collected using a combination of tools and platforms:

- Instagram hashtag analysis (#Ladakh, #LehLadakh, #IncredibleIndia)
- YouTube video analysis for travel content featuring Ladakh
- Facebook page insights from major travel influencers
- Google Trends data for Ladakh-related search terms

Influencer identification was based on follower count (minimum 10,000), engagement rates, and content focus on travel/lifestyle topics. A total of 150 influencers were identified and tracked across the study period.

Economic Impact Measurements

Economic data was collected through:

- Business revenue surveys (n=200 businesses)
- Employment statistics from local government sources
- Bank transaction data (where available and with appropriate permissions)
- Price monitoring for accommodation, food, and services

Qualitative Data Collection

In-Depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 45 key stakeholders:

- Local business owners (15)
- Tourism operators (10)
- Government officials (8)
- Community leaders (7)
- Environmental activists (5)

Interviews were conducted in Hindi, Ladakhi, and English, depending on participant preference, and were recorded with consent for later transcription and analysis.

Focus Group Discussions

Six focus group discussions were held with different stakeholder groups:

- Young entrepreneurs (2 groups)
- Traditional business owners (2 groups)
- Women's groups (1 group)
- Environmental conservation groups (1 group)

Each group consisted of 8-10 participants, and sessions lasted approximately 90 minutes.

Tourist Surveys

Surveys were administered to 500 tourists visiting Ladakh during the peak season (June-September 2024). The survey included questions about:

- Information sources influencing travel decisions
- Social media usage and influence
- Spending patterns
- Experience satisfaction
- Environmental awareness

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS and R software. Key analyses included:

- Correlation analysis between social media metrics and tourism arrivals
- Time series analysis to identify trends and seasonal patterns
- Regression analysis to quantify the relationship between influencer activity and tourism outcomes
- Economic impact analysis using multiplier models

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. NVivo software was used to facilitate coding and theme development. The analysis focused on identifying patterns in stakeholder perceptions, experiences, and recommendations.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in accordance with established ethical guidelines for social research. Key considerations included:

- Informed consent from all participants
- Confidentiality and anonymity protections
- Cultural sensitivity in research design and implementation
- Benefit-sharing with local communities through research dissemination

Results

Quantitative Findings

Tourism Growth Patterns

The analysis reveals a dramatic increase in tourist arrivals to Ladakh between 2018 and 2024. Total annual visitors increased from 287,000 in 2018 to 1,263,000 in 2024, representing a 340% growth over six years. This growth rate significantly exceeds the national average tourism growth rate of 65% over the same period.

Monthly data analysis shows that the traditional peak season (June-September) has extended, with May and October now showing substantial visitor numbers. The shoulder season growth is particularly notable, with May experiencing a 420% increase and October showing a 380% increase over the study period.

Domestic tourism accounts for 78% of total arrivals, with international tourism comprising 22%. The domestic market has shown particular dynamism, with young travellers (ages 18-35) representing 67% of domestic visitors, compared to 45% nationally.

Social Media Influence Correlation

Correlation analysis reveals strong positive relationships between social media metrics and tourism arrivals:

- Instagram posts tagged with #Ladakh correlate with monthly arrivals ($r = 0.82$, $p < 0.001$).
- YouTube video views about Ladakh predict arrivals with a 2-month lag ($r = 0.76$, $p < 0.001$).
- Google Trends search volume shows the strongest correlation ($r = 0.89$, $p < 0.001$).

Influencer impact analysis shows that posts by macro-influencers (100K-1M followers) generate an average of 2,300 additional monthly visitors per million impressions. Micro-influencers (10K-100K followers) show higher engagement rates but lower absolute impact numbers.

Economic Impact Quantification

The economic impact analysis reveals substantial benefits from increased tourism:

Direct Economic Impacts:

- Total tourism revenue increased from ₹2,140 million in 2018 to ₹9,870 million in 2024.
- Average per-tourist spending increased from ₹7,456 to ₹7,810 (adjusted for inflation).
- Hotel occupancy rates increased from 45% to 78% during peak season.

Employment Creation:

- Direct tourism employment increased from 18,500 to 47,200 jobs.
- Indirect employment is estimated at 28,300 additional jobs.
- Youth employment in the tourism sector increased by 285%.

Business Revenue Growth:

- Accommodation sector revenue grew by 385%.
- The food and beverage sector grew by 420%.
- Transportation services grew by 310%.
- Handicrafts and souvenirs grew by 450%.

Multiplier Effects

Economic multiplier analysis indicates that every ₹100 spent by tourists generates ₹156 in total economic output for the Ladakh region. This multiplier is higher than the Indian average of ₹142, suggesting effective local economic integration of tourism spending.

The breakdown of multiplier effects shows:

- Direct effects: ₹100
- Indirect effects: ₹34 (supplier purchases)
- Induced effects: ₹22 (employee spending)

Qualitative Findings

Stakeholder Perceptions of Influencer Impact

Thematic analysis of interviews and focus groups revealed five major themes regarding influencer impact:

Theme 1: Economic Empowerment Local business owners consistently reported positive economic impacts from influencer-driven tourism. A guesthouse owner in Leh stated, "Before social media, we had maybe 30% occupancy. Now we're booked solid from May to October. These young people with cameras have changed everything."

Women entrepreneurs particularly benefited, with several reporting the ability to start home-based businesses catering to tourists. A homestay operator noted, "I started with one room in 2019 after seeing tourists looking for authentic experiences. Now I have five rooms and employ three local women."

Theme 2: Cultural Exchange vs. Commodification Participants expressed mixed feelings about cultural impacts. While many appreciated increased cultural awareness and exchange, concerns were raised about superficial representation. A monastery caretaker observed, "Many visitors come for photos but don't understand our traditions. The influencers show our culture like a museum, not a living tradition."

Theme 3: Environmental Pressures Environmental concerns emerged as a dominant theme across all stakeholder groups. A local environmental activist explained, "The mountains can't handle this many people. We see more trash, damaged trails, and stressed wildlife. The influencers show paradise but don't talk about responsibility."

Theme 4: Infrastructure Strain Rapid tourism growth has strained local infrastructure. A government official noted, "Our water supply, waste management, and roads weren't designed for this volume." We're playing catch-up constantly."

Theme 5: Authenticity and Over-tourism Long-term residents expressed concerns about changing community dynamics. A traditional shop owner shared, "Leh is becoming like any tourist place. The real Ladakh is disappearing behind the Instagram version."

Tourist Motivations and Behaviours

Survey analysis of tourist motivations revealed that 73% of visitors cited social media as a primary influence in choosing Ladakh as a destination. Specific findings include:

- 45% discovered Ladakh through influencer content.
- 28% were influenced by friend/family social media posts.
- 67% planned their itinerary based on social media content.
- 89% shared their own content during their visit.

Tourist behaviour patterns showed a concentration on "Instagram-worthy" locations, with 78% visiting the same five popular photo spots. This concentration has created crowding at specific sites while leaving other attractions underutilized.

Sustainability Concerns and Adaptation Strategies

Stakeholders identified several sustainability challenges and potential solutions:

Environmental Management:

- Implementation of visitor caps at sensitive sites
- Mandatory eco-fees for tourists
- Improved waste management systems
- Promotion of off-season travel

Cultural Preservation:

- Community-based tourism initiatives
- Cultural orientation programs for visitors
- Support for traditional industries alongside tourism
- Influencer education about cultural sensitivity

Infrastructure Development:

- Sustainable accommodation development
- Improved transportation systems
- Water conservation and renewable energy
- Digital infrastructure for better visitor management

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings reveals a complex picture of rapid tourism growth driven by social media influence. While the economic benefits are substantial and measurable, the qualitative insights highlight important sustainability challenges that require immediate attention.

The correlation between social media activity and tourism arrivals is strong and consistent, validating the influence of digital marketing on destination choice. However, the qualitative findings suggest that this influence is creating concentrated impacts on specific locations and seasons, potentially reducing the sustainability of growth.

The economic multiplier effects are positive and significant, but qualitative insights reveal that benefits are not evenly distributed across the community. Young entrepreneurs and those with digital literacy have benefited disproportionately, while traditional businesses and older community members have experienced both benefits and challenges.

Discussion

The Transformation of Ladakh's Tourism Landscape

The findings demonstrate that social media influencers have fundamentally transformed Ladakh's tourism landscape, accelerating growth patterns that might have taken decades to achieve through traditional marketing approaches. The 340% increase in tourist arrivals over six years represents one of the most dramatic tourism growth stories in India's mountain regions.

This transformation reflects broader trends in digital-age tourism, where authentic, visual storytelling can rapidly elevate destinations from relative obscurity to mainstream popularity. Ladakh's unique combination of dramatic landscapes, cultural authenticity, and accessibility to social media-savvy domestic tourists created ideal conditions for influencer marketing success.

The demographic shift toward younger tourists aligns with global trends in adventure and experiential travel. However, the concentration of this demographic presents both opportunities and challenges for destination management. While young travelers tend to be more adaptable and willing to engage with local communities, they also tend to have lower per capita spending and higher environmental impact in certain categories.

Economic Development and Distributional Effects

The economic impacts of influencer-driven tourism in Ladakh are substantial and generally positive, with significant multiplier effects benefiting the broader regional economy. The creation of nearly 50,000 direct and indirect jobs has provided crucial economic opportunities in a region with limited alternative livelihoods.

However, the distributional effects of this growth raise important equity considerations. The benefits have accrued disproportionately to those with digital literacy, English language skills, and access to capital for tourism investments. This has created new forms of economic stratification within Ladakh society, potentially marginalizing traditional occupations and older community members.

The rapid growth has also created inflationary pressures on local goods and services, particularly housing and food. While this benefits suppliers and property owners, it can create hardships for local residents not directly involved in tourism. Policymakers need to consider mechanisms for ensuring that tourism benefits are more broadly shared across the community.

Sustainability Challenges and Environmental Impacts

The environmental implications of rapid tourism growth represent perhaps the most critical challenge facing Ladakh. The region's high-altitude desert ecosystem is particularly fragile, with limited carrying capacity for large numbers of visitors. The concentration of tourist activity in specific locations, driven by social media aesthetics, exacerbates these pressures.

The findings suggest that current growth patterns are unsustainable in the long term without significant intervention. The increase in waste generation, water consumption, and transportation emissions threatens the very environmental qualities that attract visitors. This presents a classic sustainability paradox where tourism success undermines the resource base that creates the attraction.

Climate change adds another layer of complexity to these challenges. Ladakh's glacial water sources and fragile mountain ecosystems are already under stress from global warming. Additional pressure from tourism could accelerate environmental degradation and threaten the region's long-term viability as a destination.

Cultural Commodification and Authenticity

The tension between cultural preservation and tourism development emerges clearly from the qualitative findings. While increased tourism has brought economic benefits and cultural exchange opportunities, it has also led to concerns about the commodification of Ladakh culture.

The influence of social media aesthetics on tourism patterns has created pressure for cultural displays that appeal to digital audiences rather than reflect authentic traditions. This "Instagram-ization" of culture risks creating a sanitized, commercialized version of Ladakh's traditions that meets tourist expectations but loses deeper cultural meaning.

The concentration of tourism in specific cultural sites, particularly monasteries and festivals, has created management challenges for religious institutions. The balance between welcoming visitors and maintaining spiritual sanctity requires careful negotiation and community involvement.

Infrastructure and Governance Challenges

The rapid pace of tourism growth has outstripped infrastructure development and governance capacity in Ladakh. The strain on water supplies, waste management systems, and transportation infrastructure reflects the challenges many mountain destinations face when tourism growth exceeds planning and investment capacity.

The governance challenges are compounded by the complex administrative structure of Ladakh, which involves central government, state government, and local council authorities. Coordinating tourism policy across these levels while responding to rapid change requires institutional innovations and enhanced planning capacity.

The digital nature of influencer marketing also creates regulatory challenges. Traditional tourism marketing was easier to monitor and control through conventional media channels. Social media influence operates across platforms and jurisdictions, making it difficult for local authorities to manage the messages and expectations being created about their destination.

Recommendations

Sustainable Tourism Development Framework

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed for managing influencer-driven tourism growth in Ladakh:

Carrying Capacity Management

- Implement science-based carrying capacity assessments for key tourist sites.
- Establish visitor quotas during peak seasons to prevent overcrowding.
- Develop a dynamic pricing system that encourages off-season visitation.
- Create alternative attractions to distribute visitor pressure.

Infrastructure Investment

- Prioritize sustainable infrastructure development, including renewable energy, water conservation, and waste management.
- Improve transportation systems to reduce environmental impact.
- Develop digital infrastructure for better visitor management and information dissemination.
- Invest in community facilities that serve both residents and tourists.

Influencer Partnership Strategy

Responsible Influencer Guidelines

- Develop partnerships with influencers who promote responsible tourism practices.
- Create content guidelines that emphasize cultural sensitivity and environmental awareness.
- Establish influencer education programs about Ladakhi culture and environmental challenges.
- Implement monitoring systems to track influencer impact and effectiveness.

Community-Based Content Creation

- Support local content creators and micro-influencers to tell authentic stories.
- Provide digital literacy training for local entrepreneurs.
- Create platforms for community members to share their perspectives on tourism development.
- Develop user-generated content campaigns that promote responsible behavior.

Economic Development and Equity

Inclusive Tourism Development

- Implement policies to ensure tourism benefits reach all segments of the community.
- Support traditional industries alongside tourism development.
- Create microfinance and training programs for tourism entrepreneurs.
- Develop local supply chains to maximize economic multiplier effects.

Revenue Management

- Introduce tourist taxes or environmental fees to fund infrastructure and conservation.
- Establish tourism development funds with community participation in allocation decisions.
- Create benefit-sharing mechanisms for communities hosting tourist activities.
- Support economic diversification to reduce over-dependence on tourism.

Environmental Conservation

Protected Area Management

- Strengthen protection of sensitive environmental areas.
- Implement mandatory environmental education for tourists.
- Develop eco-certification programs for tourism businesses.
- Create wildlife corridors and habitat protection zones.

Climate Adaptation

- Integrate climate change considerations into tourism planning.
- Develop adaptive management strategies for changing environmental conditions.
- Support research on tourism impacts and ecosystem resilience.
- Promote low-carbon tourism practices and transportation options.

Cultural Preservation

Community Participation

- Ensure meaningful community participation in tourism planning and decision-making.
- Support cultural preservation initiatives and traditional knowledge systems.
- Create authentic cultural experiences that benefit local communities.
- Develop protocols for respectful visitor behaviour at cultural sites.

Cultural Education

- Implement cultural orientation programs for tourists.
- Support cultural education initiatives in schools and communities.
- Create interpretive materials that explain cultural significance and appropriate behaviour.
- Develop partnerships between cultural institutions and tourism operators.

Limitations and Future Research

Study Limitations

This research has several limitations that should be acknowledged:

The study period (2018-2024) coincides with significant external factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted tourism patterns and may have influenced some findings. The research also relies partially on self-reported data from business surveys, which may contain reporting biases.

The social media analysis focused on major platforms and English-language content, potentially missing influence from regional language content or emerging platforms. The attribution of

tourism growth specifically to influencer activity, while statistically supported, cannot completely control for other factors contributing to Ladakh's rising popularity.

Sample sizes for some qualitative components, while appropriate for thematic analysis, may not capture the full diversity of stakeholder perspectives across Ladakh's various communities and geographic areas.

Future Research Directions

Several areas warrant further research:

Longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of influencer impact and tourism patterns over longer time periods would provide valuable insights into sustainability and adaptation processes. Comparative studies with other mountain destinations experiencing similar social media-driven growth could identify generalizable patterns and best practices.

Research on tourist behaviour and environmental impact at the individual level could inform more targeted intervention strategies. Studies of cultural change and community adaptation processes would contribute to understanding the long-term social implications of rapid tourism development.

Investigation of emerging technologies like virtual reality and artificial intelligence in tourism marketing could anticipate future trends and challenges. Research on climate change impacts and tourism resilience in mountain destinations would support adaptation planning efforts.

Conclusion

This study reveals that social media influencers have played a transformative role in Ladakh's tourism development, driving unprecedented growth that has generated substantial economic benefits while creating significant sustainability challenges. The 340% increase in tourist arrivals over six years demonstrates the power of digital influence to rapidly transform destinations but also highlights the need for proactive management to ensure sustainable outcomes.

The economic impacts are substantial and generally positive, with tourism revenue increasing by over 350% and employment opportunities expanding dramatically. The high economic multiplier effects indicate effective local integration of tourism spending, though benefits are not evenly distributed across the community.

However, the rapid pace of change has created serious sustainability concerns. Environmental pressures on Ladakh's fragile mountain ecosystem, infrastructure strain, and cultural commodification risks threaten the long-term viability of tourism development. The concentration of visitor activity driven by social media aesthetics has exacerbated these challenges.

The study's mixed-methods approach provides both quantitative evidence of influencer impact and qualitative insights into community experiences and perceptions. The integration of these findings reveals the complexity of managing digital-age tourism development in vulnerable mountain environments.

The recommendations proposed in this study emphasize the need for integrated approaches that harness the benefits of influencer marketing while addressing sustainability challenges. Key strategies include carrying capacity management, responsible influencer partnerships, inclusive economic development, environmental conservation, and cultural preservation initiatives.

Ultimately, the Ladakh case demonstrates both the opportunities and responsibilities that come with digital-age tourism marketing. The power of social media to drive rapid destination development must be coupled with equally sophisticated approaches to sustainable management. The lessons from Ladakh's experience provide valuable insights for other mountain destinations navigating similar challenges and opportunities in the digital age.

The success of sustainable tourism development in Ladakh will depend on the ability of stakeholders to work collaboratively across government, private sector, and community levels. The region's experience serves as both an inspiration for the economic potential of influencer-driven tourism and a cautionary tale about the need for proactive sustainability management.

As Ladakh continues to evolve as a major tourism destination, ongoing research, adaptive management, and community engagement will be essential for ensuring that the benefits of tourism

development are maximized while the region's unique environmental and cultural heritage is preserved for future generations.

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Funding: This research paper was not funded by any agency.

Ethics Approval: This research was conducted with appropriate ethical approval from the University of Ladakh's Ethics Review Board.

Data Availability: Anonymized datasets supporting this research are available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author, subject to appropriate data sharing agreements and privacy protections.

FEEL THE CLICK: HOW INTERACTIVE HOTEL WEBSITES SPARK HEDONIC VALUE AND BOOKING INTENTION

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Extended abstract

In the increasingly digitalized hospitality industry, hotel websites play a critical role in shaping consumer behavior. This study investigates how perceived interactivity, operationalized through two-way communication, responsiveness, and user control influences hedonic value and online booking intention. Drawing on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory, perceived interactivity is treated as a stimulus (S), hedonic value as the organism (O), and booking intention as the response (R). A quantitative study involving 221 hotel website users was conducted, and data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS version 4. Results confirm the significance of all hypothesized relationships except for the direct effect of two-way communication on booking intention and the total effect of two-way communication on hedonic value. The findings provide both theoretical and managerial insights for enhancing user experience and conversion rates in online hotel booking platforms.

Keywords: Perceived interactivity; Hedonic value; Online booking intention; Hotel website; S-O-R theory; PLS-SEM

Purpose/Problem Statement

Despite extensive research on technology-mediated interactions in e-commerce, limited empirical work has examined how specific dimensions of perceived interactivity influence hedonic value and behavioral intentions within the hospitality domain. Most prior studies focus on utilitarian outcomes, overlooking the role of hedonic experiences in enhancing booking engagement. Moreover, the mechanism through which perceived interactivity dimensions drive online booking intention via hedonic value remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining the direct and mediated effects of interactivity dimensions on hotel customers' booking intention, offering a fine-grained understanding of user experience in digital hospitality environments.

Originality/value

This study contributes to the tourism and hospitality literature by empirically validating a multi-dimensional construct of perceived interactivity (Abdullah et al., 2017) within the context of hotel websites. While previous research has generally treated interactivity as a unidimensional construct or focused on its technical components, this study differentiates between its social, temporal, and structural dimensions, namely, two-way communication, responsiveness, and user control to evaluate their unique influence on hedonic experience and booking behavior. Furthermore, the use of the S-O-R framework adds conceptual clarity to how digital stimuli evoke affective responses leading to behavioral outcomes (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

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Design/methodology/approach

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed, targeting Malaysian hotel customers with recent online booking experience. A purposive sampling method yielded 221 valid responses. Measurement items for each construct were adapted from prior validated scales: perceived interactivity (Abdullah et al., 2017; Liu, 2003), hedonic value (Babin et al., 1994; Kamal et al., 2018) and online booking intention (Abdullah et al., 2017, 2018). Structural model analysis was conducted using PLS-SEM via SmartPLS v4, following the two-step approach: (1) assessing reliability and validity of the measurement model and (2) evaluating structural relationships and mediation effects.

Findings/Discussion

The results show that responsiveness and user control significantly enhance both hedonic value and online booking intention. Hedonic value, in turn, has a strong positive influence on booking intention, confirming its mediating role. Interestingly, two-way communication significantly influences hedonic value, but its direct effect on online booking intention is not significant. Additionally, the total effect of two-way communication on hedonic value was not supported, suggesting its role may be indirect or context-dependent. These findings highlight the affective mechanisms that link interactive digital features with consumer behavior in hotel booking environments.

Theoretical implications

Theoretically, this study advances the S-O-R paradigm by mapping the influence of multidimensional interactivity (stimuli) onto affective response (hedonic value) and behavioral intention. It enriches interactivity literature by showing that not all interactivity dimensions exert equal influence on behavioral outcomes, thus calling for more nuanced theoretical modeling in future studies. Moreover, the study reinforces the mediating role of hedonic value, adding to the growing emphasis on experiential and emotional value in digital hospitality consumption (Kamal et al., 2018).

Practical implications

For hotel managers and digital marketers, the findings highlight the importance of designing interactive websites that prioritize user control and responsiveness. Tools like real-time response systems, adaptive content, and smooth navigation interfaces can significantly elevate hedonic experiences, thereby encouraging bookings. However, social interactivity features such as chat or messaging (two-way communication) may require more context-sensitive deployment, such as during pre- or post-booking stages rather than during browsing.

Social implications (Policy contribution)

From a policy standpoint, tourism boards and digital transformation agencies should consider interactivity standards in national tourism websites or promotional platforms to support smart tourism ecosystems. Ensuring inclusive and engaging online interfaces can facilitate broader adoption of digital hotel booking, particularly in post-pandemic recovery efforts where user trust and experience are critical.

Research limitations

The study is limited by its cross-sectional design and focus on Malaysian hotel users, which may affect generalizability. Additionally, behavioral intention rather than actual booking behavior was measured. Future research may consider longitudinal studies, incorporate experimental manipulations, and test alternative mediators or moderators such as trust, flow, or device type to enrich understanding.

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HOMESTAY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TOURISM PRODUCT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF WOMEN IN RURAL LADAKH, INDIA

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Extended Abstract

In the growing concerns of overcrowding and over tourism at urban destinations, homestays in the hills of India have been a favoured choice for those seeking to experience nature, tranquillity, and authenticity. Homestay tourism is popular in many destinations; it adds authentic sociocultural richness to the tourist's experience. For a nation that cannot make extensive infrastructural investment a priority but which possesses an abundance of tourism richness in remote communities, homestays are an attractive alternative tourism product. The present study analyses the alternative tourism product for sustainable development. The study suggests homestays are congruent with Ladakh's destination image. The essence of Ladakh's tourism lies in naturally beautiful rural hills and mountains and its indigenous communities with their mystical lifestyle and culture. These natural and cultural attributes can be showcased best through homestays. The primary data were collected from 27 women who run homestays in rural area of Shang village in Ladakh through questionnaire. Information was based on first-hand experiences generated through ethnographic observations and semi-structured interviews from women who run homestay business. This paper found that homestays as a pro-women tourism opportunity that promotes sustainable community development by fostering gender equality. Female ownership of homestay businesses secures women's avenues for income generation and involves them in mainstream development. The study's indicators of development are based on the well-being achieved by the Shang community, with a focus on three essential aspects of sustainable development, i.e., social, environmental and economic particularly among women and enabling them to achieve financial independence and fostering a greater sense of empowerment. Through their active involvement in tourism-related activities, women have gained economic agency and an enhanced role in household and community decision-making processes. Furthermore, the study concludes with recommendations/suggestions, and a discussion of its limitations.

Keywords: *Homestay in Ladakh; Sustainable Development; Ladakh; Women Empowerment; Feminism*

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Purpose/Problem Statement

Tourism has become one of the most important drivers of economic growth and development in many countries because it opens up so many business and job opportunities. It is the business of finding people who travel and stay outside of their home towns for work or fun and meeting their needs, (SLTDA, 2018). Tourism development in developing nations has unique infrastructural as well as operational difficulties in mountainous and distant rural areas where subsistence economies are prominent, poverty is widespread, and fragile natural ecosystems exist (Sood et al., 2017). Hilly communities, especially in developing nations like India, openly depend on pastoralism as well as agriculture, making them more susceptible to climate change and other catastrophes (Vedwan, 2006). To diversify their non-farm sources of income, hilly communities in developing nations should concentrate more on non-farm livelihoods like the tourism sector (Rasul & Kollmair, 2010). Moreover, sustainable tourism has become essential to maintain a magnificent environment as more people want to spend their vacations in nature (Bhutia, 2014; 2015).

Homestays not only embody the components of community-based tourism but also contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage (Global Himalayan Expedition, 2022; Yaja et al., 2023). The establishment of homestays not only enhances livelihood prospects for rural communities but also has the potential to curb rural migration (Salleh et al., 2014) as well as reduce gender disparities (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013). Homestay entrepreneurship has special qualities. It is an efficient and less expensive way to experience local culture while supporting the tourism industry (Gunaratna, 2014); homestays are designed to give visitors a place to stay, feed them home-cooked meals, and treat them like members of their own family (Scheyvens, 1999); it gives visitors a chance to stay with a chosen family, connect with them, and learn about their way of life (Scheyvens, 1999). The concept of sustainable homestay tourism development is one in which the community itself runs or manages, owns, or controls the tourist destination. The community based tourism (CBT) program for homestay's was also implemented, which resulted in more and more visitors requesting to stay at homestay's instead of hotels (Goodwin and Santilli, 2009).

The tourism scenario in Ladakh region has changed over the past one decade; tourist are more interested in visiting the offbeat homestay destinations of the region, which are managed by the local community and they provide homelike facilities, local cuisines, and traditional culture to the tourists. However, due to recent trends in homestay tourism in this region, future environmental-related concerns cannot be ignored. The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987) has delineated the linkages of poverty alleviation, environmental degradation and social equality as the components of sustainable development. Even though Ministry of Tourism data shows that there are many more Homestays on the list, many studies focus on the success of Homestay and only look at a few well-known Homestay destinations (Kalsom, 2002; Ibrahim, 2004). So, more research is needed to add to the body of knowledge by looking into other Homestay areas to learn more about their niche and possible problems that Homestay operators might face. Therefore, the present research is unique because it intends to reveal the perspective of tourist satisfaction along with sustainable homestay tourism.

Objectives of the Study

- a) This paper discusses homestays as an alternative form of community-based tourism product for sustainable development.
- b) To argue that homestays are tools for strengthening social and economic capacities.
- c) The purpose of this study is to understand whether the community involvement, especially of tribal women, in homestay activities in the rural village of Ladakh promotes sustainable community development.
- d) To evaluate whether the homestay business makes tribal women financially independent and leads to women empowerment.

Research Methodology

Qualitative research methodologies were used to explore the sustainability of rural community development in Ladakh, namely the active participation of women in homestays and associated tourism activities. The study's population comprises women who operate their own homestay in Ladakh region. Shang village in Leh district was chosen as a case study for this paper for several reasons (a) The enthusiasm of active female of Shang village to try an alternative business to their usual livelihood that could contribute back to the community, (b) this would be a new undertaking in a new destination where establishing of a community-based homestay programme could be done using a participatory approach and with close monitoring, (c) unlike most of the homestays in operation in Ladakh that lie in or enroute to the popular tourist destinations such as Pangong, Nubra, Changthang and Leh city, this place is situated in a backward area, less visited area of local people, while more visited of foreign tourist and situated in wildlife of Ladakh with the presence of wild animals, ample natural, cultural and historical attractions, and (d) all the registered homestay are owned and managed by women.

The data was derived through a community-based research and evaluation (CBRE) approach while the authors of this study was working with these women. Community-based research has its roots in action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2006) that entails participatory methodologies in the process of creating knowledge for growth and change (Friere, 1970). CBRE is a strong methodological tool for probing community-related issues where equitable participation of multi-stakeholders in the research processes is prioritized (Israel et al., 1998; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003), and the project progress is also collaboratively evaluated for empowerment, capacity building and high quality outcomes (Fetterman et al., 1996; Roe et al., 1997).

The authors, first visited Shang village for five days in December 2024 and discuss about the number of household in the village and tourist arrival in the village. A second visit was made by the researcher in January 2025, when some homestays began to operate for the tourist who visited to see the wild animals. The second visit, the authors formally and informally interviewed and discussed with the local residents which was pre-arranged by a core team of the women who operate homestay tourism in their village. To analyse the social, environmental and economic status particularly among women, 27 women who operated homestay were participated in the interview conducted through purposive sampling techniques. A well-structured questionnaire was framed to gathered the required data. In-depth interview from each women and Focused Group Discussion (FGD) were conducted for collected the data and first-hand experiences generated through ethnographic observations. All interviews and discussions were conducted in Ladakhi and recorded and later transcribed to ensure accuracy during analysis.

Data Analysis and Findings of the Study-

Demographic profile of the respondents

It can be found that 98% of the respondents were female and 02% of the respondents were male. The study doesn't include 02% of the male respondent as the study's main focuses on women homestay operators. Thus, the response number was 27. Regarding the establishment of homestay 22.22% of the respondent start their homestay between 2006-2010; 48.15% started between 2010-2015; 18.52% started between 2015-2020 and few that is 11.11% started recently after 2021. All the homestays are set by women herself and none is inherited. The age of the respondents 08% of the respondents were age between 60-70; while 32% of the Further, majority of the respondent were age above 50; 29.63% respondent were age between 41 to 50 and between 30 to 40 was 14.81%. Moreover, majority of the respondent (74.07%) belongs to nuclear family, therefore they have less responsibility of household chores. Regarding the marital status all are married. The study revealed that a significant majority that is 70.37% of the women respondents' managing homestays were illiterate. This suggests that formal education was not a prerequisite for women to start or operate a homestay business in the region. Despite their lack of formal schooling, these women successfully engaged in tourism-related activities, indicating that practical knowledge, traditional hospitality skills, community support, and local tourism demand played a more critical role in enabling their participation. This also highlights how homestay tourism can serve as an inclusive economic opportunity, particularly for women in remote or underserved areas, regardless of their educational background. Moreover, 37.04% earned upto Rs. 1 lakh and 62.96% earned Rs. 1-2 Lakhs per year. All the respondent's response that most of the tourist visited homestay are foreigners. They enjoy the scenic views, wildlife animals, peace in the valley and local hospitality. Moreover, the homestay business was set-up by own women and none is inherited business.

The study reveals that the homestays operating in tribal village of Ladakh is an alternative form of community-based tourism product for sustainable development. Homestays are tools for strengthening social and economic capacities and it is a tourism product operated by women in rural areas and women in this village are not only homemakers but also an entrepreneur. The role of homestay plays an important role for sustainable development of the rural communities as the community involvement, especially of tribal women, in homestay activities in the rural village of Ladakh promotes sustainable community development through homestay business. Moreover, the study found that women operated homestay in rural area are financially independent as majority of women operating homestay earns more than a lakh in one season and leads to women empowerment.

Findings/Discussions

Based on observations made in this case study, homestays appear to be a tourism product that will be helpful in addressing socio-economic, ethnic and women empowerment. Several factors appear to have contributed to positive outcomes arising from the introduction of homestays in rural area of UT Ladakh. *Firstly*, the success of the homestay programme hinged upon constant support by UT Ladakh, local community members and unity among women in Shang village.

This support built relationships, understanding and trust, and provided an environment where action and dialogue were constantly available. Similar findings were observed in studies by Beritelli (2010), Jamal and Stronza (2009), and Wong, Mistilis and Dwyer (2010). *Secondly*, the case study reveals that homestays have emerged as a viable alternative tourism product that significantly contributes to sustainable development, especially in rural and remote areas. Respondents highlighted that homestays not only generate supplementary income for local households but also encourage cultural exchange and responsible tourism practices. This model supports environmental conservation, preserves traditional lifestyles, and minimizes the negative impacts associated with mass tourism. Hence, homestays are increasingly viewed as a strategic tool for achieving community-based sustainable tourism. *Thirdly*, the study found that in Shang village, homestays serve as effective tools for enhancing both social and economic capacities, particularly among women. Women engaged in homestay operations reported increased confidence, decision-making power, and financial independence.

The homestay business has provided them with opportunities for income generation, skill development, and active participation in community-based tourism, thereby contributing to their overall empowerment in a rural context. *Fourth*, the study found that community involvement, particularly of women in homestay activities in rural villages of Ladakh significantly contributes to sustainable community development. Women actively participate in managing homestays by maintaining a tourist register and ensuring equitable distribution of guests among households, thereby promoting equal income opportunities. Additionally, the community organizes bi-monthly meetings to discuss challenges related to tourist allocation and collectively address operational issues, reflecting a strong sense of cooperation and local governance. *Fifth*, this case study further reveals that the homestay business has become a vital source of livelihood, particularly for women, enabling them to achieve financial independence and fostering a greater sense of empowerment. Through their active involvement in tourism-related activities, women have gained economic agency and an enhanced role in household and community decision-making processes.

Recommendation/Suggestions-

- a) Transparency in the development of the programme, including selection and designation of approved homestay facilities, was important for building a sense of fairness.
- b) Clear guidelines on what was necessary to operate a homestay as well as how and who did this evaluation clarified what standards were needed to participate in the homestay programme and also fostered, in most cases, the sense of an equitable operating environment.
- c) Hospitality training, and on-going monitoring of tourism environment conditions were essential in fostering local capacity to host visitors and maintain an appealing and safe environment for guests (Alexander et al., 2010; Jayawardena, 2002).
- d) Women suggested that the government support in the form of training was essential, but local direction of the initiative provided stability, commitment and enthusiasm. In the future, several factors will need to be addressed to ensure that ongoing improvements for local people arise from the homestay programme. Mechanisms that support the inclusion of lower educated, economically disadvantaged and minorities will need to be further explored. For example, in addition to hospitality training, small financial loans may be necessary to facilitate the development of additional homestays in the region, to enable the inclusion of lower socio-economic families in this enterprise opportunity (Leisher et al., 2011; Molloy, 2012).
- e) It is further, recommended that infrastructure development in rural tourism areas, particularly in homestay-based villages, be planned with careful consideration of its impact on local livelihoods. In areas where improved road access has led to a decline in tourist stays at homestays due to direct taxi access to urban centers local authorities may consider implementing controlled transportation policies. Specifically, restricting taxi access beyond a certain point could encourage tourists to stay within the village, thereby supporting local homestay operators and ensuring equitable economic benefits for the community.

Theoretical implications

This study advances the theoretical understanding of gender and sustainable development by positioning homestays as a pro-women, community-based tourism model that promotes income generation, empowerment, and social inclusion. It supports feminist and sustainable development theories by demonstrating that women's active economic participation through tourism enhances individual agency, collective well-being, and equitable growth, making homestays transformative spaces for inclusive and gender-sensitive development.

Practical implications

The study highlights that promoting women-led homestays through skill development, micro-finance access, and supportive policies can enhance women's income, empowerment, and participation in community development. It also recommends that infrastructure in rural tourism areas be planned carefully; in regions where road access reduces homestay occupancy, controlled transportation such as limiting taxi access can help retain tourists in villages and ensure fair economic benefits.

Research limitations

The research was geographically limited to selected rural villages (Shang) in Ladakh, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different socio-cultural and economic contexts. Further, the study focused mainly on women engaged in homestay businesses, and did not deeply explore the perspectives of other stakeholders such as tourists, local authorities, or male community members. Moreover, research could adopt a comparative or longitudinal approach to better understand the evolving impacts of homestay tourism on gender and sustainable development.

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Room 4
Management and Operations

STRATEGIC COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS OF KAMPUNG BATIK CIBULUH IN BOGOR AS A THEMATIC TOURISM DESTINATION

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Abstract

Kampung Batik Cibuluh (Cibuluh Batik Village) in Bogor, West Java, is one of the city's thematic tourism destinations and the first batik-producing village, highlighting traditional craftsmanship and local cultural icons (Nurendah et al., 2024; Rasyifa et al., 2021). Thematic tourism plays a vital role in promoting cultural identity while contributing to local economic development (Perdana et al., 2025; Ye et al., 2024). In this context, Kampung Batik Cibuluh empowers the community especially women through creative, educational, and manual batik-making initiatives. Visitors are invited to join interactive workshops, offering an authentic cultural experience within Bogor's tourism landscape. However, its strategic competitiveness as a thematic tourism attraction remains underexplored (Xu, J., & Au, T., 2023). This study aims to analyze the strategic competitiveness of Kampung Batik Cibuluh by examining internal and external factors that influence its sustainability and attractiveness.

A qualitative approach was employed through structured interviews with key stakeholders, including village managers and local artisans. Thematic analysis was conducted, focusing on key dimensions such as product uniqueness, visitor experience, community involvement, infrastructure readiness, and market accessibility.

Findings reveal that Kampung Batik Cibuluh possesses strong strategic competitiveness driven by internal strengths and external opportunities. Internally, its distinctive cultural heritage, original batik motifs, and strong artisan engagement centered on authenticity and sustainability form its core advantages. These handcrafted products, embedded with local narratives, appeal to niche markets seeking meaningful and culturally rooted experiences. Interactive workshops further enhance its value by offering immersive learning opportunities. Externally, rising interest in cultural and sustainable tourism presents growth opportunities, though challenges such as infrastructure limitations and underdeveloped promotional efforts persist.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the discourse on cultural tourism and destination competitiveness within the creative economy. Practically, it provides insights for tourism managers and policymakers in designing targeted development strategies. Socially, the findings highlight the empowering role of community-based tourism in⁶³preserving intangible cultural heritage. This study is limited by its single-case focus and reliance on structured interviews. Future research could adopt a comparative approach across similar destinations or include tourist perspectives to gain a more holistic view of competitiveness.

Keywords: Strategic Competitive Advantage; Cibuluh Batik Village; Thematic Tourism; Cultural Tourism; Cultural Heritage

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Introduction

Indonesia possesses significant tourism potential, supported by its natural wealth, cultural diversity, and unique historical heritage. This potential is reflected in the rapid growth of the national tourism sector. Indonesia's achievements in tourism have gained wide international recognition, as evidenced by various global awards (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2023).

In 2025, the global tourism sector shows strong signs of recovery and growth following the COVID-19 pandemic. Indonesia, as an archipelagic nation rich in natural and cultural resources, is leveraging this momentum to strengthen its position in the global tourism map.

One key strategy in tourism development is the enhancement of thematic tourism, which integrates specific themes such as culture, nature, culinary arts, history, and local traditions. This approach aims to offer visitors a more personal, authentic, and meaningful experience. It also promotes sustainability by incorporating social, cultural, and environmental aspects. Thematic tourism focuses on specific interests such as heritage, ecology, or history, and contributes to sustainable tourism by strengthening the connection between tourists and the destinations they visit (Kristantyo Wisnubroto, 2025; Mehraliyev et al., 2022).

To achieve sustainable tourism, developing culture-based thematic tourism is essential. Batik plays a key role in preserving and enriching local cultural heritage. As a form of cultural expression filled with historical, spiritual, and social values, batik serves not only as an aesthetic product but also as an educational medium that connects tourists with local narratives (Syed Shaharuddin et al., 2021; Ye, Qin, & Wu, 2024).

A concrete example of this approach is Kampung Batik Cibuluh, located in Bogor. It has been developed as a cultural-based thematic tourism destination. Here, tourists can observe and purchase local batik products, participate in the batik-making process, learn about the philosophy behind Bogor's distinctive motifs, and engage with the local artisan community. This initiative supports both cultural preservation and local economic empowerment. It also promotes sustainable tourism by integrating cultural heritage, social welfare, and environmental conservation (Rasyifa et al., 2021; Nurendah et al., 2024). Thematic tourism plays a vital role in promoting cultural identity and supporting local economic development (Perdana et al., 2025; Ye et al., 2024).

Kampung Batik Cibuluh produces batik with distinctive motifs from Bogor, such as deer, kujang (traditional weapon from West Java), Bogor Botanical Gardens, taro leaves, pakujajar, and nutmeg. Its signature style includes bright colors that reflect Bogor's natural beauty, such as green, blue, brown, and orange. In addition to synthetic dyes, artisans use natural dyes to produce eco-friendly batik. The city government promotes the development of batik in this village to highlight local potential and improve community livelihoods.

Although relatively new, Kampung Batik Cibuluh has shown significant progress in creativity and production, strengthening its internal competitiveness. However, its strategic competitiveness as a thematic tourist attraction remains underexplored (Xu & Au, 2023). Based on interviews with the local tourism awareness group (known as "*Pokdarwis*"), many Indonesians, including those in Bogor, are still unaware of its existence. Several external factors contribute to this: poor road access, limited digital promotion, community-bound marketing, and local language barriers that restrict the destination to local visitors. Additionally, there is low interest among the younger generation to wear trendy clothing made from local batik. As a result, batik is often perceived only as formal attire.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges faced by Kampung Batik Cibuluh. It also proposes a strategic development plan to enhance its competitiveness, ensuring sustainable growth and greater impact on both the local community and the preservation of Indonesia's cultural heritage. The research is titled: "Strategic Competitive Analysis of Kampung Batik Cibuluh in Bogor as a Thematic Tourism Destination."

Research Objectives

This study aims to analyze the strategic competitiveness of Kampung Batik Cibuluh in Bogor City as a culture-based thematic tourism destination. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Identify internal factors that serve as strengths and weaknesses in the development of thematic tourism, such as product uniqueness, community engagement, and visitor experience.
2. Analyze external factors that present opportunities and threats to the sustainability and attractiveness of Kampung Batik Cibuluh, including trends in cultural and sustainable tourism.
3. Provide strategic recommendations to enhance the competitiveness and sustainable development of Kampung Batik Cibuluh as a community- and culture-based thematic tourism destination.

Literature Review

1. Tourism Development

Several studies have focused on the concept of thematic tourism due to growing interest in experience-based travel and local values (Sánchez-Cañizares & López Guzmán, 2021). As a representation of cultural tourism, Kampung Batik Cibuluh requires competitive strategies to stand out among other destinations that also highlight local wisdom and unique themes (Utami & Astawa, 2021). Therefore, this study will review relevant theories and previous research, especially those related to competitive strategies in community-based tourism destinations (Widiastuti et al., 2022; Fitriyah & Rahmawati, 2023; Suhariyanto & Mulyani, 2021).

2. Thematic Tourism

Thematic tourism focuses on specific themes such as nature, history, culture, or cuisine. It offers a deeper experience by allowing visitors to engage directly with local activities or traditions (Mehraliyev et al., 2022). One widely developed theme is local culture, especially batik. Batik is not only a handicraft but also a cultural symbol and identity that should be introduced to a wider audience. In tourism, batik attracts visitors by reflecting stories, philosophies, and local values (Syed Shaharuddin et al., 2021; Ye, Qin, & Wu, 2024).

According to Nurendah et al. (2024), community empowerment is essential in developing batik-based tourist destinations. When local residents, especially women, are involved in batik making and training, they gain financial benefits and help preserve cultural heritage. Meanwhile, Rasyifa et al. (2021) emphasized the need to develop batik villages not only as production centers but also as attractive tourist destinations. This includes improving services, promotion, and tourist facilities.

However, to remain competitive, batik villages must adopt proper strategies. Perdana et al. (2025) highlight the importance of training, designing tourism packages, and using digital technology. Without effective strategies, cultural destinations tend to remain known only locally and struggle to grow further.

3. IE Matrix

The Internal-External (IE) Matrix is a strategic analysis tool used to evaluate an organization's position based on internal and external factors. It divides organizational positions into nine cells, ranging from growth and build, to hold and maintain, to harvest or divest. The matrix helps determine the most suitable strategy, such as intensive, integrative, or divestment strategies (Dita & Muis, 2020).

This analysis is a strategic planning tool that identifies and assesses internal and external factors that influence organizational success, including the development of community-based tourism destinations (Phadermrod et al., 2019).

Strengths are positive internal factors that serve as competitive advantages. For Kampung Batik, these may include: unique cultural products (local batik), historical and traditional community values, active community involvement in tourism (community-based tourism), strategic location and good accessibility. Weaknesses are negative internal factors that hinder development, such

as: limited digital promotion and branding, inadequate infrastructure, lack of human resources in tourism management and insufficient training for local residents in hospitality. Opportunities are positive external factors that support development, including: growing trends in experiential and cultural tourism, government support for tourism villages, partnerships with private sectors and digital platforms, rising tourist interest in sustainable tourism. Threats are negative external factors that pose challenges, such as: competition with more well-known destinations, seasonal visitor dependency, economic crises or natural disasters and rapid shifts in tourist preferences.

Based on the literature review, although many studies have addressed cultural tourism and community empowerment, there remains a research gap concerning the competitiveness of batik-based destinations like Kampung Batik Cibuluh. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by analyzing how Kampung Batik Cibuluh can be developed into a more competitive thematic tourism destination.

Methodology

Populations and Sample

A qualitative method was employed in this study. The population consisted of stakeholders involved in the development and management of Kampung Batik Cibuluh. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their relevance and expertise related to the research topic. A total of six informants took part in the study. The selection criteria included:

- Active managers of the tourism village and local batik artisans
- Academics (in tourism) and practitioners
- Tourists or visitors (optional), for data triangulation from the user perspective

Research Tools

This study adopts a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the strategic competitiveness of Kampung Batik Cibuluh as a culture-based thematic tourism destination. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews, which began with scheduled meetings with the local tourism awareness group (*Pokdarwis*), followed by interviews with batik artisans, and finally with tourists. The tourist interviews were conducted based on recommendations from the managers or artisans.

Interviews were supported by tools such as mobile phones, tablets, stationery, and notebooks. In addition, online interviews were conducted via WhatsApp. Observations and documentation were also carried out using mobile phones to capture visual data and field notes.

Data Collection

In this study, data were collected directly in the field through in-depth interviews using open-ended questions, as well as through online interviews. The questions were designed to gather comprehensive information on the internal and external factors that influence the competitiveness of Kampung Batik Cibuluh as a culture-based tourism destination.

Interviews were conducted gradually and in an open manner to create a comfortable atmosphere and ensure all questions were answered thoroughly. Simultaneously, the researcher conducted field observations to record actual conditions on site. This approach ensured that the data collected accurately reflected the realities of the research location.

Data Analysis

This study uses the Internal-External (IE) Matrix to analyze strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in identifying the strategic competitiveness of Kampung Batik Cibuluh (David & David, 2017). Internal factors include cultural uniqueness, community participation, and infrastructure. External factors involve tourism trends, market dynamics, and policy support. The IE Matrix helps determine appropriate strategies such as growth, stability, or divestment (Pearce & Robinson, 2013).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with purposively selected informants, including the local tourism awareness group (*Pokdarwis*), batik artisans, academics, practitioners, and tourists. These interviews explored internal and external factors influencing the

sustainability of the batik village. Field research through observations were conducted to examine daily activities, batik production processes, artisan-tourist interactions, and existing infrastructure. This helped provide a contextual understanding of the site.

Document analysis supported the findings by reviewing printed and visual materials such as brochures, community archives, event photos, and digital media. All data were triangulated to ensure validity and reliability. The collection process continued until data saturation was reached, when no new insights emerged and patterns became consistent, indicating a comprehensive representation of actual conditions

Results

The findings confirm that Kampung Batik Cibuluh holds significant potential as a culture-based thematic tourism destination. By emphasizing product uniqueness, community involvement, and local cultural narratives, it offers an authentic and immersive tourist experience. This aligns with the concept of community-based tourism, which highlights the importance of local participation in designing, managing, and benefiting from tourism activities (Fitriyah & Rahmawati, 2023).

However, field realities reveal a gap between potential and strategic implementation, especially in digital marketing, infrastructure provision, and comprehensive branding strategies. This supports Xu and Au's (2023) claim that many local thematic destinations fail to fully leverage their advantages due to a lack of strategic approaches to enhance competitiveness.

From an external perspective, cultural and educational tourism trends align well with Kampung Batik Cibuluh's approach. However, limited digital communication and weak connections with audiences outside the region hinder information flow. As a result, awareness of the village is higher outside Bogor than within the local community. This indicates a need to reformulate communication strategies to target both local and national audiences simultaneously.

Furthermore, threats from counterfeit batik products and fast fashion trends require local artisans to innovate in design and product storytelling to stay relevant. One significant opportunity yet to be fully utilized is developing educational tour packages based on storytelling and photo spots, which can enhance cultural value and visitor experience. The internal and external factors related to this study are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Internal and Eksternal Factors

Item	Internal Factors	Item	External Factors
A.	Strengths	C	Opportunities
S1.	Distinctive Batik Motif	O1.	Experience-based and thematic tourism
S2.	Bright Batik Colors	O2.	Growing public interest in authentic local culture
S3.	Good infrastructure with distinctive visual arrangement	O3.	Instagrammable photo spots
S4.	Batik Experience Program	O4.	Friendly artisans and local community
S5.	Wastewater Treatment Installation (WWTI) / IPAL	O5.	Participation in local exhibitions at shopping centers, including MSME fairs and galleries
B.	Weakness		D. Threats
W1.	Limited accessibility	T1.	Competition from nationally recognized batik destinations
W2.	Lack of supporting infrastructure such as an integrated gallery, tourist information center, and designated experience areas	T2.	Limited differentiation in promotional strategies
W3.	Absence of visual markers, such as gates or prominent signage	T3.	Lack of destination branding
W4.	Poor digital platform management	T4.	Shifting market preferences
W5.	Underdeveloped personal batik band promotion	T5.	Imitation batik products (e.g., printed batik)

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

This study reveals the strategic dynamics of Kampung Batik Cibuluh in Bogor City as a culturally themed tourism destination. Using a qualitative approach involving structured interviews and field observations, five key dimensions were identified that interact to shape its competitive position: internal strengths, internal weaknesses, external opportunities, external threats, and the community's adaptive strategies. Each of these dimensions is explained in detail below.

1. Internal Factors

Internal Strengths: Cultural Uniqueness and Community Empowerment

Findings from interviews with managers and local artisans indicate that Kampung Batik Cibuluh possesses strategic strengths rooted in its unique local culture. This is expressed through distinctive batik patterns specific to Bogor (S1), such as motifs of deer, kujang (traditional weapon), the Botanical Garden, taro leaves, nutmeg, Cibuluh bamboo, Rafflesia flowers, and others. The use of bright colors green, blue, and orange further enhances its visual identity, distinguishing it from batik produced in other regions (S2) (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Batik Education, Gallery, and Sample Batik Motifs at Kampung Batik Cibuluh In

terms of aesthetics, Kampung Batik Cibuluh demonstrates strong infrastructure support through distinctive visual design. Batik paintings by local artisans and residents decorate the area, creating an artistic atmosphere. The artisans' homes feature thematic murals representing each gallery's identity. Blooming bougainvillea throughout the area further enhances the visual appeal and provides attractive photo spots for visitors (S3) (Figure 2).

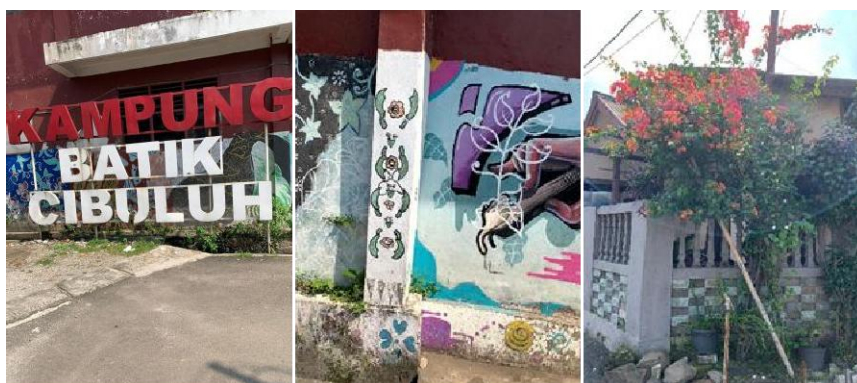


Figure 2. Infrastructure in the area

More than just aesthetics, the main strength of the village lies in the active participation of the community, especially women who serve as batik artisans. They not only produce textiles but also act as instructors in batik workshops for tourists through the Batik Experience Program (S4). Visitors can learn batik techniques on media such as cloth, tote bags, or pencil cases and explore each artisan's gallery on-site.

This activity adds educational value while promoting social and economic sustainability in line with community-based tourism principles. Artisans also utilize a Wastewater Treatment Installation (WWTI) (S5) to manage batik production waste. The liquid waste is first collected in a large central drum, then processed to separate pollutants. After treatment, the water is filtered again before being discharged into the final drainage system.

These practices align with Aldi's (2023) research, which highlights Kampung Batik Cibuluh's development as a cultural asset supported by the LPEM BAZNAS (Economic and Management Research Center of National Amil Zakat Agency). This initiative integrates environmental management and community empowerment.

2. Internal Weaknesses: Limited Access and Promotion

Although Kampung Batik Cibuluh has strong cultural potential as a thematic tourism destination based on local wisdom, it still faces significant internal challenges. One main issue is limited accessibility (W1). Narrow roads and scarce parking cause discomfort, especially for group visits from schools or communities. This situation affects both visitor interest and their comfort at the site (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Entrance view of Kampung Cibuluh alley

Besides accessibility issues, the lack of supporting infrastructure is a major challenge in providing a holistic tourism experience at Kampung Batik Cibuluh. The absence of facilities like an integrated gallery, tourist information center, and dedicated thematic batik display areas limits education and appreciation of the batik cultural heritage (W2). Currently, batik introduction occurs sporadically at individual visit points, without a unified narrative representing the cultural richness of Kampung Batik Cibuluh as a whole (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Location of the batik experience program

Furthermore, as shown in Figure 3, the village's location in a narrow area without clear visual markers, such as gates or prominent signs, causes many tourists and local residents to be unaware of Kampung Batik Cibuluh as a potential cultural tourism destination (W3). The lack of visual identity and public awareness contributes to the village's limited recognition as a cultural tourism asset worthy of further development.

In terms of promotion, Kampung Batik Cibuluh has made efforts to increase its visibility through social media and collaborations with higher education institutions such as IPB University and LSPR. According to Anggini et al. (2025), the B2B marketing program at Kampung Batik Cibuluh improved artisans' knowledge, confidence, and promotional skills. The promotional media effectively expanded networks and boosted competitiveness. The program created business partnership opportunities and is recommended to continue with regular support. However, digital channel management (W4) remains irregular and poorly organized. This is mainly due to limited digital skills among community members and the lack of dedicated personnel, such as young people, to consistently and professionally manage the official social media accounts and overall digital presence of Kampung Batik Cibuluh.

The lack of a clear digital strategy directly limits Kampung Batik Cibuluh's exposure to both local and outside communities. As a result, the village still relies heavily on word-of-mouth promotion, especially within the local government community of Cibuluh. This dependence on conventional methods hinders the village's potential to be widely recognized or reach a larger tourism market as a thematic destination.

The lack of a clear digital strategy directly limits Kampung Batik Cibuluh's exposure to both local and outside communities. As a result, the village still relies heavily on word-of-mouth promotion, especially within the local government community of Cibuluh. This dependence on conventional methods hinders the village's potential to be widely recognized or reach a larger tourism market as a thematic destination.²

2. External Factors

External Opportunities: Cultural Tourism Trends and Multi-Stakeholder Support

Global trends toward experience-based tourism offer great opportunities for Kampung Batik Cibuluh to develop thematic tourism (O1). Growing public interest in authentic local culture (O2) creates momentum to offer interactive experiences, such as batik-making, learning motif philosophy, natural dyeing processes, and eco-friendly waste management. Instagrammable photo spots (O3) and friendly artisans and community members support the sustainability of thematic tourism (O4).

According to Abdurrachman (2022), support from the city government, academic involvement, and cooperation with financial institutions and empowerment organizations (like National Amil Zakat Agency or BAZNAS) strengthen the village's development ecosystem. Participation in local exhibitions at shopping centers and UMKM galleries, such as Botani Square, also expands market opportunities for local batik products (O5).

External Threats: Destination Competition and Changing Market Preferences

Kampung Batik Cibuluh faces competition from nationally recognized batik destinations (T1), such as Kampung Batik Kauman in Solo and Pekalongan batik centers. Limited promotional differentiation (T2) and weak destination branding (T3) hinder its ability to compete nationally.

Another threat comes from changing market preferences, especially among younger generations who see batik as formal wear and less suitable for daily use (T4). Additionally, many cheap printed batik products circulate on digital platforms, confusing consumers unfamiliar with the value of authentic hand-drawn and stamped batik (T5). As a result, Kampung Batik Cibuluh's genuine products struggle to compete on price despite higher quality and cultural value.

3. Community Adaptive Strategies: Collaboration, Education, and Consolidation

In response to challenges, the Kampung Batik Cibuluh community has adopted adaptive strategies reflecting local resilience. One key approach is positioning Batik Bumiku as the main center for educational tourism, hosting batik workshops and visitor activities. Collaboration among artisans is also practiced through a product consignment system in various batik galleries, addressing space limitations.

Moreover, digital marketing training programs facilitated by external parties have been conducted several times. However, these efforts still require capacity building and ongoing monitoring. The community collectively understands that the destination's success depends not on individual businesses but on the synergy of all artisans to build the kampung's image and sustainability.

Overall, this study shows that despite internal and external challenges, the local cultural strength and community collaboration form the core assets for Kampung Batik Cibuluh's strategic competitiveness. Therefore, an integrated, collaborative, and sustainable development strategy is essential for the kampung to grow as a leading thematic tourism destination in Bogor and its surroundings.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, Kampung Batik Cibuluh has several significant internal strengths. These include unique Bogor-style batik motifs, bright colors reflecting local identity, active community involvement especially by women and sustainable educational tourism through the "batik experience" program. The presence of a wastewater treatment facility also shows a commitment to eco-friendly tourism. However, internal weaknesses need improvement. These include limited accessibility, lack of supporting facilities like information centers and integrated galleries, few visual markers, weak digital promotion, and fragmented branding strategies among artisans that do not yet represent the kampung's collective identity.

External opportunities include global trends toward experience-based and local cultural tourism, growing interest in educational tourism, multi-stakeholder support from government and academia, and participation in local exhibitions. On the other hand, external threats include competition from more established batik destinations, shifting market preferences favoring instant products and modern fashion, and the influx of cheap printed batik imitations that reduce the market value of authentic local batik.

Based on the IE Matrix, the recommended development strategies include:

1. Improving infrastructure, including road access, parking spaces, and an integrated gallery;
2. Optimizing digitalization and branding through social media management, an official website, visual rebranding, and collaboration with content creators;

3. Innovating products and educating tourists with educational tour packages and batik designs targeting younger generations;
4. Strengthening community management by forming cooperative teams (BUMK) and providing regular training for artisans;
5. Encouraging cross-sector collaboration with academics, government, private sector, and communities to expand impact and market access.

With an integrated and collaborative approach, Kampung Batik Cibuluh has strong potential to develop into a competitive, sustainable thematic tourism destination that supports cultural preservation and local economic empowerment.

Table 2. IE Matrix

Internal / External	Low External (Score 1.0–1.99)	Medium External (Score 2.0–2.99)	High External (Score 3.0–4.0)
High Internal (Score 3.0–4.0)	I – Grow & Build (Infrastructure strengthening and collaborative promotion strategy)	II – Grow & Build (Digitalization and educational tour packages)	III – Grow & Build (Re-branding and national market expansion)
Medium Internal (Score 2.0–2.99)	IV – Hold & Maintain (Survival strategy while improving access and digital channels)	V – Hold & Maintain (Consolidating collective identity of artisans)	VI – Hold & Maintain (Optimizing human resources and tourism spots)
Low Internal (Score 1.0–1.99)	VII – Harvest or Divest (Evaluate and reduce ineffective activities)	VIII – Harvest or Divest (Reorient tourism functions)	IX – Harvest or Divest (Repurpose if stagnant)

Based on the IE Matrix results shown in Table 2, the current position likely falls within Quadrant II or III. This supports the argument of the study, with the following considerations:

1. High Internal Strengths: The area demonstrates strengths in unique batik motifs, interactive batik-making experiences, an active artisan community, and effective waste management.
2. Moderate to High External Opportunities: There are opportunities from cultural tourism trends and exhibitions. However, challenges remain, such as market competition and limited promotional reach.

Therefore, the recommended strategies include:

- Digital promotion and visual branding
- Improving road access and developing integrated galleries
- Strengthening collaboration among artisans and external sectors
- Innovating batik products to appeal to younger generations

Research recommendations

Based on the findings and discussion above, the following strategies are recommended to enhance the competitiveness of Kampung Batik Cibuluh:

1. Infrastructure and Tourism Facility Development

To support the sustainable and attractive development of Kampung Batik Cibuluh as a tourism destination, an integrated approach to infrastructure and supporting facilities is essential. One key strategy is to improve road access and provide adequate parking areas to ensure visitor comfort. This can be achieved through strategic partnerships, such as utilizing the Brimob Dormitory area as a supporting parking zone.

Establishing the Kampung Batik Cibuluh Integrated Gallery is also crucial for unifying local potentials. This gallery will serve as an information center, batik product showroom, and educational workshop venue for visitors. To enhance cultural experiences, the gallery will include a local café offering traditional Cibuluh food and beverages. This not only improves tourist comfort but also promotes the local economy.

From a visual and aesthetic standpoint, the tourist route should be enhanced with distinct cultural elements. This includes building an iconic entrance gate, decorating walls with stylized batik motifs, and providing attractive, Instagram-worthy photo spots. To enrich the visitor experience and reinforce local cultural identity, traditional Bogor clothing made from local batik will also be available for rent.

2. Optimizing Digitalization and Branding

To enhance competitiveness and strengthen Kampung Batik Cibuluh's presence in the digital era, a comprehensive and technology-driven promotional strategy is essential.

The first step is to reactivate and professionally manage all social media accounts and e-commerce platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, Shopee, and Tokopedia. These platforms should be handled consistently by a dedicated and skilled digital marketing administrator. This ensures engaging content creation, broader audience reach, and increased online sales of batik products.

Additionally, a well-designed and informative official website is needed. The website should serve as a central hub for tourist and customer information. It should also feature interactive videos that showcase the stories behind Cibuluh's batik motifs, including the production process, cultural philosophy, and artisan narratives.

A strong and cohesive rebranding effort is necessary to enhance visual identity and appeal. This includes redesigning the logo, selecting distinctive color schemes, and developing a slogan that reflects the character and cultural richness of Kampung Batik Cibuluh as an educational and cultural tourism destination.

To boost public recognition, regular collaboration with content creators is recommended to expand digital outreach. Greater public awareness increases the potential for tourist visits. This opens opportunities for training partnerships with educational institutions, government bodies, and the private sector (e.g., travel agencies and CSR programs), which ultimately support local economic growth and improve community livelihoods.

As part of the promotional strategy, an attractive and informative tourism catalog should be developed. This catalog will help visitors understand available activities, facilities, and tour packages. It should feature appealing visual design and tailored content to suit both domestic and international markets.

3. Product Innovation and Tourist Education

To enhance the appeal of Kampung Batik Cibuluh as a cultural tourism destination and to bring traditional values closer to younger generations, it is essential to develop innovative and inclusive tourism programs and products.

One key strategy is to design thematic educational tour packages that offer immersive, hands-on experiences. Examples include programs such as "*A Day with Batik Artisans of Kampung Cibuluh*" or the "*Cibuluh Batik Educational Tour*," where visitors can participate in the batik-making process, learn the history and philosophy behind local motifs, interact with artisans, and enjoy the aesthetic landscape and local culinary offerings creating a memorable cultural experience.

This program is not only recreational but also educational, fostering appreciation for cultural heritage through direct involvement in traditional crafts. Based on academic input, a virtual approach via live streaming can also be implemented as an innovative alternative, allowing participants to join the full tour remotely, including live demonstrations and interactive explanations of batik motifs.

In addition, adapting batik product designs to suit younger tastes is crucial. This can be done by collaborating with youth-oriented local brands to develop modern batik items such as jackets, tote bags, sneakers, and accessories featuring Cibuluh's signature motifs. These partnerships help preserve batik traditions while expanding into broader and more dynamic markets.

An equally important aspect is the increased involvement of schools and local communities in cultural education initiatives. Such programs can take various interactive forms, including field trips to cultural centers, batik-making workshops, batik design competitions, and cultural festivals that engage students, teachers, and local creative groups. A participatory approach not only enhances the relevance and depth of cultural learning but also fosters stronger linkages between formal education and local cultural preservation efforts. This alignment ensures that cultural values are introduced early and sustained through community-based learning. Setiawan et al. (2024) highlight that integrating educational efforts with community empowerment is essential for building collective awareness and fostering long-term commitment to both cultural and environmental stewardship.

4. Strengthening Community Management and Monitoring

To ensure sustainability and professional governance of all activities in Kampung Batik Cibuluh, a clear and responsible community organizational structure must be established. One strategic step is to form a small working team based on a cooperative or Community-Owned Enterprise (BUMK). This team will manage key aspects such as destination promotion, integrated gallery management, and transparent, sustainable financial accountability. This structure will also serve as the foundation for collective and independent local economic empowerment.

Next, to improve product competitiveness and artisans' professionalism, regular upskilling and refresher training should be held. Training topics will include digital technology use, effective marketing strategies, and attractive, market-trend packaging techniques. With this training, artisans can maintain quality while adapting to changing consumer demands.

For regeneration and continuity, it is important to engage the younger generation as successors focused on developing Kampung Batik Cibuluh. Their involvement can cover areas like business digitalization, batik design innovation, and creative promotion through social media. With adaptive and visionary successors, Kampung Batik Cibuluh will have a strong foundation to grow as a leading cultural destination in the future.

5. Cross-Sector Collaboration

To expand its impact and strengthen its position as a strategic cultural destination, Kampung Batik Cibuluh requires a collaborative approach involving stakeholders across various sectors. A key step is to enhance synergistic partnerships with academics, the city government, fashion-related MSMEs, and the private sector. Such collaboration can be implemented through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, applied research, product development, as well as joint publications and promotional activities (Haidlir, Musthofa, & Mukhlis, 2024). Through this synergy, Kampung Batik Cibuluh gains not only resource support but also academic legitimacy and broader market access.

Additionally, to increase recognition as a leading destination, Kampung Batik Cibuluh should be officially integrated into Bogor City's tourism map. This can be reinforced by including Kampung Batik Cibuluh in national tourism promotion platforms, such as the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy's "Wonderful Indonesia" program. Being part of national and international tourism promotion networks is expected to boost visits from both domestic and international tourists, directly benefiting the local community's economic growth.

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EXPLORING THE ROLE OF AI TOOLS IN STRENGTHENING STRATEGIC PLANNING IN MICE INDUSTRY

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a pivotal force in transforming strategic planning across industries, particularly in the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) sector. This conceptual study investigates the integration of AI tools, specifically Machine Learning (ML), Natural Language Processing (NLP), robotics, and expert systems in enhancing strategic capabilities within MICE organizations.

AI enables precise trend forecasting, personalized service design, and dynamic operational efficiency by leveraging vast, real-time datasets (Narne et al., 2024). ML and NLP are particularly effective in uncovering behavioral patterns and sentiment insights from structured and unstructured data sources, thus supporting agile and market-relevant event planning (Magdy & Abouelazm, 2024).

AI-enhanced expert systems contribute to consistent, rule-based decision-making in areas such as venue selection and budgeting (Eriksson et al., 2020). Grounded in Resource Advantage Theory, the study positions AI as a rare and inimitable resource, offering a sustained competitive advantage through improved responsiveness and strategic alignment (Hunt & Morgan, 2017).

However, the research also acknowledges implementation barriers, including data privacy concerns and the need for human-AI synergy. Additionally, as the industry embraces digital transformation, environmental sustainability must also be integrated into strategic priorities (Setiawan et al., 2024). This study contributes to the growing literature by offering a comprehensive framework for how AI can be harnessed to shape resilient, forward-looking strategies in the evolving MICE landscape.

Keywords: Strategic management; AI integration; Competitive Strategy; MICE business; Digital Transformation

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Introduction

In the era of digital transformation, AI has evolved from a technological innovation into a strategic necessity for modern organizations. Its capabilities in data processing, predictive analytics, and decision support have redefined how businesses respond to market volatility and customer demands (Yılmaz & Demir, 2023). Particularly in sectors that rely heavily on real-time information and complex stakeholder coordination, such as the MICE industry, the application of AI is increasingly viewed as a pathway to achieving sustained competitive advantage (Narne et al., 2024).

The MICE industry operates at the intersection of tourism, hospitality, and business services, demanding high levels of customization, logistical precision, and strategic foresight. AI tools offer solutions to these challenges by enabling organizations to forecast trends, optimize resource allocation, and enhance decision-making processes (Eriksson et al., 2020). Yet, despite these capabilities, empirical and conceptual studies exploring AI's specific role in MICE strategic planning remain limited.

This study addresses that gap by exploring how AI can be integrated into the strategic framework of MICE organizations. Drawing on Resource Advantage Theory (Hunt & Morgan, 2017), the research examines AI as a strategic resource that can enable differentiation, agility, and long-term value creation. The goal is to provide a conceptual foundation for how AI tools can strengthen strategic planning in the MICE industry while also aligning with emerging imperatives such as sustainability and digital innovation.

Research Objectives

1. Evaluate how AI tools can enhance trend prediction and market insight for strategic planning in the MICE industry
2. Assess the potential of AI-driven technologies to optimize operational efficiency and resource management in MICE events.
3. Investigate the role of AI in supporting data-driven decision-making and strategy formulation for MICE organizations.

Literature Review

1. Resource Advantage Theory

Resource Advantage Theory (R-A Theory), developed by Hunt and Morgan (2017), provides a comprehensive theoretical framework to understand how firms compete by acquiring, developing, and leveraging superior resources. Unlike traditional models of competition that emphasize price-based rivalry, R-A Theory posits that competition is fundamentally a dynamic and evolutionary process wherein firms seek to achieve and sustain a comparative advantage in resources that can yield superior financial performance. This comparative advantage is rooted in the uniqueness, inimitability, and non-substitutability of resources, which collectively contribute to the development of a sustainable competitive advantage.

In an era characterized by rapid technological advancements, particularly in the realm of AI, R-A Theory becomes increasingly relevant for explaining how firms can strategically position themselves in highly competitive industries. AI, as an advanced technological resource, can serve as a critical driver of organizational competitiveness. Its integration into business processes allows firms to enhance efficiency, improve decision-making, and generate novel insights, all of which are essential in maintaining a competitive edge in complex and evolving markets, such as the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) sector.

2. MICE

The Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) industry represents a significant and rapidly evolving segment within the global tourism and service economy. Functioning at the confluence of business travel, event management, and destination marketing, the MICE industry plays a crucial role in driving economic development, fostering knowledge exchange, and facilitating international collaboration (Anas et al., 2020). It is widely regarded as a high-yield sector due to its capacity to attract large-scale professional gatherings and generate substantial economic impact for host destinations through direct and indirect spending.

The MICE industry is characterized by its complex ecosystem, involving multiple stakeholders such as event organizers, corporate clients, hospitality providers, venue operators, logistics partners, and government agencies. This interdependent structure requires a high degree of coordination, customization, and strategic planning, making the industry particularly sensitive to shifts in global trends, technological innovation, and market demand. The increasing emphasis on sustainability, digital transformation, and experiential value further underscores the dynamic nature of the sector.

In recent years, the MICE industry has undergone significant transformation, driven by advancements in digital technology and evolving client expectations. The emergence of hybrid and virtual event formats, coupled with heightened demand for data-driven personalization and real-time interaction, has redefined operational standards across the sector. These changes not only reflect broader shifts in business practices but also highlight the growing importance of innovation and adaptability as sources of competitive advantage within the industry.

3. Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, particularly computer systems. These processes include learning, reasoning, and self-correction (Pannu, 2015). AI is not a monolithic concept but comprises several interrelated domains, each offering distinct functional capabilities. The five principal areas of AI are:

1) Machine Learning (ML)

Machine Learning is a subset of AI that focuses on enabling systems to learn from data, identify patterns, and make decisions with minimal human intervention. ML algorithms can process large datasets to generate predictive insights and automate decision-making.

2) Natural Language Processing (NLP)

NLP enables machines to understand, interpret, and generate human language. It facilitates communication between humans and machines through text and speech recognition, sentiment analysis, and language translation.

3) Computer Vision

Computer Vision is the field of AI that trains computers to interpret and make decisions based on visual data from the world. This includes image and video recognition, facial recognition, object detection, and motion tracking.

4) Robotics

Robotics involves the design and use of robots to perform tasks traditionally done by humans. When combined with AI, robots can operate autonomously in dynamic environments.

5) Expert Systems

Expert Systems are AI programs that simulate the decision-making abilities of a human expert. They use a knowledge base of facts and rules to provide recommendations, solve problems, or offer explanations.

4. Applicability

The dynamic and highly competitive nature of the MICE industry requires organizations to adopt forward-looking, data-driven strategies to ensure sustained competitiveness. AI has emerged as a transformative tool that can significantly strengthen strategic planning in this sector. Among the various branches of AI, several possess distinctive capabilities that directly contribute to the enhancement of strategic functions.

1) Enhancing Trend Prediction and Market Insight through AI

Machine Learning algorithms are particularly effective in analyzing large, complex datasets to uncover patterns, forecast market trends, and identify shifts in consumer behavior. In the MICE industry, ML can process historical event data, booking trends, social media interactions, and competitor analysis to predict emerging topics, optimal dates, demand surges, and popular destinations.

Additionally, NLP plays a critical role in extracting insights from unstructured text data, such as customer feedback, social media posts, and online reviews. Through sentiment analysis and keyword clustering, NLP enables MICE planners to gauge audience preferences, evaluate brand perception, and adapt content and service offerings accordingly.

2) Optimizing Operational Efficiency and Resource Management

Operational efficiency is critical to the success of MICE events, where the coordination of logistics, human resources, space utilization, and technology infrastructure must be seamless. ML can optimize these operations by analyzing logistical data, predicting resource needs, and automating scheduling. For example, predictive maintenance models can anticipate equipment failures, while attendee flow models can guide space allocation.

Robotics, when infused with AI, can automate repetitive and labor-intensive tasks such as registration, wayfinding, and translation services. These technologies free up human resources for higher-level planning and improve the consistency of service delivery.

Expert Systems can simulate human expert decision-making in scenarios like venue selection, budgeting, and contingency planning by applying predefined rules and data analysis. These systems support consistent, scalable, and rational operational decisions.

3) Supporting Data-Driven Decision-Making and Strategy Formulation

Effective strategy formulation in the MICE industry relies on timely, relevant, and accurate information. Expert Systems provide decision-support tools that offer scenario-based recommendations grounded in data, rules, and prior outcomes. These systems can simulate multiple strategic options, assess risks, and recommend courses of action based on organizational goals and market realities.

ML enhances this process by continuously learning from new data inputs and adjusting predictions and recommendations accordingly. Moreover, NLP tools can extract strategic insights from qualitative sources such as industry reports, stakeholder interviews, and policy documents, materials traditionally underutilized due to their complexity and format.

5. Research Gap

Despite the growing body of literature on AI in business strategy, there remains a gap in understanding its contextual application within the MICE industry. Most existing studies focus on AI adoption in general management, retail, or manufacturing sectors, often neglecting the distinct operational dynamics, stakeholder complexity, and real-time decision-making demands unique to MICE settings.

Moreover, while empirical research has explored AI's role in enhancing customer engagement or operational efficiency in broader tourism and hospitality contexts, few studies have explicitly linked AI capabilities such as predictive analytics, expert systems, or natural language processing to the formulation of long-term strategic planning within MICE organizations. The literature tends to emphasize technological potential but lacks practical frameworks or models for integrating AI tools into strategic decision-making processes in this highly dynamic and event-centric environment.

Methodology

Populations and Sample

The population of this study consists of academic and industry research focused on the application of Artificial Intelligence in strategic planning, particularly within the broader contexts of tourism, event management, and the MICE industry. An initial pool of 40 scholarly articles and reports was reviewed to capture a comprehensive view of current developments and research trends.

From this pool, a purposive sampling method was used to select the 10 most relevant and high-impact sources. These were chosen based on criteria such as publication credibility, relevance to AI in strategic decision-making, and specific insights applicable to the MICE sector. The selected studies form the core foundation for conceptual analysis and synthesis in this research.

Research Tools

The primary research tools used in this study involved academic search engines and digital libraries such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Scopus. These platforms were utilized to identify, access, and download relevant peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and case studies.

All selected materials were stored and organized on a personal device for detailed review and content analysis. The tools enabled efficient keyword-based searching, filtering by relevance

and citation count, and access to up-to-date literature on AI applications in strategic planning and the MICE industry.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through secondary research using digital academic platforms. An initial pool of 40 articles was identified using keyword combinations related to Artificial Intelligence, strategic planning, and the MICE industry. These articles were reviewed and evaluated based on their relevance, credibility, and applicability to the research objectives.

From this initial pool, 10 articles were selected as the primary data sources. The selected literature represents the most relevant and recent insights into the integration of AI in strategic management, particularly in event-related industries. All documents were downloaded and stored locally for content analysis and synthesis in the study.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this study followed a structured yet flexible approach typical of qualitative content analysis. After identifying potential literature from academic search engines, we began with a surface-level evaluation to assess each article's alignment with the study's core themes. This preliminary filtering helped prioritize materials that showed direct or conceptual relevance.

Once promising articles were identified, we downloaded the full texts and conducted comprehensive readings. During this phase, a close examination of each article's methodology, findings, and theoretical contributions was carried out. Special attention was given to how AI tools were positioned in strategic contexts whether through case studies, models, or technology integration narratives.

The next step involved summarizing each article's unique contribution to the study. This included identifying the types of AI tools discussed, the strategic functions they impacted and any industry-specific observations relevant to MICE operations. These notes were used to cluster the information into thematic categories linked to the study's three research objectives.

After individual article review, we synthesized the information across the selected sources. Patterns were identified by cross-comparing arguments, use cases, and empirical results. This comparative and integrative process enabled to construct a conceptual framework grounded in literature, which informed the analysis and discussion sections of the paper. The process can be seen in Diagram 1



Diagram 1

Results

The review reveals that ML and NLP are the most effective AI tools for predicting trends and understanding market dynamics in the MICE sector. ML algorithms analyze large and complex datasets such as historical attendance, booking behavior, and social media data to forecast emerging topics, peak demand periods, and preferred event formats. NLP, through techniques like sentiment analysis and keyword extraction, provides valuable insights into participant preferences and feedback, enabling MICE planners to adjust offerings in real time (Donthireddy, 2024). For example, Magdy and Abouelazm (2024) found that the use of digital badges, QR codes, and real-time analytics among Egyptian MICE operators significantly improved data collection for predictive planning. This demonstrates growing reliance on AI technologies for anticipating attendee behavior and aligning services with market expectations.

AI also plays a critical role in improving operational efficiency in MICE events. ML models can optimize logistics by predicting resource requirements and automating scheduling processes. These technologies reduce waste and ensure better space utilization. In addition, robotics infused

with AI supports the automation of repetitive tasks such as registration, wayfinding, and translation, freeing human staff to focus on higher-value strategic tasks (Eriksson et al., 2020).

Expert Systems are also cited as effective tools for aiding decisions related to venue selection, budgeting, and contingency planning. By applying logical rules to real-time and historical data, these systems help event managers make consistent, rational decisions, even under time constraints. Magdy and Abouelazm (2024) observed that the adoption of AI-driven tools such as real-time translation and mobile apps improved not only internal coordination but also customer satisfaction levels in Egyptian MICE firms.

Studies consistently show that AI enhances strategic decision-making capabilities by improving data access, processing speed, and insight generation. For instance, Narne et al. (2024) reported that a large retail organization using an AI-based strategic planning tool experienced a 57% increase in planning cycles and a sevenfold increase in scenario evaluations, along with a 29% rise in revenue and a 46% increase in profitability.

In terms of qualitative benefits, 83% of executives in the same study reported increased confidence in their strategic decisions due to AI-driven insights, while 79% noted better foresight. These findings underscore AI's potential in supporting robust, data-driven strategy formulation in MICE contexts.

However, the literature also highlights challenges such as limited model transparency and the need for hybrid systems that combine AI recommendations with human judgment. This is especially important in the MICE industry, where decisions often involve complex stakeholder dynamics and cultural considerations. A summary of the AI tools, their applications, and benefits in the MICE industry is presented in Table 1.

Research Objective	AI Tools Involved	Key Findings	Benefits to MICE Industry	Sources
Trend Prediction & Market Insight	- ML - NLP	Analyze attendee data, forecast topics, detect trends, assess sentiment	Improved forecasting, personalized event offerings	Narne et al. (2024), Donthireddy (2024), Magdy & Abouelazm (2024)
Operational Efficiency & Resource Management	- ML - Robotics - Expert Systems	Optimize logistics, automate scheduling, manage space and equipment	Cost reduction, better resource allocation, enhanced service quality	Eriksson et al. (2020), Magdy & Abouelazm (2024)
Strategic Decision-Making Support	- Expert Systems - ML - NLP	Provide scenario-based decision support, enhance executive confidence	More accurate and timely decisions, increased revenue and customer retention	Narne et al. (2024)

Table 1. AI tools applications benefits in MICE Industry

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

This study aimed to explore how AI tools can enhance strategic planning within the MICE industry by aligning its application with three core objectives: improving trend prediction and market insight, optimizing operational efficiency, and supporting data-driven strategic decision-making. Each of these objectives is discussed below in the context of theoretical frameworks and recent scholarly findings.

1. Enhancing Trend Prediction and Market Insight

The ability of AI tools, particularly ML and NLP, to forecast industry trends and interpret market signals has emerged as a central enabler of strategic foresight in the MICE sector. ML algorithms are capable of processing vast and complex datasets, identifying behavioral patterns, and forecasting demand surges, preferred formats, and emerging destinations (Donthireddy, 2024). Complementarily, NLP tools analyze sentiment and feedback from unstructured data, such as social media and reviews, to extract actionable insights (Magdy & Abouelazm, 2024). These capabilities support dynamic market analysis, allowing MICE planners to tailor experiences proactively to meet participant expectations.

From the lens of Resource Advantage Theory (Hunt & Morgan, 2017), these AI tools constitute valuable, rare, and inimitable resources. Their integration into strategic planning equips firms with differential capabilities to respond swiftly to market trends, providing a basis for sustainable competitive advantage in the highly dynamic MICE industry.

2. Optimizing Operational Efficiency and Resource Management

The findings confirm that AI applications, such as ML-driven logistics planning, AI-powered robotics for service automation, and expert systems for resource allocation, significantly streamline event operations (Eriksson et al., 2020). By reducing operational redundancies and enhancing resource utilization, these technologies help organizations maintain quality while minimizing costs.

This operational optimization aligns with the principle of strategic fit, wherein organizations achieve efficiency by aligning internal capabilities with external demands. AI not only supports this alignment but amplifies it by enabling real-time adaptation and process automation. The result is a more agile MICE enterprise that can deliver complex events efficiently, even under fluctuating conditions.

3. Supporting Data-Driven Decision-Making and Strategy Formulation

Tools such as expert systems and predictive models offer MICE professionals advanced capabilities for scenario planning, risk assessment, and strategy selection (Narne et al., 2024). These systems enhance executives' confidence in decisions and expand their capacity to evaluate multiple strategic alternatives rapidly.

By transforming data into strategic intelligence, AI tools contribute to what Yılmaz and Demir (2023) describe as a redefinition of long-term business goals. AI serves as a cognitive partner in strategy formulation, particularly by mitigating human biases, ensuring consistency, and uncovering non-obvious insights from big data sources. This also reflects the evolving role of technology in decision sciences, whereby AI augments, rather than replaces, human judgment, especially important in the culturally nuanced and stakeholder-intensive MICE environment.

Conclusion

This research highlights key barriers such as a lack of expertise, regulatory constraints, and limited infrastructure that must be addressed to enable AI to fully support data-driven decision-making and strategic formulation. Despite these challenges, the study identifies a progressive outlook among stakeholders in the MICE industry, who increasingly view AI and digital tools as catalysts for enhancing revenue, operational agility, and market share. These findings provide a robust empirical foundation for understanding how AI can be holistically integrated into strategic planning within MICE entities, both through predictive analytics and operational applications.

Furthermore, MICE tourism expands its reliance on AI and digital transformation, environmental sustainability must also be prioritized. According to Setiawan et al. (2024), domestic eco-tourism behaviors in Indonesia reflect a growing awareness of environmental responsibility, which should be embedded into tourism strategy and policy. Therefore, strategic planning in the MICE sector should ensure that AI integration aligns not only with economic and operational goals but also with sustainable and environmentally conscious practices.

Overall, this case study reinforces that while AI has significant potential to transform strategic planning, its true effectiveness lies in deliberate integration, contextual relevance, and fostering a balanced synergy between technological intelligence and human expertise while concurrently incorporating environmental considerations to ensure sustainable development.

Research recommendations

1. Conduct empirical studies such as case studies or surveys of MICE organizations to validate these conceptual findings in practice.
2. Develop and evaluate AI tools specifically tailored to MICE planning, such as predictive attendance modeling or automated scheduling algorithms.
3. Explore policy and ethical frameworks for AI adoption in the MICE industry, addressing data privacy, governance, and responsible use of AI.
4. Investigate longitudinal and cross-industry studies on AI integration impacts to assess long-term performance outcomes in MICE contexts.

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ANALYSIS OF SERVICE QUALITY AND MARKETING MIX (7 P'S) AFFECTING THE DECISION OF THAI TOURISTS TO USE THE RAPID TRAIN SERVICE ON THE BANGKOK-CHIANG MAI ROUTE

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Extended abstract

This research aims to study and analyze the service quality and the application of the marketing mix (7P's) that influence the decision-making process of Thai tourists in choosing to use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai highspeed train service. The conceptual framework applied in this study includes the service theory and the marketing mix theory (7P's) which consists of 1) Product 2) Price 3) Place 4) Promotion 5) People 6) Process and 7) Physical Evidence. These elements were used to examine the impact of each factor on the tourists' decision to use the service. Research data were collected from 400 Thai tourists using a questionnaire that was tested for reliability and statistical accuracy. The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics to examine the relationships between various factors affecting decision-making. The results of the study reveal that the factors related to service quality and the marketing mix (7P's) have a significant impact on the decision to use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train service. Particularly, the factor related to personnel (People) was rated as the highest in terms of satisfaction, followed by process (Process) and product (Product), which had a direct impact on the travel experience. Furthermore, promotion (Promotion) and price (Price) also significantly affected the decision to choose this high-speed train service. The appropriate application of the marketing mix can enhance customer satisfaction and foster service loyalty. Additionally, the study provides key recommendations for improving and developing the service quality of the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train to enhance tourists' travel experiences, as well as adjusting marketing strategies to increase satisfaction and encourage future service selection.

Keywords: Service quality, Marketing mix (7p's), decision to use service, Bangkok-Chiang Mai rapid train service, Thai tourists

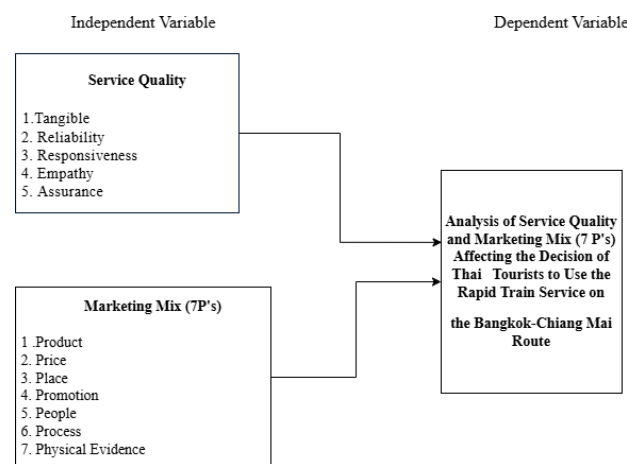
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Introduction

The State Railway of Thailand (SRT) plays a significant role in the country's transportation system, especially in providing services on the Bangkok-Chiang Mai route, which is a major route with a large number of passengers for both tourism and business purposes. However, competition from other transportation systems, such as low-cost airlines and convenient and fast buses, has posed challenges for rail travel in maintaining its passenger base. Therefore, the development and improvement of service quality are crucial in order to remain competitive in the market. A study of the factors influencing the decision to use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train service will assist SRT in improving services and better responding to passenger needs.

Statistical data for 2024 indicates that the Bangkok railway station had a total of 42,186,710 passenger trips, with most passengers being from Bangkok and the surrounding areas. In contrast, intercity travel accounted for about 4.9% of the total. SRT continues to strive to improve services in terms of comfort, safety, and punctuality to retain existing passengers and attract new ones. The development and enhancement of services on the Bangkok-Chiang Mai route are crucial, as SRT needs to develop new strategies to retain passengers amidst intense competition from other transportation systems, particularly by improving service quality to meet passengers' expectations efficiently.



Objectives

1. To study the factors of service quality in the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train service.
2. To examine the marketing mix factors that influence the decision to use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train service.
3. To analyze the factors influencing the decision to choose the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train service.

Hypothesis

1. Good service quality has an impact on passengers' satisfaction in choosing to use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai train service.
2. A properly improved marketing mix (7P's) will influence the decision to use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai train service.
3. Convenient and punctual service will have more influence on the decision to choose the Bangkok-Chiang Mai train service than other factors.
4. Passengers will choose to use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai train service when there is value in terms of price and service quality.

Research Methodology

Populations and Sample

The sample population used in this study consists of Thai passengers who used the high-speed train service (upward trip) from Bangkok to Chiang Mai. Since the exact population size was unknown, the researcher determined the sample size using the sample size calculation formula for unknown populations by Krejcie & Morgan (1970) (Narasi Waiwanichkul and Chusak Udomsri, 1995, p. 104), at a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error not exceeding 5%. The sample size for this study was 385 people, with an additional 4% reserved, equating to 15 samples. Therefore, the total sample size was 400 samples.

Research Tools

In this quantitative research, the instrument used was a questionnaire consisting of four sections. The questions included a screening question to identify Thai tourists who have used the high-speed train service on the Bangkok-Chiang Mai route. Data collection was conducted using a convenience sampling method via Google Form, with a total of 400 completed questionnaires. The data collection was divided into four sections as follows:

Section 1: Demographic information of the respondents, such as gender, age, and occupation.

Section 2: Satisfaction with the service quality.

Section 3: Satisfaction with the marketing mix (7 P's).

Section 4: Opinions regarding the decision to choose the service. Steps in Developing the Research Instrument

1. Study relevant literature, documents, concepts, theories, and previous research to guide the creation of the questionnaire, ensuring it aligns with the objectives of the study.
2. Create the questionnaire to be consistent with the conceptual framework of the independent research and present it to the advisor for verification of accuracy, obtaining recommendations, and making necessary revisions.
3. Test the content validity of the revised questionnaire by presenting it to three experts to determine the consistency index of the questions with the research objectives or content (IOC: Index of Consistency). The criteria for evaluating the IOC is that if the value is 0.50 or higher, it indicates that the question is aligned with the content. The questions used in this research had IOC values greater than 0.5, with the overall consistency index (Index of Item Objective Congruence) being 0.90, after which the questionnaire was revised based on the experts' feedback.
4. Make improvements and adjustments based on the experts' suggestions.
5. The revised questionnaire was then pre-tested (Try Out) with 30 samples, which represents 10% of the total questionnaires. The sample group consisted of Thai tourists aged 18 and above who used the high-speed train service on the Bangkok-Chiang Mai route during the 2024-2025 period. After the pre-test, the results were analyzed to calculate the reliability (Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient) of the questionnaire. The test showed a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.971, indicating a very high level of reliability, making the questionnaire suitable for use in the research. Additionally, the reliability of observable variables was analyzed, with the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for these variables being no lower than 0.7.

Data Collection

The quantitative research using a questionnaire follows these steps:

1. The researcher collected 400 completed questionnaires from Thai tourists who used the high-speed train service on the Bangkok-Chiang Mai route. The questionnaires were distributed online, with 400 sets of responses collected through Google Form. A total of 400 samples were selected using a random sampling method.
2. The researcher checked the completeness of the questionnaires and excluded any incomplete ones.
3. The researcher then took the data from the questionnaires recorded on Google Form, coded the responses, and stored them in a computer for processing using statistical software. The data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Data Analysis

This research used the SPSS software to analyze data from 400 completed questionnaires. The statistical analysis was conducted in three main sections:

1. **Descriptive Statistics** The mean and standard deviation were used to describe the general characteristics of the data and the behaviors of the sample group.
2. **Inferential Statistics** F and T tests, along with Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), were used to examine significant differences between variable groups.
3. **Regression Analysis** This method was used to study the relationships between independent and dependent variables, evaluating the factors that influence the decision to use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train service.

Conclusion and Discussion

Conclusion

Section 1: Demographic Data of Respondents

The study results show that most tourists who use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train service are female (64.7%), aged 22-30 years (64.5%), and are students (65.2%). The majority have an income between 12,000 and 20,000 baht (56.6%), are single (75.6%), and hold a bachelor's degree (76.1%).

Section 2: Service Quality Factors Influencing the Decision to Use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai High-Speed Train

The study focuses on the service quality factors in various aspects, including:

1. **Tangible:** High satisfaction with the comfort of the seating and restroom facilities.
2. **Reliability:** Trustworthy services, such as safety measures and clear information provision.
3. **Responsiveness:** Fast and efficient service responses.
4. **Empathy:** Good human relations and service orientation by staff.
5. **Assurance:** Confidence in the safety and capabilities of the staff.

ANOVA tests indicate that service and the quality of the train service, such as travel comfort, have a significant impact on the decision to use the service.

Section 3: Marketing Mix (7P's) Factors Influencing the Decision to Use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai High-Speed Train

The study found that promotion and place have a significant effect on the decision to use the service, with the Sig. values for these factors being 0.009 and 0.032, respectively. In contrast, price had no significant effect (Sig. = 0.128).

Section 4: Decision to Use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai High-Speed Train

The decision to use the service was influenced by various factors such as comfort and good service. The average satisfaction in this regard ranged from 4.08 to 4.19, indicating that the decision to use the service was primarily based on the assessment of comfort and service quality.

Section 5: Hypothesis Testing Results

The main hypotheses tested were:

1. Service quality affects satisfaction and the decision to use the service.
2. The marketing mix (7P's) affects the decision to use the service.
3. Comfort and punctuality are key factors in the decision to use the service.

The ANOVA results indicate that service factors and the quality of the train service, such as travel comfort, have a statistically significant impact on the decision to use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train service.

Table 1 The mean and standard deviation of respondents' answers regarding the service quality factors that affect the decision to use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train service for Thai tourists.

(n = 422)			
Question	$(\bar{X})$	S.D.	Interpretation
1. Tangible			
1.1 The modernity of the seating and facilities on the train affects the perception of service quality	4.17	0.894	High
1.2 The convenience of the restrooms on the train	4.05	0.952	High
1.3 Satisfaction with the charging stations for devices such as mobile phones meets expectations	4.05	1.002	High
2. Reliability			
2.1 Providing clear schedule information and services increases transparency and passenger confidence	4.06	0.955	High
2.2 The safety of the train makes passengers feel confident during travel	4.19	0.935	High
2.3 Ensuring safety and checking equipment on the train increases passengers' trust	4.09	0.940	High
3. Responsiveness			
3.1 Staff provides immediate assistance to passengers	4.10	0.931	High
3.2 When the train is delayed, staff immediately informs passengers	4.10	0.915	High
3.3 The time it takes for staff to assist passengers when problems arise on the train	4.09	0.918	High

Table 2 The mean and standard deviation of respondents' answers regarding the service quality factors that affect the decision to use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train service for Thai tourists. (continued)

(n = 422)			
Question	$(\bar{X})$	S.D.	Interpretation
4. Empathy			
4.1 Staff shows kindness in providing service	4.12	0.909	High
4.2 You feel that staff values your opinions and suggestions	4.07	0.911	High
4.3 Staff is polite and has good interpersonal skills	4.11	0.929	High
5. Assurance			

5.1 You feel confident in the safety during travel on the Bangkok-Chiang Mai train route	4.12	0.883	High
5.2 You think staff have the knowledge and skills to provide professional service	4.13	0.889	High
5.3 You feel that staff on the train can effectively solve problems that arise during the journey	4.11	0.934	High
Total	4.10	0.30	High

Table 3 The mean and standard deviation of respondents' answers regarding the marketing mix (7 P's) factors that influence the decision to use the Bangkok - Chiang Mai high-speed train service for Thai tourists.

(n = 422)

Question	$(\bar{X})$	S.D.	Interpretation
1. Product			
1.1 Cleanliness and maintenance of seating, restrooms, and luggage areas on the train affect satisfaction	3.98	0.999	High
1.2 The quality of service on the train meets your expectations	4.04	0.964	High
1.3 Traveling on this train meets your comfort needs	4.12	0.899	High
2. Price			
2.1 You think the fare for this train service is reasonable given the quality of service	4.11	0.898	High
2.2 Promotional discounts or special offers you received affected your decision to use the service	4.14	0.924	High
2.3 You are willing to pay a higher fare if you receive better service	4.18	0.890	High

Table 4 The mean and standard deviation of respondents' answers regarding the marketing mix (7 P's) factors that influence the decision to use the Bangkok - Chiang Mai high-speed train service for Thai tourists. (continued)

(n = 422)

Question	$(\bar{X})$	S.D.	Interpretation
3. Promotion			
3.1 You have seen promotional information about this train service	4.13	0.910	High
3.2 Additional services such as food, drinks, Wi-Fi, affect your decision to use the service	4.15	0.932	High
3.3 The information received about the train service is clear and relevant	4.19	0.871	High
4. Place			
4.1 You are satisfied with the convenience of booking tickets through various channels such as online or at the station	4.08	0.947	High
4.2 The location of the train station is appropriate and easily accessible	4.11	0.922	High

4.3 The time taken to buy tickets or conduct transactions is quick and convenient	4.12	0.910	High
5. People			
5.1 Staff provide service politely and with friendliness	4.11	0.911	High
5.2 Staff provide useful and relevant information	4.17	0.903	High
5.3 Staff are prepared and can respond well to passengers' needs	4.11	0.906	High
6. Process			
6.1 The ticket purchasing process is convenient and fast	4.09	0.937	High
6.2 The boarding process and ticket checks by staff are smooth	4.12	0.923	High
6.3 Ticket checks are up to standard and meet your needs	4.16	0.898	High

Table 5 The mean and standard deviation of respondents' answers regarding the marketing mix (7 P's) factors that influence the decision to use the Bangkok - Chiang Mai high-speed train service for Thai tourists. (continued)

(n = 422)

Question	$(\bar{X})$	S.D.	Interpretation
7. Physical Evidence			
7.1 The exterior and interior decoration of the train meet your expectations	4.06	0.936	High
7.2 Signage or information at the train station is clear and functional	4.15	0.925	High
7.3 The atmosphere inside the train creates a comfortable feeling	4.15	0.915	High
Total	4.12	0.28	High

Table 6 Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents' Answers Regarding the Decision to Use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai High-Speed Train Service for Thai Tourists

(n = 422)

Question	$(\bar{X})$	S.D.	Interpretation
1. Input			
1.1 Lifestyle, beliefs, or travel behavior of people affects the decision to use the train service	4.08	0.956	High
1.2 People's travel behavior influences the decision to use the train service	4.14	0.924	High
1.3 You think that most people who choose the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train for travel are Thai	4.14	0.926	High
2. Process			
2.1 The handling of your luggage during the journey is convenient	4.12	0.926	High
2.2 You feel that the process of seat allocation when deciding to use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train service is complicated	4.09	0.929	High

2.3 Using the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train is easy for travel	4.16	0.948	High

Table 7 Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents' Answers Regarding the Decision to Use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai High-Speed Train Service for Thai Tourists (continued)

(n = 422)

Question	($\bar{X}$)	S.D.	Interpretation
3. Output			
1.1 You are likely to use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train service again	4.08	0.956	High
1.2 You are satisfied with the quality of service received during the journey	4.14	0.924	High
1.3 You think that the service on this train is suitable for the travel of people close to you	4.14	0.926	High

Discussion

The study on the analysis of service quality and the marketing mix (7P's) that influence the decision to use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train service at Krung Thep Aphiwat Central Terminal Station found that tourists were highly satisfied with the service. The average satisfaction score ranged from 4.08 to 4.19, with a standard deviation (S.D.) between 0.871 and 0.956, indicating that overall, the service and marketing mix were well- received by the respondents.

Service Quality

The service provided by the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train was rated highly, particularly in the tangible aspects, such as the comfort of the seats and restrooms, as well as the polite and friendly staff. Safety measures on board and the clarity of information provided were also rated positively. Additionally, the responsiveness and empathy of the staff played an important role in creating a positive impression for the passengers.

Marketing Mix (7P's)

From the ANOVA test, it was found that promotion and place had a significant impact on the decision of tourists to use the service, with Sig. values of 0.009 and 0.032, respectively. This indicates that these factors are important in influencing the decision to use the service. In contrast, the price had no significant effect (Sig. = 0.128).

Decision to Use the Service

The decision to use the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train service was influenced by the quality of the service and the care provided by the staff, particularly in terms of comfort and attentiveness, which contributed to the tourists' satisfaction and increased the likelihood that they would choose the service again.

Outcome

The use of the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train service indicated a strong likelihood of repeat use, as respondents expressed high satisfaction with the service quality and comfort. The ANOVA test found statistically significant differences in some factors, such as service and travel comfort. However, other factors, such as price and photography, did not have a statistically significant impact.

Research recommendations

1. Expanding the scope of the research and sample population

This research surveyed a sample group of Thai tourists who used the Bangkok-Chiang Mai high-speed train service. To make the research findings more comprehensive, it would be beneficial to consider expanding the sample population to include international tourists and passengers traveling for other reasons, such as business trips or those traveling at different times.

Increasing the diversity of the sample group would provide more varied data. Using a broader random sampling method would ensure the results better represent the entire population.

2. Further study on the long-term impact of service changes

This study focused on surveying satisfaction over a short period. However, a long-term study on the impact of service improvements or changes in the marketing mix would provide a clearer understanding of how service improvements affect long-term decisions to use the service. The operational plan should include long-term passenger tracking after service improvements, using follow-up surveys to monitor changes in service usage behavior. This not only helps in improving the quality of the Bangkok- Chiang Mai high-speed train service but also increases understanding of the factors influencing passengers' decisions and can be used for planning future improvements.

3. Enhancing in-depth analysis of existing data

While this research primarily focuses on testing the main hypotheses, further in-depth analysis can be conducted on the impact of external factors, such as the economic situation, travel seasons, or social changes, which may affect service usage behavior. The operational plan could include studying external factors that might influence decision-making behavior. Expanding the study to include economic factors, such as fuel prices and ticket prices for alternative transportation methods, would provide additional valuable insights.

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INTENTION TO DISCONTINUE USING PETROLEUM AS FUEL-VEHICLES FOR BUSINESS TRAVELERS AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN SONGKHLA

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Abstract

As environmental sustainability gains global importance, transitioning away from petroleum-fueled vehicles has become a priority in business travel and tourism. This study explores the factors influencing business travelers' intention to discontinue using petroleum-fueled vehicles in Songkhla, Thailand, focusing on regret, green meeting experiences, and perceived usefulness. A quantitative survey was conducted among business travelers and MICE industry stakeholders. The findings indicate that environmental regret, positive experiences with green meetings, and the perceived usefulness of sustainable transport significantly impact travelers' willingness to adopt eco-friendly alternatives. The study contributes to sustainable tourism research by providing insights for policymakers and businesses on promoting low-carbon travel practices.

Keywords: Regret, Green Meeting, Perceived Usefulness, Sustainable Business Travel, Sustainable Logistics

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Introduction

The Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health reports that pollution continues to be a leading cause of premature deaths, with approximately 9 million deaths annually, accounting for one in six deaths worldwide. While reductions have been observed in deaths linked to pollution types associated with extreme poverty, such as household air and water pollution, these gains are overshadowed by rising deaths due to modern pollutants like ambient air pollution and toxic chemicals (e.g., lead). Since 2015, deaths from these pollutants have increased by 7%, and by over 66% since 2000 (Fuller et al., 2022).

Despite efforts by UN agencies, advocacy groups, and some governments, particularly in high-income countries, progress in addressing pollution has been limited, especially in low- and middle-income nations where pollution is most severe. Immediate action is needed to combat pollution-related diseases, with a focus on air pollution, lead poisoning, and hazardous chemicals (Fuller et al., 2022).

Pollution, climate change, and biodiversity loss are interconnected global challenges that require a unified science-policy approach to drive effective interventions, research, and funding. While pollution has historically been tackled at local or national levels, it is increasingly recognized as a planetary threat, necessitating a global response. A global effort to address modern pollutants can align with broader environmental initiatives, especially the transition to clean, renewable energy, which addresses both pollution and climate change, providing dual benefits for planetary health (R.J. et al., 2023). Since 2021, the presidents of various countries Globally, more than 8.1 million people are required to treat the disease as being of critical importance in the control of the emperor in 5 years, and more than 700,000 people become a factor. There is a secondary risk of children in this age group around the world. Secondary to malnutrition (He et al., 2020).

Considering global warming, sustainability has become a key focus in energy policy. The Energy Community Treaty already incorporates regulations on energy efficiency, the environment, and renewable energy, with plans to soon address climate change, further aligning with EU legislation and its low-carbon strategy. An integrated approach is essential to accommodate the growing share of renewables in the energy mix. At the same time, the region's significant potential for improving energy efficiency remains largely untapped (He et al., 2020).

The MICE industry is an important part of global tourism and brings in high profits. Over the past ten years, the conference and meeting industry has grown a lot. Many countries have improved their facilities and services to attract this profitable market. Events now play a big role in attracting tourists and are included in the marketing and development plans of many travel destinations. Getz (2008) pointed out that well-organized tourism events help make a destination more competitive (Getz 2008; Wee et al., 2021).

However, tourism and events can also harm the environment. A report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2008) found that tourism and related businesses create 5% of the world's CO₂ emissions. This is mainly due to air travel, hotels, and tourist activities. Because of this, researchers have looked for ways to help event planners and organizers create more eco- friendly or "green" events (UNWTO 2008; Wee et al., 2021).

Sustainability has become a cornerstone of MICE operations, with event organizers increasingly implementing green practices. Eco-friendly venues, sustainable food sourcing, and efficient waste management systems are now standard features of many large-scale events. For instance, the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) has actively promoted tools such as carbon footprint calculators, enabling event organizers to measure and mitigate environmental impacts. These efforts have reportedly reduced over 2,000 tons of carbon emissions from MICE events in Thailand since 2019, underscoring the sector's commitment to environmental responsibility. This combination of market growth and sustainable innovation highlights the evolving nature of the MICE industry in response to global economic and environmental challenges (TCEB, 2023).

The initiative to develop a Sustainable Green City is driven by criteria for evaluating sustainable urban environments. These criteria include creating a livable city, promoting public health, ensuring environmental sustainability, and fostering municipalities with effective learning and management systems. These benchmarks will be used to assess the performance of local governments (Local Performance Assessment; LPA) in the coming fiscal year. This strategy is crucial for urban development, encouraging municipalities to adopt the sustainable city framework as a tool for growth that aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment's 20-year plan (2017-2036), which focuses on balanced development in economic, social, and environmental areas. It also supports the goals of the 12th National

Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021), which aims to improve the efficiency of urban development in key provincial cities, making them livable for everyone (1 Province, 1 Livable City) (Sirilak, 2018).

In 2018, Songkhla Province led the way in promoting the development of sustainable environmental cities, covering all 48 local administrative organizations (municipalities) within the province, including 2 city municipalities, 11 town municipalities, and 35 sub-district municipalities. Local leaders and stakeholders are encouraged to work together to make Songkhla a model Green City, in line with the government's objectives (Sirilak, 2018).

Objectives

The purpose of this study are:

1. To assess the level of regret to discontinue using petroleum as fuel- vehicles for business travelers and sustainable tourism in Songkhla.
2. To assess the level of green meeting experience for business travelers and sustainable tourism in Songkhla.
3. To assess the perceived usefulness towards using petroleum as fuel- vehicles for business travelers and sustainable tourism in Songkhla.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

The population of this study consists of business traveler who travel to Songkhla Province using fuel-powered vehicles (private cars, buses, or public transport) of 5 millions. The sample will be drawn from the tourists visiting Songkhla during the specified period. A simple random sampling method will be used to select the sample to ensure a diverse group of respondents representing the population with similar characteristics.

Data will be collected from tourists who have traveled to Songkhla using fuel-powered vehicles through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire will focus on gathering information regarding their travel behaviors, transportation preferences, and their attitudes towards sustainable tourism and environmental impacts.

2. Research Tools

The survey tool will be used through a form. Questionnaire will consist of both closed-ended questions (for quantitative data) and open-ended questions (for qualitative insights into tourists' feelings and opinions about their travel choices and environmental conservation).

The sample size obtained will be approximately 384 people to cover the diversity of the population in this study. However, the sample size calculation will be increased to 400 people so that the study will have sufficient data and can be analyzed efficiently.

3. Data Collection

In this study, data collection was conducted primarily through a survey using a structured questionnaire as the main research tool. The population of this study consists of business traveler who travel to Songkhla Province using fuel-powered vehicles (private cars, buses, or public transport) of 5 millions. An appropriate sample size was calculated, and 400 respondents were selected through a simple random sampling method to ensure diversity and representativeness of the target population.

4. Data Analysis

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis involves the initial examination of the data collected from the survey. It provides a detailed summary of the basic features of the dataset, which helps to describe the characteristics of the sample population (business travelers) and their responses to the survey questions.

Statistical Methods

This research provides insights into using statistical analysis techniques to measure the impact of environmentally responsible corporate travel policies and green meetings. These methods are applicable in analyzing data in this study regarding business travelers' preferences for sustainable travel practices.

Applied Research

This research will provide valuable insights for policymakers in Songkhla. In the tourism and hospitality sectors, the results of this research can be used to develop more sustainable practices, such as promoting green travel options for business trips and incorporating sustainability into corporate policies [4].

Deductive Research

This research starts with existing theories and constructs to derive hypotheses and test them through empirical data collection and analysis. The hypotheses in the research will be developed using these theories to explore the relationships between variables such as regret [2], green meetings, perceived usefulness, and the intention to discontinue using petroleum vehicles.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

Pollution is a major cause of premature death worldwide, especially air pollution and hazardous chemicals such as lead, which have been increasing steadily since 2000. Despite efforts to address this issue, low- and middle- income countries continue to be severely affected. This research emphasizes that pollution, climate change, and biodiversity loss are interconnected issues that require a global approach to address, particularly the transition to clean, renewable energy to reduce pollution and mitigate climate change.

In terms of the MICE industry, which is a significant part of global tourism, it has high growth potential and plays an important role in stimulating the economy. However, this industry also has an impact on the environment. So, there are efforts to promote the concept of "Green Meeting" to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase the sustainability of tourism. At last the study will present how to reduce the use of petroleum fuel in vehicles for sustainable business and tourism travel and to study the public's awareness of choosing environmentally friendly vehicles.

2. Discussion

This study highlights the urgent need to transition away from petroleum-fueled vehicles, especially in the context of business travel and tourism in Songkhla. As pollution and climate change continue to pose global threats, the transportation sector plays a significant role in environmental degradation. Despite increasing awareness, many business travelers still face challenges in adopting alternative fuel vehicles, such as high costs and limited infrastructure.

The MICE industry in Songkhla, while contributing significantly to economic growth, also adds to carbon emissions. Promoting the concept of "Green Meetings" and encouraging the use of environmentally friendly transport can help reduce the industry's environmental impact. Business travelers, in particular, can serve as early adopters and influencers of sustainable practices.

Findings from this research show moderate public awareness about clean transportation options. However, stronger policy support, incentives, and better infrastructure are necessary to encourage real behavioral change. Government action and collaboration with the private sector are key to promoting sustainable mobility.

In conclusion, reducing petroleum use in vehicles is a crucial step toward sustainable tourism. A shift to clean energy not only helps combat climate change and pollution but also enhances Songkhla's image as a sustainable and forward-thinking destination.

Research recommendations

Industry continues to grow globally, it brings significant economic benefits but also poses environmental challenges particularly in terms of carbon emissions, waste generation, and resource consumption. With increasing global focus on sustainability, there is a pressing need for the MICE sector to evolve by adopting more eco-friendly practices and aligning its operations with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Recent efforts in countries like Thailand have shown promising results through tools such as carbon footprint calculators and sustainable event planning. However, gaps remain in terms of consistent implementation, measurement, and stakeholder engagement. To support the transformation of this sector into a more sustainable model, the following research directions are recommended:

1. **Explore Incentive Models for Sustainable Practices:** Analyze the impact of policy tools, subsidies, and certification programs in motivating sustainable practices among event organizers and venue operators, with a focus on low- and middle-income regions.
2. **Study Stakeholder Awareness and Engagement:** Examine the knowledge, perceptions, and behaviors of key stakeholders including organizers, participants, and service providers regarding sustainability to inform more targeted education and engagement efforts.
3. **Develop Industry-Wide Sustainability Benchmarks:** Establish standardized metrics and guidelines to help organizers evaluate the sustainability of events, facilitating consistent implementation and comparison across different regions and event types.

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DETERMINE ELEMENTS TO IMPROVE THE MANAGEMENT OF T-POP CONCERTS

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Extended abstract

The Thai pop music industry (T-Pop) has experienced significant growth, influenced by the success of K-Pop. However, the management of T-Pop concerts still faces challenges in achieving the same level of global recognition. This study examines the management of T-Pop concerts using K-Pop as a case study to identify key strategies for improvement. The research explores factors such as ticket pricing, concert organization, artist promotion, fan engagement, sponsorships, and stage design. A quantitative approach was employed, analyzing survey data from 10,000 T-Pop concert attendees. The findings indicate that pricing strategies, marketing efforts, and stage production play crucial roles in audience engagement and satisfaction. Moreover, technological advancements, social media marketing, and fan interactions significantly influence concert success. By adopting best practices from K-Pop, T-Pop concert management can enhance the audience experience, strengthen industry competitiveness, and expand into international markets. The study provides valuable insights for event organizers, music labels, and policymakers to develop sustainable strategies that will elevate the T-Pop concert industry to a global standard.

Keywords: T-pop, concert management, Demographic factors, Concert Industry

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Introduction

The global music industry has experienced continuous growth, with increasing revenues across major markets. While countries like the United States, Japan, and South Korea have successfully expanded their music industries internationally, Thailand's music industry remains underrepresented on the global stage. Despite this, T-Pop has gradually emerged as a unique genre influenced by both local and international music trends, particularly K-Pop (KuiKaew and Na Ayutthaya., 2023).

T-Pop, referring to Thai pop music, gained significant traction around 2016–2017, largely due to the success of BNK48 and the increasing visibility of Thai artists in the international market. The industry has seen growth in domestic concert revenues, with Thai concerts contributing significantly to the entertainment economy. However, despite its progress, T-Pop concerts still face challenges in terms of organization, production quality, and international competitiveness (Thaipianist., 2024; Kamonlert., 2024).

The Thai concert industry has shown resilience and growth, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted live events worldwide. By 2023, the showbiz market in Thailand had expanded significantly, with a notable increase in concert events. Social media platforms, particularly TikTok, have played a crucial role in promoting T-Pop, enhancing global engagement and increasing its reach (Ngosanam., 2024).

Given these developments, this study aims to analyze the management of T-Pop concerts through a case study of K-Pop. By identifying key success factors in K-Pop concert management, this research seeks to provide strategies for improving T-Pop concert organization, enhancing its global appeal, and elevating its quality to meet international standards.

Objectives

The purpose of this study are:

1. To assess the T-Pop concert management.
2. To identify factors and strategies to improve T-Pop's concert management.

Research Methodology

According to Sedlack and Stanley (1992), the population in a research study should have characteristics that align with what the researcher wants to study and should be present during the time of the study. In this research, the researcher defines the population as individuals who attend T-Pop concerts in Thailand. This group is chosen because they are a large group with experience in listening to T-Pop music and can understand the content and questionnaire related to T-Pop concerts well. For example, the 4EVE Concert "NOW OR NEVER" Live at Impact Arena can accommodate approximately 10,000 attendees (Stanley., 1992; eventpop., 2023). The sample size in this study is calculated using the simple random sampling method, selecting participants from those who attended K-Pop concerts in Thailand, including fans. Since the total population is currently known to be 10,000 people, the sample size is determined using the sample size table from Krejcie and Morgan for finite populations, which is approximately 370 people (Krejcie and Eayrle W. Morgan., 1970).

Research Tools

This research explores the development of T-Pop concert organization using K-Pop concerts as a case study, aiming to establish a framework for enhancing concert management standards in Thailand. It adopts an analytical and quantitative approach, emphasizing the use of factual, numerical data and controlled variables to ensure accuracy and reliability. Through statistical methods, the study synthesizes key components of successful concert organization. Grounded in inductive reasoning, it draws from theories, prior research, and practical experiences to interpret the data effectively. As basic research, it follows a structured process hypothesis formulation, data collection and analysis, and conclusion to support the advancement of T-Pop concert organization.

Data Collection

The study emphasizes the use of factual data and quantitative summarization, relying on numerical data as key evidence to ensure accuracy and reliability. To achieve this, various variables are controlled, and data collection tools are carefully prepared to maintain data quality. Statistical methods are employed to analyze and synthesize the data, minimizing errors in predictions and providing a precise foundation for the proposed framework. This study applied the Inductive research which is grounded in the principles of reasoning and data analysis, drawing upon a comprehensive review of knowledge, theories, relevant research findings, experiences, and theoretical concepts.

Data Analysis

Describes the analysis according to Catherine Cote (2021), descriptive analysis is the process of using current and past data to identify trends and relationships. It is relatively easy to access and involves explaining and summarizing data analysis results in the form of frequency, percentage, average, standard deviation (the spread of data from the mean), maximum, or minimum values. The data can also be summarized in the form of graphs, tables, or bar charts (Cote, 2021; Datainvestigator, 2021).

Conclusion and Discussion

This study explored key factors affecting T-Pop concert management, using K-Pop concerts as a reference. The results show that while T-Pop concerts are still developing, they have strong potential to improve and reach international standards. Important areas to focus on include setting fair ticket prices, improving concert management, helping artists develop their performance and communication skills, increasing fan engagement through online platforms, and using technology to enhance stage design. Support from the government and private sector, through funding and policies, is also important for promoting artists and spreading culture worldwide, which helps grow the economy and increase global competitiveness. Advertising and public relations help boost audience awareness and engagement by using online platforms and media to expand the fan base and strengthen artists' image. These findings can help government agencies, universities, and event organizers create better strategies to support and grow T-Pop concerts, making them more competitive both in Thailand and internationally.

Based on the research findings, the management of T-Pop concerts has shown progress in several areas, especially in the use of technology in stage design, interaction with fan clubs through social media, and the talents of artists that appeal to the teenage target group. However, there are still limitations in the management system of fan clubs, proactive marketing, inefficient ticketing systems, and a lack of clear support from the government compared to K-Pop. The study identified seven key factors that contribute to the success of T-Pop concert management: ticket pricing, concert organizers, artists, fan clubs, sponsors, advertising and public relations, and stage design. Among these, "social media marketing" and "stage design" are the most influential in creating a strong impression and encouraging audiences especially teenagers, the main target of the T-Pop industry to attend concerts.

- Concert Management Theory: Comprehensive event management involving stage, sound systems, tickets, artists, and fans influences the audience's satisfaction (Silercreek, 2024; Suwanapisit & Wiwattananukul, 2008).
- Stimulus-Response Theory. Audience behavior results from responding to "stimuli" such as stage design, performances, and ticket sales systems (Defleur & Bell-Rokeach, 1996).
- Field Theory. Fans' attachment is driven by positive forces in the "environment" such as social media or performance venues (Lewin, 1951).
- Social Identity Theory. Fan group membership creates shared identity, empowering support for the artist and fostering loyalty (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Research recommendations

1. Study specific aspects of audience satisfaction

The research should explore each part of concert management, such as lighting and sound systems, stage design, or audience experience, to see which part affects T-Pop fans' satisfaction the most.

2. Do in-depth research on digital marketing

Look at the role of online platforms that help fan engagement. The study should find out which factors on social media help drive the success of T-Pop concerts.

3. Analyze economic factors and ticket-buying behavior

To better understand the relationship between ticket prices, fans' income, and their intention to attend concerts.

4. Expand the study to international audiences

If T-Pop wants to grow in other countries, researchers should study the behavior of fans in nearby countries or international fans who follow T-Pop.

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A CASE STUDY OF FOREIGNER PERSPECTIVES: A MIX METHODOLOGY ANALYSIS OF THE 2024 KING'S CUP INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT

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Extended abstract

This research aims to study the perspectives of international attendees on the 2024 King's Cup football tournament and analyze their satisfaction levels, along with providing recommendations for policymakers and organizers of the 2025 SEA Games in Songkhla province. A mixed-methodology approach was employed, combining in-depth interviews and surveys of international participants. The findings revealed that most respondents were satisfied with various aspects of the King's Cup tournament, such as the high standard of organization, the warm hospitality of the staff, and the convenience of transportation and accommodations. However, areas for improvement were identified, including enhancing the diversity of side activities during the tournament and improving promotional efforts to better reach target audiences. For the 2025 SEA Games in Songkhla, the study suggests developing infrastructure, preparing tourism-related services, and fostering collaboration among relevant agencies to ensure smooth operations and maximize benefits for both participants and spectators.

Keywords: King's Cup 2024, Foreigner perspectives, Satisfaction, Mixed Methodology, Sports Tourism

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Introduction

Thailand plays a significant role in hosting international sports events, both as a host and participant. For instance, Thailand has hosted the SEA Games, Asian Games, and MotoGP in Buriram (Reuters, 2024). Additionally, events like the King's Cup reflect Thailand's capacity to organize world-class sporting activities.

The King's Cup football tournament began in 1968, organized by the Football Association of Thailand. Over the years, it has evolved into a major event attracting teams from around the world, fostering international collaboration and diplomacy through sports (Wikipedia, 2024).

Songkhla has been developed as Songkhla Sport City, with state-of-the-art infrastructure, including the Tinsulanon Stadium and various facilities suited for international sporting events. This development helps boost local tourism, economy, and provides a platform for global sporting events like King's Cup 2024 (Songkhla Sport City, 2023).

The King's Cup 2024 event has been supported by various stakeholders, including the Football Association of Thailand, corporate sponsors, and local communities. These collaborations ensure the success of the event while promoting regional tourism and economic growth. (Songkhla Provincial PR Office, 2024).

Apart from sports, Songkhla has positioned itself as a MICE City, developing its capacity to host business and international conferences. This enhances Songkhla's role in fostering economic and cultural exchange, alongside sporting events (Hatyai Focus, 2023).

This research focuses on analyzing the perspectives of international attendees toward the King's Cup 2024, with an emphasis on their satisfaction and

experiences during the event. The study employs a mixed-methodology approach, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data.

The research will evaluate various aspects of the event, such as event organization, hospitality, infrastructure, and promotional activities, to provide recommendations for improving future events, such as the SEA Games 2025 (Bangkok Post, 2024). Moreover, this study aims to identify areas for improvement to enhance the experiences of international participants and spectators while offering valuable insights for the development of Thailand's sports tourism in the future (Ministry of Tourism and Sport, 2023; Community Organizations Development Institute, 2018).

Objectives

1. To study the perspectives of international attendees toward the King's Cup 2024.
2. To assess the satisfaction levels of international attendees.
3. To propose recommendations for improving future international sports events in Thailand.

Hypothesis

H1: Effective event management has a positive impact on the satisfaction of international attendees.

H2: High-quality infrastructure and facilities positively influence the revisit intention of international attendees.

H3: Clear communication and effective promotional activities enhance the overall experience and satisfaction of international attendees.

Research Methodology

Population and Sample

- The population for this research includes attendees of the King's Cup 2024 held in Songkhla, with a total of 25,000 participants, including both domestic and international attendees. This study focuses on foreigners to analyze their experiences, satisfaction, and perspectives on the event. These participants, consisting of tourists and football fans from various countries, provide valuable insights for improving future events (Getz, 2008; Baker & Crompton, 2000).
- The sample size 20 interviewees (qualitative) and 100 survey respondents (quantitative).

Research Tools

Statistical methods were used to analyze quantitative data collected from international attendees through questionnaires. These methods included calculating averages, standard deviations, and examining relationships between variables like infrastructure, satisfaction, and event management. Tools such as SPSS and Excel ensured accurate and reliable data analysis, providing valuable insights for the research objectives (Pallant, 2020).

Data Collection

Focus groups are a qualitative research method designed to gather in-depth opinions, experiences, and feelings from participants. They provide valuable qualitative data to complement quantitative findings, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the research objectives. For this study, focus groups were conducted with international attendees of various ages, nationalities, and backgrounds.

Data Analysis

- Quantitative data analyzed using SPSS (descriptive statistics).
- Qualitative data analyzed using content analysis.

Descriptive analysis is a key method used to collect and describe information about international attendees, such as their satisfaction, experiences, and the factors influencing their perspectives on the King's Cup 2024. Tools like questionnaires and in-depth interviews were used to gather data. This information was then assessed to provide an overall picture of attendees' experiences (Creswell, 2014).

Conclusion and Discussion

The study found that effective event management, quality infrastructure, and strong hospitality significantly influence attendee satisfaction and revisit intention. The success of King's Cup 2024 demonstrates Thailand's potential to host larger-scale events like SEA Games 2025. Improving communication strategies, enhancing transportation systems, and integrating more cultural activities can further increase satisfaction and promote repeat visitation among international participants.

Research recommendations

1. Improve event marketing targeting international audiences.
2. Enhance service quality, including transportation and accommodations.
3. Invest in continuous infrastructure development for major sports venues.
4. Foster stronger partnerships among stakeholders, including local communities and sponsors.

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TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE (TBL) AND ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, AND GOVERNANCE (ESG) FACTORS IN THE BUSINESS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES OF PUBLIC LISTED COMPANIES IN THAILAND AND MALAYSIA: A COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT

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Extended Abstract

The integration of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors into corporate management has become increasingly essential, especially in emerging economies like Thailand and Malaysia. This research presents a comparative assessment of ESG's influence on financial performance in public listed companies of both countries. Utilizing panel data from 89 Thai firms (2015–2023) and 49 Malaysian firms (2014–2023), the study sources data from Bloomberg and Refinitiv, focusing on ESG scores alongside key financial metrics such as Return on Equity (ROE) and Return on Assets (ROA). By employing High Dimensional Fixed-Effects, Random-Effects, and Driscoll-Kraay standard error regressions, the study investigates how each ESG pillar environmental, social, and governance affects firm performance, accounting for control variables like leverage, liquidity, market valuation, and macroeconomic conditions. The findings reveal that environmental performance significantly enhances both ROE and ROA, indicating that sustainability-driven operations offer tangible financial benefits. Aggregate ESG scores show a strong positive impact, particularly in Malaysian firms, while governance scores present mixed effects positive for ROA but sometimes negative for ROE in Thailand. Social scores remain largely insignificant across both markets, suggesting a possible lag in translating social investments into financial outcomes. The study also finds that high interest rate spreads and financial leverage reduce firm performance, especially in Malaysia. These results underline the need for differentiated ESG strategies tailored to each country's institutional and economic contexts. This study contributes to ESG literature by linking micro-level ESG data with macroeconomic indicators, providing actionable insights for aligning corporate sustainability with financial goals in ASEAN markets.

Keywords: ESG, Firm Performance, ROE, ROA, Thailand, Malaysia

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Introduction

The integration of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors has become central to corporate accountability, particularly in emerging economies like Thailand and Malaysia, where sustainable development must balance environmental and social disparities. Malaysia has been proactive, with ESG disclosures mandated since 2016 (Alam et al., 2022), while Thailand's ESG guidelines were introduced in 2020, aligning with global standards such as the UN SDGs. Despite these regulatory efforts, research on how ESG practices affect financial performance remains limited and inconclusive in both countries (Suttipun, 2021; Suttipun & Bomlai, 2019; Tarmuji et al., 2016). Most studies focus narrowly on ESG disclosures rather than their actual financial impacts.

This study addresses this gap through a comparative analysis of listed companies in Thailand and Malaysia, exploring how local institutional, cultural, and macroeconomic conditions shape ESG effectiveness and corporate outcomes. The motivation stems from ESG's growing strategic importance in mitigating risks and enhancing competitiveness in rapidly developing economies. In Thailand, ESG adoption has been driven by environmental crises linked to industrialization, though disclosures remain voluntary and inconsistent (Suttipun & Yordudom, 2022). In contrast, Malaysia has enforced ESG compliance more rigorously, especially within sectors like palm oil under global scrutiny (Alam et al., 2022).

ESG is increasingly recognized as a performance driver. In Malaysia, strong ESG practices are linked to improved financial metrics like ROA and lower capital costs (Atan et al., 2018; Ooi et al., 2020). Similarly, Thai firms adopting ESG standards benefit from higher market valuations, especially in export sectors (Thongrawd & Suteerachai, 2023). However, a lack of standardized reporting in Thailand hinders consistent implementation (Suttipun, 2021), whereas Malaysia's structured guidelines foster broader adoption and investor trust.

Macroeconomic factors also play a significant role. Malaysia's stable financial environment supports long-term ESG investment (Yusof et al., 2021), while Thailand's economic volatility prompts ESG adoption as a risk mitigation strategy (Khemthong & Saelee, 2022). Financial

system inefficiencies, such as high-interest rate spreads, pose barriers to ESG investment, particularly for SMEs (Demirgüç-Kunt & Maksimovic, 2002). On the other hand, advanced financial markets in both countries facilitate ESG integration (Rajan & Zingales, 1998; Atan et al., 2018).

To empirically explore these dynamics, the study analyzes panel data from 89 Thai and 49 Malaysian listed companies using econometric models such as High Dimensional Fixed-Effects, Random-Effects, and Driscoll-Kraay regressions. Findings show that environmental performance positively correlates with ROE and ROA in both countries. Aggregate ESG scores are particularly impactful in Malaysia, affirming the value of comprehensive sustainability practices. Governance presents mixed effects negatively affecting ROE in Thailand but positively influencing ROA in Malaysia. Social scores, however, remain statistically insignificant in both contexts, implying their long-term nature. Financial leverage and macroeconomic pressures, notably rising interest rate spreads, negatively impact firm performance, especially in Malaysia.

This study contributes to the ESG discourse in three ways: (1) by offering a comparative analysis of ESG adoption in two ASEAN economies with differing institutional frameworks; (2) by employing rigorous panel data methods to control for firm-specific factors; and (3) by linking micro-level ESG metrics to macro-level financial variables, answering calls for multilevel sustainability research (Eccles et al., 2014). The findings guide policymakers and corporate leaders in refining ESG strategies. For instance, if governance proves more impactful, reforms in this area could be prioritized. Moreover, evidence linking financial development with ESG success supports the case for enhanced investment in financial infrastructure.

Objectives

1. To assess the impact of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) scores on financial performance of listed firms in Thailand and Malaysia.
2. To compare the role of macroeconomic indicators in shaping ESG- financial performance dynamics across the two countries.
3. To recommend ESG-aligned business strategies based on empirical evidence from both markets.

Hypothesis

H1: Environmental rating influences financial performance of the Thai and Malaysian listed companies.

This hypothesis is based on mixed empirical evidence from both countries. Some studies show positive associations between environmental initiatives (like energy efficiency or disclosure) and firm performance, while others report no or limited impact.

H2: Social rating influences financial performance of the Thai and Malaysian listed companies.

This is grounded in the notion that CSR and socially responsible practices such as gender diversity, stakeholder engagement, and alignment with cultural values enhance firm reputation and stakeholder trust, thereby improving financial outcomes.

H3: Governance rating influences financial performance of the Thai and Malaysian listed companies.

The hypothesis stems from studies indicating that effective corporate governance (e.g., strong boards, institutional ownership, oversight mechanisms) can lead to better financial performance, although results are sometimes context-dependent and influenced by firm size or cultural factors.

H4: ESG composite rating influences financial performance of the Thai and Malaysian listed companies.

This posits that the overall ESG score (a composite of environmental, social, and governance factors) serves as a holistic indicator of corporate sustainability. Higher composite ESG scores are expected to correlate with better firm performance due to improved risk management, stakeholder trust, and long-term value creation.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

The population of this study includes all publicly listed companies in Thailand and Malaysia. From these, 89 firms from Thailand (2015–2023) and 49 from Malaysia (2014–2023) were selected based on data completeness and availability in the Bloomberg and Refinitiv databases. The sample covers multiple sectors such as manufacturing, finance, energy, and consumer goods, ensuring diversity and representativeness of the broader corporate landscape.

2. Research Tools

The study employs secondary data tools comprising ESG scores, financial ratios, and macroeconomic indicators. ESG component scores (environmental, social, governance) were extracted from Bloomberg (for Thailand) and Refinitiv (for Malaysia), while firm-level financial data (ROE, ROA, debt ratio, quick ratio, Tobin's Q) were gathered from the same sources. Macroeconomic variables such as real interest rate, interest rate spread, and credit to private sector (% of GDP) were obtained from the World Development Indicators (WDI).

3. Data Collection

Data were systematically collected on an annual basis for each firm within the study period. The datasets were cleaned, standardized, and merged across platforms to maintain consistency. Particular attention was given to handling missing data and ensuring that ESG ratings were harmonized across the two databases.

4. Data Analysis

The econometric strategy includes High Dimensional Fixed Effects (HDFFE) regression to control for firm-specific unobserved heterogeneity, Random Effects modeling for robustness checks, and Driscoll-

Kraay standard errors to account for cross-sectional dependence. The models were tested for heteroskedasticity, multicollinearity, and serial correlation to ensure the validity of the statistical inferences. The outcome variables (ROE and ROA) were regressed on ESG dimensions and macroeconomic controls.

Result

The empirical findings reveal a nuanced relationship between ESG factors and firm financial performance across the two countries. In both Thailand and Malaysia, environmental performance is positively and significantly associated with ROE and ROA, supporting the view that sustainability enhances firm value. The effect is particularly pronounced in sectors such as manufacturing and energy, where environmental compliance can lead to operational efficiencies and improved stakeholder perceptions.

The composite ESG score is also positively associated with firm performance, but the magnitude and consistency of this effect are greater in Malaysia. This suggests that firms operating in stricter regulatory environments may gain more from holistic ESG engagement. In Thailand, the weaker regulatory enforcement likely limits the financial benefits of overall ESG compliance, reflecting gaps in implementation and accountability.

Governance scores show contrasting outcomes. While governance is positively correlated with ROA in Malaysia, it shows a negative association with ROE in Thailand. This could reflect short-term costs of implementing governance reforms in less mature regulatory contexts or potential inefficiencies in translating governance practices into profit.

Social scores do not show significant relationships with financial performance in either country, highlighting potential time lags or measurement challenges in linking social investment to tangible outcomes. Additionally, financial leverage and high interest rate spreads consistently reduce firm performance, especially in Malaysia, signaling macroeconomic constraints that hinder ESG implementation.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

The results affirm the hypothesis that environmental performance positively influences financial outcomes in both Thailand and Malaysia. This suggests that sustainability efforts such as energy efficiency and waste management not only improve environmental impact but also contribute to firm profitability. The composite ESG score also correlates positively with performance, especially in Malaysia, indicating that holistic sustainability strategies are better received by markets with stronger ESG enforcement.

In contrast, social scores were not significantly associated with ROE or ROA, hinting at a delayed or indirect financial effect of social initiatives. Governance scores displayed a mixed pattern positive influence on ROA in Malaysia but a negative association with ROE in Thailand indicating that governance practices are sensitive to contextual factors such as regulatory rigor and investor expectations.

2. Discussion

These findings reflect the importance of aligning ESG strategies with national institutional frameworks. In Malaysia, stronger regulatory mechanisms and financial infrastructure have supported firms in integrating ESG into core business operations. The positive association between governance and financial performance in Malaysia reflects investor confidence in corporate transparency and accountability.

Thailand's mixed results may be due to its more voluntary ESG framework and higher economic volatility. In such contexts, ESG serves more as a risk management tool than a strategic driver of value. The consistently insignificant role of social ratings across both countries suggests a need

for firms to better communicate and operationalize social responsibility efforts. Finally, the negative effects of financial leverage and wide interest rates spread on performance underscore the macroeconomic constraints firms face when adopting sustainability practices.

This study provides key implications for both policymakers and business leaders: ESG frameworks must be context-specific, and regulatory support is crucial for driving meaningful sustainability outcomes. As ASEAN economies continue to integrate into global markets, tailored ESG strategies can offer competitive advantages while contributing to inclusive and sustainable growth.

Research Recommendations

1. Policymakers in Thailand should prioritize environmental policy incentives and governance reforms.
2. Malaysia should expand credit access for ESG-focused projects, enhancing financial resilience.
3. Future studies should explore ESG-social score linkages and long-term impacts on innovation and employee engagement.

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ENHANCING O2O FOOD DELIVERY SERVICE QUALITY THROUGH MICHELIN-AFFILIATED RESTAURANTS IN BANGKOK

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Abstract

This study investigates the critical service quality dimensions influencing Online-to-Offline (O2O) food delivery services within Michelin-affiliated restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand. Utilizing the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP), data were collected from 26 expert entrepreneurs to evaluate and prioritize four principal service quality criteria Reliability, Maintenance of Meal Quality and Hygiene (MMQH), Assurance, and System Operation along with their respective sub-criteria. The findings reveal a hierarchical framework that informs strategic improvements in premium O2O food delivery contexts. MMQH was identified as the most pivotal criterion, with the sub-criterion “food received at the right temperature” receiving the highest weight (41%). This was followed by “effective communication” within Assurance (44%) and “delivery accuracy” in Reliability (33%), underscoring the essential roles of meal integrity, transparent customer communication, and accurate order fulfillment in service optimization. Consistency ratios ($CR \leq 0.10$) verified the reliability of respondents’ judgments. These outcomes directly address the research aims by pinpointing priority areas for service enhancement, providing actionable guidance for Michelin-affiliated establishments to refine their operational strategies. By aligning service quality initiatives with evolving customer expectations and industry standards, this study contributes substantively to both theoretical discourse and practical advancement in the dynamic O2O food delivery sector. Future research should broaden stakeholder engagement, investigate emerging technological solutions, and incorporate sustainability frameworks to further elevate service quality in digital food delivery ecosystems.

Keywords: Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP), Customer Satisfaction, Michelin-Affiliated Restaurants, Online-to-Offline (O2O) Food Delivery, Service Quality⁷⁵

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Introduction

Thailand's food delivery sector has experienced a significant transformation in consumer behavior since 2018, driven by shifting urban lifestyles, digital adoption, and rising convenience expectations. According to Kasikorn Research Center (2020), the market has expanded at an average annual growth rate of approximately 10%, primarily fueled by time-constrained urban professionals and the growing middle class in Bangkok. The widespread adoption of smartphones and increasing internet penetration have played a pivotal role in accelerating this trend (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2020). Urban consumers, particularly those leading fast-paced lives, have demonstrated a marked preference for online food delivery platforms. Data from Google Trends indicates that search interest for food delivery services surged dramatically across Southeast Asia between 2015 and 2019, rising thirteenfold in Indonesia, ninefold in the Philippines, and eightfold in Thailand (Google, 2020). Complementing these findings, a survey by the Electronic Transactions Development Agency (ETDA) revealed that 85% of respondents reported using food delivery services during early 2020. Generation Y (ages 19–38) emerged as the dominant user group, accounting for over half of total usage (51.09%), followed by Generation X, baby boomers, and Generation Z (ETDA, 2020).

Interestingly, spending patterns showed that Generation X incurred the highest average order values (USD 16–32 per order), followed by baby boomers (USD 10–16), while Generations Y and Z exhibited lower expenditure (USD 3–9 per order). The report further noted that 88.47% of consumers accessed food delivery via dominant platforms such as GrabFood, LINE MAN, Get, and Foodpanda. Additionally, 62.93% placed orders directly through restaurant-owned platforms, and 13.08% did so via social media channels, particularly Facebook and Instagram (ETDA, 2020). These statistics underscore the growing reliance on digital platforms in shaping Thailand's modern food service landscape. The proliferation of online-to-offline (O2O) food delivery services reflects a broader transformation in consumer behavior, driven by digital innovation and shifting lifestyle patterns. As traditional dining practices give way to more flexible and technologically mediated choices, consumers now engage with food services through mobile applications and digital platforms that provide access to a wide range of restaurants, personalized recommendations, and real-time order tracking (Kasikorn Research Center, 2020). This digital shift has empowered consumers to make informed dining decisions while enabling businesses to leverage user data for service customization and strategic positioning.

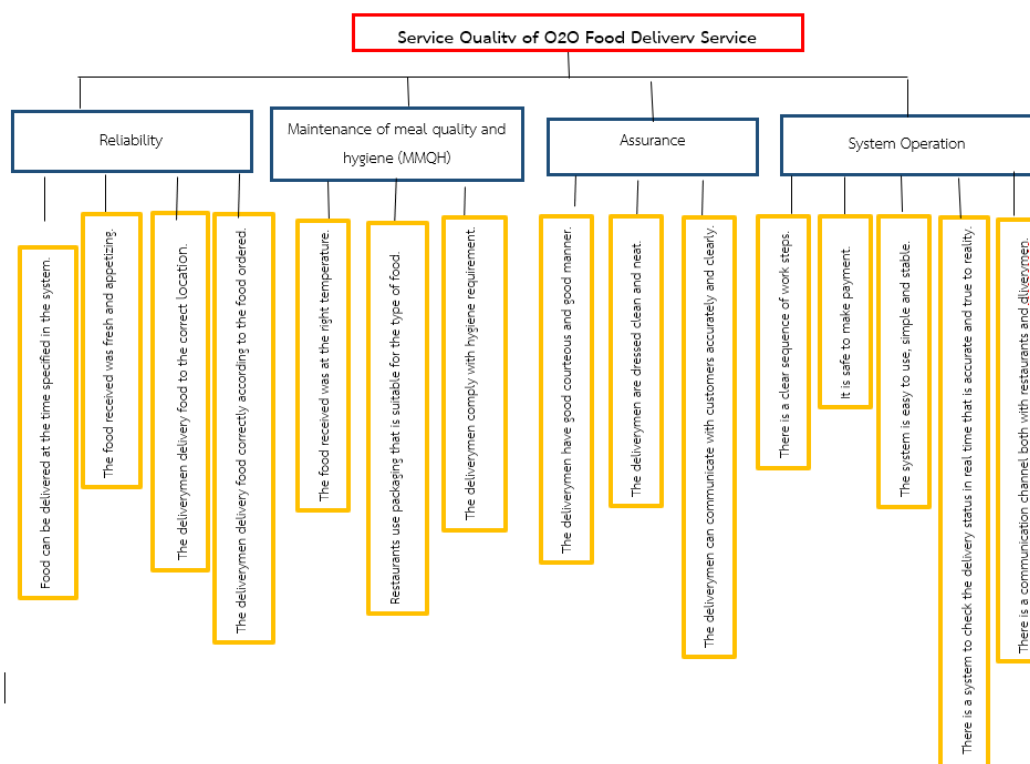
In this evolving digital food ecosystem, service quality has emerged as a central determinant of customer satisfaction and competitive advantage. Although conventional indicators such as delivery speed and food freshness remain important, a multidimensional understanding of service quality is required. Factors such as platform reliability, hygiene standards, assurance mechanisms, and seamless system operations must be systematically evaluated to ensure service excellence (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2020). To address these complexities, the present study employs the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) to examine the critical factors influencing service quality in Bangkok's O2O food delivery market. Specifically, the research prioritizes four key criteria: reliability, maintenance of meal quality and hygiene (MMQH), assurance, and system operation. The AHP framework enables a structured decision-making approach that integrates both subjective judgments and objective analysis, offering practical insights for stakeholders including platform operators, Michelin-affiliated restaurants, and service managers. The findings provide a hierarchical evaluation of service attributes, thereby guiding quality enhancement strategies and supporting sustainable growth in a highly competitive market landscape.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to systematically investigate the critical determinants of service quality in online-to-offline (O2O) food delivery services provided by Michelin-affiliated restaurants in Bangkok. The specific objectives of this study were as follows:

1. To identify the most critical service quality criteria in Online-to-Offline (O2O) food delivery services offered by Michelin-affiliated restaurants in Bangkok, from the perspective of entrepreneurs.
2. To evaluate the relative significance of the identified service quality factors to guide effective enhancement strategies for O2O food delivery services by Michelin-affiliated restaurants in Bangkok.

Figure 1: Conceptual AHP Framework



Research Questions

1. What are the most important service quality criteria for O2O food delivery services provided by Michelin-affiliated restaurants in Bangkok from the perspective of entrepreneurs?
2. What is the relative significance of the identified service quality factors in guiding effective service quality improvement strategies for O2O food delivery by Michelin-affiliated restaurants in Bangkok?

Literature Review

Online to Offline e-commerce (O2O)

Online-to-Offline (O2O) commerce has emerged as a transformative business model that integrates digital platforms with traditional brick-and-mortar operations, leveraging mobile internet technologies to bridge the gap between online engagement and offline service delivery. As an evolution of conventional business-to-consumer (B2C) e-commerce, O2O commerce emphasizes localized service provision and fosters symbiotic relationships between digital and physical retail channels (Yao et al., 2022). By adopting O2O platforms, local retailers and service providers can expand their customer base, enhance visibility, and improve profitability (He et al., 2021). The O2O market typically comprises two distinct segments: "to-shop" and "to-home." The "to-shop" model involves consumers making reservations or payments online but consuming goods or services offline, often facilitated by location-based technologies. A notable example is the "buy online, pick up in-store" strategy (Chai & Wang, 2022). Conversely, the "to-home" model delivers products or services directly to consumers at their homes or workplaces. This segment is exemplified by food delivery services, which have become a dominant form of to-home O2O commerce in many urban contexts (Yang et al., 2021; Xia et al., 2019; Agarwal & Sahu, 2022).

From the standpoint of restaurant operators, the Online-to-Offline (O2O) food delivery model offers a strategic avenue for revenue expansion without necessitating additional investment in physical seating capacity. This paradigm enables restaurants to extend their reach and enhance service accessibility beyond traditional in-store limitations. However, the widespread adoption of O2O food delivery applications has introduced new challenges in mobile marketing, particularly due to the constrained user interface and engagement context of mobile devices compared to traditional desktop platforms (Fink, Rosenfeld, & Ravid, 2018). In response, advancements in digital technologies have empowered businesses to develop integrated, multi-platform marketing and commerce solutions. These tools, grounded in the O2O framework, are designed to deepen customer engagement, optimize user experience, and foster brand loyalty in a highly competitive digital marketplace.

Service Quality in Online Food Delivery

The rapid expansion of online food delivery services has fundamentally transformed consumer access to food, redefining traditional dining behaviors and expectations. Central to this evolution is the quality of service delivered through these platforms, which significantly influences customer satisfaction, loyalty, and overall user experience. Service quality in the online food delivery context encompasses multifaceted dimensions, ranging from ordering interfaces to delivery logistics, each shaping consumer perceptions and behavioral intentions. Prassida et al. (2021) empirically demonstrated that service quality positively affects consumers' continuance intentions in O2O tourism, with customer satisfaction serving as a key mediating variable. In the domain of O2O food delivery, specific product attributes such as taste have been emphasized as critical determinants of perceived quality (Wang & Scrimgeour, 2021; Yang et al., 2021). However, the conceptual boundaries between product quality and service quality often blur within O2O commerce, particularly when service delivery is integral to product experience. A distinguishing characteristic of O2O commerce, as opposed to traditional e-commerce, is its dual-channel nature, combining both online and offline interactions. Consequently, researchers have attempted to differentiate service quality across these two channels; however, the definitional scope and operationalization of online and offline quality remain inconsistent across studies, reflecting the complexity and contextual variation inherent in O2O frameworks.

Measurement of Service Quality

The Online Food Delivery (OFD) sector has experienced exponential growth in recent years, with service quality emerging as a critical determinant of customer satisfaction and business sustainability. Service quality within the OFD context extends beyond the technical functionality of the ordering interface to encompass a range of interpersonal and logistical elements involving delivery personnel, platform providers, and food establishments throughout the fulfillment process (Chen, 2016; Banerjee et al., 2019; Verma, 2020). Key service dimensions such as reliability, assurance, and responsiveness originally articulated by Parasuraman et al. (1988) in the SERVQUAL model remain foundational to evaluating OFD service effectiveness.

Building on this foundation, the OFD-SERV scale integrates principles from the PZB (Parasuraman-Zeithaml-Berry) model and Resource-Based Theory (RBT), aligning with service triangle theory by incorporating both interactive and external marketing elements. Interactive marketing attributes include reliability, maintenance of meal quality and hygiene (MMQH), assurance, and traceability, while system operation and security reflect external marketing dimensions. This study, through synthesis of service characteristics unique to OFD and extant service quality frameworks including DINE-SERV, HD-SERV, E-S-QUAL, E-RecS-QUAL, and M-S-QUAL identified four comprehensive dimensions: Reliability, MMQH, Assurance, and System Operation. These dimensions offer a robust framework for evaluating OFD service performance in a digitalized, highly competitive environment.

- **Reliability:** refers to the consistent and accurate execution of promised services, encompassing both procedural accuracy and professional conduct by delivery personnel. This dimension is manifested when delivery agents maintain punctuality, uphold a courteous demeanor, and present themselves in clean and professional manner practices that reinforce perceptions of dependable service (Kim et al., 2009). Empirical studies have demonstrated that reliability exerts a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction within OFD environments (Banerjee et al., 2019; Cheng et al., 2021).

- **Maintenance of Meal Quality and Hygiene (MMQH):** refers to the capacity of service providers to preserve the integrity, safety, and sensory appeal of food items during the delivery process. Meal quality encompasses multiple sensory attributes, including taste, smell, appearance, and temperature, all of which are critical to ensuring customer satisfaction in food service contexts (Namkung & Jang, 2007). Hygiene, in particular, has emerged as a crucial determinant of consumers' behavioral intentions and actual engagement with OFD platforms. Al Amin et al. (2021) found that perceived food hygiene significantly influences both intention to use and continued usage of food delivery services. Given this, training delivery personnel to adhere strictly to hygiene protocols throughout the delivery process is essential for maintaining consumer trust and ensuring food safety (Mehroliya et al., 2020).

- **Assurance:** refers to the provider's capability to instill confidence and trust in customers throughout the service process. Customers typically assess assurance by evaluating the timeliness of food delivery, the accuracy of the order in terms of both items and quantities, and the fairness of pricing. Delivery personnel are expected to fulfill orders precisely as requested, ensuring prompt delivery without cancellation once an order is confirmed. The importance of assurance was further underscored during the COVID-19 pandemic, when consumers' expectations for reliable and accurate service heightened significantly. OFD providers were compelled to maintain high standards of order accuracy and delivery performance to meet these evolving demands (Zhao & Bacao, 2020).

- **System operation:** refers to the technological infrastructure's capacity to ensure a seamless, user-friendly experience for consumers engaging with Online-to-Offline (O2O) food delivery (OFD) services. A reliable ordering system enables users to search for meals, place orders, process payments, and track delivery progress in real time. The system's efficiency, clarity of interface, and quality of information are critical to enhancing customer satisfaction. As Pal et al. (2021) demonstrate, the visual and informational design of OFD applications significantly influences users' perceived ease of use, satisfaction, and ongoing loyalty. In addition, information quality including the accuracy, timeliness, and relevance of data has been identified as a key determinant in shaping positive consumer attitudes toward OFD platforms (Allah et al., 2021). Thus, the design and operation of OFD systems must prioritize intuitive navigation, transparency, and technical reliability to support the overall service quality.

Application of AHP in Evaluating Service Quality in O2O Food Delivery

The Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP), developed by Saaty (2001), is a robust multi-criteria decision-making methodology designed to address complex problems involving multiple interrelated components. AHP facilitates structured decision-making by decomposing a problem into a hierarchical framework comprising goals, criteria, sub-criteria, and alternatives. Through pairwise comparisons and matrix-based calculations, the method derives priority weights that reflect the relative importance of each element. This systematic quantification enables stakeholders to evaluate trade-offs and arrive at consistent, rational decisions, particularly in scenarios characterized by uncertainty and competing priorities.

The Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) model serves as a potent tool in addressing Multi-Criteria Decision Making (MCDM) challenges by breaking down complex problems into more manageable components. By facilitating the identification of the most appropriate decision and assigning weights to criteria, the AHP model proves invaluable. Although AHP has traditionally been applied in broader hospitality and logistics sectors, its application in O2O food delivery has gained traction due to the unique blend of digital interfaces and physical service execution. For example, studies by Lin et al. (2020) and Chen & He (2022) employed AHP to prioritize key success factors in mobile food delivery apps, identifying critical elements such as reliability, user experience, and delivery timeliness. These findings highlight AHP's effectiveness in pinpointing which criteria matter most to stakeholders and where improvements can yield the greatest impact. Applying AHP to the service quality evaluation of O2O food delivery from Michelin-affiliated restaurants in Bangkok is highly appropriate due to the complexity and high expectations involved. Bangkok, as a global food tourism destination, attracts a diverse consumer base seeking both culinary excellence and convenience. Michelin-recognized establishments engaging in O2O delivery must balance maintaining their in-house dining reputation with the limitations of third-party logistics and digital ordering systems.

Methodology

The Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) was selected for its systematic approach to evaluating and prioritizing multiple criteria in complex decision-making contexts. By structuring service quality factors hierarchically and enabling pairwise comparisons, AHP transforms subjective judgments into quantifiable insights, making it well-suited for analyzing O2O food delivery service quality (Saaty, 2001).

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the key determinants of service quality in O2O food delivery services in Bangkok. Data was collected using structured questionnaires administered to a representative sample of users, capturing their evaluations of service quality dimensions. To analyze these factors systematically, the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP), a widely recognized Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) method developed by Saaty (1988), was utilized. AHP facilitates logical decision-making by structuring complex problems into a hierarchical model, enabling the prioritization of criteria based on user judgments. Additionally, insights were drawn from Michelin-affiliated restaurant entrepreneurs to incorporate provider perspectives, thereby offering a comprehensive assessment of service quality system O2O delivery ecosystem.

Populations and Sample

The study's population consisted of 182 Michelin Star Restaurants located in Bangkok (Michelin Guide, 2023). The study explored the factors that influence service quality in O2O food delivery services. The population of entrepreneurs includes owners, managers, and key decision-makers from a variety of Michelin Star Restaurants in Bangkok. These entrepreneurs are responsible for overseeing

the operations, strategic planning, and quality standards of their respective restaurants in the competitive culinary landscape of Bangkok. The entrepreneurs' insights and perspectives are crucial for understanding the challenges, strategies, and influencing factors that impact service quality in O2O food delivery services. By focusing on entrepreneurs within the research population, the study aimed to capture in-depth insights from the supply side of the O2O food delivery ecosystem in the context of Michelin Star Restaurants in Bangkok. This perspective facilitates a clear understanding of the factors influencing service quality and supports the development of targeted strategies to enhance service standards and customer satisfaction in the online-to-offline food delivery sector.

Research Instrument

To collect quantitative data from entrepreneurs, the study utilized the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) through structured questionnaires. AHP is a decision-making tool that enables prioritization and comparison of multiple criteria by assigning weighted values based on respondents' preferences. Specifically, AHP-based questionnaires were developed for entrepreneurs affiliated with Michelin Star Restaurants in Bangkok to evaluate their perspectives on factors influencing service quality in O2O food delivery services. Respondents were instructed to perform pairwise comparisons of key service quality dimensions namely, reliability, maintenance of meal quality and hygiene (MMQH), assurance, and system operation based on their perceived significance within the O2O food delivery context. Utilizing a matrix table format, participants assigned importance weights on a seven-point scale, selecting the option that best represented their judgment (Saaty, 1988). This method enabled the systematic quantification and prioritization of relative weights among the service quality criteria.

Data Collection

In this study focused on enhancing O2O food delivery service quality through Michelin-affiliated restaurants in Bangkok, the sampling strategy targeted 50 Michelin-affiliated establishments. Data was successfully collected from 26 restaurants, resulting in a 52% response rate. The responses met the consistency requirement with a Consistency Ratio (CR) below 10% (Saaty, 1988), ensuring reliable and valid judgments from participants. This representative sample of entrepreneurs from Michelin-affiliated restaurants provides a strong basis for in-depth analysis of key service quality factors, supporting the development of effective strategies to improve O2O food delivery service quality in Bangkok's premium dining sector.

Data Analysis

The data collected from entrepreneurs affiliated with Michelin restaurants in Bangkok were analyzed using the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) to identify and prioritize the factors influencing service quality in O2O food delivery services. The AHP methodology enabled systematic pairwise comparisons among multiple service quality criteria, converting subjective judgments into quantitative weights that reflect the relative importance of each factor. Initially, consistency of respondents' judgments was assessed through the Consistency Ratio (CR), with a threshold of 0.10 (Saaty, 1988) applied to ensure reliability. Data sets exceeding this threshold were excluded from further analysis to maintain the validity of the results.

The study begins by defining the decision-making problem and establishing a hierarchical structure for evaluating service quality in O2O food delivery services. The hierarchical structure comprises four primary criteria: Reliability, Maintenance of Meal Quality and Hygiene (MMQH), Assurance, and System Operation. Each criterion is further subdivided into three to five specific sub-criteria, which represent distinct aspects of service quality relevant to the O2O food delivery context (Saaty, 1988). The sub-criteria include:

- **Reliability:** timely delivery, food freshness, accurate delivery location.
- **MMQH:** correct food temperature, appropriate packaging, hygiene compliance by delivery personnel.
- **Assurance:** courteous and well-groomed delivery personnel, clear communication.
- **System Operation:** clear workflow, secure payment, user-friendly system, real-time delivery tracking, communication channels.

Secondly, a judgment matrix was constructed by conducting pairwise comparisons of service quality factors within the same hierarchical level. This matrix facilitates the systematic evaluation of the relative importance of each criterion, enabling the derivation of priority weights through the Analytical Hierarchy Process (Saaty, 1988). We construct a judgment matrix $A = (a_{ij})_{n \times n}$, A is a positive and negative matrix, where $a_{ij} > 0$, $a_{ij} = 1$, $a_{ij} = 1/a_{ji}$. To construct the judgment matrix, we use both restaurant owners and customers as expert evaluation.

Third, once the judgment matrix AAA is constructed, its maximum eigenvalue ($\lambda_{\max}$) is calculated, and the corresponding eigenvector ($WAHPW_{\{AHP\}}WAHP$) is derived. This eigenvector is then normalized to determine the relative weights of the service quality factors at the same hierarchical level. Given the inherently subjective nature of these judgments, a consistency test is essential to ensure the robustness and credibility of the calculated weights.

Fourthly, we calculate the consistency index CI as follows:

$$C.I. = \frac{(\lambda_{\max} - n)}{(n - 1)}$$

where n is the order of the matrix (number of criteria or evaluators). To assess consistency, the CI is compared to the Random Consistency Index (RI), which depends on n , with standard RI values ranging from 0.00 to 1.45 for matrices of order 1 to 9.

Finally, the consistency ratio (CR) is calculated using the formula:

$$CR = CI/RI$$

A CR value of 0.10 or less is generally considered acceptable, indicating satisfactory consistency and reliability of the judgment matrix. Conversely, a CR greater than 0.10 suggests significant inconsistency, which may compromise the validity of the results. In such cases, the judgment matrix is deemed unreliable and requires revision to improve consistency.

Results

This study sought to identify and prioritize the key factors influencing service quality in online-to-offline (O2O) food delivery services offered by Michelin-affiliated restaurants in Bangkok, drawing on the insights of 26 expert entrepreneurs and their representatives. Employing the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP), the research systematically evaluated the relative importance of these factors to generate strategic recommendations for enhancing service quality within this premium market segment. Data collected through structured questionnaires were rigorously analyzed, and the results were discussed comprehensively.

Analysis of Main Criteria Importance in Decision-Making of Entrepreneurs

The results of the pairwise comparison matrices derived from 26 expert entrepreneurs affiliated with Michelin Star Restaurants in Bangkok are presented below. Based on a comprehensive review of existing literature, four critical criteria were identified for evaluating service quality in O2O food delivery: reliability, maintenance of meal quality and hygiene (MMQH), assurance, and system operation. Table 1 displays the initial 4×4 judgment matrix representing the comparisons among these main criteria. As presented in Table 1, all 26 respondents demonstrated acceptable levels of judgment consistency, with consistency ratio (CR) values ≤ 0.10 , satisfying the threshold recommended by Saaty (2001) for reliable pairwise comparisons in AHP analyses.

Table 1: The Consistency Ratio (CR) results of four main criteria

No.	C1	C2	C3	C4	CR
1	15%	56%	11%	18%	7.12%
2	21%	62%	13%	4%	9.25%
3	21%	62%	9%	8%	4.52%
4	39%	45%	10%	6%	6.50%
5	55%	30%	8%	7%	4.50%
6	33%	24%	24%	19%	5.73%
7	24%	57%	13%	7%	5.28%
8	36%	45%	12%	7%	7.65%
9	10%	61%	12%	17%	5.86%
10	31%	33%	31%	6%	0.53%
11	7%	31%	28%	34%	2.58%
12	7%	18%	20%	55%	8.51%
13	7%	31%	41%	21%	4.29%
14	7%	23%	51%	19%	4.33%
15	5%	38%	15%	41%	8.75%
16	13%	48%	22%	16%	5.80%
17	6%	52%	28%	15%	5.21%
18	41%	32%	10%	17%	9.82%
19	32%	32%	28%	7%	1.22%
20	12%	42%	16%	30%	9.98%
21	31%	31%	14%	24%	5.80%
22	17%	41%	32%	10%	9.82%
23	20%	59%	12%	10%	5.69%
24	9%	66%	10%	15%	8.47%
25	29%	39%	26%	6%	8.09%
26	33%	49%	9%	9%	3.36%
Average Weight	21%	43%	19%	17%	100%

The Consistency Ratio (CR) values for each comparison set were presented alongside the corresponding criteria weights to evaluate the consistency of judgments within the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) framework. The "average weight" column reflected the overall perceived importance of each criterion, with MMQH (Maintenance of Meal Quality and Hygiene) receiving the highest average weight at 43%, followed by Reliability (21%), Assurance (19%), and System Operation (17%). These CR results provided meaningful insights into the internal consistency of the respondents' evaluations, underscoring the structured decision-making process employed by entrepreneurs in the O2O food delivery sector.

Table 2: The average weights of the four main criteria, indicating their relative importance.

Main Criteria	Average Weight	Rank
C1: Reliability	21%	2
C2: Maintenance of Meal Quality and Hygiene (MMQH)	43%	1
C3: Assurance	19%	3
C4: System Operation	17%	4

Table 2 presented the analysis of the four main criteria (C1–C4), highlighting Maintenance of Meal Quality and Hygiene (MMQH) as the top priority with an average weight of 43%. Reliability and Assurance followed at 21% and 19%, while System Operation ranked lowest at 17%. The acceptable Consistency Ratio (CR) values confirm the reliability of these judgments. This hierarchy of importance provides practical insights for decision-makers to enhance service quality in O2O food delivery through Michelin-affiliated restaurants in Bangkok.

Analysis of Sub- Criteria Importance in Decision-Making of Entrepreneurs

Table 3: The average weights for the four sub-criteria under Main Criterion 1.

Sub- Criteria	Average Weight	Rank
SC 1.1: Food can be delivered at the time specified in the system.	17%	4
SC 1.2: The food received was fresh and appetizing	27%	2
SC 1.3 The deliverymen delivery food to the correct location	23%	3
SC 1.4: The deliverymen delivery food correctly according to the food ordered.	33%	1

Table 3, according to the average weight distribution, sub-Criteria 1.4 held the highest significance with a weight of 33% and ranked first. sub-Criteria 1.2 follows closely behind with 27% and ranks second. sub-criteria 1.3 was placed third with 23% weight, and sub-criteria 1.1 ranks fourth with an average weight of 17%. This ranking highlights the importance of ensuring accurate delivery of food according to the order in the overall customer satisfaction process.

Table 4: The average weights for the three sub-criteria under Main Criterion 2.

Sub-Criteria	Average Weight	Rank
SC 2.1: The food received was at the right temperature	41%	1
SC 2.2: Restaurants use packaging that is suitable for the type of food.	31%	2
SC 2.3: The deliverymen delivery food to the correct location.	28%	3

Table 4, this ranking indicated that sub-criteria 2.1: the food received was delivered at the right temperature held the highest significance with an average weight of 41% and ranks first. Following this, the suitability of packaging for the type of food used by restaurants ranks second with 31%, and delivery accuracy to the correct location ranks third with 28%. This analysis highlights the importance of maintaining food temperature during delivery to enhance customer satisfaction and experience.

Table 5: The average weights for the three sub-criteria under Main Criterion 3.

Sub- Criteria	Average Weight	Rank
SC 3.1: The deliverymen have good courteous and good manner.	42%	2
SC 3.2: The deliverymen are dressed clean and neat.	14%	3
SC 3.3: The deliverymen can communicate with customers accurately and clearly.	44%	1

Table 5, this analysis revealed that sub-criteria 3.3: the ability of delivery personnel to communicate accurately and clearly with customers held the highest significance, with an average weight of 44% and ranking first. Following this, the importance of deliverymen displaying good courtesy and manners ranks second with 42%, while being dressed neatly and cleanly ranks third with 14%. Effective communication with customers is identified as the most critical factor in ensuring a positive delivery experience and customer satisfaction.

Table 6: The average weights for the five sub-criteria under Main Criterion 4.

Sub- Criteria	Average Weight	Rank
SC 4.1: There is a clear sequence of work steps	24%	2
SC 4.2: It is safe to make payment.	29%	1
SC 4.3: The system is easy to use, simple and stable.	14%	5
SC 4.4: There is a system to check the delivery status in real time that is accurate and true to reality.	15%	4
SC 4.5: There is a communication channel both with restaurants and deliverymen.	19%	3

Table 6, the analysis indicated that sub-criteria 4.2 ensuring safety in making payments was of utmost importance, with an average weight of 29% and ranking first. Following this, having a clear sequence of work steps ranks second with 24%. Additionally, maintaining communication channels

with both restaurants and delivery personnel is ranked third with 19%, real-time delivery status checking system is fourth at 15%, and system usability stability is fifth at 14%. These results emphasize the significance of ensuring safe payment processes to enhance customer trust and satisfaction in the food delivery service.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that entrepreneurs affiliated with Michelin-starred restaurants in Bangkok prioritize specific service quality dimensions to ensure superior performance in O2O food delivery services. Among the four main criteria examined, Maintenance of Meal Quality and Hygiene (MMQH) emerged as the most critical factor. This aligns with prior literature, emphasizing the necessity for restaurants to maintain the integrity of meals during the delivery process to uphold brand reputation and meet consumer expectations (Chopra & Meindl, 2016; Wang & Xie, 2018). For Michelin-affiliated establishments, where brand image is closely tied to food quality, failure to maintain hygiene and presentation during last-mile delivery can significantly impact customer perception and repeat patronage.

Assurance also played a vital role in the service delivery chain. The emphasis on professional conduct, clear communication, and reliability of delivery personnel reflects the entrepreneurs' strategic intent to reinforce customer trust and ensure brand consistency. As supported by Liang and Du (2020), high standards of assurance can contribute to customer retention, especially in a competitive digital food delivery market. For Michelin-affiliated restaurants, where high service standards are a cornerstone of differentiation, the assurance factor supports the maintenance of a premium customer experience beyond the physical restaurant space.

In addition, System Operation was considered an essential enabler of efficiency and customer satisfaction. Entrepreneurs acknowledged the importance of having robust digital systems that facilitate smooth transactions, real-time tracking, and user-friendly interfaces. These operational components not only reduce errors and operational costs but also enhance the overall customer experience. This is consistent with the views of Liu and Chen (2019), who noted that effective system integration in O2O models improves operational excellence and supports business scalability.

Interestingly, while Reliability such as delivering food on time and accurately was valued, it was ranked lower than MMQH and Assurance. This may suggest that Michelin-affiliated restaurants already maintain a high baseline of reliability, thus placing greater strategic focus on quality preservation and professional interaction to differentiate themselves further in the O2O delivery landscape.

Overall, the insights derived from the perspectives of Michelin-affiliated entrepreneurs offer a nuanced understanding of service quality priorities in premium O2O food delivery. These findings not only validate the application of the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) in identifying key decision-making criteria but also provide practical implications for service design and strategy formulation. Enhancing MMQH, strengthening assurance mechanisms, and streamlining digital operations are critical pathways for maintaining competitive advantage and sustaining service excellence in Bangkok's high-end food delivery market.

Conclusion

This study investigated the critical dimensions of service quality affecting the performance of Online-to-Offline (O2O) food delivery services provided by Michelin-affiliated restaurants in Bangkok. Drawing upon expert evaluations from industry entrepreneurs, the research employed the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) to assess both primary and sub-criteria. The results offer strategic insights into the relative importance of each service quality factor, informing data-driven decision-making and the development of targeted improvements within the premium food delivery sector.

Among the four main criteria of service quality Maintenance of Meal Quality and Hygiene (MMQH), Reliability, Assurance, and System Operation MMQH was identified as the most influential, receiving the highest priority weight in the AHP analysis. This indicates a strong emphasis on maintaining food integrity during delivery, which is pivotal to customer satisfaction and brand reputation. Reliability and Assurance followed in importance, reflecting the entrepreneurs' concern for accurate service fulfillment and clear communication. System Operation, while still relevant, was weighted the lowest, suggesting it plays a more supportive but essential role in overall service quality.

At the sub-criteria level, the analysis provided further clarity. Entrepreneurs prioritized receiving food at the right temperature (SC2.1), accurate delivery of orders (SC1.4), clear communication by delivery personnel (SC3.3), and secure payment systems (SC4.2). These preferences reflect a consistent strategic orientation toward operational accuracy, quality assurance, customer trust, and data security.

These findings directly address the research questions by identifying the service quality criteria prioritized by Michelin-affiliated entrepreneurs and illustrating how their relative importance informs service improvement strategies. The hierarchical ranking of main and sub-criteria offers clear, practical guidance for businesses seeking to optimize their O2O food delivery processes. By emphasizing key factors such as meal quality, delivery accuracy, and communication, entrepreneurs can better align their operations with customer expectations and sustain a competitive advantage in the expanding O2O market.

Overall, this comprehensive evaluation provides actionable insights for Michelin-affiliated restaurants and other premium food service providers aiming to enhance O2O delivery performance. Aligning service strategies with these critical quality factors enables improved customer satisfaction, stronger market positioning, and sustainable growth within the evolving digital food delivery ecosystem. In summary, this study contributes both theoretical and practical value by deepening the understanding of service quality dynamics in O2O food delivery, guiding Michelin-affiliated restaurants in Bangkok to elevate service standards, foster customer loyalty, and expand their market presence amid increasing digitalization and consumer quality demands.

Research recommendations

To extend the contributions of this study, future research should adopt a broader and more inclusive framework to examine service quality dimensions within O2O food delivery contexts across diverse customer segments and service environments. While this research focused on the perspectives of Michelin-affiliated entrepreneurs in Bangkok, future studies should incorporate insights from other key stakeholders such as delivery personnel, platform operators, restaurant staff, and, most importantly, customers. Including diverse viewpoints will provide a more holistic understanding of service quality dynamics and help identify additional critical factors influencing the O2O delivery experience.

Moreover, future research should examine how these service quality criteria vary across different types of food service providers including non-Michelin restaurants and local vendors and across various geographic regions, both within Thailand and internationally. Such comparative analyses would allow for the generalization of findings and help adapt strategies to different market contexts. Longitudinal studies could also be valuable in tracking how service quality expectations evolve over time, particularly in response to technological advancements or external disruptions such as global health crises.

In addition, integrating new technologies into future studies such as AI-driven ordering systems, real-time tracking, and automated delivery solutions would offer insights into how innovation affects both operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. Methodologically, applying alternative decision-making tools such as TOPSIS, DEMATEL, or fuzzy AHP could enhance the robustness of service quality assessments and provide deeper analytical comparisons.

Lastly, future research should incorporate sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) dimensions into the service quality evaluation framework. As consumer preferences increasingly favor environmentally and socially responsible practices, understanding how sustainability influences service perception and brand loyalty has become essential (Lin et al., 2020; Han et al., 2021). Embedding sustainable practices into online-to-offline (O2O) food delivery services not only reflects shifting consumer expectations but also strengthens long-term customer engagement and enhances competitive advantage. Expanding the analytical scope in this manner will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of service quality in the digital food economy and support the formulation of more adaptive, ethical, and sustainable service strategies.

Acknowledgement

This research paper is partly funded by a research grant from the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce for the academic year 2024 on the title: ‘Influencing Factors of Service Quality of O2O (Online to Offline) Food Delivery Service in Bangkok with Analytical Hierarchy Process’ under Project Code. A09006/2023. Furthermore, this research obtained approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce on February 7, 2023, with certificate number UTCCEC/Exemp013/2023.

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INTEGRATED GOVERNANCE AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATION IN EVENT-DRIVEN URBAN DEVELOPMENT: EVALUATING SONGKHLA'S FESTIVAL SUPPORT ECOSYSTEM

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the role of integrated governance and community collaboration in supporting event-driven urban development, using the festival ecosystem in Songkhla, Thailand, as a case study. In recent years, cities across Southeast Asia have increasingly recognized the socio-economic potential of cultural festivals in driving urban regeneration, tourism, and community engagement (Richards & Palmer, 2010; Quinn, 2005). Festivals act as platforms for not only cultural expression but also inclusive development strategies that align with both policy objectives and local community aspirations. However, while the urban development impact of festivals has been documented in global contexts, limited research has examined how collaborative governance mechanisms function in the context of smaller Thai cities such as Songkhla. This study therefore addresses this gap by evaluating how local authorities, festival organizers, and community groups interact to shape a sustainable and inclusive event ecosystem.

A quantitative research design was employed to examine the perceptions and roles of multiple stakeholders involved in Songkhla's festival ecosystem. Data collection was conducted through structured online survey questionnaires distributed to local government officials, community leaders, event organizers, business owners, and festival participants. In total, 350 valid responses were gathered and analyzed using Descriptive Statistics, Pearson's Correlation, and Multiple Regression Analysis. Findings revealed that governance integration defined through inter-agency collaboration, clarity of roles, and policy coherence had a strong positive correlation with perceived festival success and long-term urban benefits. Moreover, community collaboration elements such as inclusive planning processes, volunteer engagement, and knowledge sharing were found to significantly influence both the perceived authenticity and sustainability of festivals, reinforcing their role as catalysts for urban development.

The study identified two primary dimensions of the festival support ecosystem that influence urban development outcomes in Songkhla: core governance structures and community-based support mechanisms. Key factors under core governance include strategic leadership from local authorities, transparent regulatory frameworks, and public-private partnerships for funding and logistics. On the community side, crucial factors include the active involvement of local residents in planning and operations, cultural knowledge integration, and the existence of grassroots networks to sustain festival initiatives beyond the event timeline. Conversely, infrastructural limitations such as inconsistent event venues, lack of technical support, and insufficient data on audience behavior were shown to limit the overall effectiveness of festivals as urban tools. The study suggests that cities like Songkhla could greatly benefit from a policy framework that formalizes stakeholder collaboration, ensuring that event-driven development is inclusive, resilient, and contextually grounded.

Keywords: Festival; Event; Governance; Community; Songkhla

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Purpose/Problem Statement

The aim of this research is to investigate integrated governance and community collaboration in the context of event-driven urban development, using Songkhla's festival support ecosystem as a case study. While previous studies have examined various aspects of cultural festivals such as visitor experience, tourism impact, and destination branding there remains a limited body of research that directly explores the mechanisms behind festival-based urban development, particularly in smaller Thai cities. In the case of Songkhla, festivals have become a significant tool for stimulating tourism, revitalizing public spaces, and reinforcing local identity. However, most existing research has focused on the outcomes of these events, rather than the governance frameworks and community partnerships that support them. This study seeks to address this gap by evaluating how collaboration between public institutions, private stakeholders, and community members contributes to the planning, execution, and sustainability of festivals. It offers a focused analysis of how integrated governance models and grassroots engagement can be harnessed to enhance the long-term effectiveness of event-led development strategies in urban contexts like Songkhla.

Originality/value

This research develops a framework to evaluate integrated governance and community collaboration in event-driven urban development, with a focus on Songkhla's festival support ecosystem. The framework identifies two key components essential for successful festival-based urban development: core governance structures and supporting collaborative elements. Core governance structures include strategic planning by local authorities, clearly defined roles among stakeholders, reliable funding mechanisms, and event-specific policies that align with broader urban development goals. These are complemented by supporting elements such as accessible infrastructure, local business engagement, community participation, and promotional strategies that enhance public awareness and inclusivity. In the context of Songkhla, the presence of vibrant cultural heritage and active local communities offers a strong foundation for festival development; however, long-term success depends on how well governance structures and community inputs are integrated. This framework aims to guide policymakers and planners in fostering event ecosystems that are both culturally rooted and strategically managed, contributing to sustainable urban growth.

Design/methodology/approach

This study employed a quantitative research approach to examine integrated governance and community collaboration within Songkhla's festival support ecosystem. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed to key stakeholders, including local government officials, event organizers, business owners, and community participants involved in festival planning and execution. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Findings provide empirical evidence supporting the role of structured governance and active community engagement in enhancing event-driven urban development.

Findings/Discussion

The results of this study revealed that the components of integrated governance and community collaboration had a moderate influence on the overall effectiveness of Songkhla's festival support ecosystem. Specifically, core governance elements such as transparent administrative processes, inter-agency coordination, availability of funding, and leadership from local authorities were moderately associated with stakeholder satisfaction and perceived festival success. Additionally, elements reflecting strong community collaboration such as local volunteer participation, cultural authenticity, and partnerships with community-based organizations showed a positive but moderate impact on the sustainability and social relevance of festival events. Conversely, aspects such as inconsistent safety protocols, limited diversity in festival programming, and gaps in stakeholder communication did not significantly influence perceived outcomes. Therefore, stakeholders engaged in Songkhla's festival development should prioritize broadening event diversity and improving communication strategies to better meet the expectations of various audience groups. Furthermore, while supporting factors like accessibility, accommodations, local amenities, and promotional efforts were found to influence success to a moderate degree, basic infrastructure such as road conditions, public utilities, and digital connectivity had no significant impact. As such, urban planners and local authorities should refocus efforts on enhancing foundational infrastructure to support the long-term scalability and efficiency of festival-driven development.

Theoretical implications

This study proposed a theoretical framework to evaluate the efficiency of integrated governance and community collaboration in event-driven urban development, using Songkhla's festival ecosystem as a case study. The framework consists of two key components: first, the development of the festival ecosystem in terms of core governance structures, including strategic planning, inter-agency coordination, and transparent management; and second, the development of the ecosystem in terms of supporting collaborative elements, such as local community engagement, accessibility, amenities, and promotional efforts. Together, these components provide a foundation for understanding how coordinated governance and active community participation contribute to the sustainability and success of urban festivals.

Practical implications

The findings of this study on integrated governance and community collaboration in Songkhla's festival support ecosystem can be applied by tourism stakeholders, local event organizers, business owners, and government sectors to strengthen event-based urban development. By utilizing the proposed framework, these stakeholders can better respond to the needs of festival participants, enhance coordination across sectors, and promote a cohesive and culturally rich image of Songkhla as a festival destination. The results offer practical guidance for building more effective event strategies that reflect local identity, support community involvement, and contribute to the long-term growth of urban tourism.

Social implications (Policy contribution)

Based on the findings of this study, developers and local authorities involved in Songkhla's festival ecosystem should formulate clear policies and improve strategic plans to guide event-driven urban development. This includes establishing a centralized coordinating body or festival committee to serve as the main organizer, ensuring consistent leadership and long-term vision. Additionally, fostering regional and international partnerships through festival networks can help expand Songkhla's visibility, attract diverse audiences, and strengthen its position as a cultural tourism hub. Such efforts would support a more structured, collaborative, and sustainable approach to festival development in the city.

Research limitations

Future research on Songkhla's festival support ecosystem could benefit from in-depth studies that gather insights directly from festival attendees, local entrepreneurs, and government officials to better understand their perspectives and experiences. Such qualitative investigations would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in event-driven urban development, enabling more tailored and effective strategies.

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ECO-FRIENDLY HOMESTAY PRACTICES: ARCHITECTURAL TRANSFORMATION FOR INCLUSIVE, ELDERLY-FRIENDLY TOURISM IN YOGYAKARTA, INDONESIA

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Abstract

Sustainability and inclusivity are critical in the tourism industry, particularly in homestays, given the aging global population and increasing environmental concerns. This is especially relevant for elderly tourists, who often prefer a family-like atmosphere and nostalgic traditional cuisine. Ensuring accessibility in homestays is particularly important for elderly guests, including those who use wheelchairs. However, not all homestays in the tourist village develop by implementing elderly-friendly tourism. This study examines how sustainable architectural design can contribute to eco-friendly homestays catering to elderly tourists in a tourism village in Yogyakarta. A qualitative research approach, including observations and interviews, was conducted with homestay owners and elderly tourists. This research found that biophilic design principles, such as maximizing natural light, ventilation, and greenery that can improve guest well-being while minimizing environmental impact. Ensuring inclusivity in the conversion of private homes into homestays involves providing barrier-free access through ramps, non-slip flooring, wide doors, and ergonomic furniture. Smart home technologies, including voice-activated lighting and emergency warning systems, enhance safety and comfort. Communal spaces with accessible layouts encourage social interaction while maintaining privacy. Converting private homes into homestays not only provides economic benefits for owners but also creates valuable opportunities for tourists to engage with the local community. This design contributed as effective methods for implementing eco-friendly architecture in homestays that prioritize the efficient use of sustainable materials. Additionally, integrating green building principles with age-friendly design can enhance the competitiveness of homestays by attracting elderly tourist who seek sustainability and comfort. Implementing these strategies is expected to help homestay owners reduce their environmental impact while fostering a more inclusive and responsible tourism industry.

Keywords: Eco-friendly Homestay; Elderly-friendly Design; Green Architecture; Inclusive; Sustainable Tourism

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THE IMPACTS OF OIL PALM CULTIVATION TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

The palm oil industry plays a crucial role in global economies but presents significant environmental challenges regarding sustainability. This systematic literature review investigates the environmental impacts of palm oil cultivation, focusing on deforestation, biodiversity loss, and pollution. The expansion of oil palm plantations has resulted in extensive deforestation, threatening diverse flora and fauna, disrupting ecosystems, and exacerbating climate change through increased carbon emissions. Habitat destruction and fragmentation lead to severe biodiversity loss, further endangering ecological balance. Additionally, pollution from industrial activities intensifies environmental degradation. This review evaluates efforts to promote sustainable palm oil production, such as the establishment of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) and emphasizes the necessity of balancing economic development with environmental conservation. The socio-economic dimensions of palm oil production are also explored, including labor shortages, land conflicts, and the engagement of local communities in sustainable practices. The findings highlight the critical importance of collaborative efforts among stakeholders to mitigate the negative impacts of palm oil cultivation and foster long-term environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Palm oil cultivation, Environmental challenges, Sustainability, Systematic Literature Review, Stakeholders

Introduction

The palm oil industry is one of the primary economic pillars worldwide (Chiriaco et al., 2022). Authorities bear significant responsibility in fostering the development of the palm oil industry to sustain its role as a key economic contributor in every country. To meet the escalating demand, there's a necessity to expand oil palm plantations through new plantings. However, it's crucial to acknowledge that palm oil cultivation can impact the environment to a certain extent. The environment is one of the most critical natural resources for human ecological, economic, and social well-being (Henderson, & Loreau, M., 2023). This is because the environment encompasses the flora and fauna that stabilize ecosystems, safeguard human health and the provision of natural resources, and ensure the survival of future generations (Raj, A. et al., 2019). However, this often involves extensive deforestation, which has drawn criticism and negative reports from global stakeholders towards the palm oil industry.

According to Kleinschmit and Sjöstedt (2014), the focus on deforestation issues in European news serves as a medium to express concerns about these activities. Deforestation not only affects humans but also impacts animals. Around 250 million people live in the Savanna Forest area and depend on it for their livelihoods. Most of them are poor people in remote areas, and 80 percent of animals and plants rely on the forest as their habitat. Deforestation threatens fauna species such as orangutans, Sumatran tigers, and bird species. Tree felling disrupts the canopy layer of the forest, which blocks sunlight during the day and retains heat at night. This disruption leads to temperature changes that can harm plants and animals. In terms of climate change, deforestation adds carbon dioxide to the air and hampers existing carbon dioxide levels (Nunez, 2019).

Omran and Schwarz-Herion (2020) stated that palm oil production has resulted in massive deforestation over the years as land is cleared. The worldwide production of palm oil is an important factor in deforestation and the thinning of agricultural land (Meijaard et al., 2020). The Fakt News, a major news in Poland, through the headline *Znany producentów chipsów zmienia ich skład* or famous potato food producer changes their composition by stating that palm oil extraction is highly controversial where during its cultivation, many rainforests in Indonesia and Malaysia have been destroyed (McFarland B. J., 2018). The Guardian UK, in its article titled *How the world got hooked on palm oil*, reported that Friends of the Earth UK has released a detailed report on the deforestation rates from palm oil production. Widespread opposition has raised concerns among producers due to continuous deforestation potentially harming their reputation. Therefore, the World Wildlife Federation, which began efforts to explore the possibility of sustainable palm oil in 2001, has successfully convinced a small number of palm growers, producers, and retailers to establish the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), which functions in developing and implementing global sustainability standards for palm oil.

Brundtland Report (1987) stated sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Furthermore, the concept of sustainability is a mechanism that can be linked to all aspects of development or transformation that occur among societies (Hasna, 2007). However, in the context of palm oil, there are three (3) elements - social, economic, and environmental sustainability or conservation - that need to be given primary focus in achieving sustainability for the sake of both current and future generations. According to Yaacob et al. (2013), air pollution, water pollution, and deforestation through large-scale forest clearing have become issues that have received media attention. Therefore, the researcher aims to study the challenges in the sustainability of the palm oil industry, as well as efforts in environmental conservation and preservation.

Research Methodology

Research methodology is a method and technique of designing, collecting, and analyzing data to produce evidence supporting a study. Methodology describes how a problem is studied and why certain methods and techniques are used (Siti Sarah, 2015). The purpose of the methodology is to help understand more broadly or in more detail about the application of the method by making a description of the research process.

In this article, the researchers used the secondary data collection method. Secondary data refers to the initialization of data by making reading material the content to be discussed (Mazhar, S. A. et al., 2021). According to Mazhar et al (2021) again methods of collection of secondary data usually use sources of published data such as various publications of central, state, or local government, publications of foreign government and international societies, business industries, banks, stock exchanges,

and reports, trade journals, books, magazines, and newspapers, reports prepared by research scholars, universities, economists and public record, statistical and historical document. Sometimes we can use information already stored in a database, so we don't have to find the data. Databases are simply organized lists of data

- the list of learners at a school is a kind of database. Databases can be computerized, books, or paper filing systems. A big advantage of these is that the data is already organized and is easy to access.

For some social research questions, it is possible to use data collected earlier by other researchers or for other purposes than research such as official statistics, administrative records, or other accounts kept routinely by organizations. By being achieved and made available, any primary data can serve as secondary data (Hox and Boeijs, 2005). Using secondary data from the present researcher must follow some rules or steps. Firstly, the researcher must locate a data source that may be useful given their research problem. Secondly, retrieve the relevant and suitable data that can be used in the writing finally Hox and Boeijs (2005) say that it is important to evaluate how well the data meets the quality requirement of the current research and the methodological criteria. Therefore, to obtain data on preserving the environment and the palm oil industry, the researcher has collected articles from academic journals such as Academia, Google Scholar, Researchgate, and ScienceDirect. As a result of the literature review, researchers were able to gather data related to the challenges faced in efforts to preserve the environment and the palm oil industry.

Literature review

a.) Sustainability Development

According to Lim & Osman (2020), in this era of globalization, sustainable or sustainable development has different meanings to those who have different interests. This principle is not only limited to the preservation of the environment and its resources but also includes the management of human and financial resources as well as physical development. Awareness of sustainable development began in 1987 which was pioneered by the Brundtland Report (UNWCED), then received recognition from the Rio de Janeiro Summit in 1992. Subsequently, the World Conference on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002 also strengthened the agenda of this concept by bringing the world's attention to the challenges and importance of sustainable development.

The definition of sustainable development based on the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) (1987) is "Development that meets the needs of the present generation without neglecting the ability of future generations to meet their needs". In general, the term sustainability was originally used to emphasize the preservation of natural resources. Sustainability means the ability to maintain something, ensure or extend existence. This initial concept of sustainability is further developed by taking ecological theory as the basis for sustainable development. Then it was expanded further by taking into account the technical, management, economic, social, humanitarian, cultural, ethical and institutional dimensions (Ramli and Idris, 2016).

b.) Environmental Sustainability

In "The Concept of Environmental Sustainability," Robert Goodland substantiates a history documenting this need, presenting proponents ranging from Mill and Malthus to Meadows and Brundtland et al., and puts forth a definition of "environmental sustainability as the maintenance of natural capital" and as a concept apart from, but connected to, both social sustainability and economic sustainability. These arguments are not repeated here but rather accepted as valid, supported, and used as a basis from which to proceed to further develop this concept. Some scholars tend to explain that the way to understand and use of the word "environmental" quite often tends to be associated with some kind of human impact on natural systems. This context distinguishes it from the word "ecological," which can be characterized as a concept of interdependence of elements within a system (John M., 2011).

The basic understanding of the term "environmental sustainability" outlined in this paper essentially expands our common perception of human activity to more clearly connect it with the ecological concept of interdependence, thus delineating the boundaries of this use of "sustainability" to correspond to the overlay of human activity upon the functioning of the supporting ecosystem. Meanwhile,

according to Sutton (2004), environmental sustainability is the ability to maintain the qualities that are valued in the physical environment. For example, human life, the capabilities that the natural environment has to maintain the living conditions for people and other species (eg. Clean water and air, a suitable climate), the aspects of the environment that produce renewable resources such as water, timber, fish, solar energy, the functioning of society, despite non-renewable resource depletion and the quality of life for all people, the livability and beauty of the environment. Besides that, environmental sustainability programs include actions to reduce the use of physical resources, the adoption of a 'recycle everything/buy recycled' approach, the use of renewable rather than depletable resources, the redesign of production processes and products to eliminate the production of toxic materials, and the protection and restoration of natural habitats and environments valued for their livability or beauty.

c.) Palm Oil Industry and its significance

Palm oil is one of the most traded agricultural commodities in the world. Global palm oil production is increasing every year, prompted largely by expanding biofuel markets in the European Union (European Commission 2006) and by food demand in India and China (Clay, J. 2004). Besides that, palm oil is one of the most important vegetable oils in the world and each year million tonnes of palm oil have been traded globally to be consumed by millions of people around the world. The industry has evolved dramatically and hence produced varieties of products such as crude palm oil, palm kernel oil, palm kernel cake, oleo-chemical as well as new biofuel products to fulfill the demand. However, the rapid development in this industry creates many questions on the issues of sustainable development of palm oil.

In Malaysia, the palm oil industry has been an important agriculture sector in the economy for the past three decades. The important role of this industry to Malaysia's economy is not only because Malaysia depends substantially on oil palm for its foreign exchange earnings, but also because palm oil has been used as a development tool in poverty alleviation programs for the past three decades. The palm oil industry particularly in the Southeast Asia region suffered various criticisms and negative reports from the global NGOs to discredit palm oil. The whole industry must face the growing accusations made by NGOs about the potential impact of palm oil plantations on the environment and people. However, the palm oil industry particularly in Southeast Asia regions is being pressured by the international NGOs to prevent the deforestation activities. In Malaysia palm oil is the most important agricultural commodity in the country and contributes substantially to the economy. Unfortunately, the Malaysian palm oil industry is also being accused of conducting unsustainable practices in developing this industry. These continuous pressures might affect the well-being of this industry in the future.

Findings and discussion

1.1 The challenges of sustaining the environment

A study by Arora et al (2018) titled Environmental Sustainability: challenges and viable solutions is research to identify the challenges faced in the effort to achieve environmental sustainability. Since the last century or so anthropogenic activities have intensely metamorphosed the earth's ecosystem and resulted in major environmental changes. Widespread interference with human-related activities has resulted in major problems including environmental pollution, land degradation, global warming/climate change, paucity of potable water supply, and biodiversity loss. These issues have directly affected the quality and sustainability of the ecosystems. In addition, these activities have resulted in the loss of habitats resulting in a mass extinction of species which is a matter of great concern. Environmental issues are the main challenges faced to ensure environmental sustainability can be achieved. Many environmental issues are still not being addressed by the government and the relevant parties, whether in Malaysia or the rest of the world. Several serious problems related to the environment are plaguing the planet at present and these have very serious impact on the biological forms. The most striking issues of the environment are discussed in this section.

Deforestation

Deforestation can be defined as the process of general disruption of the forest ecosystem that occurs when trees are cut on a large scale. It also refers to any process that alters an original tree cover, which includes felling of all trees on a site, thinning a forest and setting bush on fire. Trees are cut down by people for various reasons, examples include trees being cut down and used or sold as fuel in the form of charcoal and sometimes it can be used as pastures for livestock, building of houses and settlements etc (Oladipo, E., 2015). The removal of trees without adequate planting or reforestation can result in loss of biodiversity, habitat and aridity. Besides that, deforestation is a severe crisis that continually threatens many of the earth's delicate ecosystem. One of the major reasons is corruption at the government institutions whereby wealth and power are used in harvesting the riches of the forest.

Based on Assoua and Molua (2018) about Opportunities and Challenges of Sustainable Forest Management for a Green Economy Transition in Cameroon, the main challenge for sustainable forest and environmental management was deforestation. In Cameroon's case, Cameroon's forested area is declining both in absolute terms (deforestation) and in net terms (taking account of forest planting and natural expansion). Trends for different types of forests are also important. Over half of the country's historic forest cover has been lost. Between 1980 and 1995 nearly 2 million hectares of forest vanished (GFW, 2000). Although at a much slower rate today than in previous years, the situation still calls for urgent action. Another challenge identified is policy, governance, and market failures. Market failure arises from the fact that not all of the important ecosystem services provided by Cameroon's forests are monetized and captured in national, regional, and international markets. Cameroon's forestry authorities have sought to secure these other ecosystem services of forests through the designation of protected areas (PAs), restricting the exploitation of timber or access, and through regulations on timber harvesting and forest management (e.g. Forest Management Plans (FMPs). Agricultural expansion, often combined with timber extraction and the expansion of infrastructure, has been the main cause of deforestation in Cameroon over the years. The pressure on forest assets is overwhelming.

Meanwhile, Chakravarty et al. (2012) in paper titled Deforestation: Causes, Effects and Control Strategies indicate that deforestation is the conversion of forest to an alternative permanent non-forested land use such as agriculture, grazing or urban development (van Kooten and Bulte, 2000). Deforestation is primarily a concern for the developing countries of the tropics (Myers, 1994) as it is shrinking areas of the tropical forests (Barraclough and Ghimire, 2000) causing loss of biodiversity and enhancing the greenhouse effect (Angelsen et al., 1999). The causes for this issue was expansion of farming land where 60 per cent of the clearing of tropical moist forests is for agricultural settlement (Myers, 1994; Anon., 1991) with logging and other reasons like roads, urbanization and Fuelwood accounting for the rest (Anon., 1994b). Tropical forests are one of the last frontiers in the search for subsistence land for the most vulnerable people worldwide (Myers, 1992). Millions of people live on the tropical forest with less than a dollar a day where a third of a billion are estimated to be foreign settlers. However, as the land degrades people are forced to migrate, exploring new forest frontiers increasing deforestation (Wilkie et al., 2000). Deforestation is proxied by the expansion of agricultural land. This is because agricultural land expansion is generally viewed as the main source of deforestation contributing around 60 per cent of total tropical deforestation.

Biodiversity Loss

Global biodiversity loss is primarily due to the degradation and destruction of natural habitats. Habitat loss alone is not a single process and is always associated with fragmentation. Various natural, and anthropogenic activities, land use pattern alteration have caused fragmentation or loss of habitats. Constant transformation of natural habitat into isolated and smaller fragments with spatially distributed patches is known as habitat fragmentation (Kumari & Deepali, 2021). The fragmentation has the capacity to cause persistent damages to the entire forest ecosystem causing long-term damage in the functioning of remaining fragments that result in species extinctions. Kumari and Deepali (2021) also said that the exploitation of croplands, pastures, plantations, and urban areas, has caused alterations in 50% of our natural vegetation. The world forest's tree cover has declined extensively in its geographic area, as against the recommended requirement for contributing ecological stability. This affects endemic species and causes the complete elimination of entire taxonomic groups.

Environmental Pollution

One of the main challenges is pollution. Environmental pollution is a global menace influencing every nook and corner of the earth. All types of life forms are in one way or the other affected by the impact of pollution. Organisms living at poles or deep under the sea, where humans do not even inhabit are also impacted by the effects of pollution. In the last few decades, various types of pollutants have appeared due to anthropogenic activities, adversely affecting the ecosystems (Rockström et al. 2018). Conditions in developing countries are more debilitating as rampant industrialization, high rates of deforestation and urbanization are deteriorating the ecosystems. Global environmental pollution is regarded as one of the significant drivers of biodiversity loss by disrupting the earth's ecosystem causing the extinction of species and their habitat (Lotze et al, 2006). In developing countries, pollution is damaging due to overpopulation and uncontrolled urbanization along with the development of industrialization resulting in loss of biodiversity or species extinction (Pinto et al., 2003). Amongst all pollution, air pollution is the most damaging one in terms of biodiversity loss, as it influences the quality of water and soil. This affects the overall soil quality and properties, resulting in an adverse effect on crop and food productivity.

Global Warming and Climate Change

Climate change and global warming also pose a lot of problems to the environment. This is because the climate of the earth is controlled by various factors such as the output of energy from the sun, volcanic eruptions, concentration of GHGs in the atmosphere, and aerosols. There is no doubt that the global climate is changing continuously, particularly since the Industrial Revolution. Besides that, Due to increase in anthropogenic activities such as industrialization, urbanization, deforestation, modern agriculture practices, change in land use pattern and many more, climate change is now occurring at a very fast pace (Mahato 2014). Climate change usually refers to changes over time in variables such as precipitation, and wind, with temperature as the focus (Parry et al. 2007).

Meanwhile, Burton's (2019) paper titled *The Scope and Challenge of Sustainable Forestry* was about the scope and challenge of achieving Sustainable Forest and also the environment. Forestry is the management of tree-dominated ecosystems to promote selected values. It is an ancient practice, an applied science, and an inherently human-focussed activity. In other words, forest management is ultimately the management of human activities concerning forests. Forests and the trees that characterize them developed long before the human species came into existence, they have fluxed and waned with changing climates and have recovered or re-organized themselves after numerous natural disturbances.

Furthermore, global warming includes anthropogenically made climatic and ecological issues which includes clear climatic temperature shifts and precipitation management. In some areas, this can be seen in sea level rise, stratospheric ozone depletion, atmospheric effluence and forest degradation. Tropical forests are shrinking at an alarming rate of about 5% per decade as forests are cleared to provide local, national and world marketers for wood products, biofuels and agricultural turnouts (Anon, 2007).

Land Degradation

Based on a paper by Panayiotis and Nikoleta Jones (2021) about *Protected Areas in Forest Conservation: Challenges and Opportunities* shows there are challenges and opportunities to maintain the Protected Areas. Normally, forest ecosystems are important habitats for a vast number of species worldwide. These ecosystems are degrading faster than they are regenerating, due to the increased demand for natural resources and the continued application of non-sustainable practices by humans. The world's population would reach beyond the level of 8.9 billion (UN, 2004) by the 2050s. As a population is expanding extensively, the current practice could lead to the conversion of another 1 billion hectares of natural habitat into agricultural land. The world population explosion has resulted in increased per capita demand for food, timber, wood fuels, fodder, biomass, decorations, shelter, and clothes. This has caused severe repercussions on nature, vegetation, forest cover, and biodiversity. This exerts pressure on the limited land that will lead to doubling/tripling of nitrogen and phosphorus usage and 3-fold increase in pesticide usage. The disproportionate use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in soil results in soil degradation and erosion (Scherr, S. J., & McNeely, J. A., 2008). The use of fire to clear forests, ground debris for agriculture showed a major influence on the forests as it allows other invasive species to invade and out-compete them for light and nutrients. These forest fires are more damaging for native plant species.

Collaboration between Government, Stakeholders and Local Communities.

A study by Normah et al (2013) entitled "Sustainable Forest Management in Lower Kinabatangan, Sabah: Issues and Current Practices." explores the views of the three main stakeholders (Government, Private Sector, and Local Community) related to issues related to the environment, current methods of forest management and factors that affect SFM in Lower Kinabatangan. In this study, the researcher has used a quantitative approach, and data is obtained through a questionnaire distributed to a stratified sample of the target population of stakeholders. Data analysis revealed several similarities and differences in stakeholders' viewpoints. Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) is increasingly being used to maintain a balance between social, economic and environmental development. In line with this, the successful implementation of SFM depends on the involvement of all stakeholders, especially the involvement of the community. However, in the Lower Kinabatangan area, not all stakeholders, especially the community, are involved in the decision-making process in forest management.

There are several challenges faced by stakeholders and communities in conserving the forest in Lower Kinabatangan. Among them, there are palm oil companies from outside that buy wooded land from villagers to open palm oil plantations. The locals think it is more profitable to give their land to small oil palm plantations. The impact of a possible change to private land use on wildlife and biodiversity in the area would be severe as forest land would be affected. In addition, another challenge faced by the community is the dispute between the community and the foreign immigrants. Increasing job opportunities in the oil palm industry have attracted more people to the Kinabatangan district over the past few years. However, most of those employed are foreign immigrants (Payne, 1997) with almost the entire farm labor force consisting of foreign workers such as Indonesians and Filipinos, most of whom are foreigners (Azmi, 1996). The influx of large numbers of migrants into the Kinabatangan district has created problems related to forest conservation. In addition to that, the lack of cooperation among stakeholders has also created problems in forest conservation in Lower Kinabatangan.

1.2 The challenge of sustaining the palm oil industry

The oil palm tree (*Elaeis guineensis* Jacq), an indigenous crop cultivated in West Africa, is a leading tropical vegetable oil worldwide. In the early 1870's the British brought the African oil palm to Malaysia as an ornamental plant. Palm oil is one of the leading vegetable oils produced globally, accounting for one-quarter of global consumption and approximately 60% of international trade in vegetable oils (World Bank, 2010). However, the palm oil industry leads to a lot of issues, especially to the environment. There is study from Yudi (2017) about Issues and Solutions Palm Oil Industry in Indonesia. To make sure the sustainable palm oil industry can be achieved all the challenges must be solved. Indonesia is one of the chief producers of oil and has already mastered 37% of the world market. While having a positive development in the production of palm oil, Indonesia often receives negative issues against the palm oil industry such as the destruction of forests and biodiversity. All parties cannot deny that in order to ensure that the palm oil industry develops and is able to help improve the economy of a country, forests have to be explored for the purpose of opening palm oil plantations. Besides that, other challenges are food security, agrarian conflicts, and natural resources.

Labor Shortage

In Alam et al (2015) article about Malaysia's Palm Oil Industry: Prospect and Problem, major contemporary issues and challenges are labor shortages. The number of workers employed in the oil palm plantation is insufficient and gives birth to complexities related to both economic and social factors despite the fact the Malaysian government has been devising development initiatives with multiple purposes for ensuring the growth of the plantation industry. The total labor pool, according to a 2012 report, is comprised of roughly 491,000 workers, most of them are foreign workers mostly from Indonesia, to look after approximately 675 million palm trees occupying 5.0 million hectares of land of which 4.3 million hectares of land is occupied by mature trees and the rest is occupied by immature ones. Besides that, biodiversity is also one of the challenges because Oil palm cultivation is a threat to the loss of biodiversity through the adverse effects it has had on the biodiversity is far less than other lower-yielding vegetable oil crops. Cultivated as a monocrop, oil palm causes loss of biodiversity when native vegetation is replaced with it. However, during its productive life span of around 25 years, palm plantations let grow other vegetation in the lower ground and maintains the equilibrium of the environment by allowing wild animals and bird species in the plantation areas. As palm plantation requires less destruction and conversion of forests compared to its lower-yielding oilseed peers, it is considered to have a less negative effect on the loss of biodiversity.

Crowley, M. Z. (2020) says that according to the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB), Malaysia's primary authority on sector data, in 2010, an estimated 69 percent of industry employees were foreign workers (Abdullah, Azman, and Rahman, 2011). This increased to 76.5 percent in 2012 (Azman 2013) and 78 percent by 2015, prompting researchers and industry practitioners to assert that "oil palm plantations in Malaysia are too dependent on foreign workers, notably from Indonesia" (Azman, Ahmad, and Sharudin, 2015). MPOB reported that the industry was nearly 50,000 workers short of covering the approximately 4.19 million ha of planted land in 2010 (Abdullah, Azman, and Rahman, 2011). Plantation land had increased to 5.74 million ha by 2016 with fewer workers seeking agricultural sector employment, further exacerbating the shortage of harvesting labor. Losing Indonesian workers causes several problems on plantations, notably language barriers and productivity loss. Most Indonesians can understand the national language Bahasa Melayu because of its close similarity to Bahasa Indonesian. This is not often the case for other nationalities, who have no choice but to learn the language quickly or rely on minimal English to communicate (Alam, Er, and Begum 2015). Many Indonesian workers also have previous plantation experience, which other nationalities rarely have; therefore, cost of training is another concern associated with changing laborer demographics (Mahbob 2010).

Plant Infection

Plant infection can be a challenge that is very hard to solve because *Ganoderma*, a soil-borne fungus, is an increasing concern for those who operate plantations in Malaysia as it causes infection to oil palm trees. *Ganoderma* is a wood-decaying fungus that can affect different types of trees, including oil palms. A disease called basal stem rot (BSR) can be infected by *Ganoderma*. A drastic fall in the production of FFB is reported when infected by this fungus along with wilting or desiccation of leaves of palm trees. Another symptom of this fungal infection is that the exterior of the trunk forms conk-shaped mushroom bodies which also affect nearby soils and trees. Fungal threads caused by spores released from mushroom bodies grow over the roots of the oil palm tree and their tissue is penetrated by these threads. The fungus causes decay of palm trunk tissue when it moves to the lower section of the trunk near the soil line, increasing gradually in size and spreading high up at the center of the trunk.

Based on Anuar et al. (2022) paper about Significant Oil Palm Diseases Impeding Global Industry: A Review explains that the palm oil industry faces significant challenges related to plant infections, which can severely impact palm oil production. Plant diseases such as basal stem rot (BSR), *Fusarium* wilt, *Phytophthora* bud rot, *Pestalotiopsis* leaf spot, common spear rot, orange spotting, and upper stem rot (USR) have been classified as the major diseases of oil palm in terms of economic importance. In crop cultivation, pests, and diseases inevitably invade and significantly impact healthy plants. Oil palm is no exception, being susceptible to various pathogens, including fungi, bacteria, viroids, and viruses (Monge Pérez et al. 1993; Pornsuriya et al. 2013; Poromarto 2020; Sheong et al. 2018; Widiastuti et al. 2018). These diseases typically reduce oil palm yield and hinder healthy growth (Chung 2012). A total of 32 diseases and disorders affecting oil palm have been documented in Southeast Asia, Africa, and South America (Aderungboye 1977).

Basal stem rot (BSR) is recognized as the most severe and destructive disease affecting oil palm in Southeast Asia, especially in Indonesia and Malaysia (Assis et al. 2016; Muniroh et al. 2014; Munthe & Dahang 2018; Susanto et al. 2005). The disease has been estimated to cause yield losses exceeding 40%, potentially reaching up to 80%, significantly increasing total yield loss by reducing both the weight and number of fresh fruit bunches (FFB) (Assis et al. 2016; Priwiratama & Susanto 2014). In Malaysia, BSR is projected to result in the loss of over 400,000 hectares of mature oil palm (Roslan & Idris 2012).

Conflict Between the Palm Oil Industry and Local Communities

Herningtyas, W. (2021) The conflict between the palm oil industry and local communities is a multifaceted issue involving economic, social, and environmental factors. Conflicts have a direct impact on the community and can be a threat to production resources such as agricultural land, and fishing grounds as well as the results of timber and non-timber, forced evictions of settlements, horizontal conflicts among residents, the loss of the site as well as the existence of local culture and arrests and criminalization of society and traditional leaders as well as environmental pollution that impact disease and disruption of ecosystems. The conflict of palm oil companies with indigenous people and the surrounding forest community was distributed into four types.

Firstly, was the conflict related to land acquisition and HGU permits. Problems in type 1 began with the company's land acquisition process. This started once the company obtained a location permit from the local government, even before securing the HGU (Right to Cultivate) from the National Land Agency (BPN). The extended duration of the Right to Cultivate permit enabled corrupt practices, such as the company seizing locals' land under the pretense of already having the Right to Cultivate. Frequent issues in type 1 included overlapping land claims. Several articles analyzed in this research highlight these cases, which often arose due to unprocedural legal permits for obtaining the Right to Cultivate. Overlapping land claims led to locals losing their farming jobs, despite legal procedures requiring companies to compensate for agricultural land, housing, and other necessities. This compensation was frequently neglected. Moreover, when locals harvested forest crops to meet their daily needs, the company accused them of theft. To mitigate land conflicts between the company and the community, a regional boundary agreement was established. However, the company often planted beyond these boundaries on community land. In abandoned land conflicts, overlapping land legality issues arose between companies holding HGU and community members with legal evidence such as Land Ownership Titles (SHM), Certificates of Land Ownership (SKT), Certificates of Land Cultivation (SKTG), solid confirmation from farmers' associations, and land and building tax payment receipts. Another solution proposed was land compensation, but the compensation for agricultural land was often undervalued.

Secondly, Type 2 was the conflict related to plasma plantation development and land compensation which would be used for plasma plantation. The construction of plasma plantations is considered an obligation for companies once they obtain their Right to Cultivate. However, this often leads to several problems, delaying development. A significant issue is the location of these plantations, which has become a contentious point between locals and companies. Locals insist that the plasma plantations should be within the companies' land, while companies prefer to develop them on local land. Additionally, companies frequently decide on plantation locations without consulting locals, resulting in selecting land already controlled by the locals or in areas beyond the reach of village farmers' cooperatives, making access difficult. Another issue is the lack of feasibility surveys for the designated land, often leading to the selection of unproductive land with low fertility.

Thirdly, type 3 was the conflict related to Broken Promises and Unfulfilled CSR Commitments. The MOU agreement marked the initial phase of the partnership between companies and locals, aiming to enhance local prosperity. However, many companies violated the MOU, such as by stopping employing locals and hiring non-locals instead, failing to fulfill their job availability promises. Although the partnership was supposed to be a mutual agreement, companies often made decisions without involving the locals. Over time, companies frequently ignored the agreement. Initially, they employed locals but gradually replaced them with machines. Furthermore, the distribution of CSR obligations was inadequate. CSR is a crucial responsibility for companies in ensuring sustainable development for all stakeholders, including locals.

Furthermore, the type 4 conflict was the conflict that occurred during plasma plantation management by cooperatives and companies for oil palm production (TBS and CPO). The village cooperatives played an insignificant role in the partnership agreement between the companies and the farmers/locals/smallholders, leading to internal management issues within the cooperatives. Consequently, the companies assumed a larger role in the partnership and decision-making process. The companies prioritized their own products, forcing plasma farmers to store their products on the plantation, resulting in low-quality yields. The yield reports lacked transparency, providing farmers with minimal information about their products, only reporting quantities. This led to disparities in crop yields on their plantations. Payments to farmers were delayed until the following month, as companies waited for government-approved prices, causing difficulties for farmers in purchasing daily necessities. Even after a month, farmers had to pay 30% of their yield to settle debts with the companies. Additionally, farmers had limited knowledge and information about product prices, leading to price disparities. They only knew local prices, while companies sold products at international prices with different currency values, resulting in lower earnings for the farmers. The price of TBS (fresh fruit bunches) varied across plantations, even within the same tribal region, causing dissatisfaction among farmers. As a result, farmers felt the program did not provide the expected benefits and demanded that the companies return their land.

Discussion

Environmental sustainability faces numerous challenges due to anthropogenic activities that have significantly altered ecosystems. The main issues include deforestation, biodiversity loss, environmental pollution, global warming and climate change, land degradation, and the need for collaborative efforts among various stakeholders. Deforestation is a critical issue characterized by large-scale tree cutting, often without adequate replanting. It results in biodiversity loss, habitat destruction, and increased aridity. Key drivers include agricultural expansion, corruption, logging, and urbanization. In Cameroon, deforestation has led to the loss of over half the country's historic forest cover. The conversion of forests for agricultural land accounts for around 60% of tropical deforestation, exacerbating biodiversity loss and contributing to the greenhouse effect. All of this was linked into another problem and one of those was biodiversity loss. Biodiversity loss stems from habitat degradation and fragmentation, primarily due to human activities. The transformation of natural habitats into agricultural and urban areas leads to fragmented ecosystems, causing long-term damage and species extinctions.

Overexploitation of land has reduced natural vegetation significantly, threatening endemic species and disrupting ecological stability. On top of that, pollution was driven by industrialization, deforestation, and urbanization, posing a global threat, affecting all forms of life. In developing countries, overpopulation and uncontrolled urbanization worsen pollution's impact. Air pollution is particularly harmful, affecting water and soil quality, and thereby reducing crop productivity and biodiversity. The impact from pollution causes global warming and climate change issues. Global warming and climate change driven by greenhouse gas emissions from industrial activities, deforestation, and urbanization, threaten environmental stability. These changes alter weather patterns, increase extreme weather events, and contribute to sea-level rise and habitat destruction. Rapid climate change exacerbates ecosystem vulnerability and species risk.

Meanwhile, land degradation, caused by excessive use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, deforestation, and unsustainable agricultural practices, is a pressing issue. Population growth increases the demand for food and resources, leading to more land conversion and degradation. This process depletes soil fertility and increases erosion, threatening forest ecosystems and biodiversity. Besides that, collaboration between many parties was a big challenge to sustain the environment. Effective environmental sustainability requires collaboration among governments, stakeholders, and local communities. Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) aims to balance social, economic, and environmental goals, but challenges like insufficient community involvement and conflicts over land use persist. In Lower Kinabatangan, external pressures from palm oil plantations and labor issues complicate conservation efforts. Ensuring that all stakeholders, including local communities, are involved in decision-making processes is crucial for successful environmental management.

Besides that, the oil palm tree, cultivated in West Africa, is a leading tropical vegetable oil globally, accounting for one-quarter of global consumption and 60% of international trade. However, the industry faces environmental and social challenges, including forest destruction and biodiversity loss. But palm oil also has a challenge to sustain such as labor shortage. The Malaysian Palm Oil Industry faces significant challenges, including labor shortages and biodiversity loss. The industry employs around 491,000 workers, primarily from Indonesia, to care for 675 million palm trees, occupying 5.0 million hectares of land. Despite government development initiatives, the industry's impact on biodiversity is less than other lower-yielding vegetable oil crops. Palm plantations also allow for the growth of other vegetation and maintain environmental balance by allowing wild animals and bird species. In Indonesia, a major producer of oil, faces challenges such as labor shortages, food security, agrarian conflicts, and natural resources. The total labor pool in Malaysia is around 491,000 workers, mostly from Indonesia, responsible for 675 million palm trees occupying 5.0 million hectares of land. Oil palm cultivation also threatens biodiversity, as it requires less destruction and conversion of forests compared to other lower-yielding vegetable oil crops. To ensure sustainable palm oil production, Indonesia must address these issues and explore forests for plantation expansion. The Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) reports that in 2010, 69% of industry employees were foreign workers, increasing to 76.5% in 2012 and 78% by 2015. This has led to concerns about the industry's dependence on foreign workers, particularly from Indonesia. The industry is 50,000 workers short of covering the 4.19 million ha of planted land, and losing Indonesian workers causes language barriers and productivity loss. Cost of training is another concern.

A plant infection one of the most difficult to solve. Ganoderma, a soil-borne fungus, poses a significant threat to plantations in Malaysia, particularly oil palm trees. Infected with this wood-decaying fungus, the disease Basal Stem Rot (BSR) results in a significant decrease in FFB production, leaf wilting, and conk-shaped mushroom bodies. The fungus spreads to the lower trunk near the soil line,

causing tissue decay and spreading high up at the trunk's center. Also, a conflict between palm oil industry and local communities always become a challenge for palm oil development. The palm oil industry's conflict with local communities is a complex issue involving economic, social, and environmental factors. It threatens resources like agricultural land, fishing grounds, and cultural heritage. Conflicts also involve forced evictions, societal arrests, and environmental pollution, impacting disease and ecosystems.

Conclusion

Palm oil is one of the sub-sectors of agriculture, therefore the impact on the environment is one of the obstacles to future development. Deforestation, soil erosion, carbon dioxide emissions are among the potential threats to the environment especially when new areas are needed for palm oil expansion. However, due to increased awareness and pressure from stakeholders, palm oil-producing countries took immediate decisions to ensure that palm oil development in the country was within the boundaries of sustainable development. However, in addition to making palm oil the main industry to improve the economy, environmental sustainability also needs to be considered. This is because, through the findings and reading of previous studies, it has been found that the opening of oil palm plantations on a large scale has had many negative impacts on the environment, such as deforestation and pollution. Therefore, the authorities need to address the issue to achieve efforts to preserve the environment and the palm oil industry. About that, when the palm oil industry can continue without harming the environment, the economy will continue to increase, and the environment will become more sustainable.

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CHALLENGES FACED AMONG HOUSEBOAT TOURISM OPERATORS AT THE ROYAL BELUM STATE PARK, PERAK

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Abstract

Houseboat, a tourism attraction in Royal Belum State Park, Perak, offers a unique blend of nature-based and adventure tourism. However, operators face multiple challenges in sustaining their businesses while navigating operational, financial, and environmental constraints. This study explores the challenges faced by houseboat operators and the strategies they adopt to remain competitive. Using a qualitative research approach, the study employed semi-structured interviews with 10 owner-managers of houseboats to gain in-depth insights into their experiences. Thematic analysis was used to identify key issues and patterns from the data. Through analysis identified five key themes: (1) Business Model Based on Backgrounds, where prior experience shapes business; (2) Business Management Challenges and Industry Competition, highlighting financial strain due to high costs and regulatory issues; (3) Promotional Strategies and Technological Adaptation, showing reliance on traditional marketing with limited digital adoption; (4) Tourist Segmentation Based on Groups and Activities, emphasizing the need for tailored services; and (5) Environmental Conservation and Awareness, stressing the balance between tourism growth and ecological conservation. The findings contribute to SME tourism research in protected areas, offering insights for operators and providing policy recommendations for sustainable tourism governance. The study highlights the need for financial support, the adoption of digital marketing, business training, and stronger industry collaboration to enhance resilience. While limited to houseboat operator perspectives in a specific location, future research should include tourist experiences and comparative studies to strengthen sustainable houseboat tourism strategies.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Houseboat Operators, Tourism Entrepreneurship, Royal Belum

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Introduction

Houseboat tourism is a distinct segment of sustainable tourism that enables visitors to experience nature in a deep and meaningful way while supporting local economic development and environmental protection initiatives. Houseboats are primary tourist attractions in Kerala, India, and Tasik Kenyir, Malaysia, due to their contribution to economic growth while promoting environmental protection (Sharma & Sannabhadti, 2024). Royal Belum State Park maintains its position as Malaysia's most biodiverse and ecologically sensitive area but has not maximized houseboat tourism opportunities. Houseboat operators in this region face significant obstacles to sustainable development due to poorly maintained infrastructure, improper waste management systems, and conflicting regulations (Winter et al., 2020).

The research investigates the dynamics of Royal Belum houseboat tourism by examining four essential research goals. The research investigates what drives houseboat tourism operators to establish businesses and what drives their participation in the sector. The growth pattern of rural tourism economies relies heavily on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), making understanding their motivations essential (Isa et al., 2020). The research identifies operational costs and insufficient policy backing as the main obstacles that houseboat operators encounter (Osnin & Rahman, 2019; Shin et al., 2020). The research evaluates the service approach of houseboat operators delivering high-quality tourist experiences. Understanding these practices helps organizations boost their competitive edge and sustainable operations. The research evaluates promotional methods that attract tourists to Royal Belum to enhance the marketability of houseboat tourism in the area. The research aims to provide practical recommendations for improved management practices, local entrepreneur empowerment, and sustainable development of houseboat tourism in Royal Belum State Park.

Research Objectives

The study's objective is to identify the challenges faced by houseboat tourism operators in operating their businesses within Royal Belum State Park. This is to assist and facilitate stakeholders and the government at the state level in understanding and improving initiatives for developing Royal Belum State Park as an ecotourism hub. The specific research objectives are as follows:

1. To identify the reasons houseboat tourism operators are involved in the SME's businesses.
2. To identify the main challenges faced by houseboat operators in Royal Belum.
3. To assess the approach that is used by houseboat tourism operators in offering their services to tourists.
4. To identify promotion strategies for houseboat operators to attract tourists to Royal Belum.

Literature Review

Tseng et al. (2019) and Gössling and Peeters (2022) emphasize the importance of sustainable practices in the broader tourism context. However, these studies tend to focus on terrestrial ecotourism and large-scale sustainable tourism strategies, with limited exploration of water-based ecotourism initiatives, such as houseboats, especially within protected areas like Royal Belum. The unique operational, environmental, and community involvement challenges specific to water-based ecotourism remain under-researched. Furthermore, while López-Guzmán et al. (2011) highlight the significance of community participation in tourism, their studies do not sufficiently explore how local communities in Malaysia can be actively engaged in sustainable houseboat tourism despite Royal Belum's rich ecological and cultural heritage.

The challenges faced by SMEs in ecotourism, discussed by Shin et al. (2020) and Isa et al. (2020), such as high operating costs, seasonality, and limited access to resources, are well recognized. Nevertheless, most research focuses on land-based tourism enterprises, with limited insights into water-based small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), such as houseboat operators. The specific operational constraints, environmental risks, and marketing strategies relevant to these niche water-based SMEs in ecologically sensitive areas are not sufficiently explored. There is also a notable lack of empirical studies on how these operators utilize digital marketing to attract environmentally conscious tourists. This area is increasingly relevant in the digital age.

The geographical focus of existing studies often overlooks the context of Malaysia's protected areas. Winter et al. (2020) address infrastructure and waste management issues; a gap remains in understanding how local policies, infrastructural deficiencies, and ecological sensitivities influence houseboat operations in regions like Royal Belum. The unique socio-cultural landscape and ecological significance of Royal Belum require tailored research to inform sustainable practices and policy guidelines.

This study explicitly addresses these identified gaps. It investigates the operational and environmental challenges faced by houseboat operators in Royal Belum, with a focus on the ecological and community engagement dimensions. By employing qualitative methods semi-structured interviews with local operators it captures nuanced insights into the challenges and opportunities unique to water-based ecotourism in Malaysia's protected forests. Furthermore, the study examines how local indigenous communities can play an active role in sustainable tourism, expanding the dialogue around community participation emphasized by López-Guzmán et al. (2011). The research examines the potential of digital marketing strategies to enhance the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the houseboat sector, addressing the noted lack of empirical evidence in this area.

In addition, grounded in theoretical frameworks such as sustainable tourism and entrepreneurial resilience, the study provides a practical model for policymakers and industry stakeholders to develop sustainable, community-inclusive, and digitally adept houseboat tourism in protected areas. By filling the gap in context-specific, water-based ecotourism research within Malaysia, this study contributes novel insights that can inform both academic understanding and practical policy formulation, ensuring the long-term viability of houseboat ecotourism in Royal Belum.

Methodology

Populations and Sample

The study focuses on owner-managers of houseboat tour operations within Royal Belum State Park, all of whom are residents with a deep connection to the area and its ecotourism industry. As key players in the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) sector, their perspectives are essential for understanding what drives them to venture into this business, the challenges they encounter, how they enhance their services, and the strategies they use for promotion. By focusing on local owner-managers, the study provides genuine insight into the unique cultural, environmental, and economic factors that influence their operations. To gather relevant data, the study employed a purposive sampling strategy, where participants were intentionally selected based on shared characteristics, traits, or experiences that matched specific criteria, ensuring consistency and focus on the data collected (Saydam et al., 2022). Selecting ten (10) informants who share similar roles and experiences within the houseboat tour industry. This targeted approach ensures that the participants are directly aligned with the research objectives, allowing for a focused exploration of their motivations, operational hurdles, customer service strategies, and promotional efforts. By engaging with informants who operate within the same context, the study reveals common patterns and practices, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the dynamics within this niche sector.

Research Tools

The interview themes were developed based on insights from the literature review. The initial part of the interview served as a 'warm-up' to help participants feel comfortable while gathering basic information about their business profiles and their motivations for entering the tourism industry. The interview schedule was structured into three (3) sections: (1) Background and Experiences related to their involvement in the houseboat business; (2) Impact and Challenges faced as houseboat operators; and (3) Strategies for Business Improvement. This structure ensured a smooth flow of discussion while covering key aspects of the research focus.

Data Collection

For this study, the primary research instrument is a semi-structured interview guide designed to collect in-depth qualitative data from the selected informants. This approach ensures that the study's objectives are addressed while fostering open and meaningful dialogue with the informants (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Data collection will take place for 2 to 3 weeks, scheduled between January and February 2025. Interviews will be conducted in person at locations convenient for the informants, ensuring a comfortable setting that encourages open communication. Each interview is expected to last between 30 to 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded with the informants' consent to ensure accuracy during the transcription and analysis process. This method allows the researcher to capture rich, detailed data essential for thematic analysis while also maintaining the flexibility to explore new ideas that may emerge during the discussion.

Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis after transcribing the interview recordings verbatim. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method that focuses on identifying patterns, themes, and meanings within a dataset (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). This approach involved systematically identifying and categorizing patterns or themes within the data, enabling a structured exploration of the motivations and challenges encountered by houseboat tourism operators. The researcher begins coding the transcription data. Coding is the process of identifying and labeling topics, similarities, and differences in the interview data (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). After coding, researchers group codes to identify themes and subthemes that emerge from the data. This thematic analysis helps summarize findings coherently, allowing researchers to delve deeper into complex patterns within the data. This study uses alternatives like Microsoft Word, which are not costly, rather than tools like NVivo, which are expensive and not always affordable.

Results

The data analysis process resulted in five (5) variations on the themes from the analysis: (1) Business Model Based on Backgrounds, exploring when the business was established, the motivation behind entering the tourism industry, and how the business has evolved; (2) Business Management Challenges and Industry Competition, booking and management system, the impact of COVID-19, and strategy adjustment, infrastructure issues, and tourist safety, improvement planning and strategy, and flexible service based in customer needs; (3) Promotional Strategies and Digital Technology, promotion platform and digital advertising trends; (4) Tourist Segmentation Based on Groups and Activities, seasonal, loyal customers and customer development, and local vs. international visitors; (5) Environmental Conservation and Awareness, emphasizes sustainability in operating business.

Table 1: Summary of Results Captures from the Key Themes

Themes		Key Points	Notes
Business Based Backgrounds	Model	Operators' backgrounds vary – ranging from family-run businesses and former guides to individuals with traditional and nonbusiness backgrounds, which influence their commitment toward ecotourism.	Some informants talked about family-run houseboat businesses; others explained their pivot from unrelated fields into tourism service delivery.
	on	The business model is built around ecotourism – houseboats are promoted not only as an alternative lodging option but also as a way to educate visitors on the biodiversity of Royal Belum.	
Business Management Challenges and Industry Competition		High maintenance and operational costs. Competitive pressures among houseboat operators: Differentiation through service quality, crew expertise, and diverse packages is key. Seasonal fluctuations and regulatory hurdles, such as cumbersome online permit applications, cause delays. Limited support from government agencies and a reliance on traditional promotional channels sometimes hinder growth. Concerns were raised about both the physical infrastructure (parking, boat arrangements) and organizational issues (licensing limits, scheduling conflicts during peak times, etc).	Operators mentioned that after the pandemic, business slowed down, and customers sometimes may cancel trips or postpone (e.g., due to permit approval and application). Competition is viewed as “healthy” among houseboat operators when they innovate (e.g., offering different packages). However, note that if all operators offer similar packages, pricing and customer service become the primary differentiators.

Promotional gies Technological Adap- tation	Strate- and Adap-	Heavy reliance on social media (Facebook, TikTok, etc) for raising awareness and customer engagement. Liaising with tour agents to secure international bookings A mix of traditional “word-of- mouth” (mouth-to-mouth, local agent referrals) with modern digital approaches. Limited government actor engagement by agencies such as Tourism Perak and local council (<i>Majlis Daerah</i>)	Houseboat tour operators mentioned that when posting on TikTok or Facebook, “the response rate is high,” and customer inquiries increase rapidly. Some participants noted that linking houseboat promotions with apps and tour agents attracts a mix of international and local tourists.
Tourist Based Groups Activities	Segmentation on and	Segmentation by group size and preferred activity: families, small private groups, corporate/team building, government agencies versus day-trip visitors. Distinction between international tourists (private trips and more extended stays) and local tourists (short trips and cultural visits). Activities mentioned ranged from visiting waterfalls and hiking to fishing trips and cultural tours.	Several informants discussed tailoring different houseboat packages for larger groups or corporate clients and families or individuals. International tourists seek comprehensive information about the forest and its environmental aspects; local customers, on the other hand, focus on practicality and familiar comfort.
Environmental Conservation Awareness	and	Many operators emphasize the importance of sustainable tourism and the preservation	Some informants stressed that a major appeal of Royal Belum is its “green”

of forest ecosystems. Issues such as the depletion of native forests, ecosystem imbalances, and the need for conservation-friendly practices are acknowledged.	natural landscapes and and natural environment and that continued investment in eco-friendly technology (e.g., solar power) is critical. The interviews also highlight gaps, such as a need for improved professional training for nature guides and more robust government support to protect the environment while developing tourism infrastructure.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The study offers a precise alignment between the research findings and its objectives while incorporating relevant theoretical frameworks. The motivation of houseboat operators to engage in this SME venture is driven by their backgrounds and a desire to promote eco-tourism, which aligns with entrepreneurship theories emphasizing personal motivation and resource utilization. This highlights how individual experiences and community involvement inspire small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to venture into sustainable tourism markets, particularly within protected areas. The study highlights several operational challenges that operators face, including high maintenance costs and regulatory hurdles, such as licensing and permits, which hinder operational efficiency and expansion. This highlights the need for policy reforms to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in environmentally sensitive areas. Furthermore, the operators' promotional strategies are still predominantly traditional, with limited adoption of digital marketing platforms. The limited use of digital tools restricts their competitiveness and visibility in an increasingly digital tourism landscape. Lastly, the importance of environmental conservation is a consistent theme, with operators recognizing the necessity of balancing tourism development with ecological preservation and advocating responsible practices that ensure the long-term sustainability of tourism activities without degrading natural assets. Overall, the study makes significant contributions by providing insight into the challenges faced by houseboat operators. It offers practical insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders to foster sustainable, resilient, and environmentally responsible tourism, emphasizing the importance of supportive policies, technological adoption, and conservation efforts.

Conclusion

The study highlights the importance of providing enhanced financial assistance, integrating digital marketing, offering targeted business training, and fostering stronger collaborations with local tourism stakeholders to enhance service standards and ensure business resilience. Beyond addressing operational hurdles, this study provides an understanding of small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) tourism in protected areas, offers practical guidance for houseboat operators, and highlights the need for policy reforms to foster sustainable tourism development. Ultimately, the findings underscore the need to strike a balance between economic sustainability and environmental responsibility, ensuring that the houseboat business in Royal Belum thrives while preserving the park's natural ecosystem for future generations.

Research Recommendations

Based on the findings, this study provides actionable recommendations to address the challenges faced by houseboat operators in the Royal Belum State Park. The recommendations are organized into four key areas: Business Development and Financial Support, Capacity Building and Skills Enhancement, Digital Marketing and Technological Integration, and Sustainable Tourism Practices.

1. Business Development and Financial Support

Houseboat operators frequently encounter high operational costs, complex regulations, and limited financial resources. To promote business sustainability and growth, the following measures are proposed:

- **Government Support:** Provision of grants, low-interest loans, and tax incentives to ease maintenance and regulatory expenses (Ramli & Kamal, 2025; Set, 2013).
- **Accessible Funding:** Microfinance schemes and SME-focused financial assistance should be made available through banks and tourism agencies (Shin et al., 2020; Set, 2013; Mansor et al., 2011).
- **Simplified Legal Processes:** Streamlined registration, licensing, and tax guidance to support formal business operations (Shin et al., 2020; Set, 2013; Mansor et al., 2011).

2. Capacity Building and Skills Development

Many operators lack formal training in business and management, hindering sustainable growth. Recommended interventions include:

- **Entrepreneurial Training:** Workshops on budgeting, pricing, and cost control by tourism and development agencies (Ramli & Kamal, 2025; Shin et al., 2020; Set, 2013).
- **Hospitality Skills:** Training in guest services and personalized experiences to enhance customer satisfaction (Mansor et al., 2011).
- **Educational Partnerships:** Collaboration with universities and vocational institutions to provide specialized training in tourism, sustainability, and digital skills (Da & Loang, 2024).

3. Digital Marketing and Technology Adoption

Operators often lack expertise in digital marketing and online tools. To improve market reach and efficiency, the following are suggested:

- **Digital Marketing Training:** Capacity building in SEO, social media engagement, and branding (Da & Loang, 2024).
- **OTA Partnerships:** Collaborating with platforms like TripAdvisor and Airbnb to boost visibility and bookings.
- **Centralized Booking System:** Development of a unified app or website to streamline reservations and access to information.

4. Promoting Sustainable Tourism

To preserve the ecological integrity of Royal Belum, tourism must align with conservation principles:

- **Eco-Tourism Standards:** Consistent guidelines on waste management, water conservation, and eco-friendly practices must be implemented (Ramli et al., 2022).
- **Public-Private Initiatives:** Joint efforts with NGOs and agencies to support conservation and responsible tourism (Gwee et al., 2019; Ramli & Kamal, 2025).
- **Visitor Education:** Offer ecotourism briefings, informative signage, and guided sessions to promote environmental awareness.

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STREET FOOD TOURISM DESTINATION MANAGEMENT CASE STUDY: BANGKOK THAILAND

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Extended abstract

Street food tourism is a rapidly important tourism destination sector, providing a comprehensive cultural experience using convenient, authentic, traditional, and affordable cuisine. In urban destinations such as Bangkok, street food not only represents local food culture but also forms an important part of the economic life of communities (Everett, 2019). Street food represents cultural identity and socialization as cities become modernized (Sandybayev, 2018). The reason why tourists seek the vibrant foodscapes of Bangkok is the variety of flavors and sensations that evoke emotional engagement and satisfaction (Gupta, Khanna, & Gupta, 2018). However, the quality of food, quality of service, and hygiene routines are important aspects that form the perception of visitors and influence future behavioral intentions (Jeaheng et al., 2023).

This conceptual paper aims to investigate the relationship between tourist perception towards food quality, service, hygiene, and tourist satisfaction and the intention to revisit a case study of street food in Bangkok, Thailand. Being a new tourism niche, it is important that both vendors and policymakers must understand how these factors affect the management of a destination. In order to fulfill the primary goal of the investigation, there are two research questions: First, what is the impact of food quality, service quality, and hygiene quality on customer satisfaction? Second, what is the mediating role of customer satisfaction between quality dimension and revisit intention?

A quantitative research design will be adopted in this study to investigate the relationships between food quality, service quality, hygiene quality, and customer satisfaction and revisit intention in Bangkok's Street food. Data will be collected through a random survey administered to international tourists who have experienced Bangkok's street food. The survey will be distributed both in-person at key tourist hotspots such as Khao San Road, Chinatown (Yaowarat) and online via social media platforms. Data analysis will employ regression analysis for this study.

Keywords: Street Food Tourism, Food Quality, Service Quality, Hygiene and Safety, Authentic Street Food, Street Food Management

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Purpose/Problem Statement

This study aims to investigate the relationship between tourist perception toward food quality, service, hygiene, and tourist satisfaction and the intention to revisit a case study of street food in Bangkok, Thailand. Street food, as a core component of tourism destination, offers culturally immersive and economically accessible experiences for both domestic and international tourists (Everett, 2019). In Bangkok, street food is not only a culinary attraction but a socio-cultural phenomenon that strengthens local identity and supports community livelihoods (Dougherty, Brown, & Green, 2013). Prior studies confirm that tourists' perceptions of food quality, hygiene, and emotional connection significantly influence satisfaction and repeat patronage (Jeaheng et al., 2023) (Sandybayev, 2018).

However, research has traditionally examined these dimensions in isolation or within formal hospitality contexts, failing to address their combined effects on customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions in informal street food settings (Su, Swanson, & Chen, 2016). Moreover, while the sensory and emotional impact of street food experiences have been acknowledged, few studies have operationalized these insights using integrated theoretical frameworks such as SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & BERRY, 1988), and Five Senses Theory (Shao & Lin, 2021). Another gap is the direct application of these models to the Bangkok context, which is known worldwide as the street life of culinary. This study fills these gaps by suggesting an integrated framework that investigates the impact of quality-related factors on satisfaction and loyalty, and provides valuable information to vendors, tourism planners as well as policymakers interested in improving sustainable street food tourism in Bangkok.

Originality/value

Although previous studies have explored various aspects of food tourism such as food quality, hygiene, and customer satisfaction few have examined their combined influence on satisfaction and revisit intention within the street food tourism context. Most existing research isolates or applies these factors to formal dining environments, overlooking informal yet impactful settings like Bangkok's street food scene (Gupta, Khanna, & Gupta, 2018) (Su, Swanson, & Chen, 2016). The proposed study closes that gap by suggesting an integrated model that includes food quality, service quality, and hygiene quality and therefore provides new insights on customer behavior and leads to sustainable development of street food destinations.

Design/methodology/approach

This study adopts a quantitative research design using a random survey distributed to international tourists who have experienced street food in areas such as Khao San Road or Chinatown (Yaowarat) in Bangkok. Based on the research framework, the questionnaire is carefully designed to collect data on the relationships between food quality, service quality, hygiene quality, and customer satisfaction and revisit intention in Bangkok's Street food tourism. Data will be analyzed using multiple regression analysis.

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the literature on street food management tourism in Southeast Asia and examines the relationship between food quality, service quality, and hygiene quality on customer satisfaction and revisit intention an area underexplored in informal tourism contexts.

Practical implications

The findings will offer actionable insights for street food vendors and tourism stakeholders in Bangkok to enhance food presentation, service responsiveness, and hygiene practices, which are critical for improving customer satisfaction and encouraging repeat visitation. Training programs and vendor support initiatives can be designed using these findings.

Social implications (Policy contribution)

The study advocates policies that have attempted to formalize the Street food industry in Bangkok by enforcing safety standards and preserving culture. The results can inform policymakers to make sustainable tourism plans that economically empower local vendors and improve tourists' experience and public health concerns.

Research limitations

The research is limited to the perceptions of international tourists who have experienced Street food in Bangkok, Thailand. Therefore, it may not represent the views of a wider domestic perception. Thus, the researchers should focus on the domestic perspectives in future studies. The cross-sectional survey design might limit the possibility of capturing changes over time in customer behavior. Also, generalizability could be limited due to non-probability sampling, although efforts are made to ensure the respondent base is diverse and representative.

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ADVANCING MEDICAL TOURISM COMPETITIVENESS IN SONGKHLA, THAILAND: A STRATEGIC PATHWAY THROUGH THE GLOBAL HEALTHCARE ACCREDITATION FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

Medical tourism has emerged as one of the most dynamic and rapidly expanding sectors of the global tourism industry, driven by rising healthcare costs in developed nations, advances in medical technology, and an increasing focus on wellness-oriented travel. Within the Asia-Pacific region, currently dominating over 25% of the global medical tourism market, countries such as India and South Korea have implemented targeted initiatives to strengthen their international competitiveness. Thailand, long recognized as a premier medical tourism destination, has capitalized on its internationally accredited hospitals, high medical standards, and renowned hospitality culture. However, the development of this sector has been heavily concentrated in Bangkok and Phuket, leaving other high-potential provinces such as Songkhla underexplored in both research and practice. Positioned as an emerging World-Class Wellness Destination, Songkhla aspires to rank among the world's top 20 medical tourism hubs under the concept "Songkhla Medical Tourism City of the World." To achieve this ambition, the province must move beyond conventional tourism development models by adopting globally recognized frameworks such as the Global Healthcare Accreditation (GHA), which integrates patient-centered clinical processes, holistic care experiences, and sustainable business operations. This pioneering research represents the first systematic investigation into Songkhla's potential for medical tourism development using the GHA framework as the analytical foundation. Employing a mixed-method design, the study combines quantitative analysis of 400 international medical travelers, focusing on behavioral patterns and satisfaction across the GHA Medical Travel Care Continuum™, with qualitative insights from 20 key informants representing healthcare, hospitality, and tourism sectors. Quantitative findings are analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data undergo content analysis to identify structural capabilities, service quality, and strategic gaps. By integrating both demand- and supply-side perspectives, the study synthesizes a comprehensive model for enhancing Songkhla's competitiveness in global medical tourism. The findings not only bridge a significant knowledge gap in subnational healthcare tourism research but also provide actionable guidance for policymakers and private stakeholders to foster sustainable, internationally accredited medical tourism ecosystems in Southern Thailand.

Keywords: Medical Tourism, Songkhla, Global Healthcare Accreditation (GHA), Patient Experience, Healthcare Service Quality, Mixed-Method Research

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LADAKH TOURISM AS SOFT POWER: REBRANDING INDIA'S HIMALAYAN IDENTITY ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

Tsultim Zangmo

Abstract

Ladakh's tourism industry functions as a vehicle for India's soft power projection, specifically in rebranding the nation's Himalayan identity on the global stage. Through an analysis of tourism narratives, marketing strategies, and cultural representations, this study explores how the "Land of High Passes" has been transformed from a restricted border region into a globally recognized destination that embodies India's spiritual, cultural, and natural heritage. The research reveals how Ladakh tourism serves multiple diplomatic functions: challenging dominant Himalayan narratives associated with neighboring countries, asserting territorial sovereignty through cultural tourism, and positioning India as a guardian of Buddhist heritage and sustainable mountain tourism. This paper argues that Ladakh represents a strategic soft power asset that helps India project an image of cultural diversity, environmental stewardship, and peaceful coexistence while subtly asserting geopolitical claims in the contested Himalayan region.

Keywords: Soft power, Ladakh tourism, Himalayan identity, cultural diplomacy, destination branding, India

Introduction

The concept of soft power, first articulated by Joseph Nye, describes a nation's ability to influence others through attraction rather than coercion, utilizing cultural appeal, political values, and foreign policies perceived as legitimate. In the context of contemporary India, tourism has emerged as a significant soft power tool, with destinations like Ladakh playing a crucial role in reshaping global perceptions of the nation's identity. Once a restricted border region accessible only to adventurous travelers and researchers, Ladakh has been transformed into a globally recognized tourism destination that embodies India's spiritual heritage, cultural diversity, and natural grandeur. This transformation is particularly significant given Ladakh's strategic location in the contested Himalayan region, where narratives of cultural identity intersect with geopolitical realities. The region's unique position as a high-altitude desert with Tibetan Buddhist cultural influences, situated within India's borders, provides the nation with an opportunity to project a distinct Himalayan identity that challenges dominant global perceptions often associated with Tibet. The research question guiding this study is, how does Ladakh tourism function as a soft power mechanism for India in rebranding its Himalayan identity on the global stage? This paper explores the multifaceted ways in which tourism development in Ladakh serves India's broader diplomatic and cultural objectives, examining the narratives, strategies, and representations that contribute to this soft power projection.

Constructing the “Last Shangri-La” Narrative

The branding of Ladakh as the “Last Shangri-La” or “Little Tibet” represents a strategic appropriation of orientalist imagery that serves multiple soft power functions. This narrative construction positions India as the guardian of authentic Tibetan Buddhist culture, subtly challenging China's claims to cultural authenticity in Tibet while asserting India's role as a preserver of endangered Himalayan traditions. Tourism marketing materials consistently emphasize Ladakh's role as a repository of “untouched” Buddhist culture, with monasteries presented not merely as tourist attractions but as living embodiments of spiritual traditions under India's protection. This narrative serves to legitimize India's territorial claims while presenting the nation as a benevolent guardian of cultural heritage.

Environmental Stewardship and Sustainable Tourism

India's promotion of Ladakh as a model for sustainable mountain tourism serves to project the nation's commitment to environmental stewardship on the global stage. The “Responsible Tourism” initiatives in Ladakh, including carbon-neutral travel options and community-based tourism models, position India as a leader in sustainable tourism practices. This environmental messaging is particularly significant given global concerns about climate change in the Himalayas. By presenting Ladakh as a successfully managed fragile ecosystem, India projects soft power through environmental leadership while addressing criticism of its broader environmental policies.

Cultural Diversity and Pluralism

Ladakh's unique cultural landscape, characterized by Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu communities living in harmony, serves as a powerful representation of India's pluralistic ideals. Tourism narratives emphasize this cultural coexistence as distinctly “Indian”, challenging stereotypical Western perceptions of religious conflict in the subcontinent. The promotion of festivals like Hemis and cultural events that showcase interfaith harmony serves to project India's values of tolerance and diversity. This messaging is particularly important in the context of contemporary global discourse about religious nationalism and minority rights in India.

Adventure Tourism and Soft Power Masculinity

The promotion of Ladakh as an extreme adventure destination serves to project a form of “soft power masculinity” that challenges stereotypical perceptions of India as purely spiritual or intellectual. Activities like motorcycle expeditions, high-altitude trekking, and river rafting position India as a

destination for bold, adventurous experiences. This adventure tourism narrative serves to attract a different demographic of international visitors while projecting India's capacity to provide world-class adventure experiences in challenging environments. The success of events like the Ladakh Marathon and Chadar Trek in gaining international recognition demonstrates the effectiveness of this strategy.

Territorial Assertion Through Tourism

The development of tourism infrastructure in border areas of Ladakh serves as a form of territorial assertion that reinforces India's sovereignty claims. The promotion of destinations near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and international borders serves to normalize Indian administrative control while generating economic activity that benefits local communities. Tourism routes that include visits to strategic locations like Pangong Tso and Nubra Valley serve dual purposes: attracting visitors with spectacular landscapes while demonstrating effective Indian administration of contested territories. This represents a sophisticated form of soft power that combines attraction with subtle assertion.

The Paradox of Authenticity

The promotion of Ladakh as an "authentic" Himalayan destination creates a paradox wherein the very act of marketing authenticity may undermine it. The commercialization of Buddhist culture and the transformation of traditional practices into tourist spectacles raise questions about the sustainability of the authenticity narrative. However, this paradox is skillfully managed through emphasis on "living culture" rather than museum-piece preservation. By presenting Ladakh's traditions as continuing to evolve within the protective framework of Indian governance, the tourism narrative avoids the trap of cultural fossilization while maintaining claims to authenticity.

Competitive Positioning in the Himalayan Tourism Market

Ladakh tourism must be understood within the broader context of competition among Himalayan destinations. The strategic positioning of Ladakh as offering unique experiences unavailable elsewhere in the Himalayas serves India's soft power objectives by creating a distinctive niche that cannot be easily replicated by neighboring countries. The emphasis on high-altitude desert landscapes, unique Buddhist architecture, and accessible adventure activities differentiates Ladakh from Nepal's trekking-focused tourism and Bhutan's exclusive high-value model. This differentiation strategy serves both commercial and diplomatic purposes.

Challenges and Limitations

The effectiveness of Ladakh tourism as a soft power tool faces several challenges. Environmental concerns about over-tourism, cultural concerns about authenticity, and geopolitical tensions that can disrupt tourism flows all pose risks to the sustainability of this soft power strategy. Additionally, the dependence on favorable international perceptions means that broader political developments can impact the effectiveness of tourism-based soft power. The need to balance territorial assertion with tourism promotion creates ongoing strategic tensions.

Implications and Recommendations

Policy Implications

The success of Ladakh tourism as a soft power mechanism suggests several policy implications for India's broader tourism strategy:

Strategic Destination Development: The Ladakh model demonstrates the value of developing tourism in strategically important regions as a form of soft power projection. Similar approaches could be applied to other border areas and culturally significant regions.

Integrated Marketing Approach: The integration of cultural, environmental, and adventure tourism elements in Ladakh's branding provides a model for comprehensive destination marketing that serves multiple soft power objectives simultaneously.

Community Involvement: The emphasis on community-based tourism and local participation in Ladakh demonstrates the importance of authentic grassroots engagement in soft power projection through tourism.

Recommendations for Stakeholders

Government Agencies: Continue investment in sustainable tourism infrastructure while maintaining focus on cultural preservation and environmental protection. Develop clearer metrics for measuring soft power effectiveness through tourism.

Tourism Industry: Embrace responsibility for cultural and environmental stewardship as part of the soft power narrative. Invest in training and capacity building that enhances authentic cultural exchange.

Local Communities: Maintain agency in tourism development decisions while engaging constructively with broader national objectives. Continue to serve as authentic ambassadors of Ladakh's culture and values.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that Ladakh tourism functions as a sophisticated soft power mechanism that serves multiple objectives in India's global positioning strategy. Through careful construction of narratives around authenticity, sustainability, cultural diversity, and territorial integrity, Ladakh has been successfully branded as a unique Himalayan destination that projects positive images of India while serving strategic interests. The case of Ladakh reveals how tourism can serve as a form of cultural diplomacy that operates through attraction rather than assertion, creating positive associations with national identity while subtly advancing geopolitical objectives. The success of this approach lies in its ability to align commercial tourism interests with broader diplomatic goals, creating sustainable soft power projection. However, the sustainability of this soft power strategy depends on maintaining the delicate balance between tourism development and cultural preservation, between accessibility and exclusivity, and between territorial assertion and peaceful attraction. The ongoing evolution of Ladakh tourism will serve as an important case study for understanding the potential and limitations of tourism-based soft power in contested regions. The broader implications of this research extend beyond Ladakh to other regions where tourism development intersects with cultural identity and geopolitical strategy. As nations increasingly recognize tourism as a tool of soft power, the Ladakh model provides valuable insights into the complexities and opportunities of destination branding for diplomatic purposes. Future research should examine the long-term sustainability of tourism-based soft power strategies, the perspectives of international visitors on these narratives, and the comparative effectiveness of different approaches to tourism diplomacy. The dynamic nature of both tourism and geopolitics ensures that the story of Ladakh as a soft power asset will continue to evolve, providing ongoing opportunities for scholarly investigation and policy analysis.

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COMMUNITY BASED TOURISM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: A CASE STUDY SONGKHLA OLD TOWN

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Abstract

Community based tourism (CBT) is an important instrument for promoting sustainable tourism, particularly in developing nations, by increasing a town's carrying capacity, creating jobs, fostering collaboration among residents, and preserving natural resources and local culture (Strydom, Mangope, Henama, 2019). The Thai government has supported CBT for decades, leading to the development of successful CBT sites across the country (Chatkaewnapanon & Lee, 2022). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015, aim for a more sustainable future by addressing global concerns such as poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and climate change. Tourism can directly or indirectly contribute to all SDGs, specifically SDGs 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDGs 12 (sustainable consumption and production), and SDGs 15 (life on land) (UNWTO, 2015).

This study focuses on Songkhla Old Town, an area over 200 years old with unique architectural styles reflecting diverse cultures. Songkhla is a major tourist destination in Thailand, rich in natural resources and recognized for its potential to attract repeat visitors. The Thai government prioritizes sustainable tourism in ecotourism hotspots like Songkhla, supporting CBT initiatives through collaborations between public sectors, educational institutions, and local communities. The research aims to study and analyze SDGs for CBT management in Songkhla Old Town.

CBT is defined as a form of tourism where the community determines, manages, and owns tourism, ensuring sustainability and contributing to poverty eradication and improved quality of life (Dolezal et al., 2020). Previous research highlights community engagement, local benefits, sustainability focus, and protection of natural and cultural resources as key goals of CBT. The study identifies seven key elements contributing to the success of CBT in relation to SDGs: attraction, activity, community, local participation, sustainability management, learning, and improving quality of life. These elements are crucial for enhancing competitiveness and managing tourism in CBT areas.

Keywords: Community based tourism (CBT), Sustainable Development Goals, Songkhla Old Town

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Introduction

Community based tourism (CBT) has rapidly gained prominence as a pivotal instrument for advancing sustainable tourism, particularly within the context of developing nations. This model is strategically designed to empower local communities, enabling them to actively participate in, and exert control over, their tourism development initiatives. By decentralizing tourism benefits and decision-making, CBT holds substantial potential to incrementally enhance a destination's carrying capacity. This enhancement is achieved through multifaceted contributions, including the direct creation of localized employment opportunities, which in turn stimulates micro-economies; the active fostering of collaborative relationships and collective ownership among residents; and crucially, the diligent protection and responsible stewardship of invaluable natural resources and distinct indigenous cultures (Strydom, Mangope, & Henama, 2019). In Thailand, the commitment to CBT has been unwavering, with various governmental administrations consistently providing support over several decades. This sustained backing has enabled numerous local communities across the nation to successfully cultivate and significantly improve their operational efficiencies, thereby transforming into exemplary and prosperous CBT destinations (Chatkaewnapanon & Lee, 2022). This long-standing governmental support underscores the recognized potential of CBT as a viable pathway to equitable and sustainable local development.

The United Nations (2015) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent an ambitious and universally adopted blueprint for global progress, aspiring to cultivate a more equitable, prosperous, and ecologically sound future for all humanity by 2030. These 17 interconnected goals provide a comprehensive framework addressing a broad spectrum of critical global challenges, encompassing the eradication of poverty, the reduction of inequalities, the mitigation of environmental degradation, the combat against climate change, and the promotion of justice and peace. Within this transformative agenda, the tourism sector is uniquely positioned to offer substantial contributions, both directly through its core activities and indirectly through its ripple effects across various sectors, to the achievement of every single SDG. Of particular salience are Goals 8, 12, and 15. Goal 8 emphasizes the promotion of sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all. Goal 12 advocates for responsible consumption and production patterns, fostering more sustainable value chains within the industry. Lastly, Goal 15 highlights the critical importance of protecting, restoring, and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably managing forests, combating desertification, and halting biodiversity loss (UNWTO, 2015). The inherent capacity of tourism to align with these specific goals underscores its pivotal role in the broader sustainable development agenda. Songkhla Old Town, a venerable and historically significant urban area with a legacy spanning more than two centuries, stands as a living testament to a rich tapestry of cultural exchange and architectural evolution. Within its well-preserved confines, an eclectic array of historical houses and commercial buildings showcase diverse architectural styles, each bearing the distinct imprints of the area's multifaceted heritage. These styles vividly reflect influences from traditional Thai architecture, alongside prominent elements derived from Chinese settlers (primarily of Hokkien and Teochew descent), and notable European influences, particularly from Portuguese design traditions. This captivating fusion is manifest in the intricate detailing of both residential dwellings and commercial shophouses that line the community's thoroughfares. Such architectural diversity not only provides a unique aesthetic but also profoundly illustrates the historical presence and harmonious coexistence of various cultures within the vibrant fabric of Songkhla Old Town. This rich multiculturalism positions the area as an exceptionally compelling site for community-based tourism initiatives.

On a global scale, the tourism industry unequivocally holds its position as the world's third-largest economic generator, contributing a substantial 10% to global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), accounting for an impressive 30% of global service exports, and directly or indirectly sustaining one in every ten jobs worldwide (cite current source here to strengthen this statistic, e.g., UNWTO, WTTC). This formidable economic footprint underscores tourism's immense potential to drive progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. As previously highlighted, tourism can directly or indirectly facilitate the achievement of all SDGs. Its specific inclusion within Goals 8 (inclusive and sustainable economic growth), 12 (sustainable consumption and production), and 15 (biodiversity preservation and life-support systems) further solidifies its strategic importance. Consequently, undertaking a detailed study of Community-based Tourism within the culturally rich and historically significant Songkhla Old Town area is not merely an academic exercise but a critical endeavor. Such research is poised to provide invaluable insights and directly contribute to the ongoing efforts aimed at fostering genuinely sustainable tourism practices within this distinctive locale, ensuring its longevity and positive impact.

The methodological framework for this study involved a systematic and comprehensive review of pertinent academic research papers. These papers were meticulously selected from the SCOPUS database, a renowned and authoritative repository of scholarly literature. The search strategy specifically focused on publications released between 2022 and 2024, utilizing key search terms such as

"Community-based tourism" and "SDGs" to ensure relevance and currency. The analytical process subsequently entailed a thorough examination of the identified scholarly journals and research papers. This rigorous review aimed to precisely analyze the articulated goals and objectives of CBT as presented within these diverse studies. Following this initial analysis, a systematic categorization framework was developed and applied to delineate and illustrate the intricate relationships and interdependencies between various identified elements of Community-based Tourism and their direct or indirect contributions to the broader Sustainable Development Goals. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of how CBT initiatives contribute to global sustainability targets.

Research Objectives

To discover the contribution of Community based tourism (CBT) activities to sustainable development goals.

Literature Review

Community-based tourism

Zielinski et al. (2020) stated that community-based tourism (CBT) is a form of tourism that prioritizes sustainability, wherein the community assumes the primary roles of determining, managing, and owning its tourism initiatives. This approach involves the community in its direct management and stewardship, fostering educational experiences for tourists, and simultaneously serving as a strategic tool for poverty alleviation and enhancing the quality of life within the community. Consequently, CBT has emerged as a prominent approach to tourism development, emphasizing inclusive opportunities for community empowerment, a principle consistent with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Dolezal et al., 2020).

Moreover, Mtapuri and Giampiccoli (2019) also highlighted the social impact of community tourism, stating that CBT enables local communities to take ownership of tourism within their locale. This implies that communities retain autonomy to decide whether they desire tourism, the extent to which they wish to engage with it, and the specific form it should take. Concerning its environmental impact, community tourism frequently contributes to the preservation of natural resources such as forests and rivers. This preservation is crucial, given these resources' importance in attracting tourism, which in turn yields benefits for the entire community.

This study systematically selected academic research papers from the SCOPUS database. The research classification indicated that the papers provided an overview of, and contained articles related to, the concepts of community-based tourism and SDGs. To perform the analysis, publications from 2022 to 2024 were searched. Using the keyword phrase "community-based tourism and SDGs," the search results yielded articles from various journals, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Journal by number of citations

Publication title	SJR 2021	Documents 2022–2024	Cite Score
Journal of Cleaner Production	1.921	52	15.8
Science of The Total Environment	1.806	32	14.1
Marine Policy	1.166	26	6.8
Technological Forecasting and Social Change	2.336	20	13.7
Land Use Policy	1.635	20	9.9
Publication title	SJR 2021	Documents 2022–2024	Cite Score
Journal of Environmental Management	1.481	20	11.4
Resources Policy	1.461	19	7.6
Environmental Science & Policy	1.683	18	10.0
Heliyon	0.550	18	4.0
Journal of Business Research	2.316	17	11.2
Sustainable Cities and Society	2.015	17	14.4
Ocean & Coastal Management	0.969	14	6.2
Sustainable Production and Consumption	1.361	13	8.1
Ecological Indicators	1.284	12	8.4
Renewable Energy	1.877	10	13.6
Environmental Development	0.967	10	6.2
Cities	1.656	9	9.4
International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction	1.096	9	6.5
Tourism Management	3.383	8	19.8
Marine Pollution Bulletin	1.508	8	9.2
Tourism Management Perspectives	1.761	8	10.0
Journal of Rural Studies	1.292	7	6.6
Environmental Impact Assessment Review	1.053	6	7.6
Scientific African	0.436	6	2.4
Energy Policy	2.126	5	12.4

Source: The author

The nexus between Community based tourism (CBT) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) constitutes a significant and actively explored research domain within academic literature. As highlighted in Table 1, this specific area of inquiry is prominently featured among the top 25 most influential and productive journals within the field. This widespread recognition underscores the critical importance scholars attribute to understanding this relationship. Subsequently, the researcher meticulously curated and selected pivotal studies. These chosen pieces of research were identified for their direct relevance and significant insights into both community-based tourism and the SDGs. The overarching objective was to systematically uncover and articulate the concrete contributions that various CBT activities make towards achieving the broader Sustainable Development Goals, providing a clearer understanding of their symbiotic relationship.

Table 2 Perspectives towards community-based tourism (CBT) goals and objectives

Research Topic	Author (Year)	Goals and objectives to CBT
Editorial: Tourism 2030 and the contribution to the sustainable development goals: the tourism review viewpoint	Buhalis, D., Leung, X. Y., Fan, D., Darcy, S., Chen, G., Xu, F., ... & Farmaki, A. (2023).	Focus on sustainability
Community Based Tourism Development Strategy: A Study in Tourism Villages in North Minahasa Regency	Poluan, J. G., Lapian, S. L. J., Tumbuan, W. J. A., & Ogi, I. W. (2023).	Build community participation and benefit local community
Community-based tourism as social entrepreneurship promoting sustainable development in coastal communities: a study in Thua Thien Hue province, Central Vietnam	Van Tuyen, T., Uy, T. C., Le Phi Khanh, H., Phuong, L. T. H., Ha, H. D., Nga, L. T. T., & Dung, T. Q. (2023)	Improvements to the landscape, environment, and natural resources,
Planning Sustainable Community-Based Tourism in the Context of Thailand: Community, Development, and the Foresight Tools	Chatkaewnapanon, Y., & Lee, T. J. (2022)	Promote community participation, protection, and improvement of the quality of life for all
Advancing community-based tourism approaches for the sustainable development of destinations	Mtapuri, O., Camilleri, M. A., & Dłuzewska, A. (2022).	Involve community participation, generate benefits for local communities, learn about their culture, and local environment
Community-based tourism homestays' capacity to advance the Sustainable Development Goals: A holistic sustainable livelihood perspective	Pasanchay, K., & Schott, C. (2021)	Support sustainable tourism development, support suppliers such as community
Community-based tourism: concepts, opportunities and challenges	Prakoso, A. A., Pradipto, E., Roychansyah, M. S., & Nugraha, B. S. (2020)	To gain opportunities and challenges from community-based tourism
Challenges of community-based tourism in Botswana: a review of literature	Stone, M. T., & Stone, L. S. (2020)	To ensure sustainability in community-based tourism development
Community-Based Tourism and Sustainable Development of Rural Regions in Kenya; Perceptions of the Citizenry	Juma, L. O., & Khademi- Vidra, A. (2019).	Awareness levels of CBT, and perceived contributions of CBT to the socio-economic and physical sustainability of rural
Can community-based tourism contributes to sustainable development? Evidence from residents' perceptions of the sustainability	Lee, T. H., & Jan, F. H. (2019).	The sustainability of nature-based tourism, the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental sustainability
Community-Based Tourism in Developing Countries: A Framework for Policy Evaluation	Yanes, A., Zielinski, S., Diaz Cano, M., & Kim, S. I. (2019).	Community engagement

Source: The author

Table 2, goals and objectives of CBT as seen by 11 research studies in terms of Community based tourism (CBT) and sustainability researchers expanded the keywords from several viewpoints, including participation, benefiting the local community, focusing on sustainability, and supporting sustainable tourism development.

Community based tourism considers the sustainability of the environment, society, and culture, which are directed by the community. Managed by the community, for the community, and the community plays a role of ownership (Mtapuri et al., 2022). The community has the right to administer and educate tourists and visitors, which are important characteristics of CBT. It is a community-based operation based on the fact that every villager owns the resources and is a stakeholder in tourism (Stone et al., 2020).

CBT outlines the goals that can enhance local citizens' quality of life (particularly for those who are a part of socially vulnerable groups) (Stone, 2020). Moreover, CBT suggests that local communities may manage and control their resources for their own advantage. In the literature review in Table 2, it was found that the most important goal and objective for community-based tourism was sustainability. The goals of CBT include preserving local communities and their natural and cultural resources and improving the landscape, environment, and natural resources in order to support their socioeconomic growth. However, according to UNESCO (2015), sustainable development refers to the methods used to attain sustainability, whereas sustainability is typically thought of as a long-term objective.

Sustainable Development Goals:

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was endorsed by every United Nations member state in 2015, offers a common roadmap for world peace and prosperity both today and in the future. It is centered on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are a pressing call to action for all nations, both developed and developing, to work together in a worldwide collaborative effort. They understand that eradicating poverty and other forms of deprivation requires a combination of policies that address climate change, protect our forests and oceans, and enhance health and education while lowering inequality and promoting economic growth UNWTO (2018a).

The short titles of the 17 SDGs are: No poverty (SDG 1), Zero hunger (SDG 2), Good health and well-being (SDG 3), Quality education (SDG 4), Gender equality (SDG 5), Clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), Affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), Industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), Reduced inequalities (SDG 10), Sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), Responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), Climate action (SDG 13), Life below water (SDG 14), Life on land (SDG 15), Peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16), and Partnerships for the goals (SDG 17) UNWTO.

The Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) demand profound changes in every nation, necessitating complementing efforts from industry, government, civil society, and research. However, parties do not agree on how to operationalize the 17 SDGs. The six SDG Transformations education, gender, and inequality; health, well-being, and demographics; energy decarbonization and sustainable industry; sustainable food, land, water, and oceans; sustainable cities and communities; and the digital revolution for sustainable development are modular building blocks of SDG achievement, building on previous work by The World in 2050 initiative (Sachs et al., 2019)

Community based tourism for Sustainable Development Goals in Songkhla Old Town

Songkhla Old Town in southern of Thailand is known for its rich cultural heritage. Songkhla Old Town has three main roads: Nakhon Nok Road, Nakhon Nai Road, and Nang Ngam Road. These roads are full of beautiful buildings with well-preserved architecture, reflecting a blend of influences from different cultures over centuries, both Sino-Portuguese architecture, and Chinese residential and commercial shophouses. The starting point of walking around Songkhla Old Town starts from the Songkhla City Gate along Nakhon Nok Road, which is a road along Songkhla Lake. At the end of the road is an old rice mill painted red, called “Hap Ho Hin”, which is now a permanent exhibition of the story of Songkhla Old Town. Next is Nakhon Nai Road and Nang Ngam Road, which are the centers of famous local sweet and savory restaurants for decades, including shops selling rare Thai desserts such as Khee Mot, Thong Ek, Khao Fang Kuan, Khanom Krapong, Khanom Butu, Sampanee, as well as ice cream shops, stewed rice shops, old-fashioned coffee shops, etc. You can also walk and see

street art paintings on the walls of houses on various roads, each of which reflects the way of life of the locals, such as pictures of coffee shops, children of three nationalities, pushcart coffee shops, and Chinese opera actresses.

Millions of visitors have been drawn to Songkhla from all over the world for decades. Songkhla, which has become one of Thailand's most popular tourist destinations and is rich in natural resources, especially the image of beach tourism. According to the tourism statistics of Songkhla from January 1 to November 30, 2024, it was found that Songkhla tourism industry grew by more than 30% compared to the same period in 2023 (www.thainews.prd.go.th). In the first half of 2024, Songkhla welcomed more than 3 million tourists, generating approximately 28.6 billion baht in tourism revenue (www.mungngam-sk.go.th). Therefore, Songkhla was chosen as the study's focus because of its great potential to draw repeat and devoted visitors. Sustainable tourism has been given top priority by the Thai government, particularly in ecotourism hotspots like Songkhla where travel is growing. Thailand's national and municipal governments have backed community-based tourism in Phuket. Collaborations involving public sectors, including the Ministry of Tourism and Sports and the Tourism Authority of Thailand, educational institutions, and local communities have been financed in order to create and promote community-based tourism in Songkhla. Especially DASTA Thailand is a CBT organization that is deeply integrated within the Old Town community. It also arranges activities to attract more tourists and develops the local way of life.

Community-based tourism (CBT) in Songkhla's old town focuses on integrating tourism into the daily life of the local community, promoting local culture, and offering unique experiences for tourists. This approach helps maintain the authenticity of the area and provides economic opportunities for residents.

Table 3 Key aspects of community-based tourism in Songkhla Old Town

	Community-based tourism	SDGs
Community Involvement:	In order to ensure that their needs and interests are taken into account, locals actively participate in the planning and execution of tourism-related activities.	SDG 4 SDG 5 SDG 16 SDG 17
Cultural Preservation:	The goal of tourism is to preserve and promote the region's distinctive cultural legacy, which includes its rich history, customary crafts, and culinary traditions.	SDG 9 SDG 14 SDG 15
Economic Benefits	Tourism generates income for local businesses, entrepreneurs, and residents, contributing to a more sustainable and equitable economy.	SDG 1
Sustainable Practices	The focus of community-based tourism is on long-term preservation of the region's natural and cultural resources as well as environmental responsibility.	SDG 6 SDG 7 SDG 8 SDG 12

Source: The author

Community-based tourism (CBT) in Songkhla Old Town demonstrates a highly successful model of sustainable and inclusive development. By deliberately placing local residents at the very core of all planning and implementation phases, CBT inherently ensures that tourism initiatives are meticulously aligned with the authentic needs, deeply held values, and aspirations of the community

itself. Furthermore, a strong emphasis on cultural preservation not only diligently safeguards Songkhla's rich and diverse heritage – encompassing its distinctive architecture, traditional crafts, unique cuisine, and vibrant artistic expressions but also actively fosters a more profound and meaningful connection between discerning visitors and the authentic local way of life.

Economically, CBT initiatives are instrumental in generating direct and tangible benefits for residents, primarily through robust support for local businesses and the active encouragement of grassroots entrepreneurship within the community. Simultaneously, the adoption of environmentally responsible practices serves to contribute significantly to the long-term protection and careful stewardship of the town's invaluable natural landscapes and cherished cultural assets. Specific initiatives, such as the charming tram services, immersive walking tours, innovative creative spaces like Hub Ho Hin, and the dedicated promotion of authentic local restaurants, vividly exemplify how thoughtfully managed tourism can simultaneously enrich the visitor experience and substantially enhance the overall well-being of the community.

Overall, the comprehensive experience gleaned from Songkhla Old Town powerfully highlights how community-based tourism, when meticulously designed, strategically planned, and diligently implemented, can indeed serve as an exceptionally potent and transformative tool for sustainable development. This approach not only plays a crucial role in preserving the unique identity of the locale but also actively promotes economic equity among its residents and robustly empowers the local communities to shape their own future. Such examples provide invaluable lessons for other destinations seeking similar pathways to sustainable growth.

Table 4 Experiences offered by each Community based tourism site in Songkhla Old Town

Experiences	Examples of community-based tourism initiatives in Songkhla Old Town	SDGs
Tram services:	The introduction of tram services by the Songkhla City Municipality helps tourists explore the old town while supporting local businesses.	SDG 9 SDG 14
Walking tours:	Tourists can enjoy the area's distinctive architecture, street art, and local culture by following designated walking trails.	SDG 4 SDG 5 SDG 16 SDG 17
Creative spaces	The creation of creative places, such as the Hub Ho Hin (Red Rice Mill), offers chances for interaction and cultural exchange.	SDG 6 SDG 7 SDG 8 SDG 12
Local restaurants and businesses:	The focus on supporting local food businesses and other establishments ensures that income is distributed within the community.	SDG 1
Art and culture preservation:	The region's distinct identity is influenced by initiatives to protect and promote local art, such as street art and traditional crafts.	SDG 9 SDG 14 SDG 15

Source: The author

Community based tourism (CBT) is essential to achieving the SDGs and producing sustainable results. The tourist sector has the potential to contribute to the realization of the SDGs and the emergence of a more sustainable future, which is the focus of this point-of-view study. However, the SDGs should be viewed as a network of connected objectives within a broad framework rather than as a set of discrete objectives. From the study of goals and objectives, as well as components of Community based tourism management, it can be concluded that it corresponds to the Sustainable Development Goals as shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Community based tourism relating to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Songkhla Old Town

Songkhla Old Town	Community based tourism	SDGs	Dimensions 5 Ps
Street Art Hub Ho Hin Historic Attractions:	Attraction	SDG 9 Industry Innovation and Infrastructure	Planet Prosperity
Walking tours Gastronomy tour	Activity	SDG 14 Life Below Water SDGs 15 Life on Land	Planet Prosperity
Tram services Tourist Information Tourist service	Amenity	SDG 9 Industry Innovation and Infrastructure	Planet Prosperity
Songkhla Old Town Community	Community	SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities	Peace Partnership
– Community leaders in Songkhla Old Town – Local people in Songkhla Old Town	Local participation	SDG 5 Gender Equality SDG 16 Peace and Justice Strong Institutions SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals	Peace Partnership
– Old Town Tourism Community Enterprise Group – Community leaders in Songkhla Old Town – Local people in Songkhla Old Town – Tourist	Sustainability management	SDG 6 Clean water sanitation SDG 7 Affordable and Clean Energy SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production SDG 13 Climate Action	People Planet
Old Town Tourism Community Enterprise Group	Learning	SDG 4 Quality Education	People
– Old Town Tourism Community Enterprise Group – Community leaders in Songkhla Old Town – Local people in Songkhla Old Town	Improving quality of life	SDG 1 No Poverty SDG 2 Zero Hunger SDG 3 Good Health and well-being SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities	People

Source: The author

From Table 5, this is the consistency between Community based tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals. From the study of the key elements leading to the success of Community based tourism management It was found that there are 7 key elements contributing to the success of the Sustainable Development Goals, consisting of (i.e., attraction, activity, community, local participation, sustainability management, learning, and improving quality of life). It is important to develop seven key elements for CBT. It is a mechanism to drive tourism for the community-based tourism area to have competitiveness and create more advantages in managing tourism in the area (Bulatovi & Rajovi, 2016). According to the United Nations (2015), the Sustainable Development Goals serve as a road map for building a better, more sustainable future for everybody. They deal with issues such as poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, and issues of peace and justice, among other global issues. All of the objectives might potentially benefit from tourism, either directly or indirectly. Especially goals 8, 12, and 14 on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production (SCP), and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, in particular, have been included as aims (UNWTO, 2015). There are details about community-based tourism. Relating to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as follows:

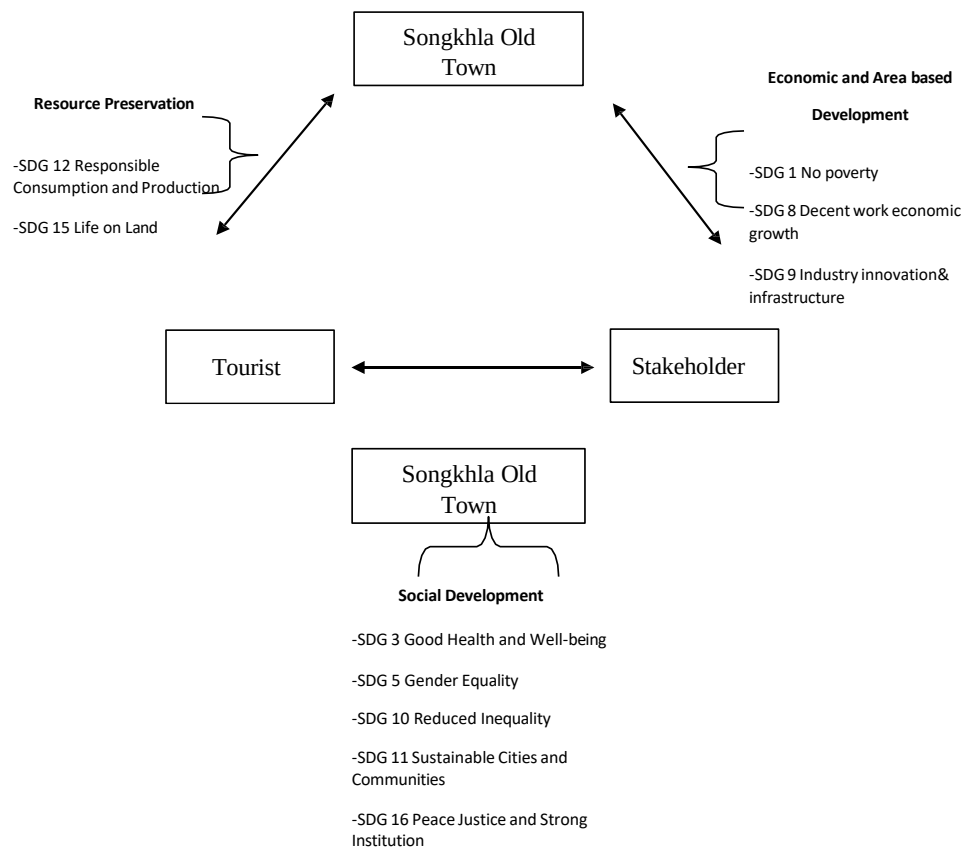


Figure 1: SDG interconnections with Community based tourism in Songkhla Old Town Source: The author

Thus, the model presents Community based tourism (CBT) as related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). CBT takes into account the sustainability of the environment, society, and culture. CBT will be determined by community members for the management of community-based and community-owned tourism. A model of CBT for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will focus on eliminating the limitations. There are limits on local participation, the promotion of the development of capital, and local people. Moreover, gender equality, local job creation, training entrepreneurship, education for local people, planning, and implementation It's a way of looking at tourism as an economic driver that helps community members have a better quality of life. It corresponds to the SDGs; the 17 development goals reflect the 'Three Pillars of

Sustainability," which are the social, economic, and environmental dimensions, plus the other two dimensions, which are peace and institutions. and the development partnership dimension that connects all dimensions of sustainability together.

Results

Community-based tourism (CBT) is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and producing sustainable outcomes. The tourism sector as a whole holds significant potential to contribute to the realization of the SDGs and the emergence of a more sustainable future. Critically, the SDGs should be viewed as an interconnected network of objectives within a broad framework, rather than as a set of discrete, isolated targets.

The study identified seven key elements crucial for successful community-based tourism management that directly contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals: attraction, activity, community, local participation, sustainability management, learning, and improving quality of life. These elements are vital not only for driving tourism growth but also for enhancing competitiveness and creating distinct advantages in tourism management (Bulatović & Rajović, 2016).

The model developed in this study demonstrates a direct and significant relationship between community-based tourism and the SDGs, emphasizing comprehensive sustainability across environmental, social, and cultural dimensions. This model posits that CBT, when effectively managed and owned by the community itself, can overcome common limitations in local participation and actively promote holistic local development. This includes fostering crucial aspects such as gender equality, creating new job opportunities, providing entrepreneurship training, and enhancing educational access. Fundamentally, this approach views tourism as a powerful economic driver for substantially improving the quality of life for community members, aligning seamlessly with the 'Three Pillars of Sustainability' (people, prosperity, planet), further augmented by the principles of peace and partnerships.

Discussion

This study highlights the critical role of Community based tourism (CBT) in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by aligning tourism practices with sustainability principles. Rather than treating the SDGs as isolated targets, the research supports the view that they function as an interconnected framework, requiring integrated, community-centered strategies.

The identification of seven core elements: attraction, activity, community, local participation, sustainability management, learning, and improving quality of life illustrates the multifaceted nature of effective CBT. These components not only drive tourism development and competitiveness but also ensure that tourism benefits are equitably distributed and rooted in local realities.

The proposed model demonstrates how CBT can directly contribute to the environmental, social, and cultural dimensions of sustainability. By prioritizing local ownership and participatory management, CBT initiatives can overcome barriers to inclusion, promote gender equity, support entrepreneurship, and enhance education and employment opportunities. This aligns closely with the "Three Pillars of Sustainability": people, prosperity, and planet, while also advancing peace and partnerships, which are integral to the SDG agenda.

Conclusion

Community based tourism (CBT) offers a viable and impactful pathway for sustainable development. When strategically managed and inclusively governed, CBT can transform local communities, improve livelihoods, and serve as a catalyst for achieving long-term sustainability goals. Future efforts should focus on strengthening community capacity, meticulously monitoring outcomes, and fostering robust cross-sector collaboration to fully realize the potential of CBT in supporting the SDGs.

Community based tourism is indeed essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and producing sustainable results. The tourism sector, as a whole, possesses the inherent potential to contribute significantly to the realization of the SDGs and the emergence of a more sustainable global future. Crucially, the SDGs should be viewed as an interconnected network of objectives within a broad, holistic framework, rather than merely as a set of discrete, isolated targets.

Research recommendations

1. The study reinforces the theoretical understanding of Community based tourism (CBT) as a holistic approach to sustainable development, integrating economic, social, environmental, and governance dimensions. It expands on existing literature by specifically mapping seven key elements of CBT to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, providing a more granular theoretical framework for analyzing CBT's contributions to global sustainability agendas. The findings align with the concept that CBT empowers local communities to manage and control their resources for their own advantage, thus contributing to improved quality of life and poverty alleviation

2. For policymakers and tourism developers, the study provides a clear roadmap for designing and implementing CBT initiatives that directly contribute to specific SDGs. The identified seven key elements (attraction, activity, community, local participation, sustainability management, learning, and improving quality of life) offer actionable areas for intervention and investment in destinations like Songkhla Old Town. This framework can guide community engagement strategies, resource allocation, and development programs aimed at fostering sustainable tourism and improving local livelihoods.

3. The study highlights the potential of CBT to address critical social issues like poverty, inequality, and quality of life within local communities by creating jobs, fostering collaboration, and promoting local culture. By aligning CBT with SDGs 1 (No Poverty), SDGs 2 (Zero Hunger), SDGs 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDGs 5 (Gender Equality), SDGs 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDGs 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDGs 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), the research provides a strong basis for policies that empower local populations and ensure equitable benefits from tourism. It advocates for policies that enhance local participation, training, and education, thereby promoting social inclusion and community resilience.

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STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION OF ISO 22379:2022 TO ENHANCE URBAN RESILIENCE AND POSITION SONGKHLA MICE CITY AS A GLOBAL HUB FOR MEGA-SPORTING EVENTS

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Abstract

Global mega-events, particularly large-scale music and sporting festivals, have increasingly become strategic platforms for promoting cultural identity, tourism innovation, and urban resilience. Festivals such as the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in the United States and Japan's Fuji Rock Festival exemplify how sustainability, inclusivity, and community participation can coexist with global-scale entertainment and economic success. Inspired by these international models, Thailand has begun leveraging its own festival economy to project soft power, enhance national image, and stimulate post-pandemic economic recovery. Iconic examples such as Wonderfruit, Big Mountain Music Festival, and S2O Songkran Music Festival highlight the country's growing potential in sustainable event management and creative tourism. Yet, despite this progress, there remains a significant research and policy gap in developing systematic frameworks for resilient, inclusive, and sustainable event ecosystems, particularly within regional contexts such as Songkhla Province. This pioneering project, "Strategic Implementation of ISO 22379:2022 to Enhance Urban Resilience and Position Songkhla MICE City as a Global Hub for Mega-Sporting Events," proposes an integrative model that bridges international standards of event resilience (ISO 22379:2022) with the unique socio-cultural and economic dynamics of Southern Thailand. Songkhla, distinguished by its multicultural heritage, creative urban identity, and strong MICE infrastructure, serves as a strategic case study for exploring how resilience-oriented event management can strengthen local governance, promote sustainable tourism, and enhance international competitiveness. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates quantitative survey data from 400 festival participants with qualitative insights obtained through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions among stakeholders in the public, private, and community sectors. This methodological convergence enables a comprehensive analysis of both structural and behavioral dimensions of event resilience, including governance mechanisms, risk management strategies, community inclusion, and sustainable resource utilization. The anticipated outcome is the formulation of the Songkhla Urban Resilience Framework for Mega-Events, a pioneering governance model designed to align local development strategies with global standards in sustainable event management. The framework aims to position Songkhla not merely as a regional festival destination but as a globally recognized MICE and mega-sporting city, capable of hosting inclusive, environmentally responsible, and economically impactful events. Ultimately, this research contributes new theoretical and practical insights into the discourse on urban resilience, sustainable event governance, and the operationalization of ISO 22379:2022, setting a precedent for similar initiatives across emerging creative cities in Thailand and the broader ASEAN region.

Keywords: ISO 22379:2022, urban resilience, Songkhla MICE City, mega-sporting events, sustainable event management, cultural urbanism, community participation

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ESG REPORTING AND SUSTAINABLE BRANDING IN HOTEL CHAINS: A CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE

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Desy Nur Aini Fajri⁴

Extended abstract

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks are increasingly viewed as essential for strategic decision-making and sustainable brand positioning in the hospitality industry. With growing consumer awareness, regulatory expectations, and investor scrutiny, hotel chains are under pressure to adopt transparent and impactful ESG reporting mechanisms that can communicate to others of their business practices. With all these requirements and consumer demands, the integration of ESG into branding strategies remains uneven (Bae et al., 2023). It is becoming a common standard today that many hospitality companies producing their own sustainability reports. However, the effectiveness of these documents in communicating the company's ESG performance and consequently to enhance their brand loyalty, trust and competitiveness in this growing industry requires further understanding (Mendrofa, 2024).

Purpose/Problem Statement

This conceptual paper aims to examine the intersection between ESG reporting and sustainable branding in the hotel industry. Despite the proliferation of sustainability reports, there is limited understanding of how ESG performance is communicated to stakeholders in ways that enhance brand trust, differentiation, and long-term competitiveness. A standard of disclosures with a high quality ESG reporting, which obviously are crucial in enhancing brand trust and differentiation are now always present and showed a notable gap (Bae et al., 2023; Bernard, 2025). Previous studies have shown that companies with a standard and proper ESG practices tend to perform better financially and will achieve greater market value as compared to those who neglect or putting less priority to these factors (Bernard, 2025; Lonescu et al., 2019). Thus, this paper seeks to explore the strategic and communicative functions of ESG disclosures in hospitality contexts.

Originality/value

The paper proposes a conceptual model linking ESG reporting quality to brand equity dimensions such as trust, perceived authenticity, and emotional connection. By integrating the stakeholder theory, signaling theory, and brand legitimacy frameworks, this paper aims to elucidate how ESG metrics can deliver the competitive advantage in hospitality branding. Major hotel chains like Hilton and Marriott have already leveraged their ESG initiatives to boost up their corporate reputation and improve the consumer trust (Mendrofa, 2024). In Malaysia, hotel operators are increasingly adopting ESG practices, and it will be guided by local regulations and international market expectations. The Malaysia hospitality sector also participated well with a growing commitment to their reporting initiatives on sustainable effort through various platforms such as the ASEAN Green Hotel Standard (Kim et al., 2025). It is more important today as this ESG disclosure could help in creating and improve stakeholder trust and engagement while combating the common perception of greenwashing particularly among hospitality industry (Bernard, 2025).

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Design/methodology/approach

A conceptual review approach is employed, drawing from academic literature in corporate sustainability, strategic branding, and stakeholder communication. Industry practices and global hospitality ESG benchmarks are analyzed to propose a model for ESG branding effectiveness.

Findings/Discussion

The proposed framework identifies three key pathways through which ESG reporting influences branding: (1) transparent disclosure enhances stakeholder trust, (2) authentic storytelling fosters emotional engagement, and (3) performance benchmarking supports brand legitimacy. Hotels that communicate ESG outcomes in relatable and culturally grounded ways are more likely to resonate with ethically conscious consumers and investors. According to Mendrofa (2024), companies like Accord Hotels has already provide extensive reports in detailing their sustainability metrics and these efforts successfully boosting stakeholder's trust. Similarly, in Malaysia big hotel brands like Berjaya Hotels and Resorts is seen to be actively communicate and publicly posting their sustainability initiatives, which they align it with cultural expectations and values among their customers (Kim et al., 2025).

Theoretical implications

This paper contributes to hospitality branding literature by embedding ESG as a core component of brand meaning. It also advances signaling theory by exploring how non-financial disclosures shape stakeholder perceptions in service-intensive industries.

Practical implications

Hospitality leaders can utilize the model to audit their ESG communication strategies, align sustainability metrics with brand narratives, and engage stakeholders more effectively. Investor relations teams may also benefit from clearer ESG-brand integration pathways. Investors also will find this information as valuable for a better understanding of the importance in integrating ESG branding, which consequently will enhance the company appeal to investors (Tarmuji et al., 2016).

Social implications

The findings suggest a need for industry-wide ESG disclosure standards in tourism to prevent greenwashing and promote genuine sustainability practices. This will align with the trends globally as transparent ESG practices will help in putting back stakeholder trust with the known greenwashing activities among the hospitality industry players. Policymakers and certification bodies should facilitate training and toolkits for ESG reporting tailored to the hospitality sector.

Research limitations

Even with the framework would give clearer message of the significance in ESG reporting, the limitations in the empirical validation of the proposed model will need future research to have wider surveys and content analysis across various hotel brands globally (Mim et al., 2022). These studies should also explore the variations in the dynamics of ESG reporting and brand relationships, with comparison of the diverse markets across Asia and the West (Bae et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2025).

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AI-DRIVEN SUSTAINABILITY IN THE SOUTHEAST ASIA MICE INDUSTRY: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

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Extended abstract

The Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) industry is a significant contributor to the world economic development. The growth of this industry in Asia has been more rapid as compared to the other regions since the 1960s (Lee & Chon, 2024). Despite its economic potential, the industry poses sustainability challenges due to its resource-intensive nature. With increasing pressure to reduce environmental impact, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a potential solution to enhance sustainability practices. However, there is limited research on how AI technologies can be effectively leveraged to foster sustainability in the MICE industry. This study responded to the call made by Paul et al. (2022), who highlighted the urgent need to examine the impact of digital transformation on MICE industry sustainability. The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform MICE stakeholders, policymakers, and technology developers about the transformative role of AI in promoting sustainability. The findings will offer practical recommendations for enhancing AI adoption and optimising resource efficiency in the MICE industry.

Keywords: MICE, artificial intelligence, sustainability, cross-countries comparison, Southeast Asia

Purpose/Problem Statement

This study aims to explore the role of AI in promoting sustainable practices within the MICE industry. Specifically, the research seeks to understand the awareness, adoption, and impact of AI-driven solutions on sustainability efforts from the perspectives of key stakeholders, including MICE operators. The study is guided by the following research questions: (1) What are the barriers to AI implementation for sustainability in the MICE sector? (2) What are the strategies to incorporate AI technology toward enhancing sustainability in the MICE industry?

Originality/value

The study integrates triple bottom line theory and diffusion of innovation theories to create a composite lens that links why organizations adopt AI (environmental, economic, social goals) with how that adoption unfolds.

Design/methodology/approach

A qualitative research approach was employed, utilising semi-structured interviews with MICE stakeholders across the Southeast Asia region, namely Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand. Using thematic analysis, the researchers identify, analyse, and interpret patterns of meaning (themes) within textual data. This analysis is appropriate for the study, as it can capture the rich contextual perspectives from the diverse MICE stakeholders. Additionally, since sustainability and

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AI adoption involve multi-layered and interrelated factors, thematic analysis allows the grouping of responses under overarching themes.

Findings/Discussion

The study found several key themes related to the barriers of AI implementation in the MICE industry, such as infrastructure, skills readiness, and institutional support. The informants acknowledged technical and human capital barriers as the main challenge. Thai informants stressed the need for simplicity and cost-effectiveness. Indonesian informants voiced concerns over fragmented infrastructure, particularly in regions outside Jakarta. In relation to AI implementation strategy, the three countries showed strong alignment in embracing paperless event strategies. AI-supported solutions included QR-based registration, virtual event platforms, smart HVAC systems, and food waste tracking. Indonesian informants particularly emphasised hybrid formats and virtual carbon reduction tools. Moreover, there was a shared call for institutional policy frameworks, academic-industry partnerships, and government incentives. Indonesian responses referenced national digital strategies and the need for cross-ministerial cooperation to enable AI readiness.

Theoretical implications

The study contributes to the development of a theoretical framework that unites technology diffusion and sustainability impact in tourism-specific innovation ecosystems. This framework can serve as a reference point for future interdisciplinary research in tourism, innovation studies, and sustainability transitions.

Practical implications

The findings provide insights into the current state of AI adoption for sustainability, highlight successful AI-driven sustainability initiatives, and identify challenges hindering widespread implementation. Additionally, the study explore strategies and opportunities to facilitate AI integration in the industry.

Research limitations

The study is limited by its qualitative scope, as the findings may not be generalisable to all MICE contexts. Additionally, the rapid evolution of AI technologies presents challenges in capturing the latest innovations. Future research should consider longitudinal studies to track the long-term impact of AI on MICE sustainability and explore quantitative methods to complement qualitative insights.

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Room 5
Human Capital and Leadership

WOMEN'S CREATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO TAPIS TRADITIONAL WEAVING PRESERVATION: A CASE STUDY OF KELAWI TOURISM VILLAGE, LAMPUNG, INDONESIA

Desy Nur Aini FAJRI¹

Extended abstract

There is a significant trend of preserving the cultural heritage of traditional tapis weaving, especially that carried out by women, demanding careful studies to explore the area. Past studies mainly focus on batik in Java (Sugiarto et al., 2025; Li et al., 2024; Phang et al., 2022; Febriani et al., 2023; Hastuti et al., 2022), ulos in Sumatra (Sijabat et al., 2025; Hariati & Purwanto, 2024; Kusuma et al., 2022), and songket in Bali-Lombok (Ariessaputra et al., 2024; Janpourtaher, 2019). There are some studies on tapis, but they emphasize the weaving's patterns, economic potential, and local values (Suherman & Vidákovich, 2022; Darwis et al., 2024). Those studies hence neglect women's adaptive creativity, particularly in tapis preservation, while their roles, specifically in rural areas, make an important contribution to maintaining family households, economic benefits, cultural heritage, and local community development (Chen & Barcus, 2024). The village female weavers perform based on three driving forces: self-actualization, culture, and religion (Badriati et al., 2022), yet they are ill-empowered, threatening weaving existence (Nugroho et al., 2021). Accordingly, the aim of this research is to bridge the gap by analyzing women's creative efforts in preserving traditional tapis weaving amid modernization and cultural shifts: a case study in Kelawi Tourism Village, Indonesia.

This descriptive-qualitative research examined a case study of women's creative efforts in preserving traditional tapis weaving in a tourism village, inspecting to what extent their initiatives contributed to preserving cultural heritage while improving socio-economic conditions. The area was Kelawi Tourism Village, Lampung, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with three local actors as informants, they are a woman weaver, a craft entrepreneur, and a Kelawi local leader. The informants were chosen purposively using the snowball technique to identify other interviewees. After data were collected, data reduction, presentation, verification, and conclusion drawing were executed.

It was found that women's creative efforts to maintain traditional tapis weaving included (1) Maintaining tapis weaving production in the traditional way, (2) Creatively diversifying Tapis woven products, and (3) Setting Their Orientation to Women's Socio-Entrepreneurship and Tapis Weaving Preservation through Younger Generation Engagement. Among the obstacles the women confronted were no showroom to display tapis weaving products and poor online promotion.

Keywords: Creative; Preserving; Traditional Tapis Weaving; Tourism Village; Woman

Purpose/Problem Statement

This research aims to investigate women's creative efforts to maintain traditional *tapis* weaving. While studies on traditional textile preservation in Indonesia are abundant, research that directly focuses on the efforts to sustain *tapis* weaving amid modernization and cultural shifts remains relatively scarce. Most studies focus on batik (Java), *ulos* (Sumatra), and *songket* (Bali-Lombok), and existing *tapis* research highlights the weaving from historical perspectives and economic potential instead of putting a fine point on women's adaptive strategies for its preservation.

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Originality/Value

This research highlights the overlooked role of women as cultural guardians and innovators in traditional crafts in underdeveloped rural areas, such as tourism villages in Lampung, Indonesia. Meanwhile, as pointed out in the findings, the opportunity to increase employment and develop tourism village strategies, especially through women's participation, is widely open and can come with a desired success rate. The study uncovered three unique strategies used by women in the Kelawi Tourism Village for preserving *tapis* weaving by combining cultural conservation with innovation and entrepreneurship.

Design/Methodology/Approach

This descriptive-qualitative research was a case study of women's creative efforts in preserving traditional *tapis* weaving in the midst of modernization and cultural shifts. It observed the degree to which women's initiatives contributed to preserving cultural heritage while improving socio-economic conditions. After data were collected, data reduction, presentation, verification, and conclusion drawing were performed.

Findings/Discussion

Women maintained traditional *tapis* weaving by performing the following creative efforts: (1) Maintaining *tapis* weaving cloth manufacturing in the traditional way, (2) Creatively diversifying Tapis woven products, and (3) Setting Their Orientation to Women's Socio-Entrepreneurship and Tapis Weaving Preservation through Younger Generation Engagement. Several obstacles women weavers faced included no showroom to display *tapis* weaving products and limited online promotion.

Theoretical Implications

This study enriches the knowledge of women's contribution to bridging tradition and innovation through traditional weaving preservation, realizing a sustainable tourism village.

Practical Implications

Some important practical implications of this study are: (1) giving evidence that the support and contribution of women's support and contribution can account for tourism village improvements and (2) confirming the high possibility that women dwelling areas that are rural have the opportunity to be economically independent and improve the welfare of their villages through the preservation of weaving cultural heritage. This research may motivate future researchers to explore the weaving knowledge and skill levels in different regions, market access, and policies that recognize women's contributions to preserving cultural heritage in tourist destinations.

Social Implications (Policy Contribution)

By uncovering field facts about the entrepreneurial role of women weavers, this study underscores how traditional weaving can serve as a means for women's financial independence and community leadership in rural tourism. This research contributes to strengthening local cultural identity while opening up economic opportunities for village women and recommends the government make policy concerning its support for infrastructure and community-based training.

Research Limitations

The research focus on one village limits generalization. Future research can compare practical weaving conservation in some tourism villages in developed and developing countries.

Introduction

Traditional weaving is essential in shaping and maintaining national identity therefore strategic measures must be performed to preserve its sustainability. According to a study in Bangladesh, UNESCO has recognized the traditional Jamdani weaving art as an intangible cultural heritage, emphasizing weaving as a symbol of identity, dignity, and self-recognition (Khalid & Chowdhury, 2018). A study in India contends that weaving activities serve as an effective means of building cultural identity and strengthening the relationship between local communities and their traditions (Dias et al., 2020). Gonzalez and Mege (2018) exhibit the manner of weaving performed by communities to express cultural identity and navigate modern influences. The importance of weaving is also underscored in a study in Ghana, addressing communities' willingness to build a national demonstration center for preserving Kente weaving, considering the economic value the weaving generates (Vondolia et al., 2022).

Furthermore, weaving opens up opportunities for the weavers, especially women, to participate in enhancing the local economy. Researchers in Morocco attest that rural women maintain the cultural significance of local weaving in the face of modernization through cooperatives (Nicholas, 2022), that provide them partnerships and benefits and generate greater economic change and growth as well as social benefit opportunities (Brogan & Dooley, 2024). By selling fabrics, village woman weavers can successfully improve the living standard of their families (El Badriati et al., 2022). Rural women's entrepreneurship contributes significantly to maintaining family households, economic benefits, cultural heritage, and the development of local communities (Chen & Barcus, 2024).

Innovations for woven products can improve the local community's welfare. It can be achieved by integrating loom development, cultural heritage digitization, and promotional strategies, elevating the economic value of the products while maintaining weaving sustainability as a cultural identity. Modern technology that can enhance the efficiency and quality of looms accounts for these innovative efforts (Amesimeku & Dzamedo, 2024). In terms of cultural heritage digitization, web-based information systems help the community maintain cultural heritage resources by facilitating the preservation and wide dissemination of cultural heritage resources (Chai-Arayalert et al., 2021). Additionally, website development can encourage the global promotion of local woven products (King et al., 2023), while the application of Geographical Indication (GI) tagging allows for the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage as a cultural symbol (Gogoi et al., 2025). Through these measures, local weavers can maintain high-quality products and innovative designs and increase their income (Distanont et al., 2019; Mamidipudi et al., 2018; Hashino, 2016).

However, some villages are identified as being unable to preserve weaving sustainably. Among the main causes are the difficulty of mass-producing woven products to compete in the modern market and the rapid development of digital information technology. Liu et al. (2024) prove that the advent of modern technology and changes in the environment threaten the survival of traditional weaving, especially because of its complex traditional techniques. These techniques hinder traditional weavers from making their crafts efficiently, particularly when confronting competition from textile manufacturers with mass production capacity (Nuque, 2025). And yet, the results of a study in Bangladesh show how communities endeavor to maintain traditional weaving regardless of the challenges posed by textile factories producing counterfeit items (Singha, 2024).

In addition, a lack of training or education about weaving has led to a decline in the transmission of weaving skills to the younger generation, that considers weaving slow and labor-intensive, preferring faster and more modern techniques (Miller et al., 2022). This indicates that the erosion of traditional weaving knowledge is a complex problem influenced by economic, educational, and cultural factors.

The loss of traditional knowledge, along with market dynamics and the need for modernization, has put the sustainability of weaving traditions in jeopardy (Partarakis et al., 2025). The event deteriorates when the number of local people mastering traditional weaving techniques declines due to social and norm changes (Hwang & Huang, 2019). Persisting artisans must face low demand for traditional woven products and the abandonment of traditional clothing traditions, interfering with their determination to maintain the authenticity and wisdom of weaving ancestors

(Chantamool et al., 2024; Brownlow et al., 2015). The results of these unfortunate phenomena are therefore markedly observed, i.e., a tradition that can soon disappear and the interest from the locals that starts to diminish. Without serious efforts, traditional weaving risks further marginalization and even extinction.

Women's participation in woven goods production should be promoted as a mitigating effort. Regrettably, establishing a weaving entrepreneurship orientation in women's groups is an arduous task since it is claimed as a resistance discourse to patriarchal and gender norms, leading to the transformation of social institutions and ideologies (Chen & Barcus, 2024). Still, empowering weavers is a matter of urgency in eradicating the threat of weaving extinction (Nugroho et al., 2021), requiring a shift in gender paradigms and systemic support to alter inhibiting social norms.

Research related to women's creative contributions to preserving and maintaining traditional weaving, especially tapis weaving, remains scarce, as past studies mainly focus on batik in Java (Sugiarto et al., 2025; Li et al., 2024; Phang et al., 2022; Febriani et al., 2023; Hastuti et al., 2022), ulos in Sumatra (Sijabat et al., 2025; Hariati & Purwanto, 2024; Kusuma et al., 2022), and songket in Bali-Lombok (Ariessaputra et al., 2024; Janpourtaher, 2019). Some studies address tapestry yet put a finer point on the patterns, economic potential, and local values of the weaving (Suherman & Vidákovich, 2022; Darwis et al., 2024). In other words, they have neglected women's adaptive creativity in tapis preservation, and their significance in maintaining family households, economic benefits, cultural heritage, and local community development, specifically in rural areas (Chen & Barcus, 2024). Therefore, this research aims to complement this gap by exploring how women maintain traditional tapis weaving using creative approaches.

Objectives

Research related to women's creative contributions to preserving and maintaining traditional weaving, especially tapis weaving, remains scarce, as past studies mainly focus on batik in Java (Sugiarto et al., 2025; Li et al., 2024; Phang et al., 2022; Febriani et al., 2023; Hastuti et al., 2022), ulos in Sumatra (Sijabat et al., 2025; Hariati & Purwanto, 2024; Kusuma et al., 2022), and songket in Bali-Lombok (Ariessaputra et al., 2024; Janpourtaher, 2019). Some studies address tapestry yet put a finer point on the patterns, economic potential, and local values of the weaving (Suherman & Vidákovich, 2022; Darwis et al., 2024). In other words, they have neglected women's adaptive creativity in tapis preservation, and their significance in maintaining family households, economic benefits, cultural heritage, and local community development, specifically in rural areas (Chen & Barcus, 2024). Therefore, this research aims:

1. to complement this gap by exploring how women maintain traditional tapis weaving using creative approaches.

Woman Empowerment in Preserving Traditional Weaving

Traditional weaving is an integral part of cultural heritage that reflects the history, identity, and values of the community, containing deep symbolism and philosophy held by the local community as the makers (Ayesu et al., 2021). For instance, Kutnu weaving in Turkey offers interesting historical value and has provided financial support for the local community (Öner, 2019). It highlights the characteristics of weaving as cultural products that redefine the conventional notion of quality, thereby shaping novel cultural values, economic significance, and overarching purpose of woven goods (Semuel et al., 2022).

Factors prompting the continuous growth of weaving businesses include family economic education, capital assistance from banks, gender equality for weavers, and the adaptability of weaving entrepreneurs. Thus, human resources are a key factor in the sustainable survival of weaving structures (Memon, et al., 2022). In terms of motivation, weavers are primarily driven by three factors, namely the self, culture, and religious actualization (Badriati et al., 2022).

The contribution of women in preserving traditional weaving is significant, where they show the best performance in their three roles as economic capital, i.e., the heart of the family, vehicles for personal fulfillment, and wives (Badriati et al., 2022). Women in tourism villages voluntarily participate in activities related to domestic food and beverages, tourism and hospitality, and souvenir production and sales (Vujko et al., 2024). In addition, female weavers, through their

leadership, are pillars that strengthen the home industry by delivering relevant knowledge and skills to the next generation (Pedro et al., 2021). Considering their paramount services, women's empowerment is instrumental in elevating their sense of self-employment (Vulkovic et al., 2023), that in turn will support the development of weaving as a cultural heritage. Further results include a strengthened cultural identity of the region concerned, higher regional income, and steadfast rapid economic growth (Sulolipu et al., 2022).

After some inspections, we understand that existing literature has foregrounded the dual significance of traditional weaving as a cultural heritage and economic driver, with women as key agents in its preservation and development. Regrettably, discussions concerning women's creative contributions to preserving and maintaining traditional woven fabrics continue to be low in number.

Research Methodology

1. Populations and Sample

This descriptive-qualitative research examined a case study of women's creative contributions to preserving traditional tapis weaving in a tourism village, inspecting to what extent their initiatives accounted for preserving cultural heritage while improving socio-economic conditions. The research area was Kelawi Tourism Village, Lampung, Indonesia. The subjects were local women weavers that played an active role in preserving traditional tapis textiles and had direct involvement in weaving practices and contributions to preserving the cultural heritage.

This research focused on purposive samples from three local main actors with the following criteria: (1) Being involved in tapis weaving activities directly, (2) Understanding the cultural and tourism development in Kelawi Tourism Village, and (3) Having an influence on community-based preservation. Three key informants were selected for in-depth exploration to ensure that their insights reflected the socio-cultural and economic dimensions of tapis weaving preservation.

2. Research Tools

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, using open-ended questions that allowed the informants to outline the contributions weavers made, their experiences, and the challenges in maintaining the traditional tapis weaving tradition. Observations were made to identify the weaving techniques, tools used, interactions with the Kelawi people, and women's perspectives on preserving cultural heritage as a response to the challenges posed by the modernization era. Documentation was carried out by taking photos and accessing Kelawi's website and social media related to traditional tapis weaving.

3. Data Collection

Comprehensive data collection in Kelawi Tourism Village was conducted in January 2025 through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation. There were two data types, that were primary and secondary. The first was obtained through in-depth interviews with three local actors: a woman weaver, a craft entrepreneur, and a Kelawi local leader. Meanwhile, to contextualize the findings, the latter was sourced from academic literature, Kelawi's official website and social media, village government reports, and online news platforms.

4. Data Analysis

The comprehensive data collected in Kelawi Tourism Village were expected to reveal the field condition. Excessive and irrelevant data and information were removed, allowing for a more focused analysis to fulfill research objectives. Categorization was performed on data that had been filtered to facilitate systematic organization. Data were presented in a structured format to facilitate analysis and interpretation. Conclusions were drawn based on the compiled and presented data, providing clear explanations related to women weavers' contributions to maintaining the tapis tradition in the face of modernization in the tourism village.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

As indicated by research findings, women's creative contributions to maintaining traditional tapis weaving took the following forms: (1) Maintaining traditional tapis weaving techniques, (2) Creatively diversifying tapis woven products, and (3) Setting their orientation to women's socio-entrepreneurship orientation and tapis weaving preservation through younger generation engagement. Likewise, the need for targeted support from the government, private sectors, and the local community in the forms of skills development program delivery, market access provision, and policy-making that recognize women's contributions to tourism villages was claimed as urgent.

This study, therefore, provides further information related to how women contribute to bridging tradition and innovation through traditional weaving preservation, realizing a sustainable tourism village. Additionally, it contributes to strengthening local cultural identity while opening up economic opportunities for village women and recommends that the government make policy concerning its support for infrastructure and community-based training. This research had a single area of observation, namely Kelawi Tourism Village, thus limiting generalization and being considered very local. Accordingly, future researchers can compare how weaving conservation practices are implemented in other rural areas in Indonesia and abroad. To be specific, they can study the real and active contributions of women in underdeveloped rural areas to encouraging local entrepreneurship and preserving the cultural heritage of weaving.

2. Discussion

Overview of Kelawi Tourism Village

Kelawi Tourism Village is a famous tourism village located in Bakauheni, Lampung Selatan, Lampung, Indonesia. Geographically, the tourism village is very accessible, located about ten minutes by car from Bakauheni Port, the main gateway connecting Sumatra and Java via the busy Bakauheni-Merak ferry route. This strategic location makes it a convenient destination for domestic and international tourists looking for natural tourism and cultural experiences.

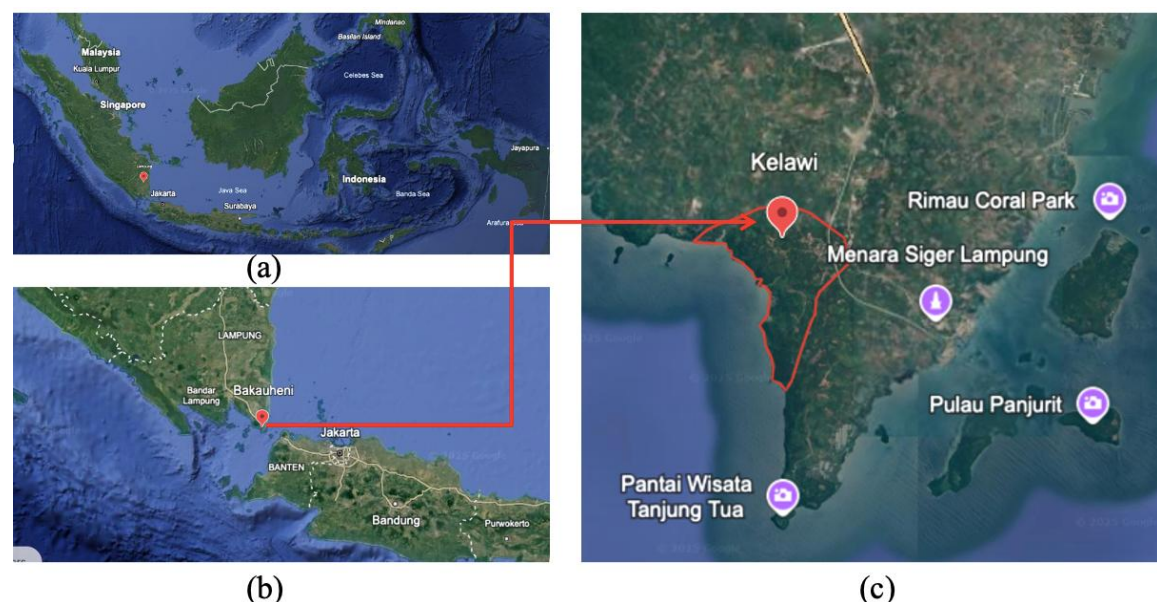


Figure 1 (a) Research Area on the Map of Indonesia, (b) Bakauheni, (c) Research Area of Kelawi Tourism Village
(Source: Google Earth)

The village has diverse tourism potential, especially natural tourism, with several attractions, such as the Green Canyon with famous rock formations and crystal-clear river flows, an underwater park that offers marine biodiversity, beautiful waterfalls surrounded by tropical vegetation, Alif Stone with its unique stone structure, and Lalay Cave an interesting cave ecosystem inhabited by bats.

In addition to its natural attractions, Kelawi Tourism Village also excels in agrotourism innovation, especially through breakthroughs in avocado cultivation. The tourism village successfully developed and patented a new avocado variety called “Sipit Kelawi avocado”, that has received official certification and intellectual property rights. This achievement demonstrates the community’s commitment to sustainable agricultural practices and economic empowerment through tourism and local product development.

Thanks to its outstanding contribution to tourism and rural development, Kelawi Tourism Village received several prestigious awards, including:

1. Second Place in the Developing Tourism Village Category at the 2023 Indonesian Tourism Village Award (ADWI), a national-level tourism village award.
2. The Green BRILiaNT Award from Bank Rakyat Indonesia (BRI) in 2023, in recognition of its efforts in environmentally friendly and sustainable tourism.
3. The MURI Record given by the Indonesian World Record Museum, appreciating it as the First Tourist Village in Indonesia to Develop Patented Local Avocado Varieties (Sipit Kelawi Avocado).

Those awards underline that in succeeding in its sustainable tourism development, Kelawi Tourism Village combined natural beauty, agrotourism innovation, and community-based tourism. According to our findings, the tourism village also recognized the contributions of women’s groups as guardians of tapis weaving, a critical cultural heritage.

Women’s Creative Contributions to Maintaining Traditional Tapis Weaving in Lampung, Indonesia

1. Maintaining Traditional Weaving Techniques

Tapis weaving, locally known as *menesi*, is a hereditary craft practiced by village women to make productive use of their time. The use of gold and silver threads distinguishes tapis textiles from other traditional fabrics. The process of tapis weaving is complicated, often taking up to two months to complete a single piece of fabric. The technique used is entirely manual, involving a method called *poaching* (hand stitching or embroidery), in which artisans carefully weave threads to form intricate patterns. One tapis fabric can feature several motifs, most of which are inspired by nature, flora, and fauna, reflecting Lampung’s rich biodiversity. Traditionally, tapis cloth is worn at Lampung traditional weddings, which symbolizes cultural identity and social status.

Tapis textile production relies on simple but specialized tools, with “*mattakh*” (a traditional loom) as the main tool, consisting of the following components:

Terikan - A tool for winding threads.

Cacap - A place to hold a loom.

Belida - A tool for tightening threads.

Kucuran - A tool for arranging and separating threads.

Supporting tools, such as *apik* (a stretcher to hold the warp thread), *guyun* (thread adjuster), *ijan/peneken* (footrest for weavers), *sekeli* (a tool for picking up weft thread), *terupong/teropong* (a tool for inserting weft thread), *amben* (a support for the weaver’s back), and *tekang* (a frame to stretch the fabric during the embroidery process of gold thread).

The complexity of the tapis weaving making is confirmed by the time taken to complete a tapis woven product. In the interview, our informant justified it through the following statement.

“Usually, it takes three-four days to make a tapis scarf, depending on the size of the scarf. For sarongs, it (the making time) can be even longer and (the price) is more expensive.” (An interview with Informant 1, a Kelawi woman weaver, at Kelawi Tourism Village on January 18th, 2025).

As a cultural heritage, tapis weaving embodies national identity while providing livelihood opportunities for rural women. Preserving the weaving is hence essential to maintain cultural symbolism and support the local economy. However, several challenges, such as declining interest among the younger generation and competition with machine-made textiles, threaten its survival. Therefore, interventions from stakeholders are needed to improve the sustainability of tapis weaving, especially by arranging government-supported weaving workshops, digital marketing of tapis products, and integration into cultural tourism.

In addition, to maintain traditional tapis weaving techniques, collaborative efforts are essential, integrating traditional skills with youth training programs and encouraging community involvement in conservation initiatives. Weaving education and training play an important role in shaping national identity by transmitting cultural heritage, patience, and practical skills (Balabuch & Rasoarifetra, 2023). Without such interventions, these handicrafts are at risk of disappearing rapidly due to modernization (Lin et al., 2022).



(a)

(b)

Figure 2 (a) A Local Weaver's House as the Tapis Weaving Training Venue in Kelawi, (b) Traditional Tapis Weaving Making
(Source: Field Observation, 2025)

Results demonstrated that mothers and women in Kelawi Tourism Village preserved the traditional tapis weaving in Lampung, Indonesia, through a consistent traditional technique application. They believed that such measure was crucial to maintaining the symbolic and practical aspects of national identity while providing economic value to local communities. The women weavers presented exceptional craftsmanship, managing time efficiently to produce high-quality textiles (Badriati et al., 2022).

2. Creatively Diversifying Tapis Woven Products

This research revealed the successful maintenance of tapis weaving sustainability due to the active contributions of local women weavers in the form of creative innovations in design and product development. Initially, the woven fabric, that generally took the form of scarves and sarongs, was permitted to be worn in traditional ceremonies only and sold at a relatively high price, limiting community circles that could afford it. However, breakthroughs in product diversification, by which the fabric was sewn into bags, bandanas, brooches, tissue holders, and caps, expanded its function to be more practical and affordable for the wider community.

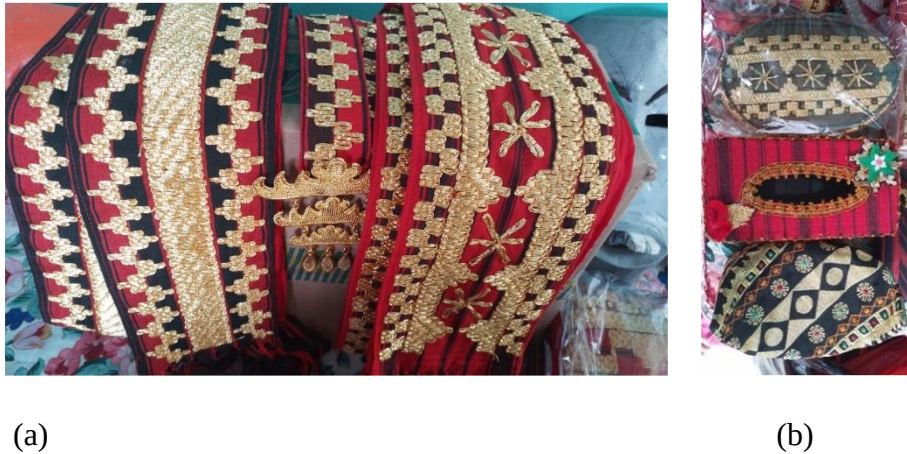


Figure 3 (a) Tapis Scarf, (b) Tapis Cap and Tissue Holder
(Source: Field Observation, 2025)

Women weavers' active contributions to the Kelawi Tourism Village were key to this transformation by continuously producing traditional fabrics, such as sarongs and *tukus* while developing derivative products by embroidering *tapis* motifs on materials that were then cut according to market needs. This strategy was in line with del Solar's (2019) findings that the development of traditional weaving should connect cultural heritage with market demand to improve the welfare of rural communities.

To support the above information, an informant commented:

"There are ten women here active in making *tapis* woven items. In addition to sarongs and *tukus*, they also sew *tapis* woven fabrics on cloth, then cut the combined materials according to their needs to make tissue holders, brooches, wallets, and others." (An interview with Informant 2, a *tapis* craft entrepreneur, at Kelawi Tourism Village on January 18th, 2025).

The innovation of derivative products, such as tissue holders, caps, and fashion accessories made of *tapis* woven fabrics, could enable expanding market share and escalating the functional value of *tapis* woven products in daily life. In other words, this creative approach was proven effective for preserving culture and creating a sustainable economic impact for local women weavers.

3. Setting Their Orientation to Women's Socio-Entrepreneurship and Tapis Weaving Preservation through Younger Generation Engagement

Tapis woven cloth is well-known for its artistic and economic values, attributable to its making process, that requires special precision and takes a considerable length of time. It is thus understandable that the woven cloth is high in price, set according to the complexity of its motif, materials, and size. A sheet of *tapis* woven cloth/sarong is generally sold at three to seven million Rupiahs.

The findings exhibited that preserving traditional *tapis* weaving facilitated the maintenance of the symbolism and practice of national identity and contributed to the local community income. And yet, it was reported that the economic potential of *tapis* woven products was constrained by structural inefficiencies. Although the fabric's high price (IDR3-7 million per sheet) reflected labor-intensive production and artistic complexity, the value was considered highly vulnerable and dependent on the demand of domestic buyers only. It was hence regrettable that the fabric remained unable to reach the international market due to the absence of export channels. According to one of our informants:

"*Tapis* woven cloth is worn by dancers during the welcoming event, where they perform the *Sembah* dance, celebrations, and cultural events. Typical Lampung scarves, *tukus*, and *kumbut* (for women) are usually given to the guests as souvenirs. Currently, there are a total of 53 youth organizations, with 35 active in making *tapis* woven cloth. They gather at Minan Mainah's house to hone their skills every week. The woven cloth has been sold to Bandar Lampung, Serang, and

other cities.” (An interview with Informant 3, a Kelawi local leader, at Kelawi Tourism Village on January 18th, 2025).

Besides, systemic barriers persisted regardless of the fact that increasing women’s participation encouraged communal interaction and empowerment (Vujko et al., 2024) and entrepreneurial orientation in weaving already existed (Permatasari et al., 2023). The tapis weaving sustainability continued to face the following challenges:

1. Traditional tapis weaving techniques (Maldonado-Erazo et al., 2025) were transmitted to young people through collaboration with youth organizations, but the demands for contemporary designs imperiled their existence.
2. Cultural commodification posed risks to tapis weaving. Despite tapis woven fabric being worn in cultural performances and given as souvenirs, hence strengthening symbolic capital, commodification risked losing meaning, and cultural values, and fading the cultural identity of the products.
3. A gap in market access was also identified. Even though tapis woven products reached the interprovincial market (Bandar Lampung, Serang, and others), the absence of digital infrastructure, e.g., e-commerce and virtual showrooms, and reliance on word-of-mouth marketing limited economic scalability.



(a)



(b)

Figure 4 (a) The Making of Tapis Woven Fabrics with the Young Generation, (b) A Girl Guiding a Tourist (the Author) in Making a Traditional Tapis Woven Fabric (Source: Field Observation, 2025)

Investigating tapis weaving preservation in Kelawi Tourism Village resulted in two findings to be highlighted, i.e., the weaving succeeded in becoming the product of a combination of culture and business, and in order to survive, the way of preservation should be improved, by preserving the heritage with conventional measures to developing it in a creative manner. To achieve this mission, policy support concerning financial capital resources, skill training, and technology/digital access for weavers, particularly women, is essential.

Women Weavers’ Challenges

Despite their important contribution to preserving the tradition of tapis weaving, women weavers in Kelawi Tourism Village faced systemic challenges that hindered their economic and cultural sustainability. The main obstacles included limited financial resources to invest in infrastructure, encompassing the absence of dedicated showrooms to showcase products, reliance on domestic order-based production without export expansion, and constant dependence on word-of-mouth promotion rather than optimized digital platforms (websites, social media).

Those challenges point to a broader structural gap in access to training, institutional support, and technology, underscoring the urgent need for stakeholder interventions. Among the interventions can be financial capital or funding support for women weavers, digital literacy programs, and public-private partnerships to ensure that tapis weaving preservation efforts are realized in the form of real empowerment, not just symbolic recognition.

The findings shine a light on this study's contribution to promoting the performance of the tourism village women in maintaining traditional weaving and achieving economic, social, cultural, and environmental sustainability.

Research recommendations

This research had a single area of observation, namely Kelawi Tourism Village, thus limiting generalization and being considered very local.

1. Accordingly, future researchers can compare how weaving conservation practices are implemented in other rural areas in Indonesia and abroad. To be specific, they can study the real and active contributions of women in underdeveloped rural areas to encouraging local entrepreneurship and preserving the cultural heritage of weaving.
2. This research helps future researchers by suggesting engaging topics for research, that are what inclusive business models involving women in decision-making are and how collaboration between governments, academics, and women weavers can strengthen the tourism village ecosystem, particularly that initiated by local communities.

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UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF UKM LIVING LABS: STAKEHOLDER CHALLENGES IN ADVANCING EDUTOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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Extended abstract

This study explores the multifaceted challenges faced by key stakeholders in transforming Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's (UKM) Living Labs into vibrant edutourism destinations. Using a qualitative research approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with current and former management officers from Pusat Pengurusan Makmal Alami & Fizikal UKM (ALAF) and the Faculty of Science, as well as local community members actively engaged with the Living Labs. The study reveals three primary constraints: limited infrastructural support, weak inter-agency coordination, and insufficient promotional strategies. A notable finding includes the organizational complexity stemming from the transfer of lab management responsibilities from the Faculty of Science to ALAF. This transition introduced operational ambiguities that further hinder progress. The paper contributes novel insights by highlighting stakeholder fragmentation in institutional settings, a relatively underexplored dimension in edutourism discourse. We argue for the implementation of a collaborative governance model that fosters synergy among university departments and local stakeholders to reposition the UKM Living Labs as inclusive, innovative, and sustainable edutourism hubs.

Keywords: Edutourism, Stakeholder Challenges, Living Labs, Collaborative Governance, Sustainable Tourism

Purpose/Problem Statement

The purpose of this research is to understand the key challenges faced by various stakeholders in the process of developing Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) Living Labs into viable edutourism destinations. While studies on edutourism have generally focused on student experiences or institutional offerings, few have touched the organizational and community-level hurdles encountered during the development phase. In the context of UKM, a clear understanding of such challenges is necessary to ensure effective planning and implementation of educational tourism initiatives.

Originality/value

This study contributes to the limited body of knowledge concerning stakeholder dynamics in the context of edutourism development in Malaysia. It identifies and analyses critical issues such as inter-agency coordination, infrastructure limitations, transition of management, and community engagement from the perspectives of various stakeholders including ALAF officers, former faculty managers, and local communities. The outcome of the study emphasizes the importance of cohesive institutional strategies and multi stakeholder collaboration to improve the appeal and accessibility of UKM Living Labs as edutourism sites.

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Design/methodology/approach

A qualitative methodology was adopted using in-depth interviews with key informants: ALAF officers overseeing current operations, former faculty managers previously responsible for the Living Labs, and members of local communities situated near the Living Labs. The data was analysed thematically to identify major categories of challenges and to uncover underlying systemic issues.

Findings/Discussion

Findings shows significant barriers in the development of UKM Living Labs, including insufficient infrastructure, unclear inter-agency roles, weak promotional strategies, and low levels of community participation. Additionally, the transition of Living Lab management from the Faculty of Science to ALAF brought about challenges in continuity and communication. These findings indicate that without clear roles, improved facilities, and integrated promotion efforts, it is difficult to sustain stakeholder engagement and attract educational tourists.

Theoretical implications

This study adds to the theoretical understanding of edutourism development by illustrating how stakeholder interaction and organizational change affect destination development. It calls for a stakeholder-centered framework that accounts for transition management and inclusive planning in educational tourism settings.

Practical implications

Findings may be useful to guide university administrators, tourism planners, and policy-makers to adopt better collaboration models between institutions, academic departments, and local communities. It encourages the implementation of infrastructure improvements, clearer communication strategies, and sustained promotional campaigns.

Social implications (Policy contribution)

The study suggests the formulation of institutional policies that prioritize inclusive stakeholder participation, clear role assignments, and long-term planning. Creating interdepartmental task forces and fostering relationships with community leaders may help to drive the vision of UKM Living Labs as public-facing edutourism destinations.

Research limitations

This research is limited to selected Living Labs within UKM and involves a small number of informants, which may not fully capture the scope of challenges faced across other institutions or tourism-focused universities. Future research may include comparative analysis with other Living Lab models.

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COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE SERVICE QUALITY AND IMPROVEMENT OF TUK TUK DRIVERS AND FOREIGN CUSTOMERS

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Extended abstract

Hat Yai is an important economic and tourism hub in southern Thailand, with various public transportation options available to facilitate travel for both tourists and locals. Tuk-tuks have long been a popular mode of transportation but still face challenges in terms of service quality, pricing standards, and accessibility. To develop and enhance the potential of tuk-tuk public transportation, it plays a key role in the growth of the area. This study aims to compare and develop the quality and service of tuk-tuks. The goal is to establish guidelines for improvement and develop service innovations in Hat Yai District, Songkhla Province, for future enhancements. Currently, Hat Yai is a key tourist destination and a hub for both economic and transportation activities in southern Thailand. Recognized as a MICE city, enhancing the potential of service innovation in tuk tuk transportation is a crucial factor in creating value and contributing to the prosperity of the area. This study will conduct the interview with key stakeholders if 15 tuk tuk drivers and 15 tuk tuk foreign customers in Hatyai. The interview will be analyses by comparative content analysis.

Keywords: Tuk tuk transportation, comparative study, service quality

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Introduction

Tourism plays a significant role in Thailand's economy, being one of the country's main revenue-generating industries. It also promotes employment and supports the development of local communities. Transportation is a critical component that can address various issues such as traffic congestion, pollution, energy conservation, and environmental challenges. Additionally, it facilitates smooth and efficient travel for tourists, enhancing their overall experience. A well-developed transportation system also serves to attract tourists to various destinations in Thailand (Nawaratana, 2018).

In Hat Yai District, Songkhla Province, a key economic and tourism hub in southern Thailand, there are various forms of semi-public transportation, including taxis, tuk-tuks, motorcycle taxis, Maxim, Grab, and songthaews (shared taxis). Among these, tuk-tuks are an iconic symbol of Thailand, widely recognized and remembered by both domestic and international tourists. The key advantage of tuk-tuks lies in their agility in navigating narrow alleys, their open structure that allows passengers to enjoy the surrounding scenery, and the unique and refreshing experience they offer compared to other modes of transportation. However, certain service quality issues with tuk-tuks can negatively impact tourists' experiences. These include unclear pricing, inconsistent service quality, communication barriers between drivers and foreign tourists, and the occasional lack of vehicle maintenance and proper support (Marketingoops, 2024).

This study aims to compare the perspectives of tuk-tuk drivers and foreign customers who use their services, focusing on the problems, expectations, and factors influencing satisfaction and service quality. The research findings are expected to identify ways to improve services that can meet the needs of both parties in a balanced manner. This includes enhancing customer satisfaction while empowering drivers to adapt and improve their services.

Once the research is completed, the findings will benefit the development of public transportation systems in Hat Yai by setting higher standards, increasing tourist satisfaction, and enhancing Thailand's tourism image. Furthermore, the study will support tuk-tuk drivers in the area by offering opportunities to develop their skills and adapt their services to meet the needs of modern tourists. Additionally, the research will promote Songkhla Province's role as a "MICE City" a key destination for international meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are to explore the perspectives of tuk tuk drivers towards tuk tuk service quality for foreign customers, to explore the perspectives of foreign customers towards tuk tuk service quality, and to provide recommendations for improving tuk tuk service quality in Hat Yai, Songkhla. This research aims to gain insights into the experiences and satisfaction levels of both tuk tuk drivers and foreign customers using the service. The findings will be used to enhance service quality to better meet the needs of foreign customers effectively

Research Methodology

Songkhla Province has a population of 1,013,317 people. From January to November 2024, 3,476,939 international visitors arrived (3 doctor, 2024; MOTS, 2024).

This study selects 30 interview participants 15 international customers and 15 tuk-tuk drivers.

The comparative Research: Interviews are conducted with both tuk-tuk drivers and customers to analyze different perspectives.

Qualitative Approach: Data is analyzed qualitatively, comparing and interpreting interview responses.

Inductive Approach: The study gathers opinions on service quality and improvement strategies from both groups.

Basic Research: The study explores behaviors, opinions, and attitudes to establish foundational knowledge.

Research Tools

This research utilized qualitative data collection tools, specifically semi-structured interviews and recording forms, to gain in-depth insights into the perspectives, problems, needs, and suggestions of the two sample groups: tuk-tuk drivers and foreign service users in Hat Yai District. The interview form was designed based on key factors, including pricing, accessibility, personnel, safety, and environmental friendliness. Open-ended questions were used to allow respondents to express their opinions freely and in diverse ways.

The collected data was analyzed using two main tools:

Comparative Matrix: to compare the perspectives and opinions of both sample groups on each key factor and summarize similarities and differences.

Content Analysis: to thoroughly analyze the interview content, extracting main issues, problems, needs, and suggestions to be used as guidelines for developing service innovations and improving the quality of tuk-tuk services in Hat Yai.

Data Collection

The data for this research were collected using qualitative methods. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with two groups: 15 Tuk-Tuk drivers and 15 foreign customers who had used Tuk-Tuk services. An interview guide with pre-prepared questions was used to ensure consistency. Additionally, video recordings were taken during the interviews to capture non-verbal communication and detailed interactions. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, focusing on perceptions of service quality and suggestions for improvement. The collected data were later transcribed and analyzed for key themes and insights.

Data Analysis

This study examines service quality expectations through qualitative interviews with 15 drivers and 15 customers. Key factors include safety, comfort, price transparency, and communication.

Comparative Matrix : Identifies differences in perspectives between drivers and users. The content Analysis will extracts key themes related to problems, needs, and suggestions. This structured approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of tuk-tuk services in Songkhla Province.

Conclusion and In Progress

This research focuses on studying the factors affecting the efficiency of the tuk-tuk public transportation system in Hat Yai. It emphasizes analyzing the satisfaction, expectations, and needs of both tuk-tuk drivers and foreign customers to understand existing problems and limitations, as well as to develop solutions that benefit both parties. The study highlights key factors such as pricing, accessibility, driver quality, safety, and environmental friendliness, which are essential elements in improving service standards. The goal of this research is to propose improvements to the tuk-tuk transportation system to better accommodate the needs of tourists and enhance Hat Yai's image as a destination with an efficient, convenient, and sustainable transportation system in the long run.

The researcher is currently in the process of conducting the study and collecting data over a period of three months. An interview framework has been designed to explore the differences in perspectives between tuk-tuk drivers and foreign customers, with the aim of improving the quality of tuk- tuk services.

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ASSESSING SATISFACTION IMT EDU-TOURIST BEHAVIOR TOWARDS EVENT ORGANIZATION AND ACTIVITIES

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Extended abstract

Educational tourism helps people explore different cultures, gain knowledge, and develop personal skills through programs offered by schools, cultural organizations, and travel agencies. These programs include language lessons, historical site visits, environmental activities, and job skills training. The success of educational tourism depends on a mix of learning and travel experiences, relevant course content, engaging teaching styles, and skilled instructors. Key factors also include comfortable accommodation, reliable transport, and easy access to learning resources. Improving these areas can enhance educational tourism for IMT Edu-tourists worldwide. This study evaluates the satisfaction of IMT Edu-tourists with the management and organization of activities. Aligning educational tourism with tourists needs can stimulate the economy, create jobs, and benefit both the education and tourism sectors. Research also strengthens international relationships through cultural exchange, supports the development of new knowledge, and addresses challenges faced by tourists. This leads to better services, improved policies, and sustainable growth of educational tourism. The study collects data from 150 IMT tourists through surveys, focusing on organizational management, educational value, staff professionalism, and facilities.

Keywords: IMT-GT, Edu-Tourist, Event Organization, Activities undertaken

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Introduction

The Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) is a regional economic co-operation initiative established in 1993 to promote development among southern Thailand, northern Malaysia, and Sumatra, Indonesia (CMGF Secretariat Thailand, N.d.). The Asian Development Bank (ADB) conducted a feasibility study and set the framework to enhance economic relations by optimizing shared resources. The initiative focuses on cooperation in production, investment, and technology transfer to improve competitiveness, alongside infrastructure development, particularly in transportation and public utilities. The IMT-GT cooperation area includes Sumatra in Indonesia, northern and western Malaysia, and eight southern border provinces of Thailand (Matichon Online, 2025).

As part of the IMT-GT, southern Thailand benefits from cooperation extending beyond trade to education. The rising number of students from neighboring countries studying in Thailand strengthens educational networks, aligning with IMT-GT's goal of sustainable development (IMT-GT Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle, n.d.). This collaboration fosters knowledge, cultural exchange, and innovation while enhancing academic standards and research opportunities, benefiting both students and institutions (IMT-GT Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle, n.d.).

Tourists' satisfaction with educational tourism, which involves learning about culture, art, history, or science, enhances both knowledge and entertainment. Key factors influencing satisfaction include educational content, service quality, and activities. A positive experience can encourage repeat visits (Tourists Satisfaction and Need towards the Agrotourism: A Case Study of Saun Lang Ban Learning Center, Tha Pha Sub-district, Banpong District, Ratchaburi Province, 2022).

Organizations educational tourism should ensure thoroughness and attention to detail in all aspects to create an effective and valuable learning experience. Factors like schedule management, group travel, accommodation, lecturers, and post-trip evaluation are essential for success. The activities, which range from community engagement to academic and leisure experiences, enhance learning and deepen understanding. These diverse activities add value to educational tourism by providing knowledge and fostering experiences that inspire future learning (Determinants of Success in Creative Tourism Case Study of Ban Nam Chieo Tourism Community Enterprise, 2018).

Tourists visiting Thailand for educational tourism, especially from IMT-GT countries, have different behaviors, objectives, and satisfaction levels. This study aims to understand the behaviors and satisfaction of educational tourists in Songkhla Province and assess their satisfaction with the activities and organizations during their visit.

Objectives

1. To assess satisfaction level of IMT Edu-tourist behavior towards organization
2. To assess satisfaction level of IMT Edu-tourist behavior towards activities
3. To provide guideline for organizer in organizing Edu-tourism for IMT tourist.

Research Methodology

The population in this study consists of educational tourists from Indonesia and Malaysia, part of the IMT-GT group, who traveled to Thailand in 2023, as well as Thai travelers who went abroad in 2022 totaling 9,872,279 travelers. The researcher will collect a sample using Krejcie Morgan's formula. The calculation of the result is 384 people, but this research focuses on Edu-tourists, a specific, niche group with no exact population figure, the sample size is set at 150 people.

Research Tools

The research tool used in this study was a questionnaire designed to assess the behavior and satisfaction of Edu-tourists towards event organization and activities for IMT tourists. The questionnaire consists of two main parts as follows:

Satisfaction with the purpose of Edu-tourism: This section explores the satisfaction of Edu-tourists regarding the objectives and experiences derived from their educational travel, such as Soft Tourism, Self-expression, or Active Holiday, etc.

Satisfaction with event organization and activities: This section assesses the satisfaction of Edu-tourists towards the organization and activities related to educational tourism. It includes aspects such as Schedule Management, Group Travel, Accommodation, Effective Knowledge Delivery, Clear and Focused Explanation of Content, and the Use of Appropriate and Easy-to-Understand Language. It also evaluates the quality of event organization, the appropriateness of activities offered to participants, the services provided, and the support for the learning experience of Edu-tourists.

Data Collection

This research uses quantitative methods to collect data through surveys to assess the satisfaction of Edu-tourists traveling to Thailand, as well as to provide empirical evidence that can be used for analysis and serve as a guideline for event organizers in arranging Edu-tourism for IMT tourists. This research develops data by collecting information from questionnaires completed by Edu-Tourists from IMT who travel to Thailand and Thai tourists traveling abroad, as well as empirical evidence that can be used to improve and develop educational tourism in Thailand.

Data Analysis

SPSS This research has collected a lot of data, and there are many variables to be analyzed, so it needs to rely on analytical tools, that's computers and computer programs, there are many popular and easy-to-use computer programs, one of which is the program. SPSS for Windows is a popular application Because it is easy to use, and the program also has Developing all the time.

In research, an important tool is cross-tabulation, creating a table that crosses variables horizontally and vertically to show the details of one variable over another. Makes it possible to see the relationship between the two variables. reading the results by comparing percentages between values or groups of independent variables.

Conclusion and In Progress

The Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) plays a vital role in promoting economic, educational, and tourism cooperation among the three countries, particularly in educational tourism, which fosters academic networking and cultural exchange. This study focuses on the satisfaction levels of educational tourists visiting Songkhla Province under the IMT-GT framework, providing insights into their behaviors, expectations, and experiences. The findings serve as a guideline for improving educational tourism programs to better meet tourist needs. Well-designed activities that integrate learning, culture, and tourism can enhance visitor experiences, strengthen international relations, and contribute to long-term economic growth. The research outcomes offer valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders in developing effective strategies to enhance educational tourism.

Researchers are in process of collecting the data from the education travelers. Expected to be completed by July 2025.

Research recommendations

1. The use of a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, to gather comprehensive and in- depth data on the experiences and expectations of the educational tourists.
2. Expand the study to include educational tourists from different IMT regions to make the results more general and diverse.
3. Comparative studies between regions or countries can help understand how cultural, economic, and social differences influence educational tourists' preferences and experiences.

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A CASE STUDY OF MISS GRAND THAILAND: AN INTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE THAILAND WOMAN BEAUTY PAGEANT CONTEST

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Extended abstract

Beauty pageants have played a significant role in shaping societal perceptions of women, serving as platforms for cultural representation, social advocacy, and economic stimulation. Miss Grand Thailand, one of the leading beauty pageants in the country, has positioned itself as more than just a competition of physical appearance, integrating intelligence, advocacy, and business strategies into its framework. However, despite its influence, the pageant faces challenges in maintaining transparency, sustaining financial stability, and adapting to evolving societal expectations. This study employs a SWOT analysis to assess the event management of Miss Grand Thailand in 2024, identifying its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The research methodology follows a qualitative approach, gathering insights through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including contestants, event organizers, sponsors, and audiences. The key findings reveal that Miss Grand Thailand benefits from strong branding, innovative commercial integration, and audience engagement, yet struggles with logistical management and increasing competition. The study highlights the importance of refining organizational strategies, improving financial sustainability, and ensuring greater inclusivity. By addressing these factors, the pageant can enhance its credibility, expand its influence, and sustain its position as a major beauty contest on both national and international stages. The findings contribute to the broader discussion on event management in beauty pageants, offering best practices for balancing commercial success with social responsibility.

Keywords: Beauty Pageant, Event Management, Miss Grand Thailand, SWOT Analysis

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Introduction

Beauty pageants have historically reflected and shaped societal ideals of femininity, intelligence, and cultural identity. Originating as contests focused purely on physical appearance, modern beauty pageants have evolved into platforms for advocacy, talent, and leadership. Today, these competitions serve as stepping stones for women to engage in social causes, raise awareness on global issues, and develop personal and professional growth. Despite this transformation, pageants continue to be a subject of debate while some view them as empowering, others argue they reinforce unattainable beauty standards and perpetuate gendered stereotypes (Be Common, n.d.).

In Thailand, beauty pageants date back to 1934, with the introduction of the “Miss Siam” competition, later renamed “Miss Thailand.” Over time, the landscape of beauty contests in the country has diversified, with Miss Grand Thailand emerging as a leading platform. Unlike traditional beauty pageants, Miss Grand Thailand integrates strong social messaging through its “Stop the War and Violence” campaign, positioning itself as a pageant with purpose. With an emphasis on intelligence, advocacy, and business acumen, it strives to redefine the role of beauty queens beyond physical aesthetics (Boonkerd & Chairat, 2022, p. 39).

However, despite its growing influence, Miss Grand Thailand faces several challenges. Issues such as transparency in judging, financial sustainability, and adapting to shifting social expectations require continuous improvement. This study examines the internal management of Miss Grand Thailand using a SWOT analysis, assessing its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. By identifying key areas for enhancement, this research seeks to contribute to the long-term success and credibility of the pageant on both national and international stages. (Hermawan, 2024, p. 323)

Objectives

1. To assess the strengths of the Miss Grand Thailand pageant in 2024 in event management.
2. To assess the weaknesses of the Miss Grand Thailand pageant in 2024 in event management.
3. To assess the opportunities of the Miss Grand Thailand pageant in 2024 in event management.
4. To assess the threats of the Miss Grand Thailand pageant in 2024 in event management.
5. To provide further improvement guideline in Miss Grand Thailand pageant event management.

Research Methodology

Populations and Sample

Population	2023	2024	Description
Participant	77	77	Female contestants competing in Miss Grand Thailand
Audience	6,805,185	4,512,828	People watching the contest in Thailand
Fan Club	210,000	210,000	A Group of people who follow Miss Grand activities on social media

The researchers will collect the data qualitative method by interview the Miss Grant stakeholders.

Stakeholder type	No. of sample	Description
Sponsors	3	Representatives from sponsoring organizations
Audience	6	Individuals attending or following the event
Beauty Pegeant	3	Participants competing in the pageant
Event Organizers	3	Members responsible for organizing the event

Research Tools

- a) Exploratory Research: This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews and SWOT analysis to gain insights into the event's management structure, organizational strategies, and areas for improvement. The findings will provide recommendations to support the long-term sustainability of Miss Grand Thailand, ensuring its continued contribution to the event industry and the national economy (Mitihoon, 2024).
- b) Qualitative Research: This study employs qualitative research to understand the perceptions, experiences, and decision-making processes of individuals involved in Miss Grand Thailand. It focuses on in-depth interviews with event organizers, audiences, contestants, and sponsors, as well as content analysis of media coverage and social media engagement to examine how internal assessments influence public perception (Mitihoon, 2024).
- c) Basic Research: Basic research aims to expand theoretical knowledge rather than solving immediate practical problems. In this study, the goal is to contribute to the academic understanding of event management, brand positioning, and social advocacy in beauty pageants. This research helps identify trends, challenges, and future opportunities for similar events in Thailand and beyond (Mitihoon, 2024).
- d) Inductive Research: Inductive Research Studying the patterns of event organization and key components such as management, participant engagement, and gathering feedback from contestants, attendees, and sponsors. Additionally, using SWOT analysis to analyze the data (Mitihoon, 2024).

Data Collection

Uses a qualitative research method. Collects data through in-depth interviews with Miss Grand Thailand stakeholders, including 3 sponsors, 6 audience members, 3 beauty pageant contestants, 3 event organizers as the result a total of 15 participants.

Data Analysis

Content Analysis: This research employs Content Analysis to process and interpret qualitative data collected from in-depth interviews and other relevant sources. Content analysis helps identify key themes, patterns, and trends in the data, allowing for a deeper understanding of the perspectives, experiences, and opinions of those involved in the Miss Grand Thailand event.

Conclusion and Discussion

This research analyzes the event management of Miss Grand Thailand through a SWOT analysis to identify key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The findings provide strategic recommendations for improving efficiency and sustainability.

Miss Grand Thailand holds global influence and serves as a powerful marketing tool. Its unique

Stop the War and Violence concept sets it apart, supported by strong branding and communication. However, challenges remain in budget management, societal feedback, and competition.

Key stakeholders include event organizers, sponsors, contestants, and audiences. The insights from this study offer guidelines to enhance event management and ensure Miss Grand Thailand remains competitive and sustainable internationally.

Research recommendations

Use Miss Grand Thailand as a platform to boost Thailand's soft power, by developing contestants into international-level singers, actresses, and public figures.

Improve the selection and judging processes to ensure greater transparency and standardization, such as publicly disclosing evaluation criteria and involving judges from diverse sectors to build trust among audiences and participants.

Organize more interactive activities for both on-site and online audiences, such as live voting, audience Q&A sessions, or exclusive meet-and-greet opportunities with contestants, to make the experience more lively and participatory.

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IDENTIFYING COMPETENCY EXPECTATIONS IN RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION WITHIN THE TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY SECTOR

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Abstract

This study explores the competencies most valued in recruitment and selection within the tourism and hospitality sector, where interpersonal skills, emotional regulation, and adaptability are essential for service quality. Based on theories from human resources management (HRM) and employability studies, the research investigates the relative weight of soft and hard skills during hiring processes.

A structured questionnaire covering 34 competencies was distributed to HR managers and directors from 58 companies, including hotels, travel agencies, incoming agencies, and event firms. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and one-way ANOVA to identify sector-specific trends.

The EFA identified four main competency clusters: interpersonal soft skills; emotional resilience and adaptability; technical and formal qualifications; and organizational and leadership abilities. Overall, soft and emotional skills were rated as more important than technical ones. However, differences appeared between subsectors: hotels prioritized interpersonal skills; event firms emphasized technical and emotional ones; and travel agencies showed a more balanced view.

These results point to a growing focus on human-centered abilities in recruitment. Recommendations include using tools to assess soft skills, aligning selection criteria with sector needs, and investing in training programs that develop these competencies.

Keywords: Competencies, Recruitment, Selection, Tourism, Hospitality

Introduction

In the context of technological changes and growing labor market complexity, the identification and development of professional competencies have become critical to workforce sustainability and organizational performance. The transformation driven by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) demands a workforce equipped not only with task-specific knowledge but also with the ability to adapt, collaborate, and continuously learn (World Economic Forum, 2020). These demands are particularly pronounced in sectors such as tourism and hospitality, where service quality depends heavily on human interaction.

Despite ongoing debates over terminology, there is broad agreement that competencies cover a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors directly associated with job performance (Heckman & Kautz, 2012). Within this conceptualization, a widely accepted distinction exists between hard skills and soft skills (Cimatti, 2016; Robles, 2012). Hard Skills refer to technical, measurable capabilities typically acquired through formal education or training, such as proficiency in hotel management systems, language fluency, or financial analysis. In contrast, soft skills include interpersonal, emotional, and cognitive abilities, such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and critical thinking, that are essential for effective performance in dynamic and service-oriented contexts (Almeida, 2014).

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While hard skills remain necessary for fulfilling operational tasks, soft skills are increasingly regarded as key differentiators for employability, particularly in sectors with high levels of customer engagement (Succi & Canovi, 2020).

In this context, skills can be broadly defined as the capacity to perform a task efficiently, with consistent and effective outcomes. Competency, however, refers to how that task is executed, comprising the integration of knowledge, skills, behavior, and judgment in a specific professional setting. This distinction is particularly relevant in hospitality, where workers are often required to go beyond mere task completion and demonstrate autonomy, flexibility, and emotional intelligence in unpredictable service encounters (Baum, 2002; Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

The tourism and hospitality industry is characterized by its service intensity, multicultural environments, and the emotional labor required in direct client interaction. Consequently, employers in this sector emphasize not only professional qualifications but also the behavioral competencies that enable employees to deliver high-quality, responsive, and culturally sensitive services (Nickson, 2013).

Drawing on a conceptual model proposed by Wang and Tsai (2014), four domains of competencies emerge as particularly relevant:

1. Fundamental competencies, including personal attributes and work attitudes such as self-discipline, motivation, and ethical behavior;
2. Personal competencies, covering areas like emotional intelligence, career planning, and self-awareness;
3. Job-related competencies, referring to field-specific knowledge and technical ability;
4. Functional competencies, focused on management, leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving within the operational context.

This framework highlights that effective performance in hospitality roles requires more than technical knowledge (it demands a multidimensional skill set that integrates personality traits, social behaviors, and technical capacity).

Moreover, recent empirical research confirms the importance of emotional resilience (Deep, 2023) adaptability, and communication Skills (Rachmawati et al., 2021) for staff working in high-pressure, customer-facing roles. These competencies are particularly valuable in navigating client expectations, cultural diversity, and fluctuating service demands, which are typical in hospitality contexts (Baum, 2006; Gursoy et al., 2012).

Soft skills have become central to the strategic priorities of organizations that rely on service excellence as a competitive advantage. In hospitality, interpersonal communication, team collaboration, and cultural adaptability directly influence guest satisfaction and brand reputation (Cimatti, 2016). Employees must be able to manage their emotions, resolve conflicts, and maintain composure under stress, especially in front-of-house roles.

From a human resources management perspective, soft skills are increasingly embedded into competency-based recruitment frameworks and performance appraisal systems (Andrews & Higson, 2008). This shift recognizes that while technical skills can be trained in the short term, soft skills reflect deeper cognitive and emotional patterns, often shaped over time and more predictive of long-term success in collaborative environments.

Furthermore, the trend toward experiential travel, wellness tourism, and bespoke service delivery has heightened the need for professionals who can demonstrate empathy, creativity, and client-focused problem-solving, skills that cannot be automated or easily outsourced.

Although soft skills dominate the discourse, hard skills remain essential. Technical competencies (such as knowledge of booking and reservation systems, financial literacy, foreign language proficiency, and digital marketing tools) are critical to operational efficiency and competitiveness (Jackson, 2010). However, what differentiates candidates in recruitment processes and supports long-term career progression tends to be their ability to integrate technical knowledge with interpersonal effectiveness. As such, modern training and education programs must go beyond skill transmission to include applied, reflective, and experiential learning approaches that foster the development of holistic competencies.

The hospitality industry functions in a fast-paced, service-oriented setting where employees are required to manage a variety of interpersonal, organisational, and operational challenges. Therefore, the development of professional competencies extends beyond the execution of technical tasks, placing greater emphasis on cognitive, social, and adaptive skills that are essential for delivering high-quality service and supporting continuous professional development (Table 1).

Table 1
Competency domains in hospitality

Competency	Description
Functional skills	Fundamental capabilities such as literacy, numeracy, digital competence, and language proficiency. These support operational efficiency in reservations, billing, communication, and the use of property management systems.
Cognitive and reflective skills	Critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and analytical reasoning, essential for roles requiring independent judgment and adaptability.
Interpersonal and communication skills	Active listening, verbal clarity, non-verbal sensitivity, and conflict resolution all vital in service delivery and professional client interaction.
Self-management and career skills	Responsibility, time management, emotional regulation, and lifelong learning. These foster adaptability, career planning, and effective team contribution.
Industry-specific and technical competencies	Sectoral knowledge such as customer service protocols, room operations, food safety, event coordination, and financial skills like budgeting and cost control.

Source: Author's own elaboration

Contemporary models of employability emphasize that skills must be both transferable and context-sensitive. That is, they must apply across different roles and situations while aligning with the particular characteristics of the hospitality sector, which includes frequent guest contact, a strong focus on service quality, and multicultural working environments.

Recent conceptual frameworks propose that employability in hospitality is achieved through the integration of several competency domains, (Bouças da Silva et al., 2022; Chen & Chen, 2018; Tian & Hebron, 2024). For example, frontline service roles⁹⁴ (e.g., front office, F&B) emphasize interpersonal, emotional, and linguistic skills, as they involve direct and continuous guest interaction (Nickson, 2013); Back-office roles (e.g., HR, housekeeping) prioritize reliability,

² For example, front office staff must not only perform check-in procedures but also respond to complaints, handle last-minute requests, and anticipate guest needs, often in real-time and under pressure.

organization, and internal communication (Baum, 2006); leadership and management functions require a broader set of integrative competencies, including strategic thinking and team coordination, aligning with competency-based leadership frameworks (Gursoy et al., 2012; World Economic Forum, 2020).

The nature of hospitality work is inherently multidimensional. Roles are rarely restricted to routine or mechanical tasks; instead, they often involve complex, non-routine interactions that require both manual dexterity and cognitive flexibility (Table 2). Similarly, supervisors must balance operational duties with staff coordination, guest engagement, and quality control.

Table 2

Key competencies by function in tourism and hospitality

Job Function	Key Competencies	Competency Type	Relevant Source(s)
Front Office/Reception	Communication (verbal & non-verbal), interpersonal skills, stress management, problem-solving, foreign languages	Soft & hard skills	Nickson (2013); Robles (2012); Wang & Tsai (2014)
Housekeeping	Attention to detail, time management, teamwork, personal presentation, reliability	Mostly soft & functional	Baum (2006); Succi & Canovi (2020)
Food & Beverage (F&B)	Teamwork, service orientation, multitasking, emotional regulation, upselling/sales skills	Soft & job-related Skills	Gursoy et al. (2012); Nickson (2013)
Guest Relations/Concierge	Cultural sensitivity, conflict resolution, initiative, autonomy, multilingual skills	Soft & functional	Wang & Tsai (2014); Cimatti (2016)
Sales & Marketing	Communication, negotiation, digital marketing tools, analytical thinking, creativity	Hard & soft skills	Jackson (2010); Andrews & Higson (2008)
Event Management	Leadership, planning, coordination, adaptability, ICT and presentation skills	Soft & technical skills	Wang & Tsai (2014); Gursoy et al. (2012)
Human Resources (HR)	Emotional intelligence, conflict mediation, strategic thinking, labor law knowledge, discretion	Soft & theoretical hard	Robles (2012); Succi & Canovi (2020)
General Management	Leadership, financial literacy, critical thinking, decision-making, innovation, cross-functional coordination	Advanced wsoft & hard skills	Nickson (2013); World Economic Forum (2020)

Source: Author's own elaboration

The gap between what employers seek and what they are able to offer remains a significant challenge in the tourism and hospitality sector. Bridging this divide requires a clear understanding of the competencies most valued by organisations and ensuring that candidates are equipped to meet these expectations in the labour market. In this context, the present study sets out to examine these priorities in detail, with the following objectives.

Objectives

The general objective of this research is to identify and analyse the competencies most valued by employers in the recruitment and selection of professionals within the tourism and hospitality sector.

This objective is approached from two complementary perspectives: (i) a theoretical dimension, grounded in the existing literature on soft skills, hard skills, and competency-based recruitment practices; and (ii) an empirical dimension, based on the collection and statistical analysis of data provided by professionals responsible for recruitment in tourism-related organisations.

The specific objectives are:

1. To explore the theoretical relevance of soft and hard skills within the context of tourism and Hospitality;
2. To design and apply a structured questionnaire to human resources managers and directors, in order to assess their perceptions of the importance of specific competencies in the recruitment and selection process;
3. To compare the value attributed to different categories of competencies according to the type of organisation (e.g., hotels, travel agencies, event companies), with the aim of identifying sector-specific patterns and priorities.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative, exploratory, and cross-sectional research design, with the aim of identifying and analysing the competencies most valued by employers in the tourism and hospitality sector during recruitment and selection processes. The exploratory nature of the study is justified by the scarcity of empirical research focused on the prioritisation of professional competencies by industry practitioners, particularly within specific regional labour markets such as the Algarve. A quantitative approach was selected to allow for the collection of measurable data from a representative sample of professionals involved in recruitment, enabling the identification of patterns, trends, and sector-specific differences. The cross-sectional design provides a snapshot of employer perceptions at a given point in time, supporting the interpretation of current competency expectations within the sector.

Populations and Sample

Data were collected from a non-probabilistic convenience sample comprising 58 companies operating within the tourism and hospitality sector in the Algarve region, located in southern Portugal. The Algarve is recognised as the country's leading "sun and beach" destination, attracting consistent demand from a wide range of European markets, as well as from countries beyond the European context.

The final sample included a diverse set of organisations, such as hotels, travel and incoming agencies, event management firms, and other related service providers. Participants were Human Resources managers or departmental directors, all of whom held direct responsibility for recruitment and talent management decisions within their organisations. The majority of respondents were male, aged between 35 and 58 years, held higher education qualifications, and had five or more years of professional experience in human resources or organisational leadership roles (Table 3). This profile strengthens the reliability of the data, as the responses reflect the perspectives of experienced professionals with in-depth knowledge of the sector's operational and strategic demands.

Table 3
Sample characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	41	70.7%
	Female	17	29.3%
Age Range	35–44 years	28	48.3%
	45–58 years	30	51.7%
Academic Qualification	Secondary Education	12	20.7%
	Higher Education (Bachelor's or above)	46	79.3%
Years of Experience	5–10 years	23	39.7%
	More than 10 years	35	60.3%
Time in Current Position	Less than 3 years	22	37.9%
	More than 3 years	36	62.1%
Company Sector	Hotels	24	41.4%
	Travel Agencies/Incoming Agencies	19	32.8%
	Event Management Companies	10	17.2%
	Other Areas	5	8.6%

Source: Author's own elaboration

Research Tools

The primary data collection instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire specifically designed to assess employer perceptions and preferences regarding professional competencies in the tourism and hospitality sector. The questionnaire was divided into two main sections: Part I - consisted of 34 closed-ended items measuring individual competencies considered relevant for employment in the sector. These competencies included a balanced representation of soft skills, hard skills, and sector-specific abilities, identified through prior empirical and theoretical research. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of each competency on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Not important; 5 = Very important), allowing for a nuanced assessment of perceived value. Part II – consisted in sociodemographic and organisational data, including respondents' gender, age, educational background, professional experience, and the type and size of the organisation in which they operated. This section was essential for contextualising the responses and identifying potential patterns based on organisational characteristics.

The development of the instrument was informed by a critical review of relevant literature on employability and competency frameworks in tourism and hospitality (e.g., Succi & Canovi, 2020; Gursoy et al., 2012; Wang & Tsai, 2014). To ensure content validity, the initial version of the questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of human resources professionals and academic experts

in the field. Their feedback contributed to the refinement of the items and to the alignment of the instrument with sector-specific realities.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was distributed to a targeted sample of 80 companies operating in the tourism and hospitality sector in the Algarve region, including hotels, travel agencies, incoming service providers, and event management firms, all with active involvement in recruitment and staff management.

Out of the 80 companies contacted, 58 organisations completed the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 72.5%.

Respondents were professionals with direct responsibilities in recruitment and human resources processes, including HR managers, department directors, and operational leaders. The questionnaire was administered online via a secure platform, and the data collection period remained open for four weeks.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to rank the importance of each of the 34 competencies, and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation was conducted to identify the latent structure of competency groupings. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were applied to verify the suitability of the data for factor analysis.

In order to identify which competencies are most valued by employers in the tourism and hospitality sector, a descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on the 34 competency variables included in the questionnaire. Each competency was rated by HR professionals and directors using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("Not Important") to 5 ("Very Important"). The mean score (M) and standard deviation (SD) were calculated for each item, providing a comprehensive view of both the average level of importance attributed to each competency and the degree of consensus among respondents (Table 4).

The results are presented and organized in descending order of mean scores to highlight the competencies that employers perceive as most critical when recruiting and selecting candidates.

Table 4

Competencies most valued

Competency	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Rank
Ability to work in a team and share knowledge	4.80	0.42	1
Ability to adapt to new situations/functions or workplaces	4.75	0.45	2
Ability to meet deadlines	4.72	0.48	3
Ability to manage stress/pressure	4.68	0.50	4
Good verbal communication skills (oral and written)	4.65	0.52	5
Resilience	4.60	0.54	6
Critical thinking	4.58	0.55	7
Problem-solving skills	4.55	0.60	8

Empathy in interpersonal relationships	4.53	0.61	9
Ability to manage negative emotions	4.50	0.64	10
Ability to multitask	4.45	0.65	11
Punctuality	4.42	0.70	12
Professional ethics and personal values	4.40	0.68	13
Planning tasks in advance	4.38	0.71	14
Technological skills relevant to the function	4.35	0.73	15
Ability to delegate or seek help	4.32	0.75	16
Career objectives (medium/long term)	4.30	0.78	17
International experience	4.10	0.85	18
Specialization (Post-graduate, Master's degree, etc.)	4.00	0.90	19
Higher education in the working area	3.95	0.92	20
Non-verbal communication skills (posture, appearance...)	3.90	0.93	21
Knowledge in human resources management	3.85	0.95	22
Previous professional experience	3.80	1.00	23
Availability to work overtime	3.75	1.05	24
Initiative	3.70	1.10	25
Autonomy	3.65	1.10	26
Ability to listen and discuss ideas	3.60	1.12	27
Ability to prevent conflicts at work	3.55	1.15	28
Creating quality interpersonal/social relationships	3.50	1.18	29
Leadership skills	3.45	1.20	30
Availability to work longer hours when necessary	3.40	1.22	31
Mastery of foreign languages	3.35	1.25	32
Experience abroad (academic or professional)	3.30	1.30	33
Work-life balance management	3.25	1.35	34

Source: Author's own elaboration

As observed in the table, the highest-rated competencies were strongly related to interpersonal skills and adaptability. Specifically, the "ability to work in a team and share knowledge" ($M = 4.80$; $SD = 0.42$) was considered the most important competency, closely followed by "adaptability to new situations/functions or workplaces" ($M = 4.75$; $SD = 0.45$).

Conversely, more technical competencies, such as "specialization (postgraduate, master's degree, etc.)" ($M = 4.00$), and "experience abroad" ($M = 3.30$), while still considered important, received comparatively lower mean scores.

Interestingly, "managing work-life balance" ($M = 3.25$) was the least valued competency among the employers surveyed, suggesting that organizational demands for flexibility may outweigh concerns with employee personal balance, at least from the recruitment perspective.

To better understand the underlying structure of the 34 competencies evaluated by employers, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted. The primary objective of this analysis was to reduce the large set of observed variables into broader, conceptually meaningful categories (factors), facilitating a more synthetic interpretation of the data and identifying dominant patterns in employer preferences.

Prior to performing the factor analysis, two standard tests were conducted to assess the suitability of the data for factor analysis: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO), and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (BTS). KMO value was 0.89, which is considered excelente; BTS yielded a highly significant result ($\chi^2 (561) = 2175.34, p < .001$), confirming that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and that the variables are sufficiently intercorrelated for factor analysis.

These results support the appropriateness of applying factor analysis to the dataset.

The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) method was employed to extract the factors, and a Varimax rotation was applied to facilitate clearer interpretation by maximizing the variance shared among variables within each factor. Following the Kaiser criterion, only components with an Eigenvalue greater than 1 were retained. The analysis revealed the presence of four distinct factors, which together explained 72.8% of the total variance (Table 5).

Table 5

Factors identified and designation

Factor	Factor Designation	Variance Explained
1	Soft interpersonal skills	28.5%
2	Emotional resilience and adaptability	20.4%
3	Technical and formal qualifications	13.0%
4	Organizational and leadership skills	10.9%

Source: Author's own elaboration

Each factor represents a distinct dimension of professional competencies valued in the recruitment and selection processes within the tourism and hospitality sector. Below is a detailed explanation of each factor:

Factor 1 – Soft interpersonal skills

This factor includes competencies related to interpersonal communication, teamwork, empathy, and conflict avoidance. It captures the relational and humanistic dimensions of professional performance, which are particularly critical in service-oriented industries. The high loadings on items such as "*ability to work in a team*", "*verbal and non-verbal communication skills*", and "*empathy in interpersonal relationships*" underscore the importance employers place on collaborative and emotionally intelligent behavior.

Factor 2 – Emotional resilience and adaptability

This factor includes competencies such as: stress management, adaptability to change, emotional regulation, and resilience. It reflects the psychological flexibility required to function effectively in high-pressure, unpredictable, and customer-facing roles.

Factor 3 – Technical and formal qualifications

This factor brings together competencies related to educational attainment, technological proficiency, and foreign language mastery. It reflects the technical foundation and formal training expected of professionals in a global and digital work environment.

Factor 4 – organizational and leadership skills

The fourth factor includes competencies such as leadership, task planning, punctuality, and delegation. It relates to an individual's capacity to manage time and resources effectively, assume responsibility, and guide others in achieving objectives.

Table 6 presents the mean factor scores for each of the four competency dimensions identified through EFA, disaggregated by company sector.

Table 6

Mean factor by company sector

Company sector	Soft interpersonal skills	Emotional resilience	Technical qualifications	Organizational & leadership skills
Hotel	4.52	4.18	3.83	4.04
Travel Agency	4.29	4.10	4.02	3.75
Events	3.96	4.16	4.33	3.62
Other	3.90	3.83	4.52	3.49

Source: Author's own elaboration

Hotels place the highest value on “soft interpersonal skills” ($M = 4.52$) and organizational & leadership skills ($M = 4.04$). This highlights their emphasis on teamwork, communication, and structured internal processes essential for maintaining service quality in larger, hierarchical settings.

Travel agencies show a more balanced profile but prioritize technical qualifications ($M = 4.02$), reflecting the need for staff trained in specific booking systems, travel protocols, and client handling in multicultural contexts.

Event companies assign greater importance to technical and formal qualifications ($M = 4.33$) and emotional resilience ($M = 4.16$), likely due to the intense demands and unpredictability of event execution, which require both technical planning and psychological flexibility.

Other companies in the tourism sector place the highest emphasis on technical qualifications ($M = 4.52$), possibly reflecting specialized service areas (e.g., transport, tourism tech) where certified skills are central.

The results of the one-way ANOVA reveal statistically significant differences across company sectors in all four competency dimensions:

The most pronounced differences were observed in soft interpersonal skills ($F(3, 54) = 16.22, p < .001$) and technical qualifications ($F(3, 54) = 15.12, p < .001$), indicating that different types of companies prioritize these competencies to varying degrees.

Organizational and leadership skills also showed a significant difference ($p < .001$), suggesting diverse expectations regarding planning, time management, and leadership responsibilities.

Emotional resilience, while statistically significant ($p = .046$), presented smaller between-group differences, indicating more consistent valuation across sectors.

Conclusion and Discussion

Conclusion

This study offers some substantial empirical insights into the evolving landscape of recruitment and selection practices within the tourism and hospitality sector. The findings confirm a marked shift in employer priorities, with soft skills and emotional competencies emerging as the most valued attributes when assessing candidate suitability. Core interpersonal competencies (namely communication, teamwork, adaptability, and emotional resilience) consistently ranked above traditional hard skills such as formal academic qualifications or prior technical experience. Although technical expertise remains relevant, it is increasingly perceived as a minimum requirement, rather than a differentiating factor in candidate evaluation.

This change reflects broader transformations in service-oriented labour markets, where human interaction, flexibility, and emotional regulation are crucial to maintaining service quality and customer satisfaction. As tourism organisations face complex operational demands and a highly competitive market, the ability of employees to collaborate effectively, manage stress, and adapt to evolving contexts has become a strategic asset.

The results also reveal sector-specific patterns in how competencies are prioritised, highlighting the need for context-sensitive recruitment frameworks. For example, hotel employers demonstrate a stronger emphasis on interpersonal and leadership competencies, aligning with the relational intensity of hospitality services. Event management firms place greater value on emotional resilience and operational effectiveness, reflecting the high-pressure, deadline-driven nature of the industry. Meanwhile, travel agencies favour a balanced combination of soft and technical skills, possibly due to the diverse range of client interactions and logistical coordination involved.

These findings hold both theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to a better understanding of competency-based recruitment/selection in tourism and hospitality, validating the growing relevance of emotional and social intelligence in professional performance. Practically, the research provides actionable data for human resources practitioners, vocational training institutions, and policy makers seeking to align educational outcomes with industry expectations.

Furthermore, the study reinforces the importance of designing recruitment and talent development strategies that reflect the real demands of each subsector. Embracing a competency-based approach can enhance organisational effectiveness, reduce turnover, and support sustainable workforce development.

In conclusion, organisations that adapt their recruitment and selection practices to prioritise emotional intelligence, adaptability, and interpersonal effectiveness will be better positioned to thrive in an increasingly dynamic and service-driven environment.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce and extend existing theoretical perspectives that position soft skills and emotional competencies as critical predictors of job performance in service-intensive, client-facing sectors such as tourism and hospitality. As identified by Robles (2012) and later confirmed by Succi and Canovi (2020), employers are increasingly inclined to value interpersonal and behavioural attributes over purely technical qualifications. In this research, the predominance of soft interpersonal competencies, particularly communication, teamwork, and empathy, illustrates the sector's strategic reliance on human interaction as a core dimension of service delivery.

This emphasis is consistent with Nickson's (2013) analysis of aesthetic and emotional labour in hospitality, where the capacity to connect meaningfully with clients underpins customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. It also reflects Goleman's (2000) foundational work on emotional intelligence, which identifies self-awareness, emotional regulation, and social skills as essential competencies for effective performance in high-contact service roles. In this sense, the industry is not merely seeking employees who are technically capable, but those who are emotionally agile,

capable of maintaining composure and empathy in dynamic, and often stressful, work environments.

The second most valued factor identified - emotional resilience and adaptability - further corroborates Goleman's (2000) argument that emotional competence is integral to both service quality and employee well-being. In sub-sectors such as event management, where unpredictability and operational intensity are high, resilience functions as a buffer against burnout and a driver of continuity in service standards, echoing insights from Karatepe (2013) on stress management in hospitality settings.

Although technical competencies (e.g., ICT skills, foreign languages) remain relevant to employability, their comparatively lower ranking among employers suggests a paradigm shift toward human-centered recruitment, where technical abilities are treated as baseline expectations rather than as differentiating attributes (Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Andrews & Higson, 2008). These results align with the conclusions of Cedefop (2020), which emphasize the growing weight of practical and attitudinal competencies over formal academic qualifications in recruitment decisions across Europe's service sectors.

Moreover, the empirical data validate the applicability of Wang and Tsai's (2014) tripartite model of employability in hospitality, which underscores the need for a balanced integration of functional, cognitive, and interpersonal competencies. In practice, this integrated skillset equips employees to navigate complex interpersonal contexts, apply knowledge adaptively, and respond to guest needs in real time (capabilities that are increasingly demanded in a globalised and highly competitive tourism market).

From a strategic human resource management (HRM) perspective, the findings lend support to Ulrich et al. (2010) and Armstrong (2014), who advocate for competency-based recruitment systems that go beyond static credentials. Instead of relying primarily on CVs and academic qualifications, organisations are called to assess candidates based on observable behaviours, contextual adaptability, and long-term potential. This requires investment in more nuanced selection processes, such as behavioural interviews, situational judgement tests, and soft skill assessments, thereby aligning talent acquisition strategies with real-world service demands.

In sum, the results affirm a growing consensus in both academic literature and professional practice: the future of recruitment and selection in tourism and hospitality lies in identifying, attracting, and developing emotionally intelligent, socially competent, and adaptable professionals, capable of delivering high-quality, human-centred service in increasingly complex operational contexts.

Research recommendations

Future research should consider the following directions:

- (i) Widen the geographical scope by including diverse national and international tourism and hospitality contexts. This would enable cross-cultural comparisons of employer expectations regarding professional competencies;
- (ii) Incorporate qualitative research methods, such as semi-structured interviews or focus groups with recruiters, HR professionals, and hiring managers;
- (iii) Conduct longitudinal studies to explore how the perceived value of specific competencies evolves over time and to assess their impact on key workforce outcomes, including employee retention, career progression, and job performance.

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A STUDY OF THE COMPETENCIES REQUIRED FOR OPERATIONAL PERSONNEL IN THAILAND'S MICE INDUSTRY

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Abstract

This research examines the essential competencies required for operational personnel in Thailand's MICE industry (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) to address current workforce gaps. The MICE sector represents a significant service industry that generates substantial economic value and has been designated by the government as a strategic economic driver for Thailand. Despite policy initiatives promoting increased MICE activities nationwide, the industry faces a critical shortage of skilled operational-level personnel, particularly among vocational certificate holders.

This study analyzes the competency requirements for vocational education graduates across the five primary MICE career domains: incentive travel management, meeting management, exhibition management, event management, and venue management. By identifying the competency gaps between current vocational education outcomes and actual industry needs, this research aims to establish appropriate competency components to inform the design of vocational MICE curricula (Higher Vocational Certificate) in Thailand that effectively address workforce development challenges.

Keywords: MICE Industry; Competency Framework; MICE professional qualifications framework

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Introduction

Thailand's current government Soft Power policy, which aims to support 1,000 events monthly, has dramatically increased demand for MICE personnel by over 10,000 positions annually. The MICE sector extends beyond traditional tourism, serving as a platform for international cooperation, foreign investment attraction, and national brand enhancement. MICE travelers represent high-value visitors, spending approximately three times more than conventional tourists. Recognizing this economic potential, Thailand's government and private sectors have collaboratively established goals to host world-class trade fairs and festivals, positioning Thailand as a premier MICE destination in the ASEAN region and advancing its status as a leading MICE hub in Asia to enhance international competitiveness. Projections for 2025 anticipate 34 million MICE travelers generating over 200 billion baht in revenue and creating 400,000 jobs.

In response to industry growth, the Ministry of Education established the Joint Public and Private Sector Subcommittee for the Development of Vocational Education Workforce (J.P.O.E.S.) in 2016, focusing on MICE careers under the "Vocational, Skilled Workers, Nation Builders" initiative. This led to the development of MICE curricula at the vocational certificate level. Currently, twelve vocational institutes offer MICE programs, but this number remains insufficient relative to the expanding Thai MICE market opportunities. This shortage may compromise Thailand's ability to bid for and host large-scale international events. Furthermore, existing curricula still exhibit misalignments with certain dimensions of MICE professional standards and qualifications, as well as the specific needs of MICE industry employers in Thailand.

Research Objectives

The objective of the study to analyze the necessary competencies for operational-level personnel in Thailand's MICE industry focused on developing competency-based MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) education curricula for vocational students in Thailand, ensuring alignment with industry needs and standards

Literature Review

Competency-Based Education in MICE Industry

The development of competency frameworks for vocational education has gained significant attention in hospitality and tourism education research. Competency-based education (CBE) focuses on developing specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes required for professional performance rather than traditional time-based learning approaches (Gonczi, 2013). In the context of MICE education, this approach addresses the industry's demand for graduates who can immediately contribute to operational effectiveness. Recent studies emphasize the importance of industry-aligned competency frameworks in vocational tourism education. Baum et al. (2016) argue that hospitality education must evolve to meet changing industry demands, particularly in specialized sectors like MICE where operational complexity requires multifaceted skill sets. This perspective supports the development of comprehensive competency models that integrate technical, interpersonal, and digital capabilities.

MICE Industry Competency Requirements

The MICE industry's unique characteristics necessitate specialized competency frameworks distinct from general hospitality education. Weber and Ladkin (2011) identify project management, stakeholder coordination, and cross-cultural communication as core competencies for MICE professionals. Their research emphasizes that operational-level personnel require strong coordination skills due to the multi-stakeholder nature of MICE events. International competency

standards for MICE professionals have been established by organizations such as the Convention Industry Council (CIC) and Meeting Professionals International (MPI). The CIC's Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) International Standards provide a framework encompassing strategic planning, project management, risk management, and stakeholder relations (Convention Industry Council, 2019). However, these frameworks primarily target advanced practitioners rather than entry-level operational personnel.

Vocational Education and Industry Alignment

The alignment between vocational education outcomes and industry requirements remains a critical challenge in tourism education. Solnet et al. (2016) emphasize that vocational programs must maintain strong industry connections to ensure curriculum relevance. Their research indicates that successful MICE education programs require continuous industry input to address evolving technological and operational requirements. In the Southeast Asian context, several studies highlight the importance of cultural competency alongside technical skills. Ap and Wong (2001) demonstrate that MICE professionals in Asia must navigate complex cultural dynamics while maintaining international service standards. This finding supports the development of competency frameworks that integrate cultural awareness with technical proficiency.

Technology Integration in MICE Education. The digital transformation of the MICE industry has created new competency requirements for operational personnel. Fenich et al. (2018) identify digital literacy, social media management, and virtual event coordination as emerging competencies for MICE professionals. Their research indicates that traditional face-to-face event management skills must be complemented by digital platform proficiency. Recent studies on post-pandemic MICE education emphasize hybrid event management capabilities. Lee and Kim (2021) demonstrate that operational-level personnel increasingly require competencies in both physical and virtual event coordination, necessitating curriculum updates that address technological integration.

Competency Framework Development Methodologies

The development of industry-specific competency frameworks requires systematic research methodologies combining literature analysis with stakeholder input. Sandwith (1993) established a foundational approach for hospitality competency identification through industry consultation and content analysis. This methodology has been adapted for MICE-specific applications by researchers examining specialized event management competencies. Recent research by Gyimóthy and Larson (2015) emphasizes the importance of integrating creative competencies in MICE education, arguing that event professionals must demonstrate innovative thinking alongside operational efficiency. This perspective supports multi-dimensional competency frameworks that encompass both analytical and creative capabilities.

Gaps in Current Research

While extensive research exists on general hospitality competencies, limited studies specifically address operational-level MICE competency requirements in the Southeast Asian context. Most existing frameworks focus on managerial-level competencies or Western market contexts, creating a gap in understanding entry-level requirements for emerging MICE markets like Thailand. Additionally, current research inadequately addresses the integration of traditional service competencies with contemporary digital skills required in modern MICE operations. This gap necessitates research that examines how traditional hospitality values can be maintained while incorporating technological competencies essential for industry competitiveness.

Methodology

This study employs research for development approach, utilizing qualitative research methods to conduct an in-depth analysis of job structures and competencies required for operational positions in Thailand's MICE industry. The primary objective is to leverage these insights as a foundation for developing structural design concepts and innovative curriculum models that effectively address labor market demands in a systematic and sustainable manner. The research process began with a comprehensive literature review examining relevant professional standards, qualifications, MICE business domains, and operational position structures to identify key competency components. Subsequently, in-depth interviews were conducted with 32 key informants across three stakeholder groups: 15 MICE industry entrepreneurs (representing five occupational categories with three representatives each), five MICE alliance association representatives, and 12 higher vocational education institution representatives.

Research Tool

This research uses tools consisting of in-depth interview questionnaires divided into 6 sections as follows:

Section 1: General Information of Key Informants

Section 2: Opinions on Specific Competencies for Operational-Level Positions (Project Coordinator) in the MICE Industry, identify of each professional field according to the MICE Professional Qualifications Framework, whether they align with entrepreneurs' needs or not. What additional issues exist regarding knowledge, skills, and characteristics of each professional field

Section 3: Opinions on Specific Competencies for Operational-Level Positions (Project Coordinator) in the MICE Industry. What distinctive specific competencies each professional field should have. To guide the design of new MICE vocational education curricula in Thailand. To align with the needs of MICE entrepreneurs

Section 4: Opinions on the Structural Format of Each Professional Field in Thailand's MICE Industry

Section 5: Opinions on the Strengths, Weaknesses, and Limitations of Thailand's MICE Vocational Education Curriculum (Higher Vocational Certificate - วิทยาลัย.)

Section 6: Policy Recommendations and Design Suggestions for Thailand's MICE Vocational Education Curriculum (Higher Vocational Certificate). To keep pace with international standards and to meet the future needs of the industry

This comprehensive interview framework aims to gather detailed insights from industry professionals to inform curriculum development that bridges the gap between education and industry requirements in the MICE sector.

Data Collection

This analysis leads to an in-depth interview process with key informants, followed by data analysis through coding and content analysis to find answers obtained from the informants. This analysis will help researchers identify competencies that are important in each professional field and align with the needs of the MICE industry. The results obtained from this analysis will serve as supporting data for developing an appropriate competency framework for MICE curriculum development at the vocational education level (Higher Vocational Certificate) to match the requirements in the subsequent stages.

Key Research Process, Literature review and content filtering analysis, Identification of competency components for operational-level MICE positions, In-depth interviews with key

informants, Data analysis using coding and content analysis methods, Development of competency framework for MICE vocational education curriculum

The goal is to create a curriculum that directly responds to industry needs and prepares students with the specific competencies required for operational roles in the MICE industry.

Data Analysis

The analysis revealed that core competencies for operational-level MICE personnel can be systematically categorized into five primary dimensions, each encompassing specific knowledge, skills, and attributes essential for effective performance in the industry.

1. Personal Characteristics Dimension.

1.1 Creative and Artistic Competencies. The analysis identified creativity as a fundamental requirement, with respondents emphasizing the need for personnel who demonstrate creative thinking skills and artistic sensibilities. This includes the ability to propose constructive and innovative solutions in work contexts, reflecting the industry's emphasis on creating memorable and unique experiences.

1.2 Service-Oriented Personality Traits. A consistent theme emerged regarding the importance of intrinsic service motivation. Key informants highlighted that successful MICE professionals possess a genuine passion for hospitality and service excellence, characterized by enthusiastic and energetic personality traits, natural inclination toward customer service, proactive approach to problem-solving.

1.3 Resilience and Adaptability Characteristics. The demanding nature of MICE operations requires personnel with specific psychological attributes, stress tolerance. Ability to maintain performance quality under high-pressure situations. Detail orientation, meticulous attention to operational details and quality standards. Adaptability, flexibility to manage frequent changes in job responsibilities and project requirements and collaborative mindset, strong teamwork capabilities essential for multi-stakeholder project coordination.

2. Technical Skills Dimension

2.1 English Language Proficiency. The analysis revealed English proficiency as a critical technical competency, specifically tailored to MICE business contexts.

2.2 Procedural execution, ability to perform job functions using English as the working language

2.3 Business communication, effective verbal and written communication in professional MICE contexts

2.4 Document comprehension, Proficiency in reading and interpreting English-language materials, contracts, and technical documents

2.5 Content creation, basic capability to prepare and present materials in English

3. Stakeholder Coordination Skills, multi-stakeholder management emerged as a core technical competency, encompassing, internal organizational coordination across departments, external vendor and supplier relationship management, client communication and expectation management and cross-functional team leadership capabilities

3. Knowledge Base Dimension

3.1 MICE Industry Knowledge, comprehensive understanding of industry fundamentals was identified as essential.

3.2 Definitional knowledge, clear understanding of different meeting, incentive, conference, and exhibition formats.

3.3 Objective comprehension, knowledge of purposes and goals for various MICE event categories

3.4 Classification skills, ability to differentiate and categorize different types of MICE events based on scope, audience, and objectives

3.5 Technology Proficiency, the analysis highlighted the importance of computer literacy and software competency, proficiency in industry-standard software applications, understanding of MICE-specific technology platforms and basic data management and analysis capabilities

4. Professional Attitude Dimension

4.1 Industry-Specific Mindset, key informants emphasized the importance of appropriate professional attitudes such as industry alignment, attitudes that reflect understanding of and respect for MICE industry standards and practices, Professional commitment, demonstrated acceptance of career path and long-term industry engagement and organizational awareness, understanding of hierarchical structures and organizational dynamics within MICE enterprises.

4.2 Service Excellence Orientation, a service-focused mindset emerged as fundamental such as genuine commitment to client satisfaction, understanding of service quality standards, and proactive approach to anticipating and meeting client needs.

5. Digital and Contemporary Skills Dimension

5.1 Technology Integration Capabilities, the analysis revealed growing importance of digital competencies such as utilization of information systems utilization, practical application of information technology in operational contexts, digital platform integration, ability to incorporate digital tools and systems into daily work processes, creative digital content development, skills in designing and producing digital marketing and communication materials.

5.2 Modern Marketing Understanding, contemporary MICE operations require basic marketing knowledge such as understanding of both traditional and digital marketing principles, awareness of online and offline promotional strategies and basic comprehension of customer relationship management concepts.

5.3 Professional Communication, reinforcement of English communication capabilities specifically for professional correspondence, client presentations and international collaboration.

Results

The key competency components for operational-level positions that meet the needs of the MICE industry have been obtained to further develop and design new-dimension curricula that are modern for teaching and learning at the vocational education level (Higher Vocational Certificate) in Thailand. The development of competencies for Project Coordinator positions in the MICE

industry (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) is extremely important for job success. The competencies that should be developed, ranked by importance in the top 5, are as follows:

1. Project Management Skills is the core of this position. One must be able to plan, set goals, allocate resources, monitor progress, and solve immediate problems efficiently, including the ability to manage time and budget according to established frameworks.
2. Communication & Coordination Skills must have the ability to communicate clearly both within and outside the organization, and coordinate with multiple stakeholders such as clients, event organizers, service providers, and team members. Negotiation and presentation skills are also necessary, including good English communication abilities, as the MICE industry involves working with many foreigners.
3. MICE Industry Knowledge, understanding the nature of the MICE industry, event organization processes, service standards, and new trends in the field, such as hybrid events, new event technologies, or sustainable event management. This knowledge helps in proposing modern concepts that meet customer needs.
4. Problem-solving & Decision-making Skills, In MICE event management, immediate problems often arise. One must be able to think analytically, assess situations, and make quick and correct decisions to solve problems, especially in high-pressure situations such as during events.
5. Digital & Technological Skills, the ability to use various digital programs and tools including project management software, registration systems, online meeting platforms, as well as understanding new technologies such as AR/VR, AI, or event-related applications. This will help increase work efficiency and better respond to the needs of modern event participants.

Discussion

The research findings identify essential competency components suitable for designing vocational MICE curriculum (Higher Vocational Certificate) in Thailand. The study encompasses five primary career domains: conference management, exhibition and trade show management, event venue management, incentive travel management, and event management. These competency components align substantively with MICE industry employers' requirements and provide a foundation for developing an innovative structural design for MICE vocational education curriculum.

The five-dimensional framework demonstrates the complexity of competency requirements for operational-level MICE personnel. The analysis reveals that effective performance requires integration across all five dimensions rather than excellence in individual areas. This finding has significant implications for curriculum design and professional development programs.

Cross-Dimensional Relationships, the data indicates strong interconnections between dimensions. For example, creative thinking (Personal Characteristics) must be combined with digital content creation skills (Contemporary Skills) and service orientation (Professional Attitude) to produce effective marketing materials that meet client expectations.

Industry Alignment and Professional Standards, The research findings align with international MICE professional qualification frameworks while addressing specific requirements of the Thai market context. Key informants consistently emphasized the need for competencies that bridge international standards with local cultural and business practices.

Theoretical, Practical and Social Contributions

Theoretical implications – This study enhances theoretical understanding by developing systematic structural design concepts, new knowledge frameworks, and innovative curriculum models across the five primary MICE career domains. These theoretical contributions provide educational institutions with robust frameworks for future curriculum development and adaptation.

Practical implications – The five-domain professional competency framework developed in this study offers practical applications for MICE industry employers seeking to recruit personnel with industry-aligned skills. Human Resource departments can utilize this framework as a structured tool for personnel selection, evaluating vocational graduates against clearly defined competency criteria. Additionally, the framework provides HR professionals with a comprehensive outline of desirable competencies that can be integrated into recruitment processes, performance evaluations, and professional development initiatives.

Social implications (Policy contribution) – This research provides empirical evidence that can inform policy interventions designed to enhance the competitiveness of Thailand's MICE workforce through a comprehensive five-domain competency framework applicable to multiple stakeholders. Educational institutions benefit by gaining clear insights into the structural requirements and competencies needed for operational-level positions across the five primary MICE career fields. Institution administrators can leverage these findings to implement curriculum reforms and enhance faculty capabilities in designing learning experiences that effectively address industry requirements. This alignment between education and industry needs contributes to broader socio-economic development by ensuring vocational graduates possess relevant, market-responsive skills.

Research limitations

This study acknowledges the diverse operational job structures across different professional domains when compared to the standardized MICE professional qualification framework. To address this limitation, the researcher conducted targeted interviews with entrepreneurs across all five occupational fields to capture authentic insights into current workplace practices and concrete industry requirements. However, the qualitative nature of the research and the specific Thai context may limit broader generalizability.

Conclusion

The five-dimensional competency framework provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding the complex skill requirements for operational-level personnel in Thailand's MICE industry. The systematic analysis reveals that effective MICE professionals require integrated competencies spanning personal characteristics, technical skills, industry knowledge, professional attitudes, and contemporary digital capabilities.

This framework serves as the basis for developing educational programs and professional development initiatives that align with industry needs while maintaining international standards appropriate for Thailand's unique market context. The findings contribute to the broader goal of strengthening Thailand's position as a leading MICE destination through enhanced human resource development.

The research establishes a foundation for future studies examining specific competency requirements within individual MICE specializations and provides a framework for ongoing assessment of industry skill needs as the sector continues to evolve.

The development of national policy for vocational MICE curricula currently needs to focus on integrating digital technology into teaching and learning by combining online learning and simulation technology to enhance learning effectiveness. Simultaneously, collaboration with the industrial sector must be established through dual education systems and internships in actual business establishments so that students can learn from direct experience. Furthermore, curricula must aim for international standards through international professional qualification certification, promoting student exchanges, and conducting instruction in English. Importantly, there must be emphasis on developing future skills including innovative thinking, sustainability management, and entrepreneurship to prepare learners to cope with changes in the MICE industry.

The implementation of such policies requires cooperation from all sectors including educational institutions, entrepreneurs, and government agencies in supporting resources, budgets, and continuous personnel development to elevate Thailand's MICE education standards to international levels.

Research recommendations

Future research should address the following key areas to expand to include non-formal and informal education to develop curricula for lifelong learning and new skill development (Upskill/Reskill) for personnel in the MICE industry, including education through online learning platforms and professional qualification certification in the form of Micro-credentials.

1. Research issues that should be further studied should focus on outcome-based research of MICE education management at the vocational education level, by examining the career achievements of graduates, employer satisfaction, and career growth rates, including comparative research on effective teaching and learning models such as blended learning, virtual reality technology use, and internships in business establishments. Research on the development of specific competencies for MICE personnel in the digital era, such as virtual event management skills, the use of AI technology in MICE administration, and sustainability management in the MICE industry, should receive additional study. Furthermore, there should be policy research regarding the creation of cooperation between government, educational institutions, and entrepreneurs in developing MICE human resources. Research studies on the development of international professional MICE competency certification systems and the transfer of work experience to educational qualifications will help elevate Thailand's MICE education management standards, including follow-up research on trends and changes in the MICE industry to continuously update curricula to remain current.
2. The expansion of research scope should cover education at undergraduate and graduate levels by studying the development of MICE curricula with greater academic depth and research, emphasizing innovation creation and new knowledge generation in the MICE industry, including the development of specialists who can serve as consultants and senior executives in MICE organizations. Research should study career progression paths from Higher Vocational Certificate level to degree level and the connections between curricula at each level by developing efficient knowledge and experience transfer systems. Additionally, the development of short-term courses and continuing education for those seeking to develop specialized skills should be studied. Research should be expanded to include non-formal and informal education to develop curricula for lifelong learning and new skill development (Upskill/Reskill) for personnel in the MICE industry, including education through online learning platforms and professional qualification certification in the form of Micro-credentials.

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RECLAIMING INDIGENOUS IDENTITY THROUGH CULTURAL TOURISM: THE CASE OF ULUN LAPPUNG IN KURIPAN VILLAGE, SOUTH LAMPUNG

Fitri Rismiyati¹, Wanto², Mahendra Wijaya³, and Marimin⁴

Extended abstract

The cultural identity of indigenous peoples is often under attack due to industrialization and commodification of tourism. In the context of community-based tourism, this study investigates the Ulun Lappung indigenous community's cultural identity representation method in Kuripan Village, South Lampung. The primary aim of this study is to examine how cultural tourism is used as a symbolic space to restore identity, transmit ancestral values and maintain the sustainability of local culture in the face of tourism business pressures.

Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, cultural actors and local tourism managers, and documentation studies of cultural expressions, using a qualitative approach and critical ethnography methodology. The results show that, far from being passive targets of tourism, indigenous people actively negotiate authentic yet adaptable cultural representations. Cultural activities such as dance, ancient rituals and stilt house architecture that are included in tour packages are preserved through a collaborative selection process. Theoretically, this study contributes to postcolonial discussions on how tourism shapes local identities. Practically speaking, the findings of this study provide a framework for managing cultural tourism that is sustainable, inclusive, and founded on the cultural development of indigenous peoples. The model can be used as a guide to create tourism regulations that are both culturally sensitive and socially just.

Keywords: Indigenous identity; Cultural tourism; Ulun Lappung; Community-based tourism; Cultural representation.

Purpose/Problem Statement

The cultural identity of indigenous communities is often eroded due to industrialization and commodification practices in tourism. This study aims to analyze how the Ulun Lappung indigenous community in Kuripan Village, South Lampung, represents and revitalizes its cultural identity through community-based tourism. In the context of the pressure of commercialization of tourist destinations, this study offers an understanding of how tourism can function as a symbolic space for the strengthening of local identity and the transmission of ancestral values.

Originality/value

This research makes an original contribution to the cultural and tourism studies literature by highlighting a participatory cultural tourism management model based on the empowerment of indigenous communities. In the context of postcolonial studies, this approach emphasises the active negotiation of cultural identity by local communities in the face of the challenges of globalisation and the tourism market.

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Design/methodology/approach

The research adopted a qualitative approach using a critical ethnographic method. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, cultural actors and tourism managers, and documentation of cultural practices such as rituals, art performances and traditional architectural structures. The analysis was carried out thematically and semi-otically to capture the meaning of cultural representations in tour packages.

Findings/Discussion

The results show that the Ulun Lapping indigenous community is not passive in the tourism industry. Instead, they actively select and negotiate the cultural elements that are shown to tourists in order to maintain the sacredness and authenticity of the culture. Cultural practices such as traditional dances, rituals and houses on stilts become a means of preserving identity and regenerating local knowledge. This model demonstrates the potential of tourism as a tool of cultural resistance as well as economic empowerment.

Theoretical implications

This research expands the discourse on cultural identity in the context of postcolonial and critical tourism, particularly on the issue of representation and commodification of local culture by indigenous communities.

Practical implications

The findings provide a basis for the development of cultural tourism policies that are more inclusive and socially just. The model offered can be applied to strengthen community-based tourism governance in other indigenous areas in Indonesia.

Social implications (Policy contribution)

This research encourages the formulation of cultural tourism development policies that favor indigenous peoples, through direct involvement mechanisms, protection of intangible culture, and development of a promotion system based on local wisdom values.

Research limitations

This study did not explore in depth tourists' perspectives on the cultural experiences offered. Further research into visitor perceptions and their impact on local cultural change is needed to strengthen these findings.

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FROM PASSIVE RESIDENTS TO ACTIVE PARTNERS: RE-THINKING COMMUNITY ROLES IN UKM LIVING LABS EDUTOURISM

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Extended abstract

This paper investigates the active and potential roles of local communities in shaping edutourism initiatives within Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's (UKM) Living Labs. Utilizing a qualitative research methodology, we conducted interviews with residents living near three major Living Labs to explore their perceptions, experiences, and aspirations. Our findings reveal a complex dynamic: while communities generally support edutourism and acknowledge its socio-economic benefits, they also voice critical concerns about infrastructural deficits, climate-related risks, and possible ecological degradation from unmanaged visitor influxes. Significantly, the study uncovers a gap between community enthusiasm and institutional mechanisms for participatory engagement. The originality of this study lies in its emphasis on community empowerment as a core pillar of edutourism sustainability moving beyond tokenistic involvement toward co-creation of knowledge and experiences. We recommend inclusive and culturally responsive frameworks that position local residents not just as beneficiaries, but as co-designers of edutourism strategies within the Living Lab ecosystem.

Keywords: Edutourism, Community Participation, Sustainability, Living Labs, Co-creation

Purpose/Problem Statement

The aim of this paper is to examine the role of the local community members in shaping and contributing to the development of edutourism activities within UKM Living Labs. Although local involvement is recognized as a critical component in tourism development, limited research has explored how communities perceive, support, or participate in university-led edutourism initiatives, particularly in Malaysia.

Originality/value

This study presents original insights into how communities living near UKM Living Labs perceive their involvement and contribution to edutourism development. It uncovers both the enthusiasm and concerns held by residents, ranging from potential economic gains to environmental impact and limited inclusion in decision-making processes. The paper emphasizes the importance of co-creating edutourism programs with local people to ensure long-term sustainability and meaningful educational experiences.

Design/methodology/approach

A qualitative approach was employed, where semi-structured interviews were conducted with local residents living near three of UKM's Living Labs. The collected data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to perceptions, motivations, and barriers to participation.

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Findings/Discussion

The findings show that while many community members express positive support and interest in edutourism, they also highlight critical issues such as limited infrastructure, lack of information from the university, climate-related challenges, and concerns about over-commercialization of natural spaces. Many also felt excluded from the planning process. These results call for the integration of participatory methods in planning and decision-making.

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to community-based tourism and edutourism literature by emphasizing the necessity of inclusive engagement. It advocates for a development model where locals are contributors and partners in tourism development.

Practical implications

The research suggests actionable strategies for university administrators and tourism developers to include local communities early in the planning phase, foster transparent communication, and provide platforms for community-driven initiatives. Capacity-building workshops, inclusive tourism committees, and community outreach programs are recommended.

Social implications (Policy contribution)

This study supports the formulation of inclusive tourism development policies that recognize community voices and empower them through participation. It also recommends environmental management strategies to balance tourism growth with ecosystem conservation with community concerns.

Research limitations

This study is geographically limited to communities surrounding UKM Living Labs and does not cover external stakeholder opinions or quantitative measures of participation. Future research can include longitudinal studies to track changes in community engagement over time.

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FROM SATI TO STRENGTH: HOW BUDDHIST MINDFULNESS PRACTICES ENHANCE PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE FOR MICE LEADERS

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Abstract

In today's hyper-competitive MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) industry, leaders face unprecedented levels of stress, uncertainty, and emotional demands. This article examines how Buddhist mindfulness (SATI), an ancient practice of cultivated awareness, offers powerful pathways to enhance psychological resilience among industry professionals navigating this high-pressure landscape. Through the lens of Edith Grotberg's "I Have, I Am, I Can" resilience framework, this paper demonstrates how SATI practices provide MICE leaders with tangible tools to not only withstand industry challenges but transform them into opportunities for growth.

The integration of Buddhist mindfulness with contemporary resilience theory presents a holistic development framework bridging Eastern contemplative wisdom with modern leadership requirements. Through conceptual analysis and synthesis of existing literature, this article reveals how SATI practices systematically foster emotional regulation, ethical clarity, and adaptive thinking, which are essential qualities for resilient leadership.

SATI-based practices cultivate three critical dimensions of resilience: a grounded sense of self-awareness and emotional intelligence ("I Am"), meaningful social connections and ethical foundations ("I Have"), and advanced problem-solving capabilities ("I Can"). This integrative approach offers practical pathways for leadership development specifically tailored to the unique pressures of the MICE industry, with implications for both individual well-being and organizational effectiveness.

This article presents a conceptual framework developed as part of the Ph.D. dissertation titled *Promoting Leadership in Young MICE Professionals through Buddhist Psychological Immunity*.

Keywords: Mindfulness, SATI, psychological resilience, MICE leaders

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Introduction

The global MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) industry represents a critical infrastructure for business development, knowledge exchange, and international collaboration, with market valuations reaching USD 1,051.41 billion in 2024 and projected growth to USD 2,269.16 billion by 2032 (Fortune Business Insights, 2025). However, beneath these impressive economic indicators lies a concerning reality: MICE leaders face some of the most demanding psychological challenges in the professional world.

Event planning ranks as the third most stressful occupation globally (PCMA, 2023), with leaders operating in high-visibility environments characterized by real-time decision-making, complex stakeholder coordination, and continuous crisis management. The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 identifies resilience, flexibility, and agility as the second most critical professional skills up from third place in 2023 highlighting the growing recognition that psychological capabilities are fundamental to leadership effectiveness.

Despite this recognition, traditional MICE leadership development remains predominantly focused on technical competencies. International certification programs emphasize project management, strategic planning, and operational excellence while systematically neglecting the psychological foundations essential for sustainable performance under pressure. This technical-operational bias creates a critical gap: professionals equipped with sophisticated event management skills but lacking the mental resilience necessary to thrive in their demanding environments.

This study explores how Buddhist mindfulness practices can enhance psychological resilience for MICE leaders through Grotberg's resilience theory. Buddhist mindfulness (SATI) represents one of humanity's most sophisticated systems for attention training and awareness cultivation. SATI encompasses a comprehensive set of mental capabilities including sustained attentional control, cognitive awareness, emotional composure, and present-moment awareness and orientation – capabilities particularly relevant to the challenges facing MICE professionals.

Grotberg's "I Have, I Am, I Can" resilience model provides a practical framework for organizing resilience resources into three distinct but interconnected categories: external supports ("I Have"), internal strengths ("I Am"), and interpersonal and problem-solving skills ("I Can"). This structure offers a practical architecture for developing specific mindfulness practices aligned with the particular resilience needs of MICE leaders. By integrating these ancient contemplative practices with contemporary resilience theory, this article presents a pathway toward leadership development that honors both timeless wisdom and modern professional demands.

Methodological Limitations

This paper has some limitations. It is a conceptual paper without empirical validation. This study presents a conceptual framework based on literature synthesis and theoretical integration. The proposed SATI-Grotberg integration has not been tested with actual MICE professionals. The article is based on theoretical analysis rather than observed outcomes. Buddhist concepts like SATI originate from specific cultural and philosophical contexts. The application in Western business environments may lose essential elements or create unintended interpretations. The framework assumes universal applicability but does not account for individual differences in cultural background, learning styles, or spiritual orientation that may affect implementation success.

MICE Leaders' Psychological Challenges

The MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) industry operates within a uniquely demanding psychological landscape that distinguishes it from traditional business environments. MICE leaders face a convergence of high-stakes pressures, complex stakeholder dynamics, and real-time performance demands. Event planners are considered to have the third most stressful occupation globally (PCMA, 2023), facing unique psychological demands that require exceptional resilience capabilities. According to the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025, resilience, flexibility, and agility have been identified as the second most critical job skills up

from third place in 2023 following analytical thinking which remains the top skill as in year before. Traditional leadership development in this sector has emphasized technical and operational competencies, often neglecting the psychological foundations which are necessary for sustainable leadership under pressure.

High-Pressure Decision Making Under Time Constraints

MICE leaders operate in environments where decisions must be made rapidly, often with incomplete information and significant consequences. Unlike traditional business decisions that can be deliberated over time, event-related choices frequently occur in real-time with immediate visible outcomes. A venue change, vendor substitution, or program modification can impact hundreds or thousands of participants, creating immense pressure for accurate and swift decision-making.

This constant pressure for immediate decisions under uncertainty leads to potential decision fatigue, where the quality of decisions may deteriorate over time. MICE leaders experience chronic stress related to the weight of continuous decision-making responsibility, particularly when managing multiple concurrent events or complex international conferences.

Multitasking and Attention Management Demands

The nature of MICE leadership requires simultaneous management of numerous interconnected elements. Leaders must coordinate logistics, manage stakeholder relationships, oversee budgets, ensure quality standards, and handle crisis situations often all within the same day or even hour. This multitasking demand creates mental overload, scattered attention that could lead to burn-out.

Research in cognitive psychology demonstrates that frequent task-switching reduces overall productivity and increases mental fatigue. For MICE leaders, this translates into decreased ability to maintain focus on critical tasks, increased likelihood of errors, and heightened stress responses as the brain struggles to manage competing priorities.

Emotional Labor and Stakeholder Management

MICE leaders must maintain composure and professionalism while managing diverse and sometimes conflicting stakeholder expectations. This includes managing demanding clients, coordinating with vendors under pressure, leading stressed team members, and ensuring positive experiences for event participants. The emotional labor required to maintain an appropriate professional attitude while managing these relationships can be psychologically exhausting.

The concept of "emotional labor" (Hochschild, 2012) involves regulating one's emotional expressions to meet professional expectations, often requiring suppression of natural emotional responses. For MICE leaders, this constant emotional regulation can lead to burnout, decreased authentic communication, and personal emotional exhaustion.

Crisis Management and Adaptability Requirements

Events are inherently unpredictable, with potential crises ranging from weather disruptions and technology failures to vendor cancellations and participant emergencies. MICE leaders must maintain readiness for crisis management while simultaneously executing planned activities. This dual requirement for stability and adaptability creates ongoing psychological tension.

The unpredictable nature of event management means that leaders must develop tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity while maintaining confidence in their ability to handle whatever challenges arise. This psychological balancing act requires significant mental resources and can contribute to chronic stress and anxiety.

Performance Visibility and Immediate Feedback

Unlike many business roles where performance is evaluated over time, MICE leaders face immediate and highly visible performance assessment. Event success or failure is apparent in real-time to all stakeholders, creating intense pressure for flawless execution. This visibility means that mistakes or challenges cannot be hidden or addressed privately, adding to the psychological pressure of the role.

The immediate nature of feedback in event management means that leaders must develop resilience to handle both positive and negative responses quickly, learn from mistakes in real-time, and maintain confidence despite public scrutiny of their performance.

Relevance of Buddhist Mindfulness (SATI)

Mindfulness is constant recollection and reflection; [or] mindfulness is the state of recollection, remembering, non-fading, non-forgetting. (Payutto, 2021). Buddhist mindfulness, particularly the practice of SATI, offers specific tools and perspectives that directly address the psychological challenges faced by MICE leaders.

SATI, derived from the Pali term meaning "to remember" or "to be mindfully aware," provides a comprehensive framework for developing present-moment awareness, emotional regulation, and clear comprehension under challenging conditions. SATI is based on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (satipaṭṭhāna):

1. Contemplation of the Body (kāyānupassanā): observing the nature of the body
2. Contemplation of Feelings (vedānānupassanā): observing the nature of feelings
3. Contemplation of Mind (cittānupassanā): observing the nature of mind
4. Contemplation of Mind Objects (dhammānupassanā): observing the nature of mind objects

In this article, SATI is presented as a more generic and universal concept, interpreted in a way that is less attached to its traditional Buddhist framework for its pragmatism.

Present-Moment Awareness for Attention Management

SATI practice directly addresses the attention management challenges faced by MICE leaders through its emphasis on present-moment awareness. Rather than attempting to manage multiple tasks through scattered attention, SATI teaches practitioners to bring full awareness to each moment and task, improving focus and reducing the cognitive load associated with multitasking. The practice of "single-pointed concentration" (ekaggatā) helps leaders maintain focus on immediate priorities while remaining aware of broader contexts and responsibilities. This approach reduces the mental fatigue associated with constant task-switching while improving the quality of attention given to each responsibility.

Equanimity and Emotional Regulation

The Buddhist concept of equanimity (upekkhā) provides MICE leaders with tools for maintaining emotional balance during challenging situations. Rather than suppressing emotions or being overwhelmed by them, SATI practice teaches leaders to observe emotional responses while accepting awareness, allowing appropriate responses without emotional reactivity. This approach to emotional regulation proves particularly valuable for managing the emotional labor requirements of MICE leadership, enabling leaders to remain authentic while maintaining professional composure and making clear-headed decisions under pressure.

Clear Comprehension for Decision-Making

SATI practice includes the development of clear comprehension (sampajañña), which involves understanding the purpose, suitability, and potential consequences of actions before taking them. This systematic approach to decision-making provides MICE leaders with tools for making effective choices under pressure while considering long-term implications. Clear comprehension helps leaders move beyond reactive decision-making based on immediate pressure or emotional responses, enabling more strategic and thoughtful choices that align with overall goals and values.

Non-Attachment and Adaptability

The Buddhist understanding of impermanence and non-attachment provides MICE leaders with valuable perspectives for managing the uncertainty and constant change inherent in event management. Rather than becoming attached to specific outcomes or plans, SATI practice teaches leaders to remain flexible and adaptive while maintaining clear intentions and goals. This approach reduces the stress associated with unexpected changes and challenges while enhancing creative problem-solving capabilities. Leaders who practice non-attachment can more easily adapt strategies and approaches as circumstances change without experiencing the psychological distress often associated with plan disruptions.

Grotberg's Resilience (I Have, I Am, I Can)

Resilience is a universal capacity which allows a person, group or community to prevent, minimize or overcome the damaging effects of adversity (Grotberg, 1995). This concept emphasizes not only bouncing back from difficulties but potentially growing stronger, through three sources of resilience: I Have, I Am, I can. Originally created to assess resilience in children, Grotberg's framework has since been widely adopted in fields such as education, youth development, mental health, leadership training or social work and resilience-building programs.

"I Have" - External Support Factors

The "I Have" factor encompasses the external support systems, relationships, and resources that provide individuals with assistance and encouragement during difficult times. For MICE leaders, this factor includes:

- **Professional support networks** form the foundation of external resilience resources for MICE leaders. These networks include industry colleagues, professional associations, mentors, and peer relationships that provide advice, shared experiences, and practical assistance during challenging situations. Strong professional networks offer both formal and informal support, from technical expertise during crises to emotional encouragement during difficult periods.
- **Team and organizational relationships** represent crucial support systems within the immediate work environment. MICE leaders who cultivate strong relationships with team members, supervisors, and organizational colleagues create support systems that provide both practical assistance and emotional resilience during challenging projects and crisis situations.
- **Stakeholder partnerships** with vendors, venues, and service providers can serve as important support resources when developed through trust and mutual respect. These relationships provide not only practical assistance but also collaborative problem-solving capabilities during difficult situations.
- **Personal support systems** including family, friends, and personal mentors provide the emotional foundation that enables leaders to maintain perspective and recover from work-related challenges. These relationships offer respite from professional pressures and provide alternative perspectives that support overall well-being.

"I Am" - Internal Personal Strengths

The "I Am" factor includes internal qualities, characteristics, and beliefs that provide individuals with inner strength and resilience. For MICE leaders, this factor encompasses:

- **Self-awareness and emotional intelligence** form the core of internal resilience resources. MICE leaders who understand their own strengths, limitations, emotional patterns, and stress responses can better manage their reactions to challenging situations and make decisions aligned with their capabilities and values.

- **Personal values and purpose** provide internal anchoring that helps leaders maintain direction and motivation during difficult periods. Clear understanding of personal and professional values enables leaders to make decisions with confidence and maintain integrity even under pressure.
- **Confidence and self-efficacy** based on past experiences and developed capabilities provide leaders with the internal belief in their ability to handle challenges effectively. This confidence enables leaders to approach difficult situations with optimism and persistence rather than anxiety and avoidance.
- **Emotional regulation and stress management capabilities** allow leaders to maintain stability and clear thinking during high-pressure situations. Internal skills for managing stress, processing emotions, and maintaining perspective provide the foundation for sustained effective leadership.

"I Can" - Social and Interpersonal Skills

The "I Can" factor encompasses the skills and capabilities that enable individuals to solve problems, communicate effectively, seek help when needed, and take action to address challenges. For MICE leaders, this factor includes:

- **Communication and interpersonal skills** enable leaders to build relationships, resolve conflicts, negotiate solutions, and collaborate effectively with diverse stakeholders. These skills are essential for managing the complex relationship dynamics inherent in MICE leadership and for building the support systems represented in the "I HAVE" factor.
- **Problem-solving and decision-making capabilities** provide leaders with systematic approaches to analyzing challenges, generating solutions, and implementing effective responses. These skills enable leaders to transform obstacles into opportunities and maintain forward momentum despite setbacks.
- **Crisis management and adaptability skills** allow leaders to respond effectively to unexpected challenges and changing circumstances. These capabilities include both tactical skills for managing immediate crises and strategic skills for adapting plans and approaches as conditions change.
- **Leadership and influence abilities** enable leaders to guide teams, motivate stakeholders, and create positive outcomes even during challenging situations. These skills allow leaders to transform individual resilience into collective resilience, building organizational capabilities that support sustained success.

Integration of SATI and Grotberg's Resilience

Present-Moment Awareness for Attention Management

- "I Have" keeps MICE leaders grounded in current reality, enabling clear assessment of external resources and support they need and effective communication of those needs to their network.
- "I Am" builds confidence, self-trust and inner stability, strengthening the identity to handle challenges without being overwhelmed by distractions.
- "I Can" enhances all capabilities by improving focus for problem-solving, enabling authentic listening for better communication, and supporting emotional regulation through real-time awareness of feelings.

Equanimity and Emotional Regulation

- “I Have” enables leaders to access support from a position of strength rather than desperation, approaching mentors and colleagues with clear requests instead of reactive demands.
- “I Am” builds inner confidence and self-respect. Maintaining equanimity under pressure develops an unshakeable identity to weather any storm.
- “I Can” enhances conflict communication, enables clear-headed problem-solving, and maintains perspective during setbacks providing the emotional foundation for all other skills to function at best.

Clear Comprehension for Decision-Making

- “I Have” helps leaders discern when and what type of external expertise to seek, enabling strategic access to the right advisors at the right time rather than consulting everyone or no one.
- “I Am” builds self-trust and confidence. Each wise choice reinforces the identity with good judgement, creating a positive feedback loop that strengthens inner resilience.
- “I Can” improves problem-solving through accurate situational awareness, strengthening communication with relevant and well-timed messages, and supporting emotional regulation by understanding reaction patterns.

Non-Attachment and Adaptability

- “I Have” enables MICE leaders to utilize support systems without dependency, receiving help gracefully while maintaining healthy boundaries that preserve relationships and resources when circumstances change.
- “I Am” strengthens core resilience by repeatedly proving leaders can handle change and uncertainty, building deep inner regardless of external circumstances.
- “I Can” prevents rigid thinking, allowing them to adapt communication styles to different people, try new problem-solving approaches when initial methods fail, and regulate emotions effectively by not clinging to specific outcomes.

Practical Guidelines for MICE Leaders

MICE leaders who integrate SATI (present-moment awareness, equanimity, clear comprehension, non-attachment) with Grotberg's resilience framework develop a unique capacity to remain grounded while accessing their available resources under pressure. This integration transforms reactive leadership into responsive leadership, where decisions emerge from clarity rather than stress.

Daily Leadership Practice

Each morning, effective MICE leaders begin with a brief SATI- enhanced resource assessment. They ground themselves in present-moment awareness, then systematically review their available support networks (I Have), assess their inner confidence and emotional state (I Am), and identify which capabilities will serve them best that day (I Can). Throughout the day, leaders can use brief pauses between major tasks to check their emotional state without judgement. When circumstances shift, they practice non- attachment to morning plans while maintaining connection to their resilience resources.

Crisis Management Through Integration

When facing significant challenges, integrated leaders assess situations with equanimity and clear comprehension, drawing on inner stability rather than emotional reactivity. For high-pressure decisions, these leaders employ a clear comprehension protocol: pausing to understand what's actually happening, checking what expertise they need to access, consulting their values and judgment, assessing relevant capabilities, and taking decisive action without clinging to specific outcomes. This systematic approach prevents both impulsive decisions and analysis paralysis.

Team Leadership Applications

Integrated leaders use present-moment awareness to notice when team members need support, offering their resources from a place of strength rather than obligation. They practice equanimity during conflicts, maintaining access to their full communication abilities rather than becoming reactive. Their non-attachment to specific communication styles allows them to adapt their approach based on team needs while staying true to core principles. They often demonstrate how mindfulness qualities enhance practical leadership skills. They show teams that present-moment awareness prevents resource waste, emotional regulation maintains strategic thinking, and adaptability enables innovation under pressure.

Strategic Leadership Integration

For long-term vision development, integrated leaders use clear comprehension to make decisions based on current reality rather than wishful thinking. They practice non-attachment to specific timelines while maintaining commitment to goals, balancing future planning with present-moment awareness of available resources. To maintain sustainable performance, these leaders apply equanimity to prevent the sacrifice syndrome common in high-pressure roles. They use present-moment awareness to recognize early burnout signals and practice non-attachment to being the sole problem-solver, actively engaging their support systems before crises develop.

Recovery and Growth

After challenging periods, integrated leaders conduct SATI debriefs, reflecting on what actually happens versus initial fears, reviewing how emotional regulation affected their response, analyzing their decision-making process, and identifying what they can release to move forward more effectively. They deliberately build anti-fragile leadership by using each challenge to strengthen the integration of SATI qualities with resilience factors. Rather than viewing difficulties as threats, they approach them as opportunities to prove their capacity for growth and adaptation.

The Integrated Leadership Outcome

Leaders who successfully integrate SATI with Grotberg's resilience develop grounded flexibility, the ability to remain centered in present-moment awareness while fluidly accessing their internal and external resources. They become known for making sound decisions under pressure, maintaining team morale during difficulties, and emerging from challenges stronger rather than depleted.

Conclusion

The integration of Buddhist mindfulness (SATI) practices with Grotberg's resilience model provides MICE leaders with a comprehensive framework for developing psychological resilience while maintaining high performance in demanding environments. This approach addresses the unique challenges of MICE leadership while building sustainable capabilities for long-term success and well-being. SATI practices can enhance each component of Grotberg's resilience model: "I Have" strengthens external support systems through mindful communication and relationship building, "I Am" develops internal strength through emotional regulation and self-awareness, and "I Can" enhances problem-solving capabilities through clear comprehension and adaptive thinking.

The proposed practical guidelines provide concrete steps for implementation, making ancient wisdom accessible and applicable to contemporary leadership challenges. The approach ensures sustainable adoption while the assessment tools enable continuous improvement and adaptation to individual needs.

For MICE leaders seeking to enhance their resilience and effectiveness, the integration of SATI practices with systematic resilience development offers a potential path toward sustainable success and personal well-being. The combination of ancient wisdom and contemporary research provides a robust framework for navigating the challenges of modern leadership while maintaining the compassion and clarity essential for meaningful professional contribution.

Future research should continue exploring the specific applications of Buddhist mindfulness in leadership contexts, examining long-term outcomes and refining implementation strategies providing a strong foundation for continued development and application of these approaches.

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WOMEN AS MAIN ACTORS IN CULINARY TOURISM ATTRACTIONS IN THE COASTAL AREAS OF NORTH JAVA

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of coastal women as the main actors in providing local culinary tourism attractions. The phenomenon of increasing tourist interest in the wealth of traditional culinary heritage creates opportunities for women's active participation, particularly in coastal regions, as the main actors in maintaining culinary heritage while addressing family economic needs. The study employs a narrative and ethnographic approach based on Labov's narrative model and a participatory ethnography framework. Data were gathered through narrative interviews, field observations, and an analysis of online testimonials that highlight women's contributions to shaping the image of culinary destinations, especially milk-fish culinary tourism, as an authentic and participatory medium for cultural branding. The data were collected through interviews, participatory observations, and documentation. The results indicate that women serve not only as food providers but also as guardians of tradition, preservers of local recipes, and intermediaries between culture and tourists. This role originated from economic motivations but has evolved into a form of social representation that elevates women's status in the public sphere of tourism. This finding confirms that culinary tourism in coastal areas is closely linked to women's contributions, who often merge cooking and selling activities as both a means of survival and a means of cultural expression. This article recommends that tourism development policies better align with gender roles and provide structural support for local women culinary entrepreneurs.

Keywords: women, main actors, culinary tourism attractions, gender representation

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Introduction

The role and participation of women in efforts for gender equality in the tourism industry are on the rise (Pettersson, 2014). Currently, the tourism industry also supports initiatives aimed at women's independence and progress. According to Ramchurjee (2011), tourism growth is highly diverse and dynamic because the industry allows significant flexibility for women's involvement. The role of women cannot be overlooked, not just in the formal sector, such as hotel and restaurant workers, but also in the informal sector.

Women play a crucial role in the tourism sector, particularly in areas related to hospitality, service provision, and local cultural products, such as culinary offerings. However, women's representation is often marginalized by patriarchal social structures. In this context, the role of women as the main actors in culinary tourism signifies both a form of resistance and an active expression of their gender identity (Aitchison, 2005; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012).

Pitanatri (2016) found examples of women's success in Ubud, Bali, both as culinary entrepreneurs and drivers of culinary tourism. The opportunities available in the tourism sector, combined with women's greater ability to create culinary delights, enhance their participation in fostering local culinary diversity within society. In coastal areas, women adopt a dual role as breadwinners and cultural guardians. In informal sectors like the culinary, they develop survival strategies and create social spaces that reinforce community identity. This engagement is not just economic; it also signifies women's agency in confronting structural limitations (Rahyono, 2018; Arimbi, 2020).

Harvey (2012) explains that culinary tourism reveals cultural heritage, offers a glimpse into community life, and portrays the landscape of a geographical area. Furthermore, it enriches experiences and serves as a valuable tool for promoting economic, social, and community development. Additionally, culinary tourism can attract more tourists to a destination and help shape its image. Suwanto (2004) notes that during their travels, tourists require various facilities and services to meet their needs, particularly regarding food and drink, emphasizing the necessity for food services that offer both local cuisine and dishes familiar to the tourists' origins.

Culinary experiences play a crucial role in the competitiveness and sustainability of tourist destinations; therefore, they should be actively promoted by national tourism authorities. According to Dinamiza Asesores (2023); Henche (2024), for national tourists, a desirable culinary destination must be unique and possess a distinctive story (60.9%), offer high-quality restaurants (49.1%), facilitate visits to local producers (47.5%), and provide opportunities to buy local products at markets, shops, and culinary exhibitions (47.5%). It should feature quality products with protected Geographical Indications (41.4%) and boast streets that convey a culinary atmosphere (39.2%). Repsol found that traditional restaurants remain the preferred choice for culinary tourists (Michelin, 2021, in Henche, 2024).

Culinary tourism is deeply intertwined with the culinary heritage of the region hosting the tourist attraction. Espeitx (2004) describes a society's culinary heritage as a selection of its "culinary culture, which includes the array of practices and knowledge, values and beliefs, techniques and representations regarding what, when, how, with whom, and why people consume certain foods within that society" (Espeitx, 2004). The relationship between heritage and gastronomy is so profound that, as Ramón Fernández (2020) notes, the disappearance of a region's gastronomy would lead to the loss of a substantial portion of its heritage.

Pitana (2009) explains that a crucial segment of the tourism industry is the accommodation sector, which involves not just temporary lodging but also encompasses the availability of food and beverages. Mason and O'Mahony (2007, as cited in Redl, 2013) explain that food can convey the diversity and differences of culinary tourism's purpose, allowing visitors to enjoy the richness of a region through its food and beverages.

In contemporary tourism studies, both individual and collective narratives have become central elements in shaping a destination's identity and image. Richards (2015) explains the significance of cultural narratives in destination branding. Lugosi (2010) analyzes the role of culinary narratives in driving social and economic transformation. The narrative sociolinguistic approach, particularly through the structural narrative Theory developed by Labov and Waletzky (1967) and later expanded by Labov (1972), provides a robust conceptual framework

for analyzing the social structure and functions of narrated experiences. This Theory categorizes narratives into six main elements: (1) Abstract (summary of the story), (2) Orientation (setting, time, actors), (3) Complicating Action (event flow), (4) Evaluation (subjective assessment or meaning), (5) Resolution (event resolution), and (6) Coda (narrative closure; return to the present).

Some contemporary tourism research employs linguistic Theory, also known as sociolinguistics-tourism (Cohen & Cooper, 1986; Jaworski, 2009), to explain tourism. In sociolinguistics and tourism, the role of language in representing cultural identity in tourist destinations is a topic of discussion (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2011; Ploner, 2013). According to Thurlow and Jaworski (2010), narratives can illustrate the processes of globalization and discursive strategies related to cultural change and global mobility. For example, Chronis (2012) examines how historical narratives are collectively constructed by tourists and local communities. Meanwhile, Sims (2009) connects local cuisine with authentic narratives in tourism.

Miles and Huberman (1984) highlight the importance of creating visual representations of data and suggest that narrative text is the most prevalent form of representation used for qualitative data. In analyzing informant stories, Labov's Theory is utilized to examine the structure of narratives using categories and rules. Oral narratives function as discourse units and are organized and segmented according to their information functions, namely abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, and coda (Berman, 1998).

According to Labov (1), the use of abstracts in narrative analysis (NA) demonstrates participants' intent to tell a story by highlighting its significance. (2) Orientation provides background information, including time, setting, participants, and circumstances. (3) Complications constitute the core part of the story where events unfold. Within these complications, conflicts, and inconsistencies, various issues will be assessed. (4) Evaluations may occur throughout the narrative, found in the speaker's remarks on events that help researchers pinpoint key moments in the story. The narrative concludes with a coda or closing sign that may alter the story's time frame. Through the coda, researchers can bridge the past and present of the story's world. This study aims to analyze the role of coastal women as main actors in local culinary tourism attractions in coastal regions. This narrative will depict the involvement of women in culinary tourism activities surrounding 'milkfish,' which serves as a tourism icon in this area.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the role of coastal women as the main actors in shaping the appeal of culinary tourism, especially in the Juwana area, through culinary practices based on milkfish.
2. To explore how women's culinary narratives and activities contribute to the formation of local identity and participatory branding in community-based tourism.
3. To examine the socio-cultural and economic transformations experienced by women entrepreneurs in culinary tourism.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore the underlying meaning of social problems as perceived by individuals and groups. The research process involves developing questions and procedures alongside data collection conducted in the participants' environment. Data analysis is inductive, beginning with specific themes that are then expanded into broader themes, allowing researchers to interpret the meaning of the data.

The informants involved in this study illustrate the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2007). A narrative approach is employed in this study, although this method is often underutilized in tourism research. Elliott (2005) suggests that a narrative approach offers insight into small events within the broader context. Based on this, the narrative interview method was utilized for ten informants. This model is relevant for interpreting the narratives of fisherwomen or culinary entrepreneurs who share their stories within the framework of the creative economy and community-based tourism. Research data were collected through online interviews in June 2025.

The study took place in the Juwana area of Indonesia, on the coast of Java. This location is strategically significant due to its strong local culinary potential, particularly concerning Juwana milkfish, which is predominantly initiated by women. The type of data used in this study is qualitative, consisting of narratives gathered from both primary and secondary sources. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, as well as literature and scientific journals. Additionally, the data collection included conducting interviews with

culinary practitioners at the research site, as well as performing documentation studies that referenced various data from journal literature and books. Furthermore, the data was analyzed in several stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion, which were then elaborated upon and examined using relevant theories and concepts.

Results

Women, as the drivers of culinary tourism in Juwana, are the main actors in culinary tourism attractions. For women, preserving the local cuisine is one way to meet their living needs. Along with being motivated by everyday necessities, women are also drawn to become culinary sellers due to the opportunities presented by tourism. The growing interest among tourists in local cuisine offers significant opportunities for residents, especially women, to showcase their cultural richness to visitors through culinary experiences. The following are the results of interviews with informants:

Testimony-1

"In this kitchen, I learned not only to cook but also to be independent. All the workers here are neighboring mothers. We do not just sell milkfish; we maintain traditions and build the future of our children."

Analysis:

Labov Elements	Narrative Content
Abstract	The kitchen serves as a place for learning and independence.
Orientation	A woman who runs a kitchen business, part of a community of mothers
Complicating Action	From cooking activities → to collective productive activities
Evaluation	The kitchen transforms into a space for solidarity and the renewal of cultural values.
Resolution	Women are shaping the future through the culinary arts.
Coda	It does not appear explicitly because this is a type of public testimony (social media caption)

Testimony-2

"I always buy milkfish from my regular stall in Juwana. The women there are not only skilled at cooking but also know how to make customers return. Natural branding!"

Analysis:

Labov Elements	Narrative Content
Abstract	Loyalty to Juwana milkfish MSMEs
Orientation	Loyal customers of milkfish stalls
Complicating Action	Regular consumption → Observation of service practices
Evaluation	Women act as informal marketers.
Resolution	Branding is formed from below through personal relationships.
Coda	It does not appear explicitly because this is a type of public testimony (social media caption)

Testimony-3

"Presto milkfish in Juwana is not merely a culinary dish; it is a cultural artifact. Every bite tells a story about women, struggles, and irreplaceable local flavors."

Analysis:

Labov Elements	Narrative Content
Abstract	Reflection on the cultural significance of milkfish cuisine
Orientation	Loyal customers of milkfish stalls
Complicating Action	Public narrative (social media / cultural tourists)
Evaluation	Culinary as an artifact of women's struggle
Resolution	Milkfish becomes a symbol of local collective memory.
Coda	It does not appear explicitly because this is a type of public testimony (social media caption)

Testimony-4

"It is impressive to observe how Juwana mothers run culinary businesses from their homes. This is not just a small business but a microeconomy that supports regional identity. #LocalHeroes"

Analysis:

Labov Elements	Narrative Content
Abstract	Recognition of Juwana women as microeconomic contributors
Orientation	Observers or tourists witness home businesses in Juwana.
Complicating Action	Mothers manage businesses from home, → developing becomes a local economic force.
Evaluation	Small businesses have become the mainstay of regional identity.
Resolution	Strengthening grassroots-based branding
Coda	It does not appear explicitly because this is a type of public testimony (social media caption)

Testimony-5

"We believe that the progress of Juwana tourism cannot be separated from the role of women. They are the key role in the economy, preservers of culture, and the face of this destination."

Analysis:

Labov Elements	Narrative Content
Abstract	The belief that women are the foundation of Juwana tourism
Orientation	Active community groups or netizens
Complicating Action	Observation of the active role of women → impacts the tourism sector.
Evaluation	Women are the main drivers of the economy and culture.
Resolution	Collective narrative about the strategic role of women
Coda	It does not appear explicitly because this is a type of public testimony (social media caption)

Testimony-6

"Juwana milkfish is a perfect example that women can be the vanguard of local tourism."

Analysis:

Labov Elements	Narrative Content
Abstract	Milkfish as tangible evidence of women's contribution to local tourism
Orientation	The narrator expresses her opinion after seeing Juwana's Culinary.
Complicating Action	Seeing milkfish as a cultural representation → Concluding women's contribution
Evaluation	Women are not just supporters but the main actors.
Resolution	Milkfish is an icon that contains a gender narrative.
Coda	It does not appear explicitly because this is a type of public testimony (social media caption)

Testimony-7

"Seeing the process of making presto milkfish in Juwana moved me. All the mothers work together, helping each other. Family-like tourism"

Analysis:

Labov Elements	Narrative Content
Abstract	Emotional reflection after witnessing the collective culinary process
Orientation	Tourists or visitors to the milkfish production location
Complicating Action	Watching mothers working together → a sense of emotion arises.
Evaluation	Solidarity and cooperation narratives as tourist attractions
Resolution	Tourism is not just an object but a social relation.
Coda	It does not appear explicitly because this is a type of public testimony (social media caption)

Testimony-8

"If you want to see great women, come to Juwana. From the kitchen to the marketplace, they are the backbone of culinary tourism!"

Analysis:

Labov Elements	Narrative Content
Abstract	Affirmation of the role of women in culinary tourism
Orientation	The narrator or visitor gives an invitation and praise.
Complicating Action	Women move from the kitchen to the public economic space.
Evaluation	Women are considered the main force of tourism.
Resolution	Branding of women-based leadership
Coda	It does not appear explicitly because this is a type of public testimony (social media caption)

Based on the analysis results of Labov elements and narrative content, the following narrative patterns were found:

Narrative Pattern Findings

Labov Elements	Narrative Content
Abstract	All testimonials convey admiration or recognition of women's contributions.
Orientation	Observers/tourists/netizens who witnessed directly or judged from experience

Complicating Action	Women move kitchen activities to become centers of economy and culture.
Evaluation	Women are considered micro-economic drivers, cultural preservers, and destination icons.
Resolution	The narrative forms a positive image of Juwana as a destination based on family values and gender solidarity.
Coda	It does not appear explicitly because this is a type of public testimony (social media caption)

Testimonies 1–8 convey a narrative of collective recognition of fisherwomen as the main actors in the development of culinary-based tourism. Although not in the form of a classic narrative (beginning–middle–end), the Labov structure is used to analyze the social, cultural, and emotional meanings in it. These narratives also demonstrate the power of branding based on local narratives and social affection, the relevance of gender and microeconomics in tourism studies, and women as symbols of the community's cultural and economic identity.

Testimony-9: Business Actors (Female MSMEs)

"I have been processing milkfish for 15 years. In the past, it was only for dishes at home, now, thank God, I can open my stall. Milkfish is not just food, but also our way of life, the mothers in Juwana."

Labov Elements	Narrative Content
Abstract	I have been running a milkfish business for 15 years.
Orientation	In the past, I only cooked for my family in Juwana as a housewife.
Complicating Action	Now that the business is growing, I can open my stall.
Evaluation	Milkfish is not just food; it is part of women's lives and struggles.
Resolution	The business is growing independently.
Coda	Reflection on the strength and role of women in local culture

Analysis:

This testimony contains a transformational narrative, from domestic space to public or economic space. The evaluation emphasizes the socio-cultural meaning of culinary and gender contributions.

Testimony 10: Culinary Tourist

"It is not complete to go to Juwana without trying Bu Sari's presto milkfish. It tastes savory; the bones are very soft! What impresses me is that all the processes are carried out by local mothers, from selecting the fish to wrapping it as a souvenir. This is not just culinary; this is a legacy of taste and hard work of great women #JuwanaCulinary #BandengPrestoBuatanIbu #TasteTourism"

Labov Elements	Narrative Content
Abstract	Bu Sari's presto milkfish is a must-try in Juwana.
Orientation	When visiting Juwana.
Complicating Action	Witnessing the process of making it directly by local mothers
Evaluation	A sense of admiration and appreciation for the role of local women
Resolution	Realizing that culinary is a cultural experience, not just a taste
Coda	Conclusion: Juwana milkfish = taste + social value

Analysis

This narrative describes the transformation of tourist perception from mere consumers to appreciators of local culture. The value of "locality" is present through women's practices.

Testimony 11: Influencer / Food Blogger

"Presto milkfish in Juwana is not just a culinary, but a cultural artifact. Every bite has a story about women, struggles, and irreplaceable local flavors."

Labov Elements	Narrative Content
Abstract	Juwana milkfish is a cultural symbol.
Orientation	Visiting or reviewing culinary destinations in Juwana
Complicating Action	Experiencing firsthand the historical and social value of local products
Evaluation	Critical reflection on the meaning of culinary as a cultural narrative
Resolution	An understanding emerges that the role of women shapes authenticity.
Coda	Advocate the importance of preserving local narratives through culinary.

Analysis:

This narrative is a meta-narrative, namely treating culinary as an identity artifact and women as cultural narrators. The results of testimony 11 can be analyzed within the framework of cultural branding and gendered tourism.

From the analysis carried out, it was found in testimonies 9-11 that the evaluation and coda are the strongest parts of all narratives. Through the coda, the local identity and the role of women in destination branding become apparent. These narratives serve as micro-stories in constructing the macro-narrative of the Juwana destination as an authentic and inclusive place rooted in local culture. Through a narrative and ethnographic approach, it can be mapped how culinary and gender shape spatial identity, tourist attractions, and destination image organically.

Testimony-12

"In this kitchen, I learned not only to cook but also to be independent. All the workers here are mothers from the neighborhood. We do not just sell milkfish; we maintain traditions and build the future of our children."

Narrative analysis from business actors shows a significant transformation of women from domestic roles to economic and cultural actors.

"I used to help my mother in the kitchen. Now I have my stall. All the people who work here are female neighbors. We help each other, strengthen each other." (MSME actor)

In this narrative, women are not only seen as complements to the household economy but as active agents in building local communities and identities. Milkfish production has evolved into a gendered labor practice with significant cultural implications.

Narrations from tourists and influencers demonstrate how culinary experiences become a means of mediation between local identities and tourist experiences. These culinary stories are rich in emotional significance, evoking experiences of taste, warmth of interaction, and local values.

"Juwana milkfish is not just about taste, but also stories. From a small kitchen to a traditional market, the dedicated hands of mothers run everything." (Culinary Influencer)

The narrative pattern that emerged was culinary, serving as a symbol of memory and authenticity, with food acting as a medium for storytelling about local culture and fostering personal interaction with actors as an attraction. In contrast to formal branding based on visual promotion, Juwana builds a destination image through a collective narrative that is formed from below (bottom-up), where women become central actors in stories and daily practices.

"We do not just sell milkfish, but also stories from our kitchen." (Female Entrepreneur)

The informant's statement suggests that destination branding originates from everyday narratives. The participation of women can form an authentic image of Juwana. In this case, branding based on experience and interaction that strengthens the destination's identity is built by the local community, not just formal institutions. Through culinary practices and the narratives surrounding them, women in Juwana do not only appear as objects "seen" by tourists, but also as subjects who speak and determine their narratives. This situation is in contrast to many patriarchal-based tourism constructions where women are only aesthetic complements.

"We do not wait for help. We move with what we have: our mother's recipe, our kitchen, and trust in each other."

This narrative represents symbolic resistance to marginalization and showcases the form of women's agency in creating a public space centered on culinary culture. In the community, the kitchen is not just a cooking space but a collective space for learning, working together, and building life values. The focus on local products (milkfish) shows the strengthening of local identity and a culture-based economy.

In the digital context, this statement forms an authentic narrative about local empowerment, allowing online audiences to feel emotionally and culturally connected, and elevating everyday practices as inspiring stories about women, traditions, and social expectations.

Data mapping from digital data obtained the following testimonials:

Statement Excerpt	Code	Category	Main Theme
"In this kitchen, I learned not only to cook but also to be independent."	independence_learning informal_educational_space	personal empowerment	learning and self-transformation space
"All the workers here are mothers from the neighborhood."	women_collectivity neighborhood_community	community strength	local women's solidarity
"We do not just sell milkfish."	culture_based_economy symbol_milkfish_locality	economic activity & identity	economic activity & identity
"We preserve traditions and build the future for children."	cultural_preservation intergenerational_vision	cultural values and education	cultural values and education

From the analysis results, the main themes in each informant's testimony were identified, including the kitchen as a space, local women's solidarity, economic activities, and cultural identities and values. The main themes are explained in the following description:

Theme	Description
Learning Space and Self-Transformation	The kitchen is a learning space that helps individuals become independent and develop their self-capacity.
Local Women's Solidarity	Collaboration of neighboring mothers forms collective strength and local social networks.
Tradition-Based Local Economy	Sales of milkfish are a combination of economic activities and cultural preservation.
Cultural Heritage and Generational Hope	This activity is designed to promote the sustainability of children's values and welfare in the future.

- 1 The results of the thematic synthesis analysis, presented in the following table, reveal narrative patterns and collective identities in the form of sub-themes, including independence, collective, cultural preservation, participatory autonomy, and heritage.

Thematic Synthesis Analysis: Narrative Patterns and Collective Identity

2	Main Theme	3	Subtheme	4	Narrative Representation
5	Women as social actors	6	Independent, collective, cultural preservers	7	Domestic transformation narrative to the public
8	Culinary as cultural memory	9	Taste, story, heritage	10	Storytelling in tourist testimonials
11	Experience-based branding	12	Authentic, participatory narratives	13	Influencers and actors convey organic images.
14	Gender and resistance	15	Autonomy, power, and local voices	16	Testimonials from business actors and social media

These findings systematically demonstrate that small narratives (micro-stories) from kitchens, stalls, and culinary interactions can compose a larger narrative (macro-narrative) about Juwana's identity as an inclusive culinary tourism destination, rooted in local culture. In it, women are not only economic actors but also controllers of meaning, image regulators, and guardians of sustainability.

The findings of this study further strengthen the narrative about the Juwana area located on the coast in Pati Regency, Central Java. This place is known as a center for milkfish processing. Milkfish commodities are not only a source of the economy but also the foundation of local cultural identity. Milkfish processing businesses, especially in the form of presto milkfish, are closely associated with women's work, both in the domestic sphere and the public economic space. Participatory observation and social media reveal that milkfish culinary production activities are not only economic endeavors but also cultural practices that are passed down generationally by women. This narrative suggests that culinary space serves as an arena for the articulation of values, memories, and togetherness. Stories such as "from the Home Kitchen to the tourist market" or "milkfish as a way of life for mothers" contain elements of evaluation and resolution in Labov's narrative structure and have high persuasive power in authentic destination marketing.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

In culinary destinations, stories told by local actors (in this case, women milkfish processors) not only represent personal experiences but also create a collective discourse that enhances the image and branding of regional tourism. According to Chronis (2012), tourism destinations are shaped not only by physical places but also by imaginary narratives that come to life through language, symbols, and social experiences.

From a gender perspective, fisherwomen or culinary actors in Juwana play a significant role as narrative agents. They not only produce food but also create discourses that affirm their positions in the economic, cultural, and tourism sectors. Their narratives embody collective values such as cooperation, sustainability, and local wisdom, which implicitly serve as organic branding strategies for Juwana's culinary destinations. The narrative also reflects the transition from private (domestic) to public (destination) space, implying the expansion of women's social agency through community-based tourism. As stated by Lugosi et al. (2010), culinary practices can serve as a means of social and economic regeneration, where language and stories play a crucial role in constructing meaning.

Labov's approach maps how women's micro (individual, everyday) experiences in Juwana transform into macro (collective, destination) narratives. Narrative structures such as evaluation and coda are often used to convey local identity, nostalgia, and social expectations, which are key elements in destination storytelling and place branding. Therefore, narrative analysis reveals not only the linguistic structure of the story but also its socio-cultural role in shaping and strengthening Juwana's position as a culinary destination based on gender, locality, and culture.

Labov's theory serves as a powerful instrument for interpreting women's narratives in culinary tourism practices, functioning not only as expressions of experience but also as tools for social construction and destination branding. In the coastal area of Juwana, milkfish is not just a commodity but also a symbol in the narrative of collective identity, where women play roles as economic actors, cultural agents, and discursive subjects within the local tourism landscape.

Labov emphasizes that narratives are not just stories but social constructions that reflect identity, social position, and cultural values. Labov's narrative theory reveals how individuals frame tourism experiences, encompassing culinary and local cultural tourism. In culinary destinations, narratives often serve as destination images, representing cultural values and local identities, and participatory branding media rooted in the experiences of both tourists and local communities.

Labov's narrative theory provides a structured approach to analyze testimonies and stories within culinary tourism. In Juwana, where women are the main actors, their narratives embody significant social, cultural, and economic aspects, influencing genuine destination branding. This research corresponds with current narrative strategies utilized in community-based tourism studies and ethnographic research.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that women play a crucial role in shaping and invigorating culinary tourism attractions in the coastal areas of North Java, particularly in Juwana. By processing and selling products made from milkfish, such as presto milkfish, soft-boned milkfish, and boneless milkfish, women serve as both economic and cultural contributors, helping to preserve the local culinary heritage. Production kitchens managed by women, especially those operated collectively by neighboring mothers, evolve into spaces that extend beyond domestic functions. The kitchen transforms into a hub for the production of knowledge, solidarity, and identity, where women learn to achieve economic and social independence. They not only sell food but also share local cultural narratives rich in values, history, and flavor.

Milkfish culinary tourism in Juwana demonstrates that women's representation extends beyond being just "food servers"; they are essential drivers of the local tourism ecosystem. Women act as product creators, business managers, and cultural communicators for tourists. Their presence not only supports the informal sector but is also crucial for the sustainability of community-based tourism attractions. Thus, it can be concluded that culinary tourism in coastal areas like Juwana is not solely about promoting local food products but also serves as a platform for social representation, where women advocate for space, meaning, and livelihood. Therefore, the development of culinary tourism should be accompanied by policies that empower local women actors through access to training, business legality, and equitable promotion within the tourism chain.

Acknowledgments

The research conducted by the author received financial support through the Fundamental Research Grant provided by the Ministry of Education and Technology for the budgetary year of 2025.

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HOSPITALITY TALENT CRISIS IN THE POST-COVID ERA: REFRAMING EMPLOYER BRANDING AND WORKFORCE RESILIENCE

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Extended abstract

The global hospitality industry faces an unprecedented talent crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is evident with widespread resignations, skill mismatches, and declining interest among younger generations in hospitality careers (Baum, Mooney, Robinson, & Solnet, 2020; Deloitte, 2023). Traditional human resource strategies have proven insufficient in addressing this exodus, calling for a rethinking of employer branding and workforce resilience strategies (Luu, 2021; Azimi et al., 2023). Given the importance of human talent in the hospitality industry, there is an urgent need to understand the role of employer branding and workforce resilience in enhancing employee retention. This paper offers a conceptual framework that repositions hospitality organizations as socially responsible (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Park & Levy, 2014).

Keywords: Human talent, Employer branding, workforce resilience

Purpose/Problem Statement

This conceptual paper investigates how hospitality organizations can strategically deploy employer branding and workforce resilience to address post-pandemic labor shortages. Existing talent retention models often overlook the emotional, psychological, and value-based factors influencing employees' decisions to stay (Luu, 2021). The pandemic has heightened staff turnover and shifted employee expectations toward well-being, organizational care, and shared values (Baum, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). This paper addresses these gaps by proposing an integrated framework that aligns socially responsible employer branding with workforce resilience to rebuild hospitality's attractiveness and retention.

Originality/value

The study introduces a dual-axis framework combining Employer Value Proposition (EVP) theory and Workforce Resilience models. It considers flexible work design, mental health support, and purpose-driven culture as critical components for retaining and attracting talent in hospitality settings (Dabirian et al., 2017; Teng et al., 2023).

Design/methodology/approach

The paper synthesizes multidisciplinary literature on employer branding, organizational resilience, and post-crisis workforce trends. Industry reports and HR best practices are analyzed to develop an integrative conceptual model.

Findings/Discussion

The proposed framework identifies three pillars of resilient employer branding: (1) Psychological safety: fostering inclusive and empowering workplace culture; (2) Flexible work systems: enabling adaptive schedules and hybrid models; and (3) Purpose-driven identity: aligning organizational values with employees' sense of meaning and contribution. These factors contribute to enhanced staff retention, satisfaction, and brand ambassadorship.

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Theoretical implications

This research enriches hospitality HR literature by integrating psychological resilience with brand strategy. It challenges the transactional view of employment and promotes a relational, purpose-oriented employment model.

Practical implications

Hospitality managers can apply the framework to redesign HR policies, employer branding campaigns, and well-being programs tailored to Gen Z and millennial workers. The model offers diagnostic tools for talent audits. The findings also suggest national tourism boards should collaborate with educational institutions and industry associations to elevate the perception of hospitality careers and provide strategic talent development grants.

Research limitations

The framework requires empirical validation via interviews or surveys with hospitality employees and HR leaders across different market segments. Longitudinal studies on talent outcomes are also recommended.

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ETHICAL CHALLENGES OF AI-POWERED SURVEILLANCE IN HOTELS: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

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Extended abstract

The hospitality industry's adoption of artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled surveillance tools such as facial recognition, behavioural tracking, and biometric identification raises critical ethical questions. While these technologies offer operational benefits such as enhanced security, personalised service, and contactless check-in, they also risk violating guest privacy, reducing trust, and creating power asymmetries. AI systems often require extensive amounts of personal data to function effectively, which raises issues regarding consent, ownership, and the risks of data breaches (Štilić et al., 2023). Lin et al. (2023) stated that the ethical implications of surveillance systems, particularly those capable of capturing and analyzing guest behaviors, can lead to invasions of privacy and the potential misuse of collected data. Thus, the need for robust regulatory frameworks that protect individuals' privacy rights is critical in this regard. Despite widespread adoption, ethical discourse surrounding AI surveillance in the hospitality is still limited. The conceptual paper aims to assess the ethical implications of AI-powered surveillance in a hotel environment. The study extends AI-ethics scholarship into a sector that has received limited attention, offering a cohesive lens through which future studies can investigate AI surveillance technologies in the hospitality service contexts.

Keywords: Ethical Challenges, Artificial Intelligence, Surveillance, Hotel Industry

Purpose/Problem Statement

This conceptual paper seeks to examine the ethical implications of AI-powered surveillance in hotel settings. It explores the tension between operational efficiency and guest autonomy, aiming to establish a framework for ethically responsible AI deployment in hospitality environments.

Originality/value

The study contributes a multi-layered ethical framework combining elements of data ethics, hospitality ethics, and surveillance capitalism theory. It provides a novel lens through which to evaluate AI adoption based on guest dignity, informed consent, algorithmic transparency, and fairness.

Design/methodology/approach

The paper draws from conceptual literature in digital ethics, service innovation, and technology acceptance. Ethical principles such as fairness, non-maleficence, and accountability are used to analyse case examples of surveillance in global hotel chains.

Findings/Discussion

The proposed framework identifies three levels of ethical concern: (1) Individual: issues of guest consent and psychological comfort; (2) Organisational: transparency of data use and employee training; and (3) Societal: normalisation of surveillance and erosion of civil liberties. The study suggests that AI surveillance can only gain guest acceptance if ethical safeguards are embedded by design.

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Theoretical implications

This paper extends digital ethics theory to hospitality contexts and advances the discourse on value-sensitive design in service environments. It challenges the techno-optimistic view of AI in tourism by introducing a rights-based perspective.

Practical implications

Hotel managers can use the framework to conduct ethical audits, design transparent consent mechanisms, and guide procurement of ethical AI technologies. It also informs staff training and crisis communication strategies. frameworks that prioritize transparency in data collection and algorithmic decision-making can mitigate some privacy risks inherent in AI surveillance (Morley et al., 2020). Moreover, the paper recommends that tourism ministries and data protection authorities formulate clear guidelines on AI surveillance use in hospitality, including third-party data sharing and biometric data handling.

Research limitations

As a conceptual model, further empirical validation is needed through interviews with guests, hoteliers, and regulators. Cross-cultural ethical perceptions of surveillance in hospitality should also be examined.

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THE RISE OF WORKCATION: REIMAGINING HOTEL BUSINESS MODELS FOR HYBRID TRAVELERS

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Extended abstract

The impact of Covid-19 pandemic has changed human lifestyles tremendously. Starting from social distancing to work-from-home (WFH) policy and now new trends on “workcation” has emerged (Voll et al., 2023). The “workcation” define as individuals integrating their professional responsibilities with vacation experiences (Fitriani & Maharani, 2024). Although some consider it as “old wine in a new bottle” to the hospitality industry (Bassiyouny & Wilkesmann, 2023). This phenomenon was previously known as “Bleisure Travel” (Chakraborty et al., 2024). Similarly, the idea of combining work and vacation was due to the constraint of physical mobility during pandemic lock down and yet today people are traveling and working in the same time (Abdul Hamid & Wee, 2023). However, the rise of remote work technologies and evolving workplace culture has obscured the traditional boundaries between work and leisure. Some organization starts to offer “workcation” that’s allowing employees to work remotely from other locations (Stich et al., 2025). Thus, the hospitality industry is forced to reevaluate current traditional service offerings, space configurations, and business model to accommodate a distinct segment of travelers whose seeks to achieved both work productivity and relaxation. This suggest that there will be a significant transformation on previous travel segment and changes in guest expectation which its may challenge today’s conventional hospitality paradigms (Bassiyouny & Wilkesmann, 2023). This conceptual paper explore on how the rise of workcation is driving the innovation in today’s hotel business models by addressing key dimensions such as spatial flexibility, guest autonomy, and tech-enabled personalisation.

Purpose/Problem Statement

This conceptual paper aims to explore how the rise of workcation is driving the innovation in today’s hotel business models. Hotel business model insistentlly adapting to guest’s expectation, requirement and routine (Pavia et al., 2023). Despite the increasing popularity of hybrid travel, academic literature remains limited in addressing how hotels are reconfiguring spaces, service design, and revenue streams to accommodate this emerging segment. The study also seeks to examine the experiential dimensions valued by workcationers, such as digital connectivity, well-being amenities, and flexible schedule.

Originality/value

This paper synthesises theoretical perspectives from consumer behaviour, servicescape design, and co-working hospitality to propose a framework for evaluating hotel readiness in embracing hybrid travel paradigms. The conceptual model addresses key dimensions such as spatial flexibility, guest autonomy, and tech-enabled personalisation.

Design/methodology/approach

The paper adopts a conceptual approach based on an interdisciplinary literature review from hospitality management, remote work studies, and spatial design. It draws on emerging industry reports and case examples from boutique hotels and urban resorts that have adopted workcation packages.

Findings/Discussion

The proposed framework suggests that hotels must integrate flexible workspace configurations, enhanced digital infrastructure, well-being-orientated services (e.g., yoga, mental wellness programs), and modular room designs to remain competitive. Tech-enabled personalization includes free Wi-Fi connection, services for business assistance, printer, scanner services and room with agronomic furnish (Pavia et al., 2023).

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Theoretical implications

This paper contributes to hospitality and consumer behaviour literature by expanding the concept of the tourist experience to include hybrid productivity-leisure goals. It also provides a service innovation lens to understand how value co-creation unfolds in hotel settings under new work-life paradigms.

Practical implications

Hotel developers and managers could utilise the framework to improve their property offerings and identify areas for spatial redesign, digital infrastructure investment, and target market. The typology provides strategic guidance for different market positions (Brigitta Pecsek, 2018). Tourism boards and urban planners should recognise workcation as a growing economic segment and incorporate it into destination planning strategies. Incentives for hotels investing in digital nomad infrastructure can attract long-stay hybrid travellers and promote local economic activity.

Research limitations

The study is conceptual and requires empirical validation across different hospitality segments and cultural contexts. Future research may include surveys or interviews with hybrid travellers and comparative analysis across destinations.

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THE INFLUENCE OF TIKTOK AND SHORT-FORM VIDEOS ON DESTINATION BRANDING AMONG GEN Z: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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Extended abstract

The rapid growth of short-form video platforms like TikTok has transformed the way destinations are promoted and perceived, particularly among Gen Z travellers. Unlike traditional media, TikTok relies heavily on user-generated content, visual storytelling, and peer-driven influence, enabling destinations to be showcased through highly personalized, emotionally resonant narratives. While existing studies recognize TikTok's viral potential in shaping destination image and travel behaviour, not all content achieves the same level of impact. Research has shown that videos lacking emotional depth or perceived sincerity often result in minimal or short-lived engagement (Zhou et al., 2024). Furthermore, overly polished or commercialized content may be dismissed by viewers as inauthentic or untrustworthy (Bowman et al., 2024). This highlights a critical gap in understanding what types of short-form videos effectively influence travel intention, and through what mechanisms (Lin et al., 2024). To address this gap, this conceptual paper proposes a framework linking three interrelated constructs narrative virality, perceived authenticity, and affective engagement to explain how TikTok content influences destination branding among Gen Z users. The framework provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the emotional and behavioural dynamics of digital tourism content. By doing so, this paper contributes to both academic discourse and practical strategies in influencer marketing, destination branding, and digital communication policy.

Keywords: Social Media, Tiktok, Destination Marketing, Destination Branding

Purpose/Problem Statement

This conceptual paper aims to explore the mechanisms through which TikTok content influences destination branding among Gen Z travelers. It addresses key research gaps concerning the role of visual storytelling, social proof, and emotional resonance in shaping travel intentions. According to previous literature, not every short-form video will enhance destination image and drive travel intentions. Poor emotional connection bond between short-form videos and the users will result in minimal or temporal impact on travel intention (Zhou et al., 2024). Additionally, if TikTok content appears too polished or insincere, audiences may dismiss it as fake or purely commercial (Bowman et al., 2024). Identifying which types of short-form videos best drive travel intention is an area that warrants further research (Lin et al., 2024).

Originality/value

This paper proposes a conceptual framework that links three interrelated constructs: (1) narrative virality, (2) perceived authenticity, and (3) affective engagement. Drawing on theories of parasocial interaction, narrative transportation, and media richness, the framework offers insights into how TikTok shapes destination image formation, trust, and travel decision-making among Gen Z users, especially when audiences are emotionally connected and have parasocial interaction with TikTok and short-form videos. The framework also offers significant value in understanding the effectiveness and impact of online influencers, especially in how online influencers connect with audiences and shape behavior.

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Design/methodology/approach

The study employs a narrative review of literature from destination branding, digital media, consumer psychology, and Gen Z behavior. It synthesizes insights from empirical studies and marketing theories to develop a conceptual model adaptable for future empirical research. Additionally, it offers a valuable foundation to study the emotional and behavioral impact of storytelling content, especially in digital media like TikTok or destination branding.

Findings/Discussion

The proposed framework suggests that TikTok-based destination branding is effective when content is (1) emotionally engaging, (2) perceived as authentic and unscripted, and (3) created by reliable peer influencers. These videos foster emotional attachment and social validation, which significantly influence travel intention and word-of-mouth behaviors. The review also underscores the role of hashtags, challenges, and algorithm-driven virality in amplifying destination narratives.

Theoretical implications

This paper expands destination branding literature by incorporating the affective and participatory nature of short-form video content. It emphasizes the need to move beyond static brand identity models toward dynamic, co-created brand experiences. It also implies why certain narratives influence travel intention, consumer behavior, or social movements. In addition, the paper highlights the kind of content strategies that generate deeper viewer engagement. These short-form videos are not just clicks, but they also initiate emotional reactions and trust.

Practical implications

Tourism marketers can leverage the findings to design TikTok campaigns that prioritize storytelling over direct promotion. Collaborating with micro-influencers and encouraging user-generated content aligned with local culture can enhance brand relatability and shareability. Policymakers should consider digital literacy and representation equity in tourism promotion strategies targeting youth, but at the same time formulate ethical guidelines or accreditation for tourism/brand influencers. As for the social media influencers, they acknowledge the types of stories that make them visible and shareable. Influencers can recognize what it takes to move audiences from passive viewing to emotional connection and action.

Research limitations

Being a conceptual study, empirical validation is recommended through content analysis, ethnographic observation, or experimental design targeting Gen Z travelers. Cross-cultural perspectives should also be explored to generalize the framework globally.

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AI-POWERED PERSONALISATION IN HOSPITALITY SERVICES: TRANSFORMING GUEST EXPERIENCES AND OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

Sofia Alisa Samseh Anuar¹, Anderson Ngelambong^{2*}, Dahlan Abdullah³, Sperico Michael Alden⁴, Kom Campiranon⁵

Extended abstract

The hospitality industry is undergoing a paradigm shift driven by artificial intelligence (AI) that enable personalisation of guest experiences (Awasthi, 2022). AI-powered personalisation has emerged as a transformative tool in shaping customer attitudes, behaviours, and operational performance in hotels. Personalisation using AI involves dynamic tailoring of services, amenities, and communications to individual preferences through real-time data analysis, predictive modelling, and machine learning algorithms. As guest expectations evolve toward seamless, anticipatory service, understanding how AI is operationalised within the hospitality sector is essential. This research investigates the use of AI personalisation tools and explores their perceived impact from both hotel guest and managerial perspectives.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Personalisation, Guest Experiences, Hospitality Services

Purpose/Problem Statement

The central aim of this study is to explore the role of AI-powered personalisation in transforming guest experiences and enhancing operational efficiency in the hospitality industry. Although prior literature has examined the general benefits of AI in service delivery, there remains a significant research gap in understanding how AI is used specifically for service enhancement in the hospitality industry (Gursoy, 2025). Moreover, few studies have investigated both the operational outcomes and guest emotional responses linked to AI personalisation. This research seeks to bridge these gaps by answering, how are AI personalisation tools deployed in hotel environments?

Originality/value

This study offers a novel contribution by examining the impact of AI personalisation on (1) guest-centric value creation and (2) operational performance enhancement. It further contextualises findings within the hospitality landscape, which is characterised by a service-centric ethos and digital adoption asymmetry. The study also contributes to AI-human interaction literature in service contexts by addressing ethical and emotional considerations in data-driven personalisation. Kwong et al. (2024) argue that the progression of AI applications in hospitality must carefully navigate the interplay between customisation and ethical concerns.

Design/methodology/approach

This study adopts a structured literature review approach to critically examine the role of AI-powered personalisation in hospitality service delivery. Relevant academic sources were systematically identified from leading databases such as Google Scholar using keywords including “AI in hospitality,” “personalised guest experience,” and “AI and personalisation.” The review includes peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and industry reports published between 2015 and 2024. Sources were selected based on relevance and thematic alignment with the research objectives. The literature was analysed thematically to identify key trends, implementation challenges, guest perceptions, and operational outcomes associated with AI personalisation. This approach enabled the identification of theoretical gaps and emerging issues that inform the conceptual contributions of the study.

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Findings/Discussion

The study revealed several themes associated with AI-powered personalisation: anticipatory service, emotional engagement, data trust and privacy, operational streamlining, and employee augmentation.

Practical implications

The study offers several practical insights for hoteliers, technology vendors, and tourism ministries. Hotel operators should emphasise emotional personalisation beyond efficiency. Transparent data policies, frontline training programs, and cultural adaptability are essential for successful integration.

Policy implications

The findings urge hospitality stakeholders and tourism ministries to develop regulatory frameworks that ensure ethical AI use, promote inclusive digital transformation, and address data sovereignty concerns.

Research limitations –

The study was limited to literature review analysis. Future research could include quantitative studies assessing long-term impacts of AI personalisation and quantitative modeling of guest behavioral outcomes.

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