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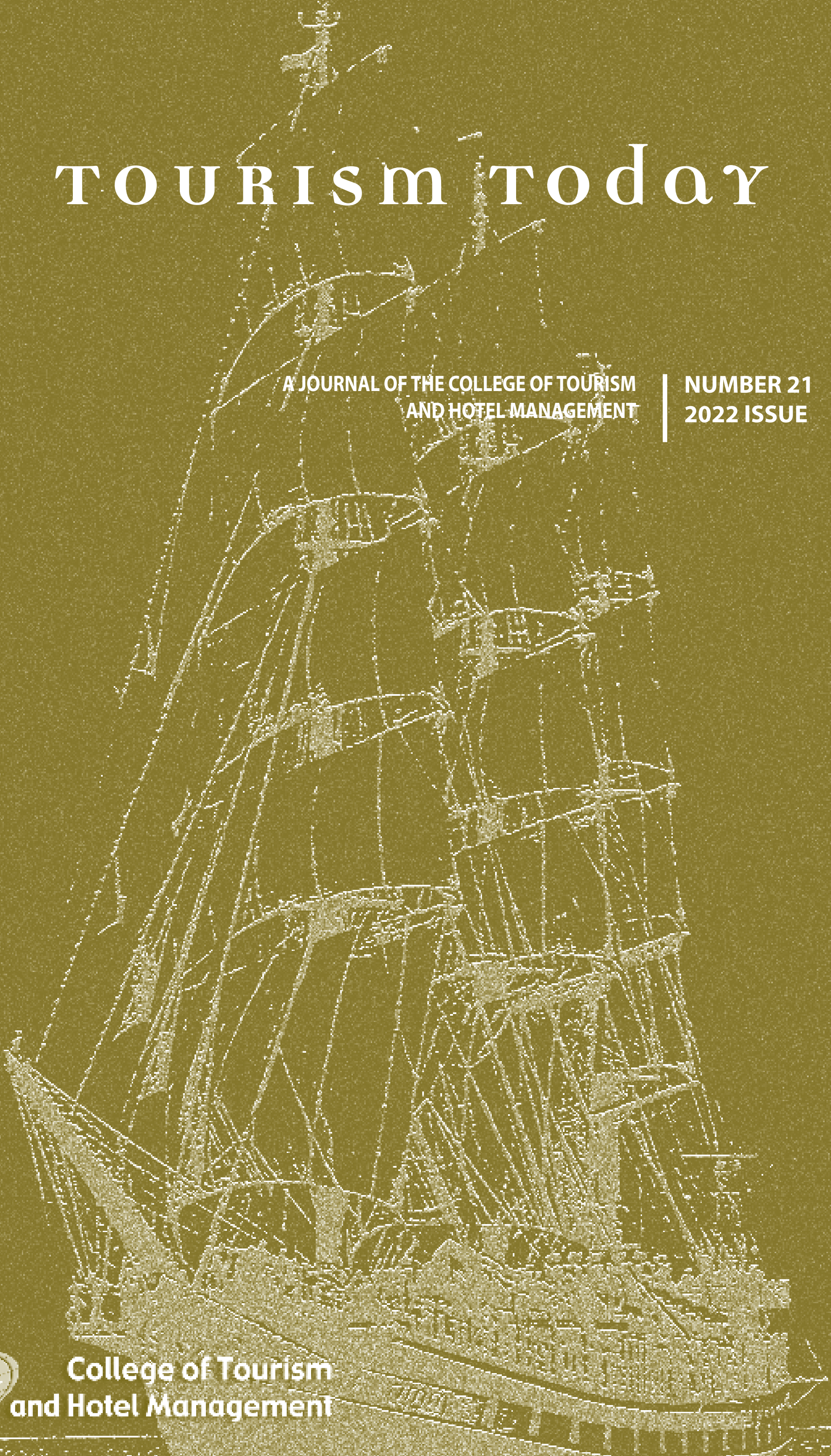

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Editorial Board

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Aims & Scope

Tourism Today serves as an international, scholarly, and refereed journal aiming to promote and enhance research in the fields of tourism and hospitality. The journal is published by the College of Tourism and Hotel Management in Cyprus. The journal is intended for readers in the scholarly community who deal with the tourism and hospitality industries, as well as professionals in the industry. *Tourism Today* provides a platform for debate and dissemination of research findings, new research areas and techniques, conceptual developments, and articles with practical application to any tourism or hospitality industry segment. Besides research papers, the journal welcomes book reviews, conference reports, case studies, research notes and commentaries.

Aims & Scope

The scope of the journal is international and all papers submitted are subject to strict double blind peer review by its Editorial Board and by international reviewers. The journal features conceptual and empirical papers, and editorial policy is to invite the submission of manuscripts from academics, researchers and industry practitioners. The Editorial Board will be looking particularly for articles about new trends and developments within the field of tourism and hospitality, and the application of new ideas and developments that are likely to affect tourism and hospitality in the future. The journal also welcomes submission of manuscripts in areas that may not be directly tourism-based but cover a topic that is of interest to researchers, educators and practitioners in the fields of tourism and hospitality.

Decisions regarding publication of submitted manuscripts are based on the recommendations of members of the Editorial Board and other qualified reviewers in an anonymous review process. Submitted articles are evaluated on their appropriateness, significance, clarity of presentation and conceptual adequacy. Negative reviews are made available to authors. The views expressed in the articles are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent those of the Editorial Board of *Tourism Today*, nor the College of Tourism and Hotel Management.

Contents

Full Papers

Note from the Editor

It is a time for rejoicing, as Tourism Today has survived much longer than most journals and is in operation well after over two decades after its founding. When Tourism Today was first launched in 1999, Antonis Charalambides and I had a vision for it. We owe it to his foresight and creativity that he invested in the journal and took me aboard to help build it and launch it. It is because of him and his foresight that we have this vehicle for scholars around the world. I am also grateful to Savvas Adamides, Director of the College of Tourism and Hotel Management, for continuing to support the journal.

In this issue, we have a very interesting mix of articles from many parts of the world and really shows a great deal of the diversity of research interests, methods, and national contexts for research. For example, Almudena Otegui Carles and co-authors look into the incorporation of sustainability content in the curricula of Spanish postgraduate studies by analysing data from a survey. Else Ragni Yttredal and Nathalie Homlong investigate the spending of tourists in a cruise destination in Norway. Andrea Gubbiotti investigates the optimization of search engines on tourism marketing in Italy. Nicole Bünstorf, has investigated issues related to transportation modes used by tourists and environmental concerns in Germany. While all four of these are about tourism phenomena in various European countries, the findings have implications beyond Europe and deal with concerns that everyone interested in tourism-related phenomena should be aware.

There are other authors in this edition that deal with areas outside of Europe. Godfred Osei Boakye and co-authors survey the adaptation of technology in the travel industry in Ghana. Yusuf and Kukoyi analyse fieldwork data to get insight into management issues in a Nigerian national park. Seitova Nazym the growth strategy of an Asian hotel firm and the cultural issues it faces when expanding abroad.

The journal continues to function as planned and, in some ways, better than planned. While the journal was designed to give scholars a useful and welcoming outlet for their research, the journal has very much turned into a very diverse vehicle as an outlet for researchers from all over the world.

As usual, I am grateful to the Editorial Board that has been supportive over the years.

As has been the case since the first edition of Tourism Today, comments that assist us in improving the journal are welcome. We encourage all our readers to support us by submitting original research, volunteering to join the Editorial Board, and telling friends and colleagues about the journal.

We wish you an enjoyable read.

Craig Webster
Editor-in-Chief, Tourism Today

Inclusion of Sustainability Content in the Curricula of Spanish Postgraduate Studies in Tourism

Almudena Otegui Carles[1], Noelia Araújo Vila[2] and Jose A. Fraiz Brea[3]

ABSTRACT

Higher education plays a vital role in supporting the implementation of sustainability initiatives, but the level of progress in the implementation varies among countries and institutions as well as in the curriculum of different studies. The training on the sustainability of professionals from the tourism sector is of great importance given that tourism is responsible for a significant environmental impact. Therefore, this paper aims to measure sustainability-related content included in the curriculum of Spanish postgraduate studies in tourism. To this aim, a sustainability tourism measurement tool has been adapted: *Sustainable Tourism for Development Guidebook* published by the World Tourism Organization. This adaptation has made it possible to have a measuring tool in the form of a questionnaire, that has been sent to professors of Spanish postgraduate studies in tourism to measure the inclusion of content related to sustainability in the curriculum, thirty-five professors from 15 universities responded to the questionnaire. The results obtained suggest that the training in official master's degrees in tourism in Spain is far from having an optimal level of content related to sustainability. There is a trend to include more technical content in the curriculum of higher education in tourism, especially those related to economics and political management. Besides, the social dimension of sustainable development is being relegated. Since measurement of sustainability is a complex and challenging process for higher education institutions, this research will have substantial academic implications, enabling the establishment of a new analytical framework for measuring sustainability.

Keywords: Curriculum; Education for Sustainable Development; Measuring; Postgraduate Studies; Sustainable Tourism; World Tourism Organization

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INTRODUCTION

Concern for the environment and sustainability within higher education institutions (HEI) has grown since the early 1970s (Alghamdi et al., 2017; Trad, 2019). The International Association of Universities (IAU) has advocated for the role higher education has played in support of sustainable development since the early 1990s (Mallow et al., 2020). In the frame of the 2030 Agenda (United Nations, 2015), education is explicitly recognized in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. It is also possible to find references to education in most of the SDGs. Higher education plays a crucial role in the achievement of the SDGs (Torres, 2021) since it can also support the implementation of every SDG and the principles of ESD (education for sustainable development) into all undergraduate and graduate courses, as well as graduate research training (Mallow et al., 2020; SDSN, 2017), and can support the implementation of sustainability initiatives (Anastasiadis et al., 2020).

There are two challenges that universities face to ensure that future leaders, decision-makers, teachers, innovators, entrepreneurs, and citizens have enough knowledge (SDSN, 2017). One of these challenges is to incorporate the SDGs into the training process, the second is to provide people with professional and personal skills and capabilities (Torres, 2021). The knowledge acquired will prepare all those stakeholders to overcome the challenges posed by the achievement of a sustainable tackling of the world's complex problems (Trad, 2019). Incorporating the SDGs into the training process is not an easy task; teachers experience some barriers, as there are difficulties in integrating sustainability into an already overcrowded curriculum due to a lack of time, knowledge, skills, and resources (Anyolo et al., 2018).

The level of progress on the achievement of the SDGs varies in different countries (Lovren, 2017) and academic institutions (Mallow et al., 2020) as well as the presence of sustainability and ESD in the curriculum of the different studies within these institutions around the world (Anyolo et al., 2018). Some universities are implementing sustainable actions at different levels. For example, MODUL University at Vienna has created a sustainability committee to implement sustainable practices in three areas: administration and management, teaching and curriculum, and research and development (Lund-Durlacher, 2015). In 2017, the SDSN (Sustainable Development Solutions Network) in collaboration with the Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability (ACTS), Australian and New Zealand universities published a guide to help to implement the SDGs through teaching, research, operations, and leadership (SDSN, 2017). The Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA) with 61 public university members established in 2013 a five-year program for Climate Change Capacity Development through a collaborative network of HEIs and in 2015 a two-year project to develop a regional curriculum for a Master's Program in Climate Change and Sustainable Development (SARUA, n.d.).

Professionals' training on sustainability for the tourist sector is of great importance given that tourism is responsible for a significant environmental impact (Styles et al., 2015). In the

2030 Agenda (United Nations, 2015), there are explicit references to sustainable tourism in the following goals:

- Goal 8.9: By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.
- Goal 12.b: Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.
- Goal 14.7: By 2030, increase the economic benefits to small island developing states and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through the sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture, and tourism.

It is important to know whether this drive towards sustainable tourism over the last decades and the commitments from different organizations working with the 2030 Agenda are being reflected in tourism university education, not only via the promotion of sustainability in the educational process, and the teaching and learning processes (Torres, 2021) but via the inclusion of sustainability content in the different courses and subjects, especially considering that tertiary education does not have sufficient sustainability assessment tools (Trad, 2019). Because "There is no equipment manufacturer that sells a sustainability meter" (Alghamdi et al., 2017 p.4), this paper aims to measure sustainability-related content included in the curriculum of Spanish postgraduate studies in tourism. To this end, a theoretical review of the concepts of sustainable tourism, including commitments to the 2030 Agenda, measurement of the sustainability of higher education institutions, and measurement of the sustainability of tourism have been carried out. On the empirical side, the methodology used has been an adaptation of an existing tool for measuring sustainability in tourism—*Sustainable Tourism for Development Guidebook* published by the World Tourism Organization—to adapt it to teaching practice. This adaptation has made it possible to have a measuring tool in the form of a questionnaire to send to professors of Spanish postgraduate studies in tourism to measure the inclusion in the curriculum of content related to sustainability. Finally, the work's findings, conclusions, limitations, and future lines of research are presented.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The first definition of sustainable development was established in 1987 with the publication of the *Brundtland Report*, also known as *Our Common Future*, in which sustainable development was defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Since then, the concept of sustainability has been extended to different areas, including tourism. One of the most popular and complete definitions of sustainable tourism is that given by Carbone (2005), which appears in the book *Making Tourism More Sustainable* (UNWTO, 2005, p 24). According to this definition, "Sustainable Tourism is Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities".

This definition is complemented by the twelve aims that address economic, social, and environmental impacts in a sustainable tourism plan (UNWTO, 2005). The twelve aims for an agenda for sustainable tourism, each of one equally important, are the following (UNWTO, 2005): economic viability, local prosperity, employment quality, social equity, visitor fulfillment, local control, community well-being, cultural richness, physical integrity, biological diversity, resource efficiency, and environmental purity. These twelve aims make the definition global in scope, making it possible to apply sustainable management to all forms of tourism and all destinations, including mass tourism, avoiding making sustainability a characteristic and exclusive of certain types of tourism and/or destinations. In the field of tourism, not only the 2030 Agenda, but also the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development in 2017 (UNWTO, 2017) have in recent years driven the development of sustainable tourism, and this impulse has been supported by the commitments from different organizations.

Various surveys and reports carried out by international bodies, universities, or independent bodies show that higher education is increasing its commitment to sustainable development thanks to the 2030 Agenda and that the SDGs are embedded more strongly at the teaching level, closely followed by research (Mallow et al., 2020). However, there are still no mandatory requirements about the presentation of reports by the universities to the United Nations in the frame of the 2030 Agenda, and the only report that countries must provide is the progress report on the implementation of the SDGs to the high-level policy forum on the development of the United Nations sustainable development goals (HLPF) at least twice between 2016 and 2030 (SDSN, 2017). Even so, the Government of Spain prepares every year an annual progress report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which reflects all the progress made at the different political, administrative, and territorial levels, as well as the commitment of different stakeholders: employers' organizations, trade unions, universities, foundations, etc. (MTERD, n.d.). The same applies to the CRUE (Conference of Rectors of The Spanish Universities), the Conference of Rectors presents every year a report of actions within the framework of the 2030 Agenda, where it gives an account of the work done so far for the achievement of the SDGs and proposes new actions to be implemented for the coming years (CRUE, 2019b).

SPANISH COMMITMENTS WITH THE 2030 AGENDA

In 2018, the Government of Spain presented the first annual progress report entitled *Action Plan for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda* (DGPOLDES, 2018), which, in line with the monitoring and review commitments agreed upon in the 2030 Agenda itself, reflects the progress that has been made so far in Spain concerning the implementation and enforcement of the 2030 Agenda as well as the decisions, targets, and commitments to be met in Spain from the time the document was adopted until 2030. The clearest evidence of Spain’s commitment to the 2030 Agenda was the creation in 2020 of The Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030, after the integration into a single department of the social competencies of the Ministry of Health, Consumption and Social Welfare and the Presidency of the Government on the Sustainable Development Goals (MDSA, n.d.). Also, at the regional, provincial, and municipal levels, different actions have been taken for the implementation, monitoring, and control of the 2030 Agenda. For example, in Galicia, at the regional level, an interdepartmental commission for the follow-up of the 2030 Agenda was created in 2019 (Xunta de Galicia, 2019); at the provincial level in Pontevedra, the strategy to promote and coordinate actions related to the 2030 Agenda in the different territories and municipalities was approved in 2019 (Pontevedra, n.d.). At the municipal level, some municipalities in the province have drafted municipal plans for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (Tomiño, 2021).

The most relevant stakeholder at the formative and educational level in Spain is the CRUE. CRUE is a non-profit association formed in 1994 by a total of 76 Spanish universities: 50 public and 26 privates (CRUE, n.d.). It is the main interlocutor of universities with the central government and plays a key role in all regulatory developments affecting higher education. It also promotes initiatives of various kinds to foster relations with the productive and social fabric, institutional relations, both national and international, and works to enhance the value of the Spanish university. The role of the CRUE is essential in achieving the target 4.7. One of the measures on which this target is based is to incorporate training into the 2030 Agenda and the 2021 SDGs into all degrees and for all postgraduates so that all students who complete undergraduate or postgraduate studies have received basic training in sustainable development and global citizenship to a level of 100% by 2025.

CRUE presented the joint contribution of the universities to the Action Plan 2018 for the implementation of Agenda 2030 presented by the Spanish government (CRUE, 2018). In this document, CRUE made certain commitments, including "a strong commitment to the inclusion of competencies related to sustainable and inclusive development in the training of all students, teaching and research staff, and administration and service staff" and "the generation and transfer of knowledge committed to sustainable development". As part of this commitment, in addition to multiple initiatives linked to the SDGs (CRUE, 2019b), CRUE collaborated very actively in the 2019 IAU survey to analyze the degree of knowledge and implementation of the 2030 Agenda in universities (CRUE, 2019a; Mallow et al., 2020).

MEASUREMENT OF SUSTAINABILITY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Although there has been considerable progress in the incorporation of sustainability into higher education institutions (Lozano et al., 2019), assessment tools are important for a diagnosis to define ways to improve and future changes (Caeiro et al., 2020). Research on ESD is growing, intending to bring together advances in sustainability development by developing sustainability assessment tools (Trad, 2019). But measurement of sustainability remains a complex and challenging process for higher education institutions, and although there are numerous tools available to help universities measure their sustainability (Alghamdi et al., 2017), there are no specific tools for each academic area. An example is the IAU Survey on Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development (HESD) developed in 2016 and 2019. Founded in 1950, IAU has members from more than 130 countries and is an official partner of UNESCO.

The second edition of the survey was responded from 536 universities from 101 countries, due to the IAU partnership with CRUE, 102 universities that responded to the survey were from Spain. Results of the survey show that, although 64% of respondents indicated that the adoption of the SDGs increased the interest in sustainable development at their institution, the SD is part of education and teaching, but not necessarily part of the official curriculum. Difficulties such as lack of staff, funding, training, and research cooperation were declared. With this type of survey, it is possible to get an overview of the SDGs' implementation in the HEI, but not an analysis of this implementation in each university and the different courses and subjects. Especially considering that the SD is understood differently in different countries and that not all SDGs received the same attention from all universities, it depends on the academic focus adopted by each institution (Mallow et al., 2020). In each country, university, study, and subject, teachers consider different sustainability dimensions (Anyolo et al., 2018). For example, the SD was associated mostly with the environment, for most of the universities. However, Asia and the Pacific are more associated with the three dimensions (environmental, economic, and social).

If there are difficulties in analyzing the implementation of the SDG in each university and the different courses and subjects, it is even more difficult to focus that analysis on the different curricula. And it is precisely in the sustainability content of higher education curricula that more focus should be placed (Trad, 2019) because it is that curricula that will establish student learning.

To measure sustainability-related content inclusion in the curriculum of Spanish postgraduate studies in tourism, the first thing to do is to specify what constitutes sustainability-related content. In this study, the objective is to know the extent to which content related to the 12 aims of sustainable tourism, according to the definition of sustainable tourism made by Carbone (2005), are incorporated in the official master's degree in tourism studies collected in the Registry of Universities, Centers and Degrees (RUCT) of Spain and taught by universities belonging to the CRUE.

MEASUREMENT OF TOURISM SUSTAINABILITY

The application of indicators is essential to evaluate the progress of tourism planning. This is not an easy task because of the diversity of stakeholders and the type of activities involved (Ivars-Baidal et al., 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020). Sustainability indicators can lead to better and more effective decisions (Kristjánsdóttir et al., 2018; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020). There has been a greater interest in developing sustainability indicators since the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, followed by a great deal of research on the development of sustainability indicators (Kristjánsdóttir et al., 2018). Many efforts have been made on the part of public organizations to measure the sustainability of tourism, especially by the UNWTO and the European Commission, with tools such as *Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations—A Guidebook* (UNWTO, 2004), S*ustainable Tourism for Development Guidebook—Enhancing Capacities for Sustainable Tourism for Development in Developing Countries* (UNWTO, 2013) or *The European Tourism Indicator System* (Directorate-General for Internal Market, 2017). The declaration of the year 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism and the 2030 Agenda has provided a boost in studies, conferences, meetings, etc. on sustainable tourism and on how to measure it. In this framework, UNWTO is working with the support of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) on the MST Measuring Sustainable Tourism tool (UNWTO, 2018). The objective of this initiative is to measure the role of tourism in sustainable development beyond the economic dimension in which measurement tools have been focused, incorporating the social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and doing so at the global, national, and subnational levels. Pilot studies are being conducted in different countries, and other experiences developed around the world are being considered.

There is no universal list of indicators to measure the sustainability of tourist destinations (Mitrică et al., 2021), and it seems to be necessary to develop new instruments, appropriate indicators, and monitoring strategies to measure sustainability comprehensively for the achievement of the SDGs (Castellani and Sal, 2012; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020). The fact that tourism indicators may be either subjective or objective (Vicens-Colom et al., 2021) hinders this task. Subjective indicators, like tourist perceptions of safety, are not always quantifiable, but even objective indicators that could be measured with precision, such as energy consumption per tourist, do not always allow for easy differentiation between what is a consequence of tourism and what is not. Therefore it is necessary a greater interest in developing new methodologies (Kristjánsdóttir et al., 2018) to measure sustainability in the field of tourism.

METHODOLOGY

RUCT is an online public register (RUCT, n.d.) in which it is possible to find all official graduate degrees, master's degrees, and doctorates taught by Spanish universities of all academic branches. A list of master's degree courses in tourism taught in Spanish universities during the academic year 2019/2020 has been drawn up based on this register, except for those universities not belonging to the CRUE, and which have not been included in this study. Seventy-six master's degrees have been counted, including the general master's degrees in tourism and those specific to hospitality, events, and/or protocol. There were some master's that although they appeared as authorized studies on the register, were not offered by the universities during the 2019/2020 academic year, or that on the website of the university, these master's did not appear as official studies. Once all exclusions have been made, there are a total of 58 official tourism master's degrees on the RUCT from universities members of the CRUE. Once this list had been drawn up, an analysis was made of the study plans for each master's degree, but given that sustainability is a transversal discipline, the analysis of the curricula, competencies, and objectives of each subject was not enough to determine whether content related to the 12 aims of sustainable tourism was being incorporated into these master's degrees. For this reason, to achieve the goal of this paper, the authors decided to look for the best way to make this measurement possible and decided to adopt a sustainability tourism measurement tool instead of creating a new one.

When a new measuring tool is created, it is not possible to know if it will work correctly. However, if this tool continues to be used and improved, for example by changing some indicators, the measurement systems, the actors involved, etc. could come to have a very refined tool and one perfectly adapted to the sector and the purposes for which it is intended to be used. One of the problems that measurement tools currently have is the lack of consensus on the right indicators, which is why more and more tools are being created. In this way, it would be possible to modify some indicators that are not working well or that are not in line with what is intended to be measured better than changing the tool and starting again. In addition, it would allow interconnecting measurements; for example, in the case of the tool adapted in this research, it is a tool created to measure the sustainability of tourism. Would it, therefore, make sense to create a completely different one to measure the sustainability taught in tourism studies? Both tools could consider different indicators of sustainability, and the content given to students in universities could be considered sustainable according to a measurement tool. At the same time, however, sustainable tourism measurement tools might not consider such indicators to indicate sustainability. So, students would be trained in a sustainable reality, not in line with that of the sector in which they will work.

Before choosing a tool to adapt for this research, several existing tools were analyzed, authors considered that three tools could be suitable:

1. *Methodological work on measuring the sustainable development of tourism* is a work commissioned in 2004 by the European Commission (European Commission, 2004) to measure sustainable tourism considering the three dimensions of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental. Based on 7 criteria, 20 indicators were presented. A voluntary survey was sent to the countries of the European Union, they should indicate whether these data were at NUTS (Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics) level 1, 2, or 3, i.e., at national, regional, or local level. The second part of the work, published in 2006 (European Commission, 2006) specifies how to measure each indicator, a description of this indicator, the objective to be achieved for each indicator, the geographical coverage, that is if it is a national level, regional, local; as well as keys to interpret the results. This tool has an inconvenience, in some indicators, it may be difficult to differentiate between tourist and non-tourist use. For example, indicator 10 "Discharge of sewage water due to tourism", if tourist accommodation is mainly focused on hotels or establishments whose only use is tourist, it could be simpler. But with a proliferation of houses for tourist use, it is more difficult to measure, of an entire building of houses, what part of those discharges correspond to those for tourist use. Moreover, the interpretations do not indicate how and to what extent they affect the sustainability of tourism.

2. *The European Tourism Indicator System* is a work of the European Commission published in 2016. It is based on 43 core indicators subdivided into four categories: Management of tourist destinations; Social and cultural impact; Economic value, and Environmental impact. In addition, it has 33 complementary indicators to adapt to each

territory (Directorate-General for Internal Market, 2017). Monitoring results are based on self-assessment, observations, data collection, and analysis of these data by the tourist destinations themselves. ETIS does not set the minimum values to be achieved nor does it provide any certification. Although ETIS includes some suggestions on possible interventions, it has some inconveniences in terms of analysis of results, improvement plans, or beneficiaries of those plans. Furthermore, the tool does not conform to the 12 objectives of Sustainable Tourism program.

3. *Sustainable tourism for development guidebook* is a work of UNWTO published in 2013 with the financial support of the European Commission (UNWTO, 2013) in the framework of the project "Capacity building for sustainable tourism for development in developing countries". This tool consists of 5 pillars and 17 sub-pillars divided into items, which are related to the 12 objectives that a Sustainable Tourism should contain, as defined in the book of sustainable tourism, Making Tourism More Sustainable (2005). For each pillar, indications are given as to how questions can be answered, in addition to plans that can be undertaken to improve the status of that pillar; tools for undertaking such improvement plans; duration, and beneficiaries of plans. There is a table in which the action priority over that item should be marked from 1 to 5, there is no quantitative formula as in the other two models to calculate it. This enables the expansion of the study of sustainability since there are characteristics and particularities of sustainability that are difficult to quantify mathematically or statistically. At the same time, allows to overcome the difficulty of quantifying subjective indicators, such as the perception of security of tourists. It has a disadvantage because of the time it takes to complete the process with 178 questions to answer.

The tool chosen to adapt has been the *Sustainable Tourism for Development Guidebook*, the authors decided to choose this tool for different reasons: it includes the 12 aims that a sustainable tourism program should contain, as defined in the book, Making Tourism More Sustainable; From all analyzed tools, this is the one that can most properly be adapted to the objective pursued since it allows an adaptation of the questions asked to the field of education; it allows to quantify not only if each of the proposed items is being included in the curricula, but also the degree to which it is being included. This inclusion could be made in all subjects that make up the curricula in tourism master's degrees, including those subjects that a priori may suggest no possibility of including sustainability content; Once adapted, it allows professors to compare year after year whether they are including that content in the subjects they are teaching and whether they are doing it to the depth that they should. This adaptation has made it possible to have a measuring tool in the form of a questionnaire to send to professors of Spanish postgraduate studies in tourism to measure the inclusion in the curriculum of content related to sustainability.

Table 1. Number of questions

Pillar	Sub-pillars	Issues	Questions
Pillar 1	3	9	49
Pillar 2	4	6	35
Pillar 3	2	5	24
Pillar 4	4	6	34
Pillar 5	4	6	36
Total	17	32	178

As observable in Table 1, there are 178 questions in the original questionnaire, 5 pillars, 17 sub pillars, and 32 issues. For this study, the authors decided to ask one question for each issue for a total of 32 questions from the 5 pillars and 17 sub pillars. The authors decided to reduce the questionnaire to 32 questions because answering 178 questions required too much time, it was going to be overly complicated for the teachers surveyed, and therefore fewer answers would be obtained. The 32 questions chosen from that 178 were randomly selected and then adapted to teaching practice. This means that the exact words of the original tool have not been used, but they have been adapted to the content that could be taught in Spanish universities. In Appendix 1 (Table 5-9), it is possible to see the original questionnaire's questions and the adaptation made for this study. The original tool was written in English, and the adaptation was made in Spanish to create the questionnaire; almost a literal translation to English from that was written in Spanish has been undertaken for accuracy. Once the adaptation was made, it was sent in the form of a questionnaire for teachers to indicate to what extent they are including such sustainability content in the subjects which they teach. As in the original tool, in the adaptation, 6 response options have been maintained with a scale of 1 to 5 and the additional option to respond: "At this time, I do not know, or I do not want to answer" as an adaptation of "No information available to answer the question / This could not be assessed" from the original. In Table 2, we can see the answer options contained in the questionnaire.

Table 2. Response options

Numeric scale	In the teaching of the subject of which I am a teacher:
1	I do not include this content
2	I include this content in the teaching only if I have the time and opportunity to do so, but in any case, superficially
3	I include this content, but partially
4	I include this content, without giving it importance and without including it in the evaluation
5	I include this content, giving it great importance and including it in the evaluation
X	At this time, I do not know or I do not want to give an answer

To send the questionnaire, the authors searched for the e-mail of directors and coordinators of the 58 master's programs. Contact was made with 44 of them. They were sent a link to the questionnaire, a brief explanation of the study, and were asked to distribute it among the teachers of the master's degree of which they are directors or coordinators. Thirty-five professors from 15 universities responded to the questionnaire. Once the results had been obtained, the analysis work was done with the IBM SPSS Statistics Editor and graphics and tables with the Excel tool.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

To understand the results, it is necessary to explain the meaning of each score. One can observe in Table 3 that the results obtained, according to the original tool, would indicate that the lower the result obtained, the higher priority of action required for that item.

Table 3. Significance of the results

Score	Score meaning	Priority for action
1	Area of particular need/opportunity – highest priority for action/intervention	**High**
2	Improvement required – should also be considered for intervention/support	
3	May benefit from some improvement – but less current need for intervention	
4	Appears to be satisfactory – maintain	
5	Area of apparent strength – may provide an example to others	
X	No information available to answer the question /This could not be assessed	**Low**

In the adapted tool, a lower number would be equivalent to indicating that little sustainability content is being imparted in the study cases. In Table 4, it is possible to see all means obtained by items and by pillars based on all scores received in response to the questionnaire sent. In the original tool, no measures were performed because it was used so that the person making the evaluation responding to all the items was concerned with obtaining conclusions and taking action in the cases in which the results indicated that it was necessary. For this study, it was necessary to make the average of the answers of all respondents to be able to obtain the results and reach a conclusion. All respondents answered all questions, so when for an item the N is less than 35, the difference is because those respondents have answered "At this time, I do not know, or I do not want to answer".

Table 4. Means obtained by items and by pillars

PILLAR 1. TOURISM POLICY AND GOVERNANCE	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Mean Pillar 1
Contribution of the National Budget to the tourism sector	34	1	5	1,97	2,87
International projects and initiatives related to Sustainable Tourism	35	1	5	2,97	
Implementation, results and monitoring of such plans, policies and/or strategies	33	1	5	2,91	
Plans, policies and/or strategies related to Sustainable Tourism implemented in Spain	34	1	5	3	
Competences of the Ministry of Tourism	35	1	5	2,46	
Civil society entities engaged and involved in the tourism policy agenda	34	1	5	2,91	
Companies and private sector associations engaged and involved in the policy agenda	35	1	5	3,37	
Competence in tourism of the local and regional communities	35	1	5	2,91	
PILLAR 2. ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE, INVESTMENT AND COMPETITIVENESS	**N**	**Min.**	**Max.**	**Mean**	**Mean Pillar 2**
Statistics of the national statistical institute and other official agencies	34	1	5	3,47	2,65
Types of trade and investment commitments available in the tourism sector	35	1	5	2,77	
Recent investments in large tourism infrastructure. Which, where and sources of investment	35	1	5	2,29	
Tourism marketing plans. Analysis of the target audience in these plans	35	1	5	3,11	
Quality standards in tourism products and services	35	1	5	2,69	
Tourism emergency management. What emergencies can occur in tourism and what protocols exist to solve them	33	1	4	1,58	

PILLAR 3. EMPLOYMENT, DECENT WORK AND HUMAN CAPITAL	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Mean Pillar 3
Role of trade unions and other workers' unions in the Spanish tourism sector	34	1	5	1,62	2,03
Quality of employment in the tourism sector	35	1	5	2,17	
Description of the different professionals in the tourism sector	35	1	5	2,26	
Profile of the tourism sector professionals most in demand today	35	1	5	2,26	
Influence of the private sector on training and employment of local communities	35	1	5	1,86	
PILLAR 4. POVERTY REDUCTION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION	**N**	**Min.**	**Max.**	**Mean**	**Mean Pillar 4**
Potential of tourism in poverty reduction	34	1	5	2,91	2,53
Identification of destinations with solidarity tourism proposals and/or poverty reduction initiatives	34	1	5	2,56	
Influence of the tourism sector in the rest of the productive sectors	35	1	5	2,57	
Impact of building new tourism infrastructure on the local community	35	1	5	2,49	
Role of women in the tourism sector	34	1	5	2,26	
Negative impacts and social problems resulting from tourism	35	1	5	2,37	
PILLAR 5. SUSTAINABILITY OF THE NATURAL AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT	**N**	**Min.**	**Max.**	**Mean**	**Mean Pillar 5**
Coastal zone conservation policies and action plans	35	1	5	2,46	2,63
Destinations and own resources of Cultural Tourism	35	1	5	3,09	
Tourism sector policies and action plans to mitigate climate change	34	1	5	2,53	
Support and incentives at national and regional level to promote sustainable tourism	34	1	5	2,59	
Tourism certifications related to sustainability, quality and/or the environment	35	1	5	2,57	
Indicators and tools for measuring sustainability in tourism	33	1	5	2,58	

RESULT BY ITEMS

By items, the lowest average score was tourism emergency management. *What emergencies can occur in tourism and what protocols exist to solve* them corresponded to item 1 of sub pillar 4 of pillar 2. It obtained a mean of 1.58, being the only item that was not scored with a 5 by any of the respondents; the rest of the items were scored from 1 to 5.

None of the items reached a mean of 4; the highest average score was for *statistics of the national statistical institute and other official agencies*, which corresponded to item 1 of sub pillar 1 of pillar 2. It obtained a mean of 3.47.

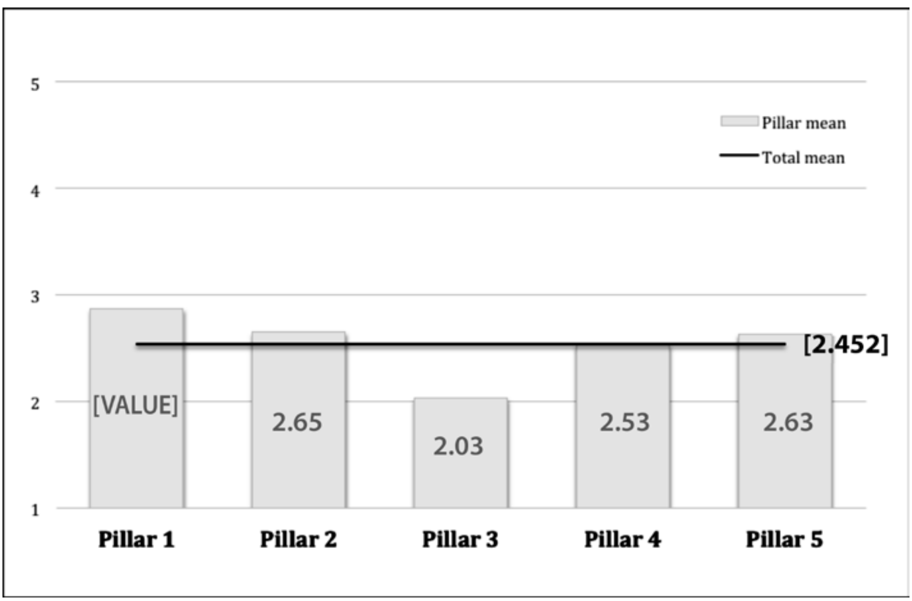
RESULTS BY PILLARS

The pillar with the lowest average score was pillar 3: *employment, decent work, and human capital*, with an average score of 2.03. The one with the highest average score was pillar 1: *tourism policy and governance*, with an average score of 2.87. All pillars were below a score of 3, so they would get the rating: "Area requiring improvement, an intervention/support is considered necessary".

TOTAL MEAN

Chart 1 shows the mean for each pillar and the total mean. The score for each pillar is as follows: pillar 1 = 2.87, pillar 2 = 2.65, pillar 3 = 2.03, pillar 4 = 2.53, and pillar 5 = 2.63. The total mean of all the pillars was below a score of 3: 2.54, which would indicate that training in sustainable tourism in a master's in tourism in Spain "Requires improvement and intervention/support is considered necessary".

Image 1. Total Mean



Both, results by items and by pillars show that there is a trend to include more technical content in the curriculum of higher education in tourism, especially those related to economics and political management. Besides, the social dimension of the SD has long been relegated to study and research. This is something expected if we consider the aforementioned survey of IAU which results indicate that the SD was associated mostly with the environment, for most of the universities. In 2019, only 53% of the respondents addressed the three dimensions of SD (economic, environmental, and social). For the same reason, Pillar 3: employment, decent work, and human capital; and Pillar 4: poverty reduction, and social inclusion obtained the two lowest results. Within pillar 1, the Contribution of the National Budget to the tourism sector is the item with the lowest mean, it could be due to decentralized management of tourism in Spain, where most competencies are of the regional governments and not of the national government.

The words attributed to the British physicist and mathematician, William Thomson Kelvin "What is not defined cannot be measured. What is not measured, cannot be improved" explains the fact that the item with higher mean was Statistics of the national statistical institute and other official agencies from the Pillar 2. In the age of data, statistics, numbers, measures, and agencies that handle such data are part of curricula of many fields of study, including tourism.

In Spain, a model of social concertation between employers and trade unions has led to workers' lack of interest in trade unions (Martín, 2020) that, together with a lack of adaptation by these unions to the new forms of work organization (Alfranca Ruber & Bericat Alastuey, 2018) would explain the low mean of the item Role of trade unions and other workers' unions in the Spanish tourism sector from pillar 3. The IUA survey indicates that SDG 5 was the second receiving most attention under Education and Teaching (Mallow et al., 2020). In a survey made in 2019 by CRUE to assess the knowledge and the implementation of the SDGs in Spanish universities, SDG 5 was also the second SDG more widely implemented (CRUE, 2019a). However, the item Role of women in the tourism sector from the Pillar 4 has the lowest mean. The implementation of SDG 5 in the curricula of tourism postgraduates' studies in Spain requires to be improved. This data will confirm the assessment that generic surveys provide an overview of the SDGs' implementation in the HEI, but not an analysis of this implementation in each university and the different courses and subjects. It's striking that of all the items of pillar 5 the one that has obtained the lowest average is Coastal zone conservation policies and action plans, considering the negative impacts in Spain in the mass destinations of the Mediterranean coast, where the urbanization to meet touristic demand has left a severely damaged landscape (García, 2017). The total mean of all pillars highlights the need for improvement when including sustainability content in the postgraduate tourism studies curricula.

CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained from the answers received show us that the training that is being given in official master's degrees in tourism in higher education institutions in Spain is far from having an optimal level of content related to sustainability, given that the inclusion of this content is an "area that requires improvement, in which an intervention/support is considered necessary".

Since this research has substantial academic implications, it addresses the measurement based on the adaptation of a tool already created for other purposes, enabling the establishment of a new analytical framework for measuring sustainability by creating an adapted tool to objectively assess whether sustainability content is being included in tourism studies and thus can implement and improve programs and education in sustainability. Thanks to these types of tools, it is possible to know what the starting situation is and how it changes over time as improvements are made to those programs. Work on the adaptation of measurement tools already created rather than always creating new tools would allow, on the one hand, to improve existing tools based on experience and, on the other hand, to achieve better clarity on the use of the correct indicators.

On the practical and operational level, this adapted tool can be used both at the teaching level and at the educational institution level, which would allow teachers to analyze and reach their conclusions concerning the need to introduce new elements or modify existing ones to include more content related to the sustainability in the teaching of their subject. In addition, it would allow them to compare year after year if they are including that training in the subject they are teaching, and if they are doing it with the depth that they should. It would allow also educational institutions to know in which subjects teachers are having more difficulties in including sustainability content and to take action on these subjects to address teachers' barriers, such as lack of time, knowledge, skills, and resources. This adaptation has been carried out to make it as general as possible and as suitable as possible for different countries. However, some questions may need different wording, depending on the country. Thus, for example, there are several questions related to policies at different levels of government, there will be countries with more centralized policies at the national level and others with more decentralized policies at the regional level, as is the case in Spain. A review of the wording of the questions will be necessary in each case. It can also be made more specific for different levels of study, as well as for the specific plans of each institution. For example, in Spain, there are graduate studies in tourism and professional training in tourism. Graduate studies have more theoretical and technical curricula, while professional training is more practical. The questions can be adapted considering this theoretical and practical nature.

The greatest limitation of this research is that only 34 professors have answered the questionnaire, despite a reduction of the questionnaire to 32 questions from 178 questions of the original tool. This reduction has been made to make it easier for teachers to respond to all the issues raised. Given the current limitations of the study, in future studies, the number of teachers surveyed should be increased, and even extended to other educational stages such as undergraduate or bachelor's degrees in tourism and tourism professional training. This would give a complete picture of the sustainability content in which the future tourism managers are being trained, given that at each level of study, it is logical that they receive training related to different content. The original tool includes indications and helps to understand how each question can be answered, as well as actions and tools to undertake improvements, when needed, in light of the results obtained. For a total adaptation of the tool, in addition to adapting the total of items as well as the indications to help respond to and improve actions, it would be necessary to test each item for validity and reliability depending on the country and the university in which the measurement is to be carried out.

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APPENDIX 1

Table 5. Adaptation of pillar 1 from the original questionnaire

PILLAR 1 TOURISM POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

1.1 The position of tourism in development policies and programmes

Issue 1: The level of recognition given to tourism in development policies

d. How much support is given to tourism from the national budget?
Adapted to: Contribution of the National Budget to the tourism sector

Issue 2: The extent and nature of international assistance for sustainable tourism development

a. Are there any major current or recent projects or initiatives in sustainable tourism that are receiving international assistance and from whom?
Adapted to: International projects and initiatives related to Sustainable Tourism

1.2 Tourism policy and regulatory framework

Issue 1: The existence of a tourism policy and strategic plans, sufficient to guide the development of tourism

j. Have tourism strategies/plans been prepared for specific destinations and are more needed?
Adapted to: Most important tourism plans, policies and/or strategies implemented in Spain

Issue 2: The implementation and monitoring of the policy/strategy/plan

d. Are progress and results being monitored and reviewed?
Adapted to: Implementation, results and monitoring of plans, policies and/or strategies

Issue 3: The adequacy of legislation and regulations affecting tourism

e. Is sustainable tourism development assisted or held back by regulations and how they are applied?
Adapted to: Plans, policies and/or strategies related to Sustainable Tourism implemented in Spain

1.3 Tourism governance and institutional setup

Issue 1: The effectiveness of a central leadership structure for tourism

a. Is there a dedicated tourism ministry, department or unit within government?
Adapted to: Competences of the Ministry of Tourism and the public agencies attached to it

Issue 2: The engagement of stakeholder interests in national tourism governance

c. Are NGOs, educational and other civil society bodies engaged in national tourism governance structures?
Adapted to: Civil society entities engaged and involved in the tourism policy agenda

Issue 3: The involvement of the private sector and use of public-private partnerships

c. How fully is the private sector engaged in tourism governance?
Adapted to: Companies and private sector associations engaged and involved in the policy agenda

Issue 4: The effectiveness of tourism governance at a local level

b. Is there effective coordination between national, regional and local tourism governance?
Adapted to: Competence in tourism of the local and regional communities

Table 6. Adaptation of pillar 2 from the original questionnaire

PILLAR 2 ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE, INVESTMENT AND COMPETITIVENESS

2.1 Measuring tourism and its contribution to the economy

Issue 1: The quality of data collection and analysis
a. Is there regular and comprehensive collection of data on visitor arrivals, profiles and activities?
Adapted to: Statistics of the national statistical institute and other official agencies

2.2 Trade, investment and the business environment

Issue 1: Recognition and treatment of tourism in trade and investment policies and commitments
b. Does the tourism policy take account of the trade and investment policies of the country?
Adapted to: Types of trade and investment commitments available in the tourism sector
Issue 2: Extent of tourism investment and conduciveness of the business environment
a. Have significant levels of investment in tourism-related infrastructure been occurring in recent years and from what sources?
Adapted to: Recent investments in large tourism infrastructure. Which, where and sources of investment

2.3 Brand, marketing, and product positioning

Issue 1: Clarity and focus of the brand and marketing plan
b. Is there a marketing plan which identifies target markets and provides a framework for promotion?
Adapted to: Tourism marketing plans. Analysis of the target audience in these plans
Issue 2: Quality and diversity of the product offer
a. How consistent is the quality of tourism products and services and is this improving?
Adapted to: Quality standards in tourism products and services

2.4 Resilience, security and risk management

Issue 1: Level of attention paid to risk and crisis management
a. Is risk minimisation and crisis management considered in tourism strategies and plans?
Adapted to: Tourism emergency management. What emergencies can occur in tourism and what protocols exist to solve them

Table 7. Adaptation of pillar 3 from the original questionnaire

PILLAR 3 EMPLOYMENT, DECENT WORK AND HUMAN CAPITAL

3.1 Human Resources planning and working conditions

Issue 1: The existence and scope of a Human Resources policy, plans and actions, discussed and agreed with the private sector and other stakeholders
d. Are there trade unions or other workers' representatives active in the sector?
Adapted to: Role of trade unions and other workers' unions in the Spanish tourism sector
Issue 2: Ensuring that workers' rights and conditions for decent work are met
a. Is the tourism sector respecting workers' rights and meeting the conditions of decent work?
Adapted to: Quality of employment in the tourism sector

3.2 Skills assessment and the provision of training

Issue 1: The level of understanding of skills gaps and training needs
a. Has an assessment of skills gaps and training needs been carried out, covering the existing industry and future development
Adapted to: Profile of the tourism sector professionals most in demand today
Issue 2: The availability of sufficient training and capacity building programmes, standards and institutions
f. Is there a system of skills standards and qualifications relevant to the needs of the tourism sector?
Adapted to: Description of the different professionals in the tourism sector
Issue 3: The level of engagement of the private sector in supporting training and capacity building
b. Does the private sector make sufficient provision for training and career development for their staff and the local community?
Adapted to: Influence of the private sector on training and employment of local communities

Table 8: Adaptation of pillar 4 from the original questionnaire

PILLAR 4 POVERTY REDUCTION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION
4.1 An integrated approach to poverty reduction through tourism
Issue 1: Level of commitment to pro-poor tourism a. Is tourism included in National Strategy Papers or in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) as a vehicle for poverty reduction? Adapted to: Potential of tourism in poverty reduction **Issue 2: Adopting a strategic approach to poverty reduction through tourism at national and destination level** d. Have any particular destinations established pro-poor tourism strategies and/or initiatives? Adapted to: Identification of destinations with solidarity tourism proposals and/or poverty reduction initiatives
4.2 Strengthening pro-poor tourism initiatives
Issue 1: Increasing income to poor communities from tourism businesses and trading b. How strong are the links between the tourism and agriculture (including fisheries) sector? Adapted to: Influence of the tourism sector in the rest of the productive sectors **Issue 2: Securing wider community benefits from tourism** c. Does the planning of new tourism infrastructure take account of impact on poor communities? Adapted to: Impact of building new tourism infrastructure on the local community
4.3 The inclusion of disadvantaged groups in the tourism sector
Issue 1: Effort to identify and address negative social impacts c. How well integrate are women in the tourism sector and have steps been taken to improve their position and opportunities for them? Adapted to: Role of women in the tourism sector
4.4 The prevention of negative social impacts
Issue 1: Effort to identify and address negative social impacts f. Is there evidence of a rise in crime and other social problems, including sexual exploitation, from tourism and is action being taken? Adapted to: Negative impacts and social problems resulting from tourism

Table 9: Adaptation of pillar 5 from the original questionnaire

PILLAR 5 SUSTAINABILITY OF THE NATURAL AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

5.1 Relating tourism to natural and cultural heritage

Issue 1: Effective policies and actions to conserve and promote natural heritage
e. Is tourism included in specific policies and actions to plan and protect the coastal zone?
Adapted to: Coastal zone conservation policies and action plans
Issue 2: Effective policies and actions to safeguard and promote cultural heritage
e. Is there a well-established tourism product/offer related to cultural heritage in the country?
Adapted to: Destinations and own resources of Cultural Tourism

5.2 Focussing on climate change

Issue 1: Sufficient attention to climate change in the tourism sector
d. Are policies and actions in place to mitigate climate change in the sector?
Adapted to: Tourism sector policies and action plans to mitigate climate change

5.3 Enhancing sustainability of tourism development and operations

Issue 1: The extent to which tourism development respects sustainability
e. Are economic instruments used to influence the sustainability of tourism developments?
Adapted to: Support and incentives at national and regional level to promote sustainable tourism
Issue 2: The extent to which tourism operations meet sustainability standards
e. Are certification schemes being used to identify businesses complying with sustainability standards?
Adapted to: Tourism certifications related to sustainability, quality and/or the environment

5.4 Measuring and monitoring tourism impacts

Issue 1: The extent of objective monitoring of environmental conditions and tourism impacts
e. Are sufficient resources available for the development and use of indicators and monitoring
Adapted to: Indicators and tools for measuring sustainability in tourism

Understanding the Blurry Picture of Tourism Expenditure in a Cruise Destination (Geirangerfjord – Norway)

Else Ragni Yttredal[1] and Nathalie Homlong[2,3,4]

ABSTRACT

Tourism expenditure in destinations is an important element of tourism research and has been the subject of numerous studies. This paper seeks to understand the complex pattern of expenditure within a distinctly defined geographical area, namely the destination Geirangerfjord in Western Norway. This is done by using a new approach where total expenditure is divided into three different measures of expenditure, which are then used to compare spending patterns of three important visitor groups in the destination - cruise visitors, individual visitors on land and land visitors staying overnight. By investigating socioeconomic, travel related, destination related and psychological explanatory variables, drivers of expenditure for each of the three groups are compared. The study reveals that different groups visiting Geirangerfjord diverge both with respect to spending patterns, as well as factors explaining these patterns. Based on the findings and previous literature in the field, the article proposes a new integrated “opportunity framework” in which to understand spending in a destination.

Keywords: Tourist expenditure, cruise destination, cruise, destination

INTRODUCTION

Before the start of the COVID-19 crisis, cruise tourism experienced sustained growth rates over several years, even in the years following the Great Recession. In the decade from

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2009 to 2019, the number of cruise tourists worldwide almost doubled, from 17.8 to 30 million (Centre for the Promotion of Imports from developing countries, 2021). However, the popularity of this segment of tourism was countered by criticism of its effects, with contrasting arguments dominating the public debate. Several studies have shown that negative externalities affecting the local population and the natural environment can be attributed to cruise tourism (Sanz-Blas et al., 2019; Yttredal and Homlong, 2020). At the same time, this form of tourism can also be linked to positive effects, mainly by generating income, which in turn helps sustaining or creating employment in ports-of-call. The income can be produced directly by the cruise operators, passengers and crew, or indirectly by purchases of direct suppliers (Brida and Zapata, 2010). When it comes to these positive economic effects, the magnitude of the contribution of cruise tourists to total tourism expenditure is often unclear. Knowledge about tourist expenditure and their explanations at cruise destinations is crucial, as this insight enables diverse actors in tourism to develop destination strategies accordingly (Lin et al., 2015). The information proves useful both for tourist enterprises, destination marketing organizations, and local governments.

Uncertainty and public debate about the role of cruise tourism can also be found in one of the top cruise destinations in Norway, in Geirangerfjord. Over many years stakeholders in Geirangerfjord have been discussing which types of businesses benefit from cruise tourism, and whether these benefits weigh up for negative impacts on the destination. Focusing on the case of Geirangerfjord, the purpose of this paper is to understand expenditure in the destination by comparing expenditure by three diverse but important visitor groups, namely cruise visitors, day visitors on land, and visitors on land staying overnight. We analyze the three groups with regard to three questions:

- Comparing the three groups, what is the total expenditure of each group?
- How does spending on different categories differ in these three groups?
- Which drivers influence expenditure of the three groups respectively?

Most of the literature on expenditure has its focus on determinants of spending in a tourist destination either by tourists in general (See for instance Wang and Davidson, 2010; Mayer and Vogt, 2016), or by one group – e.g. cruise tourists – specifically (Mudarra-Fernández et al., 2019). More in-depth analyses of spending in a destination are rare. Furthermore, the current literature on expenditure does not present a coherent picture of expenditure or its potential explanations. Hence, this study contributes to the literature on expenditure in tourist destinations in three important ways. Firstly, the current study analyzes differences of spending patterns between tourist groups in the same destination. Secondly, this research also compares explanatory variables relevant to explaining the spending patterns in the three abovementioned visitor groups (cruise visitors, day visitors on land, and visitors on land staying overnight). Finally, we propose what we call an “opportunity framework” as a new way to understand expenditure in a cruise destination. In this way, the paper provides crucial insight for local tourism planning in the Geirangerfjord area, but also potentially for tourist destinations worldwide.

In the following, the literature on explanatory variables for expenditure in tourist destinations is presented. Thereafter, the methods used for data collection and analysis are introduced, followed by results, discussion and a conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A whole range of variables affecting expenditure by tourists has been investigated in various studies. These include on the one hand sociodemographic background factors related to the visitors, like place of origin or residence, gender, occupation, income, as well as cultural, social, psychological and economic factors. On the other hand, travel- and destination related variables and their impact on tourist expenditure have been analyzed (Mudarra-Fernández et al., 2019; Wang and Davidson, 2010; Mayer and Vogt, 2016). In the following, we shed light on the discourse on tourism expenditure by presenting examples of studies of expenditure in destinations, followed by studies related to cruise tourism. Both sections illustrate the diversity of research interests and contexts. Finally, the expenditure discourse is summed up and research gaps are identified.

There is a strand of literature on tourism expenditure from a micro perspective, focusing on specific destinations. Aguiló et al. (2017) for instance carried out a decomposition analysis between personal daily expenditure and duration of stay on the Spanish island of Mallorca. The authors distinguished between expenditure in and outside accommodations, and expenditure types included restaurants, food and drink from supermarkets, entertainment, transport, excursions and souvenirs. As a result, the authors identified tourist segments with different expenditure and length of stay. Among variables affecting daily spending and duration of stay in the destination were household income, country of origin, and motivation for the choice of tourist destination. Furthermore, the study points to a number of inconclusive and contradicting results in the literature pertaining to the effect of both socioeconomic background factors and travel related factors explaining tourism expenditure. Also analyzing duration of stay and daily expenditure, Gomez-Deniz and Perez-Rodriguez (2020) made a study based on a tourist expenditure survey on the Canary Islands. Among other findings, the authors discovered a negative correlation between the number of days tourists spent at the destination and daily expenditure.

Vetitnev (2015), on the other hand, investigated the connection between trip-related variables and visitor characteristics related to tourist spending. The study was carried out at three Russian resort destinations. While several factors were found to influence total expenditure using bivariate analysis, only five underlying factors proved to affect total tourist expenditure when applying structural equation modelling: length of stay, resort, distance travelled to destination, party size and holiday organization mode. Furthermore, Vetitnev found that tourists' spending patterns were different in the various resort destinations studied.

In their study carried out at the Mediterranean coast of Spain, Garcia-Sanchez et al. (2013) investigated trip characteristics, tourist characteristics and tourist activities and their impact on tourist expenditure. Among the results was that alternative activities like sports and gastronomic events, which were offered in addition to the tourism product centered around sun and sand, significantly contributed to additional spending. Increasing numbers of days spent in the area were found to be associated with decreased daily spending. Another study that looked into the relation between tourist experiences and tourism spending was conducted by Disegna and Osti (2016) in the Dolomites in Northern Italy. The authors distinguished between different aspects of satisfaction and their impact on total expenditure, as well as diverse categories of expenditure. The study revealed quite diverse effects of satisfaction, depending on expenditure category, but concluded that expenditure at the destination was closely linked to the standard of the service offered. Having a similar group focus, Fredman (2008) analyzed determinants of expenditure by different tourist groups visiting a Swedish mountain region - general visitors, skiers, snowmobilers and backpackers. The study found that while household income, choice of activity, occupation, duration of stay, choice of accommodation and participation in an organized trip influenced spending at the destination, factors like travel mode, gender, distance and the attitude towards activities were determinants of expenditure outside the tourist destination. Furthermore, downhill skiers were identified as big spenders, consuming on average three times more than backpackers and 50% more than snowmobilers.

In a case study about North York Moors National Park in the UK, Downward and Lumsdon (2004) distinguished between public transport and car-based transportation as travel modes. Also, other trip-related factors as well as sociodemographic factors were taken into account. The authors found that expenditure of visitors travelling by car was higher, but also duration of stay for day visitors and group size affected spending. Some more uncommon variables and interactions were investigated as well. Wilkins et al. (2018) analyzed what effect a change of weather conditions related to climate change had on tourist spending. Comparing three tourist destinations in Maine, USA, the study found that while warmer temperatures had a positive effect on expenditure in summer and fall, the effect was more varying in winter. Precipitation, snow depth and stormy weather did not influence expenditure. In this context, it is also worth noting that the study found that influential factors and their effects on expenditure varied across destinations and time of the year.

Gomez-Deniz and Perez-Rodriguez (2020) created a tourism expenditure model, in which they included both tourist expenditure made at the country of origin, such as reservations for transportation and accommodation, and expenditure at the tourist destination. They based their analysis on a tourist expenditure survey in the Canary Islands, with special focus on German and British tourists. They calculated the tourist budget share, putting tourist spending at the destination into relation with the total trip expenditure and found that the determinants of the tourist budget share spent at the destination were in line with earlier findings about causality of aggregate or daily tourist expenditure. While they are less common, some studies look at expenditure categories and their potential determinants. Van Loon and Rouwendal (2017) analyzed spending patterns of urban tourists in Amsterdam. Their study showed that trip purposes influenced total daily expenditure as well as budget shares.

In their study carried out in the Midwest of the USA, Wang et al. (2006) studied the effects of socioeconomic, psychographic and travel-related variables on travel expenditures. Spending categories included accommodation, meals, transportation, shopping, entertainment and attractions, as well as total spending. Income, number of adults in the travel party and length of stay were found to have the strongest effects on expenditure across expenditure categories. There is also a strand of literature on tourism expenditure with cruise tourists at their center of attention. Brida et al. (2012) for instance focused on cruise passengers' spending in the Carribbean port of Call Cartagena de Indias. They identified that heavy spenders were distinguishable from other segments based on income levels, age, duration of stay on land, expenditure patterns and nationality. Based on the survey, the authors also developed profiles of typical cruise tourists with high spending in different expenditure categories, such as tours, souvenirs, food and beverage and jewelry. For instance, the tourist most likely to spend on jewelry has a high income and travels in a group and for the first time on a cruise, while the visitor most likely to spend on food and beverages is a young man without a high income who has previously taken other cruises. Using a different approach, some of the same researchers (Brida et al., 2014) later studied factors that may determine spending by cruise passengers in two ports of call in Uruguay. Several factors were not found to be determinants of spending, among these were gender and age. On the other hand, satisfaction with food and drink, as well as tranquility of the destination had a positive effect on spending. Of special interest in the study is the difference of spending between the destinations explained by differences in infrastructure solutions.

Marksel et al. (2017) analyzed characteristics of cruise tourists and their experiences during their visit at the Port of Koper in Slovenia. While age, frequency of cruise travel and time spent at the hinterland of the port did not turn out as significant factors influencing expenditure, gender showed a statistically significant connection. The majority of both men and women reported spending of below EUR 50 while onshore, however, all the high spenders, with over EUR 250, were male. Furthermore, nationality was a significant factor. Of the 17 nationalities in the sample, cruise tourists from Finland were the group that was exclusively represented in the highest spending group. Experiences with transport services like taxis, busses and trains were another factor that affected spending for those visitors who visited the hinterland. Casado-Díaz et al. (2021) investigated several trip characteristics to analyze expenditure of cruise passengers. On the one hand, they focused on the spatial behavior of tourists in the destination, distinguishing between cruise passengers who visit only a single node, those visiting multiple nodes, and a third group that visits the hinterland of the port city. Another angle addressed the nature of shore excursions – individual versus guided. Finally, the connection between cruise price segments – from standard to luxury – and expenditure was analyzed. The model developed by the authors was tested in the Spanish city of Valencia. The authors found that expenditure was highest among cruise passengers who visited single nodes, and those with individual shore excursions. Among the price segments, only the highest category had a positive effect on spending.

In one of the few studies focusing primarily on destination specific factors, Parola et al.

(2014) carried out a study of a 10-day cruise to six destinations in the Mediterranean to investigate the impact of tourists' destination satisfaction on spending. The authors also included the moderating effect of organized tours in their study, by testing the hypothesis that the purchase of excursion packages enhances the impact of destination satisfaction on cruise tourists' expenditure. The study confirmed the positive connection between destination satisfaction and expenditure, as well as finding that excursion packages acted as positive moderators of destination experiences, both by enhancing experiences in the destination, and by providing tourists with additional shopping opportunities. Pino and Tovar (2019) collected information on tourist expenditure of cruise tourists to the Canary Islands over six cruise seasons. Using a latent class model, they identified three distinct tourist groups depending on their level of spending, ranging from low over medium to high. They showed that explanatory factors influenced expenditure differently in each group. Furthermore, they observed that cruisers' expenditure was higher in the ports of Tenerife and Gran Canaria than in the other ports on the Canary Islands. The authors argued that the class model allows for a better basis of addressing target groups. Similar findings pertaining to differences in spending between destinations are found in Brida et al. (2020). Using a multivariate prediction Copula model, they categorized spending by cruise tourists in Uruguay into food, shopping, transportation, and tour expenses. Residence of the tourists and port-of-call were key variables determining spending, but explanatory variables varied according to group and season of the year. Similar results were found in Brida et al. (2018) using different a methodology.

Moving to the Norwegian context, Larsen et al. (2013) compared spending by cruise tourists and other types of tourists in Bergen, Norway from 2010 to 2012. The two main findings were on the one hand that expenditure by cruise tourists was clearly below average compared to other types of tourists. On the other hand, the study found that cruise tourists had a higher tendency to overestimate their spending. Also, the duration of stay of cruise tourists was significantly lower. Interestingly, the authors found that per hour spending was similar comparing cruise and other tourists, indicating that the duration of stay is an important factor for lower spending by cruise tourists. There are also several studies published as reports measuring total tourism expenditure in Norwegian tourist destinations. The studies vary both pertaining to geographical unit (national, regional, or local studies) and results (Dybedal, 2019; Yttredal and Homlong, 2019). The reason is for a large part that the studies are based on rather different assumptions, methodologies, and definitions, and are thus difficult to compare.

The studies presented above vary both with respect to research aims, choices of dependent variables and explanatory variables. Hence, there are differing and contradicting results in the literature explaining expenditure in destinations pertaining to the effects of socioeconomic background factors, travel related factors, destination related factors and psychologically oriented factors – a fact also pointed out for instance by Aguilo et al. (2017), Gomez Deniz and Perez-Rodriguez (2020) and Wang and Davidson (2010).

There have been attempts to sort out this blurry picture in several reviews over the last 15 years (See for instance the reviews by Wang and Davidson, 2010; Mayer and Vogt, 2016; Mudarra-Fernández et al., 2019). While differing in scope and focal points, there are some common denominators across the reviews and the studies referred to above. Firstly, in the literature there has been a certain consensus on the grouping of explanatory variables into socioeconomic, travel- and destination related variables. A class of more psychologically-oriented background variables like seeking stability or excitement (Wang et al., 2006), but also more trip-related psychological determinants like motivation for choosing the destination (Aguiló et al., 2017; Marksel et al., 2017) and trip purpose (García-Sánchez et al., 2013; Gómez-Déniz and Pérez-Rodriguez, 2020; van Loon and Rouwendal, 2017) have been included in a few studies. For an overview of the explanatory variables in the mentioned studies, see Table 7 in Appendix 1.

Secondly, there are some variables that seem to influence expenditure across diverse settings and methodologies. Of socioeconomic background factors, the most prominent are income and nationality, the latter is especially prevalent in cruise studies (Brida et al., 2014; Marksel et al., 2017; Pino and Tovar, 2019; Brida et al., 2020). In addition, age seems to influence expenditure in a curvilinear way, the middle-aged appear to spend more than the young or old visitors (García-Sánchez et al., 2013; van Loon and Rouwendal, 2017). Among the more resilient travel related factors explaining expenditure are length of stay (number of days) and accommodation type (See for instance Vetitnev, 2015; Fredman, 2008; Aguiló et al., 2017). Especially in the cruise studies, length of stay in the course of a day is also an issue (Brida et al., 2012; Casado-Díaz et al., 2021) .

Thirdly, destination-specific variables are few and understudied, often related to satisfaction with the destination (Disegna and Osti, 2016 made a thorough study in this respect), rather than actual destination specific variables. This, despite the fact that several studies show that spending differs between tourism destinations in general (Mayer and Vogt, 2016; Mudarra-Fernández et al., 2019; Wang and Davidson, 2010), and more specifically resorts (Vetitnev, 2015), islands visited (Pino and Tovar, 2019) and ports-of-call (Brida et al., 2014; Brida et al., 2020). In a similar vein, more psychologically oriented variables appear in few studies, and only variables like motivation for choice of destination and reason for the trip seem to be relevant background factors across studies. Also, there appears to be no consensus on which factors belong to the categories “destination-based variables” or “psychographic” variables (Wang et al., 2006; Wang and Davidson, 2010; Mudarra-Fernández et al., 2019).

Finally, the totality of the literature also draws a picture of a complex interaction between various antecedents of tourism spending, depending on contextual factors within or outside the tourist destination. Still, there are no studies, as far as we know, trying to map and understand the totality of visitor expenditure in a single destination.

This study therefore addresses research gaps by seeking to understand the totality of expenditure within a distinctly defined geographical area, the destination Geirangerfjord. This is done by firstly comparing spending patterns of three important visitor groups in a destination. Secondly, by including a battery of destination specific variables in the study as well as (a smaller number of) psychological background variables in addition to socioeconomic and travel related variables. Thirdly, by comparing expenditure patterns within the destination as well as variables explaining these patterns.

METHODS

The overall aim of the study is to better understand the expenditure patterns in a cruise destination, using the cruise destination Geirangerfjord as a case. Special emphasis is placed on similarities and differences between cruise visitors and individually travelling visitors on land. The survey design is therefore rigged towards this purpose.

Geirangerfjord is one of Norway's most visited destinations, especially within the segment of nature-based tourism. Only 232 people live year-round in the village of Geiranger (Statistics Norway SSB, 2021) , while the number of visitors to the area was estimated at just below 1 million in 2018 (Yttredal et al., 2019).

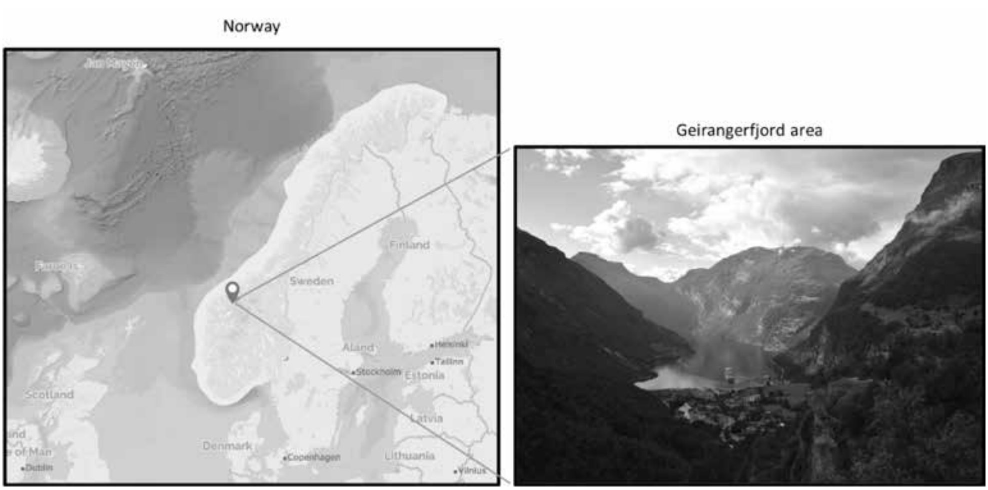

Figure 1: Geirangerfjord area on the West Coast of Norway. (Map source: WMS © Kartverket. Photo: Nathalie Homlong)

Prior to Covid-19, the annual number of cruise passengers was stable at around 350,000 (Yttredal et al., 2019). Cruise tourists thus contributed to roughly one third of the visitors to the area. There is an ongoing debate between stakeholders about whether tourists on land or cruise tourists contribute most to the local economy, and about which tourists contribute most to negative aspects of tourism, such as crowding, congestion and pollution (Larsen and Wolff, 2016; Larsen et al., 2013; Löffler, 2019).

Data was collected using a digital survey in the Geirangerfjord area Mondays through Fridays between July 9th and August 3rd, 2018. The period covered the peak leisure travel season. Daily data were collected from approximately 9 AM to 5 PM, the peak visitation time. A tablet with the questionnaire or a link to the online questionnaire were handed out exclusively to visitors on their way out of the area. This was primarily to make sure that they had completed their expenditures in the Geiranger area when filling out the form to prevent recall errors (Stynes and White, 2006). To make clear which area was the subject of inquiry, a map was included in the questionnaire. The participants in the survey could choose between six languages. The questionnaire included questions about the tourist experience and spending. 304 completed questionnaires were included in this study. Categories of expenditure in the questionnaire were: overnight stay, food and beverages at bars and restaurants, shopping including groceries and gifts, activities (sports, museums, tours, etc.), and other things (for instance fuel, travel, etc.). In addition, pre-paid purchases from cruise boats or cruise operators were defined as a separate category, but could include both activities, transportation and food. The total sum of spending was then calculated based on spending categories. Following Wang and Davidson (2010), Mayer and Vogt (2016) and Mudarra-Fernández et al. (2019), tourist-, travel- and destination-based variables and also some more psychologically oriented variables were included in the questionnaire. The ones most relevant for the following presentation and analysis are listed in table 1.

Table 1: List of Variables Included in the Analysis.

Travel related variables	**Psychologically oriented factors**
Transport mode	Environmental consciousness
Time in Geiranger area (ashore)	Importance of learning about local community
Type of accommodation	Importance of being physically active in nature
Destination related variables	**Socioeconomic background factors**
Recommend the area in the future	Country of residence
Perception of…	Region of residence (within Norway)
nature experience	Age
weather	Size of home town/village
cleanliness	Level of education
access to transport services	Household income
congestion	Gender
access to parking	Marital status
crowding	Main status of employment
noise	
exhaust from cars and buses	
visible smoke from cruise ships	

In our questionnaire, informants' perceptions of diverse variables like air pollution, crowding and congestion were included. All perception questions were formed as assertions using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "completely disagree" to 5 "completely agree." For comparative analysis, the sample was divided into three groups: day visitors on land travelling individually (day visitors, N=82), individual visitors staying overnight on land (overnight visitors, N=120), and cruise visitors (N=102). The groups "day visitors" and "overnight visitors" include visitors arriving to the area by road or car ferry mainly using cars or mobile homes, but also motorbikes, public bus transportation or travelling on foot or by bicycle. The group "cruise visitors" consists of visitors arriving in the Geirangerfjord area by cruise ship or by bus as part of a trip with a cruise ship. Crew from cruise ships were excluded from the analysis, as were group visitors on land travelling for instance by bus. Expenditure patterns in the destination Geiranger have at least three components. Firstly, for all groups it is possible to buy tours, overnight stays and activities in advance through online booking or other advance booking options. Secondly, there are plenty of opportunities to buy food or activities or to shop when in Geiranger. Thirdly, cruise passengers also have the opportunity to buy prepaid tours through the cruise operator. Total expenditure for the first two categories will mainly benefit the local business community, while the expenditure on the latter will be divided between the cruise operators and local providers. Our undertaking is to understand expenditure patterns in the local destination. It is therefore important to distinguish between what benefits the local businesses and what benefits other actors in the value chain. Previous studies have used a 50/50 split of expenditure between local and cruise operators for prepaid tours from cruise operators (See for instance Dybedal, 2019). The same proportion is used in this study to calculate local expenditure. The proportion will, however, differ between cruise operators, ships and tours.

To understand the dynamic between the three groups, our analysis thus differentiates between three estimates of expenditure all pertaining to the last 24 hours:

1. **Spontaneous spending:** Local consumption, paid beforehand or on the spot. Accommodation and advance purchase from cruise ship or cruise operator are not included.
2. **Day spending.** Spontaneous spending plus 50% of advance purchase from cruise boat or cruise operator. Accommodation is not included.
3. **Total spending:** Local consumption including both advance purchase from cruise boat or cruise operator and accommodation.

For day visitors, the three estimates will overlap. For cruise visitors, day spending will overlap with total spending. For visitors staying overnight spontaneous and day spending will overlap. All types apply to expenditure related to products or services per person bought for the last 24 hours in the Geiranger area (as indicated in in Figure 2).

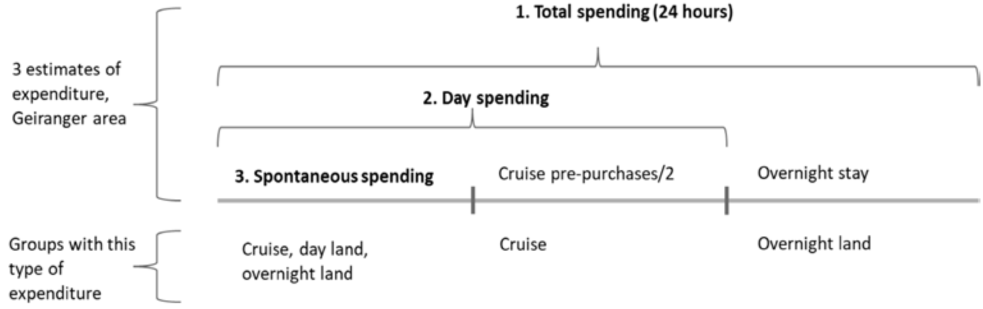

Figure 2: The study uses three different estimates of expenditure last 24 hours in the Geiranger area as dependent variables.

Table 2 sums up some socioeconomic background factors for the group of respondents in the sample. We see that most of the respondents (80%, 70%, and 81% respectively) are between 25 and 64 years of age. Furthermore, they are quite well educated, around 70% in all groups have a bachelor degree or higher, and different household income groups are represented. Slightly more males than females have answered the questionnaire and just below 30% are single in all groups. Not all respondents answered all the questions on background information, therefore N differs between variables.

Our interpretation is that there are no conspicuous differences between the groups with regard to the variables, except for the background factor of nationality. As can be seen in Table 2, the proportion of visitors from different regions of the world differs between the three groups. The difference should not be a problem for a comparative analysis of expenditure patterns between land and cruise, as we interpret the differences to be characteristics of the groups, rather than a bias in the sample.

Table 2: Profiles of Socioeconomic Background Factors for Day Visitors Land, Cruise Visitors and Overnight Land Compared.

Variable		Day visitor land	Cruise visitor	Overnight land
Age	0-24	13 %	20 %	16 %
	25-44	44 %	29 %	43 %
	45-64	36 %	41 %	38 %
	65+	8 %	9 %	3 %
	Number (N)	80	99	119
Level of education	Up to bachelor	28 %	28 %	31 %
	Bachelor degree	40 %	27 %	29 %
	Higher than bachelor	32 %	45 %	40 %
	Number (N)	78	96	117
Household income	0-39,999 EUR	17 %	22 %	21 %
	40,000 - 59,999	21 %	16 %	21 %
	60,000 - 79,999	6 %	8 %	19 %
	800,000 – 99,999	21 %	8 %	14 %
	100,000-119,999	10 %	14 %	14 %
	120,000 +	25 %	31 %	13 %
	Number (N)	63	83	102
Gender	Male	51 %	54 %	56 %
	Female	49 %	46 %	44 %
	Number (N)	79	98	116
Marital status	Single	27 %	28 %	26 %
	Cohabiting partner	22 %	12 %	30 %
	Married	51 %	60 %	44 %
	Number (N)	78	98	116
Nationality	Nordic	57 %	5 %	40 %
	Other Western Europe	32 %	65 %	45 %
	North America	1 %	24 %	3 %
	Other	10 %	6 %	11 %
	Number (N)	81	100	119

RESULTS

The results are presented in three sections, each addressing the research questions presented in the introduction. In due course, estimates of expenditure made in the last 24 hours in the area, expenditure categories and explanatory variables for the three groups in question, day visitors and overnight visitors land and cruise visitors are compared.

As presented in the methods section, three categories for local expenditure are used: spontaneous spending, day spending and total spending. A large proportion of visitors are low spenders, as these numbers show: 29% of day visitors on land, 16% of cruise tourists and 8% of visitors staying overnight do not spend any money in the Geirangerfjord area and 78% of day visitors land, 47% of cruise passengers and 36% of visitors staying overnight have a total consumption of EUR 50 or less during their stay.

Table 3: Different Estimates of Expenditure in EUR. All Expenditures Made in the Geiranger Area During the Previous 24 hours (or if shorter, for duration of stay)

		Spontaneous spending	Day spending (including cruise pre-purchases)	Total spending (Including cruise pre-purchases and accommodation)
Day visitor land	Mean	38	38	38
	Median	20	20	20
	Mode	0	0	0
	N	82	82	82
Cruise visitor	Mean	46	81	81
	Median	18	70	70
	Mode	0	0	0
	N	102	102	102
Overnight land	Mean	73	73	135
	Median	50	50	93
	Mode	0	0	0
	N	120	120	120

Table 3 shows both mean, median and mode for the different estimates of spending. Mode of total spending for all three groups is 0. Day visitors on land have a median total spending of EUR 20, cruise passengers of EUR 70 and visitors staying overnight EUR 93.

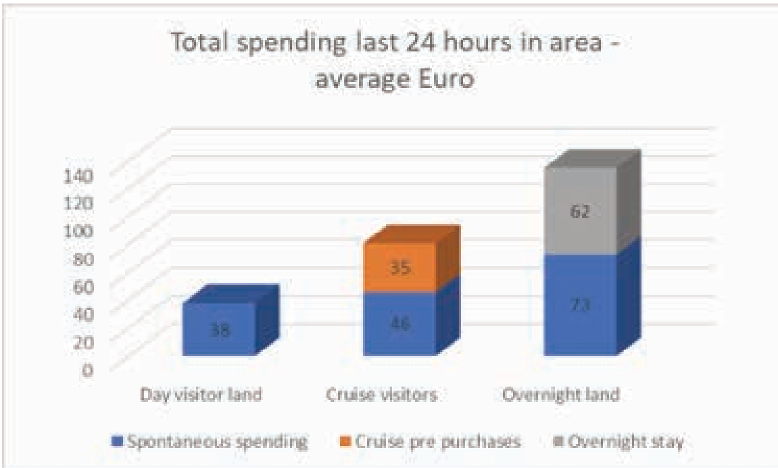

Figure 3: Average spontaneous spending (blue), day spending (blue + red color) and total spending (blue+red+grey color) for the three groups.

Figure 3 illustrates that mean spontaneous spending is quite similar for day visitors on land (EUR 38) and cruise visitors (EUR 46), while visitors staying overnight have a much higher level of spontaneous spending (EUR 73). Moving to day spending - spontaneous spending plus cruise pre-purchases - this picture changes. Cruise visitors display higher day spending (EUR 81) than visitors who stay overnight (EUR 73), while visitors staying overnight have the highest mean total spending of all groups (EUR 135). For spontaneous spending a one-way ANOVA, consecutive T-tests and consecutive Mann Whitney U-tests show that the differences in spontaneous spending between visitors staying overnight and the two other groups are significant. The same tests show that for day spending the differences between day visitors and the two other groups are significant and for total spending the differences between all three groups are significant.

The proportion of total spending on different categories for the three different groups are presented below.

Table 4: Proportion of total expenditure spent on different categories, day visitors land, cruise visitors and overnight visitors land compared.

	Overnight stay	Food and beverages	Shopping	Activities	Other	Prepaid cruise	Total group
Day visitors land		31 %	24 %	19 %	26 %		100 %
Cruise visitors		17 %	17 %	20 %	2 %	43 %	100 %
Overnight land	46 %	20 %	16 %	12 %	6 %		100 %

Expenditure is divided into five groups, namely food and beverages (in restaurants and bars), shopping (including groceries), activities, overnight stay, and other expenditures (including transport). A separate category for prepaid package tours bought from cruise operators is added (Table 4). Both transport, food and activities can be included in such packages, and only cruise passengers can buy them. Only overnight visitors on land can spend money on overnight stays.

There are striking differences between the groups related to the proportion of total spending for different categories. Day visitors on land are spending a somewhat similar proportion of their expenditure on all relevant categories. Cruise tourists on the other hand use a large proportion of their expenditure on prepaid activities (43%), and overnight visitors use 46% of their local expenditure on overnight stays.

Table 5: EUR spent on different categories; day visitors land, cruise visitors and overnight visitors land compared.

	Overnight stay	Food and beverages	Shopping	Activities	Other	Prepaid cruise	Total group
Day visitors land		12	9	7	10		38
Cruise visitors		14	14	16	2	35	81
Overnight land	62	27	21	16	8		135

Comparing absolute numbers (Table 5), both cruise tourists and visitors staying overnight spend more than day tourists on all categories except the category “other”. Visitors staying overnight spend the same or more than cruise visitors on all categories, except activities and of course prepaid tours from a cruise operator. A one-way ANOVA shows that the differences between the groups are only significant for spending on food (p=0.00) and for the catch-all category “other” (p=0.02). Spending on overnight stay and prepaid tours for cruise tourists apply to the respective groups only.

In initial bivariate correlation analyses, all the variables (as listed in table 1) were tested for explanatory power related to total spending. Few of the variables turned out to be significantly correlated with expenditure for any of the groups compared, but interesting differences between the three groups materialized. Firstly, for **day visitors on land** the strongest bivariate correlation was found between time spent in the area and total spending (r=0.40, p=0.00). We also find a significant moderately negative correlation between traffic in and out of the area (north of Geiranger center) and total spending (r=- 0.30, p=0,01), and a medium strong correlation between total expenditure and diverse perception variables related to congestion and crowding - for instance perception of traffic congestion (r=- 0.30, p=0.01), noise (r=-0.35, p=0.00) and parking (r=-0.26, p=0.00).

Table 6: Regression model. Total spending for day visitors on land. Predictors: 1: time spent in the area (2 hours intervals) 2. Traffic north of Geiranger center 3. Perception of noise. Note: All changes of F are also significant.

Model	Unstandardized beta Coefficient	R^2 model	F	t-value	p-value
(Constant)	189.962	0.35	12.5	2.2	
Time of stay (2 hours intervals)	27.961			4	0
Traffic North of Geiranger	0.096			2.7	0.01
Perception of noise	8.853			2.4	0.02

The variables with the strongest bivariate correlations to total spending for day tourists were then used in a regression model (table 6). The model shows that 35% ($r^2 = 0.35$) of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained by the factors "time of stay", "traffic north of Geiranger" and "perception of noise".

Since there are large proportions of 0 in the sample, the analysis was validated both by removing units without spending from the regression analysis, and by using binary regression models with spenders/non-spenders as dependent variables. All analyses show significant correlations between these variables, with some varying strength.

For **cruise tourists** the pattern is somewhat different. Bivariate correlations show that household income, as the only variable, is significantly (but weakly) correlated with total spending (r=0.27, p=0.01). Regression analyses pertaining to cruise tourists show that only household income has independent explanatory power related to total expenditure for this group.

For **visitors staying overnight**, bivariate analyses show that whether the visitor stays in a hotel or not is the most important explanatory variable for total spending (r= 0.49, p=0.00). Furthermore, household income is moderately correlated with total spending (r=0.35, p=0.00). Regression analyses confirm that only staying at a hotel or not has independent explanatory power for total expenditure for visitors staying overnight (r^2=0.24, p=0.00). The variable household income loses explanatory power when accommodation is included in the equation.

DISCUSSION

The goal of this study is to increase understanding of the complex pattern of expenditure within tourist destinations. For this purpose, a comparison of total expenditure and expenditure patterns between cruise visitors, day visitors and overnight visitors on land is conducted in the destination Geirangerfjord. Furthermore, by investigating socioeconomic, travel related, destination related and psychological explanatory variables, the drivers of expenditure for each of the three groups are compared. The study reveals that different groups visiting Geirangerfjord diverge both with respect to spending patterns, and factors explaining these patterns. **Day visitors on land** display relatively low average spontaneous (and total) spending in Geiranger, with 29% of this visitor group not spending any money at all. Their expenditure is quite equally divided between the four expenditure categories "food and beverages", "shopping", "activities" and "other". Day visitors' expenditure is to a large part explained by a combination of duration of stay, the number of visitors in the area, as well as factors connected to crowding, noise and congestion. **Cruise visitors** have almost equal spontaneous spending as day visitors on land. The difference in total expenditure between the two groups lies in the amount spent on pre-paid tours purchased from cruise operators. These account for 43% of the expenditure in the sample of cruise tourists. For total expenditure of this group, household income is a weak but still the most important explanatory variable. Intuitively enough, **overnight visitors** on land are the biggest spenders per 24 hours in the area, due to the cost of accommodation, which accounts for an average of 46% of their total expenditure. However, in contrast to other studies (Larsen et al., 2013) we find that day spending (overnight stay included, while prepaid tours are included for cruise tourists) is about the same for overnight visitors on land and cruise visitors.

At first glance the findings seem to add to the blurry picture of expenditure in tourism destinations pointed out in several studies (Aguiló et al., 2017; Gómez-Déniz et al., 2020; Wang and Davidson, 2010). However, interpreted against the backdrop of previous literature, they contribute to more in-depth knowledge about expenditure in the Geirangerfjord area and potentially also elsewhere. This is based on the fact that the diverse patterns of expenditure in different groups within a single destination indicate that expenditure is guided more by situation specific opportunities than other factors. In this way, the discoveries lead to a path of a more nuanced understanding of expenditure in tourist destinations.

As mentioned earlier, previous literature has grouped explanatory variables into socioeconomic background factors, travel- and destination related variables and (some) psychological variables, but the studies have diverse and contradictory findings (See for instance the reviews by Wang and Davidson, 2010; Mayer and Vogt, 2016; Mudarra-Fernández et al., 2019). The Geirangerfjord case suggests that this categorization fails to grasp the destination specific dynamics of visitor spending. Spending in a destination (and elsewhere) is made up of choices, preferences and needs over time. Combining the findings of the Geiranger study with findings from earlier literature (see Appendix 1 and the section "Summing up and research gaps to be filled"), we suggest to interpret spending in Geirangerfjord and possibly also other destinations, as a kind of opportunity framework (Figure 4), with four categories of suggested explanatory factors: 1. Travel related factors determined prior to travel (pre-destination), 2. Destination specific factors, 3. Tourist undertakings in the destination and 4. Socioeconomic factors. All-together, and in an interplay, they create a structure of opportunities for spending.

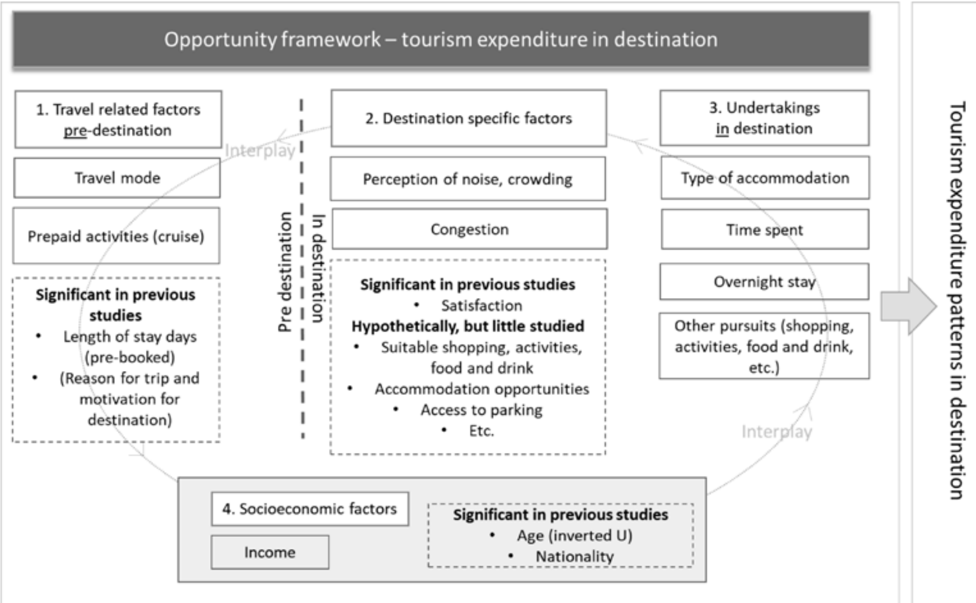

Figure 4: A framework to understand opportunities for individual expenditure in a destination.

In Figure 4 findings from this study are included in boxes with unbroken lines and findings from previous studies are included in boxes with dotted lines. **Pre-destination travel related variables (1)** are manifested in our study by travel mode and prepaid activities for cruise tourists. Both influence visitors' spending opportunities throughout the duration of stay, the decision of whether or not to eat, drink or sleep in the area, et cetera. The point is illustrated for instance by the fact that prepaid tours constitute 43% of spending in the area by cruise visitors. Individual travelers, on the other hand, are free to choose the duration of their stay at the destination, and spending is more influenced by how long they are staying, local traffic conditions, parking opportunities and crowding, among others. Moreover, when tourists on land stay overnight, their expenditures are higher. In previous studies length of stay in days is also found to influence expenditure (Vetitnev, 2015; Fredman, 2008; Aguiló et al., 2017) . The same applies to psychologically oriented variables strongly related to the destination and activities within it, like motivation to visit the destination (See for instance Aguiló et al., 2017) and reason for the trip (García-Sánchez et al., 2013; Gómez-Déniz and Pérez-Rodriguez, 2020). These factors are thus included in the framework.

Destination specific factors (2) are understudied in previous studies (Disegna and Osti, 2016). In this study we find that the number of people and perception of noise and crowding seem to influence expenditure for individual travelers on land. This reflects the destination specific situation in Geirangerfjord and suggests that there is an interplay of destination-and travel related factors pre-destination, like choice of transport. Furthermore, the relatively high expenditure of cruise tourists in our sample compared to other Norwegian studies (Larsen and Wolff, 2016; Larsen et al., 2013; Dybedal, 2019) may be explained partially by the infrastructure in the destination. The shops, or rather the spending opportunities, are predominantly, but not exclusively streamlined for this market. This is a pattern that has developed over a more than 100-year-long cruise tradition in this destination. In addition, travel by cruise sets the framework of spending by limiting the duration of stay, and partly following from this, also the range of possible activities that tourists can participate in at the destination. In this way, an interplay between travel related factors pre-destination, destination related factors and **actual tourist undertakings (3)** in the destination can explain differences between the groups with regard to expenditure on different categories. For instance, spending on accommodation, fuel and transport would be necessary items only for visitors travelling by car, as opposed to cruise tourists. Prepaid activities from the cruise liners are, on the other hand, an exclusive spending opportunity for cruise visitors.

Of **socioeconomic (4)** factors, income is the only significant explanatory variable in our study, and it is significant for total expenditure for cruise tourists and visitors on land staying overnight only, and just barely. In our interpretation, income provides an opportunity for spending, as a certain disposable income is necessary to be able to spend money, but it is not a sufficient factor. Opportunities for spending are formed in an interplay between travel related factors pre-destination, undertakings in the destination and destination specific factors, when income is to transform into expenditure. Income is also a significant explanatory variable in many other studies (See for instance Aguiló et al., 2017; García-Sánchez et al., 2013; Brida et al., 2012; Wang and Davidson, 2010; Mayer and Vogt, 2016; Mudarra-Fernández et al., 2019). It is therefore included in the framework, as well as the age of visitors (García-Sánchez et al., 2013; van Loon and Rouwendal, 2017) and nationality (Brida et al., 2014; Marksel et al., 2017; Pino and Tovar, 2019; Brida et al., 2020), which are also found to be significant by earlier studies.

For the destination Geirangerfjord these findings suggest that strategies to increase visitor spending should **firstly** be different for different visitor groups. To increase expenditure **by individual travelers on land**, measures which increase time spent in the area seem crucial. These could be special attractions and activities. In addition, data also suggest that perceptions of crowding influence spending. Therefore measures that address crowding, like a limit on the number of people in the area, improvement of parking facilities, or other measures to alleviate discomfort for individual day visitors may increase spending for this group. As for the segment of **cruise tourists**, attracting ships carrying passengers with a higher household income could be a suitable strategy. Also, as prepaid activities constitute an important part of cruise visitors' total spending, measures to increase the local proportion of profit from such activities may be a way to go. To boost expenditure by people who stay **overnight**, increasing the supply of hotel rooms could be a strategy, but also additional activity offers for this group.

Secondly, for Geirangerfjord as well as more generally, this study suggests that **opportunity is a keyword** in the understanding of expenditure in a destination. Following from this, changes that improve opportunities of individual tourists to spend money will increase expenditure, while the opposite is true for changes that restrict such opportunities. For instance, lack of parking spaces, and a poor range of shops, restaurants, or activities will lower visitor expenditure, while relevant activities, a diversity of offers and an extension of time spent in the area will most probably increase such spending.

CONCLUSION

Previous studies show that there is a blurry picture of tourist expenditure patterns in destinations. By comparing spending patterns of three diverse but important visitor groups, namely cruise visitors, day visitors on land, and visitors on land staying overnight, this study provides more clarity for this issue for the destination Geirangerfjord. Furthermore, by proposing an "opportunity framework", as illustrated in Figure 4, this study provides the fundamentals for a more nuanced understanding of visitor expenditure in destinations also on a more general basis. The framework may be used as a starting point to understand expenditure patterns also in other destinations. Further studies using this new framework as a starting point are necessary to add validity to the framework.

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Appendix 1: Overview of explanatory variables in literature

Table 7: Overview of explanatory variables in literature, categorized as socioeconomic background factors, psychologically oriented factors, travel - and destination related factors. Markers in squares ✓ = significant relationship between variables, NR = No relationship, ÷ = negative relationship.

			General										Literature reviews				Cruise									
			Agulló & Vila 2017	Vetitnev 2015	García-Sánchez et al. 2013	Disegna & Osti 2016	Fredman 2008	Downward & Lumsdon 2004	Wilkins et al. 2018	Gómez-Déniz & Perez-Rodríguez 2020	van Loon & Rouwendal 2017	Wang et al. 2006	Wang & Davidson 2010	Mayer & Vogt 2016	Mudarra-Fernández et al. 2019 (Nature tourism)	Mudarra-Fernández et al. 2019 (Cruise tourism)	Brida et al. 2012	Brida & Fasone et al. 2014 a)	Brida & Fasone et al. 2014 b)	Marksel et al. 2017	Casado-Díaz et al. 2021	Parola et al. 2015	Pino & Tovar 2019	Brida et al. 2020	Brida et al. 2018	Larsen et al. 2013
Socio economic background factors		Income	✓		✓		✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				NR					
		GDP in country of origin			✓																					
		Nationality	✓			✓					✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
		Education			✓																		✓			
		Occupation					✓											✓	✓				NR		✓	
		Age	NR		✓ inv. U					✓	✓ inv. U	✓	✓ inv. U	✓	✓	✓	✓	NR	✓	NR	✓					NR
		Gender	NR				✓ out. dest.					NR	NR					NR	✓	✓	NR		NR			
		Marital status	NR										NR													
		Socioeconomic variables general																								
Psychologically oriented factors	Choice of destination	Motivation for destination/to embark	✓													✓				✓						
		Reason for trip/trip purpose			✓					✓	✓			✓												
		Significance of activity					✓																			
		Seeking stability/excitement										✓														
		Psychographic var. In general										NR														
		Type of tourist														✓										
		Loyalty to the destination													✓	✓										
	Type of visitor	First time/repeat/times of repeat	✓		✓	✓				✓				✓					✓	NR						

			General										Literature reviews				Cruise									
			Agulló & Vila 2017	Vetitnev 2015	García-Sánchez et al. 2013	Disegna & Osti 2016	Fredman 2008	Downward & Lumsdon 2004	Wilkins et al. 2018	Gómez-Déniz & Perez-Rodríguez 2020	van Loon & Rouwendal 2017	Wang et al. 2006	Wang & Davidson 2010	Mayer & Vogt 2016	Mudarra-Fernández et al. 2019 (Nature tourism)	Mudarra-Fernández et al. 2019 (Cruise tourism)	Brida et al. 2012	Brida et al. 2014	Brida& Fasone et al. 2014 b)	Marksel et al. 2017	Casado-Díaz et al. 2021	Parola et al. 2015	Pino & Tovar 2019	Brida et al. 2020	Brida et al. 2018	Larsen et al. 2013
Travel related variables	Time	Lenght of stay - days		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	÷	✓	✓	✓		✓										
		Length of stay hours													✓	✓	✓				✓		✓			✓
	Activities	Activities (choise of,whether/or)			✓		✓	✓						✓		✓					✓			✓		
		Individual shore excursions																			✓	✓				
		Time spent at hinterland																		NR						
		Single vs many nodes																			✓					
		Number of cities visited				✓																				
		Enjoyment of food and drink																✓								
	Overnight stay	Accommodation type	✓	✓	✓		✓			÷				✓		✓										
		Overnight stay												✓												
	Group	Alone/together/type of company		✓	✓																					
		Organized/not organized trip	✓	✓			÷	✓								✓							✓			
		Number of adults in travel party										✓														
		Group size	✓		✓			✓		÷			✓	✓	✓	✓					✓		NR			
		Group composition																						✓		

Travel related variables (continued)

		General										Literature reviews				Cruise									
		Aguiló & Vila 2017	Vetitnev 2015	García-Sánchez et al. 2013	Disegna & Osti 2016	Fredman 2008	Downward & Lumsdon 2004	Wilkins et al. 2018	Gómez-Déniz & Perez-Rodriguez 2020	van Loon & Rouwendal 2017	Wang et al. 2006	Wang & Davidson 2010	Mayer & Vogt 2016	Mudarra-Fernández et al. 2019 (Nature tourism)	Mudarra-Fernández et al. 2019 (Cruise tourism)	Brida et al. 2012	Brida et al. 2014	Brida& Fasone et al. 2014 b)	Marksel et al. 2017	Casado-Díaz et al. 2021	Parola et al. 2015	Pino & Tovar 2019	Brida et al. 2020	Brida et al. 2018	Larsen et al. 2013
Travel	Travel mode					✓ out. dest.	✓		÷				✓				✓								✓
	Price segment of cruise																			✓ highest only					
	Length of travel to destination					✓					✓		✓		✓										
	Mobility patterns																			✓					
Season	Seasonality											✓	✓ un-clear				✓	✓				✓		✓	
Weather	Temperature							✓																	
	Precipitation, snow depth and stormy weather							NR																	
Planning	Booking in advance								✓																
	Planning of the trip														✓										

			General										Literature reviews				Cruise									
			Aguiló & Vila 2017	Vetitnev 2015	García-Sánchez et al. 2013	Disegna & Osti 2016	Fredman 2008	Downward & Lumsdon 2004	Wilkins et al. 2018	Gómez-Déniz & Perez-Rodriguez 2020	van Loon & Rouwendal 2017	Wang et al. 2006	Wang & Davidson 2010	Mayer & Vogt 2016	Mudarra-Fernández et al. 2019 (Nature tourism)	Mudarra-Fernández et al. 2019 (Cruise tourism)	Brida et al. 2012	Brida et al. 2014 a)	Brida & Fasone et al. 2014 b)	Marksel et al. 2017	Casado-Díaz et al. 2021	Parola et al. 2015	Pino & Tovar 2019	Brida et al. 2020	Brida et al. 2018	Larsen et al. 2013
Destination related variables	Satisfaction	Satisfaction destination/holiday	✓										✓	✓		✓					✓	✓	✓			
		Satisfaction with landscape				✓																				
		Satisfaction with friendliness				÷																				
		Satisfaction with prices				÷																				
		Satisfaction with food and beverages				✓													✓							
		Satisfaction with products in stores				✓																				
		Experiences with transport services																		✓						
	Characteristics of port	Tranquility of port																✓	✓							
		Proportion of persons from the same region														✓										
		Regarded as expensive												✓												
		Famous destination												✓												
		City/rural/coastal destinations												✓												
	Dependent on place. General.	Places visited											✓		✓	✓										
		Resort		✓					✓																	
		Port of call																✓	✓				✓	✓		
		Islands visited																					✓			
Other issues		Cruise tourist overestimate spending																								✓
		Expenditure patterns															✓									

Exploring Search Engine Optimization Impact in Real Life: Implications for Tourism Marketing, an Opportunity after COVID-19

Andrea Gubbiotti[1]

ABSTRACT

Research has verified the importance of search engine optimization (SEO) for tourist sites; however, no study has analyzed how the positioning of a tourist site online influences the presence of tourists in its physical location. Thus, this study investigates the correlations between tourism site positioning and the flow of tourists in that locality. Using a bivariate analysis and a linear regression model, the relationship between online popularity and tourist presence of 20 Italian cities was evaluated. A positive correlation between online traffic and the magnitude of touristic flow was revealed. Our findings are significant across multiple fields and can help aid future research. The identified relationship is even more important in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic; the results provide guidance on SEO positioning's effectiveness for small tourist localities to intercept tourist flows and generate value in the post-pandemic period.

Keywords: Italian tourist destination; Tourist behavior; Search engine optimization; Tourism website optimization; Online tourism information search

INTRODUCTION

Since October 29, 1969, the day Arpanet, the predecessor of the Internet was created, much has changed. The original project had a military focus and was intended for exchanging information safely and swiftly. This system was closed, the exact opposite of today's network. Today, the Internet is an open network that leads to exchange, interaction, dissemination of information, and development of knowledge (Kotler et al., 2016; Vescovi, 2007). Many sectors have been transformed by today's vast network, and the tourism sector is one of these. To date, the Internet and the World Wide Web play a fundamental strategic role in tourism and the promotion of places and activities linked to a specific territory (Goetz & Rossi, 2011).

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Digital technologies have had a disruptive impact on the tourism industry while also offering several new opportunities (Alipour et al., 2011). The literature posits that the Internet has revolutionized marketing practices by connecting potential customers to businesses in a way that was never before possible (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Further, it has encouraged the principle of customer-centricity, where the customer, rather than the product, is at the center of the company's thinking. Digitalization is at the helm of the growth of companies and is linked to their market performance (Kotler et al., 2016). Tour operators and other actors who play a role in the supply chain use different digital tools and platforms in various ways to make themselves visible and reach potential tourists to increase their revenue (Goetz & Rossi, 2011). For this reason, it becomes important to know whether the activities implemented online elicit a real physical response.

Globally, the flow of tourism is steadily increasing, and the growth witnessed in recent years confirms that the tourism sector is one of the most powerful engines of development and economic growth (United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2019). Parallel to this, how people consume tourism has changed. According to the UNWTO, travelers are no longer interested in "having" but rather in doing and being. It is understood that the tourist's emotional sphere will increasingly prevail over the rational or practical one. Having an intimate and ongoing understanding of the consumer is, therefore, pivotal in a sphere where the market can no longer rely on rational or practical logic. Hence, the Internet and tourism websites have become key tools in connecting the ever-growing link between the web and people (Konidaris & Koustoumpardi, 2018).

As stated by Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), digital media plays a decisive role in the purchasing behaviors and decision-making processes of consumers. For many consumers, the Internet is their first stop in gathering information. The web, therefore, has become an integral part of the purchasing process at every stage (Chaffey & Smith, 2017). Today, when people face a purchase decision, they consult online to obtain feedback from other consumers about the product, be it a material or an intangible product (Cialdini, 2017). This process is defined and identified by Google as ZMOT or Zero Moment of Truth (Lecinski, 2011). For this reason, and to reinforce what has already been noted, it is clear that a strong presence on the web is fundamental in today's connected world (Kotler et al., 2016). This has given rise to a reality where those who want to promote a product of any kind must compete for the attention of online shoppers long before a purchase decision is made (Lecinski, 2011). As highlighted by Hudson and Thal (2013), after a consumer makes a purchase, they develop a deep connection with the brand or product. At this level, customers will express and talk about their experience digitally using social media and other outlets.

A significant part of marketing and communication efforts is concentrated in the direct promotion of the product, however, research shows that consumers are most influenced during the evaluation phase of making a purchase (Edelman, 2010). Based on the aforementioned principles, tourism sites should embrace the concept of promoting their services with a focus on the customer's lived experience, whether for a tangible or an intangible product. The user must be influenced in a way that their experience is promoted by word-of-mouth, and this may enhance the product's promotional efforts. (Hudson & Thal, 2013).

Italy is distinctly attractive to tourists due to its many historical, experiential, and food- and wine-based attractions (Cracolici & Nijkamp, 2009). It is among the top 10 destinations in the world in terms of the number of annual visits (UNWTO, 2019). Specifically, Italy is fifth in the world for the number of tourists with about 62 million international arrivals in 2018. For that year, the top destination is France with a flow of tourists of approx. 89 million. Two other European countries are in the overall ranking: Spain is #2nd with a flow of tourists of 83 million, and Germany is 8th with 39 million tourists. #3rd place is the United States of America with an annual flow of 80 million tourists. The other countries that are part of the top ten list are listed in the table below (Table 1). According to data collected by the World Tourism Organization, the top 10 destinations receive 40% of worldwide arrivals (UNWTO, 2019).

Table 1. Top ten destinations by international tourist arrivals, 2018

n°	City	Tourist arrivals
1	France	89.000.000
2	Spain	83.000.000
3	United States of America	80.000.000
4	China	63.000.000
5	Italy	62.000.000
6	Turkey	46.000.000
7	Mexico	41.000.000
8	Germany	39.000.000
9	Thalland	38.000.000
10	United Kindom	36.000.000

In Italy, the tourism sector accounted for 13.2% of the national GDP in 2018, which is equal to an economic value of 232.2 billion euros (Enit, 2019). Therefore, it is essential to understand the power offered by the web to tourist resorts so that they may implement effective and useful strategies to intercept and attract tourist flows.

Although the acronym SEO is widely used, it is necessary to specify a shared definition for reference in this manuscript. From a grammatical perspective, SEO is an acronym derived from the English term, search engine optimization. SEO corresponds to a set of techniques and procedures used to improve a site's ranking to increase its visibility among non-paid results (organic results; Sharma et al., 2019). From this concept comes the expression "organic traffic," which indicates the visits obtained through clicks generated by search engines

(Kaushik, 2009). Consequently, in the promotion of a certain tourist area, a good SEO positioning acts as a vehicle that reinforces the storytelling of territories, thus giving strength to communication strategies that narrate the distinctive and peculiar characteristics of a place that could intercept the search intent of a user in the research phase (Bassano et al., 2019). Thus, if a person is undecided about a specific destination and looks for information on alternative destinations, the SEO positioning of the content, obtained through, say, article marketing techniques, may partly contribute to that person's choice (Pan et al., 2011). Article marketing is a form of marketing a company might use to promote its brand or products via the publication of editorial articles on the web (Di Biasi, 2017).

This paper intends to contribute to the literature in two different ways. First, its reflection functions to fill a gap in currently available information. Despite the central role of the web in modern life, there is rarely any direct and measurable feedback on whether a choice made online was beneficial and the consequent results of this choice in real life. As widely discussed and highlighted by Järvinen and Karjaluoto (2015), people are interacting through digital channels more than ever before, and it is therefore essential to evaluate the impact of these interactions. To this end, companies should equip themselves with measurement systems and metrics that allow a quantifiable understanding of online activity and performance (Järvinen & Karjaluoto, 2015). Thus, this study aims to analyze if and how SEO positioning directly impacts the off-line tourist consumption modality. Second, it intends to lead the way for further in-depth analysis of the various sites studied to understand and analyze whether the positioning obtained is the result of the search engine alone or if SEO optimization activities were conducted to identify the most effective actions.

This study aims to answer the following research questions: Does the SEO positioning of a site and the resulting organic traffic it receives have an impact on the number of tourists present on the site? In addition, is it possible to increase tourist presence by improving a site's organic position?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before addressing the topic of the paper and discussing SEO, it is important to communicate a premise necessary for understanding digital marketing's importance in any industry where search engine positioning activities are normally inserted. Digital marketing is important because it has increased and diversified the ways in which people interact with companies, regardless of size and sector. In turn, it has redefined how companies interact with people and the information they can acquire from them. The term digital marketing is used very frequently today. The growing use of the Internet, related services, and other digital media and technologies created and developed to support "modern marketing" has given rise to extensive jargon. Broadly, this domain has been called digital marketing, Internet marketing, e-marketing, and web-marketing, and the use of these terms has varied over time as well as in relation to the development of new and additional services. Reduced to its simplest form, digital marketing can be defined as the "achievement of marketing objectives through the application of technologies and digital media" (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). That said, digital marketing, for example, is not just about managing a website or a Facebook page. Going into detail, digital marketing includes the management of different forms of online presence, such as websites, mobile apps, social media, online advertising, email marketing, partnership agreements with other websites, and the management of the presence and positioning in engines of research. The website is a backbone and is essential for interfacing through the network and interacting with web users; it is at this level where the SEO and positioning of a site find their environment (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

The acronym SEO refers to a series of techniques that function to increase the quality and quantity of a website's traffic by increasing its ranking in the results of the search engine results pages (SERP). This refers to the results returned by search engines following a search made by the user (Di Biasi, 2017). When gauging the efficacy of SEO, the traffic resulting from direct visitors and sponsored ads is excluded (Mittal et al., 2018). Direct traffic is any traffic that accesses a domain by typing its URL (address) directly into the search bar of the browser (Kaushik, 2009).

When mentioning SEO, we do not refer to something distant and abstract; we are talking about people. In this case, we are referring to tourists and how to transfer the information they are looking for directly to them, on the net, at the very moment in accordance with their search intent at each stage of the planning process (Enge et al., 2012). Search intent is the ultimate goal of a web search, that is, what the user wants to know. Generally, search intent falls into three macro query categories: navigational, informational, and transactional types of research. The first term refers to research conducted by a user who knows the name of a product or a brand or who seeks information on a particular topic. In this case, the search engine returns the official pages of the reference websites as results; the user already has in mind the site to which they hope to navigate. Examples of this type of research are "beginners guide to SEO moz" or "Facebook." The informational searches, instead, serve to obtain information on a generic or specific topic. In this case, the user does not have a set site in mind; the attention is mainly focused on the information that is sought to be discovered. This type of research includes questions such as "Who is the president of the United States?" or "How to cook pasta?" Finally, transactional searches are those aimed at an action, such as a purchase, regardless of whether this should be done through digital or physical channels. This category refers to search queries such as "Best restaurants in London" or "pharmacy nearby." Therefore, SEO becomes important for understanding what a user wants at every stage of the search process and to return the correct information to them. (Di Biasi, 2017).

In the literature, several studies highlight the importance of the Internet and tourism web sites as a method for promoting a tourism location. SEO activities have strategic importance for destination marketing (Pan et al., 2011). In accordance with the recent work of Iskandar and Komara (2018), SEO optimizations are fundamental for the success of an online project. From the aforementioned studies, the techniques used to vary the results of the SERP (SEO-SEM) are important in determining the outcome of the search results returned to a potential user. A study by Konidaris and Koustoumpardi (2018), conducted on 400 sites, points out that the best-optimized sites are those that perform best. Considering the above, what is lacking in the literature is an analysis system aimed at identifying and assessing the relationship between SEO, the positioning recognized by search engines, and the presence of tourists registered in a location.

Previous research (Tolica et al., 2017) has evaluated organic positioning in search engines by analyzing Google SERP using a series of keywords deemed important for the site and derived from various sources. The results of the search engine are observed to verify whether the site is positioned for that specific keyword. According to this approach, the search keywords used are defined by the researcher and may, therefore, not reflect the actual site positioning. Moreover, the analysis could be subjected to further distortions of the results as the SERP are vitiated by factors such as the historicity of the searches conducted and the geolocation, even if this operation is carried out in incognito mode (DuckDuck Go, 2018). Moreover, by proceeding in this manner, it would not be possible to verify a relationship between the SEO positioning and the number of tourists present.

To verify the existence of a relationship between the SEO positioning and the number of tourists present, it is not advisable to proceed even using the Google Trends tool, as it is subject, in part, to the limits previously highlighted. In fact, the keywords used to perform the analysis would be chosen by the analyst and may not be the most indicative. Therefore, there would be no feedback on the organic traffic received from the site but only information related to the importance of one keyword rather than another. This importance is not directly attributable to the site being analyzed. Therefore, this study aims to overcome these limits by exploring the possibility of relating the web traffic received by a site to the amount of tourist presence that site elicits (Kaushik, 2009).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study aims to verify and demonstrate the relationship between the SEO positioning derived from a site and the off-line impact generated, therefore establishing how tourists consume sites. It is reasonable to suppose that a series of measures with on-page and off-page SEO techniques can affect and contribute to increasing the number of tourists present in an area.

The study is based on an Italian research contest. Italy is one of the world's most important tourist destinations (UNWTO, 2019). To assess whether there is a beneficial relationship between web positioning and tourist presence, SEO traffic has been analyzed because it is immune to temporary positioning variations resulting from online advertising services, including those that can be implemented in social networks (Di Biasi, 2017). These campaigns can increase the traffic that a site receives for the period of their activation. However, paying for the visibility of sites does not determine the exact positioning that a site will have in the eyes of the search engine (Semoli, 2009). Conversely, organic traffic (SEO) determines the sites to which a search engine deems it appropriate to divert its traffic.

This type of traffic is calculated by the search engine based on the score and the positioning that the search engine itself gives to the site. Based on this score, calculated by an algorithm, the search engine returns results to the user's searched queries, prioritizing one site over another (Kaushik, 2009). Several techniques can be implemented on a website (Mittal et al., 2018) that can have a decisive influence on its positioning. One of the most used and important techniques is link building (Di Biasi, 2017). In a nutshell, Google, among the multiple criteria it uses to position a site, checks the number of links that a website receives back from other sites. In addition, it evaluates the links that point from the site out to external sites (Figure 1; Enge et al., 2012).

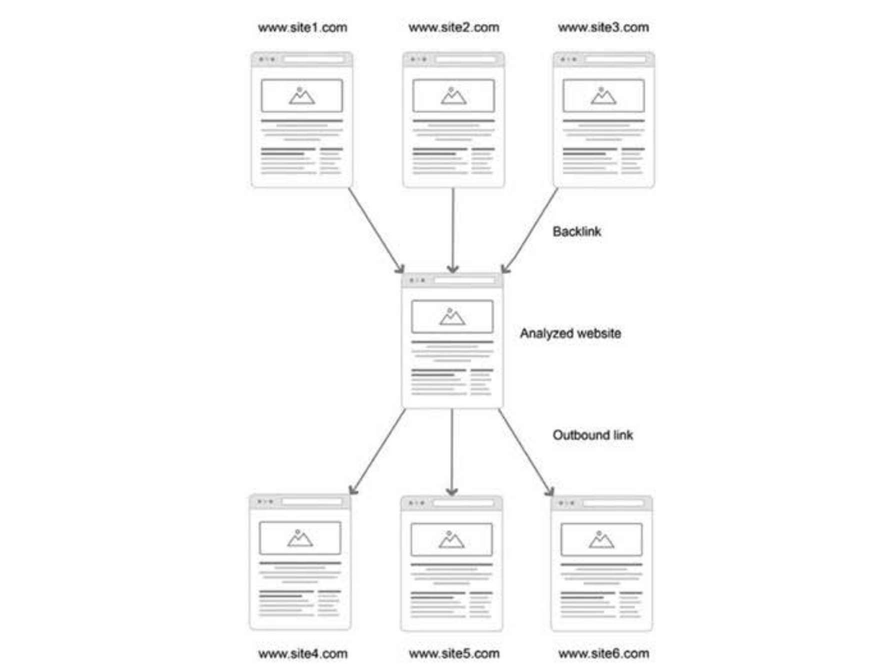

Fig 1 Website link system. (Adaptation from Di Biasi, 2017; Semrush, 2022)

Increasing links, therefore, allows you to change the positioning differently depending on the value that the search engine assigns to that particular link. This technique, therefore, deals with creating a network of links between different sites to modify their positioning and increase the ranking in the results of the SERP (Duong, 2019). In the event that there is a quantifiable relationship between the variables under study, it becomes essential to use these techniques to increase SEO scores and have beneficial repercussions on the amount of tourist presence in a given area. Within the tourism industry, it is of utmost importance to accurately predict the evolution of tourist flow (Arcer, 1987; Li et al., 2006; Lin et al., 2015).

The Internet is the prime source that people utilize to obtain information about products in which they are interested. To better understand customers' purchasing decisions and their evolution, Internet search data should be analyzed (Carrière-Swallow & Labbé, 2011; Choi & Varian, 2012). Similarly, as per Schmidt and Vosen (2009), online search data are strictly linked to potential sales. This information can be positioned among search results and may help to determine people's choices (Wilcox, 2007). With this key idea, a further study developed by Park et al. (2017) demonstrated how data from Google can improve the accuracy of predicting the tourist flow. This can allow for more accurate forecasts of generated value and economic impact.

To empirically investigate the existence of a relationship between the positioning of a site and the number of tourists present in a locality, first, a state with high tourist attractiveness was identified. Subsequently, the 20 Italian cities with the highest tourist presence in 2018 were identified and selected. The data set used was collected and processed by the National Institute of Statistics (Istat, 2019), an Italian public research body, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Organic traffic and touristic presence values

n°	City	Organic traffic (x)	Touristic presence (y)
1	Rome	5.614.645	28.992.098
2	Venice	1.519.221	12.118.298
3	Milan	3.519.760	12.058.835
4	Florence	680.794	10.592.202
5	Rimini	964.327	7.460.300
6	Cavallino-Treporti	309.348	6.261.962
7	Jesolo	2.117.947	5.533.074
8	San Michele al Tagliamento Bibione	2.147.582	5.133.279
9	Caorle	103.228	4.290.230
10	Turin	875.750	3.800.003
11	Naples	122.6710	3.684.905
12	Riccione	95.5075	3.630.318
13	Lignano Sabbiadoro	982.072	3.573.934
14	Lazise	40	3.542.695
15	Cervia	30.950	3.539.106
16	Cesenatico	554.334	3.429.222
17	Bologna	3.284.564	3.059.546
18	Sorrento	373.543	2.744.718
19	Ravenna	1.281.906	2.744.504
20	Verona	17.841	2.495.943

Once the cities were identified and sorted by the number of tourists received, the official websites promoting tourism in the cities were analyzed. To compose the data set, Semrush was used as an SEO tool to analyze and collect the number of organic visitors that the search engine sent to the site in the reference year (2018). As mentioned before, this study did not use Google Trends as a tool. This is because it does not provide data on the organic traffic received from a site, but only a value between 0 and 100 attributed to the keywords entered, in which a keyword with 1 is less popular than one with 100 (Kaushik, 2009). Therefore, it was considered more illustrative to estimate the organic traffic for a given site using the Semrush tool.

Semrush calculates the number of organic visits received from a domain by estimating and monitoring traffic for the first 100 keywords for which that site is positioned in the Google database. Based on this, it calculates the organic traffic that the site has received. Among the variables considered, there is a discrepancy of around 5% between the real traffic values measured with a tool like Google Analytics and Semrush. This discrepancy is due to how Google Analytics is able to measure traffic more accurately and promptly. This is made possible by a code that is inserted inside the site that is owned by the site managers to which external people do not have access (Alhlou et al., 2016). With regards to the search engine used for the analysis, only Google was considered, as it is the search engine used most diversely and at the highest level in the world (Statcounter, 2019). Desk analysis of the official websites has been conducted to carry out the SEO analysis of the website.

The analysis was performed on the main URL of the domain, including the various subfolders for all languages. For each domain, the first 10 Google databases identified by the tool were selected as the main traffic diversions to the sites being analyzed (Table 3). Our data collection includes and summarizes desktop and mobile traffic.

Table 3. Analyzed domain URLs

n°	City	Web site	Google Database (DB)
1	Rome	https://www.turismoroma.it	ITALY, USA, SPAIN, FRANCE, GERMANY, UNITED KINGDOM, ARGENTINA, BRAZIL, NETHERLANDS, MEXICO
2	Venice	https://www.veneziaunica.it	ITALY, USA, FRANCE, GERMANY, SPAIN, UNITED KINGDOM, CANADA, NETHERLANDS, AUSTRALIA, ARGENTINA
3	Milan	https://www.turismo.milano.it	ITALY, USA, FRANCE, SPAIN, UNITED KINGDOM, GERMANY, AUSTRALIA, CANADA, BRAZIL, NETHERLANDS
4	Florence	http://www.firenzeturismo.it	ITALY, USA, SPAIN, FRANCE, UNITED KINGDOM, AUSTRALIA, CANADA, NETHERLANDS, GERMANY, BRAZIL

5	Rimini	http://www.riminiturismo.it	ITALY, USA, FRANCE, SPAIN, GERMANY, UNITED KINGDOM, NETHERLANDS, BRAZIL, CANADA, AUSTRALIA
6	Cavallino -Treporti	https://www.cavallino.info	ITALY, GERMANY, USA, NETHERLANDS, UNITED KINGDOM, FRANCE, SWITZERLAND, SPAIN, AUSTRIA, AUSTRALIA
7	Jesolo	https://www.jesolo.it	ITALY, GERMANY, USA, FRANCE, NETHERLANDS, SPAIN, UNITED KINGDOM, SWITZERLAND, AUSTRIA, CANADA
8	San Michele al Tagliamento Bibione	https://www.bibione.com	ITALY, GERMANY, USA, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED KINGDOM, HUNGARY, FRANCE, SPAIN, AUSTRIA, SWITZERLAND
9	Caorle	https://www.caorle.eu	ITALY, GERMANY, UNITED STATES, NETHERLANDS, FRANCE, AUSTRIA, UNITED KINGDOM, SPAIN, AUSTRALIA, SWITZERLAND
10	Turin	https://www.turismotorino.org	ITALY, FRANCE, USA, SPAIN, UNITED KINGDOM, GERMANY, NETHERLANDS, BRAZIL, AUSTRALIA, CANADA
11	Naples	http://www.inaples.info	ITALY, FRANCE, USA, GERMANY, SPAIN, UNITED KINGDOM, BRAZIL, NETHERLANDS, CANADA, JAPAN
12	Riccione	http://www.riccione.it	ITALY, USA, GERMANY, FRANCE, SPAIN, UNITED KINGDOM, NETHERLANDS, CANADA, AUSTRALIA, SWITZERLAND
13	Lignano Sabbiadoro	https://lignanosabbiadoro.it	ITALY, GERMANY, CANADA, USA, FRANCE, AUSTRIA, SPAIN, NETHERLANDS, UNITED KINGDOM, SWITZERLAND
14	Lazise	http://www.tourismlazise.it	ITALY, GERMANY, UNITED STATES, UNITED KINGDOM, NETHERLANDS
15	Cervia	https://www.cerviaturismo.it	ITALY, GERMANY, FRANCE, SWITZERLAND
16	Cesenatico	https://www.cesenatico.it	ITALY, GERMANY, USA, FRANCE, SPAIN, UNITED KINGDOM, NETHERLANDS, BRAZIL, SWITZERLAND, AUSTRALIA
17	Bologna	https://www.bolognawelcome.com	ITALY, USA, UNITED KINGDOM, AUSTRALIA, SPAIN, NETHERLANDS, GERMANY, FRANCE, CANADA, BRAZIL
18	Sorrento	http://www.sorrentotourism.com	ITALY, USA, UNITED KINGDOM, FRANCE, SPAIN, GERMANY, ARGENTINA, AUSTRALIA, CANADA, NETHERLANDS
19	Ravenna	http://www.turismo.ra.it	ITALY, GERMANY, FRANCE, SPAIN, UNITED KINGDOM, NETHERLANDS, BRAZIL, AUSTRALIA, ARGENTINA, SWITZERLAND
20	Verona	https://www.veronatouristoffice.it	ITALY, SPAIN, COLOMBIA, GERMANY, UNITED STATES, NETHERLANDS, UNITED KINGDOM, FRANCE, MEXICO, BRAZIL

RESULTS

Different types of analyses were performed using Stata software to verify the existence of a relationship between the variables. The first was a bivariate analysis aimed at verifying the covariance index and the statistical correlation index to determine the relationship direction and strength between the two variables. The second analysis allowed the creation of a linear regression statistical model to quantify the relationship between the two variables and evaluate the predictive power of x over y (De Luca, 2006). From the value of covariance, COV>0 (Cov = 6.19E + 12), we expected a positive linear trend. The scatter plot depicts a preliminary understanding of the behavior of the variables and their tendency to co-operate. Subsequently, this understanding deepened with the calculation of the correlation index, thus bypassing the limit of covariance, which does not offer any indication about the strength of the relationship between variables. The correlation index has a value of 0.75 and therefore reflects a strong positive link between the two variables. This link is visible in Figure 2, in which the point cloud is not dispersed and is close to the interpolating straight line. With the last analysis based on the construction of a simple linear regression model to evaluate the impact of one variable with respect to another, we note that the p-value of the model is 0.0001, meaning a statistically significant relationship between x and y.

Furthermore, the model shows a good ability to explain the phenomenon with R2 = 56.01%. With this value it is clear that about 56% of the variability of attendance is explained by the variability of organic traffic, while the remaining 44% is explained by other factors that with further analysis could be identified in order to further refine the model and thus bypass some disturbing elements. For example, a disturbing element could be linked to the strength of the city's brand and its recognizability. Another element supporting the model and the importance of the analysis emerges from the value of the angular coefficient of the straight line equal to 3.2; this value allows us to say that as the organic traffic increases by 1, the tourist presence in that given city on average increases by 3.2.

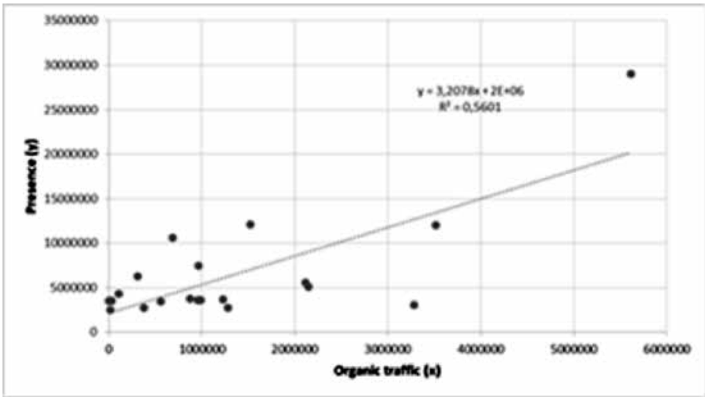

Fig 2 Organic traffic and touristic presence correlation

DISCUSSION

This study focused on a sample consisting of the 20 most touristic Italian cities, given that touristic presence is central to the scope of the study (UNWTO, 2019). It aims to be a preliminary contribution to stimulate new insights and enrich the reference literature available on the relationship between SEO positioning and its real-world implications. In this case, the study focused on the SEO implications on the amount of tourist presence detected in a given geographical area.

The analyzed sites had a diversified construction logic. Some use CMS systems. Even the logic of content development that we found inside was diversified and did not have the same pattern insofar as it did not consider the SEO positioning factors and did not analyze the on-page and off-page factors that determined the site's ranking (e.g., title, H1, anchor text, etc.) in the search engine used for the study (i.e., Google; Enge et al., 2012).

The study used the number of organic visits a site received and therefore obtained the actual result of SEO positioning. From the data and the developed model, it was observed that the positioning acquired in the search engine was fundamental for the real-life implications generated. There were several implications noted in the managerial and academic spheres, as well as for those working in the tourism sector in general. Living in a world where digital communication is the primary communication channel (Cosenza, 2014), this study provides information on the economic return of actions conducted online from the perspective of SEO. From a managerial perspective, this paper provides initial guidelines on the importance of certain procedures for increasing the business opportunities of those who manage, for example, accommodation facilities. For policymakers, this paper aims to offer a useful proposal to increase the results of those who run tourist websites, both governmental and private.

This study aims to encourage the development of SEO activities, as they are beneficial and directly related to increases in business value. From another perspective, these activities are also intimately connected to high-quality sites. According to Park et al. (2007), the quality of the website is a significant element that differentiates travel distribution businesses from their competitors.

In the academic field, this paper aims to increase knowledge and implement useful activities to improve the organic positioning of a website. For all those who work in the field of tourism promotion, it is imperative to start operating on the network using SEO techniques to intercept potential tourists in any state of the research and purchasing process and give visibility to their destination.

The scientific contribution of this paper is to show that a good SEO positioning in search engine rankings has a direct impact on the flow of tourists in a given location and that, consequently, these become controllable. This is useful information for companies operating in the sector because it encourages them to work toward their organic positioning. This is especially useful for small towns that are often cut off from large tourist circuits; thus, by starting to produce quality online content, they can improve their positioning and therefore their visibility. This study, which demonstrates the link between organic positioning and the amount of presence that can be observed in a location, is even more important in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic: It is essential for small tourist locations to capture tourist flows in the post-pandemic period to stimulate their economies. As described in the results, an increase of one unit of SEO value increases average tourist attendance by 3.2 units.

From an economic perspective, this study demonstrates a methodology for measuring the investments made on the web and their economic return. Finally, it enables the growth of the sector by identifying a series of best practices and ideal behaviors to be implemented.

Previous studies have shown that having a high-quality website with well-positioned content attracts more users and potential buyers than competing sites of lower quality. (Parasuraman et al., 2005; Wang & Tang, 2003; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). In general, a well-designed and positioned website can be a determining factor for a company's success (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003). Santos (2003) stated that a website could offer a competitive advantage as it impacts the purchasing decisions of customers and could also improve relationships with customers through promotion by word-of-mouth. In conclusion, the quality of the website is an important element that policymakers can use. As indicated by the literature, the quality of a website affects not only people's intentions but also the forecast of the profits of an organization (Park et al., 2007).

In consideration of the results, this study could be extended to further cities and states to verify the existence of a relationship between SEO positioning and the number of tourists present. Consequently, optimization techniques could be applied to increase the number of visitors. With the aim to deeping the study, the data used in the measurement can be extended by increasing, for example, the number of cities. Furthermore, the data can be organized into monthly or half-yearly subgroups in order to analyze the flow trend on a time basis. A further and relevant analysis is the one connected to the type of traffic.

The data could be organized and analyzed by type of traffic: mobile or desktop. By creating two segments, the channel, useful for example to know the one having a higher performance compared to another.

In a current situation where mobile browsing has overcome Desktop browsing Statcounter (2019) it becomes important to know which type of channel has the highest performance also to optimize SEO and promotional activities, as well as the techniques, thus allow the measuring of the return. Today many Analytics tools allow this and as a result, companies can change the action in relation to the performance of activities and thus improve their overall results (Schmidt et al., 2009).

This study also opens the door for the identification of a dual and further analysis. Such research could establish an understanding of whether the analyzed sites have implemented SEO techniques and, in a second analysis, could evaluate which were the best ones. In such a way one could evaluate the result of the actions carried out both at the site level (on-page) and off-page activities such as link-building. This information can provide valuable feedback on the validity of the actions performed. In addition to the larger cities, the field of analysis could be extended to Italian regions or small towns. In the event that the existence of the relationship is confirmed, the regions could take advantage of on-page and off-page SEO activities to better position themselves organically and thus try to attract greater flows of tourists. The same activity could be carried out by the smaller resorts, for example an analysis could be that related to the winter tourism of some Italian ski resorts. These locations enjoy recognition and may be large enough to implement and test these types of techniques. In general, the subsequent analysis would be to evaluate the organization, presence and structure of the factors that determined the site's ranking (e.g., title, H1, anchor text, etc.)

From an academic perspective, this research can be extended to other fields and sectors outside of the tourism sector. There could be several sectors where to analyze the existence or not of the relationship; much more interesting could be the industry that manufactures durable consumer goods such as household appliances. It would be interesting to analyze the traffic of the main five appliance manufacturers and evaluate the existence of the relationship between their turnover and organic positioning. If the relationship were confirmed, companies would have feedback and even guidance on how to organize digital activities.

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Technology Adaptation in the Travel Industry of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The need for advanced technologies in tourism has created attention in the travel industry space. However, empirical study that draws a shred of concrete evidence is lacking. Based on this, the study has explored the rate of technology interventions in the travel business in West Africa, drawing hypercritical evidence from Ghana. The study analyzed data with 133 respondents on the field survey conducted. From the findings, it was revealed that there was technology integration in the activities of tour operations in Ghana, although it was not as advanced as in other parts of the world. Despite the low use of modern technology, the findings show that easy advertisement, a high patronage level, and an increase in economic gains were some of the effects. Nonetheless, the study suggests that tour operators in Ghana and the West African region should employ more advanced technologies such as mobile applications, artificial intelligence, electronic commerce systems, search engine advertising, electronic marketspaces, BigData, and online travel-support software such as Lemax, TravelPerk, and Travelwork in order to meet international standardisation and status.

Keywords: Technology, Travel Industry, Travel and Tour Operations, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

In this current time, the travel and tourism industry can be considered a catalyst supporting the economic growth of low-income countries. As a result, many studies describe it as an effective weapon that can be used to battle economic liabilities in poor countries (Nedelea & Romania, 2014; Tourism Sector Medium Growth Strategy, 2010). For instance, according to WTTC, the industry has been able to create 258 million jobs worldwide, US$652 billion world's investment and US$6 trillion in global Gross Domestic Product (WTTC, 2011).

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Considering a broader understanding that tourism and travel activities impact the economic, natural, cultural, and societal status of a destination (Kaowen et al., 2018), it is worth noting that these impacts may not manifest when modern technologies are not embedded. There is an ongoing debate that the technology in today's travel industry is taken for granted especially, in less developed countries. According to Global Growth Agents (2018), technology tools including the web, the internet and other Information and Communication Technology (ICT) devices have currently transformed the way people prepare and view their journeys in developed countries. As well, it has influenced destination advertisement especially, in Europe, facilitating a rapid movement of tourists from one country to the other on the continent. It is worth noting that the tourism industry is one big global industry but has differences in terms of how it is operated across continents, nations, and regions. This makes it important to bring to attention the differences in technology usage in less developed countries like Ghana. The introduction and constant growth of artificial intelligence and modern technologies supporting e-commerce and e-mobile commerce through in-built electronic systems and mobile applications, including online transactions, catalogues, payment gateways and processing, order making, delivery, info-tech, interactive websites, and chatbots, are common in the tourism businesses of developed countries. However, this is not the same as in some less developed countries like Ghana.

Despite the proliferating literature that hails an increased adaptability and technology usage in the developed world, few studies have touched on the tone of technology (evidence-based) in the activities of the travel industry in the developing world like West Africa, leading to an information deficit on the region's travel and tourism sector. This shortage in literature in the field has necessitated the construction of this study. The study aimed to produce evidence-based confirmation on the level of technology adaptation in the travel industry of Ghana, a popular tourist destination in the region. The study was also developed based on the suggestions made by Onyije & Opara (2013) and Aghaei et al. (2012) on the need for travel and tour operators to adopt technological strategies in developing countries following Zachary's (2004) claim about poor technology in the developing world. According to him, technology growth is high globally, but the pace is not the same when comparing developed and less developed countries. For this, the study has carefully invested in and analysed some of these disparities with the aim of educating travel and tour operators in Ghana to adapt to the incorporation of modern technologies in their businesses to succeed due to the constant changes in the industry.

LITERATURE

Travel Services

Studies such as TTIAC (2012) and Hinson & Boateng (2007) have agreed to the fact that tourism is one of the fastest-growing segments in the service industry. The tourism industry is multifaceted such that it serves as a system encompassing leisure and recreation, hospitality industries, transport, destination and attraction sites, and travel intermediaries, which are all service-related industries.

The travel industry is a service industry that provides to tourists, a number of tourism goods and services at a fee. Travel agencies which are essential aspects of the industry perform different functions including the purchase of separate service components and combine them into individual tour packages for tourists (Tourism Notes, 2020; Clerides et al., 2007). Tourists need a wide variety of tourism facilities and services when travelling. For example, transportation and lodging, such as Airbnb, bed and breakfasts, and guesthouses, are arranged for tourists through third-party online intermediaries such as Booking.com, Expedia, Agoda, 9flats, and other sharing economy platforms. The services of tourism and travel agencies either main or peripheral contribute to tourists experience and satisfaction (Zehrer et al., 2010). Moreover, the travel industry is predominantly service-oriented. The industry is known to have sub-individual industries that include travel companies such as airlines and car rentals, as well as their collaborative travel agencies. The travel industry today is one of the sectors in the tourism industry that is service-centered. It combines products with services for a fee. An important function above all is the coordination of tourist movement from their regions to the visiting destinations. In Europe, tourists' activities have increased with the increase in services offered by airline companies and their technology's adaptability to providing personalised services to customers based on their individual needs. An airline company such as Ryanair is playing an instrumental role in the tourist movement in Europe due to the new strategies developed by offering low flights, advance reservations, the selling of seats at different prices, and the integration of other services like car rentals. It is important to note that the travel industry is about services. Tour operators, who are components of the travel business, offer nothing but service to customers, which is done both online and offline (Ilic et al., 2016). The services of the travel industry cannot be touched, but this is what enhances tourists' experiences to ensure customer loyalty. Zehrer et al. (2010) described these services as "intangibles." Thus, they are so because they cannot be stored in inventories. Moreover, the services of the travel industry are not just intangible but also perishable, as claimed by Moeller (2010). This means that an unsold flight seat, for example, becomes a waste when it is unsold at the time of take-off.

The ever-increasing demand for travel services has created a pool of travel companies competing for a defined number of travelers. Since they produce similar services, they create competition in the industry (Zehrer et al., 2014). Whether tough competition or not, quality service is what is paramount to tourists so far as the tourism industry is concerned. Travel agencies within the industry are propelled to provide top-notch service to create value for customers, to ensure maximum travel experience and satisfaction to gain more market shares (Dowson, 2007).

Technology and the Travel Industry

Technology has increased due to the quick and easy access to the internet, websites, web pages, search engines and other technology-related facilities (Januszewska, 2015). For this reason, many researchers have agreed on technology adoption, emphasizing that it is becoming a common information delivery tool in the travel industry (Buhalis & Licata, 2002; Christian, 2001; Olmeda & Sheldom, 2001).

Defining the word ‘technology’ may be cumbersome (Reddy & Zhoa, 1990), however, many researchers have defined it from their perspective and field of focus. To better understand technology concerning the travel industry, Wahab et al. (2012) grouped technology into two primary features and discusses that; on one vail, it is a physical component that encompasses products, tooling, equipment, techniques, machines and processes. On the other hand, it is an informational component that is made up of know-how in management, marketing, production, promotion, quality control, reliability and functional areas. Based on this definition, access control, transport (flight, cars, coach etc.) computers sets, mobile phones, technological devices, machines, websites, software and the internet are examples of technologies that are common in the travel industry.

The multidimensional make-up of technology has made travel businesses, the hospitality sector and tourists’ destinations proactive and sustainable (Hinson & Boateng, 2007). According to Aren et al. (2013), the internet as a form of technology especially has increased by 566% from 2000 to 2012 and it is commonly used by tourists and tour operators through mobile phones, computers and other digital devices. Other travel companies also use technology as a development strategy to remain competitive and successful (Karehka, 2013). According to the author, it is so because, in the United States, 81% of travelers use the internet to search for information especially package arrangement and tour planning during the year 2012. Arguably, Cavlek (2006) posits that the use of ICT and the internet in travel and tourism should not only promote contact with clients and business partners but should as well guarantee positive results in the industry’s activities (Čavlek, 2006). The researcher concluded that many tourists neglect or postpone the use of travel and tourism firms following the rise of the same ICT.

The Role of Technology in the Travel Industry

Travelers and travel intermediaries both resort to emerging technologies for their activities. Neuhofer et al. (2014) see the role of technology as a facilitator and foundation for a new tourist experience. Researchers including Aramendia-Muneta & Ollo-Lopez, (2013) and Ficarelli et al. (2013) acknowledged how technology has been approved by tour operators, tourism organizations, tourists and destinations. This means there is a wide acceptance of technology as a life companion. The revolution of Web 2.0 technologies and platforms, particularly social media, blogs, online forums, folksonomies, tagging, mashups, automated responses, and, most importantly, artificial intelligence, is speeding up business in the travel industry. The emergence of travel agencies' online presences, including Opodo.com, Kayak.com, Expedia, SkyScanner, Edreams, and Kiwi.com, which help tourists with travel packages, flight booking services, fare comparisons, advisory services, and consultations, is enabled by current technology. Other online platforms, such as TripAdvisor, make tourism activities more accessible to tourists. Providing relevant information about destinations and their offerings. Technology has made software into services that support the travel industry and the tourist experience. The increasing modern technologies are seen as reducing the work of travel agencies, but they are also supporting them in their duties in terms of organizing, promoting, and advertising tourism packages, as well as the reservation and actual execution of trips (Tourism Notes, 2020).

The significant role of technology in the travel and tourism industry is well documented in Bandara & Silva (2015), Bethapudi (2013) and Mihajlović (2012). According to Mihajlović (2012), technology has created a competitive advantage, especially sensors, artificial intelligence and robotics, mobile technologies, the internet, online sales platforms, Apps, chatbots, and other devices. Additionally, technology has helped to reduce operation costs, promote organizational capabilities and revitalize consumer engagement. For instance, many travel and tour agents have seen the need to change the way they perform their operations and are offering significant types of assistance to both recreation and business travelers (Weedmark, 2019). This means that technology has replaced expensive human labour. The invention of automatic response in the industry has also helped strengthen relationships in the industry. Travel companies are now doing business on the internet. Business-to-business electronic contracts, electronic procurement (web-based electronic resource planning), electronic document interchange (EDI), and electronic funds transfer (EFT) through electronic payments (for example, an e-wallet, e-cash, or e-cheque) make for easy transactions. It has reduced high labour rates and maintained a competitive buffer from issues with customer care. For example, automated confirmation emails sent to customers after purchasing travel packages and services build customer loyalty because of the credibility and reliability customers attach to the brand after being assured by the items purchased. Considering this, all consumers and companies in the travel industry benefit from a better network ranging from communications, bookings, promotions and easy service delivery.

A study by Batinić and Croatia (2013) on the 'Importance of technology (ICT) on contemporary tourism and travel businesses' concluded that modern technologies especially the internet, help travel and tour operation businesses in creating an exclusive identity, efficiency and quality services. The comprehensive account made by the authors provides a clear understanding that the benefits of technology in the tour operation business are immeasurable. Despite this, Mihajlović (2012) argued that most of these benefits are not enjoyed by some companies and people as a result of ignorance and low awareness of some modern forms of technologies. Januszewska et al. (2015) corroborated and posits that though, ICT plays a major role in the tourism sector, however, it is now more important in the hospitality industry compared to that of the travel industry.

From the literature, it is evident that the tourism and travel industries are growing with technology, and their activities now without modern technology are almost impossible. It is worth noting that a vast body of literature has made significant contributions to how the travel industry operates and uses modern technology to its advantage. However, it looks like there is minimal attention to technology growth and utilisation in the literature on less developed countries. It is unfortunate that these modern technologies, like company apps, among others, are not rampant and are assumed not to be taken advantage of by tour operators in less developed regions. The current literature has not delved into this to see if some of these travel agencies are still operating in the traditional manner with little technology usage. Regarding this assumption, together with the condemnatory accounts and suggestions made by Onyije & Opara (2013) and Aghaei et al. (2012) as captured in the early section of the paper, form the basis of this study. Considering this, the study has carefully explored the awareness and growth level of modern technologies in Ghana's travel industry, as well as their impacts.

METHODOLOGY

Study Areas

SOURCE: Ghana Tourism Authority (2019)

The research was conducted in the capital cities of the four major administrative regions of Ghana. These cities are Accra, Kumasi, Cape Coast and Takoradi. These locations were selected for the study because they are recognized as the major tourism hubs in Ghana, with high tourist receipts (Deichmann & Frempong, 2016). An exploratory research design was employed for this study. Also, questionnaires were administered as the main tool for the data collection on technology adaptation, usage and impact. The questionnaires were used mainly because of their ability to effectively communicate and gather adequate information on social science surveys (Sarantakos, 2005).

Additionally, the study generated a sample frame encompassing all registered travel and tour operators under the Tour Operators Union of Ghana (TOUGHA) as of 2020. This secondary data was obtained from the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA). In the data, there were major thirty-three (33) registered travel and tour companies in all the four selected cities. Accordingly, 48.5% (16) were in Accra, 12.1% (4) in Kumasi, 15.2% (5) from Takoradi and 24.2% (8) from Cape Coast. Considering this, a total sample size of 133 respondents consisting of 33 travel/tour operators and 100 tourists were derived for the study.

Finally, adequate and relevant information necessary for the research was obtained from all the managements of the 33 travel and tour operators within the selected regions before the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana at the beginning of 2020. Furthermore, a convenience sampling method was used to gather data from the 100 tourists through a detailed questionnaire during the same period. Essentially, the study employed a mixed method.

RESULTS

This section of the study presents the demographic characteristics of respondents, the integration of technology in travel companies in Ghana, modern technology usage, and the impacts of technology in the travel industry in Ghana. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. From the study, most tourists of about (58%) were international tourists with 53% of them coming from continents other than Africa (see Table 1). Concerning the travel firms, (48.5%) operate in the Greater Accra region, the capital city of Ghana. On a scale of operation, only 18.1% operate on a large scale while a majority constituting (45.5%) operates on a small scale. Additionally, a majority (57.6%) of the travel and tour firms had company websites where most of their interaction with international visitors occurs.

Table 1: Socio-demographic factors of respondents

Measures	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Respondent	Tourist	100	75%
	Travel and Tour Firm	33	25%
Nationality of Tourist	Ghanaian	42	42%
	African	5	5%
	Other Continent	53	53%
Location of Travel and Tour companies	Greater Accra	16	48.5%
	Central	8	24.2%
	Western	5	15.2%
	Ashanti	4	12.1%
Company website	Yes	19	57.6%
	No	14	42.4%
Business Scale	Small Scale	15	45.5%
	Medium Scale	12	36.4%
	Large Scale	6	18.1%

Source: fieldwork

A correlational analysis was done to find out the popularity and domestic usage of travel and tour services in Ghana. The Pearson correlation (r= 0.345) indicates a weak positive correlation between tour operators' popularity and the patronage of their services by domestic tourists. This shows that travel and tour operators in the tourism sector in Ghana are not as popular as expected; however, their services are patronised and are still used by a reasonable number of international visitors, though the types of technology they use are not modern compared to that of developed countries.

The study has revealed that most of the travel and tour firms (57.6%) have websites. This means the increasing usage of a website in other service sectors is equally important in the travel businesses as shown from the responses. Comparably, the creation and ownership of websites in developed countries are shared by the same companies in the industry in developing countries. This means that the importance of websites is common in the industry, regardless of geographical differences.

The study also inquired about the relationship that exists between tour operators and the use of common technologies such as information, electronic and transport technologies. Examples of these common technologies presented to the respondents were digitalized mobile phones, smartphones, webpages, social media handles, online payment systems, travel-support software and a customized email – as the information technology category; modernized printers, multipurpose photocopier machines, credit card readers, computer sets and contactless access control machines – as the electronic technology category; and the last category which encompasses company cars, vans, buses or coaches, courier, elevators, water vessels and other modes of transport (transport technology category). According to the responses, almost all the travel and tour firms use most of the technologies under the 'information and electronic technology category' while only 45.5% use those under the 'transport technology category'. This is so because popular transport apps like Uber and Bolt are common in the regions where the survey was conducted.

Furthermore, the study dived deep to understand how often these technologies are used and the results show that 97% and 84.3% always use information technologies such as new software and high/updated mobile phones such as iPhone, as well as electronic technologies like modern version of computers like the Hewlett-Packard Pavilion Plus, Lenovo, Apple MacBook Air/Pro. Moreover, only about (33.3%) of the firms indicated their possession of transport technologies like vans, car rentals, freights, coaches etc.

According to Vidal (2019), technology usage by tourists in their travelling is determined by travel and tour operators' familiarity with such technologies. Many travel firms operating with a company website provide a platform for tourists to reach them in order to undertake a rapid business transaction. This is because now, most tourists get in touch with travel and tour firms using technological means. For instance, more than 65% of the tourists acknowledged that technologies including the telephones, internet, and the social media facilitate their interaction and communication with the tour operators.

Lastly, it is worth noting that the level of tourists' knowledge of technology may influence the rate at which they use it. Data from the study show that only 3% of domestic tourists have inadequate knowledge concerning the use of modern technologies such as online booking, reservations, and social media interactions, which are frequently used by the tour operators. This was reaffirmed by a large proportion (57.6 %) of the travel firms who revealed that their customers have high knowledge of modern technology which aids their interaction with them.

DISCUSSION

The study reported in this paper is one of the numerous attempts to investigate the impact of technology on travel and tour operations in some parts of the globe other than developing countries like Ghana. The few existing studies that also focused on the region only explored the impact of certain technology components like the internet on the travel industry. Importantly, this study is an update, as it has thoroughly investigated the level, the usage and the impacts of technology on Ghana's travel industry.

The operations of travel and tour firms have become very instrumental in the growth of the tourism industry. The tourism business considers the travel industry as the distribution channel for tourists' products and services (Anderson et al., 2006). The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has indicated that one of the most crucial aspects of tourism is the cross-border movement of people which is mostly facilitated by the travel industry. This backs the results obtained that although, travel and tour firms are not popular in the sight of domestic tourists, however, they are very relevant to the growth of Ghana's tourism sector. From the findings of the study, most travel and tour firms in Ghana operate on a small and medium scale. This confirms the argument made by Morrison (1996) that the tourism industry is dominated by small businesses. Globally, a common feature of businesses in the travel, tourism and hospitality industry are that most (95 percent) are small firms (Lashley & Rowson, 2006). In Ghana, about 97 percent of tourism firms are classified as small (NTDP, 2012). According to Sherman (2019), a website is a backbone supporting all digital marketing businesses. A website is relevant in the tour operation business especially in this time when potential and actual tourists are technology-savvy (UNWTO, 2011). This has necessitated the development and running of a company's website. Concerning this, it is not surprising that majority of the travel firms featured in the study have developed their business websites which are facilitating growth in their operations. This is because physical booking process is slowly fading out as travelers'/tourists' purchases are steadily being channeled to relevant companies with websites (Davidson & Rogers, 2006).

The Integration of Technology in the Travel Industry of Ghana

Tourism is an information-intensive industry (Liu, 2000). From the results, informational technologies are used by almost all the firms. Technology adoption is expected to enhance the quality of service, increase performance, cut costs and broaden global markets. This informs the rate at which travel agencies use various technology types in their operations in Ghana. With this, researchers can say that there is an integration of technology in the travel industry of the country.

From the study, it was shown that information technology was linked to the internet making websites, social media, and emails for sending and receiving information possible to be used. Internet-related technologies are important resources to create more efficient business processes (Hinchcliffe, 2006). It is important to note that the internet is a powerful medium for organizations to develop their interactions with customers. This helps to strengthen business-customer relationships which lead to business sustainability and growth. These assertions affirm the reason why respondents concluded that their firms cannot operate efficiently without the internet. According to Vich-i-Martorell (2004), airlines use of the internet for the sale and distribution of flight tickets and provide real-time information on the availability of flights and seats. This makes the tour firms see the need to employ the use of the internet for efficiency, and to satisfy customers/tourists because of their relationship with the airlines in the country.

Electronic technology as another technology category was also used by many of the travel firms. Most of these electronic technologies facilitate efficient delivery of services, especially in their office spaces as revealed by the study. Air conditioners, for instance, help create a comfortable working environment and increase the motivation levels of employees during hot periods of the year due to the high atmospheric temperature which occurs almost throughout the year (Airedale Cooling, 2015). These and many common technologies used by travel and tour firms in Ghana show that there is a major impact of technology on their activities. According to Cheng & Cho (2011), some of the impacts are that they enhance the growth and sustainability of the travel businesses because it helps them to define, promote, distribute, coordinate and supply their travel products and services.

In the study, tourists affirm the current impact of technology on travel and tour operations. According to them, tourists' adaptation and use of various technology categories like TripAdvisor and others define the level at which technology has made the travel and tour business easy to be operated and access. According to a current Google Travel study, 74% of travelers plan their trips on the internet. Tourists seek all the necessary information and services of travel agencies. For example, international travelers are technologically inclined and for this reason, travel and tour operators in Ghana who become responsible for managing their tours are bound to involve the most advanced technologies to suit their demands. This is because some tourists, who are referred to as 'psychocentric', would prefer to be at destinations and receive services they are familiar with (Cruz-Milan, 2017).

The Usage of Technology in the Travel industry of Ghana

According to Kull (2007), technology is a genuine competitive tool for global marketing and communication. The study reveals how tour operators in Ghana are consistently embracing new trends and changes. The presence of technology has become universal and for that matter to be relevant in the field, it is a need for travel and tour operators to adapt to the use of these technologies in their operations. On one hand, the study recognized that majority of travel operators in Ghana take into consideration the use of various forms of technology including the internet, webpages/sites, computers and accessories, mobile devices, printing devices, gadgets among others in their operations especially in planning, designing, advertising, relaying information, organizing, distributing and delivering of services. These technologies provide the right mechanisms which foster effective, efficient and productive business activity. In economics lenses, every tour operator aims at obtaining a competitive advantage over its competitors. As a result, most of them aimed a maximum utilization of technology. This is because technology facilitates the creation of a competitive edge to absorb more market shares as posited by Mihajlović (2012).

Furthermore, despite the high usage of technology by these travel agencies in Ghana, a travel firm insisted not to have benefited from technology. According to the company, most of its advertisement is done manually. The firm explained that the company has been enjoying the traditional way of advertisement which is, through 'word of mouth'. According to the manager, 'although this company uses technology like mobile phones and computers but not mainly for advertisement of our tour packages.' Notwithstanding, after a thorough query, the firm sees this as one of its shortcomings, and aimed to own a website.

Additionally, the study sought to understand tourist knowledge and experience on how tour operators in Ghana use technology. From the research, technology usage by travel and tour operators is on average. Some of the tourists' especially, domestic tourists revealed that the services of these travel and tour companies are technology-oriented throughout. Few international tourists also raised a concern that their expectations of technology in their purchased services are below the bottom line. Taken together, few tourists revealed that technology adaptations by the travel agencies in Ghana were below standard. Averagely, responses prove that travel and tour operators are doing well with modern technologies like an active website and online payment systems.

Impacts of Technology on Travel and Tour Operations in Ghana

The travel industry as one of the service industries is making a formidable impact out of technology (Januszewska et al., 2015). The tourism industry, specifically the travel industry of Ghana has attested to the fact that technology is making a great impact in their field. It has also provided them with a harmonious interactional opportunity with their customers, building an electrifying relationship with them. These positive impacts aided in the understanding of the reasons why these travel and tour operators in Ghana have inculcated technology in their operations.

The study tried to inquire and understand the very common impacts of using modern technologies. The travel businesses revealed that the main reason for their continued usage of modern technologies is owing to a high-profit margin they obtain. This was not surprising because now, both current and prospective customers can see, hear, locate and reach out to these travel operators through the internet, smartphones, websites, digitalized billboards, social media and other online platforms. The study also identified that due to travel operators' adaptation of technology, there was a continuous increase in patronage level as indicated by most of the firms. They explained that advanced technologies have increased the patronage level for their services. This is because they now attract a wider market than previously, especially from the international lands.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study focused on the rate of technology usage by 33 travel agencies in four administrative regions of Ghana. The study aimed to identify and provide evidence-based confirmation from travel agencies in Ghana concerning technology integration in their business, to conceptualize the level of technology interference in their operations. The study identified that there is a high rate of technology usage in Ghana's travel industry. Although there is some use of these technologies, it is not on par with developed countries that offer services to a larger market. There is obviously a small market size and coverage due to the relatively small population size compared to countries in Europe like Italy, which receives millions of tourists from all over Europe. Nonetheless, the study agrees with the assertion made by Onyije & Opara (2013) and Aghaei et al. (2012) that there is a need for modern technology adaptation in developing countries subject to a change in the business model of the country's travel industry. Technology keeps growing, and there is a need to embrace modern technologies due to the high pace of continual change.

Considering this, the study suggests the need for intensive use of sophisticated technologies by the travel and tour operators in developing countries especially, Ghana including the various 33 travel and tour firms featured in the study. Specifically, they are encouraged to embed technologies such as a credible online payment system, contactless credit card readers, customized company Apps, automated communication software, BigData and 24-hour feedback platforms, GPS devices, active social media handles and online travel-support software like Lemax, TravelPerk, Travelworks, ResVoyage to create, sell and operate their trips.

Additionally, travel agencies should also employ advanced marketing research tools such as search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine advertisement (SEA) to reach a wider market and make their services and businesses available to them. They can use advertisement tools such as Google AdWords, Bing Ads, and Yandex to optimise their availability on search engine search results via meta tags, page views (PV), pop-up ads, pop-under ads, splash screens, spot leasing, and so on, to increase traffic on their company websites and boost marketing sales, so that they can redesign and redevelop their websites to modern standards as their businesses grow. This will help them expose themselves both locally and internationally to make their operation meet international standards. Subsequently, the utilisation of these technologies will contribute to the flexibility, effectiveness, and efficiency of their operations, as well as easy communication, easy accessibility, high publicity, low operation costs, high sales, and opportunities to create alliances and partnerships with top suppliers like airline companies.

LIMITATION

The only challenge faced by this study was with the answering of questionnaires, as most tourists were busy participating in their holiday activities, which took a number of days to complete the data collection activities.

Suggestions to future researchers

The study has thoroughly discussed and confirmed knowledge about technology in the travel business of developing countries. The study used evidence-based data to reveal the level of technology in the travel industry of West Africa specifically, Ghana with their associated impacts. It is on this note that the study suggests to future researchers who will focus on this region or related topics in a different country to factor specific impacts to specific technology usage. Furthermore, similar research could be conducted in various tourism environments or destinations (countries) to provide more information on modern technology usage.

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The Influence of Attitude Towards the Tourist Mode Choice: an Investigation in Germany Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior

Nicole Bünstorf [1]

ABSTRACT

Mobility and tourism belong together, as without a change of location there is no vacation. However, tourism causes around 1 billion tons of anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions, of which about 40% are due to air travel and additional 32% are due to car traffic. In view of this contribution to climate change, it seems necessary to deal with ways of ecological tourism mobility. An explanatory model based on the theory of planned behavior is used to investigate the influence of attitudes on the tourist mode choice. An empirical study with n=738 identified important starting points for the design of recommendations for action through multiple linear regression.

Keywords: tourist mobility, mode choice, attitude, theory of planned behavior, regression

INTRODUCTION

"Tourism destroys what it is looking for, by finding it!" (Enzensberger 1958). Even though this quote is over 60 years old, it is more relevant today than ever. The reason for this is one of the basics of travel, namely the spatial mobility, which contributes significantly to climate change. In total, every German is the source of about 9.6 tons of carbon dioxide produced every year, almost twice as much as the international average of 4.8 tons per capita. The transport sector is responsible for approximately 18 percent of emissions in Germany (cf. Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety 2018, 8 f.). Tourist trips are largely based on means of transport, which have a particularly strong impact on the environment and resources and constitute a significant part of the ecological consequences of transport (cf. Høyer 2000, pp. 147-150). Expressed in figures: Tourism causes about 5% of anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions, of which about 75% are due to tourism transport (cf. UNWTO 2008; Scott et al. 2010, p. 396; Gössling and Peeters 2015, p. 642; Federal Environment Agency 2022).

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Irrespective of whether a trip is close by or far away, mobility is a basic requirement for holiday trips. Mobility does not only play a role in the accessibility of the holiday destination. Travelers also move around at their holiday destination and choose between mobility alternatives. According to Hänsch (2012), tourism causes a significant amount of traffic and influences traffic development. In addition, the transport system has the ability to influence travel behavior and to shape the type of tourist flows by means of quality standards of transport services (cf. Hänsch 2012, 22 f.).

For this reason, special attention is paid to the mode choice of tourist transport. Hergesell and Dickinger even refer to this as a "critical element in holiday decision-making" (Hergesell and Dickinger 2013, p. 596), since the mode choice also influences other components of the trip and their impact on the environment. In this paper, the influence of attitudes on the mode choice is investigated, based on the theory of planned behavior, which is explained in more detail below. The empirical study was conducted in Germany with a final sample of n=738. The article first gives a theoretical overview of the research on tourist mode choice. To investigate the topic, an empirical study was carried out to clarify the influence of attitude on the mode choice. Based on the results of the study, recommendations for a more sustainable mode choice in tourism are given.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For a long period of time, the mode choice was not seen as a critical aspect of the tourism decision-making process (cf. van Middelkoop et al. 2003, 75 f.). It was recognized just over a decade ago that most of the increase in passenger transport was due to leisure and holiday travel (cf. Kagermeier 2007, p. 259). According to Kagermeier (2007), in connection with the sustainability debate, approaches were then sought to stop motorized traffic from growing or to make it as environmentally friendly as possible (cf. Fastenmeier et al. 2004, p. 153; Gronau 2005, p. 26; Kagermeier 2007, p. 259).

Transport research examined transport modalities for a large number of travel purposes, but leisure travel and the tourist mode choice have so far only been considered rudimentarily. A much larger focus has been given to study commuting to work, mainly because of its higher economic significance and the clearer capacity bottlenecks (cf. Lanzendorf 2001, p. 38).

The role of socio-demographic factors such as income, age or the presence of children in the household for the mode choice mode has been investigated in many cases, e.g. in future studies (cf. Opaschowski 2013), in the travel analysis or in supplementary studies to the travel analysis (cf. Lohmann and Aderhold 2009; Sonntag et al. 2022), in state publications (cf. Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy 2017), in publications by associations (cf. Deutscher Tourismusverband e. V. 2014), but also in numerous tourism-scientific research contributions (cf. Böhler et al. 2006; Petermann et al. 2006; Lohmann 2007; Grimm et al. 2010; Grimm and Schmücker 2015; Gross and Grimm 2018).

Due to the complexity of 'travel' and 'mobility', tourism studies mostly focus on certain regions (cf. Kitamura et al. 1997; Dill and Weinstein 2007; Brand and Boardman 2008; Cohen and Higham 2011; Filimonau et al. 2014 ; Pereira et al. 2017; Luo et al. 2018), travel motives (cf. Meric and Hunt 1998; Juric et al. 2002; Prideaux and Carson 2011; Eugenio-Martin and Inchausti-Sintes 2016), travel distances (cf. Limtanakool et 2006a; Dolnicar et al. 2010; Filimonau et al. 2014; Moeckel et al. 2015), modes of transport (cf. Gärling et al. 1998; Becken 2002, 2007; Bieger et al. 2007; Gärling and Schuitema 2007; Goodwin 2007; Chang and Lai 2009; Gössling et al 2009; Nordlund and Westin 2013) or travellers, e.g. students (cf. Bamberg and Schmidt 2003; Hsiao and Yang 2010) or seniors (cf. Romsa and Blenman 1989; Föbker et al. 2003; Scheiner 2005).

The everyday choice of transport is a research field that has been examined in a differentiated manner, while less importance is attached to the tourist mode choice. In times of climate change, however, it is important to save carbon dioxide in all areas, why the tourist use of transport should move further into focus.

Theoretical framework of the study

The research field of mode choice affects a variety of sciences. Whether in geography and transport science, economics, ecology, sociology, psychology or tourism science, various studies from a wide range of disciplines examine topics relating to the mode choice. The underlying theoretical approaches are similarly diverse.

Since the 1950's, aggregated models determined the research, and later disaggregated behavioral approaches received focus. In the following decades, economic, sociological and psychological researches developed. In the specific case of the tourist mode of transport, studies are based, among other things, on the stated preference theory (cf. Hensher 1994), the random utility theory (cf. Ben-Akiva and Lerman 1985), the rational decision theory (cf. Davidov 2004) or the approach of mobility and lifestyles (cf. Anable 2005; Gronau 2005; Barr and Prillwitz 2012). But also psychologically oriented approaches such as attitude research (cf. Liebl 1978; Gärling et al. 1998), the theory of planned behavior (cf. Fujii and Gärling 2003; Peng et al. 2014) or the norm-activation model (cf. Hunecke et al 2001; Klöckner and Matthies 2004) enriched the research on tourist mode choice. In the following, the focus is on the influence of attitudes on the mode choice, examined by means of the theory of planned behavior, which Gronau (2014) also evaluates as the starting point for analyzes and research of travel behavior (cf. Gronau 2014, p. 170).

Theory of planned behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is one of the most commonly used socio-psychological theories to predict and explain behavior (cf. Ajzen 1991, p. 189; Bamberg and Schmidt 1999, p. 26; Groot and Steg 2007; Gardner and Abraham 2010, p. 832; Forward 2014; Stark and Hössinger 2015; Pan and Truong 2018; Si et al. 2020). According to Bamberg and Bien

(1995), the TPB describes central cognitive processes on which observable behavior is based (cf. Bamberg and Bien 1995, p. 110). According to the rational action theory, decisions are made as a result of systematic processing of important behavioral consequences (cf. Bamberg and Schmidt 1999, p. 24).

The core of the theory states, that the more a certain behavior of a person becomes likely, the stronger is the intention of the person to carry out this behavior (cf. Stark and Hössinger 2015, p. 181 f.). Figure 1 shows the basic model of TPB and makes it clear that behavior is directly determined by intention and perceived behavioral control. In addition, the intention is influenced by the attitude towards the behavior, the subjective norm and the perceived behavior control (cf. Ajzen 1988, p. 132 f.).

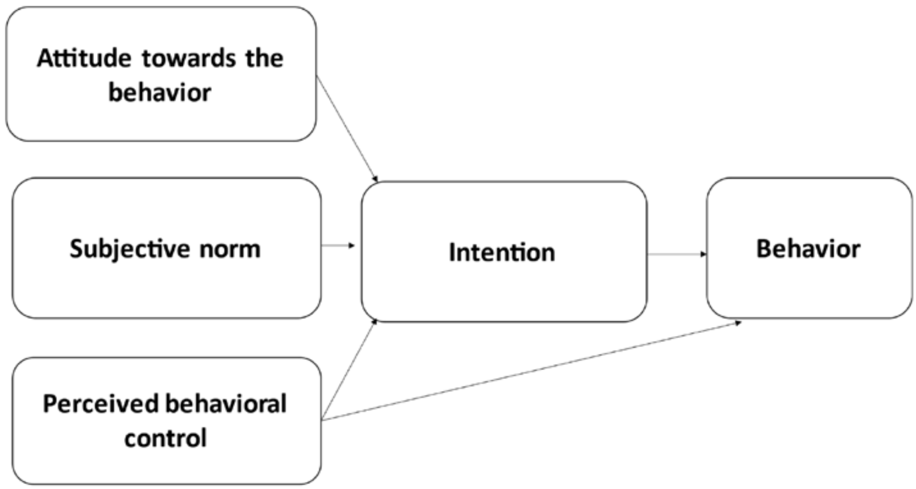

Figure 1: Theory of Planned Behavior, based on (Ajzen 1991, p. 182)

Intention is the conscious will to use mental or physical energy and resources to carry out a behavior (cf. Bamberg and Schmidt 1999, p. 25). Attitude towards behavior is a positive or negative subjective evaluation of the behavior by the individual. The score consists of factors that link the desired behavior to a particular outcome and the individual's perceived likelihood of that occurring outcome. This study focusses on the effect of attitude towards the behavior to explain the mode choice.

The subjective norm is understood as the expectation pressure that the individual experiences from significant third parties that a particular behavior should or should not be performed. The third influencing variable, perceived behavioral control, refers to the individual's subjective assessment of how easy or difficult it is to implement a behavior in reality. Experiences already made are reflected in this influencing factor as well as obstacles to be expected in this regard. According to Ajzen (1991), locus of control is the basis of perceived behavioral control. On the one hand, the locus of control is relevant in themselves. On the other hand, beliefs are taken into account that show, which available resources (e.g. knowledge, time or money) can make it easier or more difficult for the individual to carry out a behavior (cf. Ajzen 1991, p. 196-198).

Applicability of the theory of planned behavior to study mode choice

According to the TPB, if everyday behavior is carried out, the complex processing procedure is not repeated every time. Cognitions, once acquired, are stored in memory. With the everyday mode choice as a routine action, the individual will not go through all processing, but will activate stored results. In the case of new behaviors, on the other hand, attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control are formed again, stored in memory and, if necessary, automatically activated later or changed through learning processes, new experiences or communication with the social environment (cf. Bamberg and Schmidt 1999, p. 27). Numerous authors have already used the TPB to investigate traffic behavior (cf. Heath and Gifford 2002; Fujii and Gärling 2003; Steg 2005; Gatersleben and Uzzell 2007; Carrus et al. 2008; Seebauer 2011; Egbue and Long 2012; Peng et al 2014). According to Bamberg and Schmidt (1999), the TPB is particularly suitable for investigating the influencing factors (and their weighting) of the mode choice in the context of a specific purpose, e.g. holiday mobility, or of a specific subgroup like young people (cf. Bamberg and Schmidt 1999, p. 29).

In addition, the TPB is suitable for examining practical intervention measures, since, according to the theory, behavioral changes are based on the change in subjectively perceived behavioral consequences. However, interventions can only have an effect on behavior if the behavioral, normative and control beliefs associated with the performance of a behavior are changed in the desired direction. (cf. Bamberg and Schmidt 1999, p. 27 f.).

Despite its efficiency, versatility and manageable number of model parameters that speak for its use, there are also criticisms of the theory of planned behavior. This primarily concerns the operationalization of the model components, the multidimensionality of the factors and the expansion to include additional influencing factors. In addition, the low reliability of the factors is criticized because they are only collected with a few questions. In particular, the reliability of the perceived behavioral control is limited by the fact that both external and internal barriers are recorded at the same time (cf. Seebauer 2011, p. 12).

Focusing on behavioral intentions rather than actual behavior has also been criticized. Franzen (1995) notes that psychological and motivational factors can limit the translation of intentions into behavior (cf. Franzen 1995, p. 135). However, the TPB represents an established action theory that simply and conclusively shows how behavioral decisions are made.

METHODOLOGY AND EMPIRICAL STUDY

An individual environmentally-friendly transport behavior results when environmentally friendly means of transport have positive connotations for the individual, if there is a social environment that positively sanctions environmentally friendly behavior, and when appropriate opportunities are available to enforce these behavioral intentions (cf. Bittlingmayer and Steding 2004, p. 132). The explanatory power of the individual influencing variables with regard to behavior can vary depending on the context. Specific empirical tests are therefore necessary for each individual case (cf. Ajzen 1991, p. 188). This study focuses on the factors influencing the attitude towards the tourist mode choice. Therefore, the TPB offers itself an investigation basis for this research goal.

According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), the methodological approach to the application of the TPB initially provides for the implementation a preliminary study. This is used to collect the significant behavioral, normative and control beliefs on which the behavior is based in a sample representative of the target population (cf. Fishbein and Ajzen 1975; Bamberg and Schmidt 1999, p. 28; Bamberg et al. 2012). Based on the beliefs determined in the preliminary study, the next step is to use a standardized questionnaire to measure the individual constructs of the TPB. From the information obtained, intervention measures can be designed that aim to change significant beliefs (cf. Bamberg and Schmidt 1999, p. 28). Figure 2 shows the integrated explanatory model. It is assumed that the independent variables have an indirect influence on the actual behavior via the intention to behave. According to Ajzen (1991), only the perceived behavioral control also has a direct effect on the actual behavior.

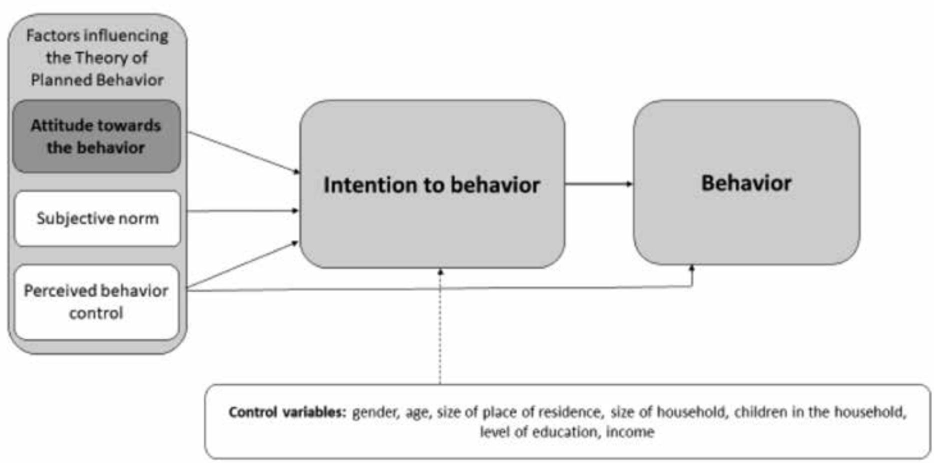

Figure 2: Explanatory model based on the TPB, based on (Ajzen 1991, p. 182)

This study focusses on the explanatory construct of attitude, which expresses the positive or negative attitude of an individual with regard to the intention of behavior and behavior itself (cf. Ajzen 1991, p. 188). The attitude does not influence the behavior directly, but indirectly via the intention to behave (cf. Bamberg and Möser 2007; Antimova et al. 2012, p. 10).

According to Ajzen (2002), various standard scales can be used to directly measure attitudes, e.g. the Likert or Thurstone scale, but he still recommends using the semantic differential. First, according to Ajzen (2002), a set of bipolar adjectives should be selected from the literature. By means of item correlation or reliability analysis, a smaller sub-set is to be selected, which is finally used. It should be noted that in addition to instrumental adjectives, those that reflect the quality of experience are also used. Ajzen (2002) does not specify the number of adjectives to be selected for the semantic differential (cf. Ajzen 2002, p. 5). In studies that use the semantic differential to measure attitude, the number varies between seven (Castanier et al. 2013, p. 157) and eight (Armitage and Conner 1999, p. 39; Witzke 2016, p .55).

Finally, the overall attitude value results from the summation of the response values of the adjective pairs, with high values expressing a positive attitude towards the behavior and low values expressing a negative attitude. To determine the adjective pairs for the main study of this work, the results of literature and preliminary studies were used. These 10 most significant adjectives were selected (see Table 1) and supplemented by the respective counterpart for the semantic differential:

Table 1: Adjective pairs for semantic differential measuring attitude towards the behavior

Safer	More unsecure
Less stressful	More stressful
Easier	More complicated
More reliable	Less reliable
More flexible	More inflexible
More convenient	More inconvenient
More practical regarding luggage/passenger transport	Less practical regarding luggage/passenger transport
Cheaper	More expensive
More user friendly	Less user friendly
Faster	Slower

In addition to measuring attitude based on the semantic differential, the questionnaire in the main study added 4 additional indicators on the general attitude towards sustainable vacations and eco-labels and, like the semantic differential, they were to be rated on a 7-point bipolar scale (-3 to +3). The general attitude towards ecologically compatible holidays was operationalized based on the travel analysis (cf. Guenther et al. 2014, p. 5). Furthermore, one item should record the existence of a higher willingness to pay for ecological offers in the holiday context (cf. Fairweather et al. 2005, p. 93; Mehmetoglu 2010, p. 184; Butzmann 2017, p. 139). The attitude towards sustainable mobility at the holiday destination was based on the study by Kreilkamp et al. (2017) as well as the importance of sustainability seals in tourism (cf. Kreilkamp et al. 2017, pp. 60-65).

The internal consistency of the semantic differential and the additional questions were checked using a reliability analysis and resulted in a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.893. Weise (1975) speaks of average values with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.8 to 0.9 and high values with reliabilities of more than 0.9 and therefore recommends a reliability of at least 0.8 (cf. Weise 1975, p. 219). Other authors accept values greater than 0.7 if there is a sufficient number of items (cf. Cortina 1993, p. 102; Bland and Altman 1997, p. 572).

Supplementary to the main model constructs, sociodemographic criteria such as age, gender, residence size, level of education, income, household size and the presence of children in the household were also integrated into the explanatory model as control variables.

Influencing the intention to choose a more environmentally conscious mode of transport in tourism is the main focus of the model. Due to the large number of alternative modes of transport, based on the work of Nordlund & Westin (2013) and Franzen (1998), only a comparison of the car as more environmentally harmful and the train as more environmentally friendly should be made (cf. Franzen 1998, p. 54; Nordlund and Westin 2013; Federal Ministry of Transport 2016, p. 52). Similarly, De Groot & Steg (2007) classify the use of public transport as environmentally friendly behavior due to the lower environmental impact compared to car use (cf. DeGroot and Steg 2007, p. 1819). Various studies concerning the carbon footprint in transport and tourism have confirmed that, in addition to airplanes, cars are also environmentally harmful modes of transport, while trains and buses are more carbon dioxide efficient (cf. Böhler et al. 2006, p. 664; Budeanu 2007, p 500; Filimonau et al 2014, p 634; Lenzen et al 2018; Luo et al 2018). In addition to carbon dioxide, the various means of transport also cause other emissions that are harmful to the climate and the environment. Nevertheless, the pure consideration of the carbon dioxide footprint can be used to assess the environmental impact. Figure 3 also shows that trains are the least carbon dioxide-intensive mean of transport (cf. Filimonau et al. 2014, p. 634).

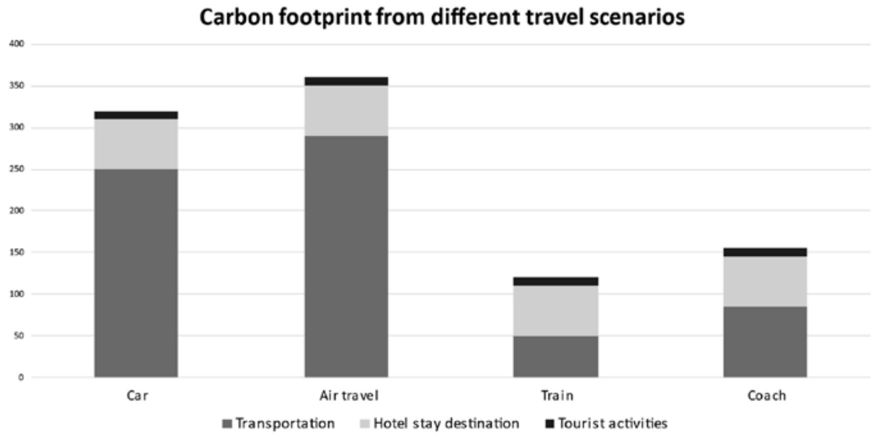

Figure 3: Carbon footprint, different scenarios, based on (Filimonau et al. 2014, p. 634)

To examine the data collected through quantitative research, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed to predict the dependent variable of intention to behave. A causal dependency of a dependent variable (intention to use the train instead of one's own car) from several independent variables like the focused attitude towards the behavior (influencing factors) is considered (cf. Backhaus et al. 2018, p. 15). The quantitative online survey using a standardized guide took place in October 2018. In compliance with the quality criteria for the measuring instrument, a partial survey was carried out from the 16 to 80-years-old German population. The quota method was selected for the sampling. The random sample was selected from the population of the 16 to 80-years-old German population based on age groups. There are several ways to determine the sample size. Based on the population of 66,422,115 people, a confidence interval of 95% and an error margin of 5%, the sample size is calculated using the following formula (cf. Surveymonkey 2020).

$$\text{sample size} = \frac{\frac{z^2 * p(1-p)}{e^2}}{1 + \left(\frac{z^2 * p(1-p)}{e^2 N}\right)}$$

According to the calculation, the minimum sample size is n=385. In order to increase the accuracy of the estimation, the aim for this study was to double the minimum size, i.e. n=770 respondents. After data cleansing, the final sample was n=738.

RESULTS

The result of the regression calculation states that around 71% of the total variance is explained by the model, while 29% remains unexplained. Consequently, around 71% of the variance of the intention to use the train instead of one's own car to travel on vacation is determined by the formulated model, which is a very satisfactory value. F-tests were also used to determine that the model itself was statistically significant (cf. Urban and Mayerl 2018, p. 165).

Figure 4 shows the results of the regression calculation for the individual constructs of the explanatory model.

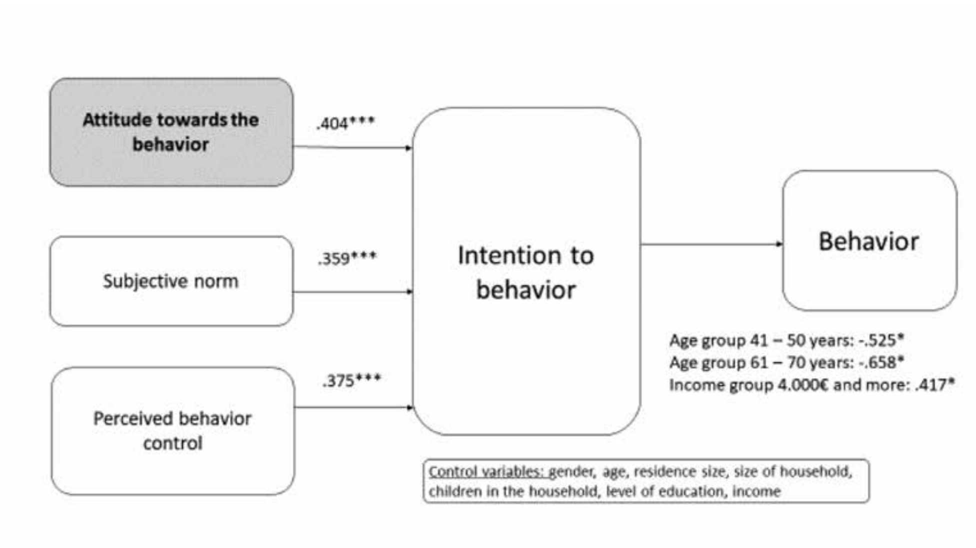

Figure 4: Overview of regression model and regression results

A regression coefficient of 0.401 was determined for the focused **attitude construct**. If the value of the attitude increases by one empirical unit, an increase in the intention to use the train instead of one's own car can be expected by 0.401 scale points. For the construct of the subjective norm, the regression coefficient is 0.359. If the value of the subjective norm increases by one empirical unit, an increase in intention by 0.359 scale points can be expected. The calculated regression coefficient for perceived behavioral control is 0.375. Accordingly, an increase in the intention to use the train instead of one's own car by 0.375 scale points can be expected if the perceived behavioral control increases by one empirical unit. With calculated regression coefficients of >0.35, the basic constructs of the TPB have a clear leverage effect on the intention to behave and are also highly significant, which is why they must be taken into account in the recommendations for action.

In addition to the basic constructs, sociodemographic control variables were integrated into the regression calculation, which resulted in a significance for the variables age and income. More specifically, there are significant results for the 41 to 50 years old and the 61 to 70 years old. However, the regression coefficients are negative in relation to the reference group of 16 to 20 years old. For the 41 to 50 years old the coefficient was -0.523 and for the 61 to 70 years old a coefficient of -0.658. These results mean that if the value for the 41 to 50 years old age group increases by one empirical unit in relation to the 16 to 20 years old age group, the intention to use the train instead of driving one's own car to go on vacation falls by 0.523 scale points. If the value for the 61 to 70 years old age group increases, the intention even falls by 0.658 scale points.

In addition to age, the regression calculation also showed significance for the income variable. The income group of people with a monthly net household income of more than 4,000 euros shows a regression coefficient of 0.417 in relation to the reference group of people with a monthly net household income of less than 1,000 euros. With an increase in the value for this income group, the intention to use the train instead of one's own car increases by 0.417 scale points. Overall, this income group must therefore be taken into account when designing the recommendations for action, since a significant leverage effect on the intention is to be expected.

Since all basic constructs in the context of mode choice have a significant influence on the variable of behavioral intention to be explained, the applicability of the theory of planned behavior according to Ajzen (1991) for the subject of tourist mode choice can be regarded as confirmed. Among the sociodemographic factors integrated as control variables, only the age variable and income show a significant influence. In a follow-up study, it would therefore be advisable to examine these factors more closely and, if necessary, to examine a moderating effect of age and income.

ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to operationalize the central model construct of the attitude towards the behavior, the influencing factors on the choice of tourist transport and their importance were determined within the framework of the literature-based as well as the qualitative and quantitative preliminary studies. Based on these results and the results of the regression calculation, appropriate recommendations for action should now be formulated.

The preliminary studies identified the following as the most important factors influencing the choice of tourist transport mode: safety, freedom from stress, easy accessibility, flexibility, convenience, user-friendliness, reliability, speed, price, transport capacity and environmental friendliness.

While the preliminary study asked about the importance of the factors influencing the tourist mode choice in general, the main study specified a comparison between using the train and using one's own car to travel. It turned out that the train was rated more positively than one's own car in terms of safety, environmental friendliness and user-friendliness. The car, on the other hand, is considered to be significantly cheaper, faster, more comfortable, more flexible, more suitable for luggage transport and easier to reach than the train. The recommendations for action should focus on these last-mentioned influencing factors in particular.

To determine the importance of the central factors influencing the tourist mode choice, the main study also asked about the general attitude towards sustainable holidays and eco-labels. The results showed a positive attitude towards ecologically compatible holidays, while the importance of eco-labels was rated as low. The empirical study also revealed a clearly positive attitude towards the sustainable design of the trip, provided that mobility at the holiday destination was ensured, for example, you do not need your own car at the holiday destination. Therefore, when formulating the recommendations for action, local mobility should be explicitly addressed.

In 2018, on average only 5% of travelers in Germany used the train to go on vacation. Although 14% of travelers chose the train for domestic travel, only 2% traveled abroad by train (cf. Sonntag et al. 2019, p. 4). So what can be done to encourage non-users to travel by train? Are further product improvements necessary or is there just a lack of special marketing? The empirical study showed that the train was rated as more expensive, slower, less comfortable, less flexible, less suitable for luggage transport and more complicated in terms of reaching destinations than private cars. However, since the attitude construct in the regression calculation with a regression coefficient of b=0.401 can exert a significant leverage effect on the intention to choose the train instead of one's own car, it is important to start at here in order to increase the attractiveness of public transport.

The flexibility of public transport is usually rated negatively compared to the car and therefore represents an important starting point for increasing the attractiveness of buses and trains (cf. Polzin et al. 2007; Noblet et al. 2014, p. 71). The flexibility of public transport can be raised by increasing the frequency of departures. If more people use public transport, it is also worth increasing the frequency (cf. Åkerman and Höjer 2006; Eriksson et al. 2010, p. 339 f.). This is favorable not only from a socially acceptable point of view, since all people and not only tourists benefit. This is also attractive from an economic point of view, since public transport offers more capacity at lower marginal costs. In addition, the provision of additional bus or train capacity is far cheaper than building new roads or bridges. Especially when the local population also benefits from the measures, it increases local acceptance, utilization and synergy effects with the local economy (cf. Wallergraber 2014, p. 18).

Another starting point for improvements relates to fare transparency. The empirical study determined a negative assessment of the fare for the train compared to one's own car. In their study on measures to reduce car use, Eriksson et al. (2010) advocate a reduction in user charges for public transport (cf. Eriksson et al. 2010, p. 339). With the implementation of the climate protection program 2030, which includes, for example, the reduction of the sales tax rate for tickets in long-distance rail transport from 19 to 7% since January 1st, 2020, the German federal government has taken an important step towards this (Federal Government 2019). According to Deutsche Bahn, this will reduce ticket prices for routes longer than 51 km by around 10 percent (Deutsche Bahn AG 2019).

The perception of public transport fares as more expensive compared to using their own car is often due to the fact that the car user only perceives the direct variable costs such as fuel costs, parking fees and any road user fees. These so-called out-of-pocket costs are paid immediately and therefore do not appear directly in the wallet (cf. Fujii and Kitamura 2003; Sommer and Hunsicker 2009, p. 367). Most people ignore the fact that a private car also causes considerable fixed costs, which include the loss in value, vehicle tax and insurance premiums as well as the costs of the main inspection and emissions test. On average, the fixed costs make up more than 60% of the total costs (cf. Baum et al. 2012, p. 69). Sommer and Hunsicker (2009) assume significantly higher costs in their forecast for the cost development of motorized private transport and public transport up to 2030. According to their mobility cost calculation, the out-of-pocket costs per kilometer in motorized private transport alone will increase in real terms by around 40 to 60% by 2030 (cf. Sommer and Hunsicker 2009, p. 374).

In addition to the costs, also the travel time when using public transport is negatively rated compared to using a car. One way to make train or bus trips more attractive is to use the travel time as experience time. As part of the *Your Time* campaign, Deutsche Bahn collected activities that can be done when someone else is driving, such as working, studying, playing, reading, meeting people, and eating. In addition, the WLAN that can be used by all passengers in buses and ICE trains as well as around 120 train stations throughout Germany, enables more digital time. Since 2019, the IC trains have also been equipped with a WiFi hotspot. In regional and local transport, however, WLAN is WiFi is only available as part of a trial program (cf. Scheibler 2019). Lufthansa offers one way of using the travel time with its *Virtual Reality app*. During the flight, the passenger can take a virtual look around the destination (cf. Lufthansa AG 2018). To make train and bus use more attractive, a similar virtual reality app could not only provide travelers with virtual information about the destination, but also report on interesting places along the route, point out current events and, if necessary, forward them directly to booking options.

DISCUSSION

For a generalization of the findings from this empirical study, various limitations must be considered. The greatest limitation of this work can be seen in the focus on the comparison between the use of trains and cars. Due to the large number of possible means of transport, it was not possible to offer the respondents all alternative options to choose from. Just the inclusion of another transport alternative, such as the airplane, would have doubled the length of the questionnaire, since all constructs of the research model would also have to be examined with regard to a further alternative mode of transport. The selection of the train as an example of a more environmentally friendly means of transport and the car as an example of a mode of transport that is more harmful to the environment appeared to be expedient for this study, but this cannot represent a real mode choice. The selectivity in the selection or restriction of the transport alternatives could be mitigated by follow-up studies that also include other modes such as airplanes, buses or bicycles.

Nevertheless, the data analysis of the underlying sample together with the theoretical knowledge gained offers a good opportunity to obtain interesting results in relation to the research questions. In addition, a separate and more detailed consideration of the mobility needs of travelers at the holiday destination could provide important insights into how to specifically influence the mode choice.

An important addition is a longer-term observation of the actual travel behavior and thus the actual future mode choice. This would enable a comparison between the intention to use an environmentally friendly mode of transport and the actual mode choice and provide even more targeted starting points for influencing the mode choice. To do this, however, it would be necessary to carry out a longitudinal study at least two different points in time with exactly the same sample. Such an investigation should take place on the basis of a smaller sample using qualitative investigation methods. However, the use of an external panel, as used in this empirical study, is not suitable for such a longitudinal study.

Finally, an extension of the examination method, e.g. to conduct in-depth interviews, helps to determine the underlying psychological and personal reasons for a particular mode choice. More precise information about the existing state of knowledge on the environmental consequences of holiday mobility could be just as useful as detailed assessments of different mobility alternatives, for example using conjoint analysis. The knowledge of the travelers about the offers of train, bus and other forms of transport should be asked in a further study.

CONCLUSION

"There is no tourism without travel" (Høyer 2000, p. 147) and how complex this 'travel' is in comparison to everyday mobility was shown, as well as the variety of factors that influence the tourist mobility. Only when all relevant factors are considered the mode choice can be steered in the desired direction. And there is no alternative to this influence on tourist mobility, especially with regard to the climate-damaging emissions of tourist traffic.

There are already alternative modes of transport that make it possible to travel in a comparatively ecologically friendly way. In addition, many destinations already offer options for environmentally friendly mobility at the holiday destination, e.g. with guest cards or the free use of public transport. If you take a look into the future, mobility will change fundamentally.

It will be faster, quieter, with fewer emissions, but it will not decrease. Travelers themselves are therefore called upon to find out more about the various modes of transport before they travel, to be open to new modes and to give more weight to their own contribution to climate change. This is the only way that the basis for tourism, the intact natural environment, can be preserved for future generations.

The importance of the attitude towards sustainable behavior in relation to the mode choice was confirmed by the explanatory model. However, the examined attitude components did not show any fundamental preference for sustainable modes of transport. Aspects such as saving time or flexibility still speak in favor of the use of climate-damaging means of transport. For the future, therefore, the existing advantages of sustainable means of transport, which were also confirmed by this study, should be brought more into focus. A starting point for future studies would be to investigate a change in actual behavior based on focused marketing of the advantages of sustainable means of transport.

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Okomu National Park: Ecotourism Prowess and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the ecotourism prowess (EP) of Okomu National Park (ONP) and identified challenges associated with tourism in the park. Three key stakeholders of ecotourism namely; host community, tourist, and park staff were involved in the study. The stakeholders rated ONP moderate in majority of EP parameters with the exceptions of; poor state of facilities such as internet, postal service and hospital, and poor status of swimming pool in Arakhwan Base Camp. Conclusively; the study established that; despite the fair EP status of ONP, ecotourism still faces a lot of challenges, therefore, National Park Service should improve ecotourism at ONP by ameliorating or where possible remove these challenges by seeking fund and other supports from government, individuals, local and international conservation-oriented organizations. Re-orientation of the host communities about the significance of ONP is also of paramount importance.

Keywords: National Park, Recreation, Ecotourism, Okomu National Park, Ecotourism Prowess

INTRODUCTION

The term ecotourism was coined by Hector Ceballos - Lascuràin in 1983, and was initially used to describe nature - based travel to relatively undisturbed areas with an emphasis on education (Cater, 1994). Ecotourism is more than simply visiting natural attractions or natural places; it's about doing so in a responsible and sustainable manner (Katherine, 2022). The term itself refers to traveling to natural areas with a focus on environmental conservation. The goal is to educate tourists about conservation efforts while offering them the chance to explore nature. Ecotourism has benefited destinations like Madagascar, Ecuador, Kenya, and Costa Rica, and has helped provide economic growth in some of the world's most impoverished communities. The global ecotourism market produced $92.2 billion in 2019 and is forecasted to generate about $103.8 billion by 2027 (Katherine, 2022). It is an effective tool

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for environmental conservation. It is a community based tourism which enables local people to augment their livelihoods security through employment in ecotourism-related businesses, it involves empowering the community economically, socially and politically (Das and Chatterjee, 2015), its clear and widely promoted principles include environmental conservation and education, cultural preservation, experience and economic benefits (Cobbinah, 2015). Ecotourism seeks to; minimize environmental impact; minimize impact on host community's culture, maximise respect for host cultures; maximize economic benefits to the host communities' grassroots; and maximise recreational satisfaction for participating tourists (Higham, 2011). Ecotourism, as an alternative tourism focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, its landscape, flora, fauna and their habitats, as well as cultural artifacts from the locality (Tugba, 2013). Carrascosa – Lopes *et. al*. (2014) submitted that ecotourism must retain its essence which is its model of sustainability, preserving ecosystems and satisfying local people by improving their living conditions. Ecotourism should be seen in direct relation to nature conservation (protected areas), with preservation of the authentic and involving local communities in stages of the process. Development process is a lengthy process, which requires a sustained effort from all those involved but can bring major benefits in the long term, contribute directly to the creation of sustainable existing target area (Roxana, 2012). Ecotourism supports local communities economically by providing employment, improves their quality of life and focuses on environmental conservation. Local ownership is high in ecotourism. Ecotourism negates the claims that it is simply a part of the "neoliberal conservation toolkit" that cannot help but exacerbate the very inequalities it purports to address (Hunt *et. al*., 2015). According to Munyaradzi and Tapiwa (2012), ecotourism is a form of tourism that is expected to boost biodiversity conservation and socio - economic development in the rural communities of developing economies, like those of many African countries. Developing countries have accepted the important roles ecotourism plays in alleviating poverty and as a meaningful economic activity that contributes to Gross Domestic Products (GDP) and foreign earnings critical for balance of payments (Okech, 2011). In line with this understanding, the developing economies have embraced and adopted ecotourism as a key development strategy with the potential to mostly benefit local disadvantaged and marginalized communities living near or around the protected areas. One of the most significant destinations for ecotourism is national park or a protected area.

A national park is an area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means (IUCN 1994). A national park is an area managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation. It is a natural area of land and/or sea designated to; protect the ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for present and future generations, exclude exploitation or occupation inimical to the purposes of designation of the area, and provide a foundation for spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities, all of which must be environmentally and culturally compatible. Parks and protected areas are unique public resources that serve a multitude of societal needs. Historically, parks and protected areas were created primarily to conserve valued species and landscapes, and conservation continues to be a core mission of many parks around the world (Watson, Dudley, Segan,

& Hockings, 2014). Parks also serve as reservoirs of ecosystem services (Palomo, Martín-López, Potschin, Haines-Young, & Montes, 2013; Postel & Thompson , 2005; Soares-Filho *et. al*., 2010). National parks and related forms of protected areas have been the most important tool of nature conservation since the late nineteenth century. Ever since the United States invented the label of a 'national park' to preserve the natural wonders of Yellowstone in 1872, the idea of confining 'nature' to a 'park' and assigning it the status of a national heritage has been transferred to a wide and diverse range of political, social and ecological settings (Bernhard *et. al*., 2012).

The establishment of a network of National Parks in Nigeria is a very recent development. The concept of National Parks was first introduced in 1979 when Kainji Lake National Park was established as the nation's premier National Park. Today, there are seven National Parks which span across the various ecological zones of Nigeria. These parks are some of the few remaining natural ecosystems capable of enhancing ecological processes and life support systems. Each of them has its own unique attributes in terms of biophysical and anthropogenic resources to offer to visitors. They cover a total land area of approximately 20,156 sq. km, i.e. about three percent (3%) of the country total land area (932,768 km^2). McNeely *et. al*. (1992) listed the factors for determining ecotourism prowess (EP) of a destination to include; closeness to international airport, closeness to other major tourist centres, standards of food and accommodation on offer, availability of cultural interest, accessibility of the park, availability of supporting infrastructures (internet, telecommunication, hospitals, postal services etc.), availability of star specie attraction/interesting wildlife/representative wildlife, probability of successful wildlife viewing, possession of distinct features of interest, status of a park in relation to other parks, availability of recreational facilities, and closeness of a park to other tourists' sites. In addition to these factors' Yusuf (2015), identified security and hospitality of the host communities as other factors involved in determining the EP od a destination. The assessment of EP of a destination and the identification of challenges of ecotourism of the same destination with a mission of improvement can never be over – emphasized in ensuring sustainable ecotourism at Okomu National Park (ONP), hence, the essence of this study. ONP is one of the ecotourism centres in Nigeria, it is endowed with numerous species of flora and fauna resources that have been preserved and conserved over a long period of time. It is a rainforest ecosystem. It is the smallest national park in Nigeria with 202.24 square kilometer. The park is renowned for white throated monkey (Cercerpithicus erythrogaster) which is endemic to the park and used as its symbol.

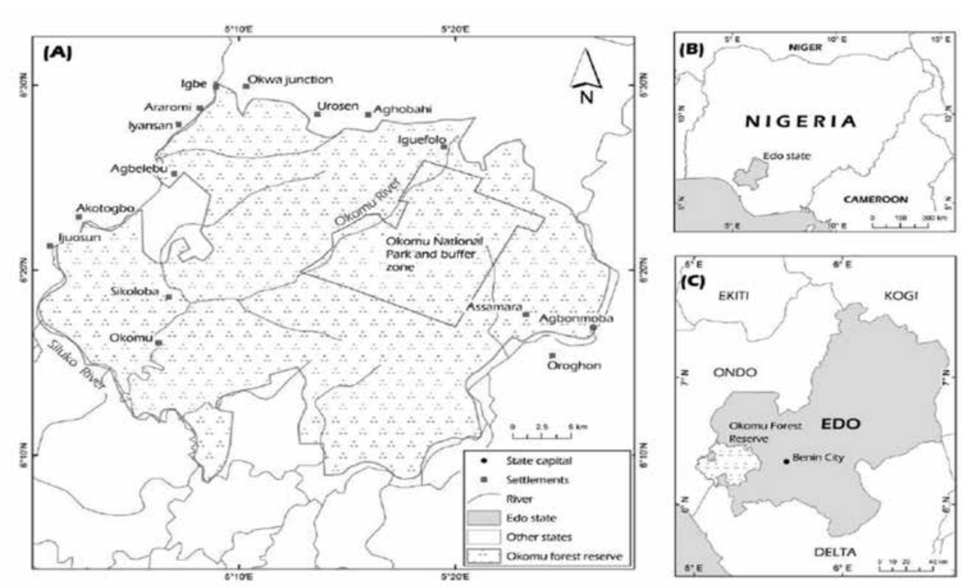
METHODOLOGY

Study Area

ONP is the smallest of the seven National Parks in Nigeria. It is located in Edo State, Nigeria on the coordinates of 6°20'0"N 5°16'0"E / 6.33°N 5.267°E. The Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) adopted Okomu as one of its priority areas and launched the Okomu

Forest Project in 1987. The climate of Okomu is tropical, with well-marked rainy and dry reasons. The mean annual rainfall is 2100mm falling mainly between March and October with the highest rainfall occurring in June, July and September. The park has relatively high humidity that is not less than 65 percent during the afternoons in every period of the year. The mean monthly temperature is 30.2°C. Moreover, the Okomu Forest Reserve consists of semi-deciduous, humid, lowland rainforest and is representative of the rapidly disappearing ecosystem of South-Western Nigeria. Freshwater swamp forests, are found along the rivers in the Park (Elochukwu, 2016). The African mahogany family (Meliaceae) is well represented, including Khaya ivorensis (African mahogany), Entandrophragma angolense (Tiama), Entandrophragma cylindricum (Sapele), Guarea cedrata (Light Bossé or scented Guarea), and Lovoa trichilioides (African Walnut) and a host of other plant and animal species (Ajayi, 2001). The wildlife survey carried out by Anadu and Oates in 1988 revealed that Okomu was the largest remaining rainforest in the southwest Nigeria, and that Okomu in addition to several other species of international concern contained a viable population of the rare white throated guenon *(Cercepithicus erythrogaster)* which is a monkey that is endemic to southwest Nigeria.

The map below shows the location of Okomu National Park within Nigeria. The map shows that the park is located in the rainforest region of Nigeria.



Population for the Study

There were three different categories of respondents for this study. The respondents were part of the important stakeholders in any ecotourism arrangement. These include; members of host communities, park staff, and tourists.

Determination of Sample Size

The number of members of host communities and tourists were determined by using Kish Leslie's formula (1965) as cited by Ajayi (2014) and Ajayi (2015)

$$n= \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2}$$

Where n = sample size
z = standard normal deviate set at 1.96 which correspond to 95% confidence interval.
p = prevalence rates of perception of residents set at 89.81% (Jeffery, 2012) and perception of ecotourist set at 82.16% (Ogunbodede, 2012)
q = 1 – p
d = degree of accuracy set at 0.04

$$\text{sample size for (n) for host communities} = \frac{1.96^2 \text{ x } 0.90 \text{ x } 0.10}{0.04^2}$$

Approximately = 216

$$\text{Sample size (n) for ecotourists} = \frac{1.96^2 \text{ x } 0.82 \text{ x } 0.18}{0.04^2}$$

Approximately = 354

For the park staff, Krejcie and Morgan (1970) recommended that in a population of about 150 people, one hundred and eight sample size (108) is suitable. Applying this to the population of Okomu Park staff which is 145, 104 members of park staff were selected.
Therefore, total number of respondents that were involved is the study was 674 (216 + 354 + 104)

This number is justifiably reliable as Roasoft (2015) modeled that 385 respondents or more are enough sample size for an unlimited total population. This was also reported by Ogubazghi and Muturi, (2014) and Oye (2017).

Sampling Technique

Host Communities: A two stage sampling technique was used to select the respondents.

> **Stage 1:** Twelve host communities namely; *Udo, Okomu Oil, Iguafole, Agekpukpu, Hassan Camp, Awori Camp, Inikorogha, Iguowan, Mairoghinoba, Igbinoba, Utesi, and Assamara* were selected by systemic sampling technique.
>
> **Stage 2:** Members of the selected host communities who participated in this study were selected by simple random sampling technique.

Park Staff: Stratified sampling technique was used to categorize the respondents into junior staff and senior staff cadres. Proportionate sampling technique was used to determine the number of staff selected from each cadre while simple random sampling technique was usedto select the survey participants. Among the park staff, 78 junior staff and 26 senior staff participated in the study.
Eco tourists: All adult tourists that visited the park during the period of data collection and who were willing to participate in the study were purposively selected.

Research Instrument and Data Collection

A well - structured questionnaire comprising of open and close ended questions was used to elicit relevant information from the respondents. The research instrument was validated in order to assess its ability to obtain the needed information from the respondents. Face and content validity were carefully conducted by subjecting the research instrument to thorough screening and judgment of experts. Relevant literatures such as; McNeely *et al*. (1992) and Ajayi (2015) among many others were consulted where relevant questions were adapted. Test – retest method of reliability was employed by administering the questionnaire among; 20 tourists who were internship students at the park prior to the commencement of data collection, 20 staff of the park, and 20 members of the host communities. The same research instruments were re- administered on the same set of respondents fifteenth day after. The two separate set of data were collated and correlated using Spearman Rank Correlation. A high correlation coefficient (r) of 0.87 was obtained. Thus, the research instrument was adjudged as reliable for the study. Five research assistants were recruited to assist in data collection. The research assistants were trained to enable them comprehend the aim and objectives of the study and the design of the research instrument.

RESULTS

Table 1: Distribution of Park Staff by Assessment of ONP for Ecotourism Prowess

n = 104

Checklist for Ecotourism Prowess	Good F (%)	Fair F (%)	Poor F (%)	Mean±SD
Closeness to international airport	08 (7.7%)	09 (8.7%)	87 (83.7%)	1.24±0.58
Closeness to other major tourist centres	09 (8.7%)	11 (10.6%)	84 (80.8%)	1.28±0.61
Standard of foods and accommodation offered	30 (28.8%)	42 (40.4%)	32 (30.8%)	1.98±0.78
Availability of cultural interest and other attractions	41 (39.4%)	34 (32.7%)	29 (27.9%)	2.12±0.82
Accessibility of the park	29 (27.9%)	51 (49.0%)	24 (23.1%)	2.05±0.72
Security	09 (8.7%)	11 (10.6%)	84 (80.8%)	1.28±0.75
Hospitality of the host community	15 (14.4%)	58 (55.8%)	31 (29.8%)	1.85±0.65
Availability of supporting infrastructures such as; internet, postal services, telecommunication, hospitals etc.	04 (3.8%)	14 (13.5%)	86 (82.7%)	1.21±0.49

How well does ONP offer star specie attraction / interesting wildlife / representative wildlife?	20 (19.2%)	62 (59.6%)	22 (21.2%)	1.98±0.64
How well is successful wildlife viewing guaranteed?	22 (21.2%)	63 (60.6%)	19 (18.3%)	2.03±0.63
How well does the park offer distinct features of interest?	26 (25.0%)	48 (46.2%)	30 (28.8%)	1.96±0.74
How will you rate the appeal of ONP in relation to other parks you had visited?	06 (5.8%)	42 (40.4%)	56 (53.8%)	1.52±0.61
How will you rate the beach or lakeside, river, swimming pool, falls, recreational facilities or other recreational possibilities available at ONP?	12 (11.5%)	17 (16.3%)	75 (72.1%)	1.39±0.69
How will you rate the closeness of ONP to other sites of tourist interest to be part of a tourist circuit?	11 (10.6%)	07 (6.7%)	86 (82.7%)	1.28±0.65

Source: Field Survey, 2021

In table 1, a 3-point scale was used to rate the park staff's assessment of ONP for ecotourism prowess. A mean score of 1.51 and above implies "good" while a mean score of 1.49 and below implies "poor". Therefore, the park staff rated ONP "good" in the following parameters; standard of food and accommodation offered (1.98), availability of other interests and cultural attractions (2.12), accessibility of the park (2.05), hospitality of the host community (1.85), availability of star specie attraction / interesting wildlife / representative wildlife (1.98), possibility of successful wildlife viewing (2.03), availability of distinct features of interest (1.96), and the appeal of ONP in relation to those of other parks visited by the park staff before (1.52). On the other hand, the park staff rated ONP "poor" in the following parameters; closeness to international airport (1.24), closeness to other major tourist centres (1.28), security (1.28), availability of supporting infrastructures such as; internet, postal services, telecommunication, hospitals etc. (1.21), availability and status of beach or lakeside, river, swimming pool, falls, recreational facilities or other recreational possibilities (1.39), and closeness of ONP to other sites of tourist interest to be part of a tourist circuit (1.28).

Table 2: Distribution of Tourists by Assessment of ONP for Ecotourism Prowess

Checklist of ecotourism prowess	Good F (%)	Fair F (%)	Poor F (%)	Mean±SD
Closeness to international airport	76 (21.5%)	76 (21.5%)	202 (57.0%)	1.64±0.81
Closeness to other major tourist centres	75 (21.2%)	116 (32.8%)	163 (46.0%)	1.75±0.79
Standard of foods and accommodation offered	09 (8.7%)	11 (10.6%)	84 (80.8%)	1.28±0.75
Availability of cultural interest and other attractions	101 (28.5%)	191 (54.0%)	62 (17.5%)	2.11±0.67
Accessibility of the park	116 (32.8%)	138 (39.0%)	100 (28.2%)	2.05±0.78
Security	174 (49.2%)	154 (43.5%)	26 (7.3%)	2.42±0.63
Hospitality of the host community	135 (38.1%)	176 (49.7%)	43 (12.1%)	2.26±0.66
Availability of supporting infrastructures such as; internet, postal services, telecommunication, hospitals etc.	12 (11.5%)	17 (16.3%)	75 (72.1%)	1.39±0.69
How well does ONP offer star specie attraction / interesting wildlife / representative wildlife?	102 (28.8%)	208 (58.8%)	44 (12.4%)	2.16±0.62
How well is successful wildlife viewing guaranteed?	93 (26.3%)	205 (57.9%)	56 (15.8%)	2.10±0.64
How well does the park offer distinct features of interest?	99 (28.0%)	199 (56.2%)	56 (15.8%)	2.12±0.65
How will you rate the appeal of ONP in relation to other parks you had visited?	116 (32.8%)	198 (55.9%)	40 (11.3%)	2.21±0.63
How will you rate the beach or lakeside, river, swimming pool, falls, recreational facilities or other recreational possibilities available at ONP?	08 (34.5%)	09 (8.7%)	87 (83.7%)	1.24±0.58
How will you rate the closeness of ONP to other sites of tourist interest to be part of a tourist circuit?	85 (24.0%)	171 (48.3%)	98 (27.7%)	1.96±0.72

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Tourists' Assessment of ONP for Ecotourism Prowess

In table 2, a 3-point scale was used to rate tourists' assessment of ONP for ecotourism prowess. A mean score of 1.51 and above implies "good" while a mean score of 1.49 and below implies "poor". Therefore, the tourists rated ONP "good" in the following parameters; closeness to international airport ($\bar{x}$ = 1.64), closeness to other major tourist centres ($\bar{x}$ = 1.75), availability of cultural interest and other attractions ($\bar{x}$ = 2.11), accessibility of the park ($\bar{x}$ = 2.05), security (2.42), hospitality of the host community ($\bar{x}$ = 2.26), availability of star specie attraction / interesting wildlife / representative wildlife ($\bar{x}$ = 2.16), possibility of successful wildlife viewing ($\bar{x}$ = 2.10), availability of distinct features of interest ($\bar{x}$ = 2.12), the closeness of ONP to other sites of tourist interest to be part of a tourist circuit ($\bar{x}$ = 1.96) and the appeal of ONP in relation to other parks visited before by the tourists ($\bar{x}$ = 2.21). On the other hand, the tourists rated ONP "poor" in the following parameters; standard of foods and accommodation offered ($\bar{x}$ = 1.28), availability of supporting infrastructures such as; internet, postal services, telecommunication, hospitals etc. ($\bar{x}$ = 1.39) and availability and status of beach or lakeside, river, swimming pool, falls, recreational facilities or other recreational possibilities ($\bar{x}$ = 1.24).

Table 3: Distribution of Host Communities by Assessment of ONP for Ecotourism Prowess

Checklist for Ecotourism Prowess	Good F (%)	Fair F (%)	Poor F (%)	Mean±SD
Closeness to international airport	12 (5.6%)	33 (15.3%)	171 (79.2%)	1.26±0.55
Closeness to other major tourist centres	11 (5.1%)	48 (22.2%)	157 (72.7%)	1.32±0.57
Standard of foods and accommodation offered	36 (16.7%)	105 (48.6%)	75 (34.7%)	1.82±0.70
Availability of cultural interest and other attractions	67 (31.0%)	93 (43.1%)	56 (25.9%)	2.05±0.75
Accessibility of the park	37 (17.1%)	81 (37.5%)	98 (45.4%)	1.72±0.74
Security	70 (32.4%)	78 (36.1%)	68 (31.5%)	2.01±0.80
Hospitality of the host community	44 (20.4%)	101 (46.8%)	71 (32.9%)	1.88±0.72
Availability of supporting infrastructures such as; internet, postal services, telecommunication, hospitals etc.	11 (5.1%)	49 (22.7%)	156 (72.2%)	1.33±0.57
How well does ONP offer star specie attraction / interesting wildlife / representative wildlife?	48 (22.2%)	105 (48.6%)	63 (29.2%)	1.93±0.72

How well is successful wildlife viewing guaranteed?	39 (18.1%)	112 (51.9%)	65 (30.1%)	1.88±0.68
How well does the park offer distinct features of interest?	43 (19.9%)	95 (44.0%)	78 (36.1%)	1.84±0.73
How will you rate the appeal of ONP in relation to other parks you had visited?	38 (17.6%)	73 (33.8%)	105 (48.6%)	1.69±0.75
How will you rate the beach or lakeside, river, swimming pool, falls, recreational facilities or other recreational possibilities available at ONP?	18 (8.3%)	62 (28.7%)	136 (63.0%)	1.45±0.65
How will you rate the closeness of ONP to other sites of tourist interest to be part of a tourist circuit?	06 (2.8%)	74 (34.3%)	136 (63.0%)	1.40±0.54

Source: Field Survey, 2021

In table 3, a 3-point scale was used to rate host communities' assessment of ONP for ecotourism prowess. A mean score of 1.51 and above implies "good" while a mean score of 1.49 and below implies "poor". Therefore, the host communities rated ONP "good" in the following parameters; standard of foods and accommodation offered ($\bar{x}$ = 1.82), availability of cultural interest and other attractions ($\bar{x}$ = 2.05), accessibility of the park ($\bar{x}$ = 1.72), security ($\bar{x}$ = 2.01), hospitality of the host community ($\bar{x}$ = 1.88), availability of distinct features of interest ($\bar{x}$ = 1.84), and the appeal of ONP in relation to other parks visited by members of the host communities ($\bar{x}$ = 1.69). However, the host communities rated ONP "poor" in the following parameters; closeness to international airport ($\bar{x}$ = 1.26), closeness to other major tourist centres ($\bar{x}$ = 1.32), availability of supporting infrastructures such as; internet, postal services, telecommunication, hospitals etc. ($\bar{x}$ = 1.33), availability and status of beach or lakeside, river, swimming pool, falls, recreational facilities or other recreational possibilities ($\bar{x}$ = 1.45), and closeness of ONP to other sites of tourist interest to be part of a tourist circuit ($\bar{x}$ = 1.40).

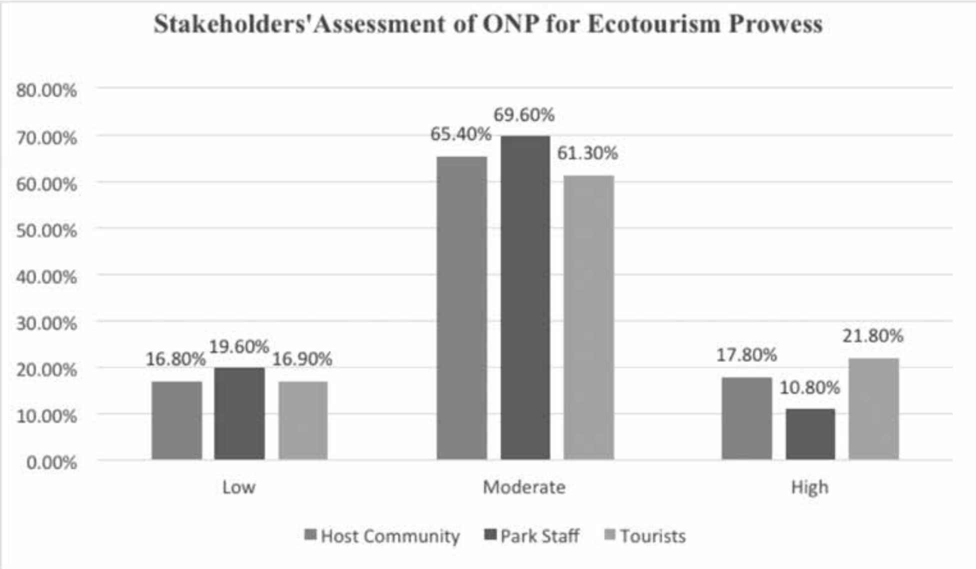


Figure 2: Bar chart showing distribution of stakeholders' assessment of ONP for eco-tourism prowess ; Source: Field survey, 2021.

Comparison of Stakeholders' Assessment of ONP for Ecotourism Prowess

The host communities rated ONP highest in ecotourism prowess (83.2%), followed by tourists (83.1%), and the least assessment was given by the park staff (80.4%). However, the bulk of these assessment percentages used for this rating were 'moderate assessment' which implies that ONP was rated average in the majority of the parameters used to measure ecotourism prowess of the park by majority of the respondents.

Challenges of Ecotourism in ONP by Park Staff

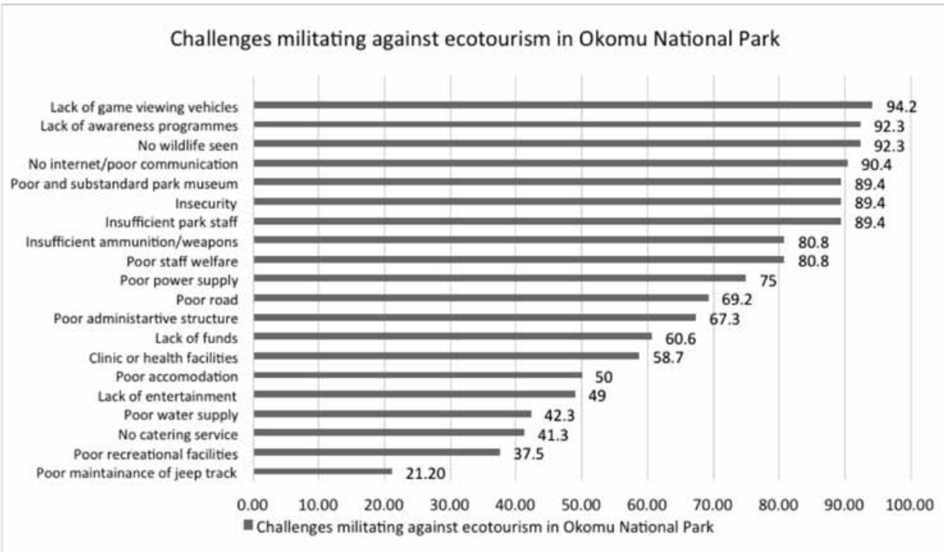


Figure 3: Bar chart showing statistics of challenges militating against ecotourism in ONP as identified by Park Staff; Source: Field Survey, 2021

As shown in Figure 2, the challenges of ecotourism in ONP in other of importance are as follows; lack of game viewing vehicles (94.2%), inadequate awareness programmes (92.3%), difficulty in wildlife sighting (92.3%), no access to internet/poor communication network (90.4%), insufficient park staff, insecurity and substandard park museum (89.4%), poor staff welfare and insufficient ammunition/weapons (80.8%), poor power supply (75.0%), poor road (69.2%), poor administrative structure (67.3%), lack of fund (60.6%), no clinic or health facilities (58.7%), poor tourists' accommodation (50.0%), lack of entertainment facilities at Arakhuan tourists' camp (49.0%), poor water supply at tourists' camp (42.3%), no catering service at tourists' camp (41.3%), poor recreational facilities (37.5%) and poor maintenance of jeep track (21.2%). Considering all these challenges listed by park staff, ecotourism cannot thrive at the park unless majority or all these problems are ameliorated or totally solved.

Tourists' identified challenges militating against ecotourism in ONP

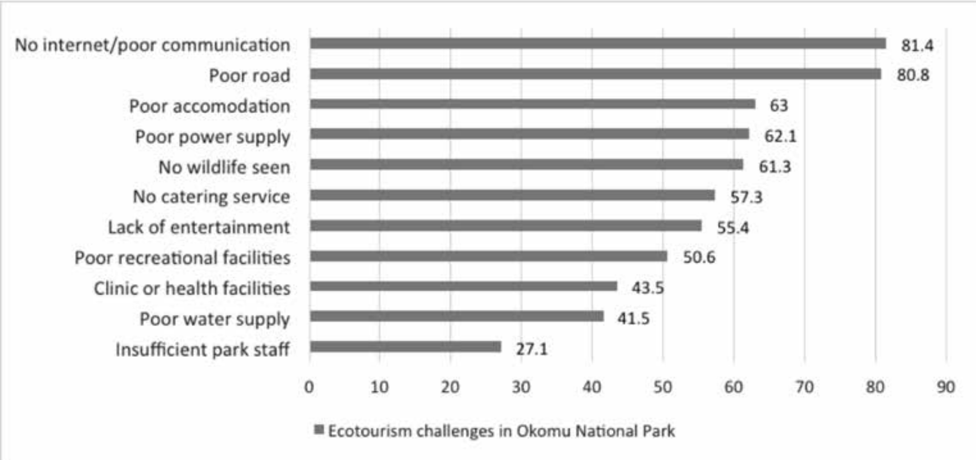


Figure 4: Bar chart showing statistics of tourists' list of challenges militating against ecotourism in ONP ; Source: Field Survey, 2021

Figure 3 displays the list of challenges militating against ecotourism in ONP as identified by the tourists. The challenges in order of importance are as follows; no internet/poor communication network (81.4%), poor road network (80.8%), poor accommodation (63.0%), poor power supply (62.1%), No wildlife seen/difficulty in sighting animals (61.3%), no catering service (57.3%), lack of entertainment (55.4%), no recreational facilities (50.6%), no Clinic or health facilities (43.5%), poor water supply (41.5%) and insufficient park staff (27.1%). In a situation in which a tourist whose goal is to have a memorable time in a park experience is faced with all these challenges, such tourist would not embark on a repeat visit nor publicize the destination to other potential tourists. All these challenges must be fixed if any meaningful tourism activities are to be sustained in this park.

Host Communities' Identified Problems Associated with ONP

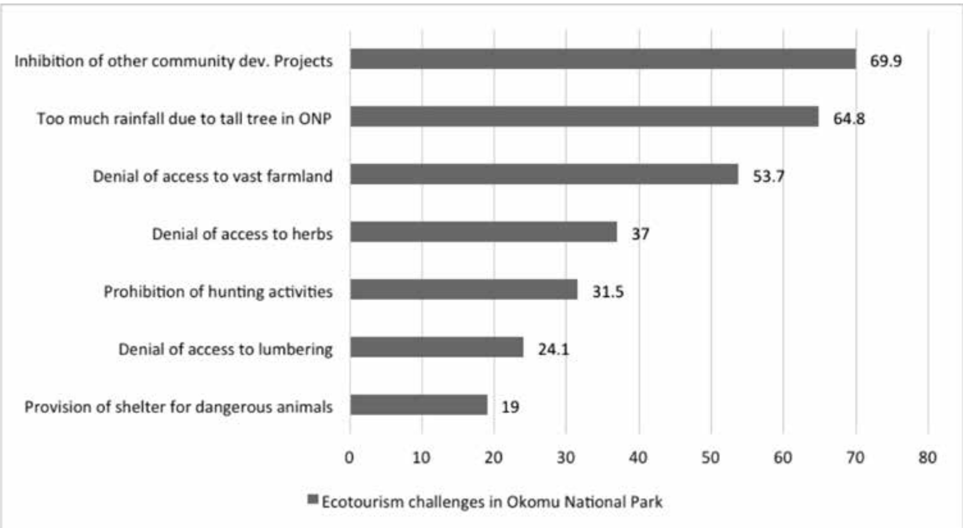


Figure 5: Bar chart showing distribution of host communities by problems created by ONP in their communities ; Source: Field Survey, 2021.

As shown in Figure 5, the most important problems created by ONP in the host communities according to residents sampled were; that as a result of the presence of dense and thick forest in the park, the area attracts too much rainfall annually which usually affect some of their economic activities (64.8%), denial of access to vast farmland (53.7%), and most importantly, due to large land mass on which the park is sited, many respondents (69.9%) believed that it has hampered land availability for other community projects. Other problems linked to ONP by respondents include; denial of access to herbs (37%), prohibition of hunting activities (31.5%), denial of access to lumbering (24.1%), and provision of shelter for dangerous animals (19.0%). This implies that many of the host community consider inhibition of other community development projects, too much rainfall due to tall tree in ONP and denial of access to vast farmland to be the major challenges created for host communities by ONP. The host communities revealed that on few occasions, wild animals had been sighted close to the communities and that on such occasions, commotion were caused and it is either the animal ran back towards the park or got killed by the villagers. Denial of access to herbs, prohibition of hunting activities, and lack of access to lumbering were other problems identified by host communities. This showed that a significant percentage of the locals still require adequate orientation on the purpose and importance of the park.

DISCUSSION

McNeely *et al*. (1992) based the ecotourism prowess of any destination on its status in these parameters; closeness to international airport, closeness to other major tourist attraction, standard of foods and accommodation offered, availability of cultural interest and other attractions, accessibility of the park, availability of supporting infrastructures such as; internet, postal services, telecommunication, hospitals etc., how well a destination offer star specie attraction / interesting wildlife / representative wildlife, how well a successful wildlife viewing is guaranteed, how well a park offer distinct features of interest, comparison of the appeal of a destination in relation to those of other parks visited before by the tourist, the standard of the beach or lakeside, river, swimming pool, falls, recreational facilities or other recreational possibilities available at a destination, how close is a destination to other sites of tourist interest that could be part of a tourist circuit. According to Yusuf (2015), in addition to above listed parameters, the hospitality of the host community and the level of security available at a destination are other parameters that could be used to determine the EP of a destination. The EP of any destination is of paramount importance, the higher the EP, the better ecotourism resources and facilities available and the higher the ability of the destination to pull tourists. This study established the EP of ONP to be moderate, hence, efforts should be made to sustain existing resources and improve on other areas of concern.

This challenges of tourism at ONP identified by tourists include; poor state of facilities (road, internet, accommodation, power, catering, entertainment, recreation, clinic, water), shortage of park staff, and difficulty in sighting wildlife. According to the host communities, challenges of ONP include; denial of access to farmland, lumbering, and herbs, too much rainfall, prohibition of hunting, provision of shelter for dangerous animal, and inhibition of community development projects. The park staff identified; lack of game viewing vehicle, lack of awareness programmes, difficulty in sighting wildlife, poor internet facility, poor and substandard park museum, insecurity, shortage of park staff, insufficient ammunition, poor staff welfare, poor power supply, poor road, poor administrative structure, lack of funding, poor accommodation, no clinic, lack of any form of entertainment within the park, poor water supply, no catering service within the park, poor recreational facilities, and poor maintenance of jeep track as challenges of ecotourism in ONP. These findings are in consonance with; Ogunjinmi *et. al*. (2017), who identified; inadequate funding, staff employment procedure and commitment, poor logistics, inadequate and unserviceable vehicles, lack of patrol incentives and allowances, low quality of firearms and lack of ammunitions, inadequate punishment for erring staff, inadequate supervision of field staff, lack of cooperation between parks and local communities, corruption, and poor judicial enforcement of conservation laws as the main challenges to conservation in Nigerian parks. Ijeoma and Ogbara (2013) submitted that insufficient infrastructures and inadequate maintenance of equipment were the most pressing challenges of ecotourism in Kanji Lake National Park (Nigeria). They asserted that; the consequences of these include; insecurity in the park, reduction in management practices and inefficiency. They stated that the host communities were very much aware of the aims of the park but they were of the opinion that they were not involved in the running and management of the park. Shortage of staff and inappropriate (insufficient) budgetary allocation to conservation activities might be responsible for the overall pressures and threats in Nigerian parks. According to Nchor and Ogogo (2012), lack of sense of ownership, limited awareness, population growth, lack of coordination, conflicts over resources, issues of boundary/lack of boundary, invasive species, illegal charcoal production, climate change, and poverty are the identified challenges that are affecting the conservation and management of national parks in Ethiopia. As a way forward from these problems, Firew and Solomon (2018) identified; developing sense of ownership within community, awareness creation and development, collaborative approach and consultation among stakeholders, co-management and resolution of border issues, reduction of free grazing, invasive species utilization, care during introduction and biological control, reduction of fuel-wood consumption and increase carbon sequestration, improving incomes, institutional and policy reforms as strategies that can bring solutions to national parks' problems in Ethiopia.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study is in consonance with findings of other researchers who had conducted similar studies in Nigeria such as Ogunjinmi *et. al*. (2017) and Ijeoma and Ogbara (2013). Similarly, the results did not diverge from those of Nchor and Ogogo (2012) and Firew and Solomon (2018) who also conducted similar studies in other African countries. These studies showed that globally, there is need to ensure that host communities comprehend the concept and importance of park, and thus, take ownership. Proper integration of host communities during conception, planning, execution, staff recruitment, running and management of park cannot be over emphasized and should be given paramount importance world-wide. Ameliorating and removing challenges (where and when possible) of tourism at national parks or protected areas is germane to ensure sustainable ecotourism.

The EP of ONP is moderately satisfactory as it rated average in majority of EP parameters. Basically, ONP is confronted with arrays of challenges ranging from administrative issues, staff welfare, tourists' needs, funding, and lack of expected support from the host community. The management of ONP should source for fund and other supports from government, individuals, local and international conservation oriented organizations in order to improve on the parameters of EP at Okomu National Park. More importantly, host community's orientation about the aim and objectives of ONP needs to be revisited in order to win their total support. Where necessary, they should be integrated in the management of the park. The management should strive to provide or improve on basic infrastructures such as; internet, postal service, telecommunication, road, water supply, and power supply. Clinic and restaurant are important infrastructures lacking at ONP and which are necessary for tourism, these must be provided without further delay. The swimming pool at the Arakhwan Base camp should be revamped for tourists' use. The Ossei River should be considered and developed for recreational tourism to include it in tourist's circuit. While more accommodation should be provided, the existing tourists' accommodation should be renovated to make them home away from home. Lastly, the management of ONP should; employ more staff, improve the welfare of staff, sustainably maintain jeep track, provide adequate ammunition, improve security around the park, upgrade and renovate the park museum.

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International Growth Strategies and Challenges of Asian Hotel Companies: the Case of Lotte Hotel Inc.

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ABSTRACT

The current case study reviews strategic directions and methods applied in various international markets by Lotte Hotel Inc., which is a South Korean hotel chain that has 13 additional outlets in 6 different countries including Russia, Uzbekistan, USA, Vietnam and Myanmar. The article critically reviews and evaluates the practical issues experienced in the chain`s growth in 3 destinations using Porter's Diamond, Yip`s International strategy drivers, and Hofstede's cultural dimensions as conceptual frameworks. Lotte Hotel Inc. has been able to positively assess its position in several markets, such as Russia, that have not been accessed by their competition. But, in contrast, host government policies have been overlooked in the case of China which resulted in the loss of construction investments. In the last chapter, the author has suggested a consolidated concept to appraise enhancements embedded in the organisational outlets to satisfy the demand of the international guests as in outlets abroad as in the headquarters.

Keywords: Hotel Chains, Lotte Hotel, Porter's Five Forces

INTRODUCTION

This case study covers the analysis of international expansion strategies and challenges of the hotel chain belonging to one of South Korea's largest conglomerates, known as a "Chaebol," the Lotte Group. Founded in 1948 as a confectionery manufacturer in Japan (Schlothaeur and Wilhaus, 2016) by a South Korean businessman Mr. Kyuk-Ho Shin (also known as "Shigemitsu Takeo,"his Japanese alias), the organisation has then followed a strategy of unrelated diversification, known as expansion by penetration of new markets with the diverse product lines (Edwards, 2014). Apart from hotels and resorts, subsidiaries of the group developed into such spheres as retail, tourism, petrochemicals, construction and food across 19 countries around the globe (Schlothaeur and Wilhaus, 2016).

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Having established its “Hotels and Resorts” brand back in 1979, now Lotte Group owns a total of over 5000 rooms in the numerous worldwide outlets according to Figure 1. The chain`s portfolio includes such brands as the “Lotte City Hotels” targeted at premium business guests, the “L7” that is focused at the lifestyle concept, the “Signiel" that is considered to be a luxury brand and the five-star “Hotels and Resorts”. Moreover, Lotte hotel Inc. is the first premium South Korean chain to enter Russia with its Moscow hotel (Lotte, 2020c).

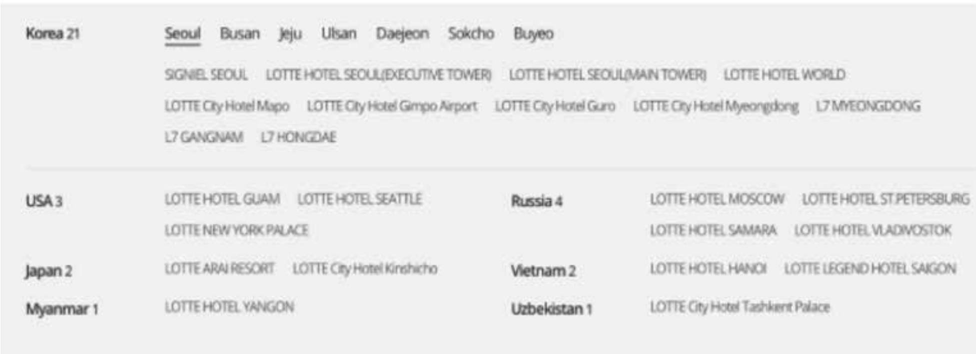

Figure 1. Lotte Hotels and Resorts Portfolio (Lotte, 2020c).

However, what is more interesting is the basis of the management structure of the organisation - “Chaebol”- that is defined by hierarchical Confucianist principles and presence of family ties (Yang and Kelly, 2009). This fact affects the recruiting process of the company's management team that usually emphasises on the candidate’s origins to be of the same region as the founders, due to possible similarities in character traits and values (ibid). Thus, being a distinctive feature not only among the Western but also some of the other Asian companies, such practice has been the reason for the hotel chain choice for this case study.

In terms of inclusivity for a foreign talent initiative among higher-tier management roles (i.e. hotel`s General Manager) that has been enforced by Lotte Group Diversity charter just in the recent years (Kim, 2013), the author is eager to assess the overall development of the Lotte hotel Inc. strategic directions and methods applied in various international markets. Prior to the analysis referring to Lotte Hotels Inc. this analysis will critically review and evaluate the issues experienced by various Asian hotel chains in their international growth management, highlighting relative recommendations.

ACADEMIC WORKS AND ASIAN HOTEL CHAINS

Despite various advantages of organisation`s international expansion, there may be a room for certain challenges, since pre-existing knowledge and networks could become highly extraneous in the new destination. According to Porter (2011) locations outside of the Asian region are described as having less attractive factor conditions, due to high-cost environments when compared to Asia with cheap and ample labour and business supplies. Furthermore, another difference lies in the cultures of operations and service within the organisational units. A number of Asian cultures are known for being collectivistic, acknowledging high power distances and long-term oriented in contrast to Western cultures (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Minding the previous statement, it is expected that staff management, incorporation of brand standards and service culture would be totally different in non-Asian destinations. With all of the above, several issues faced by Asian hotel chains while growing internationally have been identified and discussed with some empirical evidence below. The abilities to acquire access to resources such as land and infrastructure may become limited in the new environment (Porter, 2011), which in regards to the theory postulated by Porter's Diamond model, directly affects hotel`s demand conditions (occupancy, guest loyalty), overall company strategy and structure as well as competition.

Thus, the mode of entry into the new market taken by a hotel chain, such as merger, acquisition, franchise or a joint venture, can address this issue (Knights and Cavusil, 2005). For example, Shanghai Jin Jiang International Hotels entered into a joint venture with the US-based Thayer Lodging Group to acquire Interstate Hotels and Resorts that operated 46 000 rooms in 37 states and 7 other countries around the globe back in 2009. In this case, the joint venture allowed more budget to acquire necessary resources in another location, but possibly at a cost of its brand image or risk of unsolicited knowledge transfer with the strategic partner. They have made a huge progress in the end as compared to competitor chains such as Langham Hospitality Group (2020), Rosewood Hotel Group (2020) and Minor International (2020) who have managed to experience growth through acquisitions only at the rise of the tourism era. While various scholars debated whether an established organisation has to rely on local knowledge and networks through acquisition of local partners, the use of multiple modes of entry has been identified as one of the tactics of smaller scale or less known firms (Knights and Cavusil, 2005).

According to research evidence, the majority of Asian hotel chains which expanded in the Western countries have also succeeded through organic growth, which is a strategy opposite to mergers and acquisition and is based on development of the organisation`s core competencies (Wu, Costa and Teare, 1998; Jogaratnam and Tse, 2006). Those hotels include Shangri La Hotels and Resorts (T+D, 2008; Shangri La Hotels and Resorts, 2020), Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group (2020), Dusit International (Haridasani, 2012), The Oberoi Group (2020). These have exploited the concept of Asian hospitality standards as their core service competency. As it is evident from the above review, several modes of entry will offer various methods for overcoming unfavourable factor conditions of the new destination, depending on the sizes of the hotel chain and the amount of resources it manages.

Cultural differences

On the grounds of the CAGE (Cultural, Administrative, Geographical, Economic differences)

Framework, cultural distance that is related to differences in social norms, belief systems, language and ethnicity, does not only describe the shifts in customer tastes but also advocates for the way an employee delivers service and behaves at work (Ghemawat, 2007). Thus, Asian cultures in general are viewed to possess more hospitable characteristics (Wan and Chon, 2010) while many of the Western cultures prioritise competitiveness and individualism (Hofstede et al., 2010). As a sample, empirical findings on development of Shangri La hotel in Sydney, Australia have shown that sincerity and humility, the most common Asian hospitality cultural traits were found challenging to impart among Australian employees, due to majority of them to view their job in hotel as a temporary resort as well as being more willing to view their guests as equals rather than looking up to them (Heffernan and Droulers, 2008). Additionally, another factor of discomfort had been in the hierarchical culture of relationships, that is common in Asian cultures, between front-line employees and management of Shangri La, where the former would feel alleviated and less likely to be approached directly (Heffernan and Droulers, 2008). Thus, an Asian hotel chain willing to expand in culturally distant countries is advised to review its corporate culture standards prior operations in the new location to achieve desired staff performance.

Cost of operations

According to scholars, many non-Asian destinations are bound to strict legal environment regulations that affect the cost of service delivery, which becomes one of the challenges for an Asian chain pursuing international expansion overseas (Lam, Ho and Law, 2015). This seems to be especially true for many Chinese hotel chains which practice cost leadership strategy (Huang and Chathoth, 2011), such as 7 Days Group, Green Tree Inns, Home Inns and Hotels and China Lodging Group (Lam, Ho and Law, 2015). Thus, 7 Days Group, which started its operations in several locations in Austria and Germany had based their expansion on asset-light models to decrease the cost of operations without affecting brand promise (Financial Times, 2017).

An asset-light strategy is usually translated into contractual relationships with local partners to offset opening costs and land investments (Zhang et al., 2019). However, Praporski (2008) and Koh and Jang (2009) argued that despite the budget, the same type of strategy can be pursued by the luxury hotel segment as well. For the practical demonstration, Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group is one of the best examples, since it has launched its 400-room Las Vegas hotel by signing a management contract with MGM Mirage (Smith, 2005). Thus, it can be concluded that the chosen mode of entry of an Asian hotel chain can alleviate the issue of rising operation costs in the other location, despite the attempted segmentation strategy.

Brand standards and promise

Erramilli, Agarwal and Dev (2002) concluded that a hotel brand's consistent image and service delivery are one of the main goals despite the destination. While Asian hospitality is usually recognized for the unique service style with a warmth factor at its core, it has also been supported by such elements as cultural features, customer centricity, significant sensory effect and cheerful ambience (Qin, Adler and Cai, 2012; Ahn et al., 2013).

However, it was argued that culture-related service factors may not be induced momentarily in non-Asian destinations that favour skills over natural warmth (Wan and Chon, 2010). Empirical evidence from the study of Shangri La Hotel in Sydney, Australia, had shown how one local employee`s “friendly but inflexible” response to management's request jeopardised core values of the chain (e.g. Heffernan and Droulers, 2008).

Thus, the Asian hotel brand operating overseas may be required to customise training programs for the local management to develop relative service culture. Furthermore, physical aspects of brand promise such as amenities, hardware and related objects usually found in Asia may not be available immediately in some foreign destinations (Lam, Ho and Law, 2015). As a sample, it was found by Heffernan that Shangri La Hotel Group was able to rebrand its new property in Sydney with single linens and basic signage prior a major refurbishment could take place in 2004, a year after property takeover (Yang, 2014). Hence, the Asian hotel chain may need to reconsider amenities representing its brand in overseas properties.

Marketing challenges

This point is concerned with brand communications, which may affect accurate delivery of brand promise and overall image. According to Brotherton and Wood (2008), internal maintenance of global identity in non-resident countries can be challenging due to differences in comprehension of brand origins by local staff. Simultaneously another challenge in face of a hotel brand`s choice between standardisation and customisation may arise, as it will need to prioritise either hotel or destination image accordingly (Mette, 2005; Aliouche and Schlentrich, 2011).

A common image among all hotels in a chain is usually preferred in order for the hotel units to instil the same level of customer expectations to be able to satisfy them (Dev, Brown and Zhou, 2007). Therefore, all staff at Shangri La Hotel Group undergo special training within 6 months of joining the chain (Heffernan and Droulers, 2008). Nevertheless, it is debated that some other customers would expect authentic local notes in service delivery in the new destination (Hjalager, 2007).

However, there is still some risk in pursuing the customisation strategy as some individual hotels in the chain may become more powerful than the brand itself. As it happened with “Villas” of the Oberoi Group in the early 2000`s, which then had to be rebranded for marketing synergy (Bharwani, 2011). Thus, segmentation of hotel chains' target market is strongly advised for reconsideration when a brand is going abroad.

LOTTE HOTEL INC. CURRENT GROWTH CHALLENGES

Prior to identifying and discussing the method of pursuing Lotte hotel Inc. international strategy, it is worth mentioning the direction of its strategic option. With the forecast of rising competition presented by global hotel chains of the West such as Accor hotels and Marriott International, opening four hotels each that cater to various market niches in Seoul in 2020 (Chow, 2018), it is obvious for Lotte hotel chain to pursue a *market development* - strategy direction. In other words, offering their product in other geographical markets, the options for strategic options that Johnson, Scholes and Whittington (2008) outline.

Due to Lotte`s strategic capability being based on Korean service culture, it would be necessary to use an advantage of the first- mover and establish a strategic lock-in before other Korean-based rivals in the same conditions enter new markets. Thus, the only strategy providing speed of entry without disruptions in market supply and demand would be acquisition and mergers, a strategy method outlined by Junni and Teerikangas (2019).

However, there have been few exceptions to Lotte Hotel Inc.`s establishing 13 overseas properties across 6 different countries via the acquisition strategy. These include Lotte Hotel Seattle that has been acquired via joint venture with the local investment group Hana Financial Investment (Kim et al., 2019) and Lotte city Hotel Tashkent Palace that has operated on the management contract terms (Yonhap, 2016). With Johnson and colleagues (2008) proposing a framework including four factors that affect organisational expansion strategy overseas. Lotte Hotel Inc.`s growth challenges will be evaluated under the scope of the drivers.

Impact of the market driver: Tashkent, Uzbekistan

With favourable state of government and competitive drivers in Uzbekistan, since the Lotte Hotel chain has been recommended to run operations by Uzbekistan's President himself (Yonhap, 2016) as well as with lack of presence of other South Korean chain`s (i.e. competitors) in the destination, the only challenges would be addressed to cost and market driver conditions.

Running low on the financial assets for further acquisitions during the bribery case investigation period (Emis, 2018), with the conventional way of entering a new destination, which is via *acquisition*, Lotte Hotel Inc. would hold significant loss on the return of investments if the market demand would be low. In order to explain the above the author shall refer to Porter’s Five Forces framework.

In essence, the “Korean service standard” has been identified as an intangible unique resource of the chain in global expansion (Zolotyh, 2010; Lotte, 2020b). Hence, it is supposed to minimize the threat of substitutes as well as potential entrants if the advantage of the first-mover is utilised. Thus, while Uzbekistan is being classified as a lower-middle income country by The World Bank (Christensen, 2020) and Lotte targeting the luxury market segment, it is clear that potential risk could be carried mostly by the low buyer power. In other words, the issue to be faced by Lotte hotels could be the level of demand shown by the regional market segment.

Uzbekistan as a travel destination posits low travel experience cost as their main competitive advantage (Lovell-Hoare and Lovell-Hoare, 2013). This means that the demand degree is expected to be low unless the chain will adjust its pricing strategy. Thus, instead of acquisition, the management contract has been utilised as an induced strategic counter measure, which can be regarded as a challenge due to a risk of duplication of key competitive advantage (e.g. Johnson, Scholes and Whittington, 2008). Despite minimising entry costs, the transferred knowledge (i.e. training) of the Lotte hotel Inc. brand standards could be copied by partner groups or other local parties.

Impact of the government driver: China

By the time Lotte Hotel Inc. had decided to enter China with two hotel openings at once, it has already increased the amount of loyal hotel guests from the Chinese market segment and acquired a substantial amount of financial assets for this expansion. However, Lotte Hotel Inc. has underestimated the influence of government drivers, specifically, the host policies. Providing U.S. troops with convenient territory to deploy THAAD missile defence systems in South Korea, Lotte Group has overlooked the presence of the gap in political views between the two countries. Thus, the Chinese government has announced national boycott to the Lotte Group businesses in China as a result (Rosenthal, 2017).

In order to explain further, the author of the case study shall refer to the Porter's Diamond framework. According to the framework, “Government” factor postulates that destination`s local government should encourage businesses for growth through their functions and law enforcement. Government's appeal to the national abstinence from Lotte Group offerings broke favorable demand conditions. Thus, the Chinese government has forced several businesses of the chain to shut down, which accounted for a significant financial loss of USD 66 million (Rosenthal, 2017). Henceforth, the above may have damaged the brand's image across its Chinese customer segment and their decision to stay in the other Lotte hotel locations worldwide as a result, providing a consecutive financial loss.

Impact of the market and cost drivers: Moscow, Russia

Service provision is a part of primary activity that contributes to the profit margin of an organisation and sets the image of the established brand (Porter, 1998). In other words, service is also part of organisational marketing. Thus, transferable marketing being one of the market driver factors, it has to be noted that the company has partially managed to integrate the Korean service culture concept in the staff training programs of their Russian units (Zolotyh, 2010). Nevertheless, several issues persist.

The point of concern is the issue pertaining to cultural differences settling the barriers for embedding the parts of culture-related service standards among the employees (chapter 2). For example, the Korean "Chon" concept that postulates that sincerity in actions of care shown towards the guest can have an even greater amount of impact on the guest experience than tangible assets of the hotel (Zolotyh, 2010). However, the challenge is that it is mostly unfamiliar to the Russian staff and cannot be taught as it is a non-transferable part of the culture.

To explain this further, the author shall refer to the concept of Hofstede's cultural dimensions that allow to measure the level of cultural similarity/ divergence of certain nations. Thus, in terms of the discussed destination (Russia) and origins of the Lotte chain (Korea), the concept claims a great deal. With the power distance at the level of 60 points, it can be stated that South Korean culture is more receptive towards accepting the hierarchy in their organisations and in the society in general. Unlike, in Russia. Moreover, Russian society is shown to maintain a more individualistic nature of character as compared to its South Korean counterpart (ibid). Which might explain the challenge with integrating the complete service concept of the Lotte hotel chain among employees in the Russian business units.

Thus, relating back to the stance of Government and Competitive drivers are favourable in Russia, due to unrestricted host government policies from earlier Lotte Group`s business openings (i.e. confectionary) and Lotte Hotel Inc. being the first South Korean chain in the country. However, the market drivers would be their current challenge since it is a part of the cultural distance concept.

Moreover, compared to other competitor chains such as Starwood hotels and resorts as a sample, the amount of time and investments dedicated to employee training is enormous. The main restaurant chiefs of Lotte hotel Moscow have interned in New York and Paris for several months instead of weeks prior to the grand opening (Zolotykh, 2010). Even though it is hard to judge the effectiveness of such investments, due to restricted availability of financial reports of the hotel wing of the Lotte Group Ltd., it can be stated that through reading guest reviews, these actions have positively affected loyalty intentions of the chain`s customers. The above relates to the challenge with the state of the cost driver and logistical expenses of sending staff to distant locations for lengthy training.

Lotte Hotel Inc. and International Expansion

The work towards the enhancement of the business offerings can be regarded as the innovation process. This procedure can take place in any of the three different constituents of the hotel operations: process, service and manpower (STB, 2015). While the former is concerned with improving efficiency of the performance through modern technologies or tools, the latter two are concentrated upon service quality and staff skill set development (ibid). It has been mentioned that Lotte Hotel Inc.`s key competitive advantage is the Korean service standard across all points of interaction with their guests. Thus, it can be stated that the main innovation locus will be concerned with the service area rather than product.

However, it has to be highlighted that since Lotte has expanded into geographically and culturally diverse markets, the universal approach to satisfy the global demand for innovations is less likely to be expected. Moreover, this process usually takes place in response to the events in the surrounding environment. Thus, with the above logic sequence, the author of the current case study has decided to consolidate several concepts into the appraisal table below, where chain`s innovations shall be explained towards their relative PESTLE concept dimensions as drivers for change.

Innovation	Type	Location/Outlet	PESTLE driver
Butler service	**Service, Manpower**	Lotte hotel Moscow/Russia	**Socio-cultural (S)**
Eco-friendly products, property design elements	**Process**	Lotte Palace New York, USA	**Environmental (E), Economic (E)**
Contest-based hiring process	**Service, Manpower**	Lotte Hotels and Resorts, South Korea	**Economic (E), Legal (L)**

Table 2. Lotte Hotel Inc. Developments

Enhancements of Various Lotte Hotels

According to the recent survey results provided by Dr. Tolkach and Dr. Tse of SHTM, the Russian luxury hotel guest segment has often valued the warmth and attention to details as crucial factors of service provided by staff of the Asian hotel chain properties among other factors (AHC, 2018). Thus, as a response to such culture-based demands (S), one of the recent service feature developments of Lotte hotel Moscow included Butler service (Luxury Media, 2014). The property has employed 10 Bogarts Butler School`s trained staff for the guests disposal (ibid). Thus, this service innovation improved the personalisation aspect of the offered hotel services as well as its standards by providing staff training opportunities at a globally recognised institution. Hence, it is also partially linked to the manpower innovation variable.

Numerous sources have mentioned the importance of green policies and sustainability concepts as a response to deteriorating environment as a result of industry operations (Chen, 2015). Then the USA has set a global example for the hospitality industry for maintaining sustainability and CSR initiatives as part of organisational culture (Campon-Cerro, Hernandez-Mogollon and Folgado-Fernández, 2019).

Minding the above Lotte Hotel Inc. has settled several goals targeted at enforcing the sustainability initiatives across the chain outlets, starting off with the New York unit (Lotte, 2020a; Lotte, 2020b). These consisted of: reliance on renewable energy, use of eco-friendly cleaning products and LED lighting across the entire property with the aim of cutting the production of carbon emissions (Katz, 2015; Lotte, 2020b). While these can be classified as process innovation aimed at preserving the environment for future customer generations (E), their implementation is quite cost-saving as well (E).

Furthermore, several improvements have taken place across hotels in one of the chain`s headquarters, i.e. South Korea. Surprisingly, despite the 90% Lotte Group Ltd. dominance of the market in this particular location as well as patriotic nature of citizens (Samadi, 2017), which may already define the customer choice of accommodation for stay in regards to the internal tourist, the below developments took place:

In order to maintain the high standards of their services across F&B outlets, the Lotte hotel chain has enforced a challenge-based recruitment process for the chefs of the restaurants. According to Lee (2015), the company has hired 100 new employees based on the culinary test results despite the resume specs across 14 South Korean hotel outlets. This type of enhancement can adhere to both service and manpower as it aims at improving the quality of the culinary dishes on the menu as well as efficiently utilising employee skills at the workplace and consequently, cutting costs by minimising potential staff turnover (E, L).

Thus, Lotte hotel Inc. product and service enhancement have successfully implemented conformance to trends in surrounding environments. However, these have been imposed separately for each of the properties, meaning each enhancement represents a certain hotel within the chain (Table 2). This puts a risk on brand image development as these outlets may become independent and loosely associated with the Lotte Group name and standards (e.g. Mette, 2005; Aliouche and Schlentrich, 2011 in Chapter 2). As in the case with the L7 brand that's also a part of Lotte hotel Inc. but intentionally follows the same strategy.

CONCLUSION

As it has been expected, Lotte hotels Inc. has experienced some of the challenges similar to those defined in the collective review of international expansion issues of Asian hotel chains. Especially, highlighting the issue related to the cultural distances when embedding the organisational culture and Korean service standards among the Russian outlets. It could have been a substantial challenge since this constitutes the key competitive advantage of the chain, however, the relative acceptance of hierarchy by Russian society shown by high Power Distance Index allows the chance to enforce certain code of conduct among chain employees. That is also in concordance with the "Chaebol" concept on the whole.

Nevertheless, being a part of the large conglomerate the Lotte hotel Inc. has had exceptions in it`s high-cost global expansion strategy. These have been explained by utilising George Yip's "International strategy drivers" framework. Lotte hotel Inc. has been able to positively assess its position in accordance with the framework in several markets, since it has been able to invest in costly acquisitions as well as choose geographical markets that have not been accessed by their competition, such as Russia as a sample. In contrast to host government policies, the relative government driver has been overlooked in the case of China. At last, the author has suggested a consolidated concept to appraise enhancements embedded in the organisational outlets to satisfy the demand of the international guests as in outlets abroad as in the headquarters.

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