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1. Working Paper

Building Local Resident Loyalty in a Luxury Hotel: A Strategic Approach

Marga Balvert , Annick Darioly and Nicholas Thomas*

Abstract
Luxury hotels have long positioned themselves as exclusive sanctuaries for international travellers, offering personalized service, refined amenities, and unforgettable experiences. However, in recent years, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, this traditional model has evolved. With shifting travel behaviours and the rise of hybrid hospitality, luxury hotels are now reevaluating their market strategies to include a previously overlooked segment: local residents. These individuals, who live near the property, represent a unique and valuable demographic. Their ongoing engagement through dining, spa use, events, or short stays, offers consistent revenue and brand advocacy opportunities, which can be critical in periods of reduced international travel.
This conceptual paper is the first step in the process of a larger study. The aim is to examine how luxury hotels can build meaningful relationships with local residents, transforming them from occasional visitors into loyal guests. Drawing from existing literature and qualitative interviews with luxury hotel executives, it outlines the motivations of local residents, emerging hospitality trends, and actionable strategies to enhance local engagement. The findings aim to help hotels strengthen community ties, generate consistent revenue, and increase their competitiveness in a dynamic global market.
Keywords: Luxury accommodation, local residents, customer loyalty

Literature Review

Understanding Luxury in a Local Context

The definition of luxury in hospitality is increasingly fluid, but remains grounded in a few core elements: personalization, exclusivity, and attention to detail (Wirtz et al., 2020). The luxury experience is less about extravagance and more about how the guest is made to feel. For local residents, luxury is often understood through a lens of lifestyle enhancement rather than indulgence. A hotel becomes a space where they can celebrate special occasions, enjoy sophisticated dining, or participate in cultural and wellness activities that reflect their community's identity.
Executives interviewed in the study emphasized that luxury for locals is tied closely to the personalization of experience. Anticipating needs, recognizing familiar faces, and tailoring services to individual preferences create emotional bonds that foster loyalty. For example, remembering a guest's anniversary or providing exclusive access to events are small gestures that carry significant weight. In cities like Dubai or Paris, where locals have both the means and desire for such high-touch experiences, the opportunity to build loyalty through detail-oriented service is substantial.

Local Residents as a Strategic Audience

* Marga Balvert, Les Roches Global Hospitality Education, marga.balvert@lesroches.com
Annick Darioly, Les Roches Global Hospitality Education, annick.darioly@lesroches.edu
Nicholas Thomas, Abu Dhabi Hospitality Academy-Les Roches, nicholas.thomas@lesroches.ae

Local residents differ fundamentally from international travellers in both behaviour and expectation. Rather than seeking novelty, locals often desire familiarity, authenticity, and relevance. They are more likely to interact with hotels regularly through spa services, restaurants, or local events rather than through extended overnight stays. As such, their touchpoints are diverse and frequent, providing hotels with multiple opportunities to create lasting impressions.

Engaging locals benefits hotels in several ways. It stabilizes revenue, particularly during off-peak tourist seasons, and enhances visibility through word-of-mouth and social sharing. Locals can act as cultural bridges for international guests, offering a sense of place and authenticity that enhances the overall guest experience (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Furthermore, hotels that integrate local traditions, cuisine, and partnerships into their services are more likely to be perceived as relevant and community-oriented, which boosts both loyalty and brand reputation (McKercher et al., 2005).

Trends Influencing Local Engagement

Several emerging trends have made engaging local residents more practical and appealing. The concept of hybrid hospitality, which blends traditional hotel services with flexible, community-focused offerings, has allowed hotels to diversify their spaces and services. For example, offering co-working spaces, extended-stay options, or community memberships creates new reasons for locals to visit regularly (Bakker et al., 2020).

Wellness programs have also become a strong draw for locals. High-end fitness centres, spa treatments, and mental wellness retreats give hotels the opportunity to become part of a resident's daily or weekly routine. Dining is another critical factor; chef's tables, seasonal menus, and exclusive culinary events are proven to attract local interest and encourage repeat visits (Namkung & Jang, 2007).

Membership programs, often offering discounts, early access, or exclusive events, foster a sense of belonging and privilege among local guests. These programs deepen emotional connections while creating recurring revenue streams. Additionally, sustainability initiatives—such as locally sourced ingredients, eco-friendly products, and community clean-ups—resonate strongly with environmentally conscious residents and provide an avenue for meaningful engagement (Han et al., 2010).

Strategies for Building Local Resident Loyalty

Creating loyalty among local residents requires a strategic shift in how hotels understand and interact with this audience. First, it is essential to assess the hotel's context. The location, history, ownership, and existing relationship with the local community shape how engagement strategies will be received. For instance, legacy hotels with deep community roots may focus on maintaining traditions, while newer properties may need to invest more heavily in outreach and identity-building. Next, understanding the local target audience is critical. Conducting surveys, listening to feedback, and analysing usage patterns helps identify what services locals value most. Many hotels find that food and beverage outlets, wellness amenities, and seasonal events are top drivers of local traffic. Tailoring offerings to reflect local tastes and cultural rhythms increases relevance and encourages repeat visits.

One of the most effective approaches to local engagement is the creation of signature experiences that are available only to residents. This could include exclusive dining nights, seasonal spa packages, or community-driven art exhibitions. These initiatives

not only generate revenue but also make locals feel like insiders—an essential step in building loyalty. Marketing to this segment should emphasize emotional benefits and exclusivity rather than price. Messaging that highlights community belonging, cultural pride, or wellness outcomes tends to resonate more strongly than transactional offers. Technology, particularly CRM systems, can support these efforts by tracking preferences and personalizing communication (McKercher et al., 2005).

Hotels should also define measurable goals, such as increases in local dining visits, repeat spa bookings, or event participation, and track these over time. Using key performance indicators (KPIs) allows hotels to evaluate what strategies are working and where improvements are needed.

A Model for Local Resident Engagement

Based on qualitative interviews, the study proposes a simple engagement model with four levels: no local engagement, local acceptance, local interest and interaction, and local loyalty (Figure 1). This progression helps hotels identify where they currently stand and what steps are needed to move forward. At the base level, hotels have little to no interaction with local residents. As engagement increases, hotels begin to attract attention through events or marketing. The next stage involves regular interaction, where locals participate in activities or use services consistently. At the highest level—local loyalty—residents view the hotel as part of their lifestyle, acting as brand advocates and returning frequently.

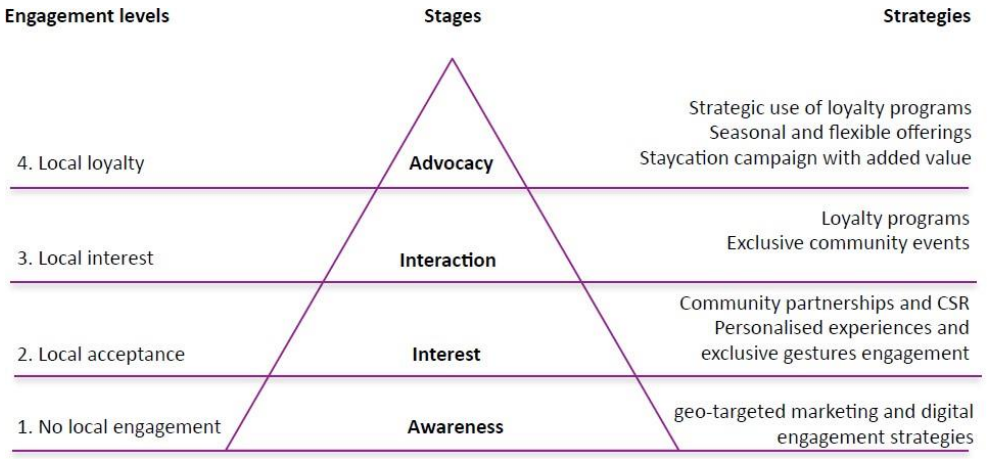

Figure 1. A model for enhancing local resident engagement (developed by the authors, 2024)

Challenges and Considerations

While the potential for local engagement is significant, several challenges must be addressed. Price sensitivity among residents may limit participation in high-end offerings, particularly in regions where luxury hospitality is still emerging. Hotels must find creative ways to provide perceived value without compromising brand positioning. Additionally, managing capacity, especially in shared spaces like spas or restaurants, can create tension between resident access and guest exclusivity. Another challenge lies in cultural perceptions. In some European cities, luxury hotels are not traditionally seen as spaces for locals. Overcoming these barriers requires intentional messaging, community partnerships, and gradual reputation building.

Conclusion

Incorporating local residents into the guest strategy of a luxury hotel is no longer a novel concept—it is a business imperative. As the global hospitality market becomes more competitive and travel patterns shift, hotels must look inward to find sustainable growth and engagement opportunities. By focusing on personalization, cultural relevance, and long-term relationship-building, luxury hotels can successfully turn local residents into loyal guests. These relationships not only improve revenue stability and enhance brand equity but also position the hotel as a valued contributor to the local community. The journey to local loyalty is not linear, and it requires continuous adaptation, creativity, and investment. However, for those hotels willing to embrace this approach, the rewards are significant—both in terms of business outcomes and meaningful community connection.

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Women Leadership Barriers in the African Hospitality Industry

Perry Muriuki, Annick Darioly and Edmund Goh *

Abstract
This paper examines the persistent barriers facing women in leadership roles in Africa's hospitality sector and explores targeted interventions. Despite growing female participation in hospitality, women remain underrepresented in decision-making positions. Through a thematic analysis of existing literature and qualitative interviews with 20 women professionals across Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, and Ghana, key challenges such as cultural norms, work-life balance issues, and limited mentorship were identified. Findings suggest that mentorship, leadership training, and inclusive policies are essential for fostering gender-equitable leadership pipelines. The study offers practical recommendations to support women's leadership progression in African hospitality.
Keywords: Women in hospitality, gender equity, women leadership, Africa, mentorship

1.Introduction

The hospitality industry is a cornerstone of Africa's socio-economic development, offering expansive employment opportunities, particularly through tourism (Cetron et al., 2020). However, gender disparities persist. Women comprise the majority of the low-skilled hospitality workforce but are significantly underrepresented in leadership roles (Booyens, 2020). For instance, women hold only 36% of skilled tourism jobs and a mere 4% of executive roles in hospitality firms across 54 African nations (Menze & Nyathela-Sunday, 2024). Factors such as patriarchal norms, caregiving responsibilities, limited educational access, and systemic discrimination shape these disparities (Moufakkir, 2023). Most existing literature focuses on women as service workers rather than leaders, limiting our understanding of their leadership trajectories (Pastore et al., 2021). This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the lived experiences of women in African hospitality leadership and recommending actionable interventions.

2.Literature Review

2.1 Challenges and Barriers to Women's Leadership

Women's underrepresentation in leadership roles stems from systemic exclusion and cultural expectations. Remington and Kitterlin-Lynch (2018) found that women occupy less than 25% of senior hospitality roles globally, with fewer in Africa. Discriminatory practices and exclusion from influential networks persist (Mwashita et al., 2020). Cultural norms reinforce male dominance in leadership, often undermining women's authority (Moufakkir, 2023). Furthermore, women's leadership trajectories are hindered by dual roles as professionals and caregivers. Liu et al. (2021) found women in hospitality were 20% more likely than men to leave jobs due to poor work-life balance. In Africa, women face similar challenges. Novikova (2021) noted that only a quarter of women leaders in Kenya and Nigeria felt supported by their organizations in balancing work and family demands. Grosser and Moon (2019) found that only 35% of hospitality firms acknowledge gender pay gaps, and even fewer address them. In South

* Perry Muriuki, Les Roches Global Hospitality Education, perry.muriuki@lesroches.com
Annick Darioly, Les Roches Global Hospitality Education, annick.darioly@lesroches.edu
Edmund Goh, Abu Dhabi Hospitality Academy - Les Roches, edmund.goh@lesroches.ae

Africa, Mwashita et al. (2020) reported a 30% gender pay gap and fewer promotion opportunities for women. Such inequities reinforce harmful stereotypes and limit leadership access.

2.2. Interventions to Enhance Women's Leadership in Hospitality

Mentorship improves confidence and navigation of male-dominated spaces (Dashper, 2020). In Kenya, Novikova (2021) found women in leadership programs were 1.5 times more likely to be promoted. Structured programs can reduce leadership isolation and build networks. This sees firms with gender-responsive CSR policies have more women leaders (Grosser & Moon, 2019). Anti-discrimination policies, flexible work arrangements, and clear promotion criteria can support gender equity. These practices align with UNWTO's educational initiatives and the African Union's Agenda 2063 (Isingizwe & Cirella, 2023). In addition, Booyens (2020) emphasized that women with formal training in hospitality management were twice as likely to attain leadership roles. Yet access to education remains uneven, especially in rural areas. Addressing this gap is key to building an inclusive leadership pipeline

3.Methodology and Results

A qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews enabled in-depth exploration of women's leadership experiences. A purposive sample of 20 women from Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa was selected based on current or aspirational leadership roles. Interviews were conducted online and analysed using thematic analysis. Participants were anonymized, and ethical protocols were followed, including informed consent and data confidentiality.

4.Results and Discussion

Five core themes emerged from the interview data. First, cultural and societal norms emerged as eighty percent of participants reported societal expectations as a barrier to leadership. Women were often discouraged from seeking executive roles, particularly in traditional communities. One respondent said, "In my community, women are expected to stay at home and not aspire to higher positions". Second, work-life balance was a key theme with seventy-five percent cited difficulties in managing professional and familial obligations. Long, irregular hours characteristic of hospitality made it difficult to meet caregiving responsibilities, affecting women's availability and willingness to pursue leadership roles. The third theme was gender discrimination and pay inequity where sixty-five percent reported unequal treatment, including slower promotions and lower pay compared to male peers. A respondent noted, "I've seen male chefs promoted faster than women, even when the women were more qualified". Next, the theme of limited mentorship was prevalent among respondents where sixty percent lacked access to mentors or role models in leadership. Participants emphasized the importance of mentorship in navigating challenges and enhancing career progression. The last theme was demand for leadership development where eighty-five percent supported the implementation of women-focused leadership training programs, citing the need for skills in decision-making, team management, and strategic planning.

The findings confirm that cultural barriers remain the most pressing challenge for African women in hospitality leadership, reflecting long-standing gender norms (Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018; Mwashita et al., 2020). The dual burden of professional work and family responsibilities continues to hinder women's progression (Novikova, 2021), while institutional barriers such as pay gaps and limited promotion opportunities exacerbate inequality (Grosser & Moon, 2019). Encouragingly,

participants endorsed mentorship and leadership development as critical pathways to equity. This aligns with Dashper (2020) and Novikova (2021), who advocate for mentoring and targeted training. However, such interventions remain scarce. More robust implementation by firms and support from policy frameworks are needed to institutionalize gender inclusion in hospitality leadership.

5.Conclusion and Managerial Implications

This study identified the key challenges impeding women's leadership progression in African hospitality and proposed evidence-based interventions. Cultural norms, work-life imbalance, and discriminatory practices continue to restrict women's access to senior roles. Interventions such as mentorship, training, and inclusive corporate policies are essential for fostering equitable leadership.

There are key managerial implications derived from this study. First, firms need to consider mentorship programs to create formal and cross-industry mentorship structures to support aspiring women leaders. Second, the role of work-life balance needs to implement flexible work policies and on-site childcare support to reduce the caregiving burden. Third, companies need to conduct regular, transparent pay audit reviews to close wage gaps and improve promotion equity. Next, companies should invest in leadership training to provide tailored development programs focusing on strategic, operational, and people management skills. This could initiate CSR integration to embed gender equality into CSR and implement anti-discrimination policies with clear reporting mechanisms. Lastly, promoting women's leadership in hospitality is not just a moral imperative—it enhances innovation, service quality, and organizational resilience. With targeted efforts, the African hospitality sector can become a global model for inclusive leadership.

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Factors influencing third-party booking platforms for Generation Z consumers when reserving short stays with small rural independent accommodation providers in the United Kingdom

Jack Collins, Rachel Germanier and Edmund Goh *

Abstract
This study explores how Generation Z consumers engage with third-party booking platforms (online travel agencies, or OTAs) such as Booking.com, Airbnb, and Expedia when booking short stays with small rural independent accommodations in the UK. Through qualitative semi-structured interviews with seven Gen Z participants from hospitality and non-hospitality backgrounds, the research identifies key behaviours, decision-making processes, and preferences related to OTA use. Thematic analysis reveals that OTAs play a critical role during the information-gathering phase due to their convenience, transparency, and reliance on peer-generated content. However, booking preferences diverged: hospitality-background respondents were more likely to book directly, while others prioritised ease and familiarity. Findings suggest small providers can increase direct bookings by leveraging authenticity, transparent pricing, and social media engagement.
Keywords: Generation Z, third-party booking platforms, online travel agencies, rural tourism, independent accommodation, hospitality marketing, United Kingdom

1.Introduction

Digital technology has reshaped the hospitality and tourism sector, with third-party booking platforms now central to the accommodation search and reservation process. OTAs offer broad listings, real-time availability, transparent pricing, and user reviews, making them attractive to modern consumers. Yet, for small rural independent accommodation providers, these platforms present both opportunities and challenges—including visibility, reliance, and high commission fees. Simultaneously, Generation Z (born 1997–2012) is emerging as a powerful market segment. Digital natives by nature, Gen Z travellers prioritise authenticity, convenience, and value. Their travel decisions are shaped by peer recommendations, social media, and online reviews. Despite their alignment with the values of small rural providers, there is limited research exploring how OTAs mediate Gen Z's booking behaviours in this niche context. This study addresses that gap by investigating Gen Z's use of third-party platforms for rural bookings in the UK and assessing behavioural differences between those with and without hospitality backgrounds.

2.Literature Review

2.1Generation Z Travel Behaviour

Generation Z (born 1997–2012) has grown up immersed in digital technology, shaping their preferences and behaviours as consumers. Gen Z is highly tech-savvy and values transparency, customisation, and user-generated content (Goh & Lee, 2018). Their travel preferences lean towards authentic and immersive experiences, often driven by social media inspiration (Seyfi et al., 2024). This cohort views sustainability positively but balances it with cost and convenience (Ribeiro et al., 2023).

2.2 Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) and Booking Preferences

* Jack Collins, Les Roches Global Hospitality Education, jack.collins@lesroches.com
Rachel Germanier, Les Roches Global Hospitality Education, rachel.germanier@lesroches.edu
Edmund Goh, Abu Dhabi Hospitality Academy - Les Roches, edmund.goh@lesroches.ae

OTAs appeal to Gen Z through intuitive platforms, real-time reviews, and comparison tools (Priporas et al., 2017; Wang & Park, 2023). Although OTAs facilitate booking, concerns over pricing discrimination and loss of provider identity persist (Wang et al., 2024). This demonstrates that peer trust remains central to Gen Z's decision-making.

2.3 Small Independent Accommodation Providers

Unlike large hotel chains with advanced infrastructure and revenue management systems, small independent accommodation providers offer personalisation and unique experiences but struggle with OTA dependency, limited marketing reach, and weaker pricing power (Gössling & Lane, 2015). Gen Z's preferences theoretically align with these offerings, but booking behaviours often favour OTAs due to their convenience and perceived trustworthiness.

3.Methodology and Results

A qualitative, interpretivist approach was adopted to explore Gen Z consumers' perceptions and behaviours. Seven participants aged 18–27, from both hospitality and non-hospitality academic backgrounds, were interviewed using semi-structured methods. All interviews were conducted online, recorded, and transcribed. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns across responses. While the small sample limits generalisability, the in-depth data collection offers valuable insight into a specific consumer segment.

A total of six key themes emerged from the interviews. First, the booking platform preferences revealed all participants used OTAs for initial research due to their convenience and the ability to compare options transparently. Reviews were especially valued, with one respondent noting, "I wouldn't book a place with only a handful of reviews." Hospitality- background participants demonstrated more critical review literacy, questioning reliability and marketing bias. Second, the use of direct booking vs. OTA was a key theme where participants with hospitality backgrounds preferred direct booking to support small businesses and avoid OTA commissions. They believed direct contact allowed for better customisation and communication. Non-hospitality participants prioritised convenience, but some expressed willingness to book directly if pricing matched OTA offers. Third, the role of social media was prevalent in travel inspiration where social media especially TikTok and Instagram—influenced destination choice but had limited impact on final booking decisions unless the property was perceived as unique. Most respondents did not post publicly about their stays unless incentivised or the experience was particularly exceptional. Fourth, sustainability was appreciated but not a decisive booking factor. Participants were more likely to value sustainability when it contributed to an enhanced experience, such as through the use of local products. A willingness to pay a small premium was noted if sustainability added to perceived value. This suggested that Gen Z consumers were price-conscious but flexible. Value-for-money was prioritised over absolute low prices. Non-hospitality respondents displayed a more pragmatic cost-based approach, while hospitality participants were more experience-driven. Lastly, the preference for devices was another key theme. Contrary to expectations, most respondents preferred using laptops for research due to better comparison capabilities. Mobile phones were used primarily for inspiration and post-booking communication. Email was preferred over SMS for professionalism and privacy.

4.Discussion and Conclusion

4.1 Discussion

This study confirms that OTAs are central to Gen Z's accommodation research process, echoing findings by Wang & Park (2023) and Priporas et al. (2017). Participants relied heavily on peer reviews and visual content, favouring unfiltered insights over branded promotions. Social media served as a tool for discovery rather than decision-making, aligning with Liu et

al. (2022). Contrary to literature suggesting high Gen Z engagement in public digital sharing, respondents in this study preferred private communication with peers. This suggests a more selective digital identity than previously assumed. While Gen Z values sustainability, it must be positioned as part of the broader experience to impact booking decisions—consistent with Homer and Kanagasapapathy (2023). Importantly, this study found that hospitality-background respondents showed greater empathy for small providers and were more likely to book directly, indicating that industry education may influence consumer ethics. Device usage patterns challenge existing assumptions. Laptops were preferred for decision-making, suggesting that interface design and screen usability still matter, even for digital natives.

4.2Conclusion

Gen Z consumers rely heavily on OTAs for researching accommodation but express a clear preference for authenticity, perceived value, and user-generated content. While convenience dominates booking behaviour, opportunities exist for small rural providers to increase direct bookings by offering personalised, sustainable, and authentic experiences. Differences between hospitality and non-hospitality respondents suggest that consumer education influences booking ethics and behaviour. Providers who strategically integrate value-driven offerings with intuitive digital engagement stand to build loyalty within this influential market segment.

4.3Managerial Implications

Small rural accommodation providers can improve Gen Z engagement through enhanced direct booking channels to develop user-friendly, mobile-optimised websites with transparent pricing and booking incentives. Next, accommodation managers can consider using authentic social media marketing to encourage guests to share experiences through incentives. This can lead to personalised local packages to offer curated, direct-only experiences that highlight the uniqueness of the region. Finally, property managers can use integrated sustainability messaging to frame sustainable practices as value-enhancing features (e.g., local food sourcing) rather than moral imperatives.

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Expanding Access to the Industry: The High School Academy of Hospitality & Tourism Model in Michigan

Paul Stansbie, Mike Sciarini,Kristen Jack and Robert Nash *

Abstract
This case study explores the development, implementation, and impact of a NAF (formerly National Academy Foundation) Academy of Hospitality & Tourism (AOHT) tailored to serve underrepresented minority high school students in the high-need urban community of Grand Rapids, Michigan (USA). It details the initial need for the academy by various community stakeholders and examines the steps taken to grow and expand the education provision into neighboring school districts despite challenges presented by the external environment. The goal of the academy was not only to provide students with exposure to career opportunities (and transferrable skills) in hospitality and related fields, but also to bridge the gap between these students and job needs of industries that have traditionally been perceived as less accessible to them.
Key Words:High School Students, Minorities, HTM Academies, Talent Pipeline, Career Opportunities

Introduction

It is well documented that the hospitality and tourism management (HTM) industries in the USA have been hit hard in recent years (American Hotel & Lodging Association [AHLA], n.d.; Botshot AI, n.d.; Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2023). In response, organizations have explored a plethora of strategies to try and remain profitable while delivering much needed services to both domestic and international visitors (Amadeus Hospitality, n.d.; American Hotel & Lodging Association [AHLA], 2023; Epos Now, n.d.).

These challenges stem from health-related issues such as COVID 19 restrictions, changes in federal government policy on transient workers (especially seasonal visas and migrants), elects of general economic downturns, or more recently the proposed impacts of tariffs affecting the cost of importing goods for new construction, building renovations or simply products to sell in their establishments. While this list isn't definitive, each of these are driving organizations to seek both innovative and more streamlined ways of operating their businesses. In addition to that drive for efficiency, an unexpected consequence of staff cutbacks, furloughs and an alignment of labor to business demands (particularly evident during the pandemic), has seen some significant migration of experienced career service workers from the industry. Many of which, have simply not returned (Croes, Semrad, & Rivera, 2021; Huang, De la Mora Velasco, Marsh, & Workman, 2021; Liu-Lastres, Wen, & Huang, 2023).

Furthermore, in correlation with the COVID 19 pandemic temporarily closing businesses and restricting travel and patronage, there has also been a marked decline in the number of students electing to pursue a degree in hospitality and tourism management fields at universities. Evidence would suggest that while some were declining in enrollment before the pandemic, there has been increased attrition from the major since with some programs opting to sunset these majors completely (Gray Decision Intelligence, 2024).

* Paul Stansbie, Grand Valley State University, stansbp@gvsu.edu
Mike Sciarini, Grand Valley State University, sciarinm@gvsu.edu
Kristen Jack, Grand Valley State University, jackk@gvsu.edu
Robert Nash, Bond University, r.nash@bond.edu.au

To stem the decline, it has been vital that program chairs, directors and university administrators seek new and somewhat innovative ways to showcase the value of their majors to prospective students and reverse this trend line.

Grand Valley State University (GVSU) located in Grand Rapids; Michigan (USA) has been one of those programs impacted by the gradual decline in students in recent years. An internal review in 2014 identified some underlying reasons influencing those challenges into the future. In particular, census data forecasted a declining high school population from traditional source markets for students within Michigan and internal policy and resource changes at the institution which impacted recruitment. Both challenges were further exacerbated by the pandemic. In a proactive response, the GVSU HTM program leadership, in partnership with local business leaders, embarked on a community wide initiative to address the perceived talent pipeline challenges and bring the attention of HTM careers and education to high school students.

To that end, a partnership was created in 2018 to implement an Academy of Hospitality and Tourism (AOHT) at a local Grand Rapids high school. Bringing together the support of the local Kent County Convention Visitors Bureau (Experience Grand Rapids), a prominent multi-hotel regional employer Amway Hotel Company (AHC), the leadership from Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) and the faculty from GVSU's HTM program, a plan was devised to seek a national partner to help facilitate the establishment of the academy.

The main objective of the partnership was to allow students (many from traditionally underrepresented, minority populations) to learn more about careers in the industry, to have mentorship and internship opportunities, learn soft, transferable skills applicable in any service environment and to gain college credit should they wish to matriculate to a college program. The hope was that these students would better appreciate the career opportunities available to them and thus embark on a career post high school in the hospitality industry.

This case study will detail the steps undertaken to develop, implement and evaluate the success of an AOHT in GRPS. It will further discuss the background, rationale, key objectives, structure, challenges, and impact on the students and the community. Finally, it will detail next steps as the success of the single academy has motivated community partners to expand the program into additional schools and districts.

It is anticipated the findings of this case will appeal to program directors, tourism professionals or community members interested in developing a talent pipeline leveraging the opportunities for minority students.

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AI in hospitality and tourism: Rewriting the customer journey

Annamarie Sisson, Rui Costa, Minwoo Lee and Billy Bai *

Abstract
Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the hospitality and tourism industry by reshaping the customer journey across pre-purchase, on-site, and post-purchase stages. This study explores AI's role in enhancing hyper-personalization, operational efficiency, and stakeholder value, while addressing challenges like ethical concerns and workforce impacts. Using stakeholder theory and accessibility-diagnosticity theory, the research synthesizes current literature to analyze AI's disruptive potential. Findings highlight AI applications such as chatbots, big data analytics, and IoT, offering actionable insights for businesses, policymakers, and researchers. The study proposes a future research agenda to balance innovation with trust and sustainability, guiding responsible AI adoption in the digital era.
Keywords: artificial intelligence, hospitality, customer journey, stakeholders

Introduction

Among the many changes the tourism and hospitality industries have witnessed in recent decades, artificial intelligence (AI) has been one of the largest integrations in the customer journey. The current customer journey consists of five stages: Pre-purchase, research, booking, on-site, and post-purchase. Although the customers' adoption of technology can vary, it is obvious that all customers utilize AI to enhance their lives (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2019). As customer demand for and reliance on AI continues to grow, understanding the use of AI applications can help create value for different stakeholders in the customer journey.

There is potential value in promoting a disruptive customer journey with AI under the hospitality and tourism lens. Therefore, the current study aims to synthesize previous research in hospitality and tourism to develop a new business strategic value. In particular, the purpose of the study is to understand how AI applications can create value at different stages of the customer journey with different stakeholders. The research questions include: (RQ1) How can AI applications disrupt the customer journey? (RQ2) How can AI applications help to identify potential impacts (e.g., enhance experience and business performance) at different stages of the customer journey? and (RQ3) How can AI applications help create value for different stakeholders in the customer journey? The study findings will help to suggest future research directions for hospitality researchers and provide industry practitioners with practical implications.

Literature Review

Customer journey perspective in the digital era, how can this be disrupted

Technological disruption has been an emerging theme in the customer journey context in the past five years (Tueanrat et al., 2021). With the rise in disruptive innovations in hospitality and tourism, these new advances are facilitated through various applications at any time in the consumer journey (Ramadan et al., 2021). Due to the nature of the fast- paced technological advancements in hospitality and tourism, there is a growing concern that these advancements change the structure of the customer journey (Farah et al., 2022). Firms are

* Annamarie Sisson, Edinburgh Napier University, a.sisson@napier.ac.uk
Rui Costa, University of Aveiro, rui.costa@ua.pt
Minwoo Lee, University of Houston, mlee37@uh.edu
Billy Bai, University of Nevada Las Vegas, billy.bai@unlv.edu

now expected to identify what part of the journey the consumer is on and act accordingly to propel them towards the next point in that journey (Farah et al., 2022).
Figure I identifies current technologies embedded in the five-stage customer journey.

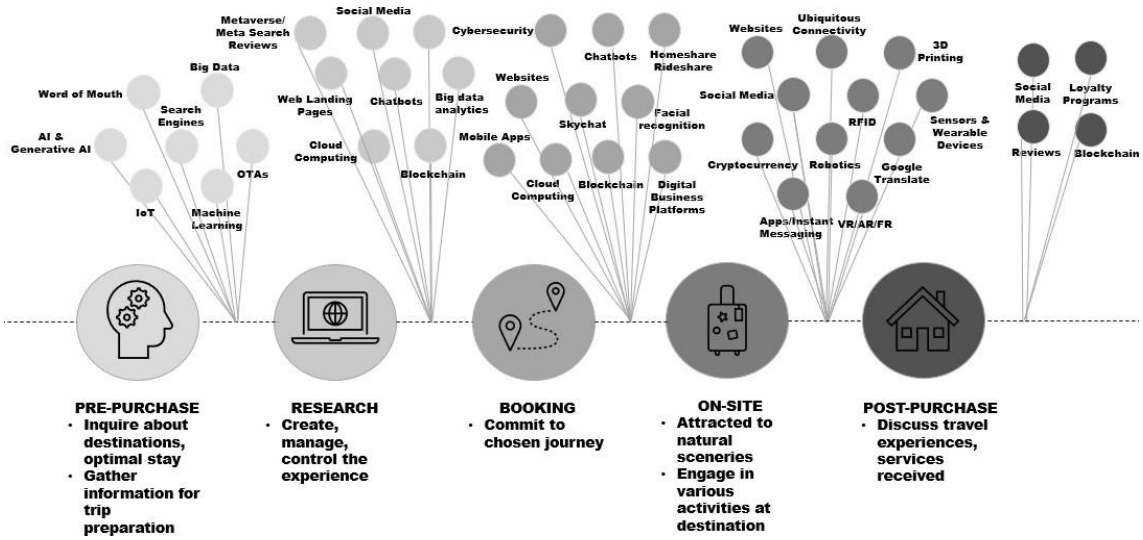

Figure 1. Technologies involved in the current customer journey

AI applications as one of the disruptive technologies

The development of AI has motivated the automation of processes and services, which facilitates the direct interaction with customers in frontline service (Belanche et al., 2020). The impact of technology on the experience (Hoyer et al., 2020). Increased personalization, customer involvement, and co-creation enhance opportunities for customer-technology interactions through touchpoints and encounters (Ghesh et al., 2024).

AI is a major source of innovation (Huang and Rust, 2018) with potential for disruption, particularly high in services (Bock et al., 2020). Increasing interest in implementing automated forms of interaction in services (Paluch & Wirtz, 2020; Balanche et al, 2020), and this trend is not different in the tourism, leisure, and hospitality industry. In addition, service automation may have a great impact on customer choices and behaviors (Van Doorn et al., 2017).

People in tourism, hospitality and events (e.g. hospitality managers and employees, event planners and attendees and tourists) use and experience AI via AI- powered information and communication technology (ICT; i.e. the convergence of telecommunication and computing through a link system for assessing, securing, processing, transmitting and storing information) and smart devices (i.e. electronic devices with wireless protocols to connect with other networks or devices) (Doborjeh et al., 2023; Gaur et al., 2021; Gretzel et al., 2015; Stankov et al., 2019).

Stakeholder Theory

This study employs stakeholder theory to serve as the theoretical framework. A stakeholder is any group or individual who has an interest in an organization. In the management field, stakeholder theory stipulates that businesses should consider the interests of all stakeholders in their decision-making processes (Freeman, 1984). To achieve long-term organizational success, businesses should emphasize the importance of managing relationships with stakeholders to create value for stakeholders.

For hospitality and tourism organizations, customers are a major stakeholder.Their consumption experience with products and services is critical to satisfaction and loyalty. Both management and employees play an essential role in creating a memorable experience, which can be facilitated by technology. Therefore, stakeholder theory will provide a theoretical framework to support the study's conceptualization, research design, and data analyses.

Accessibility– Diagnosticity Theory

Accessibility-Diagnosticity Theory (ADT) offers a valuable lens through which to examine the hospitality and tourism consumer journey. This theory posits that consumers prioritize information that is both easily accessible and highly diagnostic in making decisions. In the context of hospitality and tourism, this means that consumers are more likely to rely on information that is readily available and perceived as relevant to their specific needs and preferences (Chen et al., 2024).

By understanding ADT, hospitality and tourism providers can optimize their marketing and service delivery strategies to better cater to the needs and preferences of their target audience. This involves making relevant information easily accessible through various channels, such as websites, social media, and in-person interactions (Stergiou & Nella, 2024). Additionally, providers should strive to create highly diagnostic content that resonates with consumers and helps them make informed decisions throughout their journey.

Methodology

To achieve research objectives, the present study rigorously follows a structured systematic literature review process (Tranfield et al., 2003). To identify critical aspects of AI applications affecting various stakeholders in the customer journey, we employed a two-stage literature review search approach. First, preliminary searches were performed in the Web of Science database with search terms such as "Artificial intelligence" and "AI", leading to an initial dataset containing 162 articles published from 2019 to October 2024. The search was limited to 25 hospitality and tourism journals ranked as Q1 and Q2 journals in the Web of Science to capture the most recent, relevant, and impactful research in the hospitality and tourism field. As suggested by prior studies (Adams et al., 2017; Booth, 2016; Lee et al., 2023), this study considered only research articles to capture critical issues and ensure high-quality findings by excluding research notes, case studies, and industry reports. (Adams et al., 2017).

In the second stage, researchers independently reviewed and coded all articles to determine whether each article is directly related to focal topics and can be included or not in this study (Pautasso, 2013; Xiao & Watson, 2019). This two-stage sampling process led to 92 articles as the final dataset. Lastly, the authors performed content analysis to identify critical theories, emerging research trends, and other relevant information on AI in the hospitality and tourism context.

Findings and discussion

As this study is a work-in-progress, the authors have identified current technologies (Table 1) in the five-stage customer journey and aim to redefine technologies in a more condensed, three-stage customer journey identified as pre-purchase, on-site, and post- purchase. Additionally, the authors will redefine the technologies under the affected stakeholders of customers, employees/management, and government. Based on the findings of the study, the authors aim to create a new customer journey table and figure.

Table 1. Technologies in the current customer journey

Technology	**Pre-Purchase**	**On-Site**	**Post-Purchase**
AI	X	X	X

Generative AI	X	X	X
Word of Mouth	X		
IoT	X		
Search engines	X		
OTA	X		
Machine learning	X		X
Big data	X		X
Metaverse/Meta search reviews	X		
Web landing pages	X		
Cloud computing	X		
Social media	X	X	X
Chatbots	X		
Blockchain	X		X
Big data analytics	X		

Theoretical implications

The integration of Accessibility-Diagnosticity Theory (ADT) and Stakeholder Theory offers a robust theoretical framework to explore the implications of AI applications on the customer journey. ADT emphasizes the importance of accessible and diagnostic information in influencing consumer decision-making. In the context of AI, this suggests that AI-powered tools can significantly enhance the accessibility of relevant information, tailoring it to individual preferences and needs. For instance, AI-driven chatbots can provide instant, personalized assistance, making information readily available and easily digestible.

Furthermore, AI can enhance the diagnosticity of information by analyzing vast datasets to identify patterns and trends. This enables businesses to deliver highly relevantand targeted recommendations, improving the overall customer experience. By understanding individual preferences and behaviors, AI can anticipate needs and proactively offer solutions, thus optimizing the customer journey.

Stakeholder Theory, on the other hand, highlights the importance of balancing the interests of various stakeholders, including customers, employees, investors, and society. AI applications can contribute to this by providing valuable insights into stakeholder needs and expectations. For example, AI-powered sentiment analysis can monitor social media and customer reviews to identify emerging trends and potential issues. This information can be used to make informed decisions that benefit all stakeholders.

By combining ADT and Stakeholder Theory, this research aims to explore how AI can be leveraged to optimize the customer journey, enhance business performance, and create value for all stakeholders involved.

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Visualizing the Sequence of Service: AI-Generated Flowcharts as a Pedagogical Tool in Fine Dining Education

Sarah Belanger and Edmund Goh *

Abstract
This paper examines the use of AI-generated flowcharts as an innovative pedagogical tool to support the teaching of the Sequence of Service (SOS) in fine dining education. It begins by outlining how SOS is currently taught in hospitality programs and highlights the persistent challenges in conveying its complexity, particularly the balance between procedural consistency and the interpersonal finesse required in luxury service environments. Traditional methods often lack the flexibility and depth needed to fully prepare students for the realities of high-end hospitality. The paper introduces generative AI platforms such as ChatGPT and Whimsical as solutions for creating dynamic, customizable flowcharts that visually map service steps while integrating context-aware language and emotional intelligence. This paper provides practical implications for hospitality educators through instructional delivery by offering greater efficiency and standardization, while simultaneously helping students internalize service protocols and develop intuitive, guest-centric fluency—key competencies for succeeding in modern luxury dining settings.
Keywords: Sequence of service, hospitality training, AI-Generated pedagogical tools, ChatGPT, Whimsical

1. Introduction

In luxury hospitality, the ability to deliver standardized service with adaptive, emotionally intelligent dialogue is increasingly vital (Manfreda et al., 2023). Traditional F&B training approaches often fall short in preparing students for the nuanced demands of high-end service environments (Nyanjom & Wilkins, 2016). In most hospitality F&B education settings, the Sequence of Service (SOS) is taught as a structured, linear progression of 10 to 15 standardized steps—from mise en place and guest greeting to order-taking, service execution, and post- service clearing (Cousins et al., 2018). These steps are typically delivered through procedural checklists, visual aids, and competency-based assessment models designed to instil consistency and technical accuracy. Students are trained to execute each phase in order, often with scripted prompts or set phrases to ensure uniformity. However, this approach offers little room for adaptability. For example, the order-taking phase is commonly presented as a fixed moment: the server approaches the table and takes the guest's order. Yet this simplification does not address what to do when a guest is not ready to order—an omission that can leave learners unprepared in live service scenarios. In reality, this stage is among the most unpredictable; according to Forbes Travel Guide (2023), up to 68% of service delays originate here due to evolving guest needs or responses.

While the SOS is intended to function as a flexible guide that connects kitchen, beverage, and service operations (Cousins et al., 2018), traditional teaching methods often emphasize procedural correctness over emotional intelligence or situational awareness (Nyanjom & Wilkins, 2016). Static training resources frequently overlook the interpersonal dynamics of service, such as tone, timing, and guest mood—factors that significantly influence the guest experience. As a result, there is a growing need to evolve current pedagogical models toward

* Sarah Belanger, Abu Dhabi Hospitality Academy, Les Roches,sarah. belanger@lesroches.ae
Edmund Goh, Abu Dhabi Hospitality Academy, Les Roches, edmund. goh@lesroches.ae

more adaptive, context-sensitive approaches that reflect the realities of luxury dining environments.

2. Pedagogical challenges in teaching the Sequence of Service (SOS)

Instructing students in the Sequence of Service (SOS) for fine dining contexts poses several pedagogical hurdles, primarily due to the need for a precise blend of consistency and adaptability. High-end dining requires that service personnel uphold standardized procedures while intuitively tailoring interactions to meet individual guest preferences—all without disrupting the fluidity of the overall experience.

2.1 Cognitive load and instructional demands

One of the primary challenges lies in the cognitive demands placed on learners, who must internalize and recall over 50 distinct procedural steps while also demonstrating flexible decision-making in live service scenarios. Cognitive load theory provides insight into this issue, explaining how the burden of excessive information processing can impair learning, especially when immediate judgment is essential (Paas et al., 2016). Traditional teaching methods often struggle to adequately scaffold this complexity, resulting in reduced performance under pressure and an incomplete mastery of service delivery.

2.2 Language Use and Communication Nuance

Another key issue is the rigidity of language models commonly used in training. Prescriptive scripts fail to reflect the interpersonal and emotional subtleties expected in luxury dining. Generic phrases such as “Is everything okay?” lack the attentiveness and refinement required, especially when compared to more personalized expressions like “Would you like to adjust the pacing of your meal this evening?” Under stress, students often revert to informal or inappropriate language, for example, saying “You guys want drinks?” instead of offering wine selections with the sophistication expected in upscale venues. This communication gap underscores a broader shortfall in soft skills development. McKercher et al. (2024) note that many hospitality graduates feel inadequately prepared for nuanced guest engagement due to a lack of emphasis on tone, formality, and elevated service dialogue. Furthermore, instructional content typically focuses on task execution—such as “Take beverage order”—without modeling how to communicate these tasks in polished, guest-centric language.

2.3 Variability Across Dining Contexts

Teaching SOS is further complicated by the diversity of expectations across different fine dining environments. As Chou et al. (2025) observe, significant variation exists between service protocols in different establishments, making it difficult to apply a one-size-fits-all training framework. This supports a shift toward teaching methodologies that emphasize contextual awareness and adaptability, allowing students to tailor their service approach to align with the unique ethos and brand identity of each operation.

2.4 Bridging Theory and Practice

A longstanding challenge in hospitality education is the disconnect between classroom instruction and real-world application (Goh & King, 2020). SOS is frequently taught as a rigid, linear sequence, which may appear functional in theoretical settings but fails to prepare students for the unpredictability of live service—such as responding to last-minute guest requests or managing indecision with grace. Rosenkranz (2022) highlight this theory–practice gap, emphasizing the need for curricula that foster improvisational skills, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence. Without sufficient experiential learning opportunities, students may struggle to transition smoothly into professional roles where these competencies are crucial.

As the industry moves toward increasingly subtle forms of personalization, hospitality education must evolve accordingly (Hu et al., 2019). To equip students for the demands of modern luxury service, instruction in the Sequence of Service must extend beyond procedural accuracy to encompass emotional acuity, situational judgment, and refined verbal and non-verbal communication. Only by integrating these elements can educators cultivate graduates capable of delivering both technically proficient and highly personalized guest experiences.

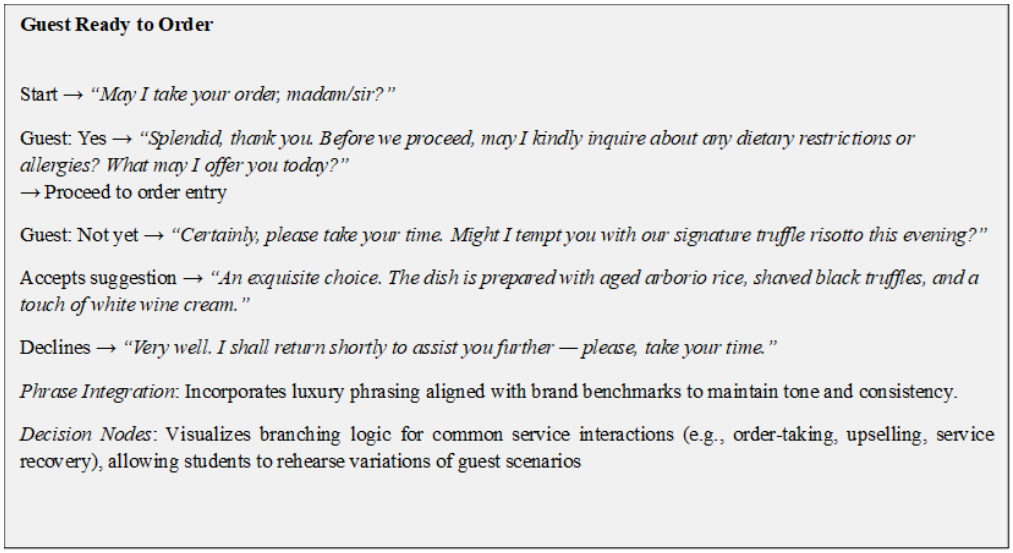
3. AI-Generated Flowcharts as an Innovative Instructional Strategy

The integration of AI-generated flowcharts into fine dining education presents a promising pedagogical response to the complex demands of teaching the Sequence of Service (SOS). This approach supports the development of T-shaped competencies (Caputo et al., 2023), which balance deep technical proficiency (vertical skills – such as 15-step service sequences) with broad interpersonal and adaptive capabilities (horizontal skills). In this context, flowcharts provide a structured yet flexible framework that helps students internalize both procedural accuracy and responsive, guest-centred communication.

3.1 Digital tools for instructional design

Digital platforms such as Whimsical AI and ChatGPT facilitate the creation of interactive service maps, allowing educators to design branching flowcharts that walk students through real-life dining scenarios. These visual tools embed scripted dialogue within decision-making trees, enabling learners to practice not only the operational steps but also the refined language necessary for luxury settings. For example, a guest interaction flow might begin with a polite inquiry such as, “May I take your order, madam/sir?” and then diverge based on guest responses. If the guest is ready to order, the script guides the student through allergy checks and dish recommendations. If not, the student is prompted to offer subtle, brand-aligned suggestions like, “Might I tempt you with our signature truffle risotto this evening?” Flowchart nodes visualize alternative responses, from upselling to gracefully acknowledging a guest’s indecision. These scripted pathways reinforce tone, vocabulary, and timing—critical for cultivating consistency and elegance in communication. See Figure 1 for example of SOS prompts through AI - Whimsical.

Figure 1. SOS prompts through AI – Whimsical



By incorporating luxury-standard phrasing and service recovery options (See Figure 2 of an example of AI-generated flowchart for order taking), these tools allow students to repeatedly engage with service variations in a low-risk, practice-oriented environment. This supports the development of communication strategies that align with a property's brand voice while preparing students for real-world interactions.

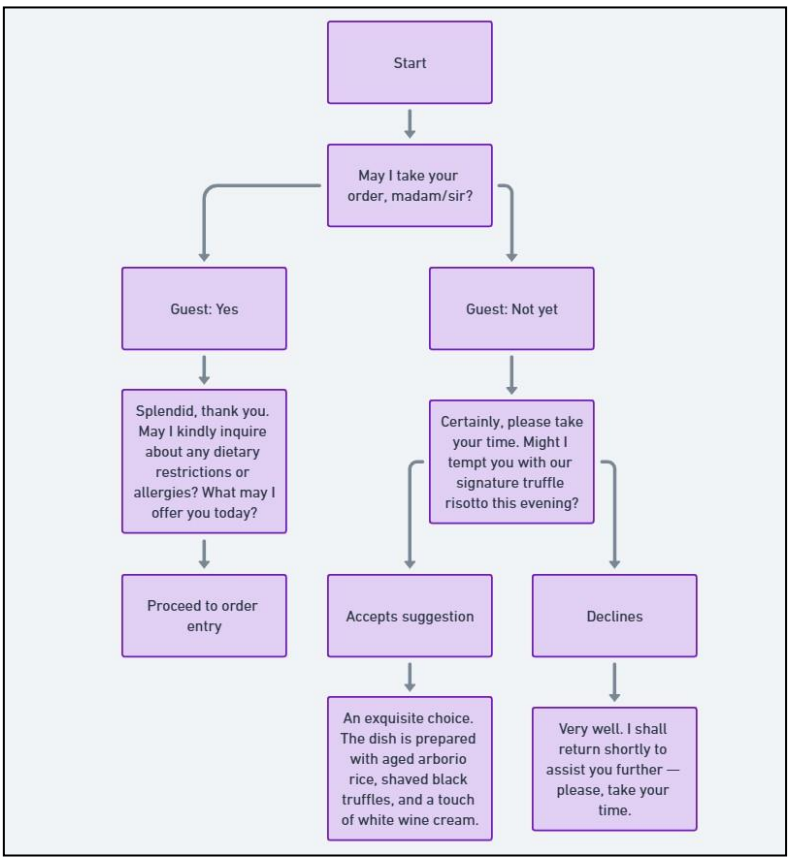


Figure 2. Example of AI-generated flowchart for order-taking with service recovery

3.2 Enhancing Adaptive Service Capabilities

AI-generated flowcharts operationalize the T-shaped skill model by fusing structured repetition with dynamic adaptability. Students gain vertical mastery by repeatedly practicing core SOS components—such as the widely adopted 15-step sequence—while simultaneously developing horizontal agility in emotional intelligence, contextual awareness, and linguistic nuance. Rather than relying solely on ad hoc improvisation, this method builds a foundation of "rebuttal-ready" phrasing and situational judgment. Learners are taught not just what to say, but how to respond in tone, timing, and content depending on shifting guest expectations. This scaffolding fosters anticipatory service behavior, a hallmark of luxury hospitality.

These instructional strategies resonate with current hospitality scholarship where consumers now anticipate not only premium physical facilities but also seek emotional resonance and deep value experiences through personalized services (Zeithaml et al., 2020).

AI-enhanced flowcharts address this dual expectation by training students to deliver scripted interactions that feel natural and bespoke, maintaining both structural integrity and emotional sensitivity. By visualizing service interactions and embedding brand-consistent language, AI-generated flowcharts provide a pedagogically rich environment where technical and interpersonal skills can be cultivated in tandem—ultimately preparing students to meet the evolving expectations of luxury dining with confidence and competence.

4. Discussion

4.1 Benefits to educators

The integration of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT with visual diagramming platforms like Whimsical offers hospitality educators a more efficient and standardized approach to designing training resources, particularly for teaching the Sequence of Service (SOS). By feeding detailed instructional prompts into ChatGPT—reflecting the tone, precision, and nuance expected in luxury service contexts—educators can generate high-quality service dialogue that adheres to benchmarks set by industry. These outputs can then be seamlessly converted into interactive service diagrams using Whimsical's AI-powered flowcharting tools. This dual-platform workflow significantly reduces the time and effort traditionally required to develop training materials, freeing instructors to focus on pedagogical refinement rather than manual content formatting.

Beyond improving efficiency, this approach also enhances instructional coherence. Each service step and corresponding phrasing are aligned to consistent luxury standards, minimizing variation in how service is taught across multiple classes or instructors. As noted by Dogru et al. (2024), generative AI tools can reduce content development time while preserving, and often elevating, instructional quality. This is particularly advantageous in hospitality education, where programs must respond rapidly to evolving service expectations without compromising excellence.

4.2 Benefits to students

From the learner's perspective, AI-generated flowcharts deliver both foundational knowledge and practical fluency by embedding the T-shaped competency model into training. Students acquire procedural proficiency (vertical expertise) while simultaneously developing the interpersonal dexterity needed to personalize service interactions (horizontal skills).

The first key benefit for students is the building of professional language reflexes. Rather than relying on impromptu or colloquial expressions during live interactions, students are immersed in structured, repeatable scenarios where they rehearse elegant, brand-consistent phrasing. This repeated exposure builds what can be described as "linguistic muscle memory," equipping students to speak with confidence and finesse under pressure. For instance, common informal phrases such as "You guys want drinks?" are replaced with elevated alternatives like, "Would our guests care for an apéritif to begin the evening?"—an alignment with the verbal sophistication expected in five-star settings. This sees the importance of language quality, tone,and guest engagement in service assessments, making this type of language conditioning essential for future professionals aiming to meet or exceed global luxury standards.

Next, AI-generated flowcharts help students to enhance their situational responsiveness. The branching design of flowcharts exposes students to multiple possible service interactions—acceptances, objections, indecision—and trains them to respond with speed, appropriateness, and grace. Over time, this shapes a more intuitive service instinct, in which learners no longer rely on memorized scripts but rather develop the capacity to tailor responses fluidly based on subtle guest cues and shifting circumstances. This evolution from reactive to anticipatory service behavior supports what many industry experts describe as the future of luxury hospitality: service that feels personalized, seamless, and "invisibly" attentive. By embedding AI-driven pedagogical tools into hospitality education, we enable learners to internalize both structure and spontaneity, preparing them to meet the elevated standards of tomorrow's service landscape.

5. Conclusion

The integration of AI-driven flowcharts into hospitality education provides an innovative approach to teaching the Sequence of Service in fine dining. By combining the rigor of traditional training with the flexibility required for personalized guest interactions, AI tools support both educators and students in achieving service excellence. While AI-generated flowcharts offer many benefits, there are limitations to consider. One key restriction is that AI cannot convey tone or body language, which are essential in luxury service interactions. Moreover, as discussed in relation to cognitive overload, an overreliance on flowcharts could overwhelm students, who are already navigating complex procedures and adapting to real-time service scenarios. To mitigate this, AI flowcharts should be used in tandem with practical, in- person role-playing and tone coaching. This symbiotic approach allows students to engage with the flowcharts for structured guidance, while still benefiting from the emotional nuances and adaptive skills that are best learned through direct interaction. By combining both, educators can reduce cognitive load and foster more comprehensive learning experience.

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Beyond Internships: Designing ELITE Experiences for Career-Ready Graduates in Hospitality, Tourism, and Culinary Education

Timothy Flohr and William Mullins *

Abstract
This interactive workshop introduces the ELITE System - Experiential Learning Integration & Tracking Evaluation - a research-based rubric designed to measure and improve experiential learning and professional development in hospitality, tourism, and culinary programs. Professor Tim Flohr will speak from the hospitality and tourism lens, demonstrating how academic institutions can intentionally align curriculum with career readiness competencies. Professor Bill Mullins will share from the culinary perspective, discussing how experiential learning manifests in kitchens, labs, and mentorship-based environments. Participants will engage with the ELITE Rubric, score their own programs, and preview the forthcoming ELITE-X Index - a global benchmarking tool under development for inter-institutional comparison and NACE-aligned professional development analysis. Attendees will leave with a scalable framework and action-ready tools to elevate applied learning in their own programs.
Keywords:Experiential Learning, Career Readiness, ELITE Rubric, Culinary Education, Hospitality Curriculum, NACE Competencies

Workshop Overview

Purpose

To provide participants with a practical framework (ELITE) for embedding and measuring experiential learning and professional development practices within higher education curricula, particularly in hospitality, tourism, and culinary disciplines.

Presenters

Tim Flohr (Associate Professor of Teaching – University of Memphis) – Hospitality & Tourism Track: Strategic curriculum alignment, NACE integration, and institutional readiness

Chef Bill Mullins (Associate Professor of Teaching – University of Memphis) –Culinary Track: Lab-based experiential learning, student coaching, and PD through applied technical training

Workshop Agenda

1.Framing the Challenge – Why experiential learning and professional development must be intentionally designed and tracked

2.Introduction to the ELITE Rubric – Four domains and twenty criteria mapped to NACE competencies

3.Dual Lens Deep Dive

Hospitality & Tourism Focus (Flohr): Curriculum integration, internships, and employer alignment

Culinary Focus (Mullins): High-pressure applied learning, reflection practices, and portfolio building

4.Rubric Scoring Activity – Attendees assess their programs using a live version of the ELITE tool

* Timothy Flohr, University of Memphis, timothy.flohr@memphis.edu
William Mullins, University of Memphis, wvmllins@memphis.edu

5.Future-Facing Tool: ELITE-X Index – A global benchmarking system for program comparison and research publication
6.Collaborative Debrief – Sharing insights, best practices, and implementation strategies
Target Participants
Faculty and department heads in hospitality, culinary, and tourism programs
Academic leadership (deans, curriculum committees)
Internship coordinators, faculty developers, and assessment professionals
Expected Outcomes
Understand the four domains of the ELITE Rubric
Benchmark current experiential learning and PD practices
Gain tools to align with NACE competencies
Explore the potential of the ELITE-X Index for institutional benchmarking and research
Leave with next steps for pilot implementation or faculty training

Addendum

Domain Criteria Focus

1. Curriculum Integration	Capstone/Practicum, Applied Projects, Reflection Practice, Cross-Curricular EL, EL Learning Outcomes	Embedding applied learning across curriculum
2. Career Development Alignment	Career Readiness Framework, PDPs, Resume/Portfolio Integration, Networking, Soft Skills Instruction	Integrating structured professional development aligned to NACE
3. Faculty & Industry Collaboration	Industry Co-Design, Advisory Loop, Guest Instruction, Faculty Externships, Employer-Aligned Assessment	Building bridges between faculty and workforce needs
4. Student Experience Mapping	Competency Tracking, Micro-credentialing, Badging and Certifications, Feedback Loops, Personal Narrative, Showcase	Helping students articulate and demonstrate their growth

Scoring Scale (currently):
1 = Absent
2 = Present but Unstructured
3 = Developing / Limited Implementation
4 = Structured & Intentional
5 = Fully Integrated & Assessed
DOMAIN 1: Curriculum Integration
1.Capstone/Practicum
2.Applied Projects
3.Reflection Practice
4.Cross-Curricular Experiential Learning

5.EL Learning Outcomes
DOMAIN 2: Career Development Alignment (Professional Development)
6.Career Readiness Framework (NACE-aligned competencies)
7.Professional Development Plans (PDPs)
8.Resume/Portfolio Integration

9.Industry Exposure & Networking
10.Soft Skills & Leadership Development
DOMAIN 3: Faculty & Industry Collaboration
11.Industry Co-Design
12.Advisory Feedback Loop
13.Guest Instruction & Panels
14.Faculty Industry Engagement
15.Employer-Aligned Assessment Practices
DOMAIN 4: Student Experience Mapping
16.Competency Tracking
17.Micro credentialing, Badging and Certifications
18.Feedback & Evaluation Integration
19.Personal Narrative Development
20.Final Showcase or Signature Experience

Score ange	**Category**	**What It Means**
0–39	**Early Stage** *(Revise & Reinvent)*	Experiential learning and career readiness practices are minimal, fragmented, or absent. No intentional structure exists to support integrated student development. The program is at risk of falling behind in employer and accreditation expectations.
40–69	**Developing** *(Build & Align)*	Foundations are emerging, but practices may be inconsistent, siloed, or reactive. Programs in this range are likely offering internships or guest speakers but lack formal tracking, assessment, or integration with curriculum and NACE competencies. Significant alignment work remains.
70–89	**Advancing** *(Strengthen & Scale)*	The program has strong structures in place across most domains. Experiential learning is largely intentional and PD is visibly embedded. There's clear evidence of NACE- aligned practices, faculty-industry collaboration, and student outcomes, but some areas still require refinement or deeper scaling.

90–100	**ELITE Status** *(Replicable & Remarkable)*	Experiential learning and professional development are fully integrated, assessed, and aligned with industry expectations. The program has signature experiences, uses employer feedback loops, and demonstrates student growth across all domains. These programs are *model institutions* and candidates for certification, case studies, and research publication.

Being a native speaker of English: an obstacle to serving nonnative guests well?

Clarisse Thouvenot *

The growth of globalisation has led tourism professionals to be increasingly confronted with guests from all around the world, thereby deeply altering how language is used (Wilson, 2016). On a global scale, this results in the English language being used as the main means of communication (known as English as a Lingua Franca, ELF), up to the point that nonnative speakers of English (i.e., Kachru's Outer Circle) are now more numerous than native ones (Kachru, 1990; Rowley-Jolivet, 2017; Seidlhofer, 2013): "[…] the English language no longer belongs numerically to speakers of English as a mother tongue, or first language" (Brumfit, 2001: 166). In Anglo-Saxon countries, this means that native tourism professionals must adapt not only to their guests' culture, but also to the way they communicate and use English, given that ELF is now "considered as a variety with issues of its own" (Millot, 2020: 10). In fact, many researchers have proven that ELF speakers do not use the same strategies to negotiate meaning as native speakers. For instance, Philip Shaw explains that ELF is not "shared code features, but rather a set of pragmatic practices and attitudes to accuracy that make communication in non-native English effective." (2011: 67).

In other words, if tourism professionals were to use English with their nonnative guests as they do with other native speakers, they would fail to adapt to ELF communication and culture, and risk threatening the face of the said guests by putting them into a position in which they may have a hard time understanding what is said. The notion of face, coined by the sociolinguist Erving Goffmann (1959), was taken up by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson in their politeness theory to refer to "two specific kinds of desires ('face-wants') attributed by interactants to one another: the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions (negative face), and the desire (in some respects) to be approved of (positive face)" (1987: 13). This theory is of relevance for the study of interactions in the hospitality and tourism industry, for it provides tools to analyse what behaviours and words threaten or maintain the guests' faces. As a matter of fact, "using highly idiomatic language full of (ENL) cultural allusions [..] is actually likely to be perceived as a failure to adapt to the ELF situation" (Seidlhofer, 2013: 40) because "the parameters for determining pragmatic success cannot always be, and should not always be, determined by the Inner Circle" (Kachru, 1990: 190). In that sense, a hotelier using native cultural references and idiomatic structures would lead their ELF guests to feel uncomfortable and their faces threatened. Such a behaviour may result in the overturning of the asymmetrical relationship observed by Erik Cohen and Robert Cooper (1986), given that the receptionist would disregard the guest's language – or variety – choice. Hence, not only do native professionals need to pay attention to cultural nuances, but they also need to tailor their use of the English language to ELF guests. However, little research has been done on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and ELF in the context of tourism, as shown by Jean-Louis Trouillon's comparative analysis of the number of articles published in the journal English for Specific Purposes and its French equivalent ASp between 1981 and 2010. This study has revealed that the hospitality and tourism industry only accounts for respectively 0.53% and 0% of the overall amount of papers published (2014: 50). This observation is all the more true when it comes to spoken – as opposed to written – interactions, especially in

* Clarisse Thouvenot, Université Lumière Lyon 2, c.thouvenot@univ-lyon2.fr

the workplace, which are often left aside due to issues in terms of accessing the field (professionals often fear that such research will breach confidentiality – Gimenez, 2001; Wozniak 2019) as well as transcribing and analysing the data collected (Baude et al., 2006; Beaud & Weber, 2010; Cefaï, 2010; Sandré, 2013). Nevertheless, analysing spoken data is essential in the hospitality and tourism industry, for it appears to be the main channel of communication.

Research on ELF interactions has highlighted that pragmatic competence prevails over language competence, which is to be seen with ELF strategies such as accommodating down - i.e., simplifying one's discourse to adapt the language level of the addressee - or code-switching - i.e., resorting to another language when it is deemed helpful for the addressee (Koester, 2010). Alan Firth (1996) explains that ELF interactions are characterised by a high degree of cooperation between speakers to achieve successful communication, which he summarised in the "make-it-normal" and "let-it-pass" principles. These principles mean that interactants let language mistakes pass and pretend everything is normal insofar as these "abnormalities" do not prevent mutual understanding or that understanding the message is considered of little relevance. In their study of ELF interactions in the hospitality and tourism industry, Aonrumpa Thongphut and Jagdish Kaur (2023) mention the use of repetition of key information, clarification of keywords and expressions, and self-repair as explicitness strategies. My own master's thesis research has led me to conclude that not only do ELF speakers correct and modify their own speech to achieve successful communication, but their addressees also cooperates to offer candidate terms and rephrasing to reach this goal (Thouvenot, 2024). Moreover, drawing from Seval Birlik and Jagdish Kaur's (2020) study on nonverbal communication used in internal meetings, this thesis has shown that ELF speakers use nonverbal communication and the surrounding environment to support verbal communication and improve communicative success in the French hotel industry, a conclusion that my PhD aims at extending to Hotel English in Anglo-Saxon contexts. This research is of importance if we are to teach native and nonnative hospitality students alike how to communicate with ELF guests, as it will enable me to underline the relevant communicative skills students must develop in a context where multimodality is paramount (Félix-Brasdefer, 2018; Ventola, 2005).

In order to analyse whether native professionals adapt to nonnative guests and how, an ethnographic approach with a triangulation of data (Angouri, 2010; Jasso-Aguilar, 1999; Wozniak, 2019) has been chosen to collect data for this ESP PhD research. Verbal & nonverbal aspects of interactions between hoteliers and their guests will be subject to video/audio- recordings and fieldnotes in four privately-owned four-star hotels in Edinburgh for about a month in October 2025. These hotels have been selected because most studies focus on luxury hotels and/or hotel chains (Blue & Harun, 2003; Scerri et al., 2017), which contributes to the overshadowing of independent businesses and the specific challenges they face. Additionally, questionnaire surveys and semi-structured individual interviews will be conducted with hoteliers to reveal what strategies they consciously or unconsciously implement to facilitate ELF conversations with guests, along with what strategies they believe they resort to but do not systematically in practice. Finally, questionnaire surveys will be filled out by guests, so that one can assess which strategies guests would like hoteliers to use more, which work best, and which are to be avoided with certain cultures. The data will be analysed with a mixed approach, i.e., qualitative and quantitative methods at both micro- and macro-linguistic levels, using tools from various disciplines linked to applied linguistics (discourse

analysis, conversation analysis, corpus linguistics, etc.), as is commonly done in French ESP research.

The aim of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of what Hotel English consists of and of the impact of ELF on hotel interactions in order to guide teachers and students of the hospitality and tourism industry. More precisely, I hope to determine which strategies are or are not put in place by native speakers when exchanging with nonnative guests, especially to prove that native speakers do make efforts to adapt to ELF culture, contrary to what some researchers have claimed (Firth, 1996; House, 1999; Samarin, 1987). The term "ELF culture" here refers to the shared culture that interactants negotiate when they converse, getting rid of the cultural weight that lies behind general English (Seidlhofer 2013), to give room to a form of acculturated English (ELF) that can embrace multiculturalism. To better identify what strategies are used, a comparison will be drawn between this corpus and that of the previous similar study led in France in 2024 among nonnative receptionists exclusively in similar hotels. Besides, the results should allow me to depict which situations are perceived positively or negatively by guests to highlight what skills should be taught precisely to hospitality students, guiding them on what strategies should be preferred or avoided when interacting with some culture or another.

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Black Friday Promotions in the Hospitality Industry: High-End Croatian Hotels

Kevin Walker,Milena Kuznin and Aurora Peric *

Abstract
This preliminary project explores the impact of Black Friday on the hospitality industry, with a focus on high-end hotels in Croatia. Traditionally a retail event, Black Friday has evolved into a major opportunity for hotels to boost bookings and revenue during off- peak seasons by offering discounts and value-added packages. Moreover, Cyber Monday and Travel Tuesday have emerged as travel-related promotion opportunities and will be explored.
The study is descriptive and exploratory in nature, examining the extent to which high- end Croatian hotels use Black Friday and related travel date promotions, the types of promotions employed, and the successfulness of said promotions. Travelers' takes on Black Friday are also examined: awareness and participation levels are determined as well as which promotions most impact their booking actions. By examining both supply (hotels) and demand (travelers), this research strives to provide insights into how luxury hotels can most effectively leverage the Black Friday opportunity.
Keywords: Black Friday, Croatian hotels, Hotel marketing

Introduction

Black Friday, traditionally associated with retail shopping, is evolving into a major event for the hospitality industry. This research explores how Black Friday impacts the hospitality sector, particularly high-end hotels in Croatia.
The hospitality sector recognizes the potential of Black Friday to boost bookings during off-peak seasons and increase overall revenue. Some hotels now offer a range of promotions, from discounted room rates to value-added packages, aiming to attract travelers and encourage direct bookings (BEONx, 2024). This shift has transformed Black Friday into a key period for the hospitality industry.
This research focuses on the impact of Black Friday on the hospitality industry with a particular emphasis on high-end hotels operating in Croatia's seasonal tourism industry. This study explores the issue from the perspective of hotels and travellers, providing a robust examination of supply and demand associated with hotels' Black Friday activities. This research provides insights into the effectiveness of Black Friday promotions in the context of seasonal luxury hospitality.

Literature Review

The evolution of Black Friday in the hospitality industry has been marked by a significant shift in consumer behavior and marketing strategies. Thomas and Peters (2011) conducted an exploratory investigation into Black Friday consumption rituals, highlighting the event's transformation from a retail-focused phenomenon to a broader cultural experience.

Black Friday

The expansion of Black Friday into the travel industry has been notable, with hotels and resorts increasingly participating in this marketing event. For example, Flemings Hotels' successful "Black Friday Week" campaign demonstrated how hotels can leverage this period to increase bookings and revenue (Amadeus Hospitality, n.d.).
The implementation of Black Friday strategies in hotels presents both opportunities and challenges. Revinate (2024) provided examples of successful Black Friday campaigns from various hotels, highlighting different approaches such as limited-time offers, early bird promotions, and value-added packages.
The adoption of Black Friday promotions in the hospitality industry is not without its complexities. BEONx (2024) described Black Friday as a "new frenemy of the hotel industry," noting the potential for these promotions to cannibalize future sales and impact profit margins. Their analysis revealed that while the week of Black Friday sees one of the lowest booking prices due to discounts, the increase in booking volume often compensates for the price drop.

* Kevin Walker, RIT Croaia, kevin.walker@croatia.rit.edu
Milena Kuznin, RIT Croaia, milena.kuznin@croatia.rit.edu
Aurora Peric, RIT Croatia, ap6292@rit.edu

The impact of Black Friday on luxury hotels presents a unique set of considerations. Goldstein, (2024) reported on Black Friday travel deals offering up to 40% off at luxurious resorts, indicating that even high-end establishments participate in this promotional period. These discounts are often valid for stays booked during the promotional period and can be redeemed over an extended period, sometimes throughout the year. This raises questions about how luxury hotels can maintain their brand image.

The effectiveness of Black Friday promotions in driving direct bookings has been a focus of recent research. Hotelchamp (2024) reported that successful Black Friday campaigns in 2023 saw an average Return on Advertising Spend (ROAS) of 15.1x, with click- through rates reaching up to 35.45%, suggesting that Black Friday strategies can significantly boost direct bookings and overall revenue for hotels.

Hospitalitynet (2025) reported that hotels running Black Friday campaigns in 2024 saw their overall website conversion rates improve by 36.0%, compared to non-participants. This data indicates that Black Friday promotions can have a substantial impact on a hotel's digital performance and direct booking rates.

The literature reveals a growing trend of hotels extending their Black Friday promotions beyond a single day. For instance, Accor's Fairmont offered Black Friday deals for bookings made over a two-week period, with stay dates extending several months into the future (Accor, n.d.). This approach allows hotels to capture a wider range of potential guests and spread the benefits of the promotion over a longer period.

Promotional days in addition to Black Friday

In addition to Black Friday, there are other promotional days like Cyber Monday and Travel Tuesday. Cyber Monday, occurring on the Monday after Thanksgiving, is dedicated to online shopping. In the context of this research, Cyber Monday is relevant as it influences travel and tourism by offering consumers a variety of deals across different sectors (Travel and Tour World, 2024).

Travel Tuesday, which occurs on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving, is a relatively newer marketing phenomenon focused on travel deals. It has gained traction as a significant event in the travel industry, offering discounts on flights, hotels, cruises, and vacation packages (Sturges, 2024).

Extent literature suggests that Black Friday is becoming an important event in the hospitality industry, offering opportunities for increased bookings and revenue. However, it also presents challenges in terms of preserving brand image and ensuring long-term profitability. As the industry continues to adapt to this trend, further research is needed to understand its full impact, particularly in the context of luxury hotels and seasonal tourist destinations like Croatia.

Methodology

So as to describe and understand the Black Friday phenomena in seasonal luxury hotels, this study examines actions and motivations behind market participants: hotels and travelers.

Study Design

In an effort to address this paper’s research questions, surveys were developed for hotels and travelers.

Participants

Croatian high-end hotels were identified through TripAdvisor. The only restriction placed on traveler participants is that they are 18 years in age or older. Preliminary pilot findings reveal that initial respondents are younger (< 35), female (approximately two- thirds), mostly of modest means (income), and travel somewhat frequently (at least twice a year).

Instrument

The hotel survey explores awareness of Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and Travel Tuesday as well as participation in these travel promotional events. Additionally, reasons as to why hotels don’t participate are ascertained. Structuring of these travel deals is also explored, including how long they run, their timing, and what benefits the promotions provide. Finally, perceived successfulness of these events is queried.

The traveller survey asks similar questions in terms of awareness of and participation in this study’s travel promotional events. A distinction is made in the survey between hotels’ promotional offers that are simply appealing versus those that are likely to increase the chance of booking. 5-point Likert scales anchored with “Strongly disagree” and “Strongly agree” are used. Demographic information is also gathered.

Procedure

Marketing departments at selected hotels were emailed requests to participate in the survey.

A random traveller sample of self-selecting individual is obtained by distributing the survey over a variety of electronic platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Viber to potential survey participants.

Results

Hotels

Interesting preliminary results of the sampled twenty Croatian high-end hotels suggest that Black Friday and related travel date promotions have become fixtures in the hotel industry in terms of hotels being familiar with the promotions as well as offering them (Table 1).

Table 1: Hotels' familiarity with and participation in travel date promotions

Promotion	Familiar with promotion		Participate in promotion	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Black Friday	20	100%	9	45%
Cyber Monday	13	65%	5	25%
Travel Tuesday	5	25%	2	10%

When examining 5-point Likert scale responses (1 = "Strongly disagree" to 5 = "Strongly agree) from hotels that participate in Black Friday promotions, they indicate that these hotels have had positive experiences with the promotions (Table 2). Notably, of the 27 responses provided by nine Black Friday participating hotels to the three statements in Table 2, only five were less than or equal to three. All but two of the hotels agreed that the promotions have a positive impact of their revenue management strategies and all but one of them indicated that Black Friday promotions are more successful than other promotions they run. Additionally, all nine hotels that run Black Friday promotions indicated that doing so increased their direct bookings.

Table 2: Black Friday promotion success at participating hotels

Black Friday promotion indicator	Mean	Std. Dev.
Promotions associated with Black Friday are, overall, successful	4.333	0.7071
In general, Black Friday promotion is more successful than other promotions the hotel runs	4.111	1.3642
Overall, Black Friday promotion positively impacted the hotel's revenue management strategy	3.889	1.4529

These promotions begin no more than one month before Black Friday and redemption time frames ran from only days surrounding the travel date promotion to any future date. All participating hotels offer discounted room rates and one of the participating hotels also offered value-add packages (spa treatment, dining experience, etc.).

Travelers

To gain insights into travelers' opinions regarding travel data promotions, 106 individuals were surveyed (Table 3). The sample was predominately female, younger, and of modest means (income). Notably, over half the sample traveled three or more times per year.

Table 3: Traveler sample demographics summary

Category	Option	Count	Percentage
Gender	Male	66	62%
	Female	39	37%
	Prefer not to say	1	1%
Age	18 – 24	57	54%
	25 – 34	20	19%
	35 -44	12	11%
	45 – 54	13	12%
	55 – 64	3	3%

	65+	1	1%
Monthly income	<= 750€	28	26%
	751€ - 1500€	40	38%
	1501€ – 2500€	22	21%
	2501€ – 3500€	7	7%
	3501€ – 4024€	1	1%
	> 4025€	8	7%
# of trips per year	0	3	3%
	1 or 2	41	39%
	3 or 4	34	32%
	5 or 6	17	16%
	7 or more	11	10%

As was the case in the survey of hotels, travelers were most familiar with and took advantage of Black Friday promotions most (Table 4). All survey participants were familiar with Black Friday and 24 of them had booked a hotel stay using a Black Friday promotion with 18 of these booking occurring solely because of the Black Friday offer (the traveler wouldn't have booked if there wasn't a Black Friday offer). Another way to think of this is that approximately 17% of the sample (18/106) booked a room because of the Black Friday promotion.

Table 4: Travelers' familiarity with and participation in travel date promotions

Promotion	Familiar with promotion		Participate in promotion	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Black Friday	106	100%	24	23%
Cyber Monday	55	52%	3	3%
Travel Tuesday	23	22%	1	1%

Delving further into travelers' familiarity with travel date promotions, this research sought to determine travelers' awareness of market supply. In other words, according to respondents, how many hotels offer travel date promotions. As seen in Table 5, Black Friday is the most prevalent offer, matching the hotel survey results.

Table 5: Travelers' awareness of hotels offering travel date promotions

Promotion	Known # of hotels that offer travel date promotions			
	0	1 – 3	4 – 7	8+
Black Friday	45	45	9	7
Cyber Monday	84	15	4	3
Travel Tuesday	89	10	5	2

In terms of which specific promotions appeal to travelers, discounted room rates and value-added packages (spa treatments, dining experiences, etc.) were favored over free room upgrades and complimentary breakfast. This research made the distinction between an appealing and a determinant (one that induces booking as opposed to simply being viewed as attractive) promotion. When asked how appealing a specific promotion is, a t- test revealed that value-added packages ($M = 4.038$; $SD = 0.675$) are statistically significantly more appealing than discounted room rates ($M = 3.651$; $SD = 0.884$) at $p < 0.01$. This significant difference, however, disappeared when respondents were asked if the promotion was determinant (if it would increase their likelihood of booking).

Conclusion

Preliminary findings related to the Croatian high-end hotels confirm existing literature in that Black Friday and related dates are gaining stature in the hotel industry with Black Friday being most prominent. Additionally, commonly practiced hotel promotions are found to be offered by Croatian high-end hotels and appreciated by travelers.

As a result of initial findings, some fine-tuning to the surveys is advised. More importantly, the sample needs to be appreciably increased. Among other things, it will be interesting to determine if Black Friday and associated date promotions are more or less appealing to various demographic subsamples (for example, those who travel more, have more or less income and so on).

One potentially concerning emerging finding is that hotels are not really offering a Black Friday promotion desired by travelers; namely, value-added packages. This suggests that there might be a disconnect between what the hotel industry is supplying and what travelers desire.

One addition to the methodology would be to add an observation element to the methods. As such, as Black Friday approaches, sample hotels' online activity (brand.com websites as well as social media accounts) would be observed.

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Digital nomad visa: The competitive economic engine of tourist destinations

Malihah Alajaji, Ziyi Wu and Po-Ju, Chen*

Introduction

Tourism, a core pillar of the tertiary industry, significantly contributes to global GDP, with visa policies playing a key role in shaping international travel. (Rosselló & Santana-Gallego, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the rise of digital nomads—remote workers leveraging the internet for location-independent work— stimulating demand for Digital Nomad Visas (DNVs) as a specialized policy tool. (Ehn et al., 2022; Sánchez-Vergara et al., 2023). DNVs allow temporary residency with tax incentives for remote workers, balancing economic benefits (e.g., GDP growth, job creation) and social challenges (e.g., cultural adaptation, resource allocation) (Bednorz, 2024; Hannonen et al., 2023). This study focuses on the roleof DNVs in destination competitiveness, using Indonesia, Barbados, and Spain as case studies to explore their economic and social impacts.

Methods

A multi-stage qualitative research design was adopted, starting with exploratory research that involved a comprehensive review of global DNV policies, literature, industry reports, and policy documents to clarify the research focus. This was followed by field research, which included conducting in-depth interviews with stakeholders such as government departments, community organizations, tourism operators, and digital nomads, as well as observing local infrastructure, community development, and socio-cultural changes in Indonesia, Barbados, and Spain. Finally, comparative analysis was used to perform cross-country comparisons of DNV policies across seven dimensions, such as income thresholds, tax incentives, and residency duration, to analyze their impact on digital nomad choices and destination outcomes.

Implication

Preliminary findings suggest divergent economic impacts of DNV policies: countries with lower income requirements and relaxed regulations attract more digital nomads, boosting short-term consumption in accommodation, catering, and retail, while nations with higher income thresholds attract fewer but higher-spending digital nomads. Key conclusions include that DNVs reshape tourism economies by addressing seasonality through stable, long-term digital nomad presence. (McKercher et al., 2023); infrastructure (e.g., high-speed internet, co-working spaces) and socio- cultural attractiveness are critical for competitiveness (Zhou et al., 2024). Balancing resident needs with the digital nomad influx is vital for sustainable development (Hannonen et al., 2023). Practical implications include tailored policy recommendations such as investing in digital infrastructure for resource-rich but underdeveloped destinations, adjusting income requirements to match economic levels, and leveraging DNVs to build unique destination brands, with this study providing a framework for designing adaptive DNV policies aligned with local socio- economic contexts.

* Malihah Alajaji, Hospitality, Hotel Management and Tourism Department, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Texas A&M University, Malihah@tamu.edu
Ziyi Wu, Hospitality, Hotel Management and Tourism Department, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Texas A&M University, maria_wu@tamu.edu
Po-Ju Chen, Hospitality, Hotel Management and Tourism Department, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Texas A&M University, po-ju.chen@ag.tamu.edu

Exploring experiential learning in hospitality education: The application of self- determination theory and cultural intelligence

Yuting An and Benjamin Altschuler*

Abstract
The tourism and hospitality industries continue to grow, with tourism numbers and cultural diversity among consumers increasing. Because of the growing cultural diversity of the tourism consumer, there is a greater expectation that employees have the capability to work in a cross- cultural work environment and demonstrate cross-cultural competence. To accommodate this growth, university tourism and hospitality programs emphasize experiential learning, allowing students to transform abstract concepts into practical knowledge, better preparing them for the demands of the workforce. While the benefits of experiential learning are well documented, less attention is focused on the intrinsic and cognitive processes of interpreting experiential learning. Using self-determination theory, this study will explore how students cognitively interpret experiential learning experiences, how these interpretations impact motivation and intention to participate in these opportunities, and how cultural intelligence moderates these relationships.
Keywords: Experiential Learning, Self Determination Theory, Cultural Intelligence, Cross-cultural competence

* Yuting An, Temple University Japan Campus, yuting.an@tuj.temple.edu
Benjamin Altschuler, Temple University Japan Campus, benjamin.altschuler@tuj.temple.edu

Enhancing Student Retention in Hospitality and Tourism Programs: Sharing Best Practices

Wayne Smith and Julie Kellershohn *

Abstract:
This workshop study explores the critical issue of student retention in hospitality and tourism programs and presents a series of best practices related to student retention initiatives. Participants will gain insights into student retention challenges and discuss best practices for supporting student retention in areas such as 1) Perceived Job Outcomes and Industry Perception, 2) Work-Life Balance and Industry Demands, and 3) Curriculum Design and Practical Learning. We will outline the best practices in combating these challenges by discussing best practices related to 1) Experiential Learning Opportunities, 2) Mentoring and Support Systems, 3) Academic Support Services and 4) Industry Engagement and Networking.

Keywords:
Student Retention, Hospitality Education, Tourism Education, Program Development, Curriculum Design

Purpose and Key Issues to be Addressed:

Student retention is a cornerstone of successful university programs, particularly within the dynamic hospitality and tourism fields (Braxton, Millem & Sullivan, 2000). High retention rates benefit students by ensuring their academic progression and career readiness and contribute significantly to an institution's program quality, financial stability, and overall reputation. This workshop/teaching case study delves into the critical issue of student retention within hospitality and tourism programs, exploring the factors influencing students' decisions to persist in their studies.

Drawing upon foundational theories of student departure, such as Tinto's (1988) model emphasizing academic and social integration, this session will highlight the unique challenges and opportunities in hospitality and tourism education. The interdisciplinary nature of these programs, encompassing business management, customer service, operations, and marketing, demands a holistic approach to student engagement. Ensuring students remain invested in their learning journey, connecting theoretical knowledge with practical skills, is paramount for producing industry-ready professionals.

Key issues to be addressed during this workshop include:

1. Understanding the complex interplay of academic and social integration in the context of hospitality and tourism education.
2. Identifying specific factors within the curriculum and co-curricular activities that enhance or hinder student engagement and perceived relevance.
3. Examining the role of industry connections, experiential learning opportunities, and career guidance in fostering student commitment.
4. Exploring effective strategies for building a supportive and inclusive learning environment that promotes a sense of belonging.
5. Discussing practical, evidence-based interventions that institutions can implement to improve student retention rates in hospitality and tourism programs.

* Wayne Smith, Ted Rogers School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, wayne.smith@torontomu.ca
Julie Kellershohn,Ted Rogers School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, jkellershohn@torontomu.ca

Targeted Participants:
This workshop is designed for faculty members, program administrators, academic advisors, and individuals involved in curriculum development and student support services within hospitality and tourism programs at universities and colleges. The content will also be relevant to those interested in research methodologies in higher education and strategies for enhancing student success.
Expected Outcome:
Participants will gain a comprehensive understanding of the critical factors influencing student retention in hospitality and tourism programs. They will be equipped with insights into a research-driven approach for identifying and addressing retention challenges.
Through interactive discussions and analysis of the proposed methodology, participants will be able to:
1. Evaluate the applicability of the presented research framework to their institutional context.
2. Identify potential areas for intervention and innovation within their programs to improve student retention.
3. Develop a deeper appreciation for the importance of data-informed decision- making in enhancing student success.
4. Network with colleagues and share best practices for student engagement and retention strategies.

Conclusion
Given the challenges and factors influencing student retention in hospitality and tourism programs, institutions can adopt several strategies to improve student persistence: offering enhanced career services that provide robust career counseling and highlight the diverse career paths available, providing work-life balance support through flexible scheduling and resources on time management, fostering industry partnerships to create opportunities for internships, job placements, and mentorships, and employing active learning techniques like problem-based learning and simulations to increase student engagement and program relevance.

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Snap, share, sustain: Photovoice meets circular economy in Indonesia

Teges Ratna Ayu Ningrum and Annamarie Sisson *

Abstract
This working paper explores Circular Economy (CE) practices in traditional, family- owned tourism SMEs in West and Central Java, Indonesia, where indigenous circularity aligns with national sustainability goals. Despite SMEs' crucial role in tourism, many operate linearly, contributing significantly to emissions. Using a pragmatic approach, this research combines Photovoice and focus groups to uncover grassroots perspectives on CE adoption, highlighting barriers like financial constraints and cultural inertia. By centering local voices, the study reveals how kinship-based SMEs navigate sustainability transitions, offering practical insights for policymakers and businesses. The findings aim to bridge the gap between global CE frameworks and Indonesia's unique socio-economic context, fostering greener tourism models.
Keywords: circular economy, tourism SMEs, Indonesia, sustainability, photovoice

Introduction

A circular model enables small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to increase profits and reduce expenses on raw materials, leading to economic advantages through material cost savings, development of competitive edges, and exploration of new markets (Dey et al., 2022). However, few studies explore circular economy (CE) in a non-Western setting, as most CE research originates from Europe (70%) and Asia (23%) (Rivera et al., 2020). Where research is lacking, Indonesia is currently adjusting towards a sustainable green economy by committing to CE (Bappenas, 2022; 2024). The country has identified five priority sectors for CE implementation, including food and beverages, textiles, construction, wholesale and retail trade, and electronics, which can enhance economic added value through SMEs (Bappenas, 2022).

Small and Medium enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial role in the tourism industry by providing essential services and collaborating with larger companies to build a robust tourism system. SMEs in the tourism sector are usually family firms that have lifestyle motivations to support their family and prevent disharmony (Getz & Carlsen, 2000), have minimal business expertise, lack financial resources, and tend to free ride (Wanhill, 2002). Most SMEs in Indonesia operate with family involvement, and it is mentioned in their regulations that one of the principles is kinship (Tedjakusuma, 2014; Wibawa & Yusnita, 2019).

Nonetheless, the significant contribution of SMEs to the tourism sector is primarily operating within a conventional economic framework, commonly referred to as a linear economic model. The traditional business model relies on 'take-make- dispose', and it is estimated that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) contribute approximately 40% of greenhouse gas emissions (Wildnerova et al., 2024). While most SMEs recognize the significance of waste management and the benefits of CE, they face numerous challenges, including financial and expertise shortages, but frequently also lack a support network or a conducive cultural environment for embracing CE (Rizos et al., 2016). Given the significance of tourism and creative industries for Indonesia's economy, there is scope to consider how indigenous circularity practices may impact the transition to sustainable tourism production, distribution,

* Teges Ratna Ayu Ningrum, Edinburgh Napier University, tegesratnaayu.ningrum@napier.ac.uk
Annamarie Sisson, Edinburgh Napier University, a.sisson@napier.ac.uk

and consumption processes in the country. Therefore, the study's purpose is to understand Circular Economy (CE) practices in traditional, family-owned tourism small and medium enterprises (SME) in West and Central Java, Indonesia.

Methodology

To capture the lived experiences of SMEs, this study adopts a pragmatic philosophy. It is important to highlight that this study emphasizes the practical insights derived from conventional SMEs. The selection of Pragmatism as a philosophy is deemed suitable since the epistemology of this philosophy relies on the notion that research can sidestep discussions regarding the essence of truth and reality and concentrate instead on practical comprehension (Patton, 2005). In this research study, it is essential to understand and learn how knowledge is generated through practical understanding. Practical knowledge derived from each person in the social setting results in a unique experience of action. In pragmatism philosophy acknowledges that people in a social context exhibit various actions and transformations that promote the exploration of adaptable research methods (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). Each individual within the social context exists in a social hierarchy (micro, meso, and macro) where the micro level (niche) role taken on by entrepreneurs creates innovations capable of disrupting other social hierarchies (Maher, 2023). By comprehending the social hierarchy, researchers can identify the leverage points at every level to promote sustainable practices, particularly in the CE.

Data collection

Qualitative methods, specifically Photovoice and focus groups, will be applied to this research to collect and analyse data from SMEs that are part of Bukit Dewi Manggung. Focus groups are a combination of interviews, discussions, and observations designed to collect information on participants' ideas, attitudes, and perceptions. They encourage interaction and stimulate responses among participants, leading to deeper insights into their understanding and motivations (D'Amato, 2008). Identifying participants with similar backgrounds is important due to the reliance on group dynamics (Green et al., 2003; Kitzinger, 1994; Thomas et al., 1995). Studies show that focus groups can uncover 'sympathetic stigma shares,' allowing participants to share more in challenging scenarios through face-to-face interaction (Reisner et al., 2018).

The research also looks at indigenous circularity practices in Indonesian SMEs, through the use of Photovoice as a second data collection method. Photovoice is mentioned as a method that lets participants express important issues visually (Budig et al., 2018), as this provides researchers with perspectives from those who might usually struggle to share their experiences. Photovoice is part of participatory action research, encouraging participants to share their daily experiences. It emphasizes understanding based on insider perspectives to create new insights into social and cultural issues (Brown, 2014). The photovoice approach has three main goals: (1) to help communities document their strengths and challenges, (2) to encourage critical discussions about significant matters through group dialogues, and (3) to connect with policy makers (Wang & Burris, 1997). This method aims to capture the daily lives of a community through photography, highlighting their emotional experiences (Wu & Guoqiang, 2007) while using photography to convey social awareness (Strack et al., 2004).

In the past, the integration of the two methodologies was utilized in a study involving Latina adolescents and their parents, where multiple focus groups alongside photovoice sessions were carried out concurrently (Hannay & Milan, 2013). The photovoice sessions in that research aimed for deeper and more detailed insights to enhance and highlight the results from the focus group discussions. The reason for combining the two methodologies (focus group

and Photovoice) in this study is that each has advantages that complement each other, enabling a comprehensive answer to the research questions.

Significance

By centering the voices of Indonesian SMEs, this study challenges the top-down imposition of Eurocentric CE models and instead highlights locally viable pathways to sustainability. The Photovoice method, rarely applied in CE research, offers a novel way to document indigenous practices. Additionally, this paper is a stepping stone toward the researcher's PhD degree, which seeks to redefine CE transitions through the lens of Southern epistemologies. By showcasing Photovoice as a tool for decolonizing sustainability research, the study invites conference delegates to: (1) critique the methodology's applicability to other Global South contexts, (2) share comparative insights from similar SME studies, and (3) collaborate on policy recommendations for Indonesia's CE roadmap. The researcher explicitly seeks engagement with ISTTE delegates to refine the study's framework, ensuring the final dissertation bridges academic and grassroots realities.

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Inside the Editorial Process: A Practical Guide for Authors, Reviewers, and Academic Contributors

Li-Chun Lin, Kara Wolfe, Edmund Goh and Soo Kang *

Abstract
This workshop is designed to provide authors, reviewers, and academic professionals with a comprehensive overview of the editorial process within a peer-reviewed academic journal. Led by the editor team of Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism (JTTT), this workshop will demystify the key stages of manuscript submission, peer review, ethical standards, and the journal's evolving policies, including the use of AI in academic publishing.
Keywords: editorial process, peer-reviewed academic journal, ethical standards

Workshop Overview:

This workshop is designed to provide authors, reviewers, and academic professionals with a comprehensive overview of the editorial process within a peer-reviewed academic journal. Led by the editor team of Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism (JTTT), this workshop will demystify the key stages of manuscript submission, peer review, ethical standards, and the journal's evolving policies, including the use of AI in academic publishing.

Target Audience:

Faculty members, researchers, graduate students, first-time authors, journal reviewers and anyone interested in understanding or participating in the peer-review process.

Objectives:

By the end of this workshop, participants will:

- Understand the full lifecycle of a manuscript, from submission to final decision.
- Gain insights into best practices for preparing a successful manuscript.
- Learn about the peer review process and how to become an effective reviewer.
- Explore current ethical standards in publishing, including plagiarism, conflicts of interest, and authorship disputes.
- Become familiar with the journal's AI policy and responsible use of AI tools in research and writing.
- Engage directly with the editor team through an interactive Q&A session.

Workshop Outline:

1. Welcome and Introduction (5 minutes)
   - Overview of the journal and the editor's role
2. Author Submission Guidelines (10 minutes)
   - Manuscript formatting
   - Scope and suitability
   - Types of manuscript
   - Common reasons for desk rejection
3. The Peer Review Process (15 minutes)
   - Reviewer selection and invitations
   - Review timelines and communications
   - What makes a helpful review

* Li-Chun Lin, Montclair State University, linl@montclair.edu
Kara Wolfe, Missouri State University, KaraWolfe@missouristate.edu
Edmund Goh, Abu Dhabi Hospitality Academy - Les Roches, contactedmund@hotmail.com
Soo Kang, Colorado State University, soo.kang@colostate.edu

- How authors should respond to reviewer comments
- Awards for best paper and best reviewer

4. Ethical Standards in Publishing (10 minutes)
   - Plagiarism and data integrity
   - Conflicts of interest
   - Authorship criteria and disputes
5. AI in Academic Publishing (10 minutes)
   - Overview of journal's AI policy
   - Appropriate and inappropriate uses of AI tools
   - Disclosure requirements
   - Future considerations
6. Interactive Q&A Session (10 minutes)
   - Open floor for participants to ask specific questions related to the editorial process, publishing strategy, or ethical concerns

Right Where We Belong: Creating a Sense of Belonging in the Hospitality and Tourism Classroom

Heather Kennedy-Eden, Jacob Robbins, Rayyan Zulfiqar and Madeleine Barth *

Abstract
Research shows that when students feel a sense of belonging in the classroom, their learning improves and absenteeism decreases. This working paper discusses an ongoing design-based study using Learning Experience Network Analysis (LENA) where students in a large class (100-200 students) were put into groups, for activities in class, according to a common leisure interest in order to see if this commonality helps create a sense of belonging. This study is being conducted over 3 semesters in an effort to understand what helps students feel a sense of belonging in class. Findings, thus far, show that creating these affinity leisure groups does help students to feel a sense of belonging. It provides an opportunity for students to interact with different people with a similar interest, learn more about their common activity, and make it easier to connect with people.
Keywords: Sense of Belonging, Student belonging
The idea of belonging is an intrinsic human need of social acceptance within a group of people (Moulds & Perry, 2024) that typically evolves around finding connection, inclusion, support, and autonomy (Blake et al., 2022). Students today are not as social as they once were and many are not putting forth the effort, or do not know how, to engage with their neighbors (Karlson-Eastvold et al., 2024). The classroom is a social system, where students and teachers both play a factor in the social experience (Barab, 2014). Creating a sense of belonging in the classroom can help students overcome challenges, hardships, and struggles (Ajjawi et al., 2019) and helps students feel satisfied with their university experience (Meehan and Howells, 2017). For faculty, it is important to create positive experiences in the classroom that help support students' well- being (Scoffham and Barnes, 2011).
The study of learning researches how people learn, what important factors should be present during learning, how we create contexts where learning occurs, and how we determine what they have learned (Hoadley, C. (2018). When students feel a sense of belonging in the classroom, research shows they more fully participate, are more comfortable taking risks and often have more consistent attendance which can all lead to better academic success (Allen et al., 2021, Carter-Plouffe, 2024, Brendtro et al, 2013). Perhaps the importance of creating a sense of belonging in the classroom has been overlooked in the past, but as experiences are tailored to student needs and holistic analysis of students are conducted, evidence shows that when students feel that they matter and that they are a part of something greater, it can contribute to their learning and the learning of those around them.
Methodology
This ongoing research seeks to understand the learner experience and gain insight into student's perception, feelings, and experiences about belonging, so a phenomenological approach is used from a constructivist theory perspective, meaning that learning involves the active construction of meaning and knowledge (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky (1978); Bruner (1996). Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1996) expanded on the original theory to include

* Heather Kennedy-Eden, Texas A&M Univesity, heather.eden@tamu.edu
Jacob Robbins, Texas A&M Univesity, jarobbins93@tamu.edu
Rayyan Zulfiqar, Texas A&M University, rzulfiqar@tamu.edu
Madeleine Barth, Texas A&M University, mkbarth12@tamu.edu

constructive interactions across individuals and between them and their social realms including peers, tools, others with more knowledge, and history. This idea demonstrates that learning can happen as an individual, collaborative, and collective construction of knowledge. Network analysis offers the analytical tool for understanding the complexity of systems and shows how objects are related to each other (Donaldson, 2023). Networks are made up of nodes, which can represent many different kinds of entities such as people, cities, and organizations, which are linked in relationships that could be friendships, routes, exchanges, and so on (Menczer et al., 2020). For this study, design-based research (DBR) was used because it recognizes that learning is a complex system, and learning by design is central to the science of learning (Donaldson, 2023). DBR allows researchers to create, test, and iteratively refine educational interventions based on theory within real-world contexts (Brown, 1992). This method is an innovative analytical approach to analyzing learner experiences data so that design- based researches can use the data to make iterative changes as the study progresses (Donaldson et al., 2023).

The type of network analysis used in this study, the Learning Experience Network Analysis or LENA, addresses the complexity of learning and the iterative sequences of data collection (Donaldson et al., 2023). LENA was created to help DBR researchers craft specific design moves after stages have been tested and before moving to the next iteration (Donaldson, 2023). In LENA, student reflections are coded at the sentence level using MAXQDA 2024 to generate themes. Once the reflections are coded, they are given a numerical value that indicates the number of sentences that theme maps into. Pearson correlations show the connection between themes based on the values given, they are completed within and across all the reflections. This information is then shown on a network map to visualize the correlations. The connections are filtered into groups using a cluster analysis based on the interconnectedness. Results are then analyzed by the researchers and course design changes are planned for the next iteration.

The professor in this course has created an activity to help students get to know other students in a large class that usually ranges from 120-200 students per semester. Leisure is the first topic discussed in the class at the beginning of the semester, so it provides the basis for this activity but it also provides a way for students to find people who may be like-minded and have a similar interest. The students are frequently grouped, of their own choosing, for activities in class and for this assignment, students were assigned a group by a leisure activity they participate in outside of class. Students came into class and had to write their leisure activity on a piece of paper. They turned in those papers and then were instructed to chat with their neighbor about their activity. The students were given prompts for their conversation that included :1) Who influenced your participation and how were you introduced/exposed to this activity? 2) How old were you when you were first exposed? 3) In what ways have your socio-demographic characteristics influenced your involvement in this activity (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, economic status, geography, etc. 4) What benefits do you derive from your involvement with the activity (e.g., health, psychological, social, economic, etc.)?

While the students chatted about their leisure activity, the professor and teaching assistants put the students into like categories. Unfortunately, there were a few that did not have similar activities, so they were put in a group together or with the closest aligned activity to their designated leisure activity. Once in their groups, the students were instructed to talk about their leisure activity by answering these questions: 1) What is the best thing about doing your leisure activity? 2) Where do you go to do your leisure activity? 3) Do you like to do this

alone of with other people? 4) What are the benefits you receive from doing this activity? 5) Is this an activity you can do locally?

Grouping students in affinity leisure groups was an effort for people to get to know other people who have a similar interest and start to create a feeling of belonging in the classroom by having students make personal connections with classmates. This is an introductory class, so many students are new to the university and may not have met many other students. This opportunity helps them find people with a similar interest and hopefully start to feel a sense of belonging in the class. Students were then subsequently put back into these groups two other times in the semester to encourage these relationships.

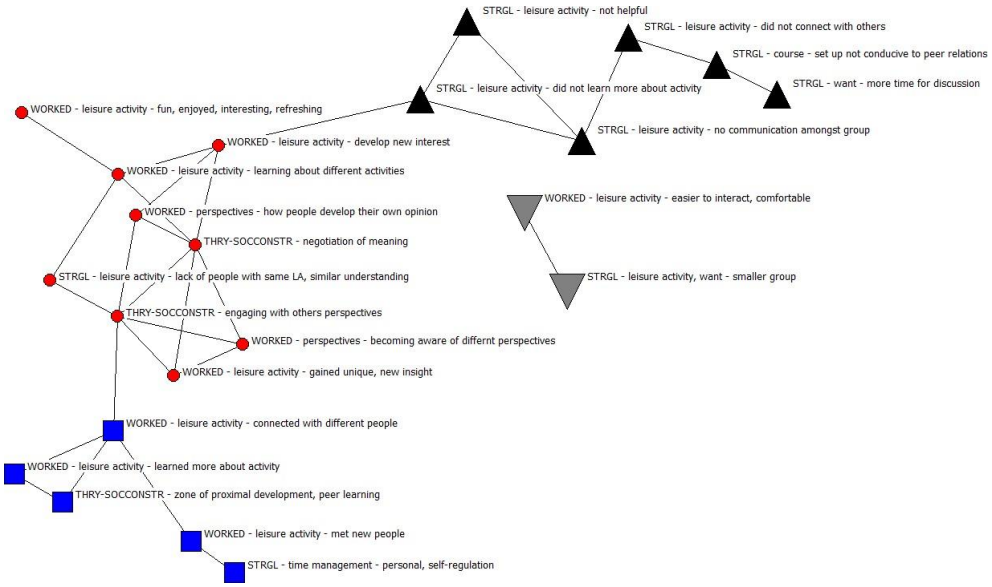
Results for Stage 1

A week after the last time the affinity leisure groups worked together, a survey was given to the students to see if this activity helped them feel a sense of belonging, a connection with others in the class. The survey included two multiple choice questions on a Likert scale and a free response question. One of the multiple-choice questions was thrown out because of an error. The multiple-choice question that was kept was “Do you believe that participating in the leisure experiences reflection activity in class contributed to your sense of belonging in class?” A Likert scale of 1-5 with 5 being “Yes, I met people with similar interests, and it greatly helped me feel a sense of belonging in this class” down to 1 being “This activity actually hurt my sense of belonging in this class”. The results show that 158 students submitted the survey and 74% said they felt it helped or greatly helped them feel a sense of belonging in the class, 15% felt neutral, and 2 % felt it was not helpful.

For the open-ended section, the students were asked to respond to these prompts: “Did your interaction with peers about similar leisure interests help you in your leisure interest? Did you find out more information about it? Did you find places and people to participate in your leisure interest? Do you feel like it helped connect you with those around you?”. The analysis shows that 92% of the students commented that some element of the leisure affinity group discussion worked towards creating a sense of belonging and 52% mentioned they enjoyed connecting with different people. Some students (15.79%) did not feel this activity helped them with a sense of belonging because no one else was interested in the same activity and 3.5% mentioned they wanted more time for discussion about their activity.

Looking at the results below, connections can be viewed on the map. For instance, students who mentioned the activity was fun, enjoyable, interesting, or similar were often connected to comments where they liked learning about different activities when they were talking to their neighbor in class. These results guided stage 2 of the research.

Figure 1.0 LENA Results for Stage 1



Methodology for Stage 2

For the next semester, in the same introductory class with about 120 students, the process changed slightly. The students were asked through an assignment on the learning system to tell which leisure activity they participated in during their free time. It was much easier to break the students into groups in advance instead of on-the-spot during class. This also should give students more time for discussion, which was requested by some students. For this semester, if a student chose an activity that was not similar to anyone else, we asked them for a second option so that they could be in a group with something they were interested in discussing. This change was made to insure that all students had at least one other person with a similar interest. Students also did two more activities over the next few weeks with their affinity group to help build relationships among them. As a final change, for the last affinity group activity, we gave them the option to switch to a different group if they wanted to meet people who participated in another activity they were interested in.

Results

The results for stage 2 are being analyzed currently and will be presented at the conference. The third stage of this research will take place in the fall semester of 2025, after the second iteration is developed and any complete analysis will be shared with the conference presentation.

Conclusion

This design-based research is continuing as the stages progress and changes are made to improve the processes. In the first stage, we learned that for most students, this activity helped them to create relationships with people in the class and in turn, helped them feel a sense of belonging in the class. In large classes, it can be difficult for students to meet people who are not sitting close by, so this activity involves socially engineering the groups so that they have a common interest. Thus far, the research shows this affinity leisure grouping is having a positive effect on developing a student's sense of belonging and this research will continue as we search out ways to build a sense of belonging in the classroom.

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The impact of AI usage on employees' counter-productive work behaviors: Focusing on the moderating roles of real-time monitoring

Lip Shin and Ken Tsai *

Abstract
This study investigates how employees' use of artificial intelligence (AI) during working hours influences counter-productive work behavior (CWB), focusing on the mediating role of moral disengagement and the moderating effect of real-time supervisory monitoring. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the research extends SDT by examining how AI usage and monitoring practices affect core psychological needs—autonomy and competence—and how these disruptions shape employee attitudes and behaviors at work. Two online experiments using scenario-based designs and a 2×2 factorial structure (AI usage: high vs. low; monitoring: frequent vs. rare) will be conducted with frontline employees in the event and hospitality sectors. The findings are expected to offer theoretical contributions by deepening understanding of SDT in AI- driven contexts and practical insights by showing how technology use and oversight strategies can influence employee motivation, moral disengagement, and work attitudes, ultimately impacting performance and organizational outcomes.
Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Counter-productive work behavior, Self Determination Theory, Real-time monitoring, Moral disengagement

INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies are significantly transforming human relations, interactions, and experiences in the business domain (Neuhofer et al., 2021). Among the wave of digital innovation, Artificial intelligence (AI), in particular, is rapidly increasing influence on the work practices of convention center employees. Indeed, adopting advanced technologies has opened up various opportunities for AI-based services in the tourism and hospitality sector (Vorobeva et al., 2024). Nevertheless, there is a significant gap in understanding its impact on high-touch event employees, particularly in the convention center frontline employees.

A prominent framework for understanding employee behavior is Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes the importance of autonomy and competence in driving engagement and performance. In frontline service settings, supervisors often rely on AI tools and real-time monitoring to enhance productivity. However, excessive surveillance can reduce employees perceived autonomy and competence, leading to moral disengagement—cognitive mechanisms that weaken adherence to ethical standards. This disengagement can foster counter-productive work behavior (CWB) and deviant actions that negatively impact productivity and morale (Jain & Rawat, 2024). Thus, the relationship between AI utilization and CWB is situated within a complex discourse, and a research gap exists regarding the impact of frontline employees' AI usage on CWB, particularly in the event sector. Furthermore, the development of technology at work facilitates the real-time monitoring and evaluation of employees. However, a comprehensive understanding of how the frequency of real-time evaluations impacts the relationship between employee AI utilization and CWB remains limited. In addition, research is lacking regarding the influence of employee AI usage

* Lip Shin, Iowa State University, ls0218@iastate.edu
Ken Tsai, Iowa State University, kentsai@iastate.edu

during working hours on moral disengagement and how supervisory real-time monitoring may moderate this relationship.

To fill these gaps, this study investigates how employees' AI usage affects CWB through moral disengagement, moderated by real-time monitoring. Grounded in SDT, it explores how perceived threats to autonomy or competence from AI and surveillance influence ethical disengagement and negative behaviors in the event service context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Artificial Intelligence

The term artificial intelligence" was first introduced in the 1950s as a concept that explores the idea of machines displaying human-like intelligence (Helm et al., 2020). The introduction of advanced technology has had a significant impact on the tourism and hotel industry, creating new opportunities for the utilization of AI-based services (Vorobeva et al., 2024). Tourism, hospitality, and events industry utilize and interact with AI through AI-powered information and communication technology (ICT) and smart devices (Wang & Uysal, 2023). While there are pros and cons to using AI technology in tourism, hospitality, and the event sector, the undeniable fact is that AI has the capability to improve efficiency and decrease expenses by saving time (Keiper, 2023; Neuhofer et al., 2021). The incorporation of artificial intelligence in the hospitality industry indicates not only an improvement in technological capability but also a significant shift in employment roles, responsibilities, and operational work practices (Gursoy, 2025). For instance, Ruan and Mezei (2022) examined the influence of product attributes on customer satisfaction when interacting with AI chatbots versus human frontline employees. Nevertheless, a significant gap remains in understanding how AI could affect the staff in charge of managing events on-site.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a theoretical framework that aims to comprehend human motivation, formulated through research on both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Deci et al., 2017). It provides a theoretical basis for understanding the influence of psychological needs, such as autonomy (freedom of choice), competence (feelings of capability), and relatedness (sense of belonging), on performance and engagement (Chiu, 2024).

Gatling et al. (2016) investigated the relationships between workplace spirituality, organizational commitment, and turnover intention among employees of a US hospitality organization, utilizing SDT as a framework. Ahn and Back (2019), drawing on SDT, established the relationship between integrated resort experiences, brand attachment, and brand compatibility. Consequently, SDT serves as a valuable theoretical lens for understanding employee motivation in the tourism, hospitality, and event sectors.

Counter-productive work behavior

Counter-productive work behavior (CWB) is defined as any intentional behavior on the part of an organization member that is viewed by the organization as running counter to its legitimate interests (Gruys & Sackett, 2003). CWB are characterized by a range of manifestations, including but not limited to sabotage, theft, withdrawal, and other deviant actions (Jain & Rawat, 2024). As CWB manifests through multiple forms of organizationally harmful actions, identifying its contributing factors is essential for developing effective managerial interventions.

In tourism, hospitality, and event studies, researchers have actively employed the concept of CWB to investigate employees' behavioral intentions. Examples of research in this area include studies examining the relationship between CWB and affective commitment, leader-member exchange, and burnout (Wallace & Coughlan, 2022). Other studies have investigated

the influence of CWB on the relationship between organizational politics and job performance (Al-Romeedy & Khairy, 2024). Furthermore, considerable research has been dedicated to investigating the antecedents of CWB (Lau et al., 2003; Marcus & Schuler, 2004; Oliveira et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the impact of AI adoption on CWB remains relatively underexplored.

Moral Disengagement

Moral disengagement describes how a person can distance themselves from feelings of guilt and act unethically (Bandura, 1999; Newman et al., 2020). These distortions justify or excuse immoral behavior like bullying or downplay personal responsibility (Thornberg et al., 2023). When individuals effectively regulate their moral behavior, they are able to identify and prevent deviant conduct through self-condemnation (Deng et al., 2022). In the tourism and hospitality sector, moral disengagement promotes antisocial behavior by enabling managers to justify that ethical standards are not relevant to them (Tariq et al., 2019).

Real-time monitoring

Monitoring and evaluating employees are essential for improving organizational performance and achieving goals. When evaluating employee performance, organizations are increasingly leveraging various technologies for monitoring purposes, including electronic performance monitoring, artificial intelligence, facial recognition, and GPS or location tracking (Arreglado et al., 2023; Ghofari et al., 2024; Nwakamma et al., 2024; Vinith & Pinto, 2023). However, this real-time monitoring inevitably brings up significant issues that need careful consideration, including privacy and ethical concerns, technical and implementation challenges, and cultural/behavioral impacts.

As a result of reviewing previous studies grounded in SDT, this study proposes that frequent AI usage may undermine employees' sense of autonomy or competence, thereby increasing moral disengagement and CWB. Additionally, it explores whether the frequency of real-time monitoring moderates this relationship. Thus, this study was able to establish the following hypotheses.

H1: Employees’ frequent AI usage during working hours (vs. optional) increases their CWB.

H2: Real-time monitoring frequency (often vs. rare) moderates the relationship between Employees’ AI usage (vs. rare) and CWB.

H3: Moral disengagement mediates the relationship between AI usage and CWB.

METHOD

To explore how AI usage and real-time monitoring affect CWB with moral disengagement through the lens of SDT, this study will utilize two separate online experimental surveys. A factorial design with two levels of AI chatbot usage (high vs. low) and two levels of real-time monitoring (frequent vs. rare) will be used to investigate the interactive effects on employee behavior. Study 1 will focus on the main effect of AI chatbot usage during working hours. Participants will be randomly assigned to either a high-usage condition (frequent, task-critical reliance on AI chatbots for guest service and communication) or a low-usage condition (minimal or optional use of AI support). A one-way ANOVA will assess differences in reported CWB between the two groups. Study 2 will employ mediation and moderation analyses using Hayes' PROCESS macro to examine whether real-time monitoring moderates the relationship between AI usage and CWB and whether moral disengagement mediates this relationship.

Participants will be recruited online and via professional networks, targeting individuals with prior experience in frontline roles at convention centers. A preliminary screening will confirm their understanding of AI chatbots and real-time monitoring in hospitality contexts. After

providing informed consent, participants will be randomly assigned to one of four scenario-based conditions.

IMPLICATION

This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical implications for AI integration in the event and hospitality industries. Theoretically, it extends SDT by demonstrating that the use of AI and real-time monitoring can undermine employee autonomy and competence, potentially leading to moral hazard and CWB. From a practical standpoint, this research aims to identify the impact of AI-usage in workplace and real-time monitoring of supervisors on employees' motivation and self-regulation, thereby illuminating how these factors influence employee work attitudes. Furthermore, it highlights the potential risks associated with the misuse of AI and surveillance.

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Intergenerational Influence and Sense of Calling on Occupational Stigma

Soyoung Park *, Jeilyn Sevilla Nunez, Bryan Caldeira and Peter Ricci

Introduction

Choosing a college major is one of the most consequential decisions young adults make, often directly shaping future career pathways. While personal interests and aptitude matter, students' choices are increasingly shaped by social factors, such as family expectations, cultural values, and perceived societal prestige of different occupations. Yet, despite growing evidence that these factors shape students' academic and professional trajectories, research on the social dynamics influencing career decision-making remains limited, especially in applied fields like tourism and hospitality (Akosa et al., 2024; Gong & Jia, 2022; Kong et al., 2018).

This issue is especially urgent for the tourism hospitality industry, which faces a dual crisis of declining enrollment and talent leakage among emerging professionals (King et al., 2021). Previous studies have found that many students who initially choose hospitality majors ultimately leave the field or actively disidentify from the profession (e.g., Cheng & Tung, 2019; Kim & Park, 2021). While prior studies have documented student dissatisfaction or poor working conditions as contributing factors, there has been insufficient theoretical integration of how stigma, identity, and intergenerational pressures shape these outcomes.

Students are often not yet directly exposed to poor working conditions in the industry, unless through vicarious learning such as intergenerational influence or cultural narratives (Wong & Liu, 2009). However, most existing studies have focused narrowly on occupational stigma tied to workplace conditions, such as long hours, low wages, or emotional labor, when explaining the perceptions of hospitality as a low-status career (Kusluvan et al., 2022).

Stigma arises when society assigns low value to a person, group, or role based on perceived deviance from social norms (Goffman, 1963). For younger adults, particularly within collectivist cultures where familial expectations are strong, perceptions of career paths are significantly shaped by parental or cultural influences (e.g., Kim & Spears, 2022; Wong & Liu, 2009). This dynamic can lead to identify conflict, the psychological tension resulting from incompatible personal and social identities, which may ultimately lead students to abandon the tourism and hospitality field despite initial interest.

According to social identity theory, individuals may posse multiple social identities, i.e., "self-concept which derives from his or her knowledge of membership to a social group (groups) together with the value and the emotional significance attached to it" (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). A chosen career path or a field of study integrates into the self-concept as students transition into adulthood, possibly for the first time away from their family—the strong part of their identity for many. When these identities merge harmoniously, the self feels coherent and stable (Donahue et al. ,1993). However, when identities clash, such as between personal interests in hospitality and family expectations, they may create identity conflicts, potentially leading to career disidentification.

Despite these barriers, we witness some individuals who demonstrate resilience, committed to the tourism and hospitality industry, thriving and leading others. This study posits that the driving force behind this resilience is sense of calling. In this industry, especially in guest-

* Soyoung Park, Florida Atlantic University, soyoungpark@fau.edu
Jeilyn Sevilla Nunez, Florida Atlantic University, jsevillanune2024@fau.edu
Bryan Caldeira, Florida Atlantic University, bcaldeira2024@fau.edu
Peter Ricci, Florida Atlantic University, pricci1@fau.edu

and visitor-facing roles, resilience requires an intrinsic desire to bring joy to the others, an aptitude closely aligned with a sense of calling. Dik and Duffy (2009) conceptualizes calling as ‘‘a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation’ (p. 427).”

Building on this premise, the present study proposes a conceptual framework (Figure 1) that integrates social and psychological dimensions to explain students’ perceptions and decisions at the critical pre-entry stage of their tourism and hospitality careers. It investigates how identity conflict stemming from stigma and familial expectations influence students’ avoidance of tourism and hospitality careers, while examining how a sense of calling can mitigate these barriers. By extending occupational stigma theories into earlier, formative career stages, the study offers insights into potential interventions to stop early talent leakage and declining enrollment in tourism and hospitality programs.

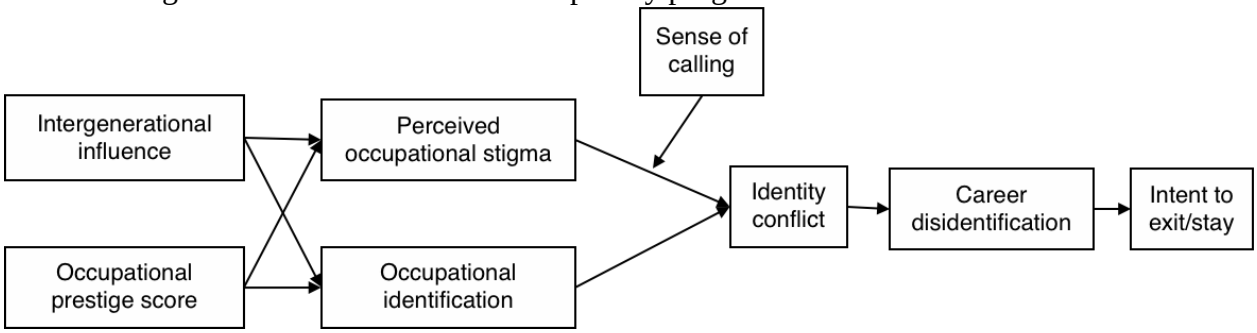

Figure 1. Study Conceptual Framework

The study proposes the following research questions:

1. How do tourism and hospitality students perceive occupational stigma, and what factors shape these perceptions?
2. How does intergenerational influence (e.g., parental or cultural expectations) affect students’ occupational identification and perceived stigma?
3. How do sense of calling and occupational identification mediate the relationship between perceived stigma and identity conflict?
4. To what extent does identity conflict predict career disidentification and intent to exit the hospitality field?

Methodology

This study will employ a longitudinal survey design, tracking the same cohort of undergraduate tourism and hospitality students across institutions and multiple time points to observe change in perceptions and attitudes over time. This approach allows for the examination of causal relationships and the development of constructs.

Participants will be recruited from multiple universities offering tourism and hospitality programs. Inclusion criteria include enrollment in a hospitality or tourism major and being at least 18 years of age. A sample size of approximately 500 participants is anticipated to ensure adequate statistical power for structural equation modeling (SEM).

Data will be collected at four key intervals: at the start of an academic semester, end of the same semester, and start and end of the following semester. This longitudinal data collection allows the study to capture changes due to exposure to academic content and professional experiences as some tourism and hospitality students may work during or between semesters.

Instrumentation

Validated and adapted scales will be used to measure the key constructs of the study. Intergenerational influence will be assessed using selected dimensions from Wong and Liu (2009)'s scale, focusing on perceived parental supports to the H&T career, perceived parental barriers to career choice, and perceived parental career concerns about welfare and prestige. Occupational prestige scores developed by Hughes et al. (2024) is also included as a precedent of perceived occupational stigma, which will be measured using a modified version of Occupational Stigma Perception scale (Schaubroeck et al., 2018), adapted for student populations. Occupational identification will be assessed using the scale developed by Kim at el. (2021), while sense of calling will be measured through the Calling and Vocation Questionnaire by Dik et al. (2012). Identity conflict will be captured using adapted items from Yampolsky et al.'s Multicultural Identity Integration Scale. Career disidentification and exit intent will be measured through scales from Schaubroeck et al. (2018) and O'Reilly et al. (1991), respectively, with Wong and Liu (2009)'s intent to stay item included as a reverse-coded measure.

Data analysis will involve confirmatory factor analysis to ensure scale validity, followed by SEM to test hypothesized relationships, including mediation effects. Longitudinal data analysis techniques will be employed to examine changes in constructs over time and the directionality of effects. Control variables such as gender, year in program, and cultural background will be considered.

Expected Outcomes

The study is expected to reveal significant insights into the psychological processes shaping tourism and hospitality students' career decisions. It is anticipated that intergenerational influence will exert both supportive and constraining effects on occupational identification and stigma perceptions. Perceived occupational stigma is expected to negatively correlate with occupational identification and positively predict identity conflict. Identity conflict is projected to emerge as a key mediator between perceived stigma and career disidentification, while sense of calling mitigating its negative effects. Ultimately, this research aims to extend theoretical frameworks of occupational stigma by highlighting the importance of early-stage social influences and intrinsic psychological resources, offering practical implications for enhancing student retention and engagement.

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Developing a Multi-Dimensional Assessment Framework for Recreational and Touristic Waterscapes Using Online Reviews and Machine Learning

Myunghwa Kang *, Hanyoug Go and Pilhoon Jang

Abstract
This study presents a data-driven framework for assessing recreational and touristic inland waterscapes using online reviews. By applying natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning techniques—specifically topic modeling and sentiment analysis—to 103,860 TripAdvisor reviews, the research identifies key dimensions that influence waterscape quality and visitor satisfaction. These dimensions are categorized using the ESEES framework, which includes ecological, social, emotional, experiential, and service/infrastructure factors. Each extracted topic is evaluated for both salience and sentiment valence, offering insights into the popularity and emotional tone of waterscape-related experiences. The resulting assessment parameters provide a scalable and adaptable tool for real-time monitoring and sustainable destination management. This approach enables tourism planners and policymakers to make data-informed decisions that balance ecological preservation with high-quality visitor experiences. By incorporating machine learning into the framework, the study contributes to the advancement of tourism experience assessment and AI-assisted environmental monitoring, offering a transferable methodology applicable to other natural tourism contexts such as coastal regions and national parks.
Keywords: Waterscape Assessment, User-Generated Content (UGC), Topic Modeling, Sentiment Analysis, AI-Assisted Environmental Monitoring

1. Introduction & Literature

Inland waterscapes—such as rivers, lakes, wetlands, reservoirs, and waterfalls—are essential recreational and touristic assets that offer scenic beauty, vital ecosystem services, and meaningful visitor experiences (Botero et al., 2013). These environments not only support biodiversity and hydrological functions but also facilitate social engagement, emotional renewal, and cultural connection (Botero et al., 2014; Costanza et al., 1997; Rhoden & Kaaristo, 2020; Roca et al., 2008; Wade et al., 2023; Wu & Zhang, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). However, the increasing popularity of water-based tourism has led to several challenges, including overcrowding, environmental degradation, infrastructure stress, and diminished visitor satisfaction (Lee, 2017; Roca et al., 2009). As a result, destination managers face the critical task of balancing ecological preservation with high-quality visitor experiences through sustainable management practices (Papageorgiou, 2016). Developing a comprehensive waterscape quality measurement system is thus a crucial step in mitigating environmental pressures and maintaining the long-term integrity of these landscapes (Arif et al, 2022).

Numerous studies have sought to evaluate waterscape quality through multi-dimensional assessment models, which underpin this study's Ecological, Social, Emotional, Experiential, and Service/Infrastructure (ESEES) framework. For example, Peña-Alonso et al. (2018) identified seven key indicators—accessibility, environmental quality, water quality, comfort, scenic value, human activity, and infrastructure—in their analysis of recreational beach quality. Lucrezi et al. (2016) incorporated environmental, social, and economic dimensions

* Myunghwa Kang, Hospitality and Tourism Management | University of Nebraska-Lincoln, mkang5@unl.edu
Hanyoug Go, Hospitality and Tourism Management | University of Nebraska-Lincoln, hgo@unl.edu
Pilhoon Jang, Kakaomobility, pilhoo@gmail.com

to prioritize sustainable beach management. Similarly, Phillips and House (2009) developed a rating checklist tailored to various tourism markets by integrating physical, biological, and human-use criteria. Chen and Bau (2016) applied a multi-criteria evaluation tool focusing on cleanliness, safety, protection, and service quality. Botero et al. (2014) proposed a technical instrument that integrates environmental and recreational indicators to guide beach management. Moreover, scenic evaluation checklists and visitor surveys have been widely adopted to assess user perceptions across physical, social, environmental, and service-related attributes (Botero et al., 2013; Phillips et al., 2010).

Traditionally, waterscape assessments have relied heavily on physical, chemical, and biological indicators (Rocca et al., 2008), while tourism research has employed surveys and interviews to understand visitor experiences (Botero et al, 2014; Chen & Bau, 2016; Lucrezi et al, 2016; Philips & House, 2009). While these approaches are scientifically rigorous, they are often resource-intensive, time-consuming, and geographically constrained—making them less suitable for dynamic or seasonal destinations (Luo et al., 2022). Additionally, these methods may overlook subjective, emotion-laden, and contextual aspects of the visitor experience.

To overcome these limitations, researchers have increasingly turned to user-generated content (UGC)—such as online reviews on platforms like TripAdvisor—as a scalable, cost-effective, and real-time data source (Chang et al., 2019; Cormier-MacBurnie et al., 2018; Fong et al., 2017; Shang & Luo, 2023). UGC provides rich insights into travelers' experiences, capturing emotional tone, preferences, and evaluations of infrastructure and environmental quality (Tussyadiah & Zach, 2017; Zhou et al., 2020). These narratives offer location-specific, real-time feedback that can inform more responsive and adaptive destination management strategies. TripAdvisor has been extensively utilized in studies that examine tourism attractions and tourist perceptions (Cormier-MacBurnie et al., 2018; Fang et al., 2016; Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019; Yu et al., 2017).

This study proposes a novel multi-dimensional assessment framework for evaluating recreational and touristic waterscapes based on five interrelated dimensions: ecological, social, emotional, experiential, and service/infrastructure (ESEES). By applying natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning techniques to analyze online reviews from Tripadvisor, the study identifies key themes and sentiment patterns that reflect travelers' authentic experiences and evaluations of the waterscape environment.

This integrative, data-driven approach aims to deliver a comprehensive understanding of waterscape quality and experiences while equipping destination managers with actionable insights to guide sustainable planning and policy-making.

2. Methodology

2.1. Data Collection

This study collected 103,860 unstructured English-language reviews from TripAdvisor related to recreational and touristic inland waterscape destinations in a U.S. state. The reviews were gathered from 36 waterscape locations identified using two keywords—"lake" and "river"—and spanned the period from 2004 to 2024 with the exception of 2005, 2006, and 2007, for which no data were available on TripAdvisor. The dataset included metadata such as reviewer location, star ratings, and review and rating timestamps. Spatial and temporal data were extracted to support contextualized interpretations of visitor experiences.

2.2. Text Data Preprocessing

To prepare the review texts for analysis, the study applies standard natural language processing (NLP) techniques in R. These steps ensures a clean, standardized corpus suitable

for topic modeling and sentiment analysis. (Alexander et al., 2017; Tussyadiah & Zach, 2017). LNP includes:

- Tokenization: Segmenting text into words and phrases.
- Stopword Removal: Eliminating non-informative words (e.g., “the,” “and,” “but”).
- Stemming and Lemmatization: Reducing words to their root forms (e.g., “relaxing” → “relax”).
- Contraction Expansion: Replacing contractions with their full forms.
- Noise Removal: Eliminating special characters, numbers, and extraneous symbols.
- Phrase Transformation: Unifying compound expressions (e.g., "ten-year-old" → "year_old").

2.3. Data Analysis

2.3.1. Topic Modeling with Latent Dirichlet Allocation

Identifying Topics: A probabilistic topic model algorithm—called latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) is used to uncover latent themes and identify clusters of co-occurring words within massive text corpora (Blei, 2003; Blei et al., 2012; Guo et al., 2017). In this study, LDA is applied with a range of pre-defined topic numbers—10, 15, 20, 25, 30 and more—to determine the optimal model (Syed & Weber, 2018). The selection is based on the Coherence score, which quantitatively measures the semantic similarity of words within each topic (Syed & Weber, 2018), as well as the interpretability of the resulting topics.

2.3.2. Labeling and Categorizing the Topics

To ensure validity, two researchers independently review the topic clusters generated by the model, verifying their internal coherence and conceptual clarity and label the topics. The study adopts an integrative approach by organizing diverse concepts under the overarching ESEES framework, which consists of five interrelated dimensions. Each topic was carefully examined and categorized by the researchers according to the following dimensions:

- Ecological (e.g., cleanliness, biodiversity, natural preservation),
- Social (e.g., community interaction, family-friendliness),
- Emotional (e.g., joy, relaxation, stress relief),
- Experiential (e.g., walking trails, scenic views, activities),
- Service/Infrastructure (e.g., restaurants, hotels, amenities, signage).

2.3.3. Topic Popularity and Positiveness Analysis

To assess both the relevance and emotional tone of the extracted topics, this study adopts two complementary measures—topic salience and topic valence—following the approaches used by Song et al. (2020). Topic salience is used to determine the popularity and centrality of each topic across the review corpus. Salience reflects how frequently a given topic appears meaningfully within the review dataset. Topics with higher salience values represent recurring themes in user narratives and thus serve as strong candidates for inclusion in the multi-dimensional waterscape assessment framework.

Topic valence is assessed to evaluate the emotional tone—or positiveness—of each topic using a logistic regression model. In this model, topic weights from all identified themes (e.g., ecological quality, social connection, emotional reactions, service/infrastructure complaints) serve as independent variables, while review sentiment functions as the binary dependent variable. Sentiment labels are derived from user star ratings, with ratings of 4 or 5 classified as positive and ratings of 3 or below classified as negative. Topic valence is represented by the coefficients of the logistic regression model, accompanied by p-values that indicate the statistical significance of each valence score. To address potential class imbalance (e.g., 85%

positive vs. 15% negative), a train-test split strategy is implemented, using 90% of the data for training and 10% for testing, to ensure the model's generalization performance.

Model performance is evaluated using accuracy, precision, and recall. Emphasis is placed on optimizing the recall of negative reviews, as the accurate detection of critical visitor concerns (e.g., pollution, overcrowding, poor facilities) is essential for waterscape management applications. The modeling goal is to achieve at least 70% overall accuracy, following benchmarks from review classification literature (Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019), and high recall for the negative review class to ensure proper identification of low- satisfaction factors.

2.3.4. Sentiment and Emotion Analysis

Sentiment analysis is also employed to evaluate travelers' emotional states and experiences, classifying sentiments as positive, neutral, or negative (Sun et al., 2017). To assess travelers' emotional responses, the study implements a BERT-based sentiment classifier, calibrated using Plutchik's wheel of emotions (Plutchik, 1980, 1982). This allows for nuanced identification of emotional valence (positive, neutral, negative) as well as affective subcategories (e.g., joy, trust, anger, fear). Sentiment distributions are mapped onto the topic clusters to identify which ESESS dimensions were associated with positive or negative visitor experiences. This analysis will reveal key emotional drivers of satisfaction or dissatisfaction in waterscape visits.

3. Expected Results

This research is expected to produce a multi-dimensional assessment framework that captures travelers' perceptions and experiences of inland waterscapes through the lens of five key dimensions: ecological, social, emotional, experiential, and service/infrastructure (ESEES).By integrating topic modeling and sentiment analysis, the study will generate a set of empirically grounded assessment parameters that reflect both objective and subjective aspects of waterscape quality.

The ESEES framework aims to support sustainable management practices by offering insights that are both data-driven and user-centered. Destination managers and tourism planners can utilize these insights to prioritize interventions, improve visitor satisfaction, and ensure the long-term preservation of natural water-based environments. The results will also guide destination marketing strategies by highlighting emotionally resonant and highly rated visitor experiences.

Unlike traditional methods that rely on costly and time-intensive surveys, this study offers a scalable and adaptive approach for real-time monitoring of recreational and touristic waterscapes using user-generated content. The methodology is transferable to other natural tourism contexts, including coastal regions, national parks, and nature reserves, enabling broader application of the ESESS-based framework.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on tourism destination management and environmental monitoring. It offers a forward-looking model for integrating advanced AI-assisted environmental tools with experiential data to support responsible and sustainable tourism development, particularly in ecologically sensitive or high-demand natural settings.

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The Impact of AI on the Emotional Wellness of Event Planners: Exploring Efficiency and Emotional Support Tools

Christian Grensteiner, Ken Tsai and Joan Su *

Abstract
Event planning is consistently ranked among the most stressful professions globally, characterized by tight deadlines, unpredictable challenges, and high client expectations. This ongoing research investigates the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the emotional wellness of event planners, focusing on how AI tools for task automation and emotional support can reduce stress, improve job satisfaction, and mitigate burnout. Grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the study employs qualitative interviews with event planners to explore their experiences with AI tools. Expected findings suggest that AI-driven automation and emotional support tools can significantly alleviate stress and enhance resilience, though adoption may be influenced by perceived usefulness, ease of use, and organizational support. This research aims to inform the development of AI interventions tailored to the unique needs of event professionals, ultimately supporting their emotional well-being and long-term success in the industry.
Keywords:
Artificial Intelligence, Emotional Wellness, Event Planning, Stress Reduction, Technology Adoption

Introduction

Event planning is widely recognized as one of the most stressful professions, often ranking among the top high-pressure industries globally (Lutz, 2023). Characterized by tight deadlines, unpredictable challenges, and high client expectations, the nature of this work demands constant multitasking and emotional resilience. Event planners frequently navigate a volatile mix of logistical hurdles, budget constraints, and stakeholder management, leaving little room for error (Atanassova & Russell, 2024). These demands often culminate in emotional burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and a high turnover rate within the industry (Chen et al., 2019). Research indicates that stress in event planning is exacerbated by the increasing complexity of client needs and the rapid pace of technological change, further highlighting the need for effective interventions to support professionals in this field (Bondanini et al., 2020).

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the event industry offers new opportunities to alleviate these pressures by automating routine tasks and providing emotional support (Halim, 2023). Tools such as scheduling software, chatbots, and sentiment analysis platforms are not only improving operational efficiency but are also being leveraged to enhance mental health support (Jangid, 2024). Despite its potential, there remains a notable lack of research into the specific ways in which AI impacts the emotional wellness of event planners (Jangid, 2024). While studies have explored AI's general benefits in workplace settings, the unique stressors faced by event professionals require a tailored investigation to understand how these tools can be optimized for this field (Foster, 2025).

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the effectiveness of AI tools in reducing stress, improving job satisfaction, and mitigating burnout. Grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), this research

* Christian Grensteiner, Iowa State University, cag1@iastate.edu
Ken Tsai, Iowa State University, kentsai@iastate.edu
Joan Su, Iowa State University, joansu@iastate.edu

investigates the interplay between AI tool usage, integration, and emotional outcomes for event planners. Specifically, it addresses three research questions: (1) How does AI improve the emotional well-being of event planners? (2) What types of AI tools are most effective in mitigating stress? (3) How do event planners perceive AI as a tool for emotional support? By exploring these questions, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how AI can transform the emotional landscape of the event planning profession.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the impact of AI on the emotional wellness of event planners, focusing on how specific tools affect stress reduction, emotional regulation, and job satisfaction. This research aims to identify the types of AI tools that are most effective in addressing the unique challenges faced by event planners, such as tight timelines, unpredictable workloads, and the emotional toll of high-stakes client interactions (Abhulimen & Ejike, 2024). By analyzing how AI tools are used to manage these challenges, the study seeks to reveal actionable strategies that professionals and organizations can adopt to improve emotional wellness and productivity.

Furthermore, the study intends to explore the role of AI in fostering emotional resilience, a key factor in sustaining long-term success in a demanding industry. By understanding the patterns of AI adoption and its perceived benefits, this research will provide valuable insights for organizations looking to integrate technology into their wellness initiatives. These findings are expected to inform not only the future development of AI tools tailored to the event planning industry but also broader strategies for creating healthier, more sustainable work environments. Ultimately, this study contributes to bridging the gap between technological advancement and human well-being, paving the way for a more balanced and supportive professional landscape.

Literature Review

Event planning is consistently ranked among the most stressful professions due to relentless time pressures, unpredictable challenges, and high client expectations (Bizzabo, 2022). The nature of the work often leads to chronic resource depletion—time, energy, and social support—resulting in emotional exhaustion and burnout (Wang et al., 2023). Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory explains that stress arises when individuals lose or fail to gain valued resources, which is especially common in event planning due to its demanding nature (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993). Conversely, resource gains, such as supportive technologies, can buffer stress and foster resilience, creating positive spirals of well-being.

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the event industry offers new opportunities to alleviate these pressures. AI-driven scheduling platforms, chatbots, and sentiment analysis tools are increasingly used to automate repetitive tasks and provide real-time emotional feedback, helping planners anticipate attendee needs without expending excessive emotional labor (Garcia- Madurga et al., 2024; Glue Up, 2025). These innovations are supported by industry reports and academic studies highlighting how AI tools reduce event planning stress by automating routine work, improving real-time visibility, and enabling smarter, data-driven decisions. For example, AI scheduling assistants can help planners complete more tasks by removing the friction of manual coordination, and chatbots can handle attendee queries around the clock, freeing planners from inbox overload.

The adoption of these AI tools is shaped by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which highlights perceived usefulness and ease of use as key drivers of technology uptake (Davis, 1989). Event planners are more likely to embrace AI tools if they perceive them as effective in reducing stress and easy to integrate into their workflows. Recent research shows that AI's ability to recognize and respond empathetically—known as Emotional AI—enhances user

engagement and emotional regulation, especially when tools are multimodal or delivered via mobile apps (Mantello et al., 2023; Jin et al., 2024; Nature, 2025). Systematic reviews confirm that AI-based conversational agents can significantly reduce psychological distress, particularly among those in high-stress roles (Nature Scientific Reports, 2023).

AI's role in workplace wellness extends beyond event planning, with applications such as personalized meditation, real-time stress monitoring, and AI-integrated wearables becoming increasingly common (WellSteps, 2025; Forbes, 2025). AI chatbots and virtual assistants provide 24/7 support, reduce stigma around mental health, and offer confidential, anonymous access to wellness resources, making early intervention more likely (MeBeBot, 2025). These tools are especially valuable in high-pressure environments like event management, where timely support can prevent burnout and improve job satisfaction.

Despite these advances, most research on AI and wellness has focused on broader workplace contexts or healthcare, leaving the specific impact on event planners underexplored. This gap highlights the need for tailored investigations into how AI can address the unique stressors faced by event planners, supporting both efficiency and emotional well-being.

Theoretical Framework

The study employs two theoretical frameworks to explore the relationships between AI tools and emotional wellness. Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory suggests that individuals strive to conserve resources, such as emotional energy, and experience stress when resources are depleted. AI tools that automate tasks conserve emotional energy, while emotional support tools buffer against stress and resource depletion.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) complements this by explaining how perceived usefulness and ease of use influence the adoption and integration of AI tools. By understanding these perceptions, TAM helps identify factors that encourage or hinder AI usage among event planners.

Methodology

This study will employ a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews to explore event planners' experiences with AI tools. A qualitative approach is particularly suited for examining subjective phenomena such as emotional wellness, perceived stress reduction, and attitudes toward AI adoption. Semi-structured interviews will provide flexibility, enabling the researcher to adapt questions based on participants' responses while ensuring consistency in addressing key themes. This method will allow for rich, detailed data collection, capturing the complexity of participants' experiences and perceptions.

Participants will be selected through purposive sampling, ensuring a targeted approach to recruit individuals who meet specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Participants will include event planners with varying levels professional experience, workload intensity, and familiarity with AI tools.

Recruitment will be conducted through professional industry networks such as Meeting Professionals International (MPI) and IMEX, leveraging these platforms to reach a diverse pool of event planners. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews, conducted via video conferencing to accommodate participants' schedules and geographical diversity. Each interview will last approximately 45–60 minutes and will be audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. The protocol will be piloted with two event planners to refine question phrasing, ensure clarity, and assess the appropriateness of follow-up prompts. Feedback from the pilot interviews will be incorporated to enhance the final protocol.

Data from the interviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that allows for the identification and interpretation of recurring patterns within qualitative data. This method aligns with the study's aim to explore the interplay between AI tool usage, emotional outcomes, and theoretical frameworks, ensuring that findings are both meaningful and actionable.

Expected Findings

It is anticipated that AI tools for task automation will significantly reduce stress levels by offloading repetitive tasks such as scheduling, data entry, and communication management. This allows event planners to focus on high-level, creative aspects of their work, improving their sense of control and job satisfaction. AI-driven emotional support tools, such as chatbots, are expected to provide meaningful emotional regulation, particularly during high-pressure periods. These tools may reduce emotional exhaustion and increase resilience by offering real-time mental health support and feedback.

Additionally, planners who integrate both types of AI tools are likely to report higher levels of job satisfaction, lower burnout rates, and improved emotional wellness. However, potential challenges, such as skepticism about AI's effectiveness or insufficient training, may influence adoption and usage. Unexpected findings may include variations in outcomes based on experience levels or organizational support for AI implementation.

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From Hero to Host: Curriculum Transformation and Student-Centered Innovation in Tourism Education

Rob Simons and Nova van Schijndel *

Abstract: This case-study examines the curriculum transformation at Breda University of Applied Sciences' Academy for Tourism. It highlights the shift from traditional, instructor-driven models ("hero") to student-centered, co-creative approaches ("host") that emphasize support and shared ownership of learning. Motivated by changing student needs, industry shifts, and global trends such as sustainability and digitalization, the Academy implemented project-based learning (PBL), challenge-based learning (CBL), programmatic assessment, and personalized education pathways. Appreciative Inquiry (AI), focusing on strengths and aspirations, guided the change. The paper critically explores challenges like emotional and cultural tensions, staff workload concerns, and the need for structural alignment. Drawing on the Academy's direct experiences, it offers insights and recommendations for institutions aiming to sustainably innovate higher education in tourism and related fields.
Keywords: Curriculum transformation, Tourism education, Appreciative Inquiry, Higher Education Innovation, Management and leadership

1. Introduction

Breda University of Applied Sciences' (BUas) Academy for Tourism, established in 1966, faces a shifting reality: declining student interest in traditional tourism programs, environmental scrutiny, and global megatrends like AI and climate change. These pressures necessitate rethinking educational approaches, a challenge shared by tourism educators globally. Internally, Generation Z learners seek relevance, flexibility, and agency, diverging from traditional, expert-led instruction (El Hajal & Losekoot, 2025).

In response, the Academy initiated a comprehensive transformation of its curriculum, pedagogy, and culture. Key changes include project-based learning (PBL), challenge-based learning (CBL), programmatic assessment, and personalized pathways (Gallagher & Savage, 2020; Baartman et al., 2022). The goal is to foster student autonomy and prepare them to be 'rewilded' leaders in a complex industry. Drawing on Brigitte Ars' 'tame tiger to resilient survivor' analogy, the Academy aims for 'rewilded' students: those who embrace uncertainty, take ownership, experiment, and confidently navigate the tourism industry's unpredictable realities. This profound shift in desired student outcomes demands a corresponding evolution in the educator's role from 'hero' to 'host'—facilitating rather than dictating learning.

This transformation encountered emotional and cultural tensions inherent in institutional change (Argyris, 1991; Kezar, 2014; Schein & Schein, 2017). Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was adopted as a guiding framework, focusing on strengths and shared aspirations. This paper explores this ongoing journey, its challenges, and insights, informed by reflections including KAOSPILOT's (2023) learning design principles, to contribute to discussions on educational transformation in tourism, especially concerning sustainability and digitalization.

2. Approach

This working paper employs a reflective practice research methodology (Schön, 1983) to critically analyze the ongoing curriculum transformation within Breda University of Applied Sciences' (BUas) Academy for Tourism. The authors, as members of the Academy's

* Rob Simons, Breda University of Applied Sciences, simons.r@buas.nl
Nova van Schijndel, Breda University of Applied Sciences, schijndel.n@buas.nl

Management Team (MT), have been centrally involved in leading, navigating, and experiencing this change. Our analysis is primarily informed by systematic, collaborative reflections undertaken by the MT, often including the Academy Director and other key team members, from approximately 2022 to the present. Key data sources for these reflections include: dedicated written reflections on the transformation process; analyses of Employee Experience Survey (EES) feedback pertinent to the changes; documented discussions, formal responses, and insights derived from interactions with various institutional bodies such as the Academy Participation Council (APC), the curriculum committee, the degree programme committee (DPC), and other relevant gremia; strategic CvB conversations; and informal feedback from bilateral colleague meetings. Through an iterative process of discussing and interpreting these diverse inputs, we have identified the core themes and learnings presented. While our MT roles offer comprehensive strategic and operational insight, we acknowledge our specific positionality and fostered critical self-awareness through inclusive reflection, considering multiple stakeholder perspectives from these varied sources.

3. Navigating change: tensions and pedagogical shifts

Higher education institutions often struggle to adapt quickly. Dutch Universities of Applied Sciences, like BUas, balance practice-orientation with institutional autonomy, creating both opportunities and tensions for innovation. Pedagogically, traditional lectures don't meet Gen Z's preference for active, collaborative, tech-enhanced learning (El Hajal & Losekoot, 2025). The Academy's move to student-centered curricula (PBL/CBL) highlighted these tensions. Initial faculty autonomy in curriculum design, meant to empower, led to uncertainty, increased workload, and delays from lacking overarching guidelines and structural scaffolding. This underscored that autonomy requires a supportive framework. The ambiguity particularly challenged educators valuing stability, inducing 'learning anxiety' (Schein & Schein, 2017).

This anxiety was further compounded by a notable divergence in perceptions regarding the initial outcomes of the curriculum transformation. On one hand, the Management Team found considerable encouragement in formal student evaluations of the new first-year curriculum's initial iterations. Systematic quantitative Qualtrics surveys, for instance, consistently highlighted positive experiences. Students particularly valued tourism industry exposure, well-balanced workloads, clear project complexity and assessments, and professional support from lecturers and teaching assistants. From the MT's perspective, these findings, sometimes improving over successive blocks, provided important early validation for student-centered pedagogical reforms. At the same time, the MT also took seriously the constructive criticism embedded within these same evaluations. Specifically, student-flagged 'challenges within the curriculum' on assignment and assessment clarity became MT priorities for investigation and targeted improvements. To address these concerns, the MT tasked Academy educationalists and the curriculum committee with developing solutions, to be informed by planned qualitative follow-ups deepening understanding of these student experiences.

However, these positive student experiences – which, while largely positive, also pinpointed areas for ongoing development – stood in stark contrast to significant concerns voiced by a segment of the academic staff. These apprehensions, identified by the MT through bilateral discussions, primarily centered on the perceived academic rigor and depth of content being delivered, especially within the foundational first year. Faculty expressed worries that students might not be acquiring sufficient core knowledge in the new PBL and CBL structures, questioning if the quality of learning was being compromised in the pursuit of self-directed learning skills. From the MT's perspective, these concerns were understandable, particularly

during a transition where the emphasis, especially in early program stages, was on developing students' capacity for self-directed learning – a necessary scaffold for more complex CBL challenges later on. It highlighted a critical tension between the pedagogical goals of fostering autonomy and ensuring faculty confidence in content mastery and educational quality.

Integrating Appreciative Inquiry (AI) aimed to provide a constructive path, but required reinforcing structures like clear boundaries and timelines. Some perceived AI's positive framing as "toxic positivity," feeling frustrations were unacknowledged. The transformation also embraced social constructivism (Fosnot, 2005) and connectivism (Siemens, 2005), viewing learning as co-created and networked. However, the complexity sometimes disrupted faculty's "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008), as challenges outweighed perceived skills or support, leading to stress. Calibrating expectations and support is vital during change.

4. Foundational principles and faculty identity

The Academy's transformation is anchored by research-backed principles: Challenge- Based Learning (CBL) for real-world problem-solving (Gallagher & Savage, 2020), programmatic assessment for continuous growth (Baartman et al., 2022), and personalized, flexible pathways for Gen Z engagement (Whalley et al., 2021). A key lesson was that autonomy without structure is not empowerment; true empowerment requires clear frameworks and emotional safety.

This shift profoundly impacted faculty, moving from 'hero' (expert) to 'host' (facilitator). This challenged identities built on content expertise, as coaching and mentoring skills became paramount. The aforementioned faculty anxieties regarding content depth and pedagogical quality (discussed in Section 3) are, in the MT's view, deeply intertwined with this identity transformation. For educators whose professional identity and sense of efficacy were traditionally rooted in the comprehensive delivery of content (the 'hero' role), the move towards facilitating student-driven inquiry (the 'host' role) could understandably generate concerns about whether students were 'being taught enough.' It raised fundamental questions for some staff about how quality and learning were being defined and assured in the new model. This identity shift demands critical reflection (Brookfield, 2017) and can trigger 'learning anxiety' (Schein & Schein, 2017), with emotional responses mirroring the Kübler-Ross change curve, especially when coupled with concerns about maintaining academic standards. Acknowledging these dynamics was crucial, though support efforts had uneven impact.

The ABC Learning Design method (Perović and Young, 2020) was introduced for structure but lacked widespread adoption. Alignment with institutional strategic pillars (Education+, Community Organization) aimed to ground the transformation but was sometimes seen as adding complexity by faculty already under pressure. This highlights the need for balancing autonomy with support, and recognizing that such changes may lead some faculty to seek other opportunities.

5. Lessons, future directions, and implications

The Academy's journey from "hero" to "host" reflects a broader shift towards learner agency and adaptability (Christensen & Eyring, 2011; Kezar, 2014). While PBL/CBL, programmatic assessment, and flexible learning are well-supported by research for developing key competencies and engaging Gen Z, the transformation revealed unresolved tensions. The complexity and emotional toll of change were initially underestimated; insufficient structural support for faculty autonomy led to confusion and increased workload. Future efforts must integrate robust workload planning and staff wellbeing strategies (Brown, 2018; Kotter, 1996).

Remaining steps and considerations:

- Define clearer scaffolding and milestones for curriculum redesign.
- Translate the shared vision into daily practices with faculty ownership.
- Embed ongoing professionalization in assessment literacy and feedback.
- Develop future faculty recruitment and professional development strategies that consciously balance pedagogical skills with industry experience, moving beyond past tendencies to prioritize the latter.
- Provide differentiated professional development pathways.
- Ensure transparent professional dialogue between management and teams.
- Strengthen alignment with quality assurance and accreditation.
- Actively manage the emotional dimensions of change.
- Reinforce feedback loops with all stakeholders.
- Assess long-term sustainability of PBL/CBL within institutional systems.

Implications for practice:

- Invest in faculty development for facilitation and coaching.
- Embed formative assessment and mentoring.
- Support personalized pathways with robust structures and collaboration.
- Engage diverse stakeholders in curriculum co-creation.
- Recognize that structural change needs cultural transformation.

Final thoughts: The Academy's 'Hero to Host' journey illustrates that transforming tourism education to be truly responsive and student-centered demands more than pedagogical innovation. It requires a courageous commitment to navigating the inherent complexities of change—actively supporting faculty through identity shifts, thoughtfully balancing diverse stakeholder perspectives, and embedding adaptable structures that foster both student agency and collective resilience for sustainable, impactful learning.

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Post-graduate tourism students and the art of making their own future a sustainable one

Dr Martin Robertson[1], Dr Nicole Ferdinand[2]

Introduction

Relating first to their collaborative funded project working with two stakeholder groups on the Isle of Portland, Dorset, Ferdinand and Robertson (2019) will lead a workshop conversation and activity focused on the opportunities and challenges of making future visioning activities both meaningful and successful for post-graduate students. Their work applies both the extension of Knobloch's (2003) framework of *authentic learning* for graduate students on programmes for tourism, hospitality and event management as proposed by Kitchin et al. (2024) and a *design thinking* pedagogy in response to *wicked problems* (Earle and Leyva-de la Hiz, 2021; Huber, Peisl, Gedeon, Brodie & Sailer, 2016).

The *wicked problem* for the workshop is stakeholder understanding, and agreements for more sustainable tourism futures at a time of funding restriction, socio-economic turbulence, and a global environmental emergency.

The three mission contexts of the university

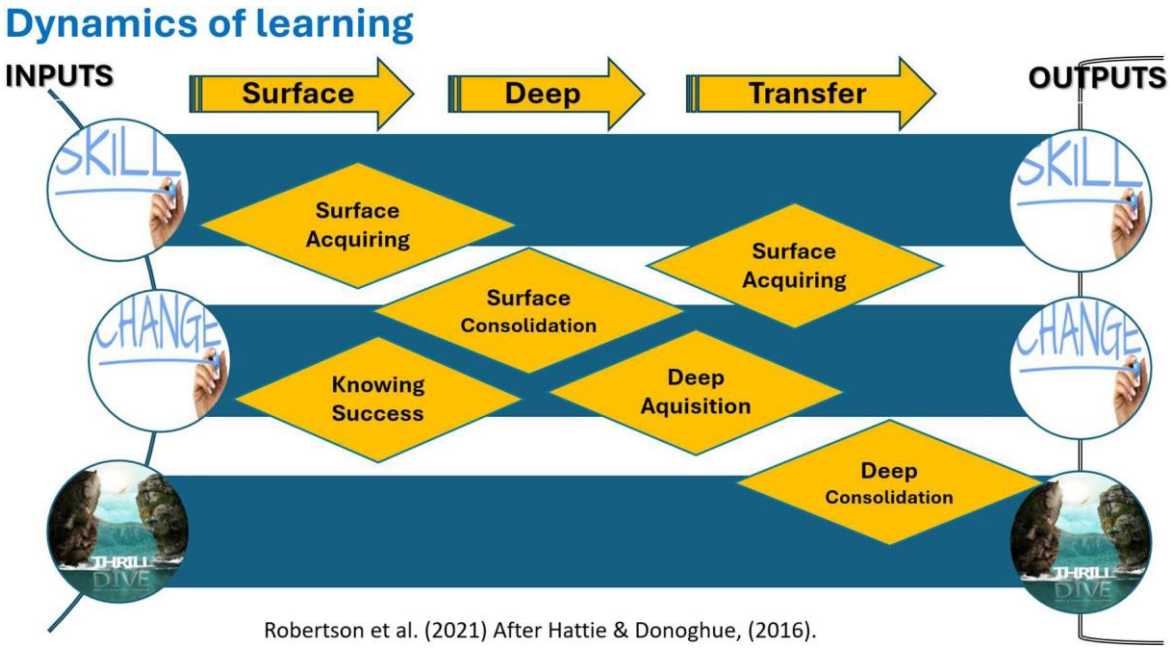
The three primary missions associated with universities are teaching, research, and community service. The latter has gained significant prominence over the past two decades, coinciding with irrevocable changes in higher education funding models (Miller, Cunningham, & Lehmann, 2021). As institutions navigate an increasingly competitive landscape and an internationalised framework for higher education, they must also respond to the specific needs of local employment, economic, and societal contexts. This dynamic, inevitably, impacts all three missions (Kitchen et al., 2024; Miller et al., 2021). Integrating the first mission, teaching, with the second, research, is crucial for academics to enhance students' capacities to adapt to evolving professional and social environments. Furthermore, the third mission, which encompasses the incorporation of social, ethical, and environmental values and principles, has gained increasing significance for higher education institutions (Godonoga & Sporn, 2023; Rentocchini & Rizzo, 2023), The third mission can be viewed as a form of societal service, which is increasingly reflected in the curricula of management programs. We argue that supporting students in future visioning contributes to this service significantly.

Future thinking with students and dynamics of deep learning

Future thinking or foresight methodologies o er structured methods, facilitates stakeholder engagement and participatory activity critical to building consensus, and develops adaptive and innovative competencies (Bourgeois, Penunia, Bisht, & Boruk, 2017; Dixon, Montgomery, Horton-Baker, & Farrelly, 2018; Neuho, Simeone, & Laursen, 2023; Starostka, Neuho, Morelli, & Simeone, 2024). This is to say, future thinking resonates in all three missions named above, but in the third mission – societal service – in particular. In short, it is an exercise in systematic sense-making (Robertson, Yeoman, Smith, & McMahon-Beattie, 2015) and an important activity to encourage active participation and encouraging deep learning (Biggs, 2012; Hattie & Donoghue, 2016). For concision, fig 1 illustrates the

1 Dr Martin Robertson, Associate Professor, The Business School, Edinburgh Napier University, Edinburgh. M.Robertson2@napier.ac.uk
2 Dr Nicole Ferdinand, Associate Dean - Postgraduate Studies & PL Post-graduate Hospitality, Tourism and Events, Oxford Brookes University. n.ferdinand@brookes.ac.uk

dynamics of learning whereby we suggest that a future methodology facilitates a learning process that may allow deep acquisition of knowledge. Further, through its authentic and active design relating to space, place and people (stakeholders) and determining a better future provides a laddering of reflective learning that provide deep consolidation.



The workshop activity

Martin and Nicole will first introduce and highlight their future visioning activity exercised over two days with two stakeholders groups - local residents and tourism sector suppliers, that brought together an agreed future based on a *geotourism* strategy serving the individual as well wider needs of the community of stakeholder. They then explain their respective application of this frame as active learning process, outlining the stages of learning towards deep consolidation.

A workshop activity for attendees is then launched. Output will be captured digitally (and autonomously) for sharing with conference attendees.

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Creating Study Abroad Experiences for Students Through a Flipped Classroom Adventure

Christina Minihan and Soo Kang *

Keywords: flipped classroom; experiential learning; culinary tourism; study abroad; student engagement

Purpose of the Workshop

This workshop introduces a dynamic teaching case study based on Colorado State University's first Culinary Tourism study abroad program in Tuscany, Italy. The course uniquely blended a flipped-classroom model with high-impact experiential learning in a post-COVID context. The purpose is to equip hospitality, tourism, and study abroad educators with a replicable, research- informed framework for creating immersive global learning opportunities centered on food and beverage tourism.

The case emphasizes how intentional curriculum design, community engagement, and flexible pedagogies can yield transformational outcomes for students while navigating complex logistical and cultural realities abroad.

Context and Teaching Framework

In Summer 2022, undergraduate students enrolled in a three-credit Culinary Tourism course based in Cortona, Italy. Using a flipped-classroom approach, students completed an online pre- departure module focused on:

- The Food Tourism Experience Model (Moscardo, Minihan, & O'Leary, 2015)
- Sustainable food supply chains
- Cross-cultural etiquette and communication

This foundational knowledge prepared students to engage meaningfully with local hosts-including truffle hunters, cheesemakers, vintners, chocolatiers, and chefs-during hands-on field experiences. Each encounter functioned as a living case study, allowing students to explore regional identity, cultural entrepreneurship, and tourism product development.

Students co-created learning objectives, collected data through field journals and interviews, and completed post-program reflections. Outcomes were assessed through qualitative student reflections and comparative analysis of pre- and post-program self-efficacy surveys regarding cultural awareness and applied tourism knowledge.

Key Issues to Be Addressed

1. Designing a flipped curriculum tailored to global learning
2. Embedding industry professionals into the academic experience
3. Facilitating active, student-led engagement in diverse contexts
4. Managing program logistics, safety, and flexibility in uncertain travel conditions
5. Building equitable, inclusive, and sustainable study abroad frameworks

Student Experiences and Feedback

Students reported increased confidence in cross-cultural communication, stronger career motivation in food tourism sectors, and enhanced critical thinking skills. Challenges included navigating unfamiliar environments, balancing reflection with participation, and adjusting expectations when confronted with cultural differences. These reflections informed future program design.

* Christina Minihan, Colorado State University, christina.minihan@colostate.edu
Soo Kang, Colostate State University, soo.kang@colostate.edu

Sample student quote:
"Meeting the truffle hunter was eye-opening-not just about food but about passion and pride in local identity. It made everything we studied real."
Interactive Workshop Components
The workshop will include:
- A visual flowchart outlining the flipped-classroom cycle before, during, and after travel
- A small group activity where attendees draft a flipped-classroom module for their own study abroad course
- Live discussion prompts for identifying local industry partners and logistical strategies
- A framework template handout that participants can adapt to their institutions
  Target Audience
- Hospitality, tourism, and food studies faculty
- Study abroad coordinators and global learning professionals
- Curriculum designers exploring hybrid or experiential models
- Graduate students and researchers in international education

Expected Outcomes
Participants will leave the session able to:
- Adapt flipped learning techniques to a global travel context
- Integrate supply sector experiences into curriculum planning
- Apply the Food Tourism Experience Model to design and evaluation
- Anticipate logistical and cultural challenges when implementing programs
- Build a draft concept for an immersive culinary tourism course

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Preaching and practicing communities of learning and practice in hospitality and tourism

Honggen Xiao *, Qingyun Pang and Zuhui Liao

Abstract: The relationship between theory and practice (or research and practice) has been a constant concern amongst academics and practitioners; consequently, the ways of bridging the two have been a focus of study in almost every applied field of research including tourism and hospitality. This paper presents a brief review and overview in theorizing the relationship between theory and practice. A shift of practice in integrating theory and practice was highlighted, from the prior two-community paradigm such as knowledge transfer to the current, increasingly popular approach to nurturing one integrated community of learning and practice. The paper illustrates three examples in the practicing of communities of learning and practice, and reflects on associated challenges and future research agenda in practicing and assessing communities of learning and practice.
Keywords: theory-practice relationships, community of learning and practice, knowledge development.

Introduction

Prior research on communities of practice has typically examined these three sectors independently, discussing communities of practice within each sector or exploring cross-communities of practice across different sectors. There has been a lack of simultaneous integration of these sectors within a single community. Some exceptions echo a similar notion of communities of learning and practice. For instance, Juusola (2023) introduced the concept of "co-creation learning communities," describing collaborative learning formed among students, faculty, academic peers, and business practitioners. This approach has demonstrated its effectiveness in enhancing student engagement through active collaboration and knowledge exchange within the community (Juusola, 2023). However, it primarily underscores the positive impact on student engagement and learning outcomes, often overlooking the potential benefits for other participants, such as academic peers and business practitioners.

There is a comparable deficiency in work-integrated learning programs (Fleming & Pretti, 2019). These initiatives facilitate students' transition between the educational sector and the industry – two distinct yet interconnected forms of social practice (Eames & Coll, 2010). Through the observation of workplace practices, students immerse themselves in the workplace culture, gain valuable insights into operational procedures, and enhance their integration into the community of practice (Fleming & Pretti, 2019). Despite these programs emphasizing the significance of balancing learning in both sectors, they are structured as unidirectional pathways, wherein students acquire knowledge and skills with minimal gains in the workplace experiences though. Additionally, this framework overlooks another crucial participant in the community of learning and practice – academics.

* Honggen Xiao, School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, honggen.xiao@polyu.edu.hk
Qingyun Pang, School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, qing-yun.pang@connect.polyu.hk
Zuhui Liao, School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, mathilda.liao@polyu.edu.hk

Despite the wealth of academic findings, practitioners often underutilize them (Xiao & Smith, 2010). Although academics have been proven to play pivotal roles in communities of practice within the realms of tourism and tourism management (Albrecht, 2012), academic research is frequently perceived by practitioners as unnecessarily complex, tangential, and communicated in an inaccessible manner (Thomas, 2012), resulting in inefficient utilization (Hudson, 2013). Shifting the focus of university research towards "usability" has been suggested as a potential approach that could be embraced by business elites (Thomas, 2012). Practitioners often maintain a noticeable distance from the academic knowledge (Ruhanen, 2008), a phenomenon particularly pronounced in the tourism sector, where instances of academic work influencing the management of commercial organizations are challenging to identify (Ryan, 2001). The transfer of knowledge between academics and the public and private sectors responsible for hotel and tourism development is limited (Frechtling, 2004). The distinct behaviors, languages, and networks inherent in these two communities impede effective communication, resulting in infrequent integration of academic research into the practical realm of tourism (Hudson, 2013; Thomas, 2012). This challenge underscores the imperative to break down boundaries and establish an inclusive community that encompasses the educational, academic, and industrial sectors.

In the digital era, information and communication technologies play a crucial role in dismantling barriers between learning communities in educational settings and communities of practice in professional environments, such as academia and industry. They enable the creation of cohesive communities dedicated to both learning and practical application. Combining the attributes of learning communities and communities of practice, a community of learning and practice can be defined as a collective of individuals possessing diverse opinions and expertise – spanning educational, practical, and academic skills – united by a shared passion and commitment to the advancement of a specific domain. This collaboration between the educational, academic, and industrial sectors is geared towards fostering the development of the domain and the overall progress of society.

Participants within the community of learning and practice can engage through face-to- face and/or online communication. In the contemporary landscape, with the pervasive use of information and communication technologies, there is no need to categorize these communities as strictly virtual or non-virtual. The younger generation of learners, primarily social learners, often seek assistance from peers through social networks when searching for information, completing tasks, or assessing their knowledge (McWilliam, 2008). They are equally comfortable with virtual interactions as with face-to-face interactions. Moreover, technologies serve as tools for interaction within the communities rather than dictating the essence of being communities of learning and practice. Interactions across the educational, academic, and industrial sectors seldom adhere strictly to either virtual or non-virtual modes. Multiple stakeholders are involved in communities of learning and practice, including learners and educators in the educational sector, suppliers and customers, employees and employers in the industrial sector, as well as research subjects and researchers in the academic sector. In introducing the concept of "communities of learning and practice," our aim is not to segregate learning from practice but to emphasize the interconnected nature of the educational, academic, and industrial sectors.

Current research on communities of learning and practice

While the concept of communities of learning and practice has not been explicitly defined in the existing literature, it has been documented in over 20 papers. These articles suggest the

potential of this concept for both research and practical applications, yet they also highlight certain limitations in its scope and methodological approaches.

Research potential

Existing research mentioning communities of learning and practice predominantly resides within the domains of health and education. In the health domain, these studies have delved into topics such as healthcare services (Chin, 2003) and education (Brittz et al., 2023), health visiting practices (Cuthill et al., 2017), and training for decision-making in public health (Caruso et al., 2019). Within education, discussions encompass various educational levels – primary, secondary (Gkoutsioukosta & Apostolidou, 2023), and higher education (Wrigley et al., 2021) – as well as various disciplines, including disciplinary (Chollett, 2014) and interdisciplinary studies (Hardré et al., 2013). Notably, the primary focus lies within a single discipline within higher education, which includes medical science (Philibert et al., 2019), agriculture (Chollett, 2014), music (Yee-King et al., 2015), and tourism (Xiao et al., 2018). Other domains engaging with this concept include professional training (Androusou, 2021), social innovation (Satrustegui et al., 2017), and school transformation (Martínez et al., 2015). Previous research has suggested the significant potential of this concept across multiple research domains.

Application potential

The concept of communities of learning and practice also holds significant promise for practical applications. For example, an educational social machine (Yee-King et al., 2015) has been created using the framework of communities of learning and practice. This innovation facilitates efficient feedback within a blended learning model for music lessons in an on-campus, face-to-face higher education context. Additionally, Chollett (2014) presented a community of learning and practice initiated by students, supported by course instructors and practitioners. Participants collaboratively establish an organic garden aligned with indigenous values, catering to the community's requirements for healthy, locally produced food. In this instance, students placed a higher emphasis on use value rather than exchange value, choosing to share this organic produce with the wider campus community. These two studies demonstrate the potential of this concept in practical applications.

This paper presents a brief review and overview in theorizing the relationship between theory and practice, which leads a better understanding in conceptualizing communities of learning and practice. A shift of practice in integrating theory and practice was highlighted, notably from a two-community paradigm such as knowledge transfer to the current, increasingly popular approach of integrating one community of learning and practice. With illustration of cases from hospitality and tourism industries, the paper reflects on associated challenges and future research agenda in practicing and assessing communities of learning and practice.

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Tourists' compensatory consumption upon service dissatisfaction

Shangzhi (Charles), Qiu Yingying Cai and Tingting Liu *

Abstract
This study investigates how tourists respond to unsatisfactory service experiences by examining the impact of service dissatisfaction on subsequent consumption upgrades.
Drawing on goal systems theory and compensation behavior theory, the research explores the mediating role of compensation motivation in this relationship. Two experimental studies demonstrate that service dissatisfaction increases tourists' likelihood of upgrading their consumption to compensate for the negative experience. Specifically, dissatisfaction activates compensation motivation, driving tourists to seek subsequent upgrades. These findings contribute to the tourism literature by expanding the understanding of how tourists respond to negative experiences and highlighting the role of compensatory motivation. The results offer practical implications for tourism businesses, suggesting strategies to target marketing efforts toward previously dissatisfied tourists and enhance their overall satisfaction.
Keywords: Compensatory consumption, Service dissatisfaction, Consumption upgrade

* Shangzhi Qiu, School of Management, Xiamen University, xmuqsz@xmu.edu.cn
Yingying Cai, School of Management, Xiamen University, wingyingcai@foxmail.com
Tingting Liu, School of Management, Xiamen University, tingtingliu@xmu.edu.cn

2. Full paper

The 44th ISTTE Annual Conference

Conference proceedings

Exploring the Drivers of Unruly Behavior in Tourism, Hospitality, and Leisure Sectors

Ady Milman and Asli D. A. Tasci *

Abstract

Unruly guest behavior is increasing across tourism, hospitality, and leisure sectors, yet cross-sector research from the guests' perspective remains limited. This study explores how U.S. consumers perceive, witness, and self-report unruly behavior in shared public environments across eight sectors. Using a cross-sectional survey (N=521), the study explores behavioral patterns, perceived triggers, and potential drivers like the service environment, fellow guests' behavior, ethics, morality, and personality traits. The findings reveal that unruly behavior is frequently observed in high-density sectors and is primarily attributed to impatience with the rules, rule ignorance, service disruptions, and guests' entitlement. Self-reported unruly behavior was relatively low but more common in casual or crowded environments. No significant demographic or personality differences were found between guests' likelihood to be unruly, suggesting situational rather than sociodemographic, psychographics, or moral predictors of behavior. The study contributes to theory development in consumer behavior and offers practical implications for policies, service design, and employee training.

Keywords: Unruly behavior, consumer behavior, public spaces, tourism, hospitality

Introduction:

In recent years, unruly behaviors have become increasingly common in various public and private spaces in tourism, travel, leisure, hospitality, and leisure sectors. The literature employs various terms to describe behaviors that disrupt public order or compromise community safety and well-being such as disruptive behavior (Petty and Cacioppo,1996), disorderly conduct (Morgan, 2021), dysfunctional behavior (Aron and Kultgen, 2019), problematic behavior (Briney, 1990), or noncompliant behavior (Wogalter, 2006). The term "unruly behavior" was adopted in this study, referring to actions that disrupt peace or threaten community well-being (Theoharis, 2022). Its form and frequency vary across sectors, influenced by the physical nature of the service environments, crowding, customer and employee dynamics, and other drivers. Unruly guest behavior is rising across tourism, hospitality, retail, and public spaces. Airlines, for example, report thousands of incidents yearly, including criminal activities such as sexual assaults, attempts to breach the flight deck, and other threatening behaviors (FAA, 2025; Fortinsky, 2024). Hotels, restaurants, and retail spaces face similar issues, from theft and rule-breaking to abusive customer behavior, which impacts staff morale, profits, and brand reputation (Han et al., 2016; Lages et al., 2023; Orth, 2024; Retail Customer Experience, 2023). Consequently, many operators have introduced new guest policies and conduct rules (Airbnb, 2022; Disneyland Paris, 2025; D'Innocenzio, 2023; Heritage Hotel Rules, 2025; Marriott, 2025; Universal Studios Hollywood, 2025; Walmart, 2025).

This study addresses an important gap by examining how guests perceive, experience, and engage in unruly and disruptive behavior across several public spaces. It explores consumers' perceptions of unacceptable behavior, how frequently they witness such conduct, as well as their own self-reported participation. The findings will contribute to expanding consumer behavior theory in shared environments, developing a cross-sector behavioral framework, and refining social norms and deviant behavior theories in public settings. The results may also offer that practical implications may help shape the development of public space policies, employee training, customer service design, and patrons' communication strategies.

Literature Review

Research on unruly guest behavior in tourism, hospitality, and leisure sectors is limited (Ngo et al., 2024; Qiu et al., 2023; Tsang et al., 2018; Yin et al., 2023; Zhang and Cao, 2023). Most studies focus on the impact on employee well-being (Huang et al., 2022; Robertson and O'Reilly, 2020; Yoon, 2022) or focus on isolated guest experiences (Fu et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Milman et al., 2020), with little attention to

* Ady Milman, Tourism, Events, Entertainment and Attractions, Rosen College of Hospitality Management, Univ of Central Florida, Ady.Milman@ucf.edu

Asli D. A. Tasci, Tourism, Events, Entertainment and Attractions, Rosen College of Hospitality Management, Univ of Central Florida, asli.tasci@ucf.edu

how guests witness, perceive, or are affected by such fellow guests' behavior. Additionally, previous studies rarely compare unruly conduct across sectors, limiting the understanding of how these behaviors differ based on the service environments, guest-to-guest and guest- employee interactions, and operational contexts. Finally, with limited studies conducted on self-reported unruly behavior in public spaces (Hopp et al., 2020; Poulos et al., 2019), no specific empirical research was published on such guest behavior in tourism, hospitality, and related leisure industries.

Sector-specific studies addressed uncivil behavior in the airline industry (Shin and Kim, 2024; Skaggs and Vieraitis, 2023), the accommodation industry (Alola et al., 2021; Manshoor et al., 2023), the restaurant industry (Chaouali, et al., 2022; Im et al., 2024), and in public spaces, such as shopping malls (Paloušová, 2024), the retail industry (Gaucher and Chebat, 2019), and natural parks or attractions (Li and Chen, 2022). The literature primarily focused on the impact on employees (Baker and Kim, 2024) rather than fellow guests. This study provides deeper insights into the broader impacts and causes of unruly behavior and informs targeted strategies for modifying negative outcomes in diverse public settings. Understanding these dynamics will contribute toimproved theory development and management practices to enhance the overall customer experience.

Methodology

A cross-sectional survey was conducted using Qualtrics, recruiting U.S. residents over 18 who traveled within the last year through Prolific. The survey examined participants' experiences versus expectations of significant unruly behavior among fellow travelers, and participants were also asked to report the frequency of their involvement in unruly behavior across the following sectors: airlines, restaurants, malls, hotels, theme parks, public avenues, outdoor attractions, and other public spaces. The sectors were selected based on the high frequency of consumer-to-consumer interactions in public spaces and their relevance to the tourism, hospitality, and leisure industries.

Data was collected in March 2024, and after excluding incomplete and failed attention- check responses, data from 588 participants were analyzed using IBM SPSS Version 28.0 to explore behavior patterns and their drivers. The survey comprised several sections: (1) Frequency of annual trips and travel within the past 12 months (2) Frequency (1=Never; 7=Always) and acceptability (1=Totally Unacceptable; 7=Totally Acceptable) of unruly behaviors in tourism, hospitality, and leisure contexts (3) Frequency of respondents' own unruly behaviors during service consumption (1=Never; 7=Always), (4) Personality Scales: Ethical views, moral development, and personality types based on validated scales (5) Demographic information.

Following data cleaning, which involved removing incomplete surveys and failing attention checks, 521 of the 588 surveys were retained for analysis. Descriptive statistics and frequencies described the sample's characteristics and the means of the various scale ratings across all sectors, as well as one-way ANOVA, t-tests, and Chi-Square tests to compare groups of respondents.

Findings

General Profile of the Respondents

The respondents, representing all 50 U.S. states and Washington, D.C., had an average age of 41 years. The gender distribution was 39% male, 59% female, and 2% identifying themselves as other. A majority of the respondents were college graduates (67%), with 41% married, 35% single, and a median of two children under 18 living in the household. Most reported annual income in the $50,000–$75,000 range. Their ethnic backgrounds were predominantly White/Caucasian (61%), followed by African American (16%), Asian (13%), and Hispanic (6%) (Table 1). On average, respondents took three trips annually, with two trips occurring in the past twelve months (Table 2).

Respondents' Experience with Fellow Guests' Unruly Behavior

Most respondents reported witnessing unruly guest behavior most often in airlines, followed by restaurants, malls, hotels, theme parks, public avenues, outdoor attractions, and other public spaces. Of 37 behaviors rated, only "displaying affection in public" scored above the midpoint on the 7-point scale (4 = neutral), while behaviors like stealing, making threats, physical violence, and sexual abuse were deemed most unacceptable (Table 3). While income, race, and the number of trips may influence perceptions, these biases are likely minimal. Thus, differences in perceptions of unruly behavior are likely attributed more to sector characteristics than to demographic factors.

Respondents were asked to rate the degree of several factors that might be contributing to the unruly behavior of fellow guests (1=not influential at all; 7=very influential). The top perceived factors were: guests being impatient with rules (mean = 5.50), guests not obeying the rules such as cutting through the

lines (mean=5.34), delays or cancellations of services (mean=5.24), sense of entitlement because of the high cost of services (mean= 5.14) and overcrowding (mean=5.13). These findings suggest that unruly behavior among guests is perceived to stem primarily from a combination of personal attitudes, rule-breaking tendencies, and situational factors (Table 4).

The most perceived influential factor in unruly behavior is impatience with rules, reflecting frustrations with the service provider's policies or rules. Fellow guests' violations, such as cutting in line, were perceived as a major trigger for conflict or disorder. This reflects how visible violations of fairness can provoke negative responses from others. Delays, cancellations, or other service disruptions create dissatisfaction, pointing out the critical role of operational efficiency in maintaining guest satisfaction and order. Finally, a sense of entitlement due to the premium payments may also contribute to entitlement-driven unruliness as a psychological response to perceived value for money.

Respondents' Self-reported Unruly Behavior

Respondents rated their frequency of unruly behavior across eight sectors on a 1 to 7 scale (1 = Never, 7 = Always). The highest average scores for self-reported unruly behavior were in restaurants (2.52) and theme parks (2.50), followed by malls and shops (2.49), airlines (2.47), outdoor attractions (2.46), other attractions (2.44), streets and avenues (2.41), indoor attractions (2.34), hotels (2.30), and natural attractions (2.12).

To identify the drivers of unruly behavior, an index was created to categorize respondents who reported such behavior (1) infrequently ("never," "rarely," "seldom") and (2) frequently ("often," "very frequently," "always"). Respondents who were unlikely to be unruly (n=403) were those whose average rating was below 4 (1 to 3.9) on the self- acceptance of unruly behaviors across all sectors. Respondents who were likely to be unruly (n=101) were those whose average rating was above 4 (4.1 to 7) on the self- acceptance of unruly behaviors across all sectors.

T-tests and Chi-Square tests indicated no statistically significant differences in the respondents' demographic characteristics, such as gender, education level, marital status, annual income, and ethnic background, between respondents who reported infrequent unruly behavior and those who reported more frequent unruly behavior. There were no statistically significant differences between the two groups in terms of the average number of trips taken annually, whether they had traveled within the past twelve months, or the total number of trips taken during that period.

Furthermore, there were no statistically significant differences in personality traits related to ethical views, such as expecting good consequences or caring for others' rights.

However, respondents more likely to be unruly slightly agreed more (mean = 4.95) that they follow rules because their social circles do (compared to a mean of 4.53 for those unlikely to be unruly). No significant differences were found between the groups regarding morality (e.g., "I stand behind my actions") or truthfulness (e.g., "I tell the truth"). This suggests that personality traits may not be reliable predictors of unruly behavior (Table 5). Overall, these findings suggest that personality traits, particularly those related to ethics and morality, may have limited influence in distinguishing individuals inclined to unruly behavior from those who are not.

Conclusions

Despite a diverse sample, the findings did not confirm that demographic characteristics such as age, gender, educational level, family status, or ethnic background may predict the likelihood of unruly behavior. Although many establishments, like theme parks and shopping malls, have recently implemented policies requiring that visitors below a certain age be accompanied by a chaperone (Carowinds, 2024; D'innocenzio, 2023; Knott's Berry Farm, 2024), the findings may not support these strategies.

Respondents most frequently witnessed unruly behavior in sectors with high density and service interactions, such as airlines, theme parks, and the restaurant industry. This emphasizes the importance of psychological, situational, and operational factors that may shape guest conduct. Bad behavior triggers may include delays, cancellations, long wait times, crowded spaces, proximity to strangers, guest-to-guest interaction, perceived entitlement, alcohol consumption, staffing issues, and strict establishment policies (DeCelles et al., 2019; De Vries et al., 2018; Papathanassis, 2012; Poon et al., 2013; Sedgman, 2023).

The findings suggest that unruly guest behavior is primarily stemmed from fellow guests (Torres et al., 2017), such as impatience with the rules, not obeying the rules, or demonstrating a sense of entitlement due to the high cost of services purchased. For example, guests who refuse to wait their turn or follow basic guidelines may signal disrespect or a breakdown of social order. The service environment and staff members could also be substantial triggers. While service disruption may increase frustration in high-stress

public settings, consumers become less tolerant of others' behavior, and that may trigger unruly behavior and confrontations among consumers and between consumers and employees.

While self-reported unruly behavior was generally low, it was slightly more prevalent in casual or high-traffic venues such as restaurants, theme parks, and shopping malls. This may reflect a perception of lower consequences or more relaxed behavioral norms in these environments, where visible enforcement is often absent, making guests feel freer to misbehave without fear that minor misconduct won't lead to serious consequences.

The findings also indicate the inconsequential role of ethics and morality in predicting unruly behavior, as no significant differences were found between individuals who reported higher versus lower levels of unruly behavior, at least in hospitality, tourism, and leisure sectors.

Since ethical or personality-based factors may not be strong predictors of public behavior, we suggest that people often adjust their behavior according to their experience of the consumption environment and not necessarily their value system. Consumers may be ethical, but their values may shift when experiencing stress or when fellow consumers break the rules or act out. In addition, people may perceive themselves as ethical, moral, and honest, yet justify their actions in specific circumstances (Szmigin et al., 2009). The only slight variation between the two groups was about adherence to the rules, as everyone in their social circles follows them. Respondents who reported being more unruly were slightly more influenced by social conformity, and they follow rules because others around them do, not necessarily due to internal ethical or moral reasoning.

Implications

The findings suggest several implications. First, identifying specific types of unruly behavior in each sector may help develop sector-specific interventions, such as guest conduct policies to improve guests' and employees' experiences. Operators in high- density environments, such as airlines, theme parks, or restaurants, should develop and publish clear communication about expected guest behavior or improve operational procedures, such as queue and crowd control management. Second, since unfairness, delays, long wait times, and guest entitlement were perceived as key triggers of unruly behavior, the service environment should be improved. This includes redesigning spatial spaces, queue lines, and employee training to manage high-stress situations and to prevent the escalation of unruly behavior.

Third, since ethical views, moral development, and personality traits did not indicate any statistically significant differences between individuals who reported higher versus lower levels of unruly behavior, unruly behavior may stem more from situational rather than moral factors. Therefore, interventions to deter unruly behavior should be focused on visual consequences and social norms rather than moral influences. Lastly, the findings present a new understanding of guest behavior in shared public environments that can contribute to the development of and refinement of existing consumer behavior theories in hospitality, tourism, and leisure sectors.

Limitations

The study presents a few limitations. First, while much of the existing research focuses on employee experiences or observed incidents, this study includes self-reported data that provides insight into guests' unruly behavior. However, dependence on self-reported data may lead to withholding and non-disclosure of personal unruly behavior due to social desirability bias. Second, the sample represented U.S. residents, limiting the generalizability of findings to international contexts where cultural norms of public behavior and rule enforcement may be significantly different. Third, although the study explored multiple sectors, the unique dynamics of each sector, such as airlines, theme parks, shopping malls, and restaurants, may be different. Finally, while the study addressed consumers' ethical views, moral development, and personality types as potential drivers for unruly behavior, broader psychological variables such as stress, anxiety, or self-control could offer additional insights into uncivil behavior in public spaces.

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Tables
Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents (N=504)

Sociodemographic Variables (% or Mean)	Unlikely to be unruly (n=403)	Likely to be unruly (n=101)	Chi-square and T-test significance
Age (Years, mean)	41.30	41.93	.681
Gender (%)			.104
Male	37.3	46.5	
Female	60.8	53.5	
Other	2.0	0.0	
Level of Education (%)			.056
High School	21.0	9.9	
Vocational School/Associate	11.0	17.8	
College/University	50.5	56.4	
Master's or PhD	15.8	14.9	
Other	1.8	1.0	
Marital Status (%)			.095
Single	38.0	26.7	
Married	41.5	47.5	
Divorced/separated	7.8	11.9	
Living with a partner	9.3	12.9	
Other	3.5	1.0	
Have children under the age of 18 living in the household (Yes%)	31.8	41.6	.062
# of children under the age of 18 living in the household	1.85	1.59	.090
Family's annual income (%)			.939
Under 15,000	6.8	4.0	
15,000 - 24,999	5.5	5.0	
25,000 - 34,999	12.0	10.9	
35,000 - 49,999	13.3	15.8	
50,000 - 74,999	17.0	19.8	
75,000 - 99,999	14.8	16.8	
100,000 - 149,999	22.0	17.8	
150,000 - 199,999	4.5	5.0	
200,000 or above	4.3	5.0	
Race/Ethnicity (%)			.449
White/Caucasian	60.5	61.4	

African American	16.3	16.8
Hispanic	5.3	9.9
Asian	14.0	7.9
Native American	0.5	1.0
Pacific Islander	0.3	
Other	3.3	3.0

Table 2. Travel experience characteristics of respondents (N=504)

Travel Experience (% or Mean)	**Unlikely to be unruly (n=403)**	**Likely to be unruly (n=101)**	**Chi-square and T-test significance**
# of trips (for business, pleasure, visiting friends or family, etc.) normally taken in a year (Mean)	3.38	3.79	.255
Taken a trip (for business, pleasure, visiting friends or family, etc.) within last 12 months (Yes%)	94.3	95.0	.767
# of trips (for business, pleasure, visiting friends or family, etc.) taken last 12 months (Mean)	2.92	3.38	.105

Table 3. Respondents' experience of witnessing different types of unruly guest behavior (N=521)

Frequency of Witnessing Unruly Guest Behavior Thinking of (the sector) where you witness those undesirable guest behaviors most frequently, please rate how often you have witnessed the following guest behaviors so far (1=Never, 7=Always)	Airlines (n=123)	Restaurants (n=98)	Malls and Shops (n=66)	Hotels (n=57)	Theme Parks (n=57)	Strips, Avenues, Allies (n=49)	Outdoor Attractions (n=37)	Other (n=34)	One-way ANOVA test significance
Lack of patience or acceptance of other guests	5.34	4.19	4.74	4.26	4.91	3.84	3.69	3.97	<.001
Delaying others by not following rules	5.25	3.46	4.34	3.79	4.61	4.00	3.67	3.91	<.001
Disturbing other guests by talking too much or trying to be too friendly	5.18	4.31	4.58	4.16	4.64	4.27	4.03	4.24	<.001
Allowing children to run around, play, and make noise	5.08	4.68	5.34	4.46	5.77	4.41	5.11	4.88	<.001
Talking loudly, screaming, yelling, cheering, or shouting	5.02	4.37	5.00	4.65	5.32	5.10	4.56	5.12	.004
Requesting too much from the employees	4.99	4.25	4.48	4.07	4.07	3.55	3.78	3.27	<.001
Listening to music or watching movies too loudly	4.96	3.02	4.35	4.18	3.80	4.10	4.64	4.15	<.001
Using profane language	4.95	4.23	5.06	4.61	5.11	5.08	4.28	4.48	<.001
Taking off shoes	4.84	2.25	2.63	4.11	3.55	3.27	4.17	3.73	<.001
Claiming right to public spaces and spots	4.80	3.76	4.12	3.96	4.50	4.18	4.25	4.42	<.001
Leaving bathrooms unusable for others	4.62	4.16	5.00	4.18	4.77	4.35	4.33	4.39	.054
Smelling from poor hygiene	4.61	3.04	4.15	3.37	4.12	4.27	3.78	3.97	<.001
Displaying drunken behavior	4.42	3.89	3.65	4.30	3.96	5.18	3.94	4.30	<.001
Displaying domestic dilemmas publicly (family fights)	4.36	3.43	4.12	3.84	4.57	4.27	3.83	4.00	<.001
Littering by throwing trash and waste	4.31	3.58	4.82	4.12	4.96	5.35	4.67	4.82	<.001
Making rude gestures to employees	4.15	3.49	3.97	3.70	3.55	3.63	2.97	2.67	<.001
Displaying affection in public	4.14	3.95	4.32	4.28	4.96	4.61	4.69	4.36	.005
Being disrespectful to guests from other cultures or ethnic groups	4.06	3.36	3.80	3.40	3.62	3.69	3.00	3.27	.009
Verbal abuse and cursing of employees	3.99	3.57	3.68	3.21	3.16	3.12	3.19	2.52	<.001
Making rude gestures to other guests	3.98	3.04	3.98	3.46	3.34	3.65	3.28	3.03	<.001

Taking photos of others without asking for permission	3.85	2.91	3.85	3.53	4.18	3.73	3.78	3.67	<.001
Verbal abuse and cursing of other guests	3.66	2.99	3.43	3.04	3.29	3.27	2.72	2.70	.018
Making threats to employees	3.60	2.89	3.29	3.09	2.82	2.80	2.72	2.36	.001
Disregarding handicapped people	3.54	2.64	3.60	3.09	3.36	2.90	2.92	2.79	.002
Making threats to other guests	3.38	2.57	3.12	2.96	2.79	3.08	2.42	2.70	.007
Wearing inappropriate clothing (bare-chested or in swimwear)	3.16	2.90	4.02	3.77	4.02	4.18	3.67	3.76	<.001
Stealing company property such as towels, utensils, blankets	2.73	2.70	3.14	3.63	2.73	2.84	2.81	2.64	.041
Smoking	2.68	3.27	4.03	4.37	4.23	5.31	4.39	4.70	<.001
Physical violence to employees such as pushing or hitting	2.60	2.24	2.62	2.49	2.29	2.53	1.94	2.27	.315
Spitting	2.56	2.46	3.51	3.44	3.96	4.27	3.94	4.24	<.001
Physical violence to other guests	2.55	2.12	2.68	2.54	2.48	2.71	1.94	2.58	.110
Vandalizing and damaging the facilities by breaking, carving, putting graffiti	2.25	2.25	3.37	2.79	2.93	3.20	2.75	2.97	<.001
Consuming illegal narcotics publicly	2.01	2.12	3.20	3.42	2.75	3.94	2.83	3.21	<.001
Sexual abuse or harassment of employees like groping, touching, hugging	1.98	2.25	2.18	2.46	1.98	2.14	1.94	1.73	.312
Sexual abuse or harassment of other guests	1.96	1.92	2.22	2.49	2.02	2.27	2.28	2.03	.316
Stealing from employees or guests (wallets, cell phones)	1.91	1.84	2.71	2.40	2.36	2.71	1.97	1.91	<.001
Stripping naked	1.42	1.45	1.78	2.53	1.86	2.14	1.72	1.94	<.001

Table 4. Respondents' Perceived factors causing undesirable guest behaviors.

Perceived factors causing undesirable guest behavior Please rate the degree of the following factors causing undesirable guest behaviors. (1=not influential at all; 7= very influential)	**Mean**	**SD**
Guests being impatient with rules	5.50	1.508
Guests not obeying the rules such as cutting through the lines	5.34	1.584
Delays or cancellations of services	5.24	1.746
Sense of entitlement because of the high cost of services	5.14	1.717
Overcrowding	5.13	1.649
Lack of adequate staff members	4.93	1.771
Guests trying to enforce the rules themselves	4.79	1.778
Lack of proper queue line management	4.79	1.738
Services becoming a "class system" based on the cost	4.48	1.838
Weather conditions causing delays	4.28	1.795
Companies charging extra fees for additional services	4.24	1.857
Companies treating some guests as third-class citizens	4.20	1.992
Lack of safety and security management	4.11	1.747
Lack of technology implementation for speedy service	4.02	1.815
Employees being fearful and not enforcing the rules	4.00	1.797
Employees not showing adequate emotional labor for guests experiencing issues	3.86	1.770

Services becoming accessible to all walks of life	3.51	1.924
Employees unable to speak English clearly	3.44	1.901
Perception of the facilities being unclean after the COVID-19 pandemic	3.40	1.920
Other (Please specify)	3.13	1.592

Table 5. Ethical views, moral development, and personality types of respondents (N=504)

Ethical views, moral development, and personality	**Unlikely to be unruly (n=403)**		**Likely to be unruly (n=101)**		**T-test significance**
Please rate your agreement level with the following statements (1=Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree)	**Mean**	**Std. Dev.**	**Mean**	**Std. Dev.**	
Ethical Views					
Utilitarian-I do the right thing because I expect good consequences	5.10	1.684	5.31	1.440	.208
Rights-I do the right thing because I care about the rights of other people	5.96	1.214	5.98	1.157	.881
Rights-I do the right thing because I consider the rights of not only people but also animals	5.72	1.438	5.84	1.056	.422
Justice-I adhere to the rules to prevent any repercussions.	5.66	1.441	5.83	1.132	.264
Moral Development					
Pre-conventional- I comply with the rules because doing so offers personal advantages.	4.97	1.704	5.23	1.482	.169
Pre-conventional- I adhere to the rules because everyone in my social circles follows them.	4.53	1.833	4.95	1.717	.040
Post-conventional or Principled- I follow the rules because I believe it is the right thing to do.	6.23	1.134	6.16	1.189	.554
Morality (mean of 4 statements)	6.16	.881	6.11	.868	.499
I stand behind my actions					
I act according to my conscience					
I like harmony in my life					
I care about justice					
Truthfulness (mean of 4 statements)	6.12	.900	6.06	.932	.562
I tell the truth					
I keep my promises					
I pay my bills on time					
I try to follow the rules					

Mindful Luxury: Introducing Equestrian Services – the Case of MV Ranch

Besim Agušaj *, Kevin Walker and Irina Raičković

Abstract
This case study explores Maslina Resort's expansion through an equestrian tourism project grounded in mindful luxury. Located in Košute, Split-Dalmatia, Croatia, MV Ranch redefines luxury travel by deepening guests' connections with horses, nature, and local culture. Beyond offering horseback riding, it emphasizes sustainable equine management, emotional well-being, and authentic human–horse interactions.
Drawing on a qualitative interview with the founder, this case study examines how equestrian services integrate into a high-end hospitality brand, focusing on customer preferences, ethical practices, market positioning, and workforce development. The founder's vision, shaped by a lifelong bond with horses and guided by empathy and responsibility, drives every detail — from stable design and event planning to equine- assisted therapy and guest experiences.
The case offers insights for students and professionals in luxury hospitality, equestrian business, and sustainable tourism, illustrating how values-driven leadership shapes distinctive, ethical tourism offerings.
Keywords: mindful luxury tourism, sustainability, cultural heritage, ethical practices

Introduction

Luxury tourism is undergoing a significant transformation, shifting away from material extravagance toward experiential and conscious travel. The concept of "Mindful Luxury" embodies this evolution, promoting responsible tourism while maintaining a high level of hospitality. By combining Croatia's historic equestrian traditions with international luxury standards, MV Ranch aims to redefine luxury travel while providing visitors with lifetime memories that are in line with their goals and values. Maslina Resort's expansion into equestrian tourism through MV Ranch strategically responds to the increasing demand for ethical and immersive travel experiences.
Equestrian tourism allows travelers to establish a deeper connection with nature, animals, and local traditions. Incorporating mindful luxury principles ensures these experiences remain ethical and environmentally responsible. The Lublin Region in Poland, for instance, has numerous equestrian tourism centers that focus on ethical practices and environmental sustainability, which has contributed to their success in attracting tourists (Brzezińska-Wójcik & Baranowska, 2012). Moreover, mindful luxury extends beyond equestrian tourism to include holistic wellness and personal development experiences. Today's affluent travelers are increasingly looking for destinations that provide both physical and mental rejuvenation. Integrating mindful equestrian activities - such as equine therapy, guided trail experiences, and access to the craft of horsemanship - aligns with the growing trends in wellness tourism.
Equestrian tourism fits seamlessly into this trend by blending sport, heritage, and luxury leisure. Regions with rich equestrian traditions offer promising opportunities for growth in this niche. Croatia, in particular, boasts a strong equestrian heritage, evident in cultural events like the Sinjska Alka, a knightly tournament that has been held annually since 1715 (Sinjska Alka - Alka, n.d.). MV Ranch can position itself as a leader by offering equestrian experiences

* Besim Agušaj, Rochester Institute of Technology Croatia, besim.agusaj@croatia.rit.edu
Kevin Walker, Rochester Institute of Technology Croatia, kevin.walker@croatia.rit.edu
Irina Raičković, Rochester Institute of Technology Croatia, ir8343@rit.edu

that celebrate Croatian culture while maintaining global luxury standards and high level of horsemanship.

This case study is based on a semi-structured qualitative interview conducted with the founder of MV Ranch. The interview took place in person and lasted approximately 90 minutes. The conversation was recorded using a smartphone dictaphone app, with the founder's consent. Content was later transcribed and thematically analyzed to identify key insights related to mindful luxury and equestrian services. Open-ended questions encouraged detailed responses, providing rich material for analysis. The depth of the answers makes them ideal for classroom use, giving students a chance to practice critical thinking and problem-solving through real-life examples.

Given the exploratory nature of the topic, a qualitative single-case interview offers rich, context-specific insight, making it an appropriate method for understanding nuanced, experience-driven approaches within high-end hospitality.

Main Concepts

Equestrian Tourism and Customer Preferences

Equestrian tourism is becoming an increasingly popular segment of the luxury travel industry, particularly in regions with a well-established tradition of horseback riding. Southeast Europe, known for its rich equestrian culture, provide an ideal setting for high- end equestrian tourism. The growing appeal of horseback riding retreats, equine therapy programs, and customized riding excursions signals a strong market opportunity for MV Ranch. According to Bambi et al. (2023), equestrian tourism represents a strategic segment of rural tourism, offering opportunities for farms to diversify their income through horse-based tourism. This is particularly relevant for MV Ranch as it seeks to ethically integrate equestrian tourism into its luxury offerings while supporting local communities and preserving cultural heritage.

However, operating in equestrian tourism comes with several challenges, including high maintenance costs, workforce training, and regulatory compliance. For MV Ranch, sustainable equine management is crucial. Bruccoleri et al. (2018) suggest that companies integrating socially responsible services may experience increased customer trust and operational performance. While the study does not specifically focus on equine welfare, its findings show that ethical considerations in service offerings, including implementing facility upgrades, staff certifications, and transparent communication about welfare policies, contribute to a company's reputation.

Luxury consumers in the contemporary age are leaning more toward distinctive and customized experiences that appeal to their own set of values, more so in niche markets like high-end equine tourism. Eneyo et al. (2022) highlight that niche tourism products, such as cultural festivals and sporting events, require targeted marketing strategies to effectively attract tourists with specialized interests. Additionally, the study highlights that inadequate marketing strategies can limit the appeal of niche tourism products.

The psychological attraction of equine tourism cannot be separated from self- improvement and personal change. Horse riding has historically been associated with discipline, confidence-building, and emotional balance, thus presenting itself as an ideal option for high-end travelers in need of rich experiences that have transformative power. According to Kelly et al. (2021), human-horse interactions (HHIs) can influence the emotional state and welfare of horses, which in turn may enhance the quality of the experience for humans. The study suggests that positive interactions between humans and horses can lead to mutual benefits, including improved emotional regulation and a deeper connection to nature. Additionally, personalization has now become an integral part of luxury travel in general. Most travel

companies and resorts utilize consumer data to craft tailor-made travel experiences that align with their desires and preferences (Eneyo et al., 2022). MV Ranch can use similar tactics by utilizing sophisticated consumer segmentation techniques to provide ultra-personalized equine experiences to attain maximum satisfaction and loyalty from discerning travelers.

Operations and Brand Integration

Effectively integrating equine operations within an existing luxury brand requires strategic deployment that achieves continuity while not watering down the personality of the brand. Maslina Resort's "Mindful Luxury" principles (Maslina Resort, n.d.) must introduce equine tourism in a way that supports its existing principles of sustainability, exclusivity, and integrative well-being. A key to the integration of the brand is coordinated marketing and communications methods. Equine experiences should not be marketed as a standalone activity but more so as part of an integrated experience of Maslina Resort in general. Operational excellence is a key factor in matching MV Ranch's equestrian operations to that of Maslina Resort's luxury level and associated brand. Ensuring ethical employment practices and workforce sustainability is crucial for long-term success in equestrian tourism, as challenges such as job dissatisfaction and workforce instability can affect operational excellence (Sylvia & Currie, 2022). Every step of guest experience from bookings, training needed to acquire skills in horsemanship, care of the horses, to riding on horseback must possess the same level of attention to detail and exclusivity that mark Maslina Resort.

Sustainability must remain at the center of the integration for the brand. As luxury consumers increasingly value ethical practices, MV Ranch must prioritize socially responsible approaches such as ethical equine management, transparent welfare policies, and community engagement to align with Maslina Resort's commitment to mindful luxury. By implementing robust equine welfare standards and integrating socially responsible services like Equine-Assisted Therapy, MV Ranch can reinforce its reputation as a responsible and ethical equestrian tourism provider. Through consistent branding, high-end service standards, and eco-friendly operations, MV Ranch has the potential to elevate Maslina Resort to new levels of mindfully luxurious status by offering guests a harmonious blend of equestrian heritage and luxury.

One essential aspect of sustainability in equestrian tourism is stable management. Mandara Equestrian Club successfully implemented an innovative approach by producing its horse bedding materials, significantly reducing import costs and the environmental footprint of its operations (Al Ali, 2020). Similarly, MV Ranch can explore sustainable solutions such as sourcing local feed, implementing water conservation measures, and investing in renewable energy sources to power its facilities.

Pavić et al. (2019) argue that equestrian tourists' motivations, such as retreat and aesthetics, are positively associated with their perceptions of service quality. This suggests that MV Ranch should focus on understanding the motivations of its guests to tailor experiences that meet their expectations, thereby improving overall service quality and satisfaction. The study also underscores the importance of sustainability in equestrian tourism, particularly in rural tourism farms, where the quality of hospitality services plays a crucial role in ensuring long-term viability (Pavić et al., 2019). By adopting sustainable practices, such as responsible land management and eco-friendly operations, MV Ranch can contribute to the long-term viability of equestrian tourism while appealing to environmentally conscious luxury travelers.

Redefining Equestrian Tourism

The story of MV Ranch is one of passion, perseverance, and a profound connection to horses. The founder's journey to create this sanctuary in Croatia's Košute region is not just about

building another luxury equestrian destination—it's about redefining what it means to harmonize horsemanship, sustainability, and mindful living. Every detail of the ranch, from its location to its operational philosophy, reflects a lifetime of dedication to horses and a vision for a different kind of equestrian experience—one where horses are not merely tools but partners, and where luxury is measured in authenticity, not opulence. Inspired by her success and the growing demand for immersive travel experiences, she is executing an ambitious expansion: introducing an equestrian camp designed to immerse guests in the transformative world of horse partnership. While this new venture aligns with her ethos of "mindful luxury," it also presents significant challenges.

The Genesis: A Lifelong Bond with Horses

The founder's love for horses began at the age of five, and it was love at first sight. "The first time I saw a horse, that was it. It became my drive in life," she recalls. Her father, recognizing her passion, struck a deal: if she completed business school, she would get a horse. True to her determination, she did just that, earning her first horse by her early twenties. "That horse followed me, and I think it's also a great responsibility in life," she says. "Before you become a mother or have other responsibilities, you have the responsibility of a huge animal. You need to take care of its well-being—both physical and mental—and you have to educate it. It's not easy."

Her journey was not without setbacks. A broken femur and multiple fractures left her unable to walk properly for three years, but even that didn't deter her. "It wasn't the horse's fault—it was mine," she admits. "It's always your fault. You didn't prepare the horse enough, or he wasn't ready for this or that." This humility and accountability became the foundation of her philosophy.

Her mentorship under Buck Brannaman, the real-life inspiration behind The Horse Whisperer, was transformative. Brannaman's approach—centered on empathy, patience, and mutual respect—reshaped her understanding of horsemanship. "Horses see through you," she explains. "They're the mirror to your soul. They show exactly who you are, and sometimes you don't like what you see." This insight became the cornerstone of MV Ranch, where the goal is not competition or trophies but a deeper, more meaningful connection between horse and rider. For the founder of MV Ranch, horsemanship is an art, not a sport. "Competition isn't my drive, and I never really liked it. I don't understand doing it for a medal. It's a pure love process, like an art. You need to work at it to evolve with it, and it's endless because they're living animals. They're all different, so you learn from each one and each situation."

The Perfect Location: Košute's Natural and Historical Significance

Finding the right location for MV Ranch was a two-year odyssey. The founder initially considered Dicmo area but after many administrative setbacks and realizing the clay- heavy terrain was unsuitable, she decided to give up on the location. "The ground there is like a slide when wet and hard like a rock when dry. It's dangerous for horses," she says. Her search led her to Košute in Croatia's Dalmatian hinterland, near the Cetina River valley – an area long celebrated for its equestrian traditions. When she discovered this location, it felt like destiny. The land's natural composition provided perfect footing for horses, while its historical ties to Croatia's rich horsemanship heritage added deeper meaning to her vision. The decision to preserve the existing structures on the property rather than demolish them speaks to the founder's respect for history and sustainability. "I could have torn it down and built my own house, but I didn't want to destroy its history," she explains (see picture 1, picture 2 & picture 3). The ranch's design prioritizes the horses' well-being, with open layouts replacing

traditional box stalls, which she likens to prisons. "A horse needs more space than a human prison cell," she says. "Imagine a horse in a stall where it can barely turn around. People say, 'We can't put them outside; they'll hurt themselves.' But when you're an animal, walking and running is natural. If you're locked in a box for years, of course, you'll hurt yourself when you finally go out."

Mindful Horsemanship

Her horses are not just well-cared for, they're elite. "My horses are the top of the top—the Rolls-Royce of horses," she says with pride. One of her horses is so finely attuned that he reacts instantly to the slightest shift in weight or pressure. "If you sit on him and do something wrong, he'll react," she says. "He's in my head and my body. He feels every small movement." This level of sensitivity requires riders to be fully present, reinforcing the ranch's ethos of horsemanship as an art form rather than a sport. At MV Ranch, horsemanship is not about dominance but partnership. The founder's approach is rooted in patience, observation, and a deep understanding of equine psychology. "Horses are very smart. They go, 'I got this,' and the next time they do it immediately," she says. "It's easier for them, so it makes sense. They learn from release, not from pressure. No horse wants to be pulled and kicked."

She is particularly critical of traditional riding schools, where horses are often overworked and underfed to make them easier to handle. Her commitment extends to equipment. She spares no expense on saddles, bits, and other gear, refusing to compromise on quality. "I would never put a plastic bit in my horse's mouth. It would be like slapping my best friend in the face."

Market Supply and MV Ranch Offering

The founder's market research was refreshingly hands-on. Upon arriving in Croatia, she visited every stable in the region, assessing gaps in equine care and luxury offerings. What she found was telling: beautiful landscapes underserved by high-quality horsemanship. "Most facilities don't understand that shiny chandeliers don't equal happy horses," she observes humorously. Her phased expansion directly addresses this niche. Phase One (2026) prioritizes horse welfare with open-concept stables, a heritage hotel, and the implementation of Swiss BIPV solar roof technology (see picture 2 & picture 3). Phase Two introduces a veterinary clinic (see picture 4) , while Phase Three will add Western-themed cottages (see picture 5), creating a year-round destination that showcases inland Croatia's cultural treasures like the Sinjska Alka knights' tournament.

The ranch's unique selling proposition? A 20-minute scenic flight from Maslina Resort to Sinj—made possible by existing airstrips in both Sinj and Hvar—where guests ride along the Cetina River before watching medieval jousting—a seamless blend of adventure and heritage. "It's about creating 'wow' moments that don't compromise horse welfare," the founder notes.

Equestrian Event Strategy

MV Ranch's approach to equestrian events reflects the founder's fundamental philosophy that true horsemanship is about partnership rather than competition. The ranch will host specialized clinics designed to deepen the connection between horse and rider, including weekend or three-day courses where participants can bring their own horses to learn under careful guidance. These "Centaur Clinics" will focus on achieving that perfect harmony of movement where horse and rider move as one being. For those interested in more structured challenges, the ranch will organize unique western-style games that test communication and skill without the pressure of traditional competitions. These may include musical freestyle patterns where riders choreograph routines to music, demonstrating their ability to communicate subtly with their horses.

Her partner, co-founder of MV Ranch, a professional cross-country rider whose father qualified for the Atlanta Olympics, will lead events that combine dressage and jumping elements alongside the founder's philosophy. These cross-country competitions will emphasize the voluntary partnership between horse and rider above all else. "In cross- country, it's all about the horse," the founder explains. "If the horse isn't with you, it's dangerous."

All events at MV Ranch will be designed to showcase the beauty of genuine horsemanship - where the quality of communication between horse and rider takes precedence over scores or medals. This approach stays completely true to the founder's vision as expressed in the interview, without adding any external information or interpretation.

Marketing

The founder's approach to marketing MV Ranch is as unconventional as her horsemanship philosophy—and just as intentional. "I don't think I'll market it heavily," she states with quiet conviction. "It's like a gem—you don't need to over-promote it." This refusal to chase trends stems from her deep commitment to attracting only those guests who share her reverence for horses. "I want the right people to come, not a lot of people," she explains, "high-quality individuals who are truly passionate about horses. I don't want people who are not here for the right reasons."

Rather than splashy campaigns or influencer partnerships, MV Ranch's visibility will grow organically through its connection to Maslina Resort, where discerning guests can discover the equestrian experience as a natural extension of the resort's mindful luxury ethos. "It'll probably get marketed a bit through Maslina Resort," the founder acknowledges. "If we connect the two, Maslina Ranch will be one of the experiences we offer." This symbiotic relationship ensures that visitors arrive already aligned with the ranch's values, having been gently introduced through the resort's existing channels.

The practical limitations of the ranch—with only 15 horses carefully maintained as partners rather than attractions—further reinforce this approach. "I don't want to overwork them," the founder emphasizes. "They're not tools to earn money—they're my friends." It's an approach that trusts the power of authentic experiences to find their audience naturally—one carefully vetted guest at a time.

Operational Challenges

If passion fuels MV Ranch, Croatian bureaucracy has been its brake pedal. "I've lost a year to administrative hurdles," the founder admits, describing a maze of permits and undefined timelines. Yet her greater challenge is human: finding staff who share her exacting standards. "I need people who understand that a horse's mouth is sacred," she says, referencing her refusal to use tie downs or any gimmicks. Her solution blends local talent with global expertise. She and her partner—both accomplished equestrian professionals—will personally train staff alongside visiting masters like Buck Brannaman Academy. For veterinary care, she has identified two exceptional local veterinarians who will have access to the ranch's cutting-edge equipment and facilities. "It's about helping the region's equestrian culture," she explains.

Sustainability

At the heart of MV Ranch lies an unwavering commitment to sustainability that permeates every aspect of its operations. The founder's vision extends far beyond superficial eco-friendly gestures, embedding environmental responsibility into the ranch's very DNA through innovative technology, thoughtful design, and regenerative practices. The ranch will harness cutting-edge Swiss BIPV (Building-Integrated Photovoltaics) solar roof technology, a revolutionary system that seamlessly incorporates solar cells into roofing materials. Unlike conventional solar panels, this elegant solution maintains the property's aesthetic integrity

while generating enough clean energy to power the entire ranch with surplus electricity to contribute back to the local community. This technology represents a quiet revolution in sustainable energy, perfectly aligned with the ranch's philosophy of mindful luxury.

Sustainability extends to the ranch's culinary offerings through its permaculture garden, where plants grow in symbiotic relationships that eliminate the need for artificial interventions. This living pantry will supply the on-site restaurant with fresh, hyper-local ingredients, creating a true farm-to-table experience that celebrates Croatia's rich agricultural heritage. The garden's design follows nature's wisdom, with companion planting creating a self-sustaining ecosystem that requires minimal human interference while yielding abundant, nutritious produce.

Every material selected for MV Ranch's construction and furnishings reflects the founder's exacting environmental standards. The buildings incorporate reclaimed and locally sourced materials, preserving the region's architectural heritage while minimizing the carbon footprint of transportation. Furniture throughout the property is made of sustainable materials, ensuring that each piece tells a story of ecological responsibility.

Even the ranch's equipment embodies this sustainable ethos. From the carefully chosen riding gear to veterinary supplies, every item is selected for its durability, ethical production, and minimal environmental impact. The veterinary clinic, born from the founder's personal experiences with inadequate and limited access to equine care facilities, will serve as a model of sustainable animal healthcare and designed to serve both the ranch's horses and the surrounding community's equine population (see picture 4). This comprehensive approach to sustainability creates a harmonious relationship between the ranch and its environment, proving that luxury and ecological responsibility are not mutually exclusive. MV Ranch stands as a testament to what's possible when every decision - from energy systems to dinner ingredients - is made with both excellence and environmental stewardship in mind. The result is a destination that doesn't just minimize its impact on the planet, but actively contributes to its regeneration while providing guests with an authentic, deeply connected experience.

Long-Term Vision

The founder's vision for MV Ranch extends far beyond its opening, unfolding in carefully considered phases that blend sustainable development with profound respect for both horses and the local community. Beyond physical infrastructure, the founder imagines MV Ranch as a living, breathing ecosystem of horsemanship and sustainability. Winter months will see the property transform into a community hub where locals can take lessons, lease horses (under careful supervision), and participate in clinics. Summers will buzz with children's camps and specialized training programs for adults, all while maintaining the ranch's intimate connection with its equine partners.

Over the next decade, the founder sees MV Ranch becoming more than a destination—it will be a proof point that luxury and animal welfare can coexist, that tourism can regenerate rather than extract, and that Croatia's hinterlands hold world-class potential. "When people see how happy our horses are, how they choose and want to work with us," she reflects, "that's when minds change."

This patient phased approach—from horse-first facilities to community-oriented programming—demonstrates how visionary hospitality can flourish without compromising its core values. The result won't just be a successful business, but a legacy that redefines equestrian tourism in the Balkans and beyond.

The founder's vision is ambitious—but how can it be rightly implemented?

Authors prepared this case as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a business situation. Special thanks to the founder of Maslina Resort and MV Ranch for generously setting time aside and openly sharing invaluable insights with remarkable transparency. Her genuine willingness to engage deeply was instrumental in helping create this case study. Teaching notes accompanying the case are included in the **Appendix A for instructors who may wish to adopt the case in their classes.*

Image 1. Existing facilities

Source: Founder's private photo repository (2025)

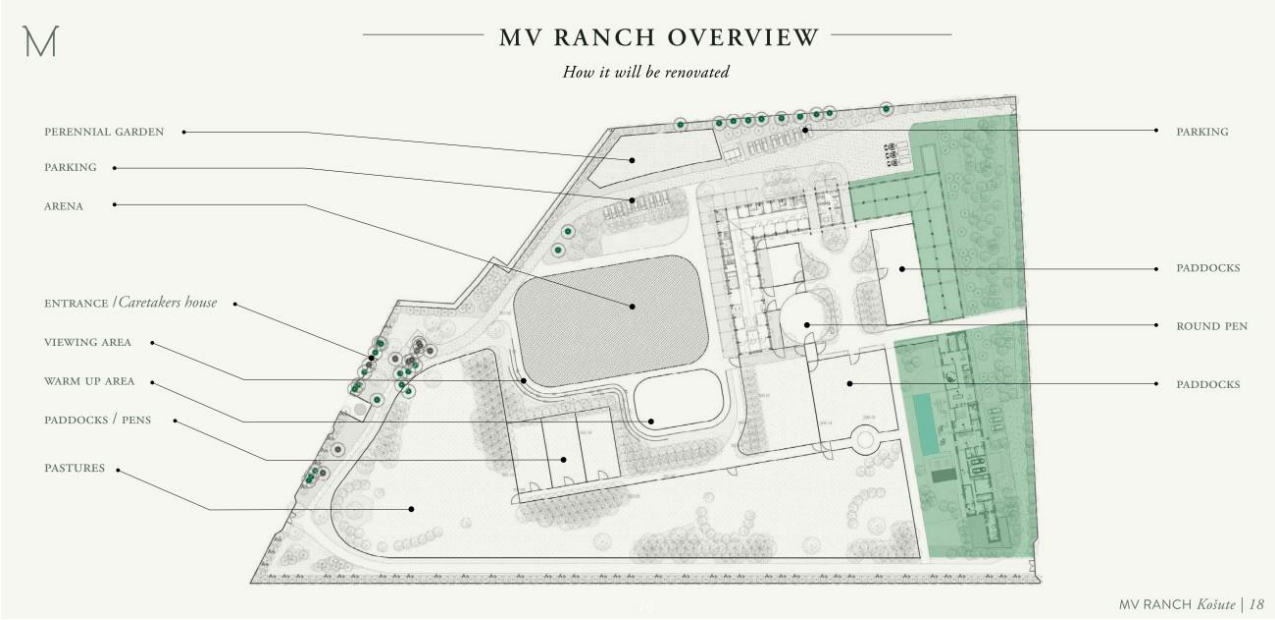


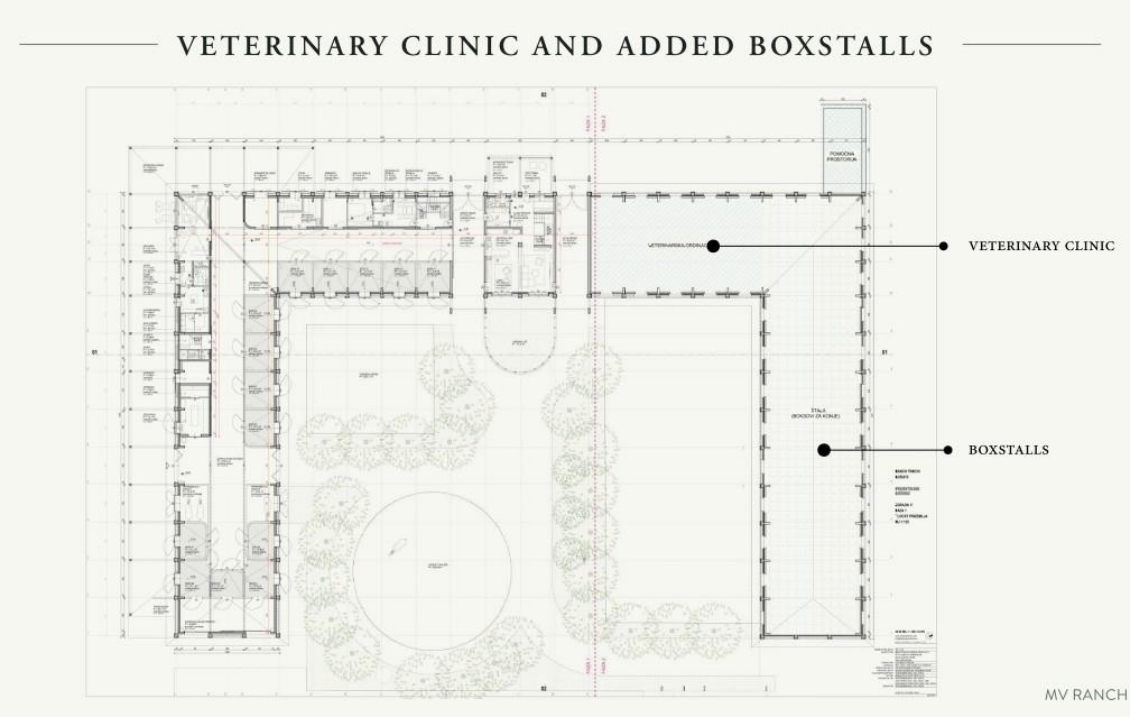
Image 2. Existing facilities – after renovation 1

Source: Founder's private photo repository (2025)

Image 3. Existing facilities – after renovation 2

Source: Founder's private photo repository (2025)

Image 4. Existing facilities – veterinary clinic and boxstalls



Source: Founder's private photo repository (2025)

Image 5. New Cottages

Source: Founder's private photo repository (2025)

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Appendix A

Teaching note

Mindful Luxury: Introducing Equestrian Services – the Case of MV Ranch

Target audience and courses

This case study is designed for advanced undergraduate and graduate students in hospitality management, business strategy, and luxury tourism programs, particularly those with interests in niche market expansion and high-end service operations. It is ideal for third- and fourth-year students who have foundational knowledge in service management, marketing, or financial analysis, though its multidisciplinary approach makes it adaptable for broader business courses. These themes make the case especially relevant for courses in:

Luxury Hospitality Management (e.g., branding high-end experiences, pricing strategies).
International Business (market entry analysis, cross-cultural stakeholder engagement).
Operations Management (resource allocation, service design for perishable assets like horse welfare).
Entrepreneurship (risk assessment, scaling niche concepts)
HR Management (recruitment, selection, training and development)

For graduate students, the case serves as a springboard for discussions on leadership in luxury markets, ethical resource management, and crisis preparedness (e.g., regulatory setbacks). Its real-world scenarios also align with capstone projects, where students must synthesize operational, and cultural data to recommend actionable solutions—mirroring challenges they may face as future managers in luxury resorts or experiential tourism ventures.

Teaching Objectives

Through analysis of MV Ranch's expansion challenges based on founder perspective and available market data, this case study enables students to examine real-world dilemmas in luxury hospitality entrepreneurship. The primary objectives are for students to:

1.Diagnose Human Capital Challenges by:
Creating appropriate recruitment strategies for specialized hospitality staff
2.Conduct Market Analysis by:
Segmenting potential customers for luxury equestrian tourism
3.Formulate Value-Based Pricing by:
Consider tiered pricing structures for different customer segments
4.Optimize Operational Systems by:
Creating phased expansion and opening timelines
5.Navigate Regulatory Environment by:
Proposing mitigation strategies for licensing/permitting delays

Lesson Plan and Instruction Overview

This case should be organized around various student activities to achieve the core learning outcomes. It is recommended these activities take place over two class sessions. During class session one, the case is assigned to all students individually (this should not take longer than 5 minutes). In class session two, student groups of 3 or 4 are formed and presented with five discussion themes and must address one in their groups (themes are listed below). Class session two entails the analysis and discussion of case themes with the instructor reviewing best practices. Session 2 is based on an 80-minute class period.

Class session 1: Readings

The first requirement is that students thoroughly read the case study and required readings as an introduction to sustainable business growth and branding challenges in equestrian tourism. These readings should be assigned prior to group activities in class session 2. Case questions should not be shared in this session.

Class Session 2: Group Exercise

Students will form groups of 3 to 4 and discuss the 5 themes offered below:

Steps:

1. Form groups and explain the format (5 min)
2. Theme Discussions (Groups Assigned 1 of 5 Themes) – Groups discuss their assigned theme and corresponding questions. If time allows, they can briefly discuss additional themes. (20 min)
3. Groups present summary answers – Each group presents key takeaways from their assigned theme. (25 min)
4. Instructor-led class discussion – Instructor facilitates a whole-class discussion, connecting insights from all themes. (15 min)
5. Debrief and key takeaways – Instructor summarizes best practices and potential

strategic approaches. (15 min)

Steps:

6. Form groups and explain the format (5 min)
7. Theme Discussions (Groups Assigned 1 of 5 Themes) – Groups discuss their assigned theme and corresponding questions. If time allows, they can briefly discuss additional themes. (20 min)
8. Groups present summary answers – Each group presents key takeaways from their assigned theme. (25 min)
9. Instructor-led class discussion – Instructor facilitates a whole-class discussion, connecting insights from all themes. (15 min)
10. Debrief and key takeaways – Instructor summarizes best practices and potential strategic approaches. (15 min)

Suggested Group Discussion Themes and Questions

Theme 1: HR acquiring staff who share the founder's philosophy

1. What qualities and values should MV Ranch prioritize when hiring new staff?
2. What challenges might arise in finding employees who fit both the luxury and equestrian aspects of the brand?
3. How can MV Ranch develop training programs to reinforce its unique philosophy among employees?
4. What strategies could be used to attract and retain skilled staff in a competitive hospitality industry?

Theme 2: Market Demand and Competitive Landscape

1. What type of customer base should MV Ranch target to sustain long-term success?
2. What marketing strategies can be used to position MV Ranch as a top luxury equestrian destination?
3. Are there enough high-net-worth individuals interested in this type of retreat to support its expansion?
4. What role does exclusivity play in attracting the right clientele?

Theme 3: Pricing Strategy – Attracting Both Local and International Clientele

1. Should MV Ranch offer tiered pricing for local vs. international guests (this question is connected to ethical pricing practices)? Why yes or why not?
2. How can MV Ranch maintain/justify high-end pricing while at the same time stay accessible to a local audience?
3. What factors should influence the pricing of accommodations and equestrian experiences at MV Ranch?
4. What risks come with setting prices too high or too low in the luxury tourism?

Theme 4: Operational Complexity

1. How can MV Ranch ensure its operations remain sustainable while expanding?
2. What measures should be put in place to balance high-end customer experiences with proper animal care?
3. How can MV Ranch create a seamless operational structure that meets the needs of diverse clientele?
4. What are the challenges of running a luxury equestrian retreat year-round?
5. Should the ranch expand (add) new cottages or focus on improving existing facilities (solar roofs, vet clinic, stables)?

Theme 5: Regulatory Challenges – Navigating Bureaucracy

1. What bureaucratic hurdles has the founder faced, and how do they impact the ranch's expansion timeline?
2. What strategies could MV Ranch use to speed up regulatory approvals while remaining compliant?
3. How are government regulations across Europe affecting luxury tourism destinations?

4. What role do industry connections and government relationships play in overcoming bureaucratic delays?
5. How can MV Ranch ensure smooth operations despite ongoing regulatory challenges?

Possible answers to group discussion themes

Theme 1: HR – Recruiting Staff Who Share the Founder's Philosophy

1. What qualities and values should MV Ranch prioritize when hiring new staff?
   - Deep respect for horses as partners, not tools.
   - Patience, empathy, hard work, curiosity, and emotional intelligence (mirroring Buck Brannaman's methods).
   - Commitment to sustainability and animal welfare (e.g., rejecting gimmicks, prioritizing open stables).
   - Alignment with "mindful luxury" (authenticity over opulence).
   - Willingness to learn and adapt to the founder's horsemanship philosophy.
2. What challenges might arise in finding employees who fit both the luxury and equestrian aspects of the brand?
   - Finding candidates with both luxury hospitality experience and equestrian expertise.
   - Balancing local hires (familiar with local culture) with global talent (aligned with high-end standards).
   - Ensuring staff share the founder's non-competitive, partnership-based approach to horsemanship.
3. How can MV Ranch develop training programs to reinforce its unique philosophy among employees?
   - Apprenticeships under the founder and visiting masters (e.g., Buck Brannaman Academy in Europe).
   - Workshops on equine psychology and sustainable practices.
   - Role-playing scenarios to reinforce empathy and patience with horses/guests.
   - Regularly conduct clinics with the founder.
4. What strategies could be used to attract and retain skilled staff in a competitive hospitality industry?
   - Competitive wages and benefits, emphasizing purpose-driven work.
   - Opportunities for growth (e.g., leading clinics, managing vet facilities).
   - Foster a culture of respect and shared mission (e.g., staff involvement in rehabilitating abused horses).
   - Highlighting the unique opportunity to learn alongside masters of both worlds.

Theme 2: Market Demand and Competitive Landscape

1. What type of customer base should MV Ranch target to sustain long-term success?
   - High-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) seeking transformative, non- competitive equestrian experiences.
   - Individuals willing to learn more about the art of horsemanship and thriving to be better horseman/horsewoman.
   - Wellness-focused travelers from Maslina Resort's existing clientele.
   - Equestrian enthusiasts disillusioned with traditional, trophy-driven stables.
2. What marketing strategies can be used to position MV Ranch as a top luxury equestrian destination?
   - Leverage Maslina Resort's channels to attract aligned guests.
   - Organic storytelling (e.g., documentaries on horse-rider partnerships).
   - Exclusive partnerships with high-end travel curators (avoiding mass influencers).
3. Are there enough high-net-worth individuals interested in this type of retreat to support

its expansion?

- Growing niche for "purposeful luxury" (e.g., regenerative tourism, animal welfare focus).
- Scarcity of similar offerings in Europe ensures exclusivity.

4. What role does exclusivity play in attracting the right clientele?
   - Limits over-tourism, preserves horse welfare, and attracts clients willing to pay premiums for authenticity.

Theme 3: Pricing Strategy

1. Should MV Ranch offer tiered pricing for local (or domestic) vs. international guests? Why yes or why not?
   - Yes. By offering the tiered pricing we avoid alienating locals.
   - No. Uniform pricing reinforces exclusivity and deepens alienating locals. Offer talent scholarships or community days instead. Different offers can apply whether it is 1-day visit, 3-day clinic, a month, or 2-year commitment.
2. How can MV Ranch maintain/justify high-end pricing while at the same time stay accessible to a local audience?
   - Highlight unique value: "Rolls-Royce" horses, personalized training, sustainability.
   - Bundle with Maslina Resort stays for perceived accessibility.
   - Develop community-focused offerings during off-season (e.g., local riding clinics, educational programs, leasing options for locals in winter months).
   - Engage local talent and professionals (e.g., veterinarians, trainers) to build regional integration and long-term loyalty.

3. What factors should influence the pricing of accommodations and equestrian experiences at MV Ranch?
   - Horse welfare costs (premium feed, open stables, vet care).
   - Scarcity (only 15 horses; small-group experiences).
   - Competitor benchmarks
4. What risks come with setting prices too high or too low in the luxury tourism market?
   - Too high: Excludes passionate but less wealthy equestrians.
   - Too low: Undermines luxury positioning and compromises horse care standards.

Theme 4: Operational Complexity

1. How can MV Ranch ensure its operations remain sustainable while expanding?
   - Phased growth (e.g., vet clinic before cottages) to maintain horse welfare.
   - Swiss BIPV solar roofs and permaculture gardens reduce long-term costs.
2. What measures should be put in place to balance high-end customer experiences with proper animal care?
   - Strict limits on guest-horse interactions (e.g., no overbooking).
   - "Horse-first" scheduling (e.g., rest days, vet oversight).
   - Well-defined training on what can be done and what can not be done with horses.
3. How can MV Ranch create a seamless operational structure that meets the needs of diverse clientele?
   - Tech tools for bookings (e.g., vetting guest experience levels).
   - Cross-trained staff (e.g., guides who understand hospitality and horsemanship).
4. What are the challenges of running a luxury equestrian retreat year-round?
   - Seasonal demand - offset with winter community programs.
   - Sourcing high quality produce
5. Should the ranch expand (add) new cottages or focus on improving existing facilities

(solar roofs, vet clinic, stables)? See images 1., 2., 3. and 4. presented in the case study

- Arguments for prioritizing improving infrastructure (e.g. vet clinic, solar roofs etc.) before adding cottages: support the local equestrian community by providing much-needed veterinary services and facilities for outside horses, preserves brand ethos, manageable growth
- Risks for prioritizing improving infrastructure: may limit growth, miss market opportunities
- Arguments for prioritizing ranch expansion (adding new cottages): sets high standards from the get-go, strengthens brand image
- Risks for prioritizing ranch expansion: resource strain, compromising horse welfare

Theme 5: Regulatory Challenges

1. What bureaucratic hurdles has the founder faced, and how do they impact the ranch's expansion timeline?
   - Permit delays (e.g., lost a year to approvals).
   - Unclear timelines for equestrian-specific regulations.
2. What strategies could MV Ranch use to speed up regulatory approvals while remaining compliant?
   - Hire local legal experts familiar with agricultural/tourism laws.
   - Partner with regional equestrian associations for advocacy.
2. How are government regulations across Europe affecting luxury tourism destinations?
   - Red tape seriously impacts (e.g., France) but lately improving with tourism growth.
3. What role do industry connections and government relationships play in overcoming bureaucratic delays (MV Ranch)?
   - Leverage Maslina Resort's existing networks.
   - Highlight MV Ranch's community benefits (e.g., vet clinic, job creation).
4. How can MV Ranch ensure smooth operations despite ongoing regulatory challenges?
   - Build buffer time into project timelines.
   - Document compliance meticulously to avoid retroactive penalties.

SUGGESTED GRADING RUBRICS

Note: Each team is evaluated based on three criteria: "Understanding of Case Concepts" (35%), "Presentation Quality" (30%), and "Theme Specific Analysis" (35%). Note that Table 2 provides for the evaluation of the theme that each team addresses.

Table 1: General Grading Criteria (Applies to all teams)

Criteria	Excellent (10–9)	Proficient (8–7)	Satisfactory (6–5)	Needs Improvement (4–0)	Weight
	Demonstrates deep understanding of all key	Shows good understanding with minor gaps in	Displays basic comprehension but lacks depth.	Limited understanding, major gaps, or incorrect	

Understanding of Case Concepts	issues, objectives, and challenges. Provides insightful analysis.	analysis.		analysis.	35%
Presentation Quality	Clear, engaging delivery; visuals support content well.	Generally clear and organized; visuals somewhat support key points.	Adequate delivery; some disorganization or visual disconnect.	Lacks clarity; poor structure or distracting delivery.	30%

Table 2: Theme-Specific Rubric (Only ONE applies per team; each worth 35%) *Instructor Note: Students are assigned one of the following five themes. Only the corresponding row below should be used for grading each team's thematic work.*

Criteria: Theme Specific Analysis	Excellent (10-9)	Proficient (8-7)	Satisfactory (6-5)	Needs Improvement (4-0)	Weight
Human Resources Strategy	Develops well-structured, innovative strategies for recruiting, training, and retaining staff aligned with the luxury brand.	Provides sound strategies with minor inconsistencies.	Presents basic strategies but lacks depth or feasibility.	Strategies are vague, unrealistic, or missing.	35%
Market Demand & Competitive Landscape	Conducts thorough market analysis, identifies target audience, benchmarks competitors effectively.	Provides good analysis but lacks some market depth.	Basic analysis with minimal competitive insights.	Limited or no market research, fails to assess competition.	35%

Pricing Strategy	Justifies premium pricing through strong financial reasoning and brand positioning.	Provides logical pricing approach with some minor gaps.	General pricing strategy without strong justification.	Unclear or inconsistent pricing approach.	35%
Operational Complexity	Balances luxury operations with strong sustainability and animal care measures.	Addresses key operational needs with minor weaknesses.	Basic approach with limited integration of sustainability.	Weak or no consideration for horse welfare and operations.	35%
Regulatory & Legal Challenges	Provides well-researched mitigation strategies for navigating bureaucracy.	Identifies main regulatory concerns with some solutions.	Mentions regulatory issues but lacks clear solutions.	Fails to consider regulatory challenges or mitigation.	35%

Total Score: / 100

The 44th ISTTE Annual Conference

Conference proceedings

Leading Gen X, Y, and Z from Within: Empowering Hospitality Managers Through Level Three Leadership and VABES

Iva Adžić Kušt*, Milena Kužnin and Nikolina Jerkić

This study investigates behavioral differences among three generational cohorts in the workplace: Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z within the hospitality industry in Dubrovnik, Croatia. While much of the existing literature emphasizes observable behavioral trends, this research adopts a deeper analytical framework by examining the foundational values, assumptions, beliefs, and expectations (VABES) that shape generational identity and behavior in organizational settings. Grounded in Clawson's Level Three Leadership, the study adopts a qualitative methodology, with focus groups as the primary data collection method. Generationally segmented focus groups were conducted to gain insights into participants' workplace experiences, leadership expectations, and motivational drivers. Thematic analysis identified patterns across cohorts, revealing significant differences in how each generation interprets authority, communication, and organizational values. The findings offer implications for hospitality educators, managers, and human resource professionals seeking to enhance generational awareness, improve engagement, and foster inclusive, values- aligned workplace cultures in the hospitality industry.

Keywords: Level three leadership, VABES, hospitality, generational differences Full paper, topic: Employee empowerment

Introduction

The contemporary hospitality industry is shaped by an increasingly diverse workforce where distinct generational groups enter the workplace with diverse values, perspectives, and experiences, deeply rooted in the socio-historical contexts of their formative years. Variations in job opportunities, socioeconomic conditions, political environments, and access to information have contributed to the development of unique generational identities. Older generations, for instance, may have been shaped by periods of war and economic hardship, prioritizing stability and security in their professional lives. In contrast, younger generations, who have grown up in the digital age, are more attuned to innovation, technological advancements, and a broader range of career opportunities (Chillakuri, 2020; Priporas et al., 2017). This diversity presents both opportunities and challenges for hospitality leaders who must navigate and integrate varying expectations and work styles within their organizations.

Effective leadership in the hospitality sector extends beyond merely recognizing generational differences in behavior. To foster a productive and inclusive work environment, leaders must develop a deeper understanding of the underlying values, assumptions, beliefs, and expectations (VABEs) that drive employee behavior across generations (Clawson, 2008). Simply observing behavioral variations is insufficient; leadership strategies must be adapted to bridge generational gaps, foster intergenerational dialogue, and create a more engaged and cohesive workforce.

This study aims to explore the generational dynamics within the hospitality industry by examining both differences and commonalities among employees of different age groups (Gen X, Y, and Z). Specifically, it seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are the significant behavioral differences among Gen X, Y, and Z employees in the hospitality industry?
2. To what extent are employees aware of generational differences in the workplace?
3. How well do individuals understand the variations in VABEs among different generations?

By addressing these questions, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of generational diversity in hospitality and provides insights for leaders seeking to foster a more inclusive and adaptive workplace culture.

Literature Review

The increasing generational diversity in the workforce has prompted extensive scholarly interest in understanding the differences in values, communication styles, work expectations, and motivational drivers

* Iva Adžić Kušt, University of Rijeka, Faculty of Economics and Business, iadzic@uniri.hr
Milena Kužnin, RIT Croatia, milena.kuznin@croatia.rit.edu
Nikolina Jerkić, RIT Croatia, nj7430@rit.edu

across age cohorts. Researchers have sought to explain these variations through sociocultural theory (Twenge & Campbell, 2008), value systems (Schwartz, 2012), and workplace behavior models (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). The present study adopts the VABEs model (Clawson, 2008), which conceptualizes behavior as rooted in individuals' values, assumptions, beliefs, and expectations, to investigate how generational differences are expressed and understood in a workplace setting.

Individuals born within the same historical period share formative experiences that shape their values, attitudes, and behaviors, so commonly defined cohorts include Generation X (1965–1980), Generation Y or Millennials (1981–1996), and Generation Z (1997–2012), although the exact boundaries vary by source. These generational distinctions are frequently used as a heuristic to understand differences in career motivation, leadership expectations, and workplace engagement (Costanza et al., 2012).

Several studies have examined how value systems differ across generations, drawing on models such as Schwartz's Theory of Basic Human Values (Schwartz, 2012) and Rokeach's Value Survey (Rokeach, 1973). According to Schwartz (2012), values function as trans-situational guiding principles and influence individual behavior and goal prioritization. Millennials, for instance, have been found to place greater emphasis on work-life balance, personal growth, and social responsibility, compared to Generation X, who prioritize stability, autonomy, and financial security (Ng et al, 2010; Smola & Sutton, 2002). Generation Z, the most recent entrants to the workforce, have been characterized as digitally native, values-driven, and highly focused on purpose and continuous learning (Chillakuri, 2020; Priporas et al., 2017).

These value differences can significantly influence employee motivation and engagement. For instance, research by Lyons and Kuron (2014) emphasized that while intrinsic motivation (e.g., purpose, development) dominates for younger generations, older workers tend to value extrinsic motivators (e.g., salary, job security). Such differences suggest that a uniform management approach may not be effective across generational lines.

Generational cohorts also differ in their expectations of leadership. Millennials and Gen Z prefer participatory, empathetic, and feedback-rich leadership, as opposed to the more hierarchical and authoritative models favored by previous generations (Gursoy et al., 2013; Deal et al., 2010). According to Clawson (2008), effective leadership requires addressing all three levels of human behavior: visible behavior, conscious thought, and the deeper VABEs. However, most leadership practices remain focused on observable behaviors and cognitive motivation, neglecting the deeper emotional and value-driven needs of a diverse workforce.

Clawson's VABEs model presents a compelling alternative by focusing on the emotional and cultural foundations of behavior. This approach has been underutilized in generational research, making its application in this study both novel and relevant. It bridges the gap between surface-level behavioral observations and the deeper psychological structures that drive them.

One of the most frequently cited challenges in multigenerational teams is communication (Zemke et al., 2013). Research indicates that younger generations prefer instantaneous, digital communication and ongoing feedback, while older generations are more accustomed to structured, face-to-face interactions (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; VanMeter et al., 2022). These differences are not merely functional but reflect deeper generational assumptions about respect, hierarchy, and self- expression.

Millennials and Gen Z expect feedback to be developmental, collaborative, and frequent (Ng et al., 2010; Chillakuri, 2020), while Gen X often perceives such practices as excessive or unwarranted. These mismatches in expectations can create workplace friction and negatively affect team cohesion if not acknowledged and managed appropriately.

Much of the literature on generational preferences points to growing demand for flexible work arrangements, particularly among younger workers (Bannon et al., 2011; Deloitte, 2023). However, the cultural context can play a moderating role.

Finally, intergenerational perceptions are often clouded by stereotypes, with younger generations viewed as entitled or overly idealistic, and older cohorts perceived as resistant to change (Costanza et al., 2012; Deal et al., 2010). These stereotypes, often perpetuated by popular media and oversimplified surveys, obscure the complex psychological and cultural factors influencing generational behavior. Addressing these misperceptions requires moving beyond demographic labels and engaging in values- based dialogue and leadership development grounded in empathy and mutual understanding (Rudolph et al., 2020).

Methodology

In this study, qualitative research methods were employed, specifically focus groups, to explore

generational differences in values, assumptions, beliefs, and expectations (VABEs). Focus groups were chosen to foster open dialogue and gain deeper insights into participants' emotions, perspectives, and lived experiences, as this qualitative research method has advantages over other qualitative data collection techniques (Powell and Single, 1996). A focus group size of four participants was chosen to facilitate deeper individual contributions, enhance group dynamics, and allow for manageable interaction since a complex and sensitive topic was discussed. As Krueger and Casey (2015) suggested, smaller groups are recommended when the topic requires detailed feedback. Open-ended questions guided the discussions, encouraging participants to expand beyond the structured outline and share responses. This approach facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of how participants relate to the topics discussed.

Purpose

The aim of this research was to identify and compare the VABEs of Generation X (1965–1980), Generation Y (1981–1996), and Generation Z (1997–2012) within the hospitality industry in Dubrovnik, Croatia. The findings intend to support human resource professionals, managers, and organizational leaders in aligning employee needs with workplace practices to enhance engagement and performance.

Participants

Twelve participants were recruited using a convenience sampling method, based on their educational and professional background in hospitality. They were evenly distributed across three generational cohorts, with equal gender representation. Recruitment was conducted via email and LinkedIn. All discussions were recorded and anonymized to ensure participant confidentiality.

Table 1: Participant Profile and Distribution

Participants						
Individuals with Hospitality Industry Backgrounds						
Demographics	Gen X		Gen Y		Gen Z	
Age range	(1965 -1979)		(1980 -1994)		(1995 - 2015)	
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Number of participants	2	2	2	2	2	2

Source: Authors

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in Clawson's work (2008), which categorizes behavior into three levels: visible behavior, conscious thought, and VABEs. VABEs, shaped by culture, upbringing, and environment, form the core of individual behavior and influence decision-making and interpersonal dynamics.

Procedure

A pilot focus group with Gen Z participants was conducted to refine the discussion guide. Based on participant engagement, the number of questions was reduced from 13 to 10. This adjustment maintained depth while preventing fatigue. Focus groups lasted 45 minutes and were held in participant-selected hotel venues to promote comfort and natural interaction. Two sessions were conducted in the hotel lobby bars; the third took place in a meeting room. The discussion followed a semi-structured format with flexibility for participant-led sub-questions. Moderators minimized their own input to avoid influencing responses. Attention was given to group dynamics, particularly identifying and strategically timing the input of dominant voices to preserve the diversity of perspectives. Discussions were audio-recorded and supplemented by notetaking for accuracy. Thematic keywords frequently cited included personal values, expectations, beliefs, assumptions, and leadership. Each group concluded by identifying five core generational values.

Study results

Thematic analysis revealed both shared and distinct patterns across the groups, which are presented below according to key thematic categories.

Personal Values and Generational Identity

All three generations acknowledged that their core values were shaped by the sociocultural, economic, and technological contexts of their upbringing. Participants were able to articulate the top five values they believe define their generational cohort. Generation X emphasized autonomy, organization, communication, security, and teamwork. Their responses often reflected a desire for stability and control, shaped by the economic transitions and increased personal responsibility they experienced during their formative years. Generation Y prioritized work-life balance, health, teamwork, open-mindedness, and loyalty. This cohort

expressed a preference for supportive, inclusive environments that offer personal growth opportunities and emotional safety at work. Generation Z selected personal growth, meaningful work, innovation, flexibility, and creativity as their most important values. They emphasized the importance of working in value-driven organizations and showed a strong interest in self-improvement and continuous learning.

"I want to be able to invest in my personal development. I also want to be able to do the job I am passionate about, and to somehow give back to the community." (Gen Z, P2)

These findings align with previous literature while reflecting some cultural differences specific to the Croatian context, particularly the high value placed on community and interpersonal connection.

Work Preferences and Flexibility Contrary to much of the research suggesting that younger generations prefer fully remote work environments, participants across all three generational cohorts expressed a general disinterest in 100% remote work models. Instead, both Generation Y and Generation Z favored hybrid work models, combining on-site engagement with flexibility to work remotely when appropriate.

"People think that our generation likes the idea of working from home every day, but that is not true, we want to be able to have the opportunity to work a few days from home and be on site with people as well" (Gen Z, P1) Generation X, in contrast, expressed a clear preference for on-site work, citing efficiency, face-to-face communication, and organizational discipline as primary motivators. These responses suggest that while flexibility remains a desirable trait in a workplace, the collectivist culture in Croatia may moderate global trends related to remote work preferences.

Perception of Career Success

The study revealed generation-specific interpretations of professional success. Generation X associated success with job stability, financial security, and organizational loyalty. This was reflective of their formative experiences during economic uncertainty and their exposure to traditional work ethics. In contrast, Generation Y and Generation Z participants expressed a strong desire for purpose-driven careers. They linked success to personal fulfilment, passion, and alignment between professional tasks and personal interests. Both groups noted that job satisfaction was significantly enhanced when work contributed to their sense of identity and self-expression. However, Generation Z also emphasized that they were still in the process of discovering their professional passion and identity and viewed exploration and trial-and-error as integral to their career development.

Communication and Feedback Culture

Feedback emerged as a universally valued component across all generations, though expectations around delivery differed. Generation X expressed a preference for formal, structured, and less frequent feedback, preferably in person or through written evaluations. They also highlighted the lack of sincere and constructive feedback mechanisms in many of their workplaces. Generation Y and Generation Z preferred frequent, spontaneous, and dialogic feedback that fosters continuous development. For them, feedback is not merely evaluative but also relational and motivational. They also valued informal communication environments, such as relaxed meetings or feedback sessions held in informal spaces (e.g., cafés or hotel lobbies), as opposed to traditional meeting rooms.

Attitudes Toward Work-Life Boundaries

Generation Z showed the strongest emphasis on maintaining clear boundaries between personal and professional life. They expressed discomfort with being contacted after work hours and believed that such intrusions were disrespectful and counterproductive. Generation Y acknowledged the need for balance but demonstrated a greater tolerance for occasional boundary crossing in the interest of team success. Generation X, by contrast, displayed a more fluid boundary between work and personal life, rooted in their sense of professional duty and a more traditional work ethic. However, they also criticized younger generations for what they perceived as unrealistic workplace expectations and overreliance on instant gratification and constant stimulation.

Intergenerational Perceptions

All three generations reported noticing behavioral differences in the workplace, but none demonstrated a deep understanding of the underlying VABEs driving those behaviors. For instance, while Generation X saw Generation Z as less loyal and overly idealistic, Generation Z felt that Generation X was rigid, resistant to change, and hierarchical in communication. Generation Y often acted as a mediator in their perceptions, recognizing both the traditional strengths of Gen X and the innovation- driven outlook of Gen Z. These intergenerational perceptions, while somewhat stereotypical, reinforce the importance of leadership that addresses the deeper motivational layers of employee behavior, rather than focusing solely on surface-level

traits.

Observational Insights from Focus Groups

Behavioral observations during the focus groups provided additional insight into generational communication styles and engagement levels. Generation Z demonstrated high levels of verbal and non-verbal engagement, including eye contact, gestures, and active listening cues. They were also comfortable with casual environments and appeared to thrive in collaborative discussion formats. Generation Y displayed similarly high engagement and often used personal anecdotes to contextualize their views. Generation X, however, participated more formally and conservatively and required more prompting from the moderator to elaborate on responses. These observations suggest that environmental comfort and timing (e.g., holding discussions during or outside of work hours) may influence the depth and openness of responses.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into generational values, assumptions, beliefs, and expectations (VABEs) within the Croatian hospitality industry, several limitations must be acknowledged that may affect the generalizability and interpretation of the findings. Firstly, the primary research was conducted exclusively with participants from Croatia, whereas much of the secondary literature referenced was based on research from Western, individualistic societies. This cultural mismatch presents a limitation, as collectivist cultures such as Croatia may emphasize different values, particularly regarding work-life balance, leadership expectations, and remote work preferences. These cultural differences were notably evident in the discussion around remote work, where participants demonstrated a preference for hybrid or in- person models, contrary to trends reported in Western-based literature. Secondly, the study employed a small sample size, twelve participants divided equally among the three generations, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the use of a convenience sampling method may introduce selection bias, as participants were not randomly selected or representative of the broader workforce demographic. Another limitation relates to the varied contexts in which the focus groups were conducted. Generation Z participants were interviewed outside of academic or work obligations and appeared more relaxed, whereas Generation X participants took part during their working hours, which may have led to distractions, such as the use of mobile phones or reduced engagement. These environmental discrepancies could have influenced the depth and openness of the discussions.

Acknowledging these limitations is essential for contextualizing the study's findings and for informing the design of future research aimed at understanding multigenerational dynamics in culturally diverse and industry-varied settings. Therefore, future research could expand the sample size and diversity, both demographically and geographically. Including participants from a broader range of industries, educational backgrounds, and regions would improve the generalizability of findings and allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how generational VABEs manifest in different professional and cultural contexts. In addition, conducting cross-cultural comparative studies would be particularly valuable. By aligning both primary and secondary research within a shared cultural framework, researchers could better identify which generational differences are truly global and which are culturally specific. Future studies could also consider mixed generation focus groups or workplace simulations. This approach could offer richer insights into real-time communication styles, value conflicts, and negotiation strategies between generations. Observing these interactions could help organizations better design training or onboarding programs to bridge generational gaps. Longitudinal studies in the future could reveal how generational attitudes evolve over time. Generational cohorts are not static, and their expectations may shift as they age or as workplace norms evolve. By addressing these areas, future research can provide more insights for leaders, HR professionals, and policymakers working in multigenerational environments.

Conclusion

This study explored generational dynamics within the Croatian hospitality industry, emphasizing the underlying values, assumptions, beliefs, and expectations (VABEs) that shape employee behavior across Generation X, Y, and Z. Through qualitative focus group analysis, the research confirmed that while generational cohorts share some common values, such as the importance of feedback and collaboration, marked differences exist in how they define career success, approach communication, and perceive work-life boundaries. These distinctions are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural and technological contexts of each generation’s formative years, as well as in Croatia’s collectivist cultural environment, which appears to mediate global trends. Importantly, the study revealed that although behavioral differences are widely

acknowledged in the workplace, there remains a limited understanding of the deeper motivational drivers that inform these behaviors. Without this insight, organizations risk perpetuating stereotypes and overlooking opportunities for meaningful engagement. Clawson's VABEs framework proved particularly effective in bridging this gap, offering a valuable framework for hospitality leaders seeking to navigate intergenerational complexities with greater empathy and strategic awareness. The findings underscore the importance of contextually informed leadership practices that move beyond surface- level generational labels and instead address the emotional and cultural foundations of workplace behavior. By fostering environments that support intergenerational dialogue and tailored management strategies, organizations can cultivate more cohesive, adaptable, and high-performing teams. Future research should build on these insights through cross-cultural and longitudinal studies to better understand the evolving nature of generational identities in diverse professional settings.

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Beyond the Plate: Cultivating Work-Life Balance in the Hospitality Industry

Sasi Gangiah *

Abstract

Employee well-being in the hospitality sector is often challenged by demanding work conditions, which can negatively impact psychological health, job satisfaction, and service quality. This review synthesises literature to examine the intersection of work- life balance and mental health, focusing on management, waiting staff, and chefs, revealing a critical research gap: the need for targeted interventions to address specific stressors within each role. While studies highlight the detrimental effects of stress, lack of autonomy, and poor work-life balance, there is limited exploration of effective, role- specific strategies. This research employs a systematic review to analyse stress, burnout, organisational culture, and support mechanisms. Technology-based wellness interventions, including wearable health kits, AI-driven health support, and telehealth services, are emerging as promising solutions. It emphasises aligning industry practices with SDGs 3 and 8. Addressing this gap is crucial for fostering a supportive work environment and ensuring a sustainable and equitable future for hospitality workers, ultimately enhancing organisational performance and employee health.

Keywords: Well-being, hospitality staff, work-life balance, mental health, organisational support

Introduction

The hospitality industry stands out because of its dynamic and vibrant nature while playing an important role in the global economy. The fast-paced nature of the industry creates substantial pressure on employees, negatively affecting their mental health and work-life balance. Work-life balance has become critical for employee well-being and organisational success in the fast-paced, customer-focused environment. Research by Khan and Sreenivasan (2024) shows that better work-life balance decreases stress levels and higher job satisfaction. Organisational support policies help employees achieve better health through balanced professional and personal life management (Pal and Sharmar, 2024).

Work-life balance is now a defining determinant of organisational performance and employees' well-being in today's customer-focused and stressful environment. Improved work-life balance correlates with decreased stress and job satisfaction (Khan and Sreenivasan, 2024). Facilitative organisational policies provide scope for improving personal and professional life balancing (Pal and Sharmar, 2024).

The research offers a framework to examine the multifaceted interaction among working conditions, employee wellbeing and organisational performance in the hospitality sector. This research will inform policy and strategy development in creating healthy working conditions in the industry. It examines interventions to tackle stress and technology innovations that promote psychological wellbeing in the distinctive working environment of the industry.

The research contributes to developing theoretical insights through marrying stress- coping theory with current work-life balance models. Educating hospitality managers and policymakers on specific interventions may lower burnout levels, enhance job satisfaction, and increase employee performance. Recommend creating customised organisational practices to support sustained employee wellbeing and thus talent retention in a competitive

* Sasi Gangiah, Durban University of Technology,sasig@dut.ac.za

industry. Even though there is significant research on work- life balance, psychological health, and stress in diverse industries, there is a lacuna in research that brings together multiple frameworks (such as Transactional Theory of Stress and coping and multi-dimensional models of wellness) in the context of the hospitality industry. The research covers a gender-sensitive and culturally contextual comparison of work-life practices of the hospitality industry. Suggest practical and evidence-based solutions to achieve work-life balance with organisational and employee-level interventions in unison.

Literature Review

The hotel industry has unique challenges in promoting employee health and organisational efficiency. Quality-of-Work-Life (QWL) and organisational support are pivotal in addressing these challenges. Research indicates that enhanced QWL positively impacts employee satisfaction, lessens stress, and leads to higher levels of service excellence (Supina and Singh, 2024). Organisational support is most effective in curbing emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation, major constituents of burnout, and building resilience and peak performance (Moustafa et al., 2024).

QWL goes beyond remuneration to cover safe working conditions, job security, work- life balance, acquiring new skills, and the prospects of growth and improvement. The paradigm includes these eight important dimensions, including satisfactory compensation to societal applicability (Zaman and Ansari, 2024). Comprehensive QWL can only be achieved through a program that offers fair compensation, professional development, flexibility, and wellness (Ambardar and Singh, 2017). In the case of managers, linking QWL to corporate culture and long-term goals ensures long- term prosperity (Kautish et al., 2024).

Leadership is a key driver of QWL. Transformational leadership behaviours promoting employee empowerment and communication are critical in improving QWL (Dalkhjav et al., 2024). Job design measures such as job autonomy and job variety also increase job satisfaction and decrease stress (Durão et al., 2024).

Inclusive policies catering to diverse employee needs, like parental leave and elder care, assist employees in fulfilling personal and professional obligations (Chaudhuri, Arora and Roy, 2020). High QWL is associated with improved mental health, reduced turnover, and less burnout (Jung, Hwang and Yoon, 2024). Improved QWL also equates to enhanced service delivery. The Nigerian hospitality industry reports developed organisational citizenship and customer satisfaction (Kwahar and Iyortsuun, 2018), and investing in the overall employee well-being is a cycle of high performance and loyalty (Majeed and Ul Haq, 2022). In general, the convergence of QWL with high- performance work systems (HPWS) contributes to higher productivity and sustainability (Afonso et al., 2024).

Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (TTSC)

The framework was formulated based on stress being a product of the ongoing exchange between an individual and the work setting (Wong, Kim and Xu, 2025). Employees in the service industry who come into daily contact with a wide variety of customers and with high job demands weigh up potential sources of stress at all times. These assessments include a primary assessment (e.g. evaluating job-specific demands such as job insecurity, stress of electronic communication, or troublesome supervisory behaviour) and a secondary assessment (e.g. assessing an individual's own stress resources). Such cognitive processes have immediate impacts on mental health, which in turn inform coping strategies. A summary of the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping is presented in Figure 1.

TTSC and Work-Life Harmony

The TTSC process constructs work-life harmony. Workers who perceive work demands as controllable and employ successful coping strategies are more successful in achieving a balance between work and personal life (Fotiadis et al., 2019; Budhiraja et al., 2024). Individuals with high psychological autonomy and competence are more prone to utilise adaptive coping, which consequently influences work-life balance and psychological well-being. Organisational support and positive culture will facilitate employees' coping resources, which further strengthen work- life harmony (Dalkhjav et al., 2024; Ghaderi et al., 2024).

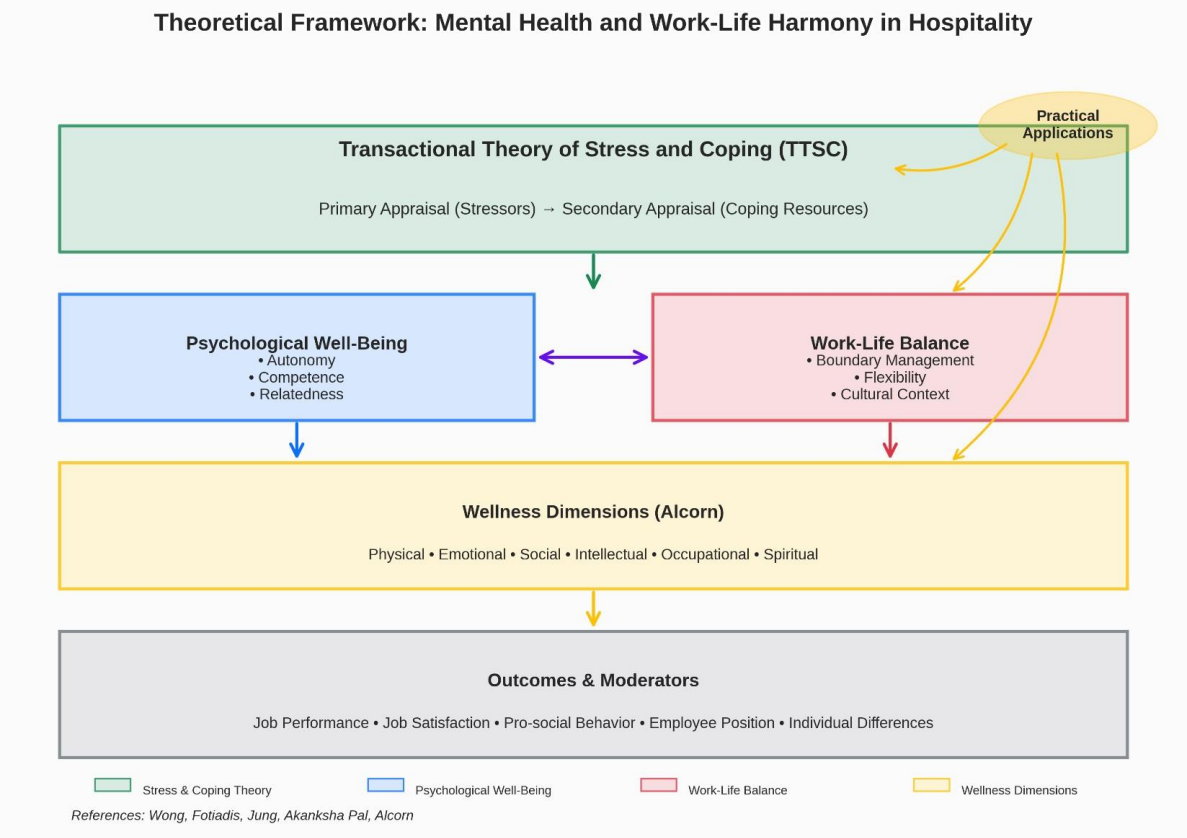

Figure 1: Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping

Perspectives on Psychological Well-Being and Self-Determinatio

Fotiadis, Abdulrahman & Spyridou (2019) identify three primary dimensions of psychological well-being: psychological autonomy (the perception an employee has regarding having control over their own work, personal decisions and own achievement at work), psychological competence (employee's perception regarding their ability to successfully cope with work demands and the demands they face in their career) and psychological relatedness (the sense of social connectedness and support received from the work environment).

In addition, the study of Jung, Hwang and Yoon (2024) aggregated data and analysis of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale with positive dimensions—self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose of life, personal growth and positive relations—support that these dimensions are directly associated with performance, job satisfaction and pro-social service actions. Psychological well-being is related to better performance at work and higher voluntary organisational citizenship work behaviour in service-intensive industries.

1.What is the global prevalence of Work Stress in Hospitality?

2.What are the stressors at a workplace in the Hospitality industry?

3.How can the quality of work-life be improved?
4.Does gender affect the quality of work-life balance?
5.What role can technology play to enhance work-life balance?
Methodology.
The review was conducted with three main academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, which were extensively searched for relevant literature. This search strategy uses specific terms and phrases like: "mental health," work-life balance, hospitality industry, employee well-being, workplace stress, and organisational support.
Inclusion Criteria:
Articles published within the last 10 years are accounted for.
Studies on work-life balance and mental health in the hospitality industry are examined.
It contains articles that present empirical data, theoretical frameworks, or relevant case studies.
Exclusion Criteria:
Opinion pieces and articles that are not peer-reviewed will be removed. Non-hospitality research will not be incorporated.
Any articles not available in English will be omitted.
The selection process is divided into two stages. Inclusion criteria and exclusion factors are used to evaluate the initial relevance of article titles and abstracts. Afterwards, the complete versions of articles that may be of interest are recovered and scrutinised thoroughly to ensure their suitability. A holistic outlook that bridges the gap between theory and practice is selected from 63 recent articles.
These studies are systematically analysed to extract relevant data. The hospitality industry report outlines crucial findings and specific effects on mental well-being and work-life balance. By means of thematic analysis, the extracted data is examined to identify recurring themes related to mental health issues, work-life balance, and organisational interventions. The outcomes of the diverse studies are merged to offer an in-depth analysis of what is currently literature, including consistent findings and any variations between studies.
Results and discussion
The prevalence of work stress in hospitality is prevalent globally
The hospitality industry is consistently one of the most stressful employment sectors globally, as per Fotiadis, Abdulrahman and Spyridou (2019), indicating that around 74% of hospitality workers worldwide experience moderate to severe work-related stress, compared to 62% across all industries. Additionally, Afonso et al. (2024) found that 68% of hospitality workers in Spain experience heightened work-related stress, affecting urban tourist destinations particularly. Budhiraja, Varkkey and McKenna (2022) found that 79% of workers suffer from severe work stress, mainly caused by extended work hours and limited organisational support. According to the hotel industry in Serbia, around 71% of hospitality employees report stress levels that impact their personal lives (Ognjanović and Mitrović, 2022). The study conducted in Nigeria shows that 76% of hospitality employees experience chronic work stress, with front- line service personnel being the most affected (Kwahar and Iyortsuun 2018). Nevertheless, this contrast highlights the particular demands of hospitality employment.
Factors affecting stress related to work
Several primary causes and effects of stress at work exist in this domain:
1.Workload and Time Pressure
A high workload becomes a significant source of stress. The. The workload in the hospitality sector shifts is high during peak operational periods, with minimal time for recovery

(Woranetipo and Chavanovanich 2020). Task density (Buruck et al., 2020) refers to the need to complete numerous intricate tasks in short timeframes. As per Garcia-Buades et al. (2024), the repetitive and high volume of work exerts physical strain on hotel housekeepers, who are frequently burdened by unrealistic room quotas that do not reflect changing room conditions.

2.Emotional Labour and Customer Interactions

Maintaining a positive attitude in all situations, known as emotional labour (Fotiadis, Abdulrahman and Spyridou 2019), is considered incredibly demanding. Negative customer interactions, especially when addressing complaints or dealing with challenging guests, can lead to acute stress responses that accumulate over time (Wong, Kim and Xu, 2025).

3.Job Insecurity and Seasonal Fluctuations

Neglected job outcomes in the hospitality sector underscore the impact of seasonal hiring patterns and economic instability (Peng and Potipiroon, 2022). The uncertainty is particularly evident in resort locations with distinct high and low seasons, where staff cuts are common during off-peak times. The health of hospitality staff is associated with elevated anxiety and reduced psychological security (Saito, Brozović and Baum, 2025).

4.Work-Life Conflict and Irregular Schedules

In the hospitality industry, work-life balance is often stale and challenging due to its 24/7 operation. Sun's research on work-life balance and gender reveals that irregular and unpredictable scheduling practices, such as split shifts, weekend work, and holiday coverage, directly interfere with family responsibilities and social engagements.

5.Organisational and Management Factors

The stress levels in a workplace are significantly influenced by organisational culture and leadership styles. Autocratic management, poor communication channels, and limited employee autonomy are all factors that can lead to stress reduction (Dalkhjav et al., 2024). Work-related anxiety is further increased by vague roles and inadequate training (Salama et al, 2022).

6.Physical Work Environment

Physical conditions can be a major source of stress. Noise levels, temperature extremes, and ergonomic challenges are among the factors that contribute to physical discomfort and mental fatigue in kitchens (Unguren et al, 2024), housekeeping departments, or front desk areas with high noise levels due to frequent turnover during work hours. The occurrence of these conditions, when unremitting, intensifies psychological stress by negatively impacting physical health.

Moderating Strategies for Hospitality Workers

Hospitality workers have used several methods to reduce stress at work. Managers, waiting staff, and chefs in the hospitality industry report specific stressors they face and the actions to cope, as seen in Table 1.

1.Psychological Resilience Building concept reinforces the application of cognitive reframing techniques to manage stress responses (Jung, Hwang and Yoon, 2024). By implementing short-term meditations between shift schedules, workers can attain emotional equilibrium during stressful times and utilise these mindfulness practices (Ciarlante, Mejia and Broker, 2024).

2.Using Boundary Management Techniques across professional and personal domains can help reduce widespread stress throughout the lifespan (Pal and Sharmar, 2024). Real-life strategies involve arranging time off without electronic devices, devising transition practices between work and home, and practising open communication about being available outside

of scheduled hours. Creating boundaries through these practices is effective in reducing conflict between work and life (Budhiraja, Varkkey and McKenna, 2022).

3.Work-related stress can be absorbed by Social Support Networks (Stankevičienė et al., 2021). Those who work in hospitality and actively engage in constructive relationships with colleagues are likely to feel less stressed and satisfied. Formal and informal peer support groups offer practical assistance in utilising their emotional resources as problem-solving tools (Baquero, 2023).

Figure 2: The Multiplier Effect of Poor Mental Health and Work-Life Balance in the Hospitality Industry

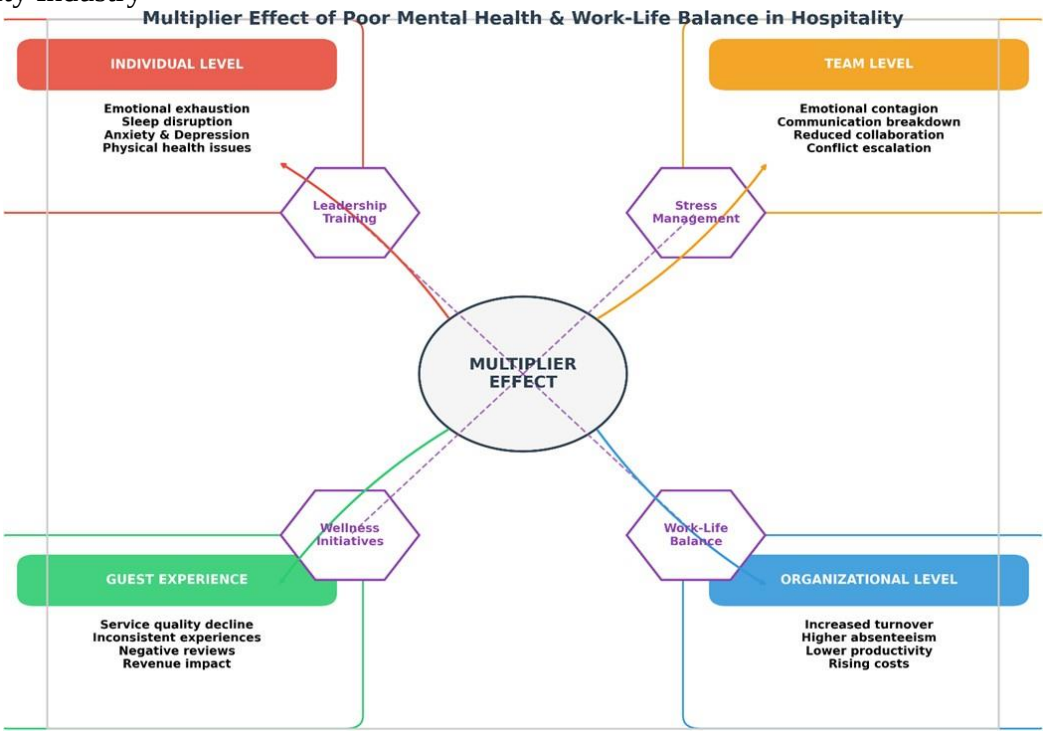

Table 1: Role-Specific Stressors among Hospitality Staff

Elements	Hotel Managers	Waiting Staff	Chefs
Key Stressors	High responsibility for overall operations	egular shift patterns	High-pressure kitchen environment
	Financial and strategic decision making	ense service demands	Demanding and fast-paced work with strict deadlines
	Conflict resolution and staffing challenges	ysical fatigue from long periods on their feet	Quality expectations and perfectionism
		notional labour related to maintaining a positive demeanour	
Authors	Hofmann and Stokburger-Sauer (2017; Kautish et al. (2024)	rcia-Buades et al. (2024); Wong, Kim and Xu (2025).	Budhiraja, Varkkey and McKenna (2022); Fotiadis, Abdulrahman and Spyridou (2019)
Unique Challenges	Heavy administration workload	nt of house interactions with unpredictable customer behaviours	Physical strain from long hours in hot, crowded kitchens
	Balancing operational targets with employee well-being	lancing speed and accuracy under pressure	Intense coordination within teams
	Pressure to sustain profitability during crises	nimal break opportunities	Creative pressure to innovate under stress
Authors	Majeed and Ul Haq (2022; Hu, Wen and Kozak (2024).	ama et al. (2022); Moustafa et al. (2024)	Woranetipo and Chavanovanich (2020); Buruck et al. (2020)
Targeted Interventions and Recommendations	Leadership coaching and peer mentoring programs	bile wellness apps for real-time stress monitoring	Technological interventions such as automated kitchen tools
	Stress management workshops focused on strategic decision-making	-the-job mindfulness practices	Role-specific resilience training includes time management
	Crisis management training and resilience building	xible scheduling strategies and adequate ak management	Enhanced supportive teamwork and communication protocols
Authors	Nizam (2022); Dalkhjav, Munkhuu and Sukhragchaa (2024).	rlante, Mejia and Broker (2024); Torres and Zhang (2021).	Budhiraja, Varkkey and McKenna (2022); Fotiadis, Abdulrahman and Spyridou (2019)

1. Nizam (2022) notes that Self-Care and Recovery Practices involve engaging in intentional recovery activities during off-work hours. Self-care for health is possible through physical exercise and proper sleep hygiene, as well as nutritional awareness among hospitality workers. Alcorn and Koo argue that wellness dimensions reinforce the need for incorporating self-care practices that address physical, emotional, and social aspects.
2. Professional Development and Skill Enhancement among workers also promote greater self-efficacy and lower stress levels in response to workplace challenges (Majeed and Ul Haq, 2022). Some of these skills are deemed resistance to stress: time management, conflict resolution, and technical proficiency. Training leads to better career prospects and increased self-assurance in managing workplace stress (Hofmann and Stokburger-Sauer, 2017).
3. Employee assistance programs, wellness initiatives, and formal grievance procedures effectively manage stress through the Strategic Use of Organisational Resources (Torres and Zhang, 2021). Utilising supportive workplace policies instead of isolating stress promotes sustainable well-being (Ghaderi et al, 2023).

Understanding the Multiplier Effect

Issues with work-life balance and poor mental health in the hospitality sector lead to a vicious cycle that exacerbates adverse effects on several levels. This "multiplier effect" explains how issues that start at one level spread and worsen across the hospitality ecosystem. Better mental health and work-life balance lead to upward spirals of well- being, performance, and guest satisfaction. Figure 2 shows that these interventions can break the multiplier effect at different points, potentially turning the negative cycle into a positive one. This underscores the importance of aligning industry practices with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth),

Gender Dynamics and Mental Health

Hospitality workers exhibit greater rates of burnout, stress (Sun et al., 2022), anxiety, and depression in females than in males (Khan and Sreenivasan, 2024). The factors contributing to this are occupational segregation of low-paid, high-demanding jobs and significant wage disparities (Garcia-Buades et al., 2024). The combination of professional and domestic responsibilities results in significant work-family conflicts (Sun et al., 2022) and challenges with childcare arrangements (Khan and Sreenivasan, 2024). According to Erburu et al. (2024), women are more likely to be victims of sexual harassment than men and are often expected to remain pleasant despite inappropriate behaviour (Liu et al., 2021). Although women constitute a significant portion of the workforce, they are not frequently appointed as leaders, leading to increased stressors (Erburu et al, 2024).

Effective interventions, including policies that consider gender, such as flexible scheduling and fair pay (Afonso et al., 2024), can be achieved through effective measures. Effective mental health support (Nizam, 2022), peer networks (Moustafa et al., 2004) and leadership/mentorship programs (Erburu et al., 2024) can significantly enhance well-being and retention.

Innovative Strategies and New Technologies for Stress Management to Improve Psychological Well-being

Personalised stress management is available to hospitality workers through digital interventions. Wearable health monitors that track heart rate variability and other physiological data offer real-

time feedback, which can help with perceived stress and reduce perception of stress (Torres & Zhang, 2021). Mindfulness apps provide easy exercises that enhance psychological well-being

(Ciarlante, Mejia and Broker, 2024). Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a significant breakthrough in stress interventions. Industry-specific AI chatbots offer round-the-clock support (Hu, Wen and Kozak, 2024), while predictive analytics can identify employees at high risk of burnout accurately. Telephone counselling offers comparable outcomes to in-person therapy, resulting in greater utilisation and less stigma (Wong, Kim and Xu, 2025). Treating with video therapy is expected to increase engagement with mental health services (Nizam 2022).

Virtual reality (VR) can help to reduce cortisol levels by providing immersive stress reduction experiences, such as nature settings during breaks (Saito and Brozovi, 2025). Stress can be alleviated by using VR simulations during customer interactions in real- world scenarios (Stankeviien et al., 2021). In addition to Transcranial direct current stimulation (TDCS) pilot programs, biofeedback technologies such as portable EEG devices (Buruck et al., 2020) provide feedback on the mental state of workers. Workflow adjustments based on stress indicators or integrating digital wellness platforms with organisational systems can help reduce burnout.

Policies and labour laws

Labour laws and their enforcement can vary significantly across different countries. Factors such as economic development, political stability, and the strength of labour unions can shape the legal landscape and its effectiveness. While many African countries are developing their legal frameworks, South Africa has relatively well- defined labour laws that impact the hospitality sector. Table 2 indicates a comparison of labour laws in the Hospitality Industry among various countries.

Sustainability and Future Directions

Hotel staff benefit from digital interventions that offer tailored stress management plans. Wearable health monitors that track heart rate and other physiological data provide real-time feedback, which reduces perceived stress (Torres and Zhang, 2021). Mindfulness apps provide easy exercises to enhance psychological well-being (Ciarlante, Mejia and Broker, 2024).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a significant breakthrough. AI chatbots offer industry- specific support around the clock (Hu, Wen and Kozak, 2024), while predictive analytics can identify employees at high risk of burnout with significant precision (Moustafa et al, 2004). Remote support through telehealth (e.g. telephone counselling) has similar outcomes to in-person therapy with greater frequency of use and lower stigma (Wong, Kim and Xu, 2025). The use of video therapy is expected to increase engagement with mental health services (Nizam 2022).

Virtual reality (VR) reduces cortisol levels through immersive experiences with nature settings during breaks (Saito, Brozović and Baum 2025). Stress can be alleviated by using VR simulations during customer interactions in real-world scenarios (Stankeviien et al, 2021). In addition to TDCS pilot programs, biofeedback technologies such as portable EEG devices (Buruck et al., 2020).

By integrating digital wellness platforms with organisational systems, such as stress indicator workload adjustment (Dalkhjav et al., 2024) or digital recognition systems (Majeed and Ul Haq, 2020), burnout can be reduced. Ethical issues, including the boundaries of work-life and varying technological access (Kwahar & Iyortsuun, 2018) to be taken into account.

Conclusion

The workload, emotional strain, and organisational limitations exacerbate the work-life balance and mental health concerns of hospitality professionals, despite efforts to enhance these aspects. Finding a balance between work and personal life is essential for the hotel industry's
sustainability, not just for recreational purposes. Institutions can anticipate a healthier workforce, reduced absenteeism rates, improved service quality, and ideally balanced work arrangements. While individual coping techniques are effective, systemic organisational changes such as QWL programs, supportive leadership, and inclusive policies contribute to healthier work environments. Specifically, women experience more mental health burdens due to gender differences. Research emphasises the importance of integrating flexible scheduling, mental health services, and gender-based approaches to enhance employee well-being and sustain the industry's long-term success. The positive effects lead to a beneficial relationship where the betterment of employees enhances guest experiences, which improves customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Table 2: Comparison of Labour Laws in the Hospitality Industry Across Countries

Country	Legal Framework References	forcement References	spitality-Specific References
USA	Fair Labour Standards Act (FLSA); Americans with Disabilities Act; state labour laws	DOL Wage & Hour Division enforcement data; Economic Policy Institute (2017) nployers steal billions from workers' paychecks each year'	C United (2018) 'Take Us Off the Menu: The Impact of Sexual Harassment in the Restaurant Industry'; BLS industry-specific data
EU	EU Working Time Directive (2003/88/EC); EU Charter of Fundamental Rights; national implementations	ropean Labour Authority reports; ETUI (2020) 'Labour Inspection in Europe'	FAT (European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions) reports that sectoral collective agreements
UK	Working Time Regulations 1998; Employment Rights Act 1996; National Minimum Wage Act 1998	Low Pay Commission reports; HMRC National Minimum Wage enforcement istics	Hospitality (industry body) reports, Unite the Union hospitality sector research
India	Factories Act, 1948; Minimum Wages Act, 1948; Industrial Disputes Act, 1947	(2017) 'India Labour Inspection Audit'; ntre for Sustainable Employment (2019) 'State of Working India'	leration of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India reports, academic studies on the Indian hospitality sector
China	Labour Law of the People's Republic of China; Labour Contract Law	ina Labour Bulletin reports, academic dies on labour law enforcement in China	ina Hospitality Association data, and academic studies the Chinese hospitality industry
South Africa	Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997; Labour Relations Act; Sectoral Determination 14	reports on South African labour inspection; Department of Labour annual reports	DHASA (Federated Hospitality Association of South Africa) reports, Sectoral Determination 14 for hospitality
Russia	Labour Code of the Russian Federation; federal labour laws	reports on Russian labour inspection; demic studies on Russian labour law compliance	ssian Hotel Association reports, academic studies on the Russian hospitality sector

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Social Embeddedness, Shequ Governance and Peer-to-Peer Lodging Operations at Xinjiang, China

Yang Jiao, Zhenhao Mark Meng * and Yunzi Zhang

Abstract

Today there is little contention that peer-to-peer (P2P) lodging is one mainstream option, not an alternative, of travel accommodations. It shapes the lifestyles of many and accelerates the transformation of neighborhoods and places. This paper resonates with the critique of the hegemony of business-oriented analysis on tourism and travel, and advocates for a business-in-society approach to contextualize the links between P2P lodging operations, community and government. Through observing and analyzing the group conversations of the hosts for an extended period, this paper reveals how P2P lodging entrepreneurship is embedded in the local socio-political institutions and highlights how the hosts cope with the effects of local governance in the daily business operations.

* Yang Jiao, K2 Liberal Arts Pathways, aug26th@gmail.com
Zhenhao Mark Meng, Indiana University Kokomo, mengz@iu.edu
Yunzi Zhang, Northern Marianas College, yunzi.zhang@marianas.edu

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A Review of IoT and Guest Experiences in the Hospitality Industry

Olakunle Shakur Olawuyi and Carina I. Kleynhans *

Abstract

Internet of things is a technological creation that ensures the connectivity between two or more devices for a particular purpose. Guests' experience is very important to the financial sustenance of a hospitality business. It is pertinent to investigate literature trends vis-à-vis IoT and guest experience in the hospitality industry, based the literature gap that exists. Data for the study was collected from Scopus database and analysed through bibliometric analysis. The study revealed that there are limited articles that have been published with respect to IoT and guest experiences in the hospitality sector (30 articles). It is no gainsaying that the hospitality industry has increasingly engaged technology however, it will be of immense help to the hospitality industry to engage IoT in connecting systems-guest-facing technologies with room service sensors/restaurant/kitchen sensors to avail guests with pleasant experiences and the best of services.

Keywords: IoT, Guest experience, Scopus and Bibliometric analysis.

Introduction

Kumar and Mallick (2018) noted that the contemporary era largely has an inclination to digital and automotive perspectives, hence, wireless and internet connections play significant roles in this era. Internet driven technologies are being engaged every time or every other time by different individuals and organizations. Two or more technological devices can be connected together with the internet to achieve a particular purpose. Hence, Internet of things (IoT) is a concept that explains the connectivity between two or more technological gadgets in a bid to achieve a particular goal. Ahmad et al. (2022) asserted that a network of physical facilities, inclusive of various technology inventions which engage sensors for communication, as well as sense both external and internal environments are referred to as internet of things (IoT). Internet of things (IoT) could be described as a dimension through which gadgets that are enabled with actuators, processors as well as sensors interact with one another for specific reasons (Gubbi et al., 2013). IoT relies on sensors to ensure that one device communicate with another device, so as to make it easy for human beings to either quickly simplify or complete their tasks. Hence, it is very important in simplifying tasks, solving problems and making life easier. Its essence is basically to ensure that all or most processes/engagements of man are technology integrated and driven. Haddaoui et al. (2023) asserted that the dynamics of IoT is targeted at integrating contemporary technology into the entire engagements of man, thereby, ensuring such engagements becomes smarter, accessible and smarter from any location and any time. Kumar and Mallick (2018) opined that internet of things (IoT) is a technology that is evolutionary because it has a vast scope in engineering as well as scientific applications with respect to proffering solutions to problems while not relying on machine-human physical connection. IoT ameliorates or obliterates human's regular contact with technological devices, because of the superb programmes computed into such technological devices.

Literature Review

Concept of Internet of Things (IoT)

Haddaoui et al. (2023) asserted that Internet of Things (IoT) implies the interconnectedness of computer gadgets with the enablement of sensing pertinent amount of data. Khamesra and

* Olakunle Shakur Olawuyi, tshwane university of technology
Carina I. Kleynhans, tshwane university of technology, kleynhansic@tut.ac.za

Priya (2017) opined that internet of things is usually referred to as smart connections that enables the collection, exchange as well as communication of data, with the aid of programmed internet characters and specific identifiers, devoid of computer to human or human to human connection. It is the interconnectivity between actuating and sensing gadgets with the capacity to provide information sharing through channels by connected frameworks, thereby, creating a general perception of creative dynamics (Gubbi et al., 2013). IoT is an interconnection of devices with in- built censors that could easily collect, analyse, store and disseminate pertinent data. Kumar and Mallick (2018) noted that it is easy to identify all objects in IoT and they are linked in a network that gives room for sending, receiving and disseminating information. Rahman et al. (2018) pointed out that for the creation of an efficient as well as robust IoT framework, it is important to work with the correct architecture from the outset. The operationalization and characterization of IoT is usually dependent on existing IoT paradigm or components. Ahmad and Nabi (2021) noted that in a bid to have sound knowledge of IoT framework, its components and architecture must be understood, by reiterating its extensible, interoperable and scalable characteristics that define ubiquitous and different IoT elements, which is divided into, IoT gateways, IoT devices as well as IoT platform. Sultan (2019) noted that the components of IoT architecture are things, gateways and streaming data processor. Kumar and Mallick (2018) asserted that there are four major building components associated with implementing IoT, and they are things, cloud infrastructure, network infrastructure and gateways. Things in this regard refers to the technological devices/gadgets that houses sensors and different elements used for collecting, storing and disseminating information. Sensors and actuators are components of things, it is notable that sensors are used for data gathering through the measurement of physical properties, while, actuators are used in allowing the operations and actions of 'things' (Sultan, 2019).

IoT in the Hospitality sector

IoT is very important for connecting different devices in the hospitality industry to meet with guests' preference, aspirations and provide pertinent answers to guests' queries. Car et al. (2019) noted that IoT makes available novel opportunity of connecting the digital world to the physical world, as well as enabling active and direct connectivity between tourism products, hotels, tourist as well as tourism sites. Hence, it is used to collate different information about guests at the hospitality industry. In the same vein, it is engaged to save, process and channel guests information to the appropriate section of the hospitality industry. Similarly, it used to store different information about the hospitality industry so that it will make only relevant information available to guests at the request of such guests. The process of gathering and saving important information about customers is sequential and systematical. Diwan (2025) noted that the procedures of collecting such information are; a) customer image acquisition: capturing the images of guests with the aid of cameras; b) camera status check: checking if cameras are on. The cameras will show negative images if off.; c) Image selection and preparation: there is selection of high quality images for further treatment; d) Being converted into gray images: Chosen images/frames are read as well as processed to gray-scale images to make the processes simple; e) activating cascade classifier: there is an initiation of classifier for scanning of gray-scale images for facial characteristics; f) face detection: the classifier gets the images scanned for facial detection. The facial scanning continues until a face is detected and a rectangular shape is drawn around the face. In the light of the foregoing, as soon as a customer checks in a hotel, facial information of such customer is collected and saved by IoT device. As soon as the customer starts making inquiries, requests and orders,

such information is also collected and saved by IoT device(s) in the hotel. Phu (2024) asserted that IoT could be used for collecting highly intimate customers actions and preferences, which may constitute serious privacy issue, especially, if such information could be hacked into or used for the wrong reasons, premised on inadequate data protection mechanism.

Guest Experience in the hospitality industry

Experience may be pretty difficult to conceptualize premised on the fact that it differs from one individual to the other. Kim et al. (2015) noted that experience is essentially a subjective issue, hence, one guest has differing attitude, behavior and belief from another, which makes it a challenge to establish a clear definition of experience. Arapou and Kapiki (2023) noted that there is a personal degree of engagement as well as participation from customers in terms of experiences. What an individual may consider as a pleasant experience may be at variance with what another individual will consider as a pleasant experience. It is pertinent for all business entities to strife as a much as possible to render quality services that will transform into pleasant experiences for their customers. Arapou and Kapiki (2023) asserted that it is a basic condition for the hospitality industry to deliver highly impressive guest experiences, in a bid to continuously maintain as well as attract customers with high level loyalty. It is pertinent that all customers should be able to derive pleasant experiences from all components (rooms, beverage, meals and sundry facilities) of the hospitality industry. Suleri et al. (2021) asserted that customer experience is not restricted to beverages and food and rooms in the hospitality industry but it is also inclusive of ancillary attributes such as staff members expertise, ambiance, amenities and so on. Hence, customers would be able to produce a solid narrative about their experience at a hospitality firm after a few engagements with offerings and facilities of such hospitality firm. Guests' experiences in the hospitality industry are essentially a consequence of relatively long engagements that makes available an opportunity for hospitality firms to produce lasting as well as positive experiences for customers (Kandampully et al., 2018). Hence, Verhoef et al. (2009) noted that consumer experience is the total accumulation of consumers engagements with an organization, rather than product of one single engagement with the organization. Engagement(s) between a person and an organization produces customer experience, and various points along the experience curve is referred to as touchpoints (Homburg et al., 2015).

Methodology

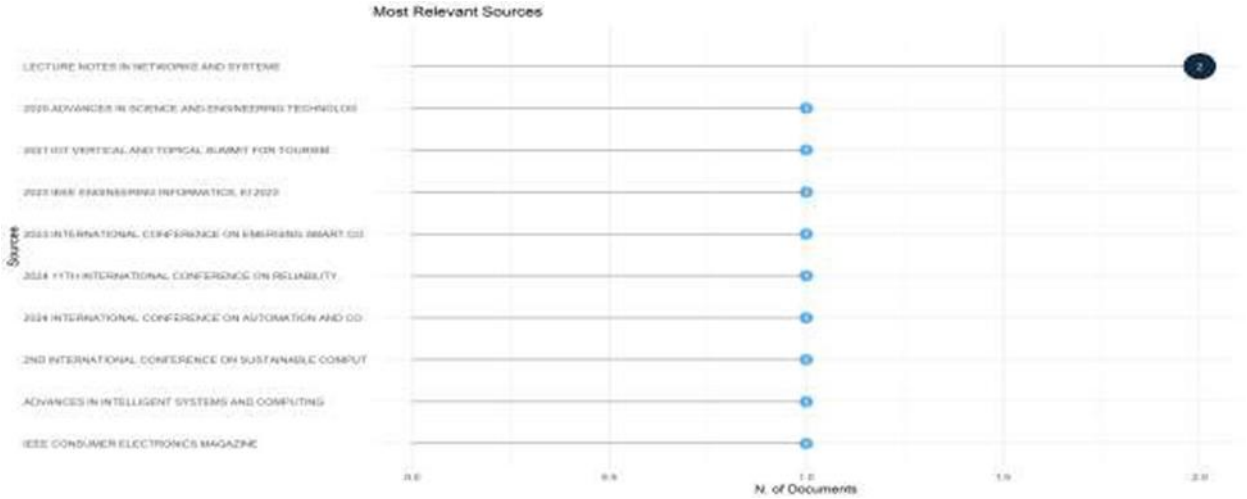
This study adopts a bibliometric analysis of papers that had been published on IoT and customer experience in the hospitality industry. The data was collected from Scopus database. Publications from 2009 through 2024 were collected. The collected data were analysed with biblioshiny in Rstudio. The research questions for this review were;

Q1: What are the sources of the publications between 2017-2024?
Q2: What are the sources of the publications between 2017-2024?
Q3: Information of authors for the publications between 2017-2024?
Q4: What is the word coupling of the publications between 2017-2024?

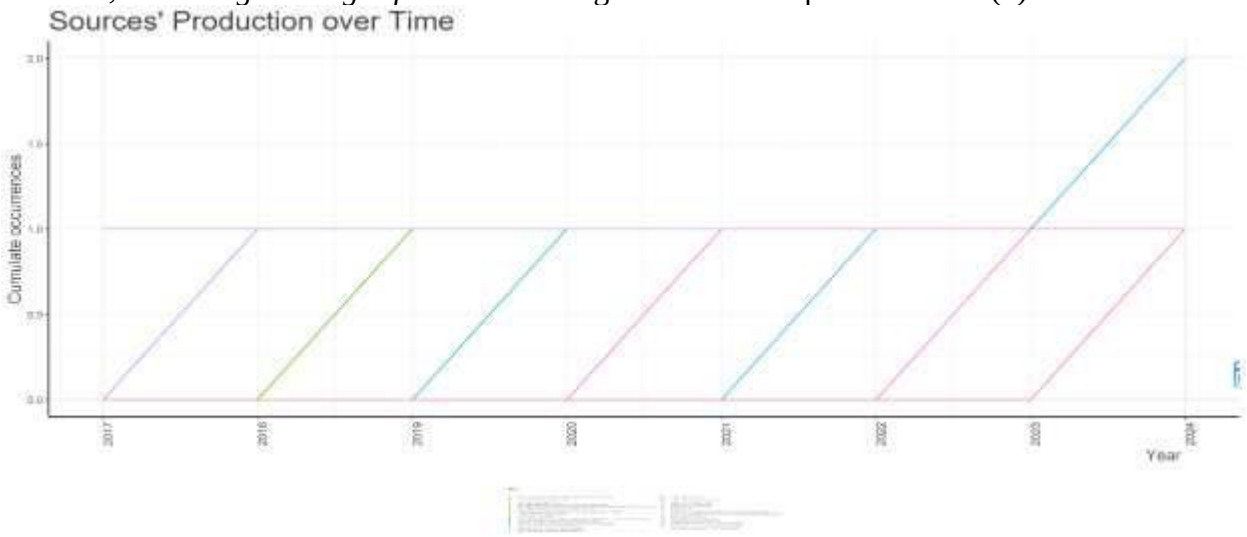
Results

What are the sources of the publication between (2017-2024)?

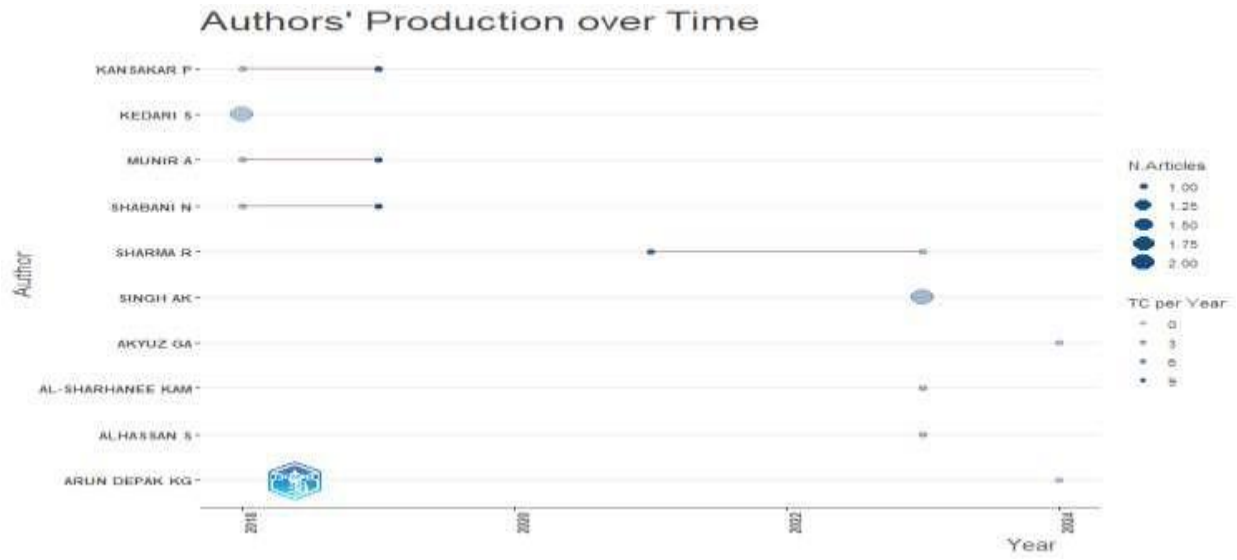
The most relevant source of publication is lecture notes in networks and systems with two (2) published articles; advances in science and engineering technology, IOT vertical and tropical summit for tourism, IEEE engineering informatics, International conference on reliability, international conference on automation and co., international conference on sustainable computing, advances in intelligent systems and computing, IEEE consumer electronics magazine, amongst other publication outlets with one (1) published article each.



Q2: What are the Sources of the Production Over time (2017-2024)?
In 2017 it was only *Nec Technical Journal* that published one (1) article with respect to IoT and hospitality industry, in 2018, *Advances In Intelligent Systems And Computing, Nec Technical Journal and Proceedings - 2018 International Conference On Frontiers Of Information Technology*, published one (1) article each, while in 2024, *Lecture Notes In Networks And Systems* published two (2) articles and *IoT Vertical And Topical Summit For Tourism, IEEE Engineering Informatics* amongst other outlets published one (1) article each.



Q3: Information of authors for the publications between 2017-2024?
Singh AK published two (2) articles in 2023 with each of them with two (2) citations, Kansakar P published one article in *International Conference on Frontiers of Information Technology* in 2018 with five (5) total citations, Shabani N published an article in 2019 in *IEEE Consumer Electronics Magazine* with eighty-two (82) citations.



Q4: Word coupling of the publications between 2017-2024?

It is noteworthy that the prominent words in the word coupling chart below are hospitality (which is the biggest), IoT, smart, tourism and industry. IoT and smart are keywords that follow hospitality in terms of dominance. The technology underpinned concepts in the chart are internet, artificial intelligence, technologies and technology, while, user focused concepts are service, experience, customer and guest; ultimately, the operational and management concepts are management, challenges, study and hotel.

Discussion and conclusion

The analysis revealed that is a few published articles (30) that focused on IoT in the hospitality industry in Scopus database from 2017-2024. It is evident that the most relevant source of publication is *Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems* with two (2) published articles. The most cited article that focused on IoT in the hospitality sector is Shabani N.'s publication in 2019 in *IEEE Consumer Electronics Magazine* with eighty-two (82) citations. Shabani N. article in 2019 got the highest citation because it specially unpacked the role of technology in state-of-the-art hospitality services and it also described both the prospects and challenges associated with IoT in the hospitality business.

The word coupling simply shows that hospitality is most dominant word in all the articles. Hence, other concepts in this study are anchored on hospitality. The fact that 'IoT' and 'smart' are keywords that follow hospitality in terms of dominance, implies that there was a strong focus of hospitality on technology, especially, with respect to IoT and smart technologies. Tussyadiah (2020) noted that there is a strong concentration on technological innovation in the hospitality sector, that essentially aligns with digital customer experience as well as smart tourism. The user focused concept of the analysis (customer, experience and service) is corroborated by the assertion of Li et al. (2023) that service quality and guest satisfaction can

be enhanced by smart technologies that are user centric in nature. The word 'challenges' is also a key word in the chart and it depicts that it is bound that there will be challenges associated with the engagement of IoT in the hospitality industry. Mariani and Baggio (2021) noted that challenges are hinderances to implementing smart technology, for instance, digital literacy amongst employees and cybersecurity. A major challenge is that history has shown that the hospitality industry is very slow in absorbing new technological creation and development (Shani et al., 2023).

There are guest-facing systems in the hospitality industry and they essentially comprise of kiosk, mobile phones, remote controls, point of sale terminals, thin client terminals and in-room tablets (Shabani et al., 2019). These are technologies that can essentially be operationalized by guests without the support of the staff members of the hospitality business. However, it must be ensured that they are programmed in such a way that they can be seamlessly explored by customers with little or no aid. IoT could be used to ensure that customers have seamless and pleasant experience with guest-facing systems. IoT could be operationalized in positively connecting guest-facing systems with in-room services so as to deliver impressive digitalized services to customers of hospitality businesses. The result revealed that there is a lot of grounds to cover vis-à-vis the study on IoT and guest experiences in the hospitality industry. It is no gainsaying that the hospitality has increasingly engaged technology innovations however, it will be of immense help to the hospitality industry to engage IoT in connecting systems-guest-facing technologies with room service sensors and restaurant/kitchen sensors to as to avail guests with pleasant and the best of services. It is notable that IoT can also be used to include environmental information and sensitization as part of the service that will be rendered to its guests. Shani et al. (2023) asserted that IoT could be used to enhance tourism via tracking of health and environmental issues, for instance, the level of pollution in an environment. Hence, the exploration of IoT to blend technological devices together, is capable to giving guests pleasant experiences with respect to guests engagement of technological gadgets, access to digitalized in-room service and access to pertinent environmental and health- based information.

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Development of a Technology Course in an Events Management Undergraduate Degree Programme

Ubaldino Couto * and Hou Peng Lam

Abstract

In light of increasing use of technology in events, a dedicated course was newly added to an events management undergraduate degree following a major curriculum revamp. Using the case of this third-year core course at a higher education institution in Macao dedicated to tourism and hospitality studies, this paper documents the process from curriculum design to implementation and feedback from students of this course. The course design was conducted by a team of three individuals: one academic in events studies, one in management information system and the last a practitioner and adjunct faculty. Meeting records by course instructors and focus group interviews with students provided rich data for analysis. This paper demonstrates that beyond the consensus of incorporating latest technological perspectives into curricula, it is essential to adopt a multi-faceted approach in developing new courses that are contemporary and relevant to groom tomorrow's workforce for the events industry.

Keywords: Curriculum design; events management; event studies; technology

Introduction

Universities undergo programme curricula revamps to align well with contemporary pedagogical needs, policy changes and new developments in societies. One example is the introduction of technology in everyday life; universities scramble to revamp their programmes to incorporate technology in the curricula in order to groom tomorrow's workforce who are capable and adept to new, modern and innovative technologies. In China, technological advancements can be felt and seen across all sectors in all levels. Namely, the adoption of technology in finance and governance has been profound in recent years, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic which inevitably forced an acute adoption of technology in all walks of life.

In the events sector, technology adoption has mainly been a tool to facilitate event processes, as well as creation and enhancement of event experiences rather than highly advanced adoptions. For instance, technology facilitates a more streamlined experience from registration to attendance at conferences and exhibitions, deploying drones at large events for surveillance - even drone shows as spectacles, heatmaps and smart mobile applications to dissipate and manage crowds at events, and so on. However, the incorporation of technology in the events management curricula appears to be rather slow and scarce following a worldwide scoping and benchmarking project in a recent programme revamp.

This paper largely follows the reflective essay by Lock et al. (2018) and documents the process of introducing a third-year core course - Event Technology - into the revamped programme, from curricula review and design to implementation and feedback from students using the case of a recent programme revamp of an undergraduate events management degree in a higher education institution dedicated to tourism and hospitality studies in Macao. Using the present case, this paper attempts to uncover the considerations of developing new courses that are contemporary and relevant to groom tomorrow's workforce for the events industry.

* Ubaldino Couto, Macao University of Tourism, dino@utm.edu.mo
Hou Peng Lam, Macao University of Tourism, joe@utm.edu.mo

Event management curriculum design

Despite the increasing demand for quality assurance and expectations for students' learning experience, research on university curriculum review process does not seem to have received particularly much attention other than its outcomes such as career trajectories, perceptions to career aspirations and the development of particular skillsets. One possible reason for the lack of attention in events management is its lack of recognition as a 'serious career' with authors arguing that substantial work is still necessary to truly professionalise the industry (Bladen & Kennell, 2014; Jiang & Schmader, 2014).

Although recognised as a national study concentration and highlighted again and again on national policies, events management as a study major in China is still regarded miniscule compared to other traditional majors (Chak-keung Wong & Jing Liu, 2010) despite the proliferation of technology in everyday life particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic (Couto, 2023; Lei et al., 2023) when it was evident the skills, flexibility and adaptiveness of event professionals were indispensable in keeping the economy running.

The episodic nature and culmination of emotions at events compared to the continuation and consistency of performances embedded in everyday business show that event management – and by its extension events management education – is inherently different from general management (Mules, 2004). It is therefore important to design curricula which must be able to groom graduates who are adept to these challenges and at the same time able to face the everchanging – and in some ways – the unpredictable developments of the events industry.

Lock et al. (2018) suggest a five-step process for collaborative curriculum review: setting clear expectations; maintaining open, consistent communication; incorporating multiple levels of leadership; engaging various groups of stakeholders; and implementing through actionable items. Based on this framework, this paper documents the process from curriculum design to implementation and feedback from students by using the case of a third-year core course of a bachelor degree programme in events management at a higher education institution in Macao dedicated to tourism and hospitality studies.

Background of the present case

Because technology plays a crucial role in any contemporary curriculum. In the present case, following extensive consultations with stakeholders, namely the industry partners, faculty members, alumni, and students, the curriculum review panel proposed to add a new third-year core course 'Event Technology' to the revamped Bachelor of Science programme in Tourism Event Management with the course description as follows:

This course aims to build a concrete understanding of the role of technology in events, particularly in facilitating event project organisation and management, hybrid and online events, as well as to enhance event experience. It compares and contrasts the various technologies applied in different types of events and critically examines how technology is adapted in every stage of project management to design better event plans.

When the degree programme was first introduced in 2005, Macao was just beginning to undergo an unprecedented economic and social development following the liberalisation of the gaming licences, which brought in gigantic Vegas-style integrated resorts with lavish hotels, casinos, retail and business events facilities; these new introductions at this scale were never before seen in Macao (Vong, 2008). The university in which the present case is based is a public institution, which has an invested duty to groom professionals to cater for the industry development. Hence, this programme was launched based on the success of the Hotel Management degree in the context of the socio-economic situation at the time.

Fast-forward a decade later, Macao went through a complete transformation in all aspects imaginable (Couto, 2018). It was imperative to revise the curriculum to better reflect and meet the demands of the burgeoning event industry at the end and in preparation for the future. The revamped programme departed from the Hotel Management-centric approach and incorporated more courses specific to events management, while balancing the academic rigour with practical experience. The present case – Event Technology – is a new addition to the curriculum to draw students' attention to the role of technology in the practice of event management. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the same period when the new curriculum was launched, and the proliferation of technology in everyday life especially in e-payments and governance, this course takes on and focuses more the role of technology in events rather than technology as tools to facilitate event management.

Methodology

This study employs a constructivist research design (Pilarska, 2021) to uncover the considerations of developing new courses in a university curriculum that are intended for a degree programme specialised in events. Whilst seeking students' viewpoints on the revamped curriculum is crucial as they are the ultimate 'end users', it is also important to understand the perspectives 'from within' by those involved in the curriculum design. These datasets not only provide more insights but also contextualises the study (Yin, 2009).

The first dataset follows the reflective nature of Lock et al. (2018), from journals and meeting records by the team of three faculty members responsible for incorporating the new course into the curriculum, specifically one academic in events studies at a leadership position, one academic in information technology and the last a practitioner and adjunct faculty in information technology. The journaling records follow a specific structure that gauge discussions and reflections during the course design. Together with the meeting records, this dataset provides important context to the process of the curriculum design and reaffirms the data that emerges from the semi-structured interviews with students.

The second dataset involves data from semi-structured interviews with students of this course. Semi-structured interviews as a method is useful when exploring a phenomenon, especially a new or under researched topic that benefits from flexible questioning that naturally develops in conversations. It also puts the research subjects at ease, which is particularly relevant in this case as students could feel intimidated by the researchers, such as feeling being 'interrogated' rather than interviewed. To this end, the interviewers made every attempt to encourage the students to share confidently and in a language they find most comfortable with in the campus open public spaces so they are in a relatively more natural environment rather than in a lecturer's office. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and content analysed using the coding table developed from previous studies and the meeting notes during the development of the new course. The themes emerged from the data were restructured and refined as the authors see fit basing on the literature.

Findings

Both datasets gone through the normal practice of qualitative data, such as reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing and verification (Huberman & Miles, 2002). The following presents a summary of the data that emerged from analyses of the two datasets. Table 1 shows the outline of the journal entries and meeting minutes by the facilators responsible for this new course (Dataset 1).

Table 1. Outline of journals and meeting records by course facilitators

Course contents	• Components of technology • Related to events • Level of difficulty • Examples (locally and internationally) • Hands-on experience • Reference courses and materials
Learning outcomes	• Specific ones for this course • Relation to the degree programme • KSA attributes • Assignments and assessments
Industry relevance	• Align with future work expectations • Knowledge of variety of technology in trade
Future	• More than COVID-19 tech • Ability to learn new things; adaptability • Interest in technology beyond work

Table 2 presents the finalised themes and subthemes as emerged from the semi-structured interviews with students (Dataset 2). A total of 23 third-year students were interviewed, each lasting about 20 minutes, representing roughly two-thirds of the present cohort. All students are 20 to 22 years old, with a split of 50-50 male and female, all majoring in events management, and each with a 6-month internship experience in a related-industry placement. The interview questions are related to event careers and the role of technology; skills, knowledge and attitudes to technology in the context of events management; and, relevance to national policy and industry environment. Table 2 are the themes emerged from both inductive and analytical coding and presented in a data structure presented based on Gioia et al. (2013).

Table 2. Themes emerged from the interviews with students

1st Order Concepts	2nd Order Themes	Aggregate Dimensions
• Specific knowledge of what technology is available for events	Knowledge of event technology	
• How technology facilitates events • Tools to enhance events • China technology		Knowledge and skills of event technology
• Using technology in event operations • Designing apps and other functions	Practical skills	
• Can use technology in work • Tech product knowledge and skills • Able to work with others in the team	Competitive at work	Attitudes towards event technology futures

• Able to adopt new technology • Can use AI (DeepSeek) • Surviving the next pandemic	Ready for the future	

Discussions

One unexpected outcome between the curriculum review and development of the new course Event Technology was the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst special pedagogic considerations must be in place to cater for the actual operation of university programmes (Couto, 2023), these students who are the first cohort of taking this course – admitted in 2022 when the pandemic was declared over with China opening up its borders to the outside world – completed their secondary education using the latest technology. This posed an immediate challenge to the team when developing the new course as these students are supposed to be tech savvy. In addition, the course learning outcomes aim to equip students with skills about using technology, which then evidently became redundant, but rather the need to go beyond. For example, students need to be able to learn the role of technology in enduring events can still run, how events can adopt to new limitations using technology and how to work remotely and virtually.

The team also had difficulty in securing a relevant textbook for the course as the available ones at the time of the course development was considered old and irrelevant. Despite a number of reference texts available (Lei & Couto, 2022), 'event technology' was assumed to be technological tools that facilitate events (e.g. registration systems, mobile apps) and facilitating event experience (e.g. drone shows). Because the team was made up of academics and practitioners from the industry, it was imperative to have the course contents be industry relevant. For instance, there were guest lectures by developers and actual site visits to events using latest technological mobile apps were incorporated into the course where students could experience in a first-hand and immersive environment.

The framework for designing learning outcomes manifested through knowledge, skills and attitudes reflect well the concerns from students. Students did not focus on the kind of technology being used in events but rather more on how adept they are to new technologies being used. For instance, many students noted that the double-edged sword of using AI-generated contents. Specifically, AI is being used extensively yet its irresponsible use could lead to unethical behaviour. To this end, we recommend that students must also be taught about the morals of using AI responsibly.

Whilst much of the discussions with students focused on their future, students also felt helpless with regards to the technology being used. First, they may not necessarily have first hand access to technology (e.g. state of the art mobile paid apps exclusive to certain events). Second, students also felt that their 'management degree' does not adequately educate them about the actual operations of technology (e.g. programming apps, writing webpages). Finally, students noted that another pandemic at the scale of COVID-19 is imminent in their lifetime. The need for their survival in competing with their younger generation of peers is necessary. This probably arose from their observations during their secondary school when there were lockdowns and homeschooling via the internet during COVID-19.

Conclusions

This paper aims to document the process of developing a new course - Event Technology- in a third-year events management degree curriculum. However, it uncovers only partly the issues that revolves around the experience. More research is needed to gauge students' perceptions and how these thoughts evolve over time, particularly technology is always evolving and therefore the curriculum should also be regularly updated. Although several

years behind us, the COVID-19 pandemic still plays an important role and has both managerial and policy implications in how we develop and run our programmes, particularly in the context of technology. The fact that vents as a multi-faceted industry with no specific technology associated with it further complicates this endeavour.

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