Athens Journal of Tourism

Quarterly Academic Periodical, Volume 8, Issue 4, December 2021
URL: https://www.athensjournals.gr/ajt Email: journals@atiner.gr

Front Pages

Athens Journal of Tourism

Published by the Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER)

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The Athens Journal of Tourism
ISSN NUMBER: 2241-8148- DOI: 10.30958/ajt
Volume 8, Issue 4, December 2021
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Editorial and Reviewers' Board

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The current issue is the fourth of the eighth volume of the *Athens Journal of Tourism,* published by the Tourism, Leisure & Recreation Unit of ATINER.

Gregory T. Papanikos
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- Submission of Paper: **14 March 2022**

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Worldmaking in Sri Lankan Heritage Design: The Case of Travel Writers

By Rodanthi Tzanelli* & Gauthami Kamalika Jayathilaka±

This article develops an analytical model to examine how heritage tourism mobilities are designed by travel writers. Using Sri Lanka as an example, we thematise professional activity in heritage tourism through a blend of Margaret Archer's work on reflexivity in late modernity and Keith Hollinshead's 'worldmaking authority/agency' to understand the factors driving tourist design. Our model replaces Jensen's focus on 'design' as a fixed creative property with 'designing' as creativity in motion, here collaborative and solidary, there conflictual and endorsing creative inequalities. Our theoretical blend informs the organisation of Sri Lankan heritage tourist professionals into three active categories: 'communicatives' (with an emphasis on developing closed-communal solidarity), 'autonomous' (with an emphasis on virtual reconstitutions of community beyond geographical fixity that may support tourist entrepreneurialism), and 'meta-reflexives' (with an emphasis on bringing tourist markets and communities in a dialogue beneficial for the latter) This typology accommodates disparate worldmaking vistas and forms of tourist design agency that then feed back into authorial tourist scripts, promoted by institutions, organisations and even communities. Thus, agency develops both self-reflexively and through negotiations with independently existing authorial forces driving tourist design managed by the nation state and its own biographical records.

Keywords: *agency, designing mobilities, reflexivity, heritage tourism, worldmaking*

Introduction

This article develops a new analytical model to examine the ways heritage tourism mobilities are designed by travel writers. Recognising something as 'heritage' partakes of the ways tourism design is understood by travel writing designers and determines the forms of identity such writing produces. Whilst Sri Lanka provides a neat example of the ways a native imagination that was colonised by the West now appears to awaken with the help of its younger female generations of travel writers, the model itself outlines the complexity and ambiguity of this awakening. The model brings together a micro-sociological study of reflexivity (Archer 2012) and a macro-cultural study of tourism 'worldmaking' (Hollinshead 2009). The Sri Lankan case study tests and clarifies the new analytical model, by highlighting how foreign/imported systems of

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governance and structures of belief and action are interlocked into negotiation with native agency in the design of cultural/heritage tourism.

However, it must be stressed that the main objective of our research moves beyond the contextual (Sri Lankan heritage and history) and circumstantial (the feminisation of digital labour, its middle-class nature) variables. Even though an article can only provide limited data ('evidence'), it can develop a workable hypothesis regarding the process of validating one's creative competencies, constraints to social recognition as well as tools and techniques of overcoming them, without becoming a-social agents (i.e., while continuing to belong to a larger whole). The process can be summarised as 'reflexivity', a way of making and remaking our world through internal deliberations of how things are and what is possible to achieve in context. To unpack this, we have selected a 'field' and a theme we delineate as 'Sri Lankan heritage tourism', a social/creative activity we recognise as 'heritage design', and a pool of actors who aspire to become agents ('informants', mainly professional women working in the creative digital sector). In this introduction we walk our readers through these elements, commencing by explaining what tourism means for Sri Lanka, how it is marketed and why and how it interacts with international structures of cultural heritage representation.

Tourism has been considered by scholars and practitioners as a system, an activity, or a profession in various combinations. Greatly affected by economics and psychology, early twentieth century research spoke mostly about mobility motivations, placing an emphasis on the desires of tourists as consumers. This tendency to focus etiologically on individualistic attitudes lingers to date, mainly because of the industry's profit-orientated nature and a misreading of sociological analyses such as that by Georg Simmel, who placed the individual in society, as subjectivist exercises. Critical tourism scholars influenced by interdisciplinary theory have mostly prioritised the study of social inequalities, and when they spoke of tourism as an activity or experience, their subject matter remained the biographical trajectory of the tourist as an ideal type of middle-class modern subject. Some critical tourism theory has taken great strides towards refocusing attention on interplays between structure and agency in the tourismification of places and cultures (Salazar 2009, 2012, Salazar and Graburn 2016), or systems and structures (Korstanje 2016).

Such tensions become even more pronounced in research, in particular tourism niches, which are territories of politicised investigation, such as dark or heritage tourism. The standard definition of 'dark tourism' as human visits to locations 'wholly or partially motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death' (Halgreen 2004, p. 149) will not suffice. Using the terms 'cultural' or 'heritage tourism' instead better supports our investigation into the host communities' investment in memory, identity and belonging. Whereas 'heritage' is considered by international NGOs such as UNESCO a universal right to be protected (Labadi 2013), nation-states that emerged from colonisation *produce* heritage in discursive forms to bolster a sense of identity independently from their former colonisers.

Sri Lanka's historical background matters in our analysis and we intend to address this as part of our introductory scaffolding to generate connections between indigenous context (results and discussion) and our epistemological proposition (literature review). The Sri Lankan context has been studied as a standard case of colonialism. Sri Lanka's colonial influence begins as early as the sixteenth century, when the country began to be occupied by the Portuguese, Dutch and English respectively from 1505 onwards. For the next 400 years the island was subjected to successive naval powers, which controlled parts or the entire country and radically modified its social and economic structures (Wickramasinghe 2006). Coming in last, the British built the island on native structures as well as the Dutch legacy (Schrikker 2007), so we may conclude that the transformations begun between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries under the Portuguese and Dutch gathered momentum during the British rule (Wickramasinghe 2006). The British created a market society spearheaded by the demands of plantation capitalism so that amidst a period of worldwide revolutions and imperial change, along with similar nations in the region, Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), was gradually turned into a modern colonial state in the hands of the British.

In 1815 Sri Lanka was brought under a single English-speaking administration, converted into a unified island polity, from a colonial state to a nation state, forming a boundary-based society (Wickramasinghe 2006). English was gradually embraced as a virtual mother tongue by a section of the multi-ethnic non-European population of Sri Lanka constituting Sinhalese, Tamils, Moors, and the Malays. It became the language of commerce, administration, and secondary and tertiary education (Sivasundaram 2013). The acquisition of English by Sri Lankans from early on provided opportunities for an elite class to form, gradually transforming Sri Lanka from a caste-based to a class-based society. The British colonial rule utilised a range of institutions, such as justice and education, to submerse their colonial subjects in modernity and produce the national elites and leaders of the country, thus consolidating the anglicisation of well-to-do segments of society during the colonial period and its aftermath (Gamage 1997). The main underlying intent had been to create modern colonial subjects who would be efficient and willing servants of the Empire (Wickramasinghe 2006, p. 42, Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 4).

At the same time, coloniality influenced cultural production and social formation in the country and ongoing construction and representation of specific spaces and experiences (Hall and Tucker, 2004). It 'set in motion a discursive and intellectual way of thinking, seeing, and writing about the country space as a romanticised and sexualised island…or a lost Eden' (Sivasundaram 2013, p. 14), in that among others islandness and tropicality are two ways of seeing and imagining Sri Lanka (Jazeel 2009, 2013). As an ex-colony Sri Lanka increased in popularity as a favoured tourist destination whereby its places, people, customs, artefacts, arts and crafts, indigenous and colonial heritage and histories were transformed into tourist sites. Western ways of seeing continued and were repeated, reproduced well into independence (gained in 1948) and the advent of institutionalised tourism in the late 1960s, when the first textual/visual tourist brochures and promotional materials began to be produced and disseminated (Samaranayake et al. 2013). Tourism motivated by an interest in the history, traditions and consumption of Ceylon tea is a good example that combines aspects of heritage tourism, ecotourism, health tourism and farm or rural tourism (Aslam and Jolliffe 2015). This is particularly significant since tea was popularised, and its traditions introduced to Sri Lanka and developed by the British (Jolliffe 2007). Thus, much of the built heritage remains of Ceylon's colonial tea industry have evolved into heritage accommodations for tourists. Tea heritage tourism also includes tea centres and retail outlets, tea gardens, tea processing factories and landscapes (Aslam and Jolliffe 2015) driven by a nostalgia for the past and a desire on the part of the tourists to experience forgotten cultural landscapes and relive them in the form of tourism (Caton and Santos 2007).

However, in this article we are interested in the ways colonial mentality seeps through the cracks of organised knowledge after the fact, when administrative decolonisation has been completed, and native culture has acquired sovereignty and statist form (Herzfeld 2002). Although such pleasure peripheries managed by free states have gone through centuries of interpreting their place in the world without such external control, they still borrow from their erstwhile control centre's portfolios of development (Said 1978, Alatas 1974). Whereas administrative structures of colonialism and the very economic model of imperialism may be replaced by native nationalism, the overall foreign mentality is difficult to extricate and tends to be reproduced unreflexively in cultural organisation. This produces models of culture – 'knowledge economies', such as particular versions of cultural tourism (Tzanelli 2015). This form of culture sits at intersections between cybernetic (digital design of tourism), ecological (the management of native environments) and biopolitical (the management of national and multiple social identities based on class, gender and so forth) interests (Fuller 2012). At these intersections particular types of humans are designed – by human actors, who imagine themselves as part of communities. Undoubtedly, the professional design of cultural/heritage tourism in terms of visitations to places managed by national power has an economic dimension (Smith et al. 2010). However, economic studies seldom address affiliations between creative agency in heritage design and legacies of cognitive subjection to an external source.

In the following section (literature review), we discuss such links between creative agency and legacy both contextually and analytically so as to highlight that emancipation is always a process of negotiation, as realistically there is no absolute "freedom" in a world not ruled by the state of nature and individual desire. Our model is populated by humans, not abstract models, who act between wisdom, talent and the limitations of knowledge and tools they may possess. Thus "tourism" is a systemic example of our much broader and deeper concerns regarding what makes us mobile humans who create and under what conditions. To do so, we outline our model that combines tourism worldmaking and morphogenesis moving on from there to a discussion with examples of Sri Lankan travel writers and the design process in which they engage.

Literature Review

Today these versions are channelled through digital design of tourist destinations, as online marketing has an immediate global reach. Such 'knowledge economies' are armed with labour entertaining varied degrees of visibility in the design of heritage tourism, as its primary role may not be the tourist market, but other projects centring on personal development, employment, or empowerment. Such observations are central in our justification of bringing Archer's thesis in play with Hollinshead's. They highlight how 'worldmaking' in tourism may be less about tourism as such and more about changing social and cultural mores in the touristified country: about heritage as an intergenerational hierarchy of values about place, culture, and nation.

Tourism design often commences with collecting from different individual impressions of a place and its culture during travel, to produce a coherent narrative of it befitting the needs of its mobilities arbitrator: the nation-state and its satellite markets (or, under neoliberal rules, vice versa). As part and parcel of 'doing mobility' in Western ways through marketing that often homogenises diverse impressions, the design of heritage tourism may produce or solidify tourism imaginaries, representational frameworks of place, culture, and history (Salazar and Graburn 2016). Notably, however, this article does not examine the mentalities of professionals, who have set agendas on selling place and culture, but some of their potential 'muses': travel writers, who publish their embodied or digital travels to heritage locations in a professional capacity (i.e., as travel journalists), or not (i.e., as independent travel bloggers).

We argue that in contemporary contexts of cultural production, such as that of Sri Lanka, the politics of Western mobility (Cresswell 2010) and the poetics of imaginative native movement are interlocked in the production of hybrid ontologies of design. It has already been argued by others that in the design of Sri Lanka's heritage tourism, we find colonial echoes (Sivasundaram 2013). But the native sources of the travel imagination, the aforementioned travel writers, are primarily drawn from the new middle classes. For these writers, the colonial past they never experienced slides down their hierarchy of priorities. In modern contexts of mobility questions of power are never two-dimensional, as those who are supposed to be enacting structures of domination (e.g., our travel writers) may be subjected themselves to other structures of inequality, from which they want to escape. To do so, they may endorse market capitalism in the ways they produce their own imaginary frameworks, to acquire a voice. Heritage tourism as national ideology emerges at the nexus of the real interests of the nation state and the subjective interests of those involved in tourism worldmaking that supports the national enterprise, both formally (employed as tourist designers) and laterally (travel journalists and bloggers) (Lukes 1974, pp. 15–25). Heretofore, we redirect Cresswell's (2006) suggestion that mobility has conduits and itineraries, pointing at the complexity of what our travel writers enact and support in their writings as a form of *structured agency*.

Who are these subjects from which tourism systems borrow to form official tourist imaginaries, even though they may not be working in the travel industry as professional designers? How can we write their meaningful biographies, not as a record of individual (affective, political, or otherwise) motivations, but so as to acknowledge their role as paradigmatic subjects, who are recruited, often in unsolicited ways, by those who end up claiming authorship of the scripts of native tourism? Such an endeavour would necessitate a reading of human lives and activities as *part and parcel of societal tendencies*, shortcomings, or examples of cosmopolitan solidarity. Our task is to exorcise the phantom of psychologistic motivations or over-critical takes on tourism mobilities as extensions of consumerist phantasmagorias.

We suggest a thematization of the profiles of Sri Lankan travel writers through sociologist Margaret Archer's (2012) work on reflexivity in late modernity. This is used to explore professional self-identities as paradigmatic of particular forms of social action (roughly corresponding to Hollinshead's (2009) 'worldmaking agency'), so unhelpful 'psychological' interpretations of catering for tourist mobilities are refuted. Notably, our informant pool suggests that both the profession and the amateur endeavour of travel writing are a femininized territory. Not only is the profession/hobby feminine, but it also lacks access to sources of power and an endorsement of displaying forms of self-guided authorship that deviate from the canon of stereotyped Sri Lankan place and culture. The ways female travel writers respond to this challenge is by *consciously* conforming to a market agenda, with the occasional deviation, whenever this can pass under the radar of inspection. Based on interdisciplinary explorations of the ways agency emanates from the structures in which individuals are born, grow up and occasionally rebel against, Archer's 'morphogenetic/morphostatic' model provides a starting point for a sociological investigation of human action, intentionality, and empathic connectivity with others in our research context.

Archer's work is placed in an unlikely dialogue with tourism studies scholar, Keith Hollinshead's (2009, Hollinshead et al. 2009). Hollinshead developed a comprehensive framework for understanding the ways tourist professionals and tourists produce 'worlds of tourism': conceptual frames for doing tourism and experiencing destinations. He conceived of 'tourism worldmaking' as an activity emanating not from fixed institutional agendas, but self-standing cultural discourses existing independently and mediated via their structures. Where Archer stands outside tourism theory, Hollinshead tapped into the globalising potential of tourist structures (he calls them 'authority'), noting that the actual job of tourism creativity becomes the job of designers, who act on these structures (he calls that 'agency'). Because worldmaking agency is also in an interplay with national interests and contemporary societal structures on the one hand, and global markets and their labour on the other, the choices of our female travel writers become structured: either they fulfil their parents' expectations as women and professionals, or they endorse the market norms and values to achieve personal independence. The 'writing' of heritage tourism becomes part of a personal project of professional development, under which a critique of 'colonial mentality' may or may not survive, depending on personal beliefs and political inclinations. Hollinshead never examined the socio-biographical specificity of the actual 'tourism worldmakers' (i.e., professionals working in the sector) or their 'muses' (our travel writers). Archer provides us with the opportunity to examine how sexism, racism and nationalism discursively shape tourism worldmaking at its grassroots level – and why by simply condemning these writers' choices scholars reproduce these structures of inequality.

The *Reflexive Imperative in Late Modernity* (2012) is Archer's third volume on 'morphostasis' and 'morphogenesis', two concepts referring to the ways past structural conditions impose themselves on social actors without determining them, before being reproduced/elaborated upon respectively through their actions. Like her mentor, Pierre Bourdieu, Archer is unclear with regards to the consciousness of this reproduction/contestation which Bourdieu (1984) termed 'habitus'. To consider the agency of Sri Lankan tourism professionals as a form of reflexivity we repurpose Archer's model to think about distinctive categories of consciously performed travel writing agency in the organisation of cultural/ heritage tourism. We have the following travel writing 'reflexives' in Sri Lankan tourism:

1. Communicatives, emphasising closed-community solidarity against social diversity, reiterating 'family' norms and values.
2. Autonomous, maintaining less connection to communal roots and emphasising instead virtual reconstitutions of community beyond geographical fixity. They may be internet entrepreneurs, and often willing to stage authenticity in communities, mostly to endorse collective valorisation in the tourist trade.
3. Meta-reflexives, focusing their efforts on bringing tourist markets and communities in a dialogue beneficial for the latter ('entrepreneurial activists').

Archer also identifies a fourth type of reflexivity she terms 'fractured', to explore these mobile professionals who display complete loss of rooting, but we are suspicious of the category's normative underpinnings. Also, Archer places these forms of reflexivity in a temporally progressive schema in human history (from 1 in traditional societies to 4 in contemporary ones), but in our pool of data we find the first three types conterminously intertwined, and enabling different forms of deliberation on the touristic craft, which may even change in the course of engagement with tourist destinations (e.g., communicatives may invest in strengthening community development against tourismification, and meta-reflexives seek to harmonise the two forces, thus acting as mediators of differences, but it is not unlikely that meta-reflexives will develop into fractured entrepreneurial professionals, if they fail to maintain community collaboration). Hence, the typological schema accommodates disparate worldmaking vistas and shifting forms of tourist *and* host agency that then feed back into authorial tourist scripts (Hollinshead 2009, Hollinshead et al. 2009), promoted by institutions, organisations and even host communities. Archer's model assumes that mobility and/or loss of rooting are bad things that produce bad agents. At the same time, her work tends to endorse a biopolitical vision of belonging, because it has as its basis family and education variables. A critique of Archer's biopolitics, which asserts the unconscious and performative reiteration of national, gendered and class identity of travel writers, sits better with Hollinshead's model. This refutes the idea that the objectives of tourism agents/travel writers will always be determined by their family expectations, while acknowledging that biopolitics can affect the organisation of tourism.

Hollinshead's notion of 'worldmaking' refers to the declarative power of tourism in the construction of places, events, or inheritances. Where, following Archer, we would conclude that tourism has the power to act on social modes of being and thinking, to either transform visions of cultural structure, or reiterate them, Hollinshead believes that it has the power to proclaim visions of culture in forms disseminated via institutions or authoritative agents (i.e., professionals). However, for Hollinshead these visions of culture *are not being generated by institutions*, instead, they reside in deep-seated discourses, circulating in the cultural field. For Hollinshead (1999, p. 271), tourism as practice does not just mirror 'fixed' worlds, it changes the ways they are understood symbolically and materially, 'by tapping into repositories of situated inheritances and heritages'. Tourism is performative for both professionals and locals, who can modify the scripts of power with their performances. Following Archer's (1998, p. 63) logic, like most social rituals, tourism draws on the 'activities of the long dead', to produce variable versions of material, moral and symbolic change/stasis through living agents - a point also supported by Hollinshead (1999) in his earlier work.

Despite any conceptual and theoretical differences, following both theorists, we can conclude that tourism is not just a way of knowing, but being and becoming via multiple 'conversations' with the self and the 'world'. Another shared tenet in these scholars' work is that the couple performance/re-production (i.e., doing/ catering for tourism), transforms the professional or amateur culture writer into a contributor (structured agent) to real-world changes. Archer can help us to focus on the ways professionals articulate social tendencies through their biographical encounters with reality and Hollinshead to focus specifically on ways imagining and reimagining/designing tourism instils social and political reflexivity ('praxis') in the organisations and communities involved in tourism. For Hollinshead, professionals can generate worlds of tourism by tapping into instillations, repertoires, storylines, or standpoints 'that are important to [a] given or found "authorising" management or mediating agency' (Hollinshead and Suleman 2018, pp. 202–203). Where Hollinshead builds a macro-social scaffolding to consider the role of tourism professionalism, Archer helps us with the micro-social dimensions of ethnographic research into the multiple dynamics of professional agency. For critical ethnographic researchers, accustomed to Hollinshead's more abstract vocabulary of worldmaking, Archer provides an entry point to individual action for or against tourist markets, as she thinks in terms of family or community associations. Also, with Archer's thesis, a critical tourism ethnographer can proceed to examine the ways worldmaking scripts are structured and contested by native worldmakers, who reflect on their own position in the inheritances/heritages with which they grew up. The proof is in the test, which follows a brief presentation of our methodology.

Methodology

We discuss Sri Lanka's heritage design upon the consideration of local travel writers belonging to three broad categories of writing and representation contributing to the creation of distinctive versions of the country. Among this cohort are those identified as tourism writers, who produce promotional travel material for commercial magazines, websites and other such material, travel journalists who contribute content to local English newspapers and finally travel bloggers who wield their personal travel narratives via online blogs.

We perform content and discourse analysis of 25 travel narratives published in Explore Sri Lanka and Serendib (inflight magazine of SriLankan Airlines), two widely reputed and distributed commercial magazines within the country. In addition, we mobilise content from three independently maintained but influential travel blog sites: Three Sugars in my Tea, Nadeepaws, and NatnZin. These analyses were supported by in-depth interviews with 17 local travel writers belonging to three broad categories of writing outlined below. Among this cohort of writers interviewed and placed under discussion are seven writers - all directly employed for tourism promotion. The initial six writers had all contributed to the magazines, Explore Sri Lanka, and Serendib. None of them was employed by these magazines at the time of the interviews, and only two were engaged in writing as a career, whereas the others had all moved on into other professions or were unemployed at the time. Five interviews were conducted with journalists, who contribute to local English newspapers. Another five interviews were conducted with independent bloggers, who maintained their own blog sites (two of whom work on a single blog site as a couple: working as the writer and the photographer). The degree of professionalism in the interviewees' engagement with heritage tourism design was intentionally dissociated from their employment, so as to think of designing as a dynamic but also asynchronous process of co-creation of similar conceptions of 'heritage'.

Adopting a design perspective calls for an evaluation of process: the 'how' behind the staging of disparate ideas of culture as heritage. This involves borrowing from the visual arts (visualising heritage via technologies, such as photography and cinema) and embodied travel into sites of visualisation (prospective heritage sites) in styles invoking the situationist movement. Such hybrid genres are constitutive of belonging in a mobile world in which communities are constituted both terrestrially and digitally (Germann Molz 2012). Focusing on designing instead of design highlights the involvement of different native agents in heritage tourism concepts. It is significant, for example, that the contribution of female travel writers to this process is largely downplayed in tourism studies and native work contexts, as gender norms produce heritage; or that these women largely work in the digital labour sector.

At first it seems that these writers engage in acts of 'worldmaking' only as 'captives' of colonial mentality (Alatas 1974): that they are pre-programmed in their gaze or aesthetically conditioned and politically pre-imbued with what is worth seeing and celebrating (Hollinshead et al. 2009). However, we argue that leading to these acts of worldmaking, they also engage in some form of internal conversation enabling different forms of projection in relation to tourism. We assert, following Archer (2012), that within a context of late modernity in Sri Lanka there is no direct, well-defined, or clear norm or role to simply internalise through socialisation. Instead, the process is to be reconceptualised as 'relational reflexivity' (Archer 2012). Individuals draw upon their socially determined yet personal powers of reflexivity when it comes to their course of action in relation to the nature and uniqueness of the circumstances they come across (Archer 2012).

Accordingly, we scrutinise the way in which these writers engage in internal conversations constituting dialogues that they exercise inwardly whereby they define and clarify their beliefs, attitudes and goals, and delineate projects built upon their main concerns (Caetano 2015). These writers are reflexive beings who deliberate about their circumstances, determining their own courses of action in society (Archer 2003). However, there is no homogeneity in the way they exercise reflexivity. There is a sense of mental privacy and subjectivity through which each writer surveys and evaluates their external circumstances leading to their actions. Whereas colonial influences may appear in the ways they design tourism in their writings, what takes precedence is the 'here and know' pragmatic circumstances in which they write. This generates a dynamic engagement with the past, which can often be seen as a resource, rather than a value, in a project of escape from other community values that endorse inequalities or unwanted career pathways.

Results and Discussion

In what follows, we attempt to examine the Sri Lankan travel writers in terms of what is identified as internal conversation at a crucial point: when 'reflexivity' transforms into 'critical engagement' with the material and symbolic conditions and constrictions these travel writers have to overcome and/or negotiate. To equip our research with a sound methodology, we concede that situationism (performing travels to such future or established heritage spots) enables their technological representations/visualisation (Jensen 2014, pp. 28–35), and grants such representations with verisimilitude (alleged 'credibility'). However, it is wrong to assume that the same designers carry the task from start to finish: someone may be commencing the process of imagining place and culture and someone else may be taking over, refining, redefining or even usurping such ideas to systematically trade them as tourism.

Communicative Reflexives

Many of the professional Sri Lankan travel writers engage in or have engaged in what is identified as communicative reflexivity. However, this reflexive exercise does not necessarily influence the nature and logic of the travel writing they produce. This transition from communicative contexts to professional reflexivity that does not necessarily adhere to family values, has mainly been as they had initially commenced their careers often employed by publishers or as freelance journalists. Communicative reflexives are those that engage in an internal deliberative process upon constant external influence and consultation - particularly given the nature of Sri Lankan society, where family and kinship ties are strong and stable. For instance, decisions about becoming travel writers have been to them strongly predisposed by both nuclear and extended family.

'Kate' provides a good example of a communicative reflexive whose social environment has effectively influenced her decisions and actions particularly in acquiring her professional travel writing position. Kate expressed her high regard for her new urban middle-class family (Hettige 1996) with the guidance of whom she stated that she had become a travel writer for the reputable magazines *Explore Sri Lanka* and *Serendib*. She explained the way in which her mother had encouraged her from a young age to learn English, emphasising its significance for future employability and success. As a young adult, she had left for the US to follow an undergraduate degree in Economics. Another characteristic of communicative reflexives is that they share their concerns with significant others around them and seek to resolve issues often interpersonally. 'Kate' explained that upon returning to Sri Lanka after her undergraduate studies she had sought work opportunities and that it was her mother who had directed her to acquire the travel writer position, while she had been applying for NGOs unsuccessfully (Interview with 'Kate' 2018).

A friend of 'Kate', 'Pricilla', who has worked for the aforementioned magazines also made statements revealing strong and stable relationships with her family. She maintained for instance, that her habit of reading which she had picked up from her family made her a good writer in English. 'Pricilla' explained how she had access to a collection of old English classics that were handed down from her grandfather to her mother and to her. Writing in English certainly affects the ways heritage is communicated to travel magazine readers – it bears the stamp of colonial deliberation. However, priority over such lay influences had an entrenched insecurity regarding what constitutes a 'professional' style of writing. These writers appear not to rely completely on autonomous internal conversations - they are mistrustful about arriving at the right decisions and achieving appropriate actions. 'Pricilla' reflects that she was 'always on edge' on her first few days as a travel writer for the aforementioned most widely distributed and reputed magazines in the country. She would often resort to asking her boss: 'okay I met these people and got these many stories and seem to have covered this much… how do I write this?' (Interview with 'Pricilla' 2018). Thus, evidently, family ties were important in the selection of professional orientation, but guidance in writing was not. 'Pricilla' went on to describe that writing for these magazines often meant perusing older issues and following the established styles of writing adopted by these magazines through time. Whilst her statement suggests a communicative reflexive process it also crucially denotes how this leads to orchestrating and perpetuating a particular national image led by a Western-centric promotional agenda and a tourist gaze shaped by centuries of images. 'Priscilla' further established that writing for commercial travel magazines was a constant effort at exclusively depicting the country in a positive light. This she argued involved a certain kind of language involving 'a lot of unnecessary elaboration…too much detail and kind of make things look very romantic' (Interview with Pricilla 2018).

Significantly, tourism writers such as 'Pricilla' represented the tea industry and culture of Sri Lanka. The tea heritage is a pivotal selling point within the country's tourism sector initiated by the British in the 1870s, during the colonial era within the historic city of Kandy. Since independence Sri Lanka's tea and its associated attractions have been continuously fostered, combining the national culture and colonial heritage as part of the tourism promotion agenda. Loolecondera located in Hantana, Kandy, is the first tea estate in the country where the industry had been born in 1867 when Sri Lanka was still a British colony under the superintendence of the Scottish planter James Taylor. Currently home to a tea museum, a popular tourism destination, much is written about in travel magazines about this. *Loolecondera: The Beginning of an Illustrious Brew* and *Preserving a 150 Year Legacy Ceylon Tea: The Brew that Put an Island on the Map, Exuberant Ceylon Tea, Ceylon Tea a Brew Loved World Over, Ceylon Tea – Soothing the World* and *Ceylon Tea Celebrates 145 Years* are some of the features that portray this particular tea estate. In each of these the estate is portrayed as being enveloped in history, timeless and unchanged. The writers attempt to instil in the reader a nostalgia for a bygone era as often practiced in the promotion of heritage tourism (Caton and Santos 2007). Thus, the Loolecondera estate is not only depicted as an escape into nature and scenic landscape but also characteristically existing outside of time and space (Jayathilaka, 2019). In an article to which 'Pricilla' contributed we read that visitors, who are interested in the tea production process and the 'history of Ceylon Tea, can visit the Tea Museum in Hantane, Kandy for a glimpse into the past' (Rajapakse and Nanayakkara 2011). The journey and experience suggest that this tea estate is 'timeless'. Hence, these writers are engaged in circulating and perpetuating the foundational tourism imaginaries or assemblages. These established ways of seeing contain messages of colonialism (Said 1978) led by an 'imperialist gaze' grounded on nostalgia, the empire and imperialist myths (Brito-Henriques 2014). These professional writers' representations of places, people, and culture of Sri Lanka as timeless, mysterious, exotic or enchanting follow on from colonial representations and an acquired Western-centric lens of looking at the country. This pattern points to an indeterminate relationship vis-à-vis community values, in that these writers begin to reproduce learned by their middle-class families colonial habits, subjected to the styles of the market, which often reinforces them.

This slow rift between native and market or colonial influences is evident in 'Kate's' and 'Pricilla's' decisions regarding their education or career as writers and major influencers or mentors. 'Pricilla', for instance, further revealed that it was through a friend who worked for the magazines that she had obtained the opportunity to join the organisation. This also brings us to what Archer described as 'contextual continuity' (Archer 2003, p. 185): the close and continuous personal relationships between family members which are then complemented by lasting friendships. Incidentally, this recurs in non-professional travel writing. 'Natalie', 'Anna' and 'Amali' are three interviewed bloggers who demonstrated some of these features and 'Lucy', 'Tania' and 'Irene' were three travel journalists whose statements also confirmed their communicative reflexivity. These examples demonstrate that communicative reflexivity is a co-product of structure and agency where, structurally, there is evidence of a context that is continuously accessed by the writers throughout their key transitional points and that agentially, they define their work and successes within their new socio-cultural backgrounds (Archer 2003).

In the Sri Lankan context, communicative reflexivity is supposed to have a resurgent nature, because it allegedly wishes to preserve 'native' structures of thought and 'undo' colonial patterns. This can have diverse results, as often breaking free from colonial customs can be replaced with investing into new forms of international paternalism that bring back imperialist styles of action. Illustrations of this paradox appear in interviews with writers from various other categories of writing apart from tourism writing, where family or friends had paid an active role in their acquiring their travel writer positions. 'Natalie', for instance, explained how she had acquired her passion for travel from her mother who is a journalist and political activist by travelling with her from childhood. She had also been influenced by a friend who worked for an NGO. 'Natalie' stated that with time she had developed an interest in sharing these particular places, people and experiences, and her blog writing was influenced by these travels with her mother and her friends. The activist past of 'Natalie's' family is present in the content of her blogging which also has a strong aesthetic dimension we associate with vacationing and collecting impressions. Given the nature of Sri Lankan society and culture, many of the writers are communicative reflexives influenced by both schooling and work, which already encloses colonial attitudes in its engagement with native heritage. As a result, what emerges as 'heritage tourism' is the legacy of colonial acculturation of the Sri Lankan middle classes into Western patterns of touring the 'native interior'.

Autonomous Reflexives: Metamorphosis to Independent Writers

Unlike in the previous case, some other interviewed travel writers appeared to be individualistic and independent. 'Zin', who maintains a travel blog with her partner 'Nat', explained how she had struggled to stablish a career as a freelance writer while travelling around Sri Lanka and maintaining her travel blog. She argued: 'at the end of the day you need to do what makes you happy. You can't satisfy everyone around you' (Interview with 'Zin' 2018). Speaking of her education and influences on her writing career 'Zin' explained how, after studying Environmental Studies at the University for two weeks meeting her parents' expectations, she joined a different institute to study a degree in English literature following her own passion. At the time of the interview 'Zin' had left home, started studying English and Sociology and to support herself financially had started working for a clothing brand as a social media executive. Despite her parents' dissatisfaction with her choice her determination to follow her passion to become a blogger had grown stronger. In order to become a travel writer, she had to disengage herself from her collective background, so she moved from her hometown Kandy to the capital Colombo. The dense and continuous network of family and friends has been absent from 'Zin's' background upon leaving her hometown and after having met and made friends with travellers from abroad at a backpackers' hostel in Colombo and being familiarised with travel blogging, she had developed her own passion to become a freelance writer and travel blogger. Since then, she had sought opportunities to build a portfolio and develop her writing. Many of the other travel bloggers working for magazines such as those mentioned above and promoting tourism also demonstrated this form of reflexivity. They had decided to resign and step into their own personal writing upon the development of their self-knowledge as well as knowledge about society.

Instead of engaging in writing to promote tourism as in the previous case, autonomous reflexive writers such as 'Zin' move away from representations of places that perpetuate the 'othering' of non-Western, developing countries following a way of seeing by the early colonists during periods of European expansion (Echtner and Prasad 2003, Stone and Nyaupane 2019). Instead, they become independent internet entrepreneurs and write about Sri Lanka in their own way. Provided their self-confidence in their own internal conversations these writers declare themselves to be led by the belief that they, and everyone else, should take personal responsibility for themselves, which is not only demonstrated by the ways that they travel but also their writing. Thus, we argue that they engage in the promotion of what they identify as 'responsible' travel.

For instance, 'Zin' travels with her partner 'Nat' via the often-erratic Sri Lankan public transport in search of the unexplored non-touristic destinations, staying with residents of small communities, thereby experiencing local cultures about which they write stories and share via their online blogs (Jayathilaka 2019). She revealed that they often seek hidden and off-the-beaten-track places to visit and write about and promote how to travel responsibly. They are advocates of community-based travel, where they endeavour to promote small-scale local travel related businesses, such as home-stays and local restaurants. In one of her articles Zin writes:

> I often think what I love the most about this island is its people. I'm not trying to romanticize the island…I love it when Ibrahim came five kilometres to find our bus just so he could return my floppy hat and our lens cap. I love it when a thambili [native variety of king coconut] aunty in Tangalle giggles about how Nathan looks like a South Indian actor. I love it when a small family in Nanu Oya welcome us and feed us string-hoppers, and lentils curry even when our stomachs are full (Nathan and Zinara 2018).

This form of writing contrasts with that discussed in the previous case where the natural beauty is exoticized. Another such writer is 'Harriet', described her attitude towards the taming of elephants in Sri Lanka and their exploitation for cultural festivals. Elaborating on an article she had to write for a commercial magazine to promote the Kandy Esala Perahera (religious and cultural procession held every August in the city), Harriet stated how her perspective had changed with time: she was assigned to write about how the elephants are dressed, but she thought that the resulting product was a typically romanticised, glorified representation of the event and objectification of animals. Harriet's perception of elephants shifted after she had learned about harm caused to these animals through domestication – so, 'now, I'd rather write about the controversial stuff' (Interview with Harriet 2018).

Upon online publication, writers such as Zin use their blogs to promote themselves and their writing and are commissioned by various businesses such as restaurants, hotels, or guesthouses to experience and write about these places. Foremost, however, they have had to establish themselves as travel bloggers, acquire a substantial following and promote themselves through social media before this occurs. Thus, while they promote distinct ways of travelling, they also earn through these commercial collaborations and social media, making them more entrepreneurial than the previously discussed group.

Meta-Reflexive Travel Bloggers

Many of the investigated travel writers have engaged in some form of autonomous reflexivity particularly during their transformation from professional tourism writers or journalists to independent travel bloggers. These bloggers were also seen to engage in a great deal of meta-reflexivity. The meta-reflexive writers appeared to share 'contextual discontinuity' with the 'autonomous reflexives' (Archer 2003, p. 258). Above all, they appeared not to be firmly rooted in a single context, as made evident through their extensive travels to remote, far away locations in the country. At the same time, the accounts of their experiences seem to contain uniform critiques of society as they appeared to be preoccupied especially with distributive social injustice: they are deeply concerned for the oppressed and the deprived.

'Natalie', one of the travel bloggers, provides a good example of this form of reflexivity. Employed as a content writer for an international organisation, 'Natalie' travels for pleasure, and had just begun blogging about her travels and experiences. On the one hand, she rebuked published content of mainstream tourism which she argued was commercially driven working solely to accentuate the 'the nicer side of Sri Lanka' (Interview with 'Natalie' 2018) and identified this as merely an effort to attract international tourists, gain profit and earn tourism revenue. Claiming that she does not want to write for magazines such as *Explore Sri Lanka*, Natalie asserted her disregard for the 'one-sided' representations such magazines offered. Instead, through her writing 'Natalie' strives to convey experiences of a more independent, 'wholesome' nature with no time limitations to explore, deadlines or editorial requirements set by a certain magazine or employer. Natalie explained why this form of travelling is more enriching than that of tourism writers when they are commissioned to write about a place:

> It's two different areas of writing I guess; I don't like this resort type of thing. I tried it once. I went to like a posh place like for Rs. 30,000 a night or whatever and people don't even look at you. But I've stayed at *gewal* [houses] in a village in *Matale* [small town in centra province] where there was no place to stay, no B&Bs even you know, and we slept on the floor, we ate what they gave, and we got to give them some money. So that's the kind of traveller that I am. I have a friend too she does beautiful pieces about the real problems at the ground level of Sri Lanka, and for me, that is the ideal type of travelling (Interview with 'Natalie' 2018).

Natalie and the other travel bloggers engage regularly in 'budget travelling' during their spare time not only to learn but also present a more 'authentic' picture of Sri Lankan life, culture, and traditions. One criterion through which these Sri Lankan travel writers define authenticity is by identifying places, locations, and people 'untouched' and 'unspoiled' by tourism often in rural, but nonetheless touristic regions (Noy 2004, p. 85). In other words, the less travelled place and the more difficult path is often associated with being a wholesome experience with a degree of authenticity. In one of her blog articles about a tea estate in the hidden corner of the historic city of Kandy, 'Amalie', another blogger, writes:

> We've felt the distance of the journey, just how long the road is from the town, and when the people begin to tell us of all the hardships they've faced, it makes the journey seem longer. The bright lights of Kandy and *Hantana* light up around the mountain, so high up they seem to ring the peak, yet those living so close to the summit have a different kind of story to tell (De Sayrah 2015).

The last phrase demonstrates the element of authenticity and sincerity the travel bloggers endeavour to bring out through their writing. Natalie stated that opting to stay at small-scale guest houses and homestays also benefits rural communities and help community-based businesses by offering advice on marketing, setting up websites or social media profiles.

These actions and perceptions of the five bloggers interviewed, also point in the direction of volunteer tourism as its ideals are based on making a positive contribution to the social, natural and economic environment of places they travel to, where both the volunteer and the host community benefit from the experience (Ooi and Laing 2010). As such, these are some of the ways in which the bloggers attempt to escape the passivity and commercialism of tourism and seek authenticity (Azariah 2012, Hulme and Youngs 2002). On the one hand, what 'Natalie' and the four other bloggers seek is holistic and demonstrative of meta-reflexivity: a life wholly aligned as an expression of their ideal (Archer 2003, p. 259). On the other, these alternative ways of experiencing the country derive from pre-existing Western concepts such as 'backpacking' 'pro-poor tourism', 'volunteer tourism' or 'community development'. What they adopt are these already stamped Western discourses about tourism, humanity, social change or development, and blogging - the tool with which they raise their arguments - points to the westernisation of heritage design.

Also, exemplary of 'Natalie's' meta-reflexive thinking is how her travel narratives tap into some grave social issues within the tea estate sector of Sri Lanka. Whist writing about her travels to the tea growing regions, she portrays social issues such as poverty, poor health and inaccessibility to housing, healthcare, or education by the tea estate workers. She also focuses on some of the persisting gender inequalities whereby women are compelled to work more both in terms of time and volume but denied adequate facilities and the right to reproduction, leadership even at the grass-roots level in an entirely patriarchal plantation social structure. Sri Lanka's 'few major cities, including Colombo' is evolving rapidly, she says. 'We have roads and fancy buildings and education and jobs and houses', but not many of these ' "evolutions" have graced the lives of poor people (NadeePaws 2015).

'Zin', who was discussed as an autonomous reflexive writer also demonstrates features of meta-reflexive thinking upon functioning as a traveller and blogger. Like 'Natalie', 'Zin' and her partner also travel to remote places in Sri Lanka, usually on impulse with little planning or prior organising, using public transport and community-based, low-budget accommodation. While writing about the beauty of these destinations they frequent, they also feel that it is their responsibility to protect these places, help the host communities and ensure they share the message of sustainability amongst their readers the result of which is their travel blog *NatnZin*. Nat and Zin explained that through their blog, they also endeavour to promote a 'different kind of travel' (Interview with 'Nat' and 'Zin' 2018). As part of this agenda the duo of bloggers focus on some of the social, environmental, and social costs to tourism. For instance, through their blog post *Nine Reasons Why We Dislike Sri Lanka's South Coast* the duo portray photographs of litter-strewn roadsides inclusive of non-degradable plastic waste. Claiming that the tourism industry is 'taking over the island as never before' (Nathan and Zinara 2017), they also emphasise issues such as coastal erosion:

> What might have opened up the tourism industry in the South Coast? The beaches. Those sandy far-stretched beaches once existed. Now, there's only a little of it. Kudos, humans, you've killed it. There's coastal erosion...Some parts have become narrower than ever that in some years, the waves may wash you over as you're sitting in a Matara-Weligama private bus (Nathan and Zinara 2017).

Through the cases thus far discussed we attempted to examine the way in which the local Sri Lankan travel writers exercise reflexivity through internal conversation, a process that negotiates the effects of structure upon agency. More elaborately, reflexivity was examined as an internal dialogue, which actuates the causal powers of structures where writers project their actions based on the articulation between personal concerns and the conditions that make it possible to accomplish them (Caetano 2015). As posited by Archer, such facilitation relies on agents wielding their personal authority 'to formulate projects and to monitor both self and society in the pursuit of their designs' (Archer 2003, p. 298). We argue therefore, that all these writers are seen as capable of this. The final type of reflexivity that Archer discusses, the "fractured reflexive" thinkers whose powers of reflexivity have been suspended and therefore no longer engage subjectively with the objective environments they encounter were not among the writers of this study.

Conclusion

In this article we have focused on the *designing* rather than design of heritage tourism mobilities in Sri Lanka. In more general terms, our model replaces Jensen's (2014) focus on 'design' as a fixed creative property with designing as creativity in motion, here collaborative and solidary, there conflictual and endorsing creative inequalities. To consider design in motion, we developed a transferrable reflexive methodological framework of tourism worldmaking as a dynamic process of co-creation and/or asynchronous but progressive creation of similar conceptions of 'heritage'. We thus explored the promotional work of Sri Lankan travel writers to demonstrate the complexity and ambiguity of designing tourism imaginaries.

Through in-depth investigation of interviews and published resources, we have concluded that the social identity of Sri Lankan travel writing is defined at the intersection of class and gender, rather than ethnic specificity exclusively. Whilst certain visions/versions of Sri Lanka derive from cultural discourses mediated through structures that exist independently of the writers, they are part of a reflexive process modulating the writers' 'conversations' with the self and the world. Tourism writers who engage in a communicative reflexive process reiterate 'family' norms and values. In consultation with and help from family and friends, they settle into their professional travel writing roles and often comprehend Sri Lanka and its heritage as a lifeworld founded on Western structures of beliefs. When these writers move along in their careers and gradually develop self-knowledge, they engage in autonomous reflexivity, often becoming internet entrepreneurs and engaging in travel writing to raise awareness about the various conditions of places and people that tourism often exoticizes and romanticises. Meta-reflexive travel writers become entrepreneurial activists aiming to bring tourist markets and communities in a dialogue beneficial for the latter.

Archer's generic focus on the power of family inheritances over individual choice and Hollinshead's notion of worldmaking as an abstracted multimodal force, here espousing structural integration, there agential forms of mobilities design, transform into blends of other and self-directed action. By this we point to the conscious engineering of national heritage as a progressive motion to the future. This 'motion'produces a version of modern human, who is capable of modulating their biological and ecological interests via a combination of cybernetic routes and roots (Fuller 2012): a meta-traveller into one's interior of sorts.

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Athens Journal of Tourism - Volume 8, Issue 4, December 2021 – Pages 233-246

Can Loyalty be extended to Airlines? An Inquisition from Air Passengers

By Sam Sarpong[*]

Airlines have always sought to engage with passengers by resorting to customer loyalty programmes. The exigency for this is that customers drive businesses and loyalty constitutes a means to sustainable business. The loyalty programmes by airlines has been a driving force behind customer loyalty since the early 1980s. The study uses a narrative inquiry to explore the extent to which passengers have become acquainted with it. It also examines whether passengers can be loyal to airlines and under what conditions this can prevail. Its findings suggest that although air passengers are prepared to forge closer ties with the airlines, they often see the airlines as reneging on their pledge to offer reciprocal terms of this loyal arrangement.

Keywords: *customer loyalty, airlines, frequent flyer, passengers, reward systems*

Introduction

The competitive landscape of the global airline industry has been in a constant change in recent years (Wegner et al. 2012). Uncertainty in the marketplace, high fuel costs, environmental concerns, dwindling passenger numbers and other issues have seriously affected the fortunes of the industry (Sentance 2012). Airlines have, thus, been under increasing pressure to demonstrate superior services through innovative schemes in order to attract more passengers (Zuidberg 2014). Aside from the recent developments, the Covid-19 pandemic, which has engulfed the world, has also added to the already disturbing fate of the airline industry (Pascual and Cain 2021, Maneenop and Kotcharin 2020).

With many aviation sources presenting a grim situation for the airline industry, airlines are now striving to turn the industry around (Deloitte 2020). This has spurred them to initiate various means to optimise, strengthen and scale up plans to help the airline industry to get back on track. Incidentally, one of the areas opened to the industry is creating innovative strategies for customer loyalty (Pascual and Cain 2021). As such, loyalty programmes, a marketing strategy which is used to attract and retain business, have become very popular within the airline industry of late (Deloitte 2020). Through these loyalty programmes, companies are able to create some value by motivating new and existing customers (Reichheld and Sasser 1990).

But with 'loyalty' remaining a seemingly ill-defined concept, the need to explore what it is and the gains that parties in this arrangement can derive from it, seems quite essential. For instance, it is important to know whether loyalty programmes ensure a win-win situation for both passengers and airlines. How can loyalty to an airline be beneficial to a passenger? Would it guarantee a situation

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which can translate into huge revenues and growth for the firms or is loyalty rather a blind allegiance by a customer to a brand? What is the purpose of being loyal to a firm at all? If loyalty is indeed a feeling, an action, and above all, a clear sign of a brand's message resonating with their customers, then how does that work in the airline industry?

The paper takes cognisance of the above issues and examines the factors that affect customer loyalty and retention in the airline industry. It is particularly interested in ways in which passengers can be loyal to their choice of airlines, what the motivation is and how these passengers deal with situations like that. The paper subjects these to interrogation in order to determine how organisational life and the social understanding of individuals can lead to loyalty for a brand.

The study's premise is on a narrative inquiry. It uses the experiences of air passengers to provide the needed narrative. The resort to this is because a narrative provides an insight into two realms: (i) the realm of experience, where individuals detail their experience regarding certain events and deliberate on their subjective meaning onto these experiences; and (ii) the realm of narrative means (or devices) that are put to use in order to make (this) sense (Bamberg 2012). The unique thing about this approach is that the respondents were interviewed during chance meetings on a number of flights. The discussions were mainly centred on customer loyalty and its significance for both the airlines and customers.

The paper begins with an introduction to the issue under consideration. This is then followed by a review of the literature on customer loyalty, and then a focus on loyalty within the aviation industry. A brief is then devoted to the narrative inquiry and how it can be applied in the context of the study. A further explanation is offered for the approach adopted by the paper. Subsequently, the findings and discussions section is ushered in and the conclusion comes after that.

Creating a Customer Focus Approach

The continuous existence and growth of a company in today's complex business environment demands a broad vision as well as strong strategies aimed at customer relationship management (Baran et al. 2008). As such, companies need to understand and assess the potential of retaining customers since having loyal customers creates a situation in which organisations can develop an effective winning strategy (KPMG, 2016). That said, there is every indication that organisations become more successful when they embrace a customer-oriented approach in their deliberations (Narver et al. 2000). This is often done especially by creating a customer-centric company structure, in which the entire organisational activities are subject to the objectives of understanding, attracting and retaining the most valuable customers.

A customer-centric orientation, therefore, implies the mobilisation of resources primarily to identify, engage, acquire and retain by improving customer service and meeting their needs. According to Shah et al. (2006) it is the alignment of activities and resources of an organisation to effectively search for and respond to the ever-changing needs of the customer, whilst building mutually beneficial relationships. It is above all, a strategic approach that enhances a business's competitiveness and increases its profitability (Deloitte 2020). Currently, companies are realising that customer centricity provides the best means to develop close and profitable relationships with their customers (Day 1999). This approach helps to ensure business sustainability and the alignment of all aspects of the relationship with customers in a way that delivers true competitive advantage for the business and also engages their loyalty (Jorgenson 2015).

Seeking Loyalty among Customers

The use of loyalty programmes has become quite popular now as a means to encourage customer loyalty. Managers of organisations typically believe that it is desirable and expected for a properly executed loyalty rewards programme to increase usage of company's product or service offering (O'Brien and Jones 1995). Loyalty programmes have, therefore, become a key component of customer relationship management (Kivetz and Simonson 2003). Henderson et al. (2011, p. 58) have defined a loyalty programme as 'any institutionalised incentive system that attempts to enhance consumers' consumption behaviour over time. According to Sharp and Sharp (1997), they are structured marketing efforts that reward and therefore encourage loyal buying behaviour, which is potentially beneficial to the firm.

Many researchers have acknowledged the significance of loyalty in service industries (Asuncion et al. 2004). Gomez et al. (2006) believe loyal customers are highly attractive to businesses because they are less price sensitive and require a lower effort to communicate with. Hence, in a bid to strengthen relations with their customers, organisations have begun to show renewed interest in customer loyalty programmes (Deloitte 2020). This has come to the fore because customer loyalty is a proven way not just to sustain market share but also to grow it (KPMG 2016).

Today, customer loyalty has become the new mantra for sustained growth and profitability. It is regarded as crucial for any organisation (Gravier 2013) since it is specific to inter-human relations. It is seen by Brink and Berndt (2008) as a customer's willingness to have a close relationship with a firm on a long-term basis. Tellis (1988) goes further to describe it as repeat purchasing frequency or relative volume of same-brand purchasing. Central to this notion of loyalty is that, loyalty is linked to some kind of gain or reward that induces someone to stay or repeat behaviour (Rai and Medha, 2013). But one aspect of this is that, it is not possible to show one line of action that drives customer loyalty, as it is heavily reliant on customers and their individual experiences with a brand (Hyken 2018). Memorable, enjoyable, novel and engaging consumption experiences are all seen as critical in customer experiences. Formation of customer loyalty is, therefore, a thorough process that involves a series of customers' evaluative judgements and other psychographic variables that stem from these service evaluations (Rai and Medha 2013).

Types of Loyalty Programmes

Loyalty programmes are now used in many areas of business. They are structured in such ways that they provide the issuance of membership cards like: loyalty cards, rewards card, advantage card or club card which all identify the card holder as a member in a loyalty programme. They reward and encourage loyal buying behaviour among consumers. A typical loyalty programme includes five elements; a database, an enrolment process, rewards, value-added or soft benefits and customer recognition (Arantola 2000).

Loyalty Schemes in the Service and Leisure Industry

There is mounting evidence that organisational structures are evolving toward closer alignment with markets, especially for firms that are implementing solutions, strategies, and/or with assertive customers that want a single point of contact (Day 1999). Large companies striving for increased market share, scale, and efficiency therefore, try to compensate for the loss of personal relationships by using database marketing or sophisticated market research techniques to target valuable customers (O'Brien and Jones 1995). The sheer size of certain companies requires that in order to draw in their most valuable customers, they should have in mind the principles of effective value sharing. This requires such companies to provide effective considerations to their best customers in order to maximise their loyalty (Kim and Park 2017). By this means, customers who generate superior profits for a company are given the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of that value creation (Jorgenson 2015). This, therefore, connects them more to the company and enhances their loyalty to it. Crucially, this involves rewarding those customers who have stayed faithful to the companies. Rewards can and do build customers' loyalty, and most companies now appreciate how valuable that loyalty can be (Meyer-Waarden and Benavent 2006).

The leisure and hospitality industry has strenuously used the loyalty system to reward its customers (Deloitte 2020). The industry which includes a broad category of fields such as lodging, food services, event planning, theme parks, transportation and other tourism-oriented products and services, have various loyalty systems for their customers ranging from reward systems for guests who stay in hotels and resorts for leisure purposes or frequent users of particular services, among others. The promotions of loyalty programmes have become quite common today to the extent that consumers are now so inured to offers promising them a variety of exclusive things (Pascual and Cain 2021). To this end, customers now have certain levels of expectations about the service and leisure industry in terms of what they stand to gain from their association with some of these service operators or even on airlines as frequent flyers (Deloitte 2020).

Loyalty Schemes in the Airline Industry

In the case of airlines, the rewards offered include frequent flyer programmes which comprise accumulation of flight miles for future redemption against discounted or cheap flight tickets, affiliation with star alliances, special rewards for frequent flyers and other perks. The homogeneity of airline services has forced customer service quality to emerge as a principal factor in gaining a competitive advantage within the industry (Narver et al. 2000. Many airlines are often keen to offer quality services that can differentiate them from their key competitors. The loyalty scheme has therefore been touted as a good means to reach out to customers (Arantola 2000, Narver et al. 2000).

As acknowledged by KPMG (2016), the success of an airline depends upon its knowledge of its customers and its ability to device marketing campaigns that can suit the preferences of target groups. A careful identification of the most important attributes of airline services that can satisfy the needs of passengers and also provide an understanding of the best way to achieve passenger loyalty, seem very paramount more than ever (Dolnicar et al. 2011). Hence, factors leading to loyalty and their consequences in terms of loyalty behaviours are worth looking into, in that, they stand to provide us with a clear understanding of what might lead to effective loyalty practices and also offer a concrete base for designing an effective loyalty programmes for the airline industry.

Numerous studies have been conducted in recent years attempting to understand people's choices of airline patronage (Dolnicar et al. 2011). These studies have been quite diverse (see Suzuki 2007). Many of these have tried to explain in one way or the other the airline and their loyalty programmes, how consumers make their choices regarding airline selections as well as the experiences people carry when they enjoy certain experiential offerings (Dolnicar et al. 2011). Varied reasons for the selection of airlines have often engaged our attention. Most of these have bordered on: price; safety record of airline, or lack of one; mileage accrual and benefits; on-board facilities; schedule, baggage allowances, recommendations from friends, among others (O'Connell and Williams 2005).

Suzuki (2007), meanwhile, has noted that the airline selection is a two-step process where consumers first select a subset of airlines in their choice set and then determine the winning airline in their second step. In terms of the factors that play a significant role in airline choice, Suzuki identifies the price of the air fare, frequency of flight services provided to the required destination and frequent flyer membership status. Indeed, airline selection attributes represent an impression that is created by diverse factors such as airline service and airline image, and may play a critical role in the decision making and motivation of passengers who select an airline (Kim and Park 2017). Therefore, for an airline to attract more passengers and remain competitive, a thorough understanding of the factors considered by passengers when selecting an airline is essential.

The varying levels of customer preferences in terms of the selection of airlines create the need for a more insight into this as there is now a strong demand for improved ways of delivering sustainable competitive advantage strategies due to the competitive nature of the airline industry (Siu et al. 2013). Whilst numerous factors play into each airline's ability to surpass their competitors, that consistency in terms of what customers expect, remains to be achieved. From an airline's perspective, providing service quality promotes competitive advantage and increases the prospect of enjoying ongoing passenger patronage and loyalty (Keller

2013) yet, customer loyalty is quite intricate and dynamic, it is ever changing and evolving over time (Johnson et. al. 2006). Hence, in order to survive and grow, airlines ought to find the best means of satisfying and retaining their customers. How this can be done depends on a number of factors. A major factor though would be for a firm's service delivery vision and organisational culture to be designed to ultimately provide customer value to the passenger (De Meyer and Mostert 2011).

Loyalty or frequent flyer programmes can therefore be built to provide stronger links with customers by providing increased satisfaction and value to passengers (Kim and Park 2017). Loyal customers are deemed to be people who would be willing to pay more and are less likely to be swayed by the competition. Loyalty is, therefore, principally valued for its outcomes since it amounts to the behaviour put up by loyal customers (O'Brien and Jones 1995). Hence, many companies strive to build customer loyalty and for good reasons too. However, an aspect yet to capture the attention of airline officials is that, part of what makes true loyalty so powerful is that it is emotional, rather than rational (Taylor 2016). According to Taylor, emotional loyalty entails a deeper level of commitment to an airline brand because the emotional tie goes beyond economic incentives. He argues further that, the rational consumer only stays as long as a certain value is being provided, but an emotional customer is more likely to stick with a brand.

But loyalty hinges on mutuality and parties involved ought to take each other's interests into consideration (Li 2015). The mutuality reinforces the position that one can be loyal to someone if that person is loyal to the other. In line with such expectations, we may assume that airlines from which passengers expect so much, might perform or pursue some good actions in line with the said expectations passengers have of them, so that they would have repeat custom from passengers. This implication is that businesses need to explore the concept of value more deeply so as to better understand what customers consider valuable to them (Jorgenson 2015).

Methodology

The methodology adopted for this research is a qualitative one. It is based on and reflects the researcher's chats with air passengers on various routes over a three-year period. Initially orchestrated as a routine chat often engaged in during the author's air travels between the UK and Asia, what emerged from this led to the development of a full study by the author. These were chance meetings with total strangers during walk-abouts on flights. These acquaintances were engaged during informal strolls during flights. Although discussions pertained to various issues, loyalty issues concerning air passengers, cropped up in the course of these chats. Experiences that resonate with each other led us to the connection the researcher had with the interviewees. It was as a result of this that the researcher decided to analyse the issue further. Through this means, it became possible to have an insight into air travellers engagement preferences from a point of lived experiences.

The study's major aim was to explore various factors that serve as antecedents to customer loyalty development. It, therefore, delved into customers' experiences with regards to the airlines they tend to patronise and the kind of relationship or bond they form with the said airlines. There was nothing formal about this approach. It was rather a shared conversation that threw up a lot of issues for discussions. The narratives were captured through mental notes which the researcher took in the course of the conversations during the interactions from 2017 to 2019. The study grouped together the views of 23 travellers on the subject of loyalty within the airline industry. Majority of the travellers were opened to engaging with the researcher and their other seatmates.

Creswell (2008) has provided an outline of how a narrative research can be conducted. The first, he claims, is to identify the problem. The next stage is to elicit responses from the participant through interviews, conversations, written accounts, artefacts and recordings that will provide stories their experiences. The next part is to retell the story to create a chronology of events that may include story elements of characters, setting, problem, actions and resolution. Active collaboration between the researcher and participants was vital during the entire research process. The researcher then composed the story of the participants' experiences, as suggested by Creswell. Finally, the narrative account was validated to ensure it represents accurately as possible the participants' stories.

Narrative Inquiry

In recent years the popularity and practice of narrative research methods or inquiry has grown significantly (Philpott 2014). A number of qualitative, in-depth interviewing techniques have been designed to elicit explicitly narrative accounts (Hollway and Jefferson 2008). Narrative approaches have also found their way into business-related disciplines as well. They have been used in marketing studies (Schau and Muniz 2006) and organisation studies (Gabriel 2000) among others. A narrative, in the context of narrative inquiry, is a story about a significant event or experience in a person's life. Stories can be viewed as a window onto a knowable reality. The stories offer us an insight into the narrators' experiences as they recall them at the time of the interview.

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience through "collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, p. 20). It focuses on people's narratives or stories either about themselves or a set of events, so there is an emphasis on emplotment (historiography) and characters. It is based on the premise that, as human beings, we tend to understand and give meaning to our lives or things around us through story telling or narration (Andrews et al. 2008). Such an inquiry, has relevance for our knowledge of the world of human interaction as it gives expressions to people to speak of their intentions and other issues concerning human interactions.

Bruner (1987) has argued that people construct meaning; they also make sense, and engage in a social nature through 'narrative' by chronicling events. More particularly, the field of narrative research involves engaging analytically with the ways in which people make sense of meaning and experiences, within the wider context of our social world (Bruner, 1987). Narratives whether attained through particular elicitation techniques, such as interviewing or initiated through interactional settings, are typically the outcome of a research stance or orientation. Narrative inquiry dwells on how meaning is conferred onto experience, especially in narratives of personal experience. It falls within the realm of qualitative research procedures and is also seen both as a method and the phenomenon of study.

Analysis

According to Gehart et al. (2007) in a narrative inquiry, analysis (meaning making) occurs throughout the research process rather than being a separate activity carried out after data collection. The process of 'data gathering' and 'analysis' therefore becomes a single harmonious and organic process, a situation which the researcher applied. Polkinghorne (2007) also gives credence to this by explaining that narrative research, just like conventional research, most often involves two performances: (a) the collection of evidence and (b) the analysis or interpretation of the evidence.

In terms of the evidence provided by the interviewees, the study noted the explanation offered by Polkinghorne (2007) that the purpose of the validation process is to convince readers of the likelihood that the support for the claim is strong enough and that the claim can serve as a basis for understanding of and action in the human realm. Again, the study took cognisance of the fact that validating knowledge claims is not a mechanical process but is, instead, an argumentative practice. As Polkinghorne (2007) explains, narrative researchers do not ask readers to grant validity to their claims only when they reach a level of near certainty about a claim, rather, readers are asked to make judgements on whether or not the evidence and argument convinces them at the level of plausibility, credibleness of the worthiness of a research knowledge claim in readers of the research. The argument here is that, it is the readers who make the judgment about the plausibility of a knowledge claim based on the evidence and argument for the claim reported by the researcher. Thus, as Polkinghorne (2007) reiterates, the confidence a reader grants to a narrative knowledge claim is a function of the cogency and soundness of the evidence-based arguments presented by the narrative researcher.

Results

The question of loyalty seemed a contentious one with the respondents. Whilst a considerable number of the respondents (83%) deemed the loyalty programme as very interesting, attractive and worthy of note, there were varied reasons that called for the repudiation of the programme. Some even claimed whilst some airlines faithfully honour their promises, others reneged on them. Again, the respondents noted that such programmes lack transparency and that claiming rewards is so cumbersome to them. Faced with how the airlines operate these schemes, all the respondents felt the issue of loyalty has not been properly positioned in the best interest of passengers.

Whilst admitting that loyalty is reciprocal, they, however, insisted that the expected reciprocity has not been forthcoming from the airlines. Many respondents (95%) stated that the airlines are more business-oriented to the extent that all they care about is to make a sound profit on their business, rather than reciprocating the gesture by customers. One respondent noted: "If the airlines are keen to ensure our loyalty then, they also ought to be loyal to us too." Another queried, "do you know the number of times I have to fly with the airline of my choice before I can even get to be rewarded? It is so ridiculous." The respondents were unanimous in their belief that reciprocal loyalty should become a new standard for effectively acquiring and retaining customers. They believe that the loyalty programme, for now, is so one-sided as it is only the passengers who are duly showing their loyalty to the airlines more than anything else.

In explaining further their perplexity, the respondents argued that since airlines demand loyalty, they (airlines) should, in turn, show reciprocity by also working in the best interest of passengers and by reducing ticket prices whenever possible for loyal passengers. The complaint was that ticket prices go up astronomically during the peak season, irrespective of whether one is a loyal passenger or not. 'How can we be loyal to them when they raise their fares during the time that they know we'd need their services so badly? They saw this as an act of betrayal which is only meant to make more money from them. "I can't even travel with the kids when they are on holiday because this is the time that the airlines also increase their fares," noted another respondent. Respondents said ticket prices are one of most salient economic exchange factors that a traveller will consider when selecting an airline. They gave credence to the fact that the success of low cost carriers demonstrates the importance of ticket prices and therefore when the major airlines increase their tickets prices, the issue of loyalty fizzles out in the eyes of a number of passengers.

There was also a huge concern about the perceived devaluation of the reward system. The complaint here was that fewer miles per flight are awarded and that unless one buys high-priced tickets, it is quite impossible to get more mile add-ons and eventually use that to buy a ticket. Many claimed the frequent flyer programme has become ridiculously useless. Not surprisingly, they all carried the notion it is quite good to look around and find out which airlines are offering the best prices at a point in time, rather than sticking to a particular airline on the basis of loyalty.

Many felt their loyalty is not being valued. Again, there was this notion that loyalty is an obsolete concept. Some even complained that the airlines have no 'souls or morals' and, therefore, do not care if they rip-off the customer. "Simply put, in this day and age, there is no reason to be loyal to one airline," many stated. The common refrain from the respondents was that since airlines are not doing anything to earn passengers' loyalty, passengers therefore should not show any dedication to them.

The frequency and nature of the changes to the loyalty programmes by the airlines also came up for discussion. Whilst varied views were expressed on this, what emerged was that normally much information is not provided if and when the airlines make some changes in that regard. In many cases, programme changes, invariably make it harder to earn miles, obtain better seats without paying some upcharge, and require even more miles to get the free trips or upgrades to premium cabins that travellers seek.

The narratives also provided an indication that the customer's perception of value is individualised and dependent on context and circumstances. What to one customer represents great value could be seen differently from the other's point of view. What a few of the respondents adduced was that the use of menu cards issued on flights was unnecessary as passengers had less options when it came to food being made available on a flight. It also emerged that perceiving an airline as having a good reputation leads to the relatively highest behavioural loyalty for the said airline. Although a greater number of the respondents stated their preference for airlines with good safety records and comfort, they were forthright on what they thought is more important to them when it comes to patronising airline services. For these people, price runs as the major motivating factor. The price hikes deter them from serving their cherished airlines loyally. They argued that since there is so much homogeneity in the services offered by the airlines, the only clear difference among them today is the price. The study revealed that frequent flyer passengers are very sensitive to prices.

Discussion

The narratives produced revealing insights into a variety of lived experiences among the participants. The relational properties of narrative inquiry provided the researcher and participants with a means to connect with each other, and also, offered a broader understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. It was realised that the promotion of such narratives has the tendency to contribute to greater levels of service delivery by organisations as the stories recognise, firstly, the problems customers were faced with and then offered the requisite solutions as well. The narrative inquiry with its relational aspects provided an opportunity for the researcher to build a relationship with the participants over a longer period which led to the collection of 'hidden' concerns that otherwise might have been lost out during a shorter data collection time.

What emerged from the interactions was that consumers very much care about the moral compass of the airlines, their deliberations and deliveries. Since many passengers do not seem to see how morally good airlines are, they stated that the airlines' profit-orientation makes them quite greedy. The contention was that the airlines ignore the plight of passengers and always try to take advantage of them during the peak travel times.

Consumers today, indeed, expect this loyalty to go in both directions. There seems to be a disconnection, though, in how the airlines talk about loyalty. Whilst they want repeat custom, they always seem to forget that by raising their fares during the peak season, they hit their customers very hard that even loyal ones always have to look around to get cheaper tickets elsewhere. Besides, some airlines even charge their passengers extra amount when they go slightly beyond the baggage allowances. Meanwhile, changes in departure dates also attract more payments and after a period of inactivity, the mileage won by passengers is also wiped off within a couple of years if passengers do not travel with the said airlines. All these issues provide a refrain for passengers that they cannot have the best deals from their favourite airlines. Whilst passengers were in agreement with the fact that loyalty rewards programmes provide an opportunity to build, longer, stronger and deeper relationships with customers it, they also reinforced the notion that if this is not handled very well, then the disaffection this causes could be much more beyond repair and probably take much longer time for customer loyalty to be reinstated.

So what can airlines do with their loyalty programmes to earn greater trust? How can they create a sense of loyalty that is reciprocal, authentic, and emotional? It would be important for them to foster the response that is most likely to drive loyal behaviour. Ultimately, this should be inspired by a well-articulated shared purpose and motivated by a heartfelt desire to show appreciation for and to return kindness to customers.

Managerial Implications, Limitations and Contributions

The findings of this study have important implications for airline managers. First, it provides an intimation that customer loyalty is quite intricate and dynamic, ever changing and evolving over time. As such, airlines need to understand passengers much more since having and retaining loyal customers could create a situation in which organisations can be successful. It also highlights the critical importance of looking at the whole issue of customer loyalty programmes from another perspective, through the narratives of frequent flyers.

The study's uniqueness is that it uses narrative inquiry as its method of inquiry. This inquiry is based on the premise that a person's lived and told stories are who they are and are becoming and that these stories sustain them. This understanding shapes the need to negotiate avenues that respectfully represent participants' lived and told stories. It also brings to the fore the need for organisations to reflect on these viewpoints and to address any concerns inherent thereof. The paper makes the argument that narrative inquiry is well suited to service delivery research in general as it focuses its inquiry on the individual person's experience from a temporal, social and spatial point of view.

The findings throw more light on how customers feel about airline loyalty schemes in particular and service delivery in general and, thus, contributes to the understanding of customer loyalty as a critical determinant of customer's attitude and behaviour. It offers an opportunity for managers to realise that airline loyalty programmes can build stronger links with customers if there is increased satisfaction and value to these customers.

Whilst the study constitutes an important step towards developing a better understanding of drivers of airline loyalty, there are some limitations in it, which need to be addressed too. This could also provide an opportunity for further research. First, this study focuses on a small number of passengers that the author met casually. As such, it could be argued to some extent that that it would be difficult to generalise its findings. Hence, future studies can use a larger number and also seek the views of the airlines regarding the assertions made by the passengers. Again, given that narrative inquiry is a new methodology, some audiences could be unfamiliar with the criteria to judge and respond to narrative inquiry research texts. Nonetheless, the criteria for judging narrative inquiries follow from the definition of narrative inquiry and the conceptual frame for thinking narratively.

Conclusion

The study sought to determine whether loyalty programmes are gaining the requisite support from air passengers. It also explored whether passengers can be loyal to airlines and under what conditions this could prevail. Its findings suggest that although air passengers are prepared to forge closer ties with the airlines, they often see the airlines as reneging on their pledge to offer reciprocal terms of this loyal arrangement. Passengers, therefore, see this loyalty engagement as a one-sided arrangement which airlines rather stand to benefit from. Such a viewpoint has made many passengers to adopt a half-hearted approach to the loyalty programme which the respondents primarily perceive as a means to be signees of the loyalty programmes rather than being loyal members of the airlines.

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Athens Journal of Tourism - Volume 8, Issue 4, December 2021 – Pages 247-268

Gender Equality and Empowerment through Corporate Social Responsibility in Ecotourism at Malealea, Lesotho: A Qualitative Study

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Corporate Social responsibility (CSR) has been widely discussed since the end of the first half of the 21st century. In the 1950s, CSR focused on the demand for social responsibility for business in general but towards the end of the century, diverse issues had emerged ranging from concerns about environmental sustainability, human rights abuse and business sustainability. Gender issues were later taken on board. Companies are taking initiatives to improve gender issues at the workplace, community and marketplace. Guidelines and benchmarks have been developed to mainstream gender issues in CSR. However, a limited focus has been given to CSR in ecotourism especially as it relates to equality and empowerment. This exploratory study reports findings on how Malealea lodge through Malealea Development Trust has been dealing with gender issues in its CSR initiatives in Lesotho. Using interviews with the lodge management, employees and the beneficiaries of the CSR initiatives, findings suggested that the lodge did not have a formal gender policy, gender issues were addressed at various levels and the corporate social responsibility initiatives had empowering effects on both women and men.

Keywords: *CSR, empowerment, ecotourism, gender, Lesotho*

Introduction

Corporate Social responsibility (CSR) has been widely discussed since the second half of the 21st century in scientific and practical discourses. A wide range of CSR issues has been given attention in almost all the sectors of human activity ranging from concerns about environmental sustainability, human rights abuse and business sustainability. In the 1950s when CSR became a buzzword, it focused on the demand for social responsibility from business in general (Bowen 1953). However, towards the end of the second half of the twenty-first century diverse issues concerning CSR had emerged to encompass gender issues. Companies developed CSR initiatives concerning women in particular in the workplace, community, and marketplace as well as the supply chain. Various global initiatives such as the Women's Empowerment Principle, a partnership of the United Nations Global Compact, whose seven principles cover gender equality in corporate leadership were established and implemented (Grosser and Moon 2019). International institutions such as the World Bank and United Nations and their specialized agencies have incorporated gender issues and mainstreaming in their operations. The UN, for instance, adopted the Sustainable Development Goals in

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2015 whose aim among others was to achieve gender equality and empowerment (Pathania 2017). Besides, there are initiatives to develop guidelines and benchmarks on gender equality issues within the mainstream CSR systems such as the Global Reporting initiative and Ethical Trading Initiative. Similarly, CSR initiatives incorporate stakeholder consultation on gender issues. For example, Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Gender Working Group was held in 2010 (Grosser and Moon 2019). Nonetheless, very little attention has been given to CSR in Lesotho especially its contribution to gender equality and mainstreaming.

Lesotho is a signatory to several international gender conventions but studies show that there is a limited achievement in gender equality and mainstreaming. Several scholars unanimously agree that gender relations are discriminatory against women hence they do not benefit from development processes (Epprecht 1996, Makoa 1997, Fogelman 2017, Mojapelo and Faku 2019, Ramakhula 2019). Makoa (1997), for instance, argues that there has not been improvement in the social status of women, making it difficult for them to fully participate in politics. Some years later, Fogelman (2017) maintains that legal frameworks that have been developed with assistance from international communities have failed to improve the economic status of women. Laws that have been enacted to improve women access to land and other resources have temporarily improved the situation but given the patriarchal nature of the society, women do not fully benefit. The same sentiments are shared by other scholars that women in Lesotho are better educated than men but they are dominated in the workplaces and other spheres of life (Morojele 2011, Morojele et al. 2011, Mojapelo and Faku, 2019, Komiti and Moorosi 2020). The argument is that the education system in Lesotho perpetuates gender disparities where school curricular continue to regard men as breadwinners and women portrayed as weak and could not do anything without assistance from their male counterparts (Komiti and Moorosi 2020). It has been argued that gender is not about women but both men and women. Some studies have shown that it will not be possible to achieve gender equality and mainstreaming without the involvement of men (Connell 2005).

Ecotourism has been hailed as a panacea to rural poverty, inequalities and a sustainable environment. Some studies have explored the interconnectedness between SDGs particularly SDG 5 with tourism (Alarcón and Cole 2019). Tourism is a growing sector in Lesotho. The government of Lesotho has identified tourism as one of the sectors that could contribute to the socio-economic development of the country. Some tourist facilities have long been practising ecotourism while new ones have been developed recently to take advantage of the unique beauty of the country (The Lesotho Review 2018, Ministry of Tourism and Culture 2019). However, there have been no studies in this country that explore the role of tourism in promoting gender equality and empowerment.

This study aimed to explore the role of ecotourism in Lesotho in promoting gender equality and empowerment using the case of Malealea Lodge. It investigated how the Malealea Development Trust (MDT), a subsidiary of the lodge entrusted with the CSR initiatives, promote gender equality and empowerment. This proposed the following research questions: What gender policies were implemented at Malealea lodge and MDT? How are gender equality and empowerment being promoted at Malealea lodge and MDT? What were the effects of the CSR initiatives on gender equality and empowerment? The study interviewed the management of the lodge, MDT and beneficiaries of the CSR initiates. This study used thematic analysis to present the findings. This paper is divided into the following section: firstly, following this introduction, it presents a brief profile of the study area. Secondly, it presents the literature review that covers the main variables of the study: corporate social responsibility, ecotourism and gender issues; thirdly, the paper presents the methodology and methods adopted for this study. The last sections present the discussion and draws conclusions and recommendations in that order.

Case Study – Malealea Lodge and MDT

Malealea Lodge is situated approximately 60km south of Maseru, the capital city of Lesotho, in Southern Africa and completely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa (see Figure 1 in Appendix). The initial major attraction to the area was the pony trekking that was managed and controlled through an informal agreement between the Pony-trekking Association and the Malealea Lodge. The treks could be taken as a short day or overnight trek traversing through the Lesotho highlands via places of interest such as Ribaneng, Ketane and Maletsunyane Falls (Mohasi 1999, Mearns 2012). The activities at the lodge have since grown to accommodate more and more community-based ecotourism ventures. They include a village tour, village homestay, Sangoma/traditional herbalist appointment, visit to Musi's reclamation donga- a Revolutionary Conservation in Action, Pony treks, hiking and mountain bikes (The Lesotho Review 2018).

The history of the present vibrant ecotourism activities at Malealea lodge can be traced back to a local store in the area of Matelile, in the southern part of Lesotho (Mohasi 1999, Mearns 2012). The government of Lesotho through the Lesotho National Tourism Office realized in 1973 that a manager of Frasers store in the area of Matelile owned a lodge at the place called Ha Qaba. He had three horses that were used for trekking to entertain visitors. The activity grew over time culminating in the formation of a Farmer's Community Pony Trekking association in 1988 (Mohasi 1999). It is reported that the Qaba lodge was later overwhelmed by the number of tourists during peak seasons resulting in another local trader, Mr Jones, venturing into the business of accommodating tourists in his premises. His lodge was bigger hence accommodated more tourists. Mr Jones established the Malealea Pony Owner's Association in 1991 which offered pony trekking services for the lodge (Mohasi 1999). Besides, pony trekking, the lodge is engaged in many ecotourism activities that include among other protection of the environment, history and culture. Following the establishment of the Farmer's Community Pony trekking association at Malealea, most activities decline at ha Qaba resulting to benefits accruing to Malealea community.

The Malealea Lodge and the adjacent community have since become inter-reliant (Mearns 2012) and the success of the lodge has directly affected the well-being of the local community. As a result of the close relationship, the Malealea

Lodge established the Malealea Development Trust (MDT) whose main objective is to "promote and support community empowerment and community participation for the advancement of the quality of life for the members of the Malealea Community" (MDT 2021). MDT was registered in 2002 with the Law office under the deeds office. It was established as a result of tourists' interest in improving the livelihoods of people. Tourists used to work directly with members of the community and the lodge would receive donations on behalf of the community but later the lodge realized that more tourists were contributing to the community and decided to establish the Trust to handle the funds (MDT Director, June 2021). MDT is therefore an entity that manages CSR initiatives of the Lodge and is currently focused on five priority areas on which all projects within the Malealea community are implemented. They are education projects, infrastructure development projects, health and well-being; income generation and self-sufficiency projects (Mearns 2012, MDT 2021).

Literature Review

Corporate Social Responsibility – A Concept

Since Bowen's book "Social Responsibility of Businessman" (1953), CSR has been a contested concept with no single definition and scholars argue that it is elusive, controversial, ambiguous and liable to various interpretations (Sharma and Kiran 2013, Yin and Jamali 2016). Nonetheless, attempts have been made to define it. It is the responsibility of businesses for their impact on society stating that companies should take full responsibility for their negative impact on the community and environment. Carroll has been one of the scholars who presented a comprehensive definition of CSR beginning with the 1979 definition which was modified several times (Carroll 1991, 1999, Carroll and Shabana 2010). It presented a four-dimensional model of CSR that takes into account economic, legal, ethical and discretionary (philanthropic) aspects of business performance. The 1979 pyramid model presents the economic category as the base on which all other aspects were premised (Carroll 1991). It states that business should not consider the categories as hierarchical, sequentially fulfil them, but each should be fulfilled at all times (Carroll 1999).

The concept of CSR though originated with the business, it has been infused in other areas including gender studies. It has been debated in studies focusing on gender mainstreaming (Grosser and Moon 2005, 2008, Lee and Parpart 2018, Ozkazanc-Pan 2018). Some of the studies maintain that there is a relationship between CSR and gender (Karam and Jamali 2017). Some of them pose that gender equality should be considered as one of the objectives of CSR. Other studies focus on evaluating CSR on gender mainstreaming at various levels of society including workplace equality (Grosser and Moon 2005, 2008). It is argued that CSR makes good business sense by improving business outcomes such as risk management, corporate and brand reputation, and the recruitment and retention of employees, and having a gender-inclusive leadership at workplaces account for sustainable benefits to both companies and the society (Soares et al. 2020). Kaur (2013) argues that women are often deprived of their fundamental rights, given low paid subsidiary jobs and are barred from the decision making process in the economy. However, CSR plays a pivotal role in the creation of gender equality at workplaces as equality and diversity are its main pillars. Kaur (2013) accounts that companies that incorporate gender equality within their CSR initiatives have seen fruitful results.

Grosser and Moon (2019) are of the view that although CSR addresses gender issues, the feminist theory is rarely explored in the CSR literature. They argue that this omission becomes a limit in this field. Their study seeks to address this gap by reviewing the developments in feminist organisation theory and mapping their relevance and importance to CSR. In studies relating to mining and gender, it has been observed that parts of the mining industry are beginning to foreground gender issues in community relations but it has further been observed that the present practice is far behind international practices (Kemp and Keenan 2010). McGuiness et al. (2017) and Rao and Tilt (2020) explored the role played by gender and foreign ownership in the CSR performance of Chinese firms. Their findings are that there is an increase in the number of Chinese firms which attract female board members. They attest that the greater the gender balance in top management, the stronger the CSR performance. However, some studies have shown that since the Beijing Platform gender policies have witnessed limited success. Gender mainstreaming policies were put in place but implementation remained inconsistent or faced with many obstacles (Vlassoff and Moreno 2002, Moser and Moser 2005, Kali 2018).

Corporate Social Responsibility and Empowerment

Gender and CSR have been debated in other fields. Gender in agriculture is an important field where CSR contributions are studied. Agriculture accounts for 14 percent of Africa's GDP and 60 percent of its employment (African Development Report 2015). The agricultural and tourism sectors go hand in hand (Uduji and Okolo-Obasi 2019). The Africa Competitiveness Report (2017) confirms that women in rural areas can contribute to agriculture-related tourism product diversification because of their strong community ties and their traditional farming skills. However, they account that there is a very low agricultural production for females compared to their male counterparts suggesting that the shortfall is caused by women's lack of access to agricultural land and inputs. As a result, Uduji et al. (2019) assessed the contribution multinational oil companies' CSR initiatives in Nigeria had on rural women on their access to modern agricultural inputs. Their study revealed that indeed there was a rise in agricultural production however gender inequality was still prevalent.

Apart from limited access to agricultural land and technologies, women are not empowered to take part in agricultural activities. Uduji et al. (2020) seek to examine the impact CSR initiatives of multinational oil companies had on rural women empowerment in strengthening the linkages in agriculture-related tourism in Niger Delta. The study concluded after 800 women were interviewed that rural women hardly take part in the global memorandum of understanding interventions in agro-tourism value chain projects because of culture and norms prevalent in rural communities. This exclusion results in rural women not being able to partake in the economic benefits of tourism compared to males.

Therefore, several studies have maintained that there is a need for women empowerment which would end gender disparities (Pimpa and Phouxay 2017). Empowerment is a process that helps people, organisations or groups that are powerless with awareness of power dynamics at work in their lives, develops skills and capacity of gaining control over their lives, take control of their lives without infringing on others and support the empowerment of other members of the community (Rowlands 1995). Therefore, women empowerment through CSR has been a contested issue (McCarthy 2017). On the one hand, some studies argue that women empowerment would mean that women earn a better income learn new skills and gain confidence and autonomy. On the other hand, some studies are critical about the role of CSR in empowering women arguing that this is impossible within the capitalist system which recently has dominated the field of CSR with patriarchal tendencies that perpetuate women domination (McCarthy 2017). The argument states that though CSR could create employment for women, they continue to with the burden of a triple shift of paid work, housework and care work. Hence gender equality and women empowerment are unlikely to be achieved. It is further argued that within the value chain women are abused (McCarthy 2017).

Some studies have argued that gender equality and women empowerment would hardly bear fruits without the involvement of men because they are the gate-keepers (Connell 2005, Cornwall et al. 2011, van Huis and Leek 2020, Monneuse 2020). Monneuse (2020) argues that the involvement of men in women's networks has the potential to change men from being gatekeepers to gate-openers. Men have been hailed for their transformative role in gender equality processes. As a result, it is argued that men just like women should be part of strategies that empower women (Connell 2005). However, some studies are sceptical about men's involvement in gender equality and women empowerment arguing that they are likely to stifle all effort for their benefit (Winther et al. 2019).

Ecotourism and Gender Equality

Tourism especially ecotourism has been widely debated and promoted for promoting gender equality and women empowerment (Das and Chatterjee 2015, McComb and Boluk 2017, Tseng et al. 2019, Snyman 2017, Wondirad and King 2020). McComb and Boluk (2017) postulate that tourism has been pursued by governments as a means to develop rural areas and that the stakeholders' participation can result in a significant contribution to the rural tourist destinations. Manaf et al. (2018) studied the role played by CSR in rural tourism in terms of its effects on the socio-economic disparities between the rural and the urban areas. Their argument is in line with McComb and Boluk (2017) who argue that the involvement of the stakeholders is a very important tool in addressing specific factors (poor infrastructure, inadequate services, lack of accessibility and lack of appropriate knowledge and skills as well as unclear destination image) that inhibit the smooth running of the rural tourist facilities.

According to Davison et al. (2005), rural tourist facilities seek to contribute to the local society through CSR initiatives. As a result, some social problems such as poverty and environmental degradation will be improved. This can be attributed to the rise of CSR that more and more businesses have begun to realize that they have a role to play in addressing social problems while still running a profitable business. Zeng and Wang (2019) affirm that CSR does not only contribute to society but also has a considerable role in the reputation and public perception of the business. Wang (2014) reveals that when it comes to rural tourism CSR initiatives, strategies and behavioural choices are closely related to the positive responses of the tourists resulting in customer commitment and loyalty. Henderson (2007) is of the view that the characteristics of tourism add an extra dimension to CSR. Henderson regards society as part of the product and rural companies have perspicacious obligations and responsibilities regarding the places in which they are selling, making them more sensitive to the adoption of CSR and better tourism management because of the consumer tastes and environmental movements

Zeng and Wang (2019) acknowledge the important role played by rural tourist facilities through their CSR initiatives in enhancing the empowerment of women in rural areas. They indicate that to achieve poverty reduction especially through tourism it is pivotal to boost and empower disadvantaged groups in the society like women, orphans and people living with HIV and CSR will play an important role in this regard. In the same manner, Snyman (2017) has found that in Southern Africa the private sector has an important role to play in local socio-economic development concerning employment creation, skills training and development as well as philanthropic development projects. Other studies maintain that ecotourism activities lead to additional income-generating activities as the main or side jobs (Fistiningrum and Harini 2021), it involves natural resource conservation, cultural preservation and livelihood improvement that helps women among others to generate income (Teshome et al. 2020) and that ecotourism can offer the highest salaries in formal employment, encourage residents to sell their agricultural produce and enabling commercial agriculture to improve its income-generating activities while protecting, preserving and managing the natural environment (Chirenje 2017).

Ecotourism is not without critics attacking it on basis of its label and arguing that it is fuzzy, the meaning of the label “eco” is not clear (English 2002). As a result, it is blamed for “green-washing” to lure unsuspecting tourists who want to enjoy “green” choices. Some scholars equate it with an oxymoron, a figure of speech that juxtaposes seemingly contradictory concepts such as “an open secret” (Wilcox 2015). It is argued that in the case of ecotourism, two contradictory concepts “eco” and “tourism” are juxtaposed, suggesting that there is nothing ecological about tourism. They argue that tourism is anti-ecology (Wallace and Russell 2004, Hartman and Cavaliere 2009). Ecotourism is blamed for the inevitable cost of revealing nature’s secrets, that is, it has a potentially negative impact on the environment in the areas of energy, water, sewage, food, waste (organic and inorganic), over the capacity of tourists and logistic (English 2002).

Ecotourism is considered a paradise but critics argue that paradise will fall when something goes wrong. It can harm the socio-economic and political life of the local communities in the sense of negatively affecting the flora and fauna, lead to political corruption, offshore banking and drug trafficking (English 2002, Wallace and Russell 2004). Several studies in Southern Africa and other parts of the world have demonstrated that ecotourism could lead to enclave development in which local communities are excluded from the benefits. It is argued that the poor especially women, children and other vulnerable groups in the community are excluded (Mbaiwa and Stronz 2010, Mbaiwa and Hambira 2019). Some studies argue that it leads to the overharvesting of fishery resources, negatively impacting income-generating activities for local people and women in particular (Cusack et al. 2021).

There is also literature that demonstrates that tourism is limited in improving rural livelihoods because it is a sensitive industry easily affected by epidemics and disasters. Some of these studies have documented the impact of the earlier epidemic such as Ebola and SARS and the present COVID-19 arguing that tourism, in general, has been pushed to its limits (McKercher and Chon 2004, Chen et al. 2007, Mizrachi and Fuchs 2016, Maphanga and Henama 2019).

The government of Lesotho has identified tourism as one of those sectors that lead to socio-economic development (Yiu et al. 2015, Ministry of Tourism and Culture 2019). In 2012 tourism in this country was worth $152.3 million, almost 7% of the country's economy. It was projected that the industry would grow by 4.4% in value during the period 2013-2022 (World Economic Forum 2013). It was already employing 34,000 locals representing 6% of the workforce. There have been new developments in Lesotho's tourism sector with the establishment of Afriski, an eco-tourism resort that depends on snowfall in Lesotho and one of the two of the type in the southern region. However, the potential of rural tourism has not been explored in this country on its contribution to gender equality and empowerment. Studies have focused on its vulnerability to disasters (Stockigt et al. 2019), local community participation (Thetsane 2019) and Livelihood strategy (Makwindi and Ndlovu 2021) without necessarily focusing on gender relations.

Methodology and Process

A qualitative exploratory study design was used to explore the perceptions of the management and beneficiaries of Malealea Development Trust concerning the contribution of the MDT's CSR initiatives in promoting gender equality and empowerment. Using purposive sampling techniques, the management of Malealea Lodge, MDT's employees and the beneficiaries of some of the MDT CSR projects were selected. The study spanned over six months collecting data from January to June 2021. The sample size was decided upon reaching data saturation that produced sufficient in-depth information. All in all six employees of the lodges/ MDT and four focus groups formed part of the sample. For confidentiality, the participants were labelled P1, P2 and so on while participants from the focused group discussion were labelled P1FG1, P4FG2 to represent individual participants in different focus groups. The focus group discussion with a maximum of eight members was held with pony trekking members, hiking guides, HIV and AIDS support group, key-hole gardeners and a men's-only group. The support group was divided into two groups because it was bigger than all other group resulting in a total of six focused groups and forty-eight participants. Table 1 presents the participants for the in-depth interviews represented by the codes assigned to each, description of their duties and other socio-demographic information.

Table 1. *Demographic Profile of the Participants*

Participants	Duty	Age	Sex	Highest Education
P1	Director MDT	56-65	M	Master's degree
P2	Finance admin	31-40	F	Diploma
P3	Field work	31-40	F	Senior secondary
P4	Field work	41-50	M	Junior secondary
P5	Computer trainer	21-30	M	Diploma
P6	Teacher preschool	41-50	F	Junior secondary
P7	Manage lodge	31-40	M	Diploma
P6	Social worker	41-50	F	Senior secondary

The Dean of the Faculty of Humanities granted permission to conduct the study because the university does not have an ethical review board. A rapport was built with the participants especially the chief (traditional leader), management of the lodge and MDT who in turn approved access to the rest of the staff and beneficiaries. The research purpose and authors' information were fully disclosed then consent was secured for face to face individual in-depth interviews, group discussions and audio recording. The language convenient to the participants was used. The interviews and discussion were transcribed and translated verbatim to the English language before data analysis.

The rigour of the study was ensured by adhering to reliability and validity as they apply to qualitative studies. The credibility of the study was maintained through triangulation that led to a collection of data from multiple sources, at different times and on many sites (Korstjens and Moser 2018). The trustworthiness of findings in qualitative research is normally assured through dependability (Yin 2003, Cohen et al. 2011). Therefore, the researcher increased dependability through a detailed description of how data were collected, how categories were formed, and how decisions were reached throughout the entire study inquiry (Ghafouri and Afoghi 2016). Transferability is achieved when the findings obtained in a study could be easily applied in other settings and contexts which is referred to as the external validity of the findings (Mandal 2018). To achieve transferability, the researcher should provide a detailed setting and context of a study. In this study, the setting and context of the Malealea Lodge and its MDT CSR projects were provided as detailed on the section labelled – The study Case: Malealea and MDT.

In qualitative research, conformability refers to the objectivity of the study during data collection and data analysis. To ensure conformability, there is a need to obtain congruence between two or more independent persons about the accuracy, relevance and meaning of the data. Conformability does not deal only with data collection and analysis but with the whole quality of the research. As a result, analysis of the methodology used in the study was emphasized by the researchers to establish conformability (Mandal 2018). In this study, conformability was achieved through the assessment of the accuracy, relevance and meaning of the data through engaging other experts in the department of Development studies specializing in rural development and CSR to check the data.

The digitally recorded data from the interviews and focus group discussion were transcribed into a word document. The Atlas.ti version 8.0 was used to organize and develop initial codes and categories based on the research questions of the study. Thematic, instead of content analysis, was used because it is the most common method for descriptive qualitative projects (Patton and Cochran 2002). Unlike content analysis which examines who says what, to whom, and with what effect, counting the frequencies of what was said, thematic analysis emphasises, pinpoints, identifies and records patterns or themes within the data (Vaismoradi et al. 2013, Kleinhans 2018). Patton and Cochran (2002) and Vaismoradi et al. (2013) clarify that with thematic analysis, all the data is inspected to spot the common issues that recur and identify the main themes that summarise all the views that have been collected.

In the present study, data were coded for classification into predefined subcategories, categories and overall themes. The thematic analysis involves a 'bottom-up approach' where the lowest level consists of descriptive codes that are applied directly to data. The second level involves gathering similar codes into more conceptual categories. The categories were then summarised into a limited number of interpretive themes, usually 3-5 of them (Vaismoradi et al. 2013). In line with Nowell et al. (2017), the study followed the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) to ensure transparency that details the methods used to achieve the findings. A combination of shorter quotes within the narrative and longer block quotes were included in the reports and all the quotes were given a unique identifier to demonstrate that variegated participants were represented across the results.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of Transcripts and Generation of Themes

The analysis of the transcripts identified 8 codes which were later collapsed into three main themes:

- Policy – The transcripts suggested a lack of policy or described the way the work was done at Malealea lodge and MDT suggesting a lack of policy.
- Projects – These transcripts describe different projects suggesting the involvement of women and the lack of men’s participation.
- Attitude – The transcripts describing the attitude of men and how they were encouraged to change.
- Issues – These transcripts described gender issues in the community and among the beneficiaries of the CSR initiatives and how they were handled.

They were violence, child marriage, and men's reluctance to mix with women and refusal to take medication.

- Women needs – Transcripts describe how women needs were catered for in different CSR projects and individual activities
- Self-employment – These transcripts described self-employment activities and income-generating activities initiated by MDT CSR and individual beneficiaries.
- Abilities/capabilities – These were codes that describe the abilities and capabilities of the participants suggesting an empowering effect of MDT's CSR initiatives.
- Training – These were the transcripts that described the role of training for men and women and its empowering effect.

After the codes were identified, the following three main themes evolved: "lack of formal gender policy"; "informal knowledge and implementing gender issues"; and "empowerment". A detailed description and explanation of these themes are presented hereafter.

Lack of Formal Gender Policy

The present study sought to assess the effect of CSR initiatives on gender relations and the analysis of the various transcripts revealed that MDT did not have a formal policy though gender issues were addressed at various levels. Participants 1 and 2 elaborated that the Trust did not have a gender policy. Participant 1 explained that it was by coincidence that employees of the Trust were 50% females and 50% males. "We just employ eligible people without considering whether they are males or females". He further explained that beneficiaries were not considered based on their gender. He summarised how the Trust works thus "We do not have a gender policy; our mandate is to give help where it is needed without necessarily putting gender into consideration" (P1). Participants from the lodge shared the same sentiments and explained that in the lodge there were more female than male employees. This was the result of the nature of the job not because there was a specific policy followed.

All other participants stated that the Malealea lodge and MDT did not have an official policy on gender. They explained that when they went out to the beneficiaries, they did not follow any specific policy. "We base ourselves on the needs of the communities without following any gender policy. For instance, we help old people regardless of whether they are males or females" (P8). In the same manner, another participant said "We enroll anyone who needs to acquire computer skills whether they are males, females, or school children without considering whether they are boys or girls" (P5).

The different focus group discussions revealed that there was no official gender policy that they were following. Most participants in the focus group discussion with the support group explained that they were all females in the group not because they were using any formal policy. "We have only one male in our group not because there is a policy that men should not join. We encourage anyone to join but men in this community are reluctant to join support groups" (P4FG1).

The participants in the other focus group discussions explained that there were more men in their groups because of the nature of their job. "Hiking is a tough job. It needs one to travel in dangerous place overnight hence females may fear it" (P1FG2). Some indicated that the tourist centre was in the rural areas and traditional norms prevailed. "Few women participate in pony trekking. Horses belong to men hence there are many men in this group" (P5FG4). Therefore, the findings were suggesting that different groups consisted of more males or females not because there was a policy to that effect but depending of the nature of activities being done.

Informal Knowledge and Implementing Gender Issues

Despite the apparent lack of a formal gender policy, the data revealed that the Trust and majority of beneficiaries believed that MDT's CSR was addressing many gender issues and there were informal discussions about gender issues. In recognition that men do not participate in many activities, the Trust established a Men's-Only Group that addressed their issues such as failure to attend to health problems and as they related with their partners. One participant who was responsible for this group of beneficiaries explained thus:

> "This is where men are grouped together to share experiences and offer support to one another because we are aware that men are not able to share their grievances, they find it hard to go to health centres when they are sick, they bottle up things which results in them not being able to get the necessary help. The other aim in the Men's Only Group is the fight against child marriage." (P1FG4)

A participant who was working with the local community on various development projects, explained that during the work they normally discussed gender issues that relate to men's relationships with their spouses, HIV and AIDS as well as other issues of concern within the community. He elaborated in this manner:

> "The community here is rural and the main challenges are early marriages that involve underage children, violence perpetrated against women and children, refusal of men to deal with sexually transmitted diseases. The Men's-Only Group discusses these concerns and we encourage them to spread the message in their villages. Men in our group seem to understand these issues. They help us spread the message in the village though it was not easy given the area we live (rural area with strong cultural beliefs)." (P4)

The participant explained that the initiatives were not based on an official policy from the MDT but he volunteered to form the men's-only group following his observation concerning challenges facing men as a group in his community. He explained that the MDT did not object to his initiatives instead he got encouragement.

Women and girls are normally disadvantaged regarding health, skills and they lack knowledge concerning their rights. CSR activities at MDT address these issues. One of the Participants elaborated how MDT addressed these issues. She explained that the Trust had established a group of young women and girls to equip them with knowledge about their rights and skills such as dressmaking and catering. Besides, participants from the hiking guides explained that on their own accord, they address issues that affect both males and females.

> "When we take tours and it happens that we have females among us, we talk to them about their needs and ensure that they are catered for. We tell our male counterparts that they should be aware that they are travelling with ladies so we should take care of them and their needs." (P3FG2)

This assertion was confirmed by Participant 5 from that group who was a lady who explained that the male hiking guides take care of them and they were not afraid to travel with them. "Before any trip, males talk to us to find out what our needs are. They assure us that we will be safe throughout the journey and indeed we feel safe travelling with them" (P5FG2).

The focus group discussion with the support group revealed that they understand gender issues and impart the same knowledge in the community.

> "We use drama to impart knowledge about gender issues. HIV and AIDS is a gender issue. Men refuse to take medication. They blame women for the disease. But following the approaches we use, HIV and AIDS stigma has gone down in this community." (P6FG3)

Empowerment

Several participants commented on the empowering effects of the CSR initiatives at MDT. This was displayed by the way they handled the challenges imposed by the advent of COVID-19. Both males and females expressed the sense of empowerment demonstrated in three main ways: the ability to form new groups following the loss of employment from the lodges as a result of lack of visitors; ability to mobilise local resources to deal with the pandemic; and the ability generate income for themselves following the decline in international tourists.

> "We are a group of 4 males, we have decided to continue with the tour guiding business to sustain our lives. With the money I was getting before COVID-19 I managed to buy all the necessary equipment for touring. I have camping tents, camping chairs and sleeping bags, so I can say we are beginning to be self-employed now." P4FG2)

> "We are aware that the lodge does not have visitors anymore because of COVID-19, and the business is not as usual, however, we as horse owners have come together and agreed to continue with the local tours. Several men and women in this village continue with this new endeavour. We have our horses and we maintain them using the skills we learned while working with the lodge." (P6FG1)

Face-to-face interviews revealed that employees of the trust and its beneficiaries felt that the CSR activities had empowered them to deal with the adverse consequences of COVID-19. Participant 5 explained two ways in which CSR initiatives had empowered him with skills. The following excerpt summarized his views:

> "Because of my previous experiences working with other pandemics such as HIV and AIDS mobilizing resources, I managed to help the lodge to raise 1.3 million while the original target was to raise five hundred thousand (M500 000) for COVID-19. Concerning the education project that I am leading, especially the computer training component, I used my skills and so far we have signed an agreement with one mobile telephone Company in the country (name withheld). They are going to donate twenty computers and provide a building, training workshop and free data for a year." (P5)

There were several ladies from face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions who acknowledged that CSR activities at MDT had empowered them to participate in production and income-generating activities. Three excerpts suffice to demonstrate empowering effects of MDT:

> "MDT trained us on keyhole gardening. We have been successful to feed our children for the whole year. Using the same skills we have extended our production to a larger field outside the family garden. It has been successful. The only problem is that women need fields where we can practice agricultural skills." (P1FG5)

> "The activities that have been initiated by the lodge have helped me to sell different items to the visitors. Besides, I have horses that we use for pony trekking. What I am doing has helped me to feed my family for many years now. Because of the activities at the lodge and MDT, I sell artefacts to tourists and I manage to survive. Had it not been because of the activities at MDT we could be suffering." (P7FG2)

> "I am now working in this shop. It belongs to my parents but when I lost income from tour guiding, I decided to use my skills to run the shop for my parents. Being a tour guide working with foreigners has given me skills to talk with people which helps a lot in the shop. I am no longer shy to talk with customers." (P6FG2)

The findings suggest that the CSR initiatives at MDT were empowering the beneficiaries, employees and the community. Some of the explained that they trained members of the clubs on gender issues because they understood that it good for business when the new members understand gender issues and respect people regardless of the gender or age. But as the female participants from the key-hole gardening suggested, the challenge with women was lack of access to resources especially land to expand their production.

Discussion

This exploratory study examined issues of gender equality and empowerment promoted by Malealea Development Trust. The study established that the initiatives were not guided by a formal gender policy suggesting that there are limitations concerning gender equality and mainstreaming in the country. The findings suggest, like much of the literature in Lesotho, that the country is still far behind in addressing gender issues and gender mainstreaming (Epprecht 1996, Moser and Moser 2005, Makoa 1997, Fogelman 2017, Ramakhula 2019). The findings in this area concerning the lack of formal policy in CSR and gender are consistent with the literature that limitations in the field of CSR originate from several issues including lack of theorization about gender and outdated gender policies (Grosser and Moon 2019, Kemp and Keenan 2010).

However, the findings further revealed that despite the lack of formal gender policy at MDT, gender issues were discussed to promote understanding and addressed them at the community and individual levels. This has been consistent with the literature reviewed that where problems are serious specific programmes should be established to address women's needs in particular (FAO 2013, Madesen 2016, FAO 2017) and that to achieve meaningful gender mainstreaming men should be part of the changes (Connell 2005). The present study revealed that besides women-specific projects, CSR initiatives at MDT have gone a step further to include men's-only projects, an issue ignored in some studies because men are considered the perpetrators of gender violence and inequality (Winther et al. 2019).

The findings showed that the MDT through the CSR initiatives is promoting the empowerment of both genders through skills development. Women were trained in skills such as catering and dressmaking, while men were empowered to deal with their problems and address gender issues in the community. The findings are consistent with the literature (Connell 2005, Das and Chatterjee 2015) that to achieve meaningful gender equality and empowerment men should be part of the process.

Besides, the findings have shown that ecotourism at Malealea catered for the needs of the local community regardless of gender, age or social standing. The employees of the MDT demonstrated that they helped everyone regardless of their gender. The findings, therefore, suggest that the local community benefited from tourism activities in their area. This contradicts some literature that concluded that elsewhere ecotourism leads to enclave tourism, failing the needs of the poor and vulnerable groups such as women (Mbaiwa and Stronz 2010, Mbaiwa and Hambira 2019).

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, three important sets of conclusions could be drawn. First, tourist-related activities at MDT do not follow and implement any formal gender policy. The management of the lodge and the Matelile Development

Trust acknowledged that they did not have a formal policy on gender. The participants added that they were working without following any particular policy. This situation may be attributed to arguments raised in the literature that since the Beijing Platform gender mainstreaming has never been consistently implemented.

Second, it is clear from the findings that individuals working for the Lodge and MDT were actively addressing gender issues as they arose. For example, some beneficiaries realized that men had problems participating in some projects, they continued to perpetrate violence, engaged in child marriage and refuse to take HIV and AIDS medication. Hence some individuals initiate a men's-only group to address these issues. Individuals who had been working for the MDT continued to address gender issues in their organisations formed after the scourge of COVID-19.

Third, it has been clear from the study that both men and women were being empowered by the MDT CSR initiatives. Most participants demonstrated that during the recent COVID-19 pandemic they were able to effectively deal with its challenges using skills and capabilities acquired while working with MDT. These ranged from the ability to form their groups to continue with some activities that were supported by MDT. Those working for MDT demonstrated their skills in sourcing funds for COVID-19 as a result of skills acquired while working on another pandemic, HIV and AIDS. Therefore, it clear that the local community at Malealea were benefiting from CSR activities in their area and the benefits extended to address gender issues of child marriage, disease, and gender violence.

Recommendations

It firstly recommended that Malelea Lodge and MDT should formulate and implement a gender equality, and empowerment policy. It is clear from this study that gender issues were already being addressed at various levels. The policy will help the CSR initiatives to achieve their goals because literature has shown that incorporating women in CSR benefits companies.

Secondly, it is recommended that both men and women should be empowered with skills, jobs and knowledge. The findings and literature reviewed showed that empowerment of women is a necessity but men should not be left out. Some participants, especially women stated that the Malealea Development Trust was providing them with inputs but limitations arose concerning land. Based on this, it is recommended that land policies and legal frameworks should be harmonized to improve the status of women (Fogelman 2017).

Besides, it has been clear from the findings that women, men and youth were benefiting from the CSR initiatives at the MDT regardless of their gender, age or social status. It is, therefore, recommended that similar ecotourism facilities in the country should initiate CSR projects that address gender issues and ensure that the local community benefit from the projects. Perhaps this should start with the country focusing on mainstreaming gender policies in all sectors with particular focus on tourism which has the potential to address the needs of vulnerable groups (Fistiningrum and Harini 2021, Teshome et al. 2020).

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge the valuable contribution of all who contributed to the success of this study. We would like to single out the following individuals and organizations: all the participants who spared their time to participate in the study; the local chief and the management of Malealea Lodge and MDT who gave us access, organized other participants and participated in the study; and the National University of Lesotho that allowed us to use its resources for this study.

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Appendix

Figure 1. *Africa Map Showing Lesotho's and Malealea Lodge Locaction*

Source: Google map. Retrieved from: https://www.sleeping-out.co.za/md/Malealea-Lodge-Pony Trek-Centre/2944. [Accessed 22 September 2021]

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The Near Abasement of Uganda Hotels' Staff Altruistic Behaviour by COVID-19 Pandemic: A Relief Model

By Joshua Gukiina[*] & Elizabeth Lamunu[±]

This paper aims to analyze the relationship between employee optimism, status competitiveness, interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, it examined the mediating effect of interpersonal adaptability and employee optimism in the stated relationship. A quantitative study was conducted using a sample of 303 respondents that constituted both managers and employees from 70 selected hotels in Uganda shortly after the end of the first lockdown in July, 2020. The associated hypotheses were tested using the Smart-PLS 3.2 software. Once employees are optimistic, undergo free and fair competition for any position, and feel that they freely interact with one another, then they are bound to devote themselves to the welfare of one another at all costs. It examined employee optimism, status competitiveness, and interpersonal adaptability as explanations of employee altruism. This is in addition to the mediation effect of interpersonal adaptability and employee optimism in the stated relationship. In terms of its value, when employees have positive expectations regardless of the current challenges they undergo, there is fair competition for all positions in the organization, and that they interact freely, they can offer help for others' welfare.

Keywords: *employee optimism, status competitiveness, interpersonal adaptability, employee altruism, organizational citizenship behavior and COVID-19*

Introduction

The devotion to the welfare of others underlies the summative essence of employee altruistic behaviour. This is because it precisely denotes an act of sacrificing or risking one's own interests for the sake of another(s), usually at less or no personal cost (Savulescu and Wilkinson 2020). It involves those fairly small but timely and relevant sacrifices to the recipient, such as: attending to a sick colleague in a hospital, donating a kidney to a family member and standing in for a coworker just because he or she is unable. Altruism was derived from a Latin word "alter" which means "other," and its first application is merrily associated with Auguste Comte in the 1830s (Green 2005) who used it to mean caring for others.

However, while the largest percentage of altruism involves little or no cost, this behaviour has in certain cases been offered in extreme circumstances. For instance, some people offer to work for the helpless away from their home countries. To date, we continue to witness cases where medics have walked the extra mile to provide medical care to the sick. In times of war and violence, the services of the Red Cross are by no means merely an illustration. While this

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behavior continues to be demonstrated by people in our respective societies, in Uganda, the hotel industry has been hit big by the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the ease in lockdown measures, the response mechanisms in place have, and continue to threaten, altruistic employee behaviours. For instance, through the help of personal observation, there is glaring disregard for personal assistance. Workmates no longer easily step in to offer assistance to a friend in-need; this is regardless of such ongoing measures such as sanitization, wearing masks, let alone social-distancing. There are marked diminishing employee feelings of concern and empathy for others let alone their hitherto actions that benefit one another. This has stretched to even affect clients. What is important to note is that the dictates of altruism warrant that, even in such extreme situations, employees are still expected to act in such ways that continue to benefit others even when there is evident fear of personal risks (Savulescu and Wilkinson 2020).

Based on these observations, some of the explanations for the reduction in employee altruistic behaviors that were provided by the selected staff we interacted with, were but not limited to a reduction in employee optimism, interpersonal adaptability and status competitiveness. According to those interviewed, they observed that generally staff continue to believe that COVID-19 is real and here to stay. Therefore, they do not envisage proper mechanisms through which to secure their lives (not optimistic). What worries most is that some staff were laid-off since very few clients visit to hotels to date. Therefore, they better relax the extent of care that they have been offering to both their colleagues and clients. For as long as they can be retained on their jobs, so be it. In addition, due to social distancing as a COVID-19 response mechanism, there is no opportunity to freely interact with one another, either with clients or colleagues. This is the essence of absence of interpersonal adaptability. Actually, employees are now being challenged to accept this as a new normal until further notice, since to date, it is hard to tell who is with the infection given that many people are asymptomatic. Therefore, the need to easily socialize and relate with others so as to enhance productive behaviors within the hotels has so far hit a snag. In addition, as for status competitiveness, due to status differences, supervisors are now too bossy, therefore, isolated from their subordinates, reserved, often stay on their desks, irregularly move around and about the hotels and do not wish to easily mix with subordinates. The consequence of all these abating factors is that the selfless behaviors (altruistic behaviors) that inevitably foster individual and organizational efficiency and effectiveness, have significantly declined.

Theoretical Background

In order to attach a theoretical lens to the relationship between employee optimism, status competitiveness, interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism in the context of Uganda hotels, two theories have been adapted. These are: the Interpersonal Theory (Kiesler 1996) and the Social Comparison Theory (Festinger 1954).

Employee Optimism, Status Competitiveness Interpersonal Adaptability and Employee Altruism

In this study, employee altruism refers to the assistance or care that employees offer to their colleagues at little or no cost without expecting to be rewarded (Savulescu and Wilkinson 2020). Employee optimism is taken to mean the generalized feeling amongst people that positive experiences will occur in the future while those that are negative will be minimized (Carver and Scheier 2014). Status competitiveness refers to the struggles that are associated with the socially accepted ranking of individuals, groups, or activities in any social structure (Washington and Zajac 2005). Interpersonal adaptability refers to the flexibility and willingness to interact with others in different situations (Kiesler 1996).

The Interpersonal Theory (Kiesler 1996)

This theory is derived from the notion of interpersonal reciprocation. This view argues that people in a relationship choose to behave in such ways that maintain or reflect similar previous actions and expectations towards each other. This implies that the actions of one party in a relationship simply depict and reaffirm what the other did before. The result is a relationship characterized by a give and return behavior amongst the interactants. To this extent, it could be argued that people in an interaction are usually flexible to the extent that they reciprocate what each other does (interpersonal adaptability). This is to the extent that whenever one party behaves in a particular way, he or she remains expectant that at some point in time, the other party will behave in a similar manner. This is the essence of employee optimism. Further, it is should be overtly stated that in an effective interpersonal interaction, since positive expectations (optimism) are characteristic, offering help to one another (altruism) in such a relationship at little or no cost without expecting to be rewarded could result. This is as such to indicate that the interpersonal theory can explain employee optimism, interpersonal adaptability and employee altruistic behaviors. However, while there is a basis for an inference that employee optimism, interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism could be related, this is not to imply that the theory advances the argument that interpersonal adaptability, mediates in the relationship between employee optimism and employee altruism. Further, the theory does not in any way reflect the argument that interpersonal behaviors are competitive at all. This is because each action of a party in an interaction is voluntarily induced by the actions of the other (Kiesler 1996). Indeed, this is the basis of the integration of the social comparison theory (Festinger 1954), which advances the element of competition in a social system so as to rise or maintain a particular social status in an organization.

Empirically, while there is scanty literature to attest to a relationship between employee optimism, status competitiveness interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism, somehow, the works of Xiao et al. (2020) fragmentally suggest so. This is because, they argue that workplace friendship is the manifestation of interpersonal relationships in the workplace. It is important to note that workplace friendship not only manifests interpersonal relationships, but as well, employee optimism, interpersonal adaptability and selfless helping behavior (altruistic behavior). However, this possible relationship is devoid of traits of status competitiveness. Besides, while Xiao et al. (2020) make a possible basis against which to infer the stated relationship, they do not attempt in any way to state that, interpersonal adaptability and employee optimism, are possible mediators of the relationship under investigation.

Further, the works of Yin et al. (2018) could equally be a basis for inferring that a possible relationship between employee optimism, status competitiveness interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism, could be existent. To these scholars, workplace friendship can positively affect employees' attitudes toward work, and as such, their mates. It could be humbly argued that workplace friendship cannot exist without such employee perceptions of optimism, interpersonal adaptability and selfless behaviors towards one another. This is because their absence implies lack of friendship at the workplace. In this respect, the fact that they move hand-in-hand they could as well be related. However, just as it has been the case in the foregoing scholarly works, Yin et al. (2018) does not as well propose that interpersonal adaptability and employee optimism mediate in the assumed relationship. Besides, these scholars remain silent about a possible inherent inclusion in the hypothesized relationship, status competitiveness.

Equally, Wei et al. (2019) could allude to a possible relationship between employee optimism, status competitiveness interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism. This is because, to these scholars, a negative emotional state in employees has a direct effect on their work attitude and thoughts and this affects their extra role behaviors. By implication, when employees have positive emotions such as when they are optimistic, they are bound to have positive work attitudes such as easily integrating with each other which subsequently leads to extra role behaviors such as altruism. These scholars however do not propose that subsequently, in such a relationship, status competitiveness is inherent, and that the said relationship could be mediated by interpersonal adaptability and employee optimism. Therefore, to this extent, it was possible to hypothesize that:

H_1. Employee optimism is significantly related to employee altruism.
H_2. Employee optimism is significantly related to interpersonal adaptability.
H_3. Interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism are significantly related.
H_4. Interpersonal adaptability mediates in the relationship between employee optimism and employee altruism.

Employee Optimism, Status Competitiveness Interpersonal Adaptability and Employee Altruism

The Social Comparison Theory (Festinger 1954)

This theory posits that individuals in a social system choose to perform better than others. In return, the urge to always do better than others introduces competitive behavior amongst them. Therefore, given that competition is driven by associated privileges, such as a rise in rank or social status, competition is part of human behavior in any social system. In relation to the current study, status competitiveness is inherent in the Uganda hotels' management structures. This is because, due to competition, superiority in performance amongst workers has accrued, and in return, some occupy lower ranks than others. It is those in superior positions that have chosen to remain reserved, keep busy around their desks and do not move around and about the hotels to supervise others due to the fear of COVID-19. This has led to the continuing inflexibility amongst the workers to the extent that employees practically do not blend with one another easily even when it comes to offering each other the necessary assistance (altruistic behaviors) intended to enhance their hotels' efficiency and effectiveness. This is why there is a marked reduction in employee altruism yet these behaviors are critical to the hotels' productivity, although employees are always optimistic whenever they compete through performance enhancement. However, regardless of this implied relationship amongst status competitiveness, employee optimism, interpersonal adaptability and employee altruistic behaviors, to date, there is a paucity of scholarship that attempts to link these constructs. Besides, there is a lack of scholarly evidence to suggest that interpersonal adaptability mediates in the relationship between status competitiveness and employee altruistic behaviour.

In addition, a quick review of the scanty empirical literature relating employee optimism, status competitiveness, interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism, indicates that there could exist a basis against which to hesitantly argue for a derived relationship amongst these variables, however, one that is marked with significant weaknesses that justified the need for this investigation.

For instance, to Anjum et al. (2019), when there is a high level of friendship amongst workers in an organization, the near equivalent of interpersonal adaptability, employees respond by demonstrating strong willingness to share what they have with colleagues, resurrection of emotional needs such as optimism, the will to continue working in the organization in any capacity of choice, the equation to status competitiveness and obviously wanting to help each other at all costs (altruism). Under such an environment, it is possible to argue that these variables are related, considering that all could exist under the same conditions. However, while it is possible to assume this relationship, it is important to note that the relationship is just a derivative of a study that had an entirely different set of variables. Besides, these scholars do not permit a sense of a conclusion that interpersonal adaptability and employee optimism could mediate in a relationship that is being assumed. In addition, the theoretical lens that Anjum et al. (2019) employed to anchor this study is contrary to what the current study has adapted. This implies a contradiction in the constructs' validity of the respective studies.

In a related argument by Yu et al. (2021), there is another point of view against which to derive a possible linkage amongst these variables, but definitely with marked weaknesses. These scholars argue that workplace friendship results in the achievement of individuals' emotional needs in the organization, knowledge sharing, mutual help among workmates, harmonious working atmosphere characterized by mutual trust and love and increased resource investment in extra-role behavior. In the preceding argument, work friendship was treated as the equivalent of interpersonal adaptability which has the potential to lead to emotional needs such as employee optimism, mutual help among workmates (employee altruism). It could reluctantly be argued that against such a background, the spirit of competition for the different positions in the organizational structure could be present. However, until now, even when this relationship could be assumed, it is ideally a derived one without any sufficient empiricism. Besides, the mediation tests alluded to in the present study, are not mentioned anywhere in the study by Yu et al. (2021). Therefore, it was necessary then to hypothesize that:

H_5. Status competitiveness is significantly related to interpersonal adaptability
H_6. Status competitiveness and employee altruism are significantly related.
H_7. Interpersonal adaptability mediates in the relationship between status competitiveness and employee altruism.
H_8. Employee optimism mediates in the relationship between status competitiveness and interpersonal adaptability.
H_9. Employee optimism is mediates in the relationship between status competiveness, and employee altruism.

Methodology

Study Population, Sample Size and Procedure

The staffing of hotels in Uganda was investigated. There are 516 hotels in Uganda (www.jovago.com/ Uganda hotels). For the purpose of this study, out of the stated total number of hotels (516), 220 hotels were selected randomly from the list of hotels using a simple random sampling technique. After contacting each one of those that had been selected, 100 hotels accepted to participate in the study. 5 questionnaires were then distributed to 5 people in each of the 100 hotels that appeared in the final sample for this study. Of the five (5) potential respondents, one (1) was a supervisor and four (4) were subordinates. This selection approach led to the distribution of 500 questionnaires to 500 potential respondents. Out of the 500 questionnaires distributed, 350 were realized. This means that 150 questionnaires were never realized. This implies that an average of seventy (70) hotels finally participated. Therefore, the final usable sample was three hundred fifty (350) respondents which dropped to (303) after data-cleaning. These hotels were located in 16 districts of Uganda but they had not been classified because, until now, the hotel classification in Uganda is still ongoing.

<u>Operationalization and Measurement of Study Variables</u>

The study variables were operationalized based on earlier scholarly works. Four variables were examined which are: employee optimism, status competitiveness, interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism. All the items that measured these variables were anchored on a five point likert scale which ranged from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. This is because this scale provides a neutral middle point which caters for a condition in which a respondent may not have an opinion on the question at hand (Chung Ho Yu 2008). The description of the measurements for each variable is as follows:

Employee Optimism

The unidimensional scale by Cameron et al. (2004) was modified for this study. It consists of six items that directly measure employee optimism. Some of the sample items include: "As employees of this organization, we are optimistic that we will succeed, even when faced with major challenges." This was modified to read as follows: "As employees of this hotel, even under this COVID-19 pandemic situation, we are optimistic that we will succeed, even when faced with major challenges." The second item is: "In this organization, we are dedicated to doing good in addition to doing well." This was modified to read as follows: "In this hotel, regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, we are dedicated to doing good in addition to doing well."

Status Competitiveness

The one-dimensional scale of status competitiveness by Fletcher and Nusbaum (2010) was modified for this study. It is constituted by seventeen items that measure status competitiveness. Some of the sample items include: "My status at work depends on my performance relative to others." This was modified to read as follows: "Under this COVID-19 pandemic situation, my status at work depends on my performance relative to others." The second item: "My achievements are routinely compared to those of my coworkers." This was modified to read as follows: "Under this COVID-19 pandemic situation, my achievements are routinely compared to those of my coworkers."

Interpersonal Adaptability

This was measured using the unidimensional scale of Charbonnier-Voirin and Roussel (2012). This scale consists of five items that measure interpersonal adaptability. Some of the sample items include: "I adapt my work practices to the requirements and suggestions of others." This was modified to read as "under this COVID-19 pandemic situation, I adapt my work practices to the requirements and suggestions of others." The second item: "I try to understand the viewpoints of my counterparts to improve my interaction with them." "Under this COVID-19 pandemic situation, I try to understand the viewpoints of my counterparts so as to improve my interaction with them."

Employee Altruism

The one-dimensional scale by Organ (1988) was adapted for this study. It is a six-item scale that measures employee altruistic behaviors. Some of the sample items include: "Helps others who have heavy workloads in this organization." This was modified to read as follows: "Regardless of this COVID-19 pandemic situation, I help others who have heavy workloads in this hotel." The second item: "Helps others who have been absent in this organization." This was modified to read as follows: "Regardless of this COVID-19 pandemic situation, I help others who have been absent in this hotel."

Common Method Bias

To control for common methods bias, we kept questions short and precise, avoided double-barreled questions and limited the use of negatively worded items. We ensured respondents' anonymity which enabled them to give unbiased responses. Further, we conducted multiple follow-up calls and email reminders for those who delayed to answer the questionnaire. In addition, we adapted previously validated measurement scales to suit the study context. We also contacted three professional academics and two managers to ensure the items were clear and captured their respective constructs. We further used four respondents for each sampled unit of analysis, whereby we received 303 questionnaires in 70 hotels.

Measurement Validation

We assessed the convergent validity of the item using two criteria; standardized item load of above 0.708 and average variance extracted (AVE) above 0.5. The results in Table 4 indicate that these two criteria were met as recommended by Hair et al. (2017), indicating that the items measure what they are intended to measure. Internal consistence was assessed in terms of Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability by considering indices above 0.6 (Hair et al. 2017). The results reveal that the coefficient for the study variables—altruism, interpersonal adaptability, optimism and status competitiveness—are all well above the 0.6 threshold, indicating that the data is reliable.

Table 1. *Measurement Validation Results*

Measures / Constructs	Weight/ Loading	VIF	CV^2 Communality	CV^2 Redundancy	α	Rho-A	CR	AVE[1]
ALT1	0.768	1.137	0.33					
ALT6	0.754	1.418	0.43					
ALT7	0.746	1.365	0.32					
Altruism		1.730	0.34		0.634	0.638	0.800	0.571
IA1	0.912	2.992	0.34	0.28				
IA3	0.810	1.793	0.35	0.30				
IA5	0.790	1.855	0.26	0.27				
IA9	0.807	1.926	0.31	0.28				
Interpersonal Adaptability		1.436	0.29	0.23	0.850	0.861	0.899	0.691
OPT1	0.847	1.312	0.49	0.34				
OPT4	0.663	1.166	0.47	0.35				
OPT5	0.743	1.276	0.38	0.29				
Optimism		1.706	0.46	0.35	0.625	0.666	0.797	0.570
SCOMP2	0.728	1.267	0.37	0.35				
SCOMP3	0.831	1.361	0.36	0.34				
SCOMP4	0.735	1.224	0.37	0.35				
Status Competitiveness		1.740	0.45	0.41	0.649	0.664	0.810	0.587

Discriminant Validity

In order to show the distinction between items (or a set of items) for the study constructs, discriminant validity tests were performed (Henseler et al. 2015). Based on the results in Table 1 it can be stated that there was discriminant validity at the item level due to the high correlation between items of the same construct, and a very weak correlation between items of the different constructs (Henseler et al. 2015).

In addition, as a new method for assessing discriminant validity in partial least squares structural equation modeling, Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) was applied (Henseler et al. 2015). According to these scholars, if the HTMT value is below 0.85, discriminant validity has been established between two reflective constructs. In this regard, based on the results in Table 2, the HTMT value was below 0.85 and as such, there was discriminant validity. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 2. *Fornell-Larcker Criterion Results*

	Altruism	**Interpersonal adaptability**	**Optimis m**	**Status competitiveness**
Altruism	0.756			
Interpersonal adaptability	0.533	0.831		
Optimism	0.472	0.539	0.755	
Status competitiveness	0.474	0.605	0.635	0.766

Table 3. *Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Results*

	Altruism	**Interpersonal adaptability**	**Optimism**	**Status competitiveness**
Altruism				
Interpersonal adaptability	0.701			
Optimism	0.704	0.712		
Status competitiveness	0.712	0.807	0.767	

Further, according to Gefen and Straub (2005), discriminant validity is shown when each measurement item correlates weakly with another construct except for the ones to which it is theoretically associated. Based on results of the cross loadings below, it can be stated that there was discriminant validity amongst the study constructs since each measurement item correlated weakly with another construct except for the ones to which it is theoretically associated. The results in Table 4 indicate discriminant validity based on the cross loadings.

Table 4. *Cross Loadings*

	Altruism	Interpersonal adaptability	Optimism	Status competitiveness
ALT1	0.768	0.470	0.447	0.416
ALT6	0.754	0.311	0.336	0.275
ALT7	0.746	0.400	0.260	0.359
IA1	0.502	0.912	0.522	0.553
IA3	0.470	0.810	0.414	0.510
IA5	0.376	0.790	0.330	0.455
IA9	0.411	0.807	0.505	0.487
OPT1	0.447	0.509	0.847	0.588
OPT4	0.270	0.320	0.763	0.405
OPT5	0.323	0.360	0.743	0.417
SCOMP2	0.283	0.415	0.443	0.728
SCOMP3	0.400	0.531	0.569	0.831
SCOMP4	0.397	0.435	0.435	0.735

Results

Descriptive Statistics

We relay the descriptive statistics the characteristics of the respondents, and hotels that were surveyed. This is as follows:

Characteristics of the Respondents and Response Rate

The average age range of the respondents was 20-25 years. Results revealed that 67% of the respondents were male and 33% were female. In total, the final sample constituted three hundred and three respondents (303).

The survey attained a 90% response rate from the units of inquiry that were Uganda Hotel staff. This was only possible because the investigator requested respondents to spare some time to fill the questionnaires and indeed made many follow-up trips to the selected hotels. Otherwise, the hotel staff were ever busy that it became very hard to secure 100% response rate.

Characteristics of the Hotels Surveyed

The number of hotels that finally constituted the sample was seventy (70). Their characteristics are reported in terms of: number of years that the hotel had been in existence, the number of rooms that the hotel possessed, the number of employees that the hotel had employed at the time of the investigation and its form of ownership. This was in terms of whether it was government or private. Table 5 breaks them down as follows.

Table 5. *Characteristics of the Hotels Surveyed*

No.	Item	Ranges	Sub total	Total
1	No. of years in existence	Less than 10	27	
		Between 11-20	20	
		Between 21-30	23	
		Above 31	10	
		Total		70
2	No. of rooms	Less than 40	20	
		Between 50-100	25	
		Between 101-150	15	
		Above 150	10	
		Total		70
3	No. of employees	Less than 20	20	
		Between 21-40	10	
		Between 11-60	35	
		Above 60	5	
		Total		70
4	Ownership	Government	0	
		Private	70	
		Total		70

Source: researcher's computation.

Correlation Analysis Results

Table 5 presents the means, standard deviations and zero order correlations amongst the study constructs. This is because means depict a summary of the data, whereas standard deviations indicate how well the means represent the data (Field 2009). In light of the above, it can be argued that given the small standard deviations relative to the mean, the data and the attendant results represent the true reality.

Furthermore, in order to establish the relationship between employee optimism, status competitiveness, interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism amongst Uganda hotels' staff, we first examined zero-order correlations coefficients (Table 5) between the variables. At this level of analysis, we established that the correlations between employee optimism and interpersonal adaptability are positively and significantly correlated (r=0.533, p=0.01); the same is for employee optimism and status competitiveness (r=0.472, p=0.01); employee optimism and employee altruism (r=0.474, p=0.01); interpersonal adaptability and status competitiveness were positive and significantly related (r=0.539, p=0.01); interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism (r=0.605, p=0.01); and status competitiveness and employee altruism (r=0.635, p=0.01).

Hypotheses Testing

In order to test for the direct and indirect relationships as indicated in our hypothetical model, Smart-PLS 3.2 was applied (Henseler et al. 2015). In return, bootstrapping was equally applied so as to specify the standard errors and t-statistics. To determine the path's importance, the validity of the Partial Least square-structural equation model (PLS-SEM) was assessed based on the path coefficients and the significance of the path coefficients and the significance level. The resulting p-values were obtained using SmartPLS by using the bootstrapping process and calculating the p-value for each path. Path coefficients and significance levels were determined by randomly sampling 5,000 instances into the model. The results are presented in Table 6 which is supported by Figure 1.

Table 6. *Means, Standard Deviations (SD) and Zero Order Correlations*

Study variables	Means	SD	1	2	3	4
Employee Optimism (1)	4.41	0.68	1			
Interpersonal adaptability (2)	4.42	0.75	0.533**	1		
Status competitiveness (3)	4.40	0.65	0.472**	0.539**	1	
Employee Altruism (4)	4.12	0.54	0.474**	0.605**	0.635**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); n=303.

Figure 1. *PLS-SEM for Employee Altruism*

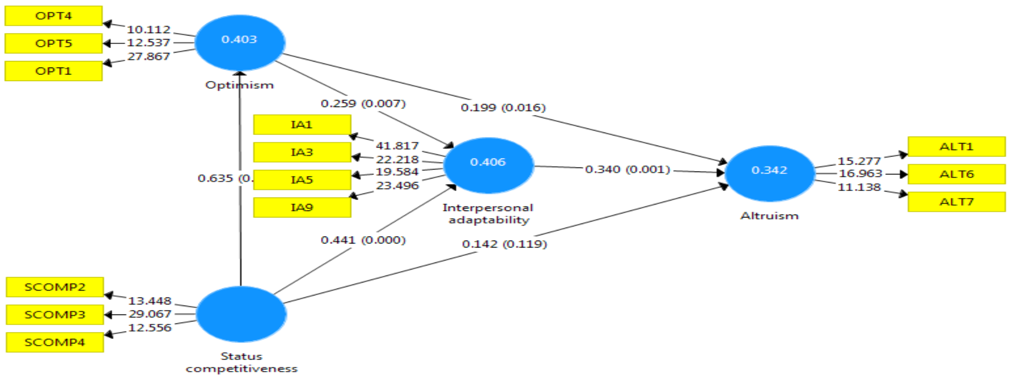

Figure 1 shows the results of the t-values of the outer model factor loadings and the inner model path coefficient and p-values. The size of the arrows represents the absolute value of each path. Table 6 summarizes the results of each proposed hypothesis.

The results show that there is a positive and significant relationship between interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism (β=0.340, p=0.001, t-values= 3.445 with effect size of 0.104). Also, a positive and significant relationship between optimism and altruism (β=0.199, p=0.016, t- values=2.417 with effect size of 0.034), employee optimism and interpersonal adaptability (β=0.259, p=0.007, t-values=2.690). Additionally, we established that status competitiveness is positively and significantly associated with interpersonal adaptability and optimism (β=0.441, p=0.000, t-values=5.072, with effect size of 0.195; β=0.635, p=0.000, t-value=10.519, with effect size of 0.676) but not significantly related with altruism (β=0.142, p=0.119, t-value=1.562, with effect size of 0.015). Further, in terms of the predictive accuracy, coefficient of determination (R^2), the exogenous variables (interpersonal adaptability, status competitiveness and employee optimism,) explain 34.2% of the endogenous factor (employee altruism) which is considered a moderate effect and further supports our model's in-sample model fit (Hair et al. 2017). Hair et al. (2017) recommend that any predictive variance above zero (0) shows predictive relevance, as presented in Table 6.

Mediation Test Results

To test for these indirect relationships, we followed Cepeda-Carrion et al.'s (2018) recommendations. Based on these guidelines, results presented in Tables 7 and 8 show that interpersonal adaptability has a positive and significant mediating effect in the relationship between status competitiveness, employee optimism and employee altruism (β=0.150, p=0.006; β=0.088, p=0.042), with variance accounted for (VAF) of 31.65% and 30.66% in that order, confirming our theorized indirect relationship of status competitiveness, employee optimism and employee altruism through interpersonal adaptability. Additionally, employee optimism has a positive and significant mediating effect in the relationship between status competitiveness, altruism and interpersonal adaptability (β=0.126, p=0.017; β=0.164, p=0.006) with VAF of 26.58% and 27.11% respectively. This confirmed our theorized indirect relationship of status competitiveness, altruism and interpersonal adaptability through optimism. This implies that optimism plays a complementary partial mediating role between status competitiveness, altruism and interpersonal adaptability.

Table 7. *Results of the Direct Hypotheses Tested*

Direct Path	β	S. D	T Stat	P Values	f
Interpersonal adaptability -> Altruism	0.340	0.099	3.445	0.001	0.104
Optimism -> Altruism	0.199	0.082	2.417	0.016	0.034
Optimism -> Interpersonal adaptability	0.259	0.096	2.690	0.007	0.067
Status competitiveness -> Altruism	0.142	0.091	1.562	0.119	0.015
Status competitiveness -> Interpersonal adaptability	0.441	0.087	5.072	0.000	0.195
Status competitiveness -> Optimism	0.635	0.060	10.519	0.000	0.676

R Square	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Altruism	0.342	0.334
Interpersonal adaptability	0.406	0.401
Optimism	0.403	0.401

Table 8. *Mediation Test Results*

Direct Path	β	S.D	T Stat	P Values	
Interpersonal adaptability -> Altruism	0.340	0.099	3.445	0.001	
Optimism -> Altruism	0.199	0.082	2.417	0.016	
Optimism -> Interpersonal adaptability	0.259	0.096	2.690	0.007	
Status competitiveness -> Altruism	0.142	0.091	1.562	0.119	
Status competitiveness -> Interpersonal adaptability	0.441	0.087	5.072	0.000	
Status competitiveness -> Optimism	0.635	0.060	10.519	0.000	
Indirect Path	**β**	**S. D**	**T Stat**	**P Values**	**VAF %**
Optimism -> Interpersonal adaptability -> Altruism	0.088	0.043	2.041	0.042	30.66%
Status competitiveness -> Interpersonal adaptability -> Altruism	0.150	0.054	2.757	0.006	31.65%
Status competitiveness -> Optimism -> Altruism	0.126	0.053	2.391	0.017	26.58%
Status competitiveness -> Optimism -> Interpersonal adaptability	0.164	0.060	2.742	0.006	27.11%
Total Effects	**β**	**S. D**	**T Stat**	**P Values**	
Interpersonal adaptability -> Altruism	0.340	0.099	3.445	0.001	
Optimism -> Altruism	0.287	0.091	3.169	0.002	
Optimism -> Interpersonal adaptability	0.259	0.096	2.690	0.007	
Status competitiveness -> Altruism	0.474	0.066	7.194	0.000	
Status competitiveness -> Interpersonal adaptability	0.605	0.053	11.458	0.000	
Status competitiveness -> Optimism	0.635	0.060	10.519	0.000	

Discussion

The central objective of this investigation was to examine the predictive relationship between employee optimism, status competitiveness interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism under the current COVID-19 pandemic. Findings reveal that there is a positive and significant relationship between employee optimism, interpersonal adaptability and altruism; status competitiveness, interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism; status competitiveness, employee optimism and employee altruism; and status competitiveness, employee optimism and interpersonal adaptability. These results have the following implications in the context of Uganda hotels:

Employee Optimism, Interpersonal Adaptability and Altruism

Results indicate that there is a positive and significant relationship between employee optimism and employee altruism; employee optimism and interpersonal adaptability; interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism; employee optimism, interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism; and that interpersonal adaptability mediates in the relationship between employee optimism and employee altruism. This finding is supported by the works of Xiao et al. (2020) who argue that workplace friendship is the manifestation of interpersonal relationships in the workplace, which in turn, raise the emotions that workers have and the need to help each other. As applied to the context, these relationships imply the following.

Employees that have positive expectations in whatever they do with and for the organization, are bound to ensure that they go out of their way to foster the general welfare of those in need without expecting to be paid. In other words, Uganda hotels' staff who are optimistic that they will succeed, even when faced with major challenges as those conditioned by the COVID-19 pandemic, will always help others who have heavy workloads at their places of work regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic challenges. Further, it means that under uncertain times such as the COVID-19 pandemic, staff that usually expect the best from their hotels will always willingly give off their time to help others who have work-related problems in their workplaces.

Staff that derive positive expectations in all that they do for their employer will always blend with others, regardless of the challenges they are undergoing under the COVID-19 pandemic. In other words, hotel staff in Uganda that find it easy to relax while at their workplaces will always try to understand the viewpoints of their counterparts so as to improve their interaction with them, regardless of the prevailing challenges conditioned by the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, it means that staff of Uganda hotels that are dedicated to doing well for their hotels regardless of the challenges that they undergo such as those associated with COVID-19 pandemic, are always willing to adapt their work practices to the requirements and suggestions of their colleagues. The purpose will always be to ensure that they keep doing well for their own benefit and the employer.

Employees that have the ability to interact with one another freely can easily be able to offer help to one another regardless of the challenges they undergo during the COVID-19 pandemic. In other words, Uganda hotels' staff that do not consider negative comments about their work very important so as not to get derailed, are likely to offer orientation to new employees of the hotels, even though it is not required by the hotels that employ them, let alone the fact that they are undergoing stringent conditions under this COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, this means that Uganda hotels' staff that regard the act of developing good relationships with all their counterparts as an important factor for them to be effective regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, will always offer help that is intended to make their colleagues become more productive. This finding is in part supported by the scholarly works of Yin et al. (2018), who argue that workplace friendship can positively affect employees' attitudes toward work and as such, their mates.

Employees who interact with one another freely, will always have positive expectations in whatever they do regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, so as to be able to offer help to others in need. In other words, hotel staff that freely relate with one another, will always have positive expectations in whatever they do regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic situation. In turn, this will always make them ready to offer assistance to one another at all costs. In support of this relationship, Yin et al. (2018) have humbly argued that workplace friendship cannot be existent without such employee perceptions of optimism, interpersonal adaptability and selfless behaviors towards one another. Relatedly, it means that Uganda hotels' staff that try to understand the viewpoints of their counterparts so as to improve their interaction with them, are always optimistic that they will succeed, even when faced with major challenges such as those associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. In return, such staff can easily offer help to others so as to make them more productive.

These findings are supported by existing theories such as the interpersonal theory (Kiesler 1996). This theory is derived from the notion of interpersonal reciprocation. It maintains that people in a relationship choose to behave in such ways that maintain or reflect similar previous actions and expectations towards each other. This implies that the actions of one party in a relationship simply depict and reaffirm what the other did before. The result is a relationship characterized by give and return behaviors amongst the interactants. Under such a relationship, there is inherent constructive interactions (interpersonal adaptability), given the reciprocal interactions (optimism) since the positive actions of one party inevitably build similar positive expectations from another. Hence, the need to offer help to each other at all costs without expecting a reward becomes a norm (altruism). This is how interpersonal theory anchors the relationship between interpersonal adaptability, employee optimism and employee altruism. To date, there is a dearth of literature to attest to this relationship.

Status Competitiveness, Interpersonal Adaptability and Employee Altruism

Results indicate that there is a positive and significant relationship between status competitiveness and employee altruism; status competitiveness and interpersonal adaptability; interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism; status competitiveness, interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism; and that interpersonal adaptability mediates in the relationship between status competitiveness and employee altruism. These findings could be supported by Anjum et al. (2019) who argue that when there is a high level of friendship amongst workers in an organization (interpersonal adaptability), employees respond by resurrecting their emotional needs (such as being optimistic), and will continue working in the organization in any capacity of choice (status competitiveness) and inevitably wanting to help each other at all costs (altruism).These findings further imply the following.

This implies that Uganda hotels' staff that are convinced that competition for any status in the structures of the hotels is guaranteed, will always be available to offer help intended to improve the welfare of others in their organization regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic situation. In addition, this means that staff that believe that their status at work depends on their performance in relation to others are likely to help others so as to make them become more productive regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

This means that Uganda hotels' staff that believes that promotions in their hotels are only given when one outperforms others, can easily try to understand the viewpoints of their counterparts so as to improve their interaction with them regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Further, it means that Uganda hotels' staff that believe that they can only be able to obtain high status if they outperform their coworkers, easily develop good relationships with most, if not all, of their counterparts as an important factor for their effectiveness regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Uganda hotels' staff that do not consider negative comments about their work to be very important, will always believe that occupation of any status in their hotels depends on one's performance relative to others, regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic situation. In return, such staff is bound to offer help to others who have heavy workloads in their workplaces. In addition, Uganda hotels staff who believe that developing good relationships with most, if not all, of their counterparts is an important factor of their effectiveness, are likely to believe that only the best employees can obtain high status at work regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic situation and these can offer help to others make them more productive. This relationship is supported by Yu et al. (2021) who argue that workplace friendship results in the achievement of an individual's emotional needs in the organization, knowledge sharing, mutual help among workmates, harmonious working atmosphere characterized by mutual trust and love. This ultimately increases resource investment in extra-role behavior.

Theoretically, these findings are equally supported by the social comparison theory (Festinger 1954). This theory argues that there is always an element of competition in a social system for people to either raise or maintain particular social statuses in an organization. This means that once the spirit of competition is accepted as a norm in an organization, there is a possibility for members to relate easily with one another so that they can even go beyond the call of duty by way of being able to offer help to others so that their welfare can be improved. This is the extent to which status competiveness, interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism can be anchored by the social comparison theory (Festinger 1954). In the same breath, there is limited empirical evidence to support these findings.

Status Competitiveness, Employee Optimism and Employee Altruism

Results indicate that there is a positive and significant relationship between status competitiveness and employee altruism; status competitiveness and employee optimism; employee optimism and employee altruism; status competitiveness, employee optimism and employee altruism; and that employee optimism mediates in the relationship between status competitiveness and employee altruism. This finding is supported by Wei et al. (2019) who argue that a positive emotional state in employees has a direct effect on their work attitude and thoughts. In turn, this affects their extra role behaviors. These findings have the following implications:

Once Uganda hotels' staff comes to believe that formal titles such as director of human resource management, manager outside catering etc., are contingent on one's performance relative to others in their hotels, then, staff become optimistic that they will succeed even when faced with major challenges such as the ones associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, as long a Uganda hotels' staff is convinced that ranks and privileges are based on outperforming others in their respective hotels, then they are likely to become dedicated to doing well their work.

This finding equally means that whenever Uganda hotels' staff is convinced that responsibilities in their hotels are delegated based on one's performance relative to others, then it is likely that their formal actions will be associated with a sense of profound purpose regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic situation. In return, such staff cannot avoid helping others who have been absent from their work stations for genuine reasons. In addition, as long as Uganda hotels' staff believe that everybody must compete for every prestigious position in their hotels regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, they are likely to become dedicated to doing well in their work. In return, such staff is bound to willingly give off their time to help others who have work-related problems in their hotels.

Theoretically, these findings are equally supported by the social comparison theory (Festinger 1954). This is because, as argued before, this theory maintains that there is always an element of competition in a social system for people to either raise or maintain particular social statuses in an organization. This implies that with the acceptance of a spirit of competition in an organization, members can then have positive expectations in what they do for the organization. This in return, makes them offer help to each other given the justice associated with the spirit of competition in the organization.

Status Competitiveness, Employee Optimism and Interpersonal Adaptability

Results equally indicate that there is a positive and significant relationship between status competitiveness and interpersonal adaptability; status competitiveness and employee optimism; employee optimism and interpersonal adaptability; status competitiveness, employee optimism and interpersonal adaptability; and that employee optimism mediates in the relationship between status competitiveness and interpersonal adaptability. Given that most of what this relationship implies has been discussed above, what remains is the inherent relationship between status competitiveness, employee optimism and interpersonal adaptability and the extent to which employee optimism mediates in this relationship.

Uganda hotels' staff convinced that ranks and privileges are based on outperforming others in their respective hotels regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, are likely to become dedicated to doing well in their work and can adjust their work practices if someone points out a better solution. Uganda hotels' staff need to be optimistic that they will succeed, even when faced with major challenges such as those associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, for them to develop a feeling that they are able to obtain high status if they outperform their coworkers. In doing so, they are bound to adjust their work practices if someone points out a better solution to any challenge they face while working. This could be supported by Wei et al. (2019) who allude to the argument that employees that are optimistic, have improved work attitudes and thoughts. In return, this brings about employee altruism as a form of extra role behaviors.

Theoretically, these findings are as well-supported by the social comparison theory (Festinger 1954) and the interpersonal theory (Kiesler 1996). This is because the spirit of competition guarantees positive expectations among staff of an organization, and this in turn could make them interact meaningfully amongst each other as advanced by the interpersonal theory. However, in the same breath, there is limited empirical evidence to support these findings.

Conclusions

This paper presents an examination of the relationship between employee optimism, status competitiveness interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism. Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that staff that is optimistic that they will succeed, even when faced with major challenges such as those associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, can try to understand the viewpoints of their counterparts so as to improve their interaction with them. This tendency makes them ready to offer help to others so as to make them more productive.

In order for staff to believe that occupation of any status in their organization depends on one's performance relative to others, they need at times to disregard the majority of the negative comments made by others because they have a duty to offer help to others who have heavy workloads in their workplaces regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Staff needs to believe that each and everybody must compete for every prestigious position in their organization regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, if they are likely to become dedicated to doing well their work and interact with one another more meaningfully in the pursuit of organizational goals and objectives.

Staff needs to positively expect to succeed even in face of competition for the different positions in the organization particularly if a culture of offering help to one another is to be nurtured in the organization regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Implications of the Study

At a theoretical level, the interpersonal theory (Kiesler 1996), explains employee optimism, interpersonal adaptability and employee altruistic behaviors. In a constructive interpersonal relationship, there is inherent expectation for the best, based on previous experiences by the interactants, which the parties flexibly adjust to one another's ways of life and can be available to assist one another at all costs. However, the theory does not argue for interpersonal behaviors being competitive at all. This is because the actions of the interactants are voluntarily induced by the actions of the other (Kiesler 1996). Therefore, status competitiveness could be explained by the social comparison theory (Festinger 1954). This theory maintains that elements of competition exist in a social system so as to enable parties to rise or maintain a particular social status in an organization.

At policy level, regardless of the pandemic, the willingness and necessity to offer assistance to others in the same workplace should be explicit in the core values of the organization. This is why organizations need to be clear on how they foster positive expectations on the part of their employees, how they do not segregate any employee when it comes to competition for the positions in the structure when they fall vacant, and how they encourage positive interactions amongst their members. These ideals need to be documented and communicated explicitly so that they retain as much clarity necessary to induce their full implementation. This is because they have been found to impact essential employee altruistic behaviors.

Managerially, this is a direct invitation of supervisors in organizations to ensure that if employees are to sacrifice their resources for the sake of others' welfare, there is a need for them to always have positive expectations in the actions of the organization, and they should be certain that they are free to compete for the various positions in the structure, have to be able and willing to interact freely with one another in the organization. This is because all these standards have been found to have an effect on the level of sacrifice that an employee can make to the welfare of the organization.

Study Limitations and Future Research Directions

In the explanation of employee altruistic behaviors, this study has specifically considered the role of employee optimism, interpersonal adaptability and status competitiveness. Future studies could explore the role of other factors in ensuring the growth and development of employee altruistic behaviors. Such factors as cultural adaptability, training and learning efforts, ability to deal with uncertain and unpredictable work situations, competitive recognition, co-worker competitiveness, and more, directly impact the willingness to sacrifice for others in the organization. However, these have not been considered in the recent scholarly efforts intended to explain employee altruistic behaviors.

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