

# *Athens Journal of Tourism*



*Quarterly Academic Periodical, Volume 9, Issue 4, December 2022*  
URL: <https://www.athensjournals.gr/ajt> Email: [journals@atiner.gr](mailto:journals@atiner.gr)



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**Exploring the Growing Importance of Cultural Diversity: Case Studies of the Hospitality Industry**

# Athens Journal of Tourism

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The *Athens Journal of Tourism (AJT)* is an Open Access quarterly double-blind peer reviewed journal and considers papers from all areas of tourism and related disciplines such as culture, leisure, recreation, geography, urban planning, heritage, sports, historical cities, landscape, architecture etc. The AJT considers theoretical and empirical papers as well as case studies and policy papers. The journal's aim is to be useful to both academics of tourism research and the practitioners of the tourism industry. Many of the papers published in this journal have been presented at the various conferences sponsored by [the Tourism, Leisure & Recreation Unit](#) of the Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER). All papers are subject to ATINER's Publication Ethical Policy and Statement. A journal publication might take from a minimum of six months up to one year to appear. All papers are subject to ATINER's [Publication Ethical Policy and Statement](#).

The Athens Journal of Tourism  
ISSN NUMBER: 2241-8148- DOI: 10.30958/ajt  
Volume 9, Issue 4, December 2022  
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The current issue is the fourth of the ninth volume of the *Athens Journal of Tourism*, published by the [Tourism, Leisure & Recreation Unit](#) of ATINER.

Gregory T. Papanikos  
President  
ATINER



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- 

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- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **8 May 2023**

#### **Academic Member Responsible for the Conference**

- **Dr. Valia Kasimati**, Head, [Tourism, Leisure & Recreation Unit](#), ATINER & Researcher, Department of Economic Analysis & Research, Central Bank of Greece, Greece.
- **Dr. Peter Jones**, Co-Editor, [Athens Journal of Tourism](#) & Professor of Management, University of Gloucestershire, UK.

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## How Digitalization in Tourism Led to Moral Disengagement of Employees: Differential Impacts on X, Y, Z Generations in Egyptian Hotels

By Mohamed Hany B. Moussa<sup>\*</sup>, Dalia Ibrahim Helal<sup>‡</sup> & Mohamed Hussein Abdel Gaber<sup>°</sup>

*The recent global trend towards digitalization is causing a lot of economic, political and social changes to all world populations and states. From travel agencies to Online Travel Agencies (OTA's) in Tourism and from Central Reservation Offices (CRO's) to Global Distribution Networks (GDS) in hospitality business, this is how the world changed. Even social media is converting from Facebook to Metaverse and from Two Dimensional (2D) to Virtual Reality (VR) and Virtual Augmented Reality (VAR) besides to holograms. Many researches explored the impacts of digitalization on these perspectives. However, few if any were focused to measure the shift in moral models adopted due to this shift in life, from physical to digital. This paper targets to explore the moral disengagement caused by the aforementioned trend on employees from different generations “x, y and z” concerning total performance, reputation, present and future image of hospitality business operations and how is this perceived among them and the role of accumulated experience to mitigate these impacts.*

**Keywords:** digitalization, x, y, z generations, moral disengagement, immoral decisions, reputation, total performance, present and future image, accumulated experience

### Background

Moral disengagement is a concept used in social psychology to describe the process of persuading oneself that ethical norms do not apply to them in a given situation. This is accomplished by distinguishing moral responses from inhumane behavior and avoiding self-condemnation. Moral disengagement, as a result, is the process of re-framing or re-construing destructive action as morally acceptable without modifying the behavior or moral norms.

Job happiness, organizational citizenship activities, and counterproductive behaviors have all been demonstrated to be influenced by organizational justice perspectives. The current research investigates how people view organizational fairness in connection to self-reported deviant work practices.

Moral disengagement refers to a person's ability to turn off moral self-control and self-censure, allowing them to engage in morally objectionable behavior

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without feeling guilty or remorseful (Bandura et al. 1996, Detert et al. 2008). Moral self-regulation is deactivated when people rephrase the issue in a way that permits them to rationalize and justify behaviors that are against moral standards. Detert et al. (2008) claim that employees may use one of several rationalizations as a reflection of their moral disengagement. Employees, on the other hand, may draw advantageous analogies to justify unethical behavior. Employees can rationalize their conduct in a variety of ways, allowing them to mentally separate themselves from unethical or immoral behavior (Claybourn 2011).

In the link between injustice and deviant work behaviors, we hypothesize that two mechanisms of moral disengagement – diffusion and shifting of responsibility – act as mediators. Risk-taking, non-compliance, and a lack of involvement are all considered deviant work habits in today's workplace. Our assumptions were tested using structural models, and the results suggest a relationship between self-reported deviant work equation behaviors and feelings of organizational injustice. Feelings of unfairness exacerbated individual moral disengagement, which helped to minimize the impact of justice beliefs on deviant work conduct. The findings of this study add to our understanding of the impact of organizational justice and indicate to moral disengagement as a possible mechanism for sustaining workplace deviant behavior.

Moral reasoning is translated into behaviors by self-regulatory mechanisms based in moral norms and self-sanctions, according to the social cognitive theory of morality. As a result, the moral self is incorporated into a larger socio-cognitive self-theory that also encompasses self-organizing, proactive, self-reflective, and self-regulatory systems. There are three key sub-functions to this moral agency-based self-regulatory system. The first sub-function is self-monitoring, which is the first step in gaining control over one's behavior. "Action causes self-reactions by triggering a judgement mechanism that evaluates conduct against internal norms and contextual circumstances."

As a result, moral judgments have a self-reactive effect. The second and third sub-functions, respectively, are self-reactive and judgmental systems.

### *Deceptive Behavior and Unethical Decision-making*

When addressing the numerous causes of moral disengagement, Bandura et al. (1996) concluded that humane personal values are insufficient to reject violent behavior. In order to sustain moral personal control and "compassionate" behavior, civilized living necessitates safeguards as an intrinsic component of social structures.

When Detert et al. (2008) looked into the effects of moral disengagement, they discovered empirical data that backed up their theory that moral disengagement is linked to immoral decisions. Morally disengaged people are more inclined to make morally unacceptable decisions. Internalized deterrents that may ordinarily prevent people from acting unethically are less active when there is a gap between internal moral norms and "contemplated behaviors."

Barsky (2011) also conducted two researches to look into the effects of moral disengagement on workplace unethical behavior. Moral disengagement was

studied utilizing moral justification and blame shifting, as well as unethical behavior including “outright lying” and “attempts to conceal the truth.” Both of Adam Barsky’s experiments in the organizational literature found a substantial link between moral disengagement and people’s proclivity to make unethical decisions. In the second study, Barsky (2011) uncovered empirical evidence that goal-setting participation, i.e., a collaborative decision-making process, is positively connected to deception. “Perhaps most surprising, while moral reasons tended to increase in reported incidences of unethical behavior, this was only true when employees didn't believe they had a say in determining their performance goals at work,” says the study.

Moral arguments, according to McGraw et al. (1995), have major political implications. They discovered that moral factors lead to a more positive appraisal of a contentious decision. Character assessments can also be swayed, leading to more favorable public perceptions of the politician in question. McGraw et al. (1995) came to the conclusion that politicians can influence public opinion on sensitive matters and improve their own reputations without fear of punishment by using moral arguments.

### *Moral Disengagement Perceptions*

According to research on moral disengagement, the ability to recognize one’s moral obligation and discern between right and wrong is not always followed by the desire and ability to act accordingly (Caprara et al. 2014). People might avoid taking full responsibility for the consequences of their actions that are contrary to their own norms and values, and whose disclosure would result in a loss of self-esteem, by selectively disengaging their own sense of moral culpability. Considering the high infectivity of breaking boundaries set at protecting public health during a pandemic’s outbreak, however, it may come at a significant human and societal cost (Task Force COVID-19 2020).

Moral disengagement is a changeable social cognitive orientation influenced by both individual dispositions and perceptions of social context, such as generalized social trust (henceforth GST), described as “the idea that most people can be trusted” (Uslaner 2012). Individual personality traits (such as agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability (Caprara et al. 2013, Fossati et al. 2014)) as well as so-called dark personality traits (such as narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (DeLisi et al. 2014, Fossati et al. 2014)) have been linked to moral disengagement in empirical studies. Other research has discovered that perspectives on the social environment, such as GST, can either encourage or discourage moral disengagement (Hystad et al. 2014).

We tested a theoretical model assigning moral disengagement the role of the proximal predictor of two important classes of rule-respecting behaviors: digitalization and immoral decisions, with the goal of furthering our understanding of the mechanism fostering rule-respecting behaviors during the digitalization. Of course, further research is needed on the characteristics that keep people motivated in rule-following activities. The moral offers social science an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to contribute meaningfully and timely to the well-being of our hospitality society.

*Relationships between Moral Disengagement and Cumulative Experience*

Moral disengagement was investigated in particular to learn more about how previous cumulative experience influences labor quality. In this study, the researchers intended to see if there were any links between job characteristics, job satisfaction, moral disengagement, and work experience.

Employees with negative attitudes toward their jobs were more likely to experience moral disengagement, leading them to believe it was okay to damage others, according to the research (Oldham and Hackman 1981, Latham and Budworth 2007).

Employees' attitudes and actions in the workplace Despite the fact that numerous industrial and organizational psychologists have been striving for more than four decades to identify the impacts on employees' workplace behavior, harassment has not been researched to the same amount as other variables in workplace behavior studies. Despite this, it has been suggested that harassment has a similar impact on firms and their employees (Leiter and Maslach 1988). Employees who have been harassed are more likely to report low levels of organizational commitment, bigger intentions to quit, higher levels of turnover, higher levels of absenteeism, and lower job performance ratings if harassment is similar to other workplace behaviors.

Employees who have been harassed are more likely to report low levels of organizational commitment, bigger intentions to quit, higher levels of turnover, higher levels of absenteeism, and lower job performance ratings if harassment is similar to other workplace behaviors. If there are relationships between harassment and other workplace behaviors, data from research on the factors that influence those behaviors could be utilized to better understand harassment. Employees who work in high-harassment environments, for example, may exhibit lower levels of organizational commitment than those who work in low-harassment environments. Furthermore, individuals with low levels of dedication to their firm may be less concerned about the well-being and courteous treatment of their coworkers, which will reflect negatively on the organization as a whole experience.

*Job Satisfaction and Workplace Perceptions*

Organizational climate and job characteristics—dealing with others—were strongly connected with job satisfaction among the work factors studied in this study to identify employees' work attitudes (organizational climate, interpersonal job characteristics-dealing with others, and friendship opportunities). Employee perceptions of how their firm treats them are reflected in the organizational climate. Employees with better organizational climate ratings were more satisfied at work than those with lower organizational climate ratings, indicating that their supervisor valued and respected them (Cohrs et al. 2006), Employees who stated that they did not have as many opportunities for interpersonal connection as they would want were less satisfied with their jobs than those who stated that they did. This finding is consistent with prior study (Cohrs et al. 2006) that demonstrated favorable connections between job satisfaction and social support, which is

conceptually linked to, but not identical to, the idea that one has ample possibilities for interpersonal connection at work. This link could be used to highlight individual variances in social contact preferences. For example, both scotopic and scotopic are scotopic (i.e., people who need others to feel safe, help, or gratification (Sturman et al. 2006)). People who are extroverted, talkative, and sociable, as well as introverts, are more likely to perceive opportunities for social interaction as vital, though not critical, for job satisfaction. The extent to which such individuals were able to meet their interpersonal contact needs at work may have influenced their feelings about their jobs. Employees' feelings that their jobs don't allow them to meet their social needs can lead to a lack of job satisfaction.

#### *Cumulative Effect on Reputation*

In the workplace, unethical behavior and other bad interpersonal interactions are all too typical. Harassment and other harmful behaviors, such as those listed above, can definitely have a negative influence on business and individual operations.

According to the findings of this study, work quality, satisfaction, and moral disengagement are all linked to unethical behavior. They also provide guidance on how to effectively implement interventions to minimize or eradicate harassment, which is a practical consequence of this relationship.

For example, changing organizational characteristics (such as structure, policies, and employee programs) to improve workers' work ratings is likely to lessen harassment incidences.

Intervening on behalf of individual employees or groups of employees may also be beneficial. Education about the types of unethical behavior that harm individuals and organizations, as well as how to successfully prevent or deal with unethical behavior on an individual and/or organizational level, could be one of these therapies.

#### *Causes and Manifestations of Moral Disengagement*

According to moral disengagement theory, morally disengaged employees are more likely to engage in activities that hurt the business, its members, or both (Bandura 1986, Bandura 1999, Robinson and Bennett 1995). Based on organizational control theory and moral disengagement theory, we claim that slack formal organizational control increases workplace deviance by allowing employees to morally detach. We also suggested that moral disengagement affects the strength of the positive link between perceived organizational control and workplace deviance, because morally disengaged people are more inclined to engage in behaviors that benefit the organization than morally engaged people (Moore 2008). As a consequence, based on the real facts and theoretical concepts expressed previously.

*Mediating Role of Moral Disengagement in the Relationship between Empathy and Employee Ethics*

Empathy has received a lot of attention in the morality literature (see Batson 2011). Empathy is “our ability to identify what another person is thinking or feeling, and to respond to those thoughts and feelings with an appropriate emotion,” according to Cohen (2012).

According to academics, empathy has both subjective and cognitive components (Davis 1980, Hoffman 1984). Ahmad and Murray (2019) nailed both components of empathy when they described pity and compassion as “the emotion which we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to imagine it in a very real fashion” in the classic *Their Theory of Moral Sentiments*. The fact that we frequently derive anguish from the suffering of others is so self-evident that no instances are necessary to demonstrate it.

Furthermore, in the business ethics literature, empathy has been demonstrated to result in less immoral bargaining strategies and more principle-based moral judgments (Cohen 2012; Mencl and May 2009). According to moral psychology research, empathy leads to charity, teamwork, and pro-social behavior (Batson and Ahmad 2009, Eisenberg and Miller 1987). In a review of the literature, Miller and Eisenberg (1988) found a negative association between empathy and antisocial/aggressive behavior.

According to Detert et al. (2008) there is also a link between empathy and unethical decision-making. Empathy has not been extensively explored in relation to the many components of consumer ethics, which is a flaw in the consumer ethics literature.

Empathic concern and perspective taking, just as empathy is linked to cheating (Brown et al. 2010) and other antisocial activities, should be connected negatively with consumer actions that are unjust, unfair, or damaging to others (Miller and Eisenberg 1988).

Passively profiting from the seller’s blunders (mistakes that harm the seller) and actively earning from questionable but legal conduct are examples of these behaviors. Empathy increases generosity, therefore it’s likely to influence attitudes toward “doing well” and “recycling” activities. Because these actions do not inflict any direct harm, empathy should not be linked to perceptions of “no harm, no foul” behaviors. The formal hypotheses listed below are proposed.

Empathy is linked to unfavorable thoughts about passively benefiting at the seller’s expense. H1b: Empathy is linked to unpleasant thoughts about making money from illegal but legal activities. H1c: The principle of “no harm, no foul” has nothing to do with empathy. H1d: Empathy is linked to positive ideas about “doing well” and recycling.

Empathy and moral disengagement were discovered to be negatively associated in a previous study. According to Hoffman (1987), empathetic responses culminate in the internalization of moral thought that is concerned with the wellbeing of others. According to Eisenberg et al. (2004) empathy-related responses are linked to pro-social moral thinking. As a result, empathy should be



inversely related to moral disengagement because moral disengagement is linked to cognitive mechanisms that allow immoral behavior.

Detert et al. (2008) claim that moral disengagement mediates the negative link between empathy and unethical decision-making. Their study examined unethical decision-making using an eight-item scale, with just two of the questions related to consumer activities, as previously mentioned. Their findings could be applied to a variety of unethical consumer behavior. Moral disengagement is hypothesized to lessen the unfavorable associations between empathy and attitudes toward different types of unethical consumer behavior (e.g., passively profiting from seller faults and actively benefiting from questionable but legal actions).

More positive sentiments toward “do no harm” activities should result from moral detachment. People may utilize moral justification (e.g., claiming that duplicating a CD does not directly harm someone) or beneficial comparison to make these types of behaviors acceptable (e.g., by believing that downloading software without paying for it is not as unethical as stealing physical products from a store).

Employees can also use blame displacement/diffusion to justify activity that causes “no harm, no foul” (e.g., by believing that many other employees also copy music or download software without paying for it). Because a lack of empathy leads to increased moral disengagement, which in turn leads to more positive judgments of “no harm, no foul” behaviors, an indirect negative relationship between empathy and beliefs about “no harm, no foul” behaviors can be predicted, with moral disengagement acting as a mediating factor.

## **Methodology**

This paper adopts a descriptive quantitative analysis technique. The tool used in this paper is a questionnaire form of twelve questions. The first four questions were meant to reveal the demographic data of respondents whereas the rest of the questions meant to reveal the level of moral disengagement and how and to what extent does this impact immoral decisions taking in the enterprise from one side and its effect on reputation, image and accumulated experience of the enterprise. To do this a Likert scale of five points was used. The questionnaire was tested for validity and reliability where alpha Cronbach values were 0.83 and 0.81 which refer to acceptable levels of both. The questionnaire form was circulated among employees via Survey Monkey platform on random basis. A number of 366 questionnaire were received of which 204 “55.7%” were valid for analysis. This number is adequate as a sample according to Online Sample Size Calculator. The handling of this questionnaire extended between March and June 2021. The limited number of received questionnaires is due to diminishing labor force during COVID-19 pandemic. Employees of all hospitality ranks participated in this study aside from their job titles. The tool was allowed only to Cairo hotels since other destinations hotels were closed or confined to work at very low capacity 8-15%. This poses a limitation to the generalization of the results of this study. In the next phase, data collected were tabulated and coded for analysis. Percentages, ANOVA

and Kruskal-Wallis tests were later instituted using online analytical platforms.

**Results and Discussion**

Data collected was tabulated and analyzed to derive out findings of this research. First tabulation of responses was made based on three generations investigated. Table 1 shows this.

**Table 1. Attributes Distribution According to Age Category**

Total = 48					Total = 66					Total = 85				
<26 “Generation z”					<26-57 “Generation y”					<57 Total = 85 “Generation x”				
V. high effect	High effect	Neutral	Little effect	No effect	V. high effect	High effect	Neutral	Little effect	No effect	V. high effect	High effect	Neutral	Little effect	No effect
22	12	8	5	1	42	13	8	2	1	38	27	7	1	1
8	27	9	3	1	34	18	9	4	1	49	26	7	2	0
14	19	10	4	1	25	30	8	2	1	55	23	5	2	0
23	11	6	5	3	19	28	13	5	1	35	33	10	5	1
28	9	6	3	2	28	22	14	2	0	26	20	8	4	1

To explore whether there are differences among x, y, z groups two tests were performed, i.e., Anova and Kruskal-Wallis tests.

**Table 2. Anova Test Results Among x, y, z Groups**

Summary of Data						
	Treatments					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
N	5	5	5			15
∑X	488	606	665			1759
Mean	97.6	121.2	133			117.267
∑X <sup>2</sup>	47870	74038	89185			211093
Std.Dev.	7.7653	12.1532	13.6015			18.5567
Result Details						
Source	SS	df	MS			
Between-treatments	3248.93	2	1624.467	F = 12.40051		
Within-treatments	1572	12	131			
Total	4820.93	14				

\*The f-ratio value is 12.40051. The p-value is 0.001202. The result is significant at p<0.01.

According to Table 2 significant differences were detected among x, y, z groups where the f-ratio value is 54.98961. The p-value is <0.00001. The result is significant at p<0.01.

To further explore the case, Kruskal-Wallis Test was performed as a confirmatory test. Table 3 shows that highly significant differences exist between groups where the p-value is 0.00148. The result is significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 3.** *Kruskal-Wallis Test*

T1	T2	T3	
95	105	94	
106	118	96	
103	122	86	
98	139	81	
86	122	111	
Ranks T1	Ranks T2	Ranks T3	
2	5	9	
6	7	13	
4	9	12	
3	14	11	
1	9	15	
T: 16	T: 44	T: 60	
n: 5	n: 5	n: 5	
$H = (12/(N(N+1))) * (\sum T^2/n) - 3(N+1)$			
$H = 0.05 * 1158.4 - 48$			
$H = 9.92$			
The $H$ statistic is 9.92 (2, $N = 15$ ).			

The p-value is 0.00701. The result is significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

Both Anova and Kruskal-Wallis tests detected highly significant differences among views of x, y, z generations as shown in Tables 2 and 3. This means that their perceptions towards investigated factors differ significantly based on their generation.

To understand the differences weighted average was used to rank responses of each generation. This is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** *Investigated Attributes Distribution Among z Generation*

Attribute	Total = 48					w.average	Attribute Rank	G. Rank
	V. high effect	High effect	Neutral	Little effect	No effect			
Reputation	22	12	8	5	1	95	4	
Cumulative experience	8	27	9	3	1	106	1	
Total performance	14	19	10	4	1	103	2	
Present image	23	11	6	5	3	98	3	
Future image	28	9	6	3	2	86	5	
Total						488		3
Mean						97.6		3

Table 4 shows that for z generation (up to 26 years) cumulative experience ranked as first attribute in importance meaning that generation z see that first to

lose when immoral decisions exist is cumulative experience, they see that second to lose is total performance, third in row is present image, fourth will be reputation and fifth will be future image whereas future image came fifth and last. Performance, present image and reputation came as second, third and fourth in row. It is evident that this group possesses the least mean (97.6) and the least weighted average score (488 points).

**Table 5.** Investigated Attributes Distribution among y Generation

Total = 66								
<26-57 " Generation y"								
Attribute	V. high effect	High effect	Neutral	Little effect	No effect	w.average	Attribute Rank	G. Rank
Reputation	42	13	8	2	1	105	4	
Cumulative experience	34	18	9	4	1	118	3	
Total performance	25	30	8	2	1	122	2	
Present image	19	28	13	5	1	139	1	
Future image	28	22	14	2	0	122	2	
Total						606		2
Mean						121.2		2

Table 5 shows that for generation y (<26-57) present image ranked number one in importance since they see present image is first to lose when immoral decisions are there, they also see that second to lose is performance and future image of the operation. They see that third to lose will be cumulative experience, followed by reputation and finally future image. It can be concluded that this group possesses the second highest mean (121.2) and the second average weighted score (606 points).

**Table 6.** Investigated Attributes Distribution Among x Generation

Total = 85								
<57 "Generation x"								
Attribute	V. high effect	High effect	Neutral	Little effect	No effect	w.average	Attribute Rank	G. Rank
Reputation	38	27	7	1	1	122	5	
Cumulative experience	47	27	5	3	1	133	2	
Total performance	49	26	7	2	0	130	3	
Present image	55	23	5	2	0	124	4	
Future image	35	33	10	5	1	156	1	
Total						665		1
Mean						133		1

Table 6 shows that Future image is seen by generation x as major loss due to immoral decisions resulting from moral disengagement. They think that cumulative experience comes in second rank as the more the operation possesses of this attribute the less immoral decisions are present. They also see that the third loser here is performance, the fourth is present image as a consequence and the fifth will be reputation of the operation. It is also worth stating that generation x weighted

averages were the highest among all other generations (665points) and that their mean was also highest of all generations.

**Table 7. Post Hoc Tukey HSD (Beta)**

Pairwise Comparisons		HSD <sub>.05</sub> = 19.3119	Q <sub>.05</sub> = 3.7729    Q <sub>.01</sub> = 5.0459
		HSD <sub>.01</sub> = 25.8279	
<b>T<sub>1</sub>:</b> <b>T<sub>2</sub></b>	M <sub>1</sub> = 97.60 M <sub>2</sub> = 121.20	23.6	Q = 4.61 (p=0.01738)
<b>T<sub>1</sub>:</b> <b>T<sub>3</sub></b>	M <sub>1</sub> = 97.60 M <sub>3</sub> = 133.00	35.4	Q = 6.92 (p=0.00100)
<b>T<sub>2</sub>:</b> <b>T<sub>3</sub></b>	M <sub>2</sub> = 121.20 M <sub>3</sub> = 133.00	11.8	Q = 2.31 (p=0.27122)

Tukey's HSD (honestly significant difference) procedure facilitates pairwise comparisons within ANOVA data. The F statistic in Table 7 tells whether there is an overall difference between sample means. Tukey's HSD test results determine that significant differences arise between T1 (z generation) and T2 (y generation). Results also indicate significant differences between T1 (z generation) and T3 (x generation). It could be concluded that T1 (z generation) is significantly different from T2 and T3 (y & x generations) in regards to their views on immoral decisions impacts. No significant differences arise between T2 and T3 (y & x generations). To deeper explore the case, attributes were order-listed based on generations' perceptions to show differences in order then weighted averaged. These order-listing and weighted averages appear in Tables 8 and 9.

**Table 8. Oder of Attributes Based on Type of Generation**

Attribute	Gen z	Gen y	Gen x
1	Cumulative	P. image	F. Image
2	Performance	F. image & Performance	Cumulative experience
3	P. Image	cumulative	Total performance
4	Reputation	Reputation	Present image
5	F Image		Reputation

**Table 9. Ranking of Attributes Among Different Generations**

Attribute	Gen z	Gen y	Gen x	Total	Rank
Reputation	4	5	5	14	4
Cumulative experience	1	3	2	6	1
Total performance	2	2	3	7	2
Present image	3	1	4	8	3
Future image	5	2	1	8	3

Generations in general see that immoral decisions resulting from oral disengagement drives cumulative experience away from the operation in the first place. This reflects secondly on performance of the operation, eventually, both

present and future images of the operation are affected and last, reputation of the operation is destroyed.

In general the ranking of importance for investigated attributes is as follows

- 1- Cumulative experience
- 2- Total performance of the operation
- 3- Present and future image.
- 4- Reputation of the operation.

Thence, generation z seems to be aware the loss of cumulative experience for a start more than the other two generations. Generations z and y seem to be aware of the consequence of losing cumulative experience in downgrading operational performance than generation x. Generation y values present image of the operation more than z and x. Generation x values future image of the operation than do generation z and y. Generation z looks to be keener on reputation of the operation than do generation z or x.

**Table 10.** Cumulative Re-ranking of Attributes Among Different Generations

Attribute	Gen z	Gen y	Gen x	Total	Rank
Cumulative experience	1	3	2	5	1
Total performance of the operation	2	2	3	7	2
Present image	2	1	4	7	2
Future image	2	2	1	5	1
Reputation of the operation	4	5	5	14	3

Cumulative experience and future image came as first in importance with same weights, total performance and present image came as second with same weights and reputation came as third in row as shown in Table 10.

### Conclusions, Limitations and Implications

Overall, it can be concluded that Digitalization caused moral disengagement that led the enterprise to take immoral decisions especially at the absence or deterioration of accumulated experience. This leads to negatively impacting the reputation of the enterprise and reflected negatively on the total performance. It is worth saying in this context that all generations perceived these variables but in different ways. Tukey's HSD test results asserted that significant differences arise between T1 (z generation) and T2 (y generation). Results also indicate significant differences between T1 (z generation) and T3 (x generation). It could be concluded that T1 (z generation) is significantly different from T2 and T3 (y & x generations) in regards to their views on immoral decisions impacts. No significant differences arise between T2 and T3 (y & x generations). This might be due to the nature of life stressors on both categories investigated. It should also be noted that the cumulative re-ranking of attributes among different generations indicated that Cumulative experience and future image came as first in importance with same weights, total performance and present image came as second with same weights

and reputation came as third in row. This means that employees aside from gender are more concerned about variables that are common between them and the operation like total performance, image whether present or potential and experience, while they are less concerned with variables that relate to the operation seldom like reputation that relates only to the enterprise.

From an academic view point, data collected were analyzed- overall- away from variables like marital status and education. Also, the limited number of questionnaire forms returned back due to diminished labor during COVID-19 pandemic limits the generalization of the results of this study. More research is seen in demand to cover these areas. Many questions can be answered like what marital status are more exposed and which educational level is more liable to bear impacts of such decisions stemming from moral disengagement and caused by digitalization of business.

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## Adapting for Resilience: Exploring the Advent of Virtual Experiences in Pandemic-era Wine Tourism Offerings

By Barsha Amarendra\* & Amarendra Kumar Das<sup>‡</sup>

*When nations across the world were brought to an abrupt hiatus by the ravaging pandemic, the tourism industry was left in a quagmire. Tourism ventures were faced with the option of either suffering through an onslaught of hardships; while hoping to be relieved of it soon or adapting for resilience in order to cushion the blow. If they choose the latter, the conventional playbook of experience offerings and customer interactions had to be reinvented. It was a choice that the wine tourism sectors in America and Europe made; a choice that charted its course towards embracing the attributes of virtual tourism. Wineries curated virtual vineyard tours, hosted virtual tastings and conducted virtual interactions over wine. Although these virtual experiences did not exude the panache of being present in the midst of a vineyard or winery's immersive atmosphere, virtual wine tourism became increasingly popular. This newfound popularity and its outcome of garnering new clientele for wines and wine tours, in turn, boosted competitiveness in virtual experience offerings amongst wineries and wine regions. Despite this phenomenal adaptation of the wine tourism sector for resilience, there have been few peer-reviewed studies examining the enrichment of the sector through virtual experiences during the pandemic. The paper, thereby, explores the trajectory of virtual experiences in the pandemic battered wine tourism sector and the influence of such experiences in shaping consumers' appreciation of wines and wine destinations. The paper discusses the failings and challenges of incorporating virtual experiences in wine tourism, along with appraising the future forward of using such experiences in the sector.*

**Keywords:** *tourism digitalisation, virtual tourism, virtual wine experiences, virtual wine tasting, virtual wine tours*

### Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, the wine tourism segment has progressively grown to emerge as one of the most significant niche sectors in the 21st-century global tourism market. Its financial contribution to a wine country's annual economy has been substantial. According to Atout France estimates, in 2016, over 10 million wine tourists visited France's wine regions, spending a total of 5.2 billion euros (Explore France 2022). Hochschule Geisenheim University (2019) and German Wine Institute's joint survey for the German wine region indicate a flow of 50 million wine tourists annually, generating 5.5 billion euros. According to Tourism Research Australia, in 2018, 8.4 million people visited Australian wine regions, with total spending of 9.6 million dollars (Allen 2019). In the United States, wine

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tourism generates around USD 20 billion in revenue (Intel 2017), while 27% of all holiday visitors to New Zealand visit a winery and spend just over USD 2.7 billion per year (New Zealand Winegrowers Inc. 2018). Furthermore, wine tourism is one of the very few national industries that are concentrated outside metropolitan areas, and so it can play a vital role in regional development, employment generation, business growth, tourism and corporate investment (Galloway et al. 2008). These trends have been witnessed in many of the 'New World' wine countries venturing into wine tourism, such as Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, to name a few.

The prominence of the wine tourism segment to a country's annual GDP and rural development resulted in an annual series of UNWTO Global Conferences on Wine Tourism, beginning in 2016. The initiation of this conference series established wine tourism as an emerging segment of significance. It also enabled the opportunity of steering the development of the wine tourism segment toward a holistic and sustainable future. All these developments in the wine tourism industry halted abruptly when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world in 2020. The United Nations World Tourist Organisation argued that tourism was one of the sectors most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, impacting economies, livelihoods, public services and opportunities on all continents (Jones 2022). The wine tourism sector enjoyed no exception to it. National Lockdowns and International border closures drastically reduced the number of tourists to the wine regions worldwide, plummeting the revenue of wineries majorly dependent on wine tourism. According to the Global Report of COVID-19 Impact on Wine Tourism published by [winetourism.com](http://winetourism.com) (2021), 83% of surveyed wineries saw their turnover negatively impacted. This effect has been drastic in most cases, cutting income by over half compared to the previous year. While the disruption caused by COVID-19 has undoubtedly lent a heavy blow to the revenues of countless wineries worldwide, it has also been a thrust towards digitalisation in wine tourism offerings. Several wineries relied on digital tools to cope with COVID-19 challenges and remain in contact with their consumers (Alebaki et al. 2022). Wineries adopted a variety of social media platforms to engage with customers through online events. In particular, virtual tasting and tours witnessed exceptional success during the pandemic. Their success propelled the discussion toward embracing virtual experiences as part of a winery's long-term tourist engagement strategy, going beyond the pandemic.

Against this backdrop, the present paper aims to answer the question: How did wine tourism display resilience to the COVID-19 setback through the advent of virtual experiences? To answer this, the paper elaborates on two objectives. The first objective is to appraise the various virtual engagements offered by different stakeholders to compensate for the wine tourism industry's closure during the pandemic. The second objective is to assess the customer's reception of these virtual offerings and their impact on their future wine tourism and procurement plans.

The first section lays down the literature review for the paper's research. This comprised establishing an understanding of wine tourism offerings before the pandemic, the intricacies of its economics for a winery's revenue and the incorporation of digitalisation by the wine tourism sector in the face of the COVID-19 adversity. The second section articulates the methodology adopted to achieve

the paper's research objectives. The third section elaborates on the two predominant virtual offerings, virtual tasting and virtual tours; the stakeholders behind these formats, the wine tourists they cater to and the experiences and perceptions that they offer. The fourth section enlists a set of recommendations to enhance the experience of both these virtual formats and their incorporation into the post-pandemic wine tourism offerings. The last section of the paper concludes.

## Literature Review

### *Wine Tourism Offerings before COVID-19*

Wine tourism, also known as Enotourism or Vinitourism, is classified as a form of special interest tourism (Hall et al. 2000) comprising visits to wine cellars, wineries, vineyards, museums, and wine festivals and events in wine-growing regions. Initially, wine tourism was driven by the primary motivation of tasting and buying wine, with the secondary motivation of witnessing the landscape of wine. In recent years, the motivation behind wine tourism has become multi-layered, in line with the notable shift in the wine region's imagery. Imagery shifted from an overriding landscape theme of neatly cultivated vineyards set within wine regions with unspoilt natural scenery to a stronger emphasis on the natural scenery, and cultural and leisure-rural features of the wine regions (Bruwer and Alant 2009). This shift from an indulgence in wine-centrism to nuances of aesthetic experiences has broadened the range of motivations driving wine tourists, reflected in their profiles. According to the 2017 Mintel Report, wine tourists can be categorised into four groups; wine lovers (very knowledgeable about wine; 15% of all wine tourists), wine interested (enjoys wine but takes a more relaxed attitude toward wine education; 55% of all wine tourists), wine curious (satisfied with a basic knowledge of wine and enjoys doing other things while on vacation; 17% of all wine tourists), and wine disinterested (along for the ride; 12% of all wine tourists). The wine tourism sector accommodates these diverse tourist profiles, interests and motivations by offering tailored experiences contextualised to the distinct characteristics of its winescape. While these offerings are unique, they share commonalities in their framework of experiences.

The desire to learn about wine is accommodated by offering educational experiences such as harvesting and stomping grapes, witnessing the wine-making process, tasting wine varieties, and learning about wine blending and wine-food combinations. The desire to create memorable experiences in an aesthetic environment is accommodated through winescape activities or wine routes. Indulging in local gastronomical experiences, vineyard picnics, walking/cycling/driving through a vineyard and the wine region's picturesque rural roads are common winescape activities. Hot-air ballooning, horseback riding, horse-drawn carriage touring, snow-shoeing and skiing through snow-covered vineyards are some of the unconventional winescape activities. Individual wineries curate these varied engagements to enable tourists to immerse in the distinct appeal of their vineyard and the corresponding wine region. In contrast, wine routes are experiential

routes designated by national governing bodies to allow tourists to experience the social, cultural and environmental attributes that lend a distinctive character to a wine region (López-Guzmán et al. 2014). These routes are a unique feature of the wine tourism sector in Europe. According to Bruwer (2003), each wine route although similar in terms of content is endowed with its own regional or geographical identity. Last but not least, the overlapping desire to socialise with fellow wine lovers and enjoy speciality wines with local gastronomical delights in a relaxed setting is accommodated through wine festivals and events. These wine festivals and events enable tourists to learn about the delicate pairings of wine and food from top regional chefs and mixologists and enjoy the display of regional culture through art displays and music performances. While each wine country hosts annual wine festivals and events, France, Italy, Spain, and the USA host several wine festivals and events throughout the year, attracting millions of tourists.

### *Economics of Wine Tourism and COVID-19*

Wine tourism for a tourist is the culmination of several unique experiences: the ambience, atmosphere, surrounding environment, regional culture and cuisine, local wine styles and varieties (Carmichael 2005). For the wine cellars and wineries, it is a vital revenue stream. Each supermarket chain displays a wide range of wines on its shelves, creating fierce competition for sales. In such a situation, wine enthusiasts often stick to a few brands they have tried and enjoyed before rather than experimenting with new brands on display. Wine tourism allows wineries to have their wine varieties sampled by wine enthusiasts informing their purchasing decisions. More often than not, wine tourists buy a bottle or two from the cellars and tasting rooms of the wineries they visit. Wine tourism also allows the wineries to establish customer relationships through one-on-one interactions and brand reputation through a satisfactory wine tourism experience at the winery. This is significant in relation to domestic tourists as they return to the winery's cellars, tasting rooms or wine clubs for future wine purchases instead of procuring wine from the supermarket. For instance, among Italian citizens, one-third of the entire population shops in wineries (Colombini 2013). Direct-to-customer (DTC) wine sales provide immediate cash income with unbeatable profit margins for wineries (Colombini). As a result, DTC sales comprise a significant percentage of the revenue for many small and mid-scale wineries. In Germany, 12% of the annual wine sales volume is purchased at cellar doors following wine tastings, representing a value share of 22% with a total turnover of €1.44 billion (Szolnoki et al. 2021). The direct-to-consumer sales represent 65% of California's average winery revenue, driven by tasting rooms and clubs (Szolnoki et al. 2021). Not all DTC sales occur through wine cellars, tasting rooms or wine clubs. Wine festivals are another tourism offering that enables DTC sales. They help family-run estates and small wineries without a huge marketing budget to boost their wine sales.

The economics of wine tourism goes beyond the benefits to a winery's revenue. According to the Wine Tourism Observatory for the Cities of Wine organisation, each euro spent on wine produces at least four euros on meals, sightseeing tours or shopping (Colombini 2013). The contribution of wine tourism to its local

gastronomical sector is especially significant. Pairing wine with the right food combinations enhances its sensory experiences. For wineries, they must demonstrate the combinations which enrich their wine's flavours and textures so that wine tourists are not disappointed when they consume the purchased wine within the comforts of their homes. Wineries collaborate with local chefs and restaurants to curate their wine-food pairings and conduct food pairing sessions.

With the onset of COVID-19, the national lockdowns and international border closures that came in its wake, the significant revenue stream of DTC sales was hard hit. Suspension of wine tourism meant wineries had to close down wine cellars and cancel participation in wine festivals/events, substantially cutting their income. The situation has been devastating for family-run estates and small businesses whose sales solely relied on DTC sales. Furthermore, a wine estate cannot stop the clock on production, lay off staff and wait out the situation (Hesford 2020). Storing wine in barrels for too long risks spoilage. It has to be bottled. However, small wineries do not tend to have enough space to store two consecutive vintages. As a result, millions of litres of wine had to be sent for crisis distillation for government subsidy, a scenario that unravelled in much of Europe. For instance, in France, the government supported French winemakers by funding a crisis mechanism for distillation (Reuters 2020). This aid still fell short of the distillation requests made by French winemakers, risking a million litres of wine still getting spoiled.

#### *Digitalisation in Wine Tourism Sector*

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (2020), one of the most substantial impacts of the crisis is the acceleration of digitalisation. Before the pandemic, the wine industry's digital presence and engagement were negligible. Wine regions, wine routes and wine festivals used digital platforms minimally for tourism promotions. Wineries indulged in little to no digital engagements. However, the pandemic-induced financial setback forced the historically traditional wine industry, significantly less digitalised than other industries, to rapidly realise the importance of up-to-date technology (Halmari 2020). Wineries embraced digital tools to adapt their business model and strategies to stay viable to fit the rapidly changing trading environment (Szolnoki et al. 2022), albeit with regional disparities. American and Australian wineries proactively ventured into the digitalisation of wine tourism following the introduction of worldwide lockdowns. The entrepreneurial drive to seize new opportunities and learn by doing, strongly motivated by the vision of progressive owners, was cited as a powerful force to unite staff and survive, but thrive, during the crisis (Szolnoki et al. 2022). It is essential to note that wineries in America and Australia had already begun experimenting with virtual reality tools to enhance wine tourism marketing years before the pandemic struck. In contrast, the Old World European countries initially exhibited a cautious approach toward engaging in the virtual space. They were, perhaps, culturally more reluctant to adopt new technologies when the return on investment had not yet been proven, and the urgency was not so apparent (Szolnoki et al. 2022). Once the Old World became fully aware of the attributes of virtual wine tourism offerings,

they adopted their preferred virtual engagement strategies. In this eventual transition towards digitalisation of tourism offerings, Germany and France present interesting cases of wineries' involvement in virtual tourism curation. In Germany, individual wineries developed virtual tourism offerings supported by the Wine Institute and prominent newspapers through promotion. The platform "cheerswith.de" was established, offering wineries a free service for their virtual offerings (Szolnoki et al. 2021). Conversely, virtual offerings in France were majorly curated by wine regions and the Tourism Department rather than by individual wineries. The virtual offerings so created were hosted on the French Tourism Ministry's official website. A staggeringly high percentage of wineries/wine regions in the Old World did not engage in virtual wine tourism.

Despite the variable digitalisation of wine tourism by the wine industry, it is noteworthy that a substantial section embraced digital means and revolutionised wine tourism offerings as we knew before the pandemic. Through digital platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, Instagram, Facebook and Youtube, wineries curated creative and innovative engagements to connect with wine enthusiasts worldwide. Virtual wine tourism engagements can be categorised into four typologies; Virtual Wine Talks, Virtual Wine Events, Virtual Tastings and Virtual Tours. For this paper's research into virtual experiences in wine tourism, Virtual Tasting and Virtual Tours was selected for further inquiry.

## **Methodology**

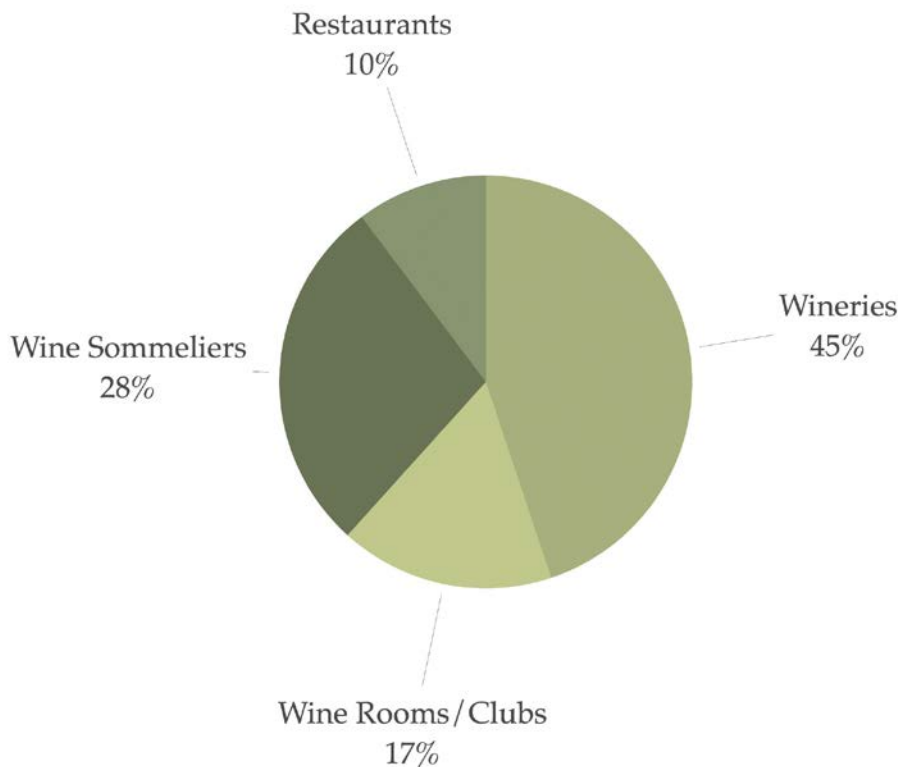
The unique research enquiry of the paper required developing a methodology that weaved together various methods from qualitative research. The methodology developed comprises three phases. The first phase was a literature review of wine tourism offerings before the COVID-19 pandemic, the economics of tourism on a winery's revenue and the digitalisation of wine tourism offerings during the pandemic. This was done by referring to journal articles, conference papers and news reports online. The second phase involved manual tracking of virtual wine tourism offerings. The tracking involved making a country-wise inventory of virtual tasting and virtual tours by following established wine blogs, news websites and winery/wine tour pages on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The inventory included event format details and stakeholder details. This step brought to notice that USA, Germany and Australia hosted the most virtual tastings and tours. The inventory was thereby filtered to include only virtual engagements being hosted in these three countries to ease meeting the research objectives. These events were further filtered based on exclusion-inclusion criteria such as the willingness of stakeholders to collaborate in the research, open group engagements, event costs and delivery logistics. This resulted in a set of 14 virtual tastings and 11 virtual tours. From this set, 2 virtual tastings and 2 virtual tours per country were selected for further investigation during the third phase. The third phase utilised the research methods of participant observation and survey questionnaire to establish a meticulous understanding of the virtual offerings. Each of the selected virtual offerings was personally attended to experience the format and interactions

therein. This participation took the form of passive participant observation. Towards the end of the virtual event, a feedback session was conducted with fellow participants and the host in attendance. The feedback session involved a round of casual conversation regarding their experience, followed by filling in online survey forms. The survey form constituted two types of questions; 10 open-ended questions and 10 ordinal scale questions. It started with open-ended questions relating to their age, place of residence, association with wine, interest in wine tourism, prior experience in undertaking wine tourism, information source of the virtual event attended, motivation for attending the event, qualities of the attended event they enjoyed and qualities of the attended event they did not like. The ordinal scale questions pertained to rating their perceptions, their experiences and their satisfaction. A total of 52 online survey forms were filled in and investigated for the research.

## **Analysis**

### *Virtual Tasting*

Virtual Wine Tasting is an engaging, interactive format developed by the wine tourism sector in the wake of the pandemic. It enabled wine enthusiasts to taste new wine vintages from across the world from the confinement of their homes. The virtual tasting format usually comprised purchasing a package of selected wines, followed by logging into a digital platform like zoom, google meet, or Facebook live to connect with the concerned winery or wine expert and enjoy a guided wine tasting session. During the session, the host would discuss a range of topics such as winemaking philosophy, the nitty-gritty of running a vineyard and a cellar, the speciality of the selected vintages being tasted and the ideal food pairings that go with them. While the virtual tasting session allowed viewers to taste new wines and acquire new knowledge, it allowed wineries to engage in DTC wine sales, making it immensely popular among wineries entering the realm of virtual offerings during the pandemic. According to a study conducted by Szolnoki et al. (2021), 36% of the surveyed wineries introduced Virtual tastings during the pandemic, in contrast to only 3% of the surveyed wineries hosting them before the pandemic. However, wineries were not singularly motivated to host virtual by the opportunity for DTC wine sales. Wineries also introduced virtual tastings to create brand awareness, acquire new customers and build customer loyalty. However, virtual tastings were not a feature exclusive to the wineries. Figure 1 illustrates the different stakeholders that hosted virtual tastings from April 2020 to November 2021. The variation in host profiles led to different ways of conducting virtual tastings; a phenomenon that resulted in three broad typologies of virtual tasting events; Happy Hours (4% of all virtual tasting events), Livestream Tasting (47% of all virtual tasting events) and Personalised Tasting (49% of all virtual tasting events). Table 1 details the character of each typology and the tourist profile that they catered to.

**Figure 1.** Composition of Stakeholder Hosting Virtual Tasting Events**Table 1.** Details of Virtual Tasting Typologies Hosted

Virtual Tasting Typology	Host Profile	Participant Profile	Wine Tourism Experience Incorporated	Event Requirement
Happy Hours	Restaurants   Wine Rooms-Clubs	Wine Curious   Wine Interested	Socialisation over Wine	Bring your own Wine   Pre-order from a selection of wines
Livestream Tasting	Wine Rooms - Clubs   Wine Sommeliers   Large Wineries	Wine Interested   Wine Lovers	Sommelier led wine tasting   Food-wine pairings   Entertainment activities	Pre-Order from a selection of wines   Wine package delivered by host
Personalised Tasting	Wine Sommeliers   Large and Small Wineries	Wine Interested   Wine Lovers	Sommelier led wine tasting   Food-wine pairings   Entertaining Activities	Wine package delivered by host

The study showed that Happy Hours was the most unstructured and casual virtual tasting format. It exhibited the same characteristics as displayed by wine festivals where wine-disinterested, wine-curious and wine-interested tourists gather with the motivation of socialising over wine and engaging in entertaining activities. Additionally, while COVID-19 restrictions impacted restaurants and wine rooms/clubs, they are not the driving stakeholders of wine tourism. As such, Happy Hours



cannot be considered a virtual adaptation of the wine tourism offerings. Both Livestream Tasting and Personalised Tastings, on the other hand, presented a structured wine experience and incorporated many of the components of conventional on-site wine tourism. Table 2 provides a comparison between the two formats.

**Table 2.** Comparison between Livestream Tasting and Personalised Tasting

Attributes	Livestream Tasting	Personalised Tasting
Event Priority	Brand Awareness	Direct Customer Sales
Event Size	Most times 100 and above participants	25-40 participants
Event Requirement	Register and pre-order from a selection of wine. Purchase is not always compulsory. Participants can follow the session with their own wines.	Register for the event and a specially curated wine-food package delivered by the host before the tasting.
Event Charges	12% of events free of charge. 87% of events have a ticket cost. Delivery of exact wine bottles to be tasted charged additionally.	All events are with ticket Costs that is inclusive of wine-food package
Hosting Platform	Youtube Live   Facebook Live   Google Meet	Google Meet   Zoom   Webex
Educational Component	Learning about wine styles, wine aroma-flavor-notes, wine tasting method, wine-food pairing	Learning about wine styles, wine aroma-flavor-notes, wine tasting method, wine-food pairing. Learning about wine serving and handling. Learning about wine production and wine branding.
Complementary Activities and Entertainment	Celebrity Partnerships, Comedian Gigs, Live Music Shows, Live Cooking Demonstration by Chefs, Blending Sessions by Mixologists	Follow-along cooking classes with chefs. Follow-along blending sessions with mixologists.
Interaction Opportunity	Due to the huge number of participants, majority of times, there is no or limited interaction with the host	There is ample time allotted in the schedule for interaction with the hosts and other guests

While each typology of the virtual tasting had its unique attributes and catered to a specific clientele, the study found that the satisfaction level was the highest (81%) among participants of personalised virtual tastings. They attributed it to the intimate nature of the tasting, where they could casually interact with the winery and its varied collaborators. Most participants especially appreciated the personal touch that the wineries brought into the tasting. Wineries used the wine package as the first point of establishing rapport with the participants by including a personalised note and a food pairing guide or little pouches containing nuts, dried fruits, and chocolates. The talk during the tasting became the second point of adding a personal touch by sharing their winemaking journey, inspirations, and trials and tribulations through the years. Livestreams were found to have a satisfaction level of 67%

among their participants. The reasons cited by participants for their lower satisfaction were the overwhelming number of participants making it feel like a mass event, the inability to properly interact with the host/collaborators and difficulty in procuring wines selected for the tasting. However, an interesting trend was the diversity of participants based on their geographical locations. Purchasing wines chosen for the event was not compulsory for Livestream Tastings. Participants could follow the session while sipping the wine available to them. This enabled participants in a different country/continent where the selected vintages were not available to join the wine tasting sessions. 53% of Livestream participants did not belong to the same country as the event host. In contrast, personalised tastings always had participants belonging to the same country as the event host due to the logistical requirement of package delivery.

### *Virtual Tours*

As discussed previously during the paper, the winescape forms an integral part of the experience of visiting a winery and developing an appreciation for its vintages. Although virtual tasting allowed wineries to bring their wines and brand story to a diverse set of potential customers, it did not enable them to showcase the natural and socio-cultural attributes that made their wine and brand uniquely distinct. Wineries, thus, curated Virtual Tours. Virtual tours are not distinctly different from personalised virtual tasting; in all likelihood, it is an improvisation of personalised virtual tasting to cater to the long-term motivation of drawing tourists post-pandemic alongside the short-term motivation of enabling direct customer sales. Table 3 illustrates the comparison between Personalised Virtual Tasting and Virtual Tour formats.

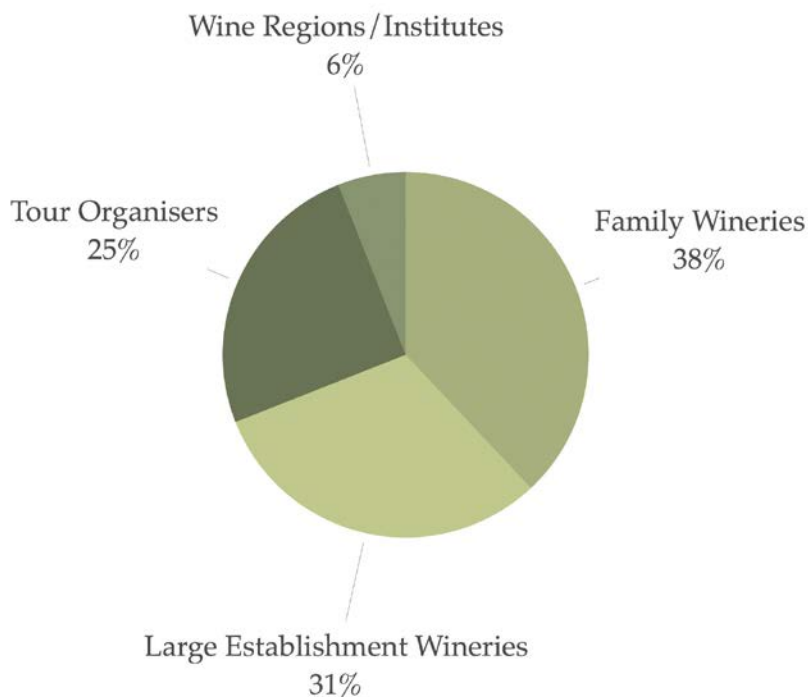
**Table 3.** *Comparison between Personalised Virtual Tasting and Virtual Tour*

<b>Attributes</b>	<b>Personalised Virtual Tasting</b>	<b>Virtual Tour</b>
Event Motivation	Direct Customer Sales	Entice Visitors for Post-Pandemic Travel
Event Package	Wine-Food Package delivered by the host before the event	Wine-Food Package delivered by the host before the event
Educational Component wrt. Wine Consumption	Learning about wine styles, wine aroma-flavour-notes through wine tasting, wine tasting tips, Wine serving and handling tips	Learning about wine styles, wine aroma-flavour-notes through wine tasting, wine tasting tips, Wine serving and handling tips.
Educational Component wrt. Wine Production	Lecture on wine production, wine branding.	Visually exhibit the different stages and spaces of wine production; from viticulture to fermentation to storage.
Winery Visitation	N.A	Virtual mediums of viewing the winery.
Complementary Activities and Entertainment	Follow-along cooking classes with chefs. Follow-along blending sessions with mixologists.	Recipe demonstration by local chefs. Visual presentation of the region's attractions.

Local Food Experience	Cooking sessions linked to the wine varietal, not the wine's geographical origin.	Local Chefs invited to demonstrate local recipes to go with the wine varietal.
Interaction Opportunity	Ample time allotted for interaction with the hosts and activity collaborators	Ample time allotted for interaction with the hosts and activity collaborators. Additional opportunity of interacting with winery staff incharge of different stages of wine production.

Virtual tours were similar to a personalised virtual tasting, but instead of complementary activity, they had the added feature of a tour through the winery or wine region. Just like the personalised virtual tasting, the tour can be enjoyed from the comforts of a participant's home through a laptop or a smartphone and by logging into easy-to-use interactive platforms such as zoom and google meet. Simply put, virtual Tours are an enriched format of virtual tasting. Wineries offering virtual tours were motivated by long-term prospects of enticing participants to visit the winery and the short-term opportunities of enhancing DTC sales and brand awareness. Most wineries hosted virtual tours on their own. These wineries were usually Large-establishment wineries or middle-scale family wineries with the means and resources to develop a virtual tour. Few others collaborated with tour organisers and wine Regions/Institutes to host virtual tours. Figure 2 illustrates the stakeholders hosting virtual tours.

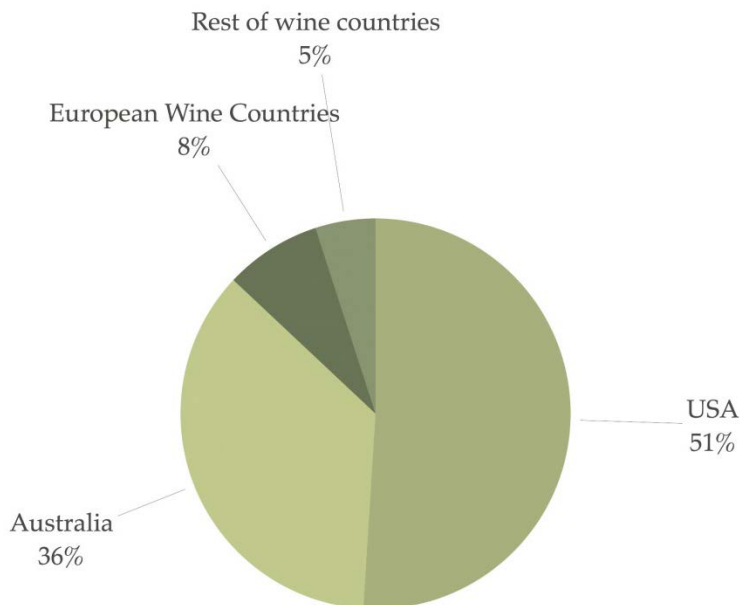
**Figure 2.** *Composition of Stakeholders Hosting Virtual Tour Events*



While most recent studies on wine tourism's virtual offerings provide data on the countries that introduced virtual tastings and their frequency, such a database is

not available for virtual tours. The paper's phase 2 has made such data possible. Figure 3 illustrates the countries hosting virtual tours.

**Figure 3.** Composition of Countries Hosting Virtual Tour Events



Understanding how participants virtually engaged in a tour of the wineries/wine regions is noteworthy in the discussion. Wineries virtually took their participants on a virtual tour by incorporating one of the two modes: Walk-Along Video Tours (64% of all virtual tour events) and 360-degree Video Tours (36% of all virtual tour events). Table 4 illustrates the comparison between both these tour modes.

**Table 4.** Comparison of Walk-along Video Tours and 360-degree Video Tours

Attributes	Walk-along Video Tours	360-degree Video Tours
Host Profile	Family Wineries   Tour Organisers	Large Establishment Wineries   Wine Institutes/regions
Participant profile	Wine Lovers   Wine Interested	Wine Lovers   Wine Interested
Event Charge	More expensive than 360-degree Video Tours	Less Expensive than Walk-along Video Tours
Format Description	Similar to video-calling someone and walking around a place to show the scenes around with a narration.	Video of the host showing the various winery spaces in pre-recorded 360-degree format.
Tour Highlights	Architectural Spaces   Vineyard	Architectural Spaces   Vineyards   Landscape Around Vineyard   Tourist Attractions around Vineyard

Special Requirements	N.A	Few events require VR glasses for the tour to be more immersive. Others require the event to be streamed on a tablet for easy motion navigation.
Pros	Un-hassled virtual tour mode   Meet and greet with winery staff	Can look all around a scene   Idea of the vineyard's landscape and tourist attractions
Cons	Cannot look around a scene, or zoom into things   Cannot ask questions during the walkthrough due to time constraints.	Complicated virtual tour mode for first-time users   Cannot interact with staff   Cannot ask questions during the walkthrough.

Although the medium of showing around the winery differs, the overall format of all virtual tour events is the same. All virtual tour events begin with a quick introduction to the winery and host. The winery tour in a mode suitable to the host follows. This tour concludes in the winery's tasting room. From the winery's tasting room, the host engages the participants in tasting selected vintages pre-delivered to their homes and other complementary activities and entertainment.

Both the virtual tour modes had unique attributes and catered to a specific clientele, however, the study found that the satisfaction level was higher (93%) among participants of walk-along video tours. They attributed it to the easy-to-follow template of the tour, where they could sit back and enjoy the sights and sounds of the scenes being shown on their screens. Most participants appreciated that they were shown what was happening in the vineyard, and the host brought in people working there to chat about their everyday life at the winery. 360-degree video tours were found to have a satisfaction level of 67% among their participants. Participants shared that navigation in the 360-degree video format is initially quite confusing and takes the attention away from what the host is trying to share about a particular space. Participants also felt that they were not able to immerse themselves in the tour in real time due to the 360-degree videos being pre-recorded.

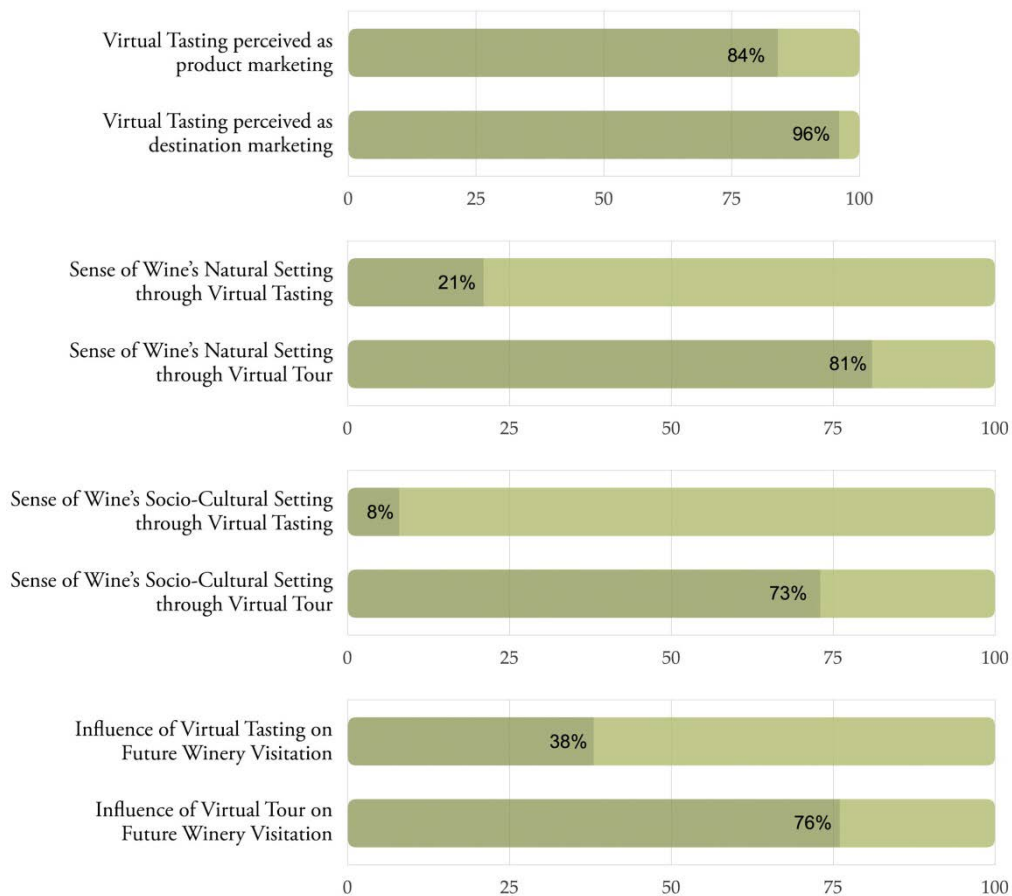
#### *Participant Satisfaction of Virtual Tasting Vs. Virtual Tours*

Amidst the pandemic-induced confinement of their homes, wine enthusiasts could revel in specific aspects of wine tourism, albeit in a virtual setting, through the curation of virtual tasting and virtual tours. It was found through participant feedback sessions that both virtual offerings had their own unique set of attributes that participants liked and disliked. Table 5 illustrates the qualities of virtual tastings and virtual tours that participants liked and disliked. The different qualities experienced by participants during the virtual tasting and virtual tours generated different perceptions of the respective events. Figure 4 illustrates the perceptions afforded by virtual tasting and virtual tours.

**Table 5.** *Qualities of Virtual Tasting & Virtual Tour Liked & Disliked by Participants*

	<b>Most appreciated quality</b>	<b>Other appreciated qualities</b>	<b>Qualities disliked</b>
Virtual Tasting	Educational Quotient	Complementary activities and Entertainment   Brand Narrative   Social Interaction	Tasting that included too much scientific jargon.
Virtual Tour	Narratives & Visual Richness	Personalisation & Intimacy   People behind the Brand   Educational Quotient	Tours being rushed due to time constraints

**Figure 4.** *Perceptions Afforded by Virtual Tasting and Virtual Tours to its Participants*



**Discussion on Post-pandemic Discourse**

The potential of virtual tasting to draw a diverse crowd of participants interested in experimenting with different wine vintages and brands has been well-recognised by individual wineries. As a result, many wineries and tasting rooms in Australia and USA have incorporated virtual tasting as a supplement to cellar-door tastings, although with a lesser frequency than during the pandemic. However, several other

wineries (in the European wine countries and the rest of the New World) have suspended their virtual engagement altogether following the opening up of lockdowns. By contacting the wineries hosting virtual tasting (from the first inventory made during phase 2 of the research methodology), it was found that only a mere 7% have continued the offering beyond December 2021. These offerings are mainly personalised virtual tastings for reservations by corporates or groups of friends and family. Upon reaching out to the organisers that have suspended their virtual offerings, they cited that while virtual offerings allowed them to engage with potential customers and continue DTC sales, neither of the offerings matched up to the profits of onsite wine tourism. They would rather expedite their time and energy in catering to onsite tourists, especially the wave of domestic tourists who have the potential of becoming a loyal customer base. However, these organisers have failed to realise the potential that virtual tasting has in attracting newer crowds of wine consumers and establishing brand loyalty. During the participant feedback session, it was noticed that virtual tastings, particularly Livestream tastings, engaged participants who identified themselves as wine-curious (satisfied with a basic knowledge of wine and enjoying doing other things while on vacation). The onus of this lies in that Livestream tastings incorporated a wide range of complementary activities such as cooking and mixology, as well as entertainment such as comedy, music and celebrity gigs. Employing these complementary activities as motivation for participation, wine-curious participants can be made aware of a wine brand and cultivate a likelihood for it. As such, Livestream tastings once in a while can have the same kind of impact that wine festivals do in attracting new crowds of people to try out new varietals of wine in a fun, relaxed environment, albeit in a virtual format.

Similarly, the potential of virtual tours to motivate its participants to engage in wine tourism following the end of COVID-19 restrictions has been well-ascertained by various wine regions/tourism organisations. For instance, the French wine regions and tourism organisations have pivoted towards using the digital modes that made virtual tours possible as a long-term destination marketing strategy. French wine regions have released 360-degree videos of wine regions on social media to inspire wanderlust among wine enthusiasts. The national tourism website also showcases 360-degree videos of wineries to entice potential tourists to indulge in the country's wine tourism. While these initiatives are significant in incorporating the innovative 360-degree video mode curated during the pandemic, a far more substantial impact can be generated by integrating them as part of their branding strategy. Today's wine buyers want to know more about the product they are consuming, where it comes from, the people behind it, and their stories. Customers are invested in a brand's narrative and ascribe value based on the connection they feel to it. As such, wineries could embed QR codes into their bottle labels that navigate to a 36-degree video tour of the winery. The video tour can inform the buyer of the wine's unique natural contexts, share the winery's story and showcase the team behind the product. This personalisation of the branding can be extremely helpful for small and medium family-owned brands that have to stand out from the rest of the brands on a supermarket shelf.

## Conclusion

In the ancient Greek dialogue *Republic*, philosopher Plato wrote: “our need will be the real creator”. Before the pandemic, the wine industry had been making a substantially slow transition towards digitalisation. The challenges in the wake of the pandemic made it imperative for the industry to shed its inhibitions, embrace digitalisation, and reinvent its offerings to keep up with the times. However, the pivot toward digitalisation has not been uniform throughout the world. As underlined by the paper, the cultural mindsets of different wine countries resulted in varying degrees of engagement with digital tools to offset the impact of the pandemic on wine tourism. Similarly, wine countries, regions and wineries were motivated by different incentives to venture into offering virtual experiences. This prevented the development of one single format of virtual offering from being replicated worldwide, enabling varied ingenious virtual experiences to be explored by the wine industry. Through this paper, an understanding of virtual tastings and virtual tours has been attempted.

The paper acknowledges the different typologies of virtual tastings and virtual tours curated during the pandemic and elaborates in detail on their structure and experiential character. It investigates the participant's satisfaction levels pertaining to the attended virtual format and its reasons. It also sheds light on the qualities participants appreciated about virtual tastings and virtual tours and the qualities they did not like. This data is valuable for virtual hosts to reflect on to improve their chosen formats for greater participant satisfaction and appreciation. The study also revealed the participant perceptions afforded by virtual tastings and visual tours. Virtual tastings provide an exemplary case of product marketing and virtual tours of destination marketing. Virtual tastings established brand visibility. Virtual tours established a personal connection to the winery's unique socio-cultural and natural context.

At this point, it is noteworthy to discuss the nuanced formulation of both virtual tastings and tours. Learning about new wine varieties and tasting them has been central to both virtual formats. All other wine-related activities were structured around it. As already elaborated in the paper, virtual tours are also an enhanced virtual tasting format that attempts to recreate the essence of travelling to a wine country for wine tourism. While this paper has tried to create a base understanding of virtual tastings being hosted as a pandemic response, this primacy of wine tasting to virtual formats opens opportunities for future research into enhancing the act of virtual wine tasting to become more engaging and sensorial. In particular, researchers working on VR wine tourism can focus on making the performance of wine tasting more experiential for the user.

To conclude, virtual tastings and virtual tours have immense potential for incorporation into the business model of wineries as a complement to onsite tourism experiences. Although many others have reaped their benefits during the pandemic, they do not see long-term benefits. The paper, however, argues otherwise. There will still be many wine enthusiasts who will not be able to travel miles to a wine region or a winery. Virtual experiences allow them to engage with a winery to either inform their decision to visit the winery or establish connections for long-



term DTC sales. Additionally, the recommendations laid out in the paper will help wineries expand their customer profile and forge new connections. The wine tourism sector needs to consciously assess these recommendations and the long-term benefits that the incorporation of virtual formats would provide them. There is no doubt that the advent of virtual experiences has proven that the wine tourism sector is resilient in the face of adversity, but must it wait for another mishap for innovative diversity and resilience to be imbibed in its regular workings?

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## The Specialized Product of the Experiences in the Tour Guide Services

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*The present research aims to study and analyze the theoretical concepts and characteristics of recreational urban tourism experiences, realized by tour guide. Such research supports the development of management of tourism destinations in Bulgaria. They contribute to the improvement of the internal and external management of the destination, carried out by the Organizations for Management of Tourist Areas. The objective of the study is the tour guide activity carried out by the tour operator's representative during the travel and the stay in the tourism destination, specialized in its product offering and branded as such. The subject of analysis is the quality of the specialized product offered by the tour operator and the tourism destination providing experiences to the tourists during their stay and traveling in the tourism place. The aim of the scientific research is to prove the place and role of the tour guide through participating in the tourism process of formatting experiences for the tourists, also for the promotion of the region, as well as for its functions in the development and management of tourism areas in Bulgaria, as a participant in the internal and external management of the destination/Organizations for Management of Tourist Areas established in Bulgaria.*

**Keywords:** *tourism destinations, tour guide services, tour operator, specialized products, experiences, organizations for management of tourist areas*

### Introduction

The relevance of the topic is determined by the fact that there is no distinct term that comprehensively covers all intermediaries whose function is to take care, guide, inform and explain to tourism groups. Nor can they convincingly link these functions to a particular sector of the industry, it is for these and other arguments that this kind of activity is associated with the profession of the tour guiding. Some of these intermediaries are representatives of tour operators, others work independently by promoting tourists' experiences during a stay in a tourism destination or during a tourism tour or provide their services to unrelated companies (Ianeva 2014).

In an industry where the importance of the individual is becoming more personalised, companies are growing, and tourism products are increasingly homogeneous, the role of the person who is the representative of the tourism site or represents the tour operator is constantly growing. In different types of tourism products, the tourism professionals find their specific place and have different roles in the tourism service. Such a specific place of the representative of the tour operator or of the site offering products of the experiences can predetermine to a

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significant extent the satisfaction of the tourists in terms of meeting their requirements and expectations. In some types of tourism programs, this may be the only part of the package that differentiates one product from another. Very often the role of the tour guide, animator and tourism specialist is underestimated by some tourism companies, usually due to cost cutting.

### **Tour Guide Leader as a Represented of Tour Operator during Packed Tours**

The differentiation of the tourism product through the experiences offered by the representative are one of the tools of the enterprises to differentiate and distinguish their product compared to the one of the competitors, even when offering an identical product of experiences, the same quantitative and similar qualitative standards in the accommodation, the same means of transport and identical places to eat. Quite often in different tourism programs, the quality of the guide service helps to promote the product of a destination or a specific tourism site through word-of-mouth information from actual customers who have used the product.

The above motives are the reason why the research should address the issues related to the development of scientific knowledge in this field. In its context, new configurations in tourism are sought, the psychological needs of man to integrate into different cultural environments are clarified, the emergence and development of tour guiding is traced, and ways of overcoming discomfort through the representatives of tour operators are sought.

Particular attention should be paid to the organisation of this type of activity depending on the specifics of the respective tour operator, tourism service provider or others in the field of tourism whose functioning affects the guides in tourism programs. Particular attention is given to the World Federation of Associated Tour Guides, as its influence is leading in this field (Yaneva 2011).

In order to have a targeted impact on consumers to attract them, the tour guide product must be offered professionally to the target segment. Therefore, there is a need to analyze the tour guide product based on certain metrics through SERVQUAL model (Ryan and Cliff 1997) and conflict technique. Then, the actual improvement of the tour guide product is proceeded through the Customer Care program. The achieved level of tourism product offering through the guide service attracts more tourists, which leads to an increase in tourism revenue.

Of a great interest are the issues of tourism related to intercultural relations and the cultural mediation of tour guides in order to integrate the cultural heritage of people through different forms of experiences during a visit to a specific destination, as well as the promotion of Bulgaria as a tourist destination.

When analyzing the activities of the tour guides, it is necessary to pay attention to the themes, and the lectures that they prepare and presents on the occasion of conducting tourism tours for different purposes, with priority given to the topics, related to the economy of the experiences, which in the recent years have been gaining interest among consumer demand and the choice of this type of destinations or specific locations or tourism areas.

Pine and Gilmore (2005) published a study that pointed the changes occurring in the economy and society. In short, the economy was once based on trade in raw materials and then these were gradually replaced by standardised goods. During the 20th century, the share of services grew until, at the end of the century, the service sector accounted for 80% of all activities, and tourism enterprises discovered a new value in society – the need for experiences, feelings, emotions. It seems that this is already a natural trend in the development of today's society, which is also taken into account in the structuring of tourism programs and is advocated in their implementation by the guide of tourists in destinations. All the people living and working in enclosed environments in the last two years from 2020 to 2022 need something different and the industry is offering exactly what the consumers need. According to many authors, this change is mainly due to technological advances and the application of digital technology. Travel and entertainment are classified as an experience industry and are expected to regain their place in the modern global economy after their decline in the last two years. Experiences are now represented, introduced, integrated and pervasive in all aspects of consumption and existence (Yaneva and Gaidarov 2017).

In recent years, urban leisure tourism (Ianeva et al. 2021) has found its place in the economy as a new and specialised product related to tourists' experiences. The modern tourist is not only looking for recreation through accommodation, meals and standard cultural attractions presented to him/her by the tour guide during the tourist program, which are easily tangible in the digital environment, but seeks to remember the trip (holiday) through entertainment opportunities and experiences offered to him/her on spot. Such can be wine tours, national and regional menu tastings, and other sensory experiences to focus on. These can also be excursions to areas with rose plantations and lavender typical of the tourism area of the Rose Valley, as well as available in other tourism areas in Bulgaria. The tour guide for incoming tourism programs should also prepare on such tours.

In order to reposition the image of Bulgaria as a mass tourism destination, it is necessary to develop and promote such specialized tourism products. We believe that one of them could be the urban tourism of the experiences. All this helps to position the specific tourism place correctly on the market, presented to tourists by the tour guide during the tour, focusing on certain target groups and presenting it as attractive enough for them in order to create experiences. In this way, it supports the development of both accommodation and catering facilities and the accompanying business in the tourism destination and the inflow of funds undoubtedly also contributes to further developing, renovating and making the destination more and more attractive to visitors. Although all tourism destinations compete for a share of the global tourism market, competition between some specific destinations is much more intense, depending on a number of criteria, due to common issue markets, similar products and experiences, similar target market segments, roughly equal distance from key markets, similar economic growth and similar peak tourism seasons (Ianeva and Portarska 2019).

The "economics of the experiences" (also called the economics of emotions, the economics of feelings, etc. in different countries and by different authors) is also considered as the economics of entertainment by some authors, since the

essence of both "economies" is hidden in the question - how the tour guide during a tourism program can offer feelings and emotions to consumers. This question is of particular importance for all industries and therefore all companies are trying to find a way to survive in the context of fierce competition in the era of the "new" economy.

The tour guide representing the destination to the tourists implements the management policy of both the destination and the tourism enterprise. In this regard, destination management and promotion are also linked to the regulations in the respective country in order to synchronise the activities of all stakeholders in the process. In Bulgaria, as a tourism destination, according to the provisions of the Tourism Act, the management and promotion of destinations is regulated through tourism zoning. It covers the entire territory of the country and there are 9 tourism regions (Concept of Tourist Regionalization 2016) which are large enough to be clearly identifiable on the tourism map and small enough to be managed effectively. The concept places geographical names on the regions. Within the territorial scope of the areas, Tourism Area Management Organizations (TAMOs) have now been established, which in the tourism marketing literature, as well as in the practice of developed tourism countries, are known as Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs). Each tourism region has a main and an extended specialization. The main specialization is a combination of two types of tourism that combine to define the uniqueness of the regions. The extended specialisation includes other complementary types of tourism in addition to the main ones (Ianeva 2020). This specialization differentiates the different areas in terms of product, thus not only certain types of tourism are offered, but also the guides during the tour can draw the attention of the tourists to which type of tourism the tourism destination is popular for.

Each tourism area can be identified and branded with a package of thematic products to make it recognisable among its potential consumers, as well as to be identified by tour guides during their domestic or inbound tours. In this way, the destination's recognisability will be unified at different levels of promotion, both by the marketing managers of the destinations and by the tour operators represented by the tour guide during the implementation of tourism programs. In relation to this, themed sites in destinations are becoming more and more numerous, with some being for entertainment only and others offering a mix of culture and history. Tangible memories of a unique, personal experience are important (Gierstberg and Vroege 2008).

In the year-round tourism destinations, mainly related to business tourism, (Ianeva and Georgieva 2020) cultural and sightseeing tourism, in order to seek new niche markets, tour operators and the suppliers (hotels and other accommodation properties) also integrate other components into their product, such as spa, gaming services and other entertainment elements, and tour guides immerse tourists in them during their stay or on an excursion there.

With regards to the destination management, in terms of the internal and external activities carried out by Destination Management Organisations, the tour guide is part of the stakeholders for this development. In this regard, it is emphasized that when conducting a tour in the destination, it is necessary to pay attention not only to the natural features, but also to the environment and cultural features of the

tourism area. Interesting tips and initiatives should be included in the program to diversify the guest's trip. The information shall be supported by brochures (Hodgson 1991) issued by the municipalities or by the tourism organisations, which shall be issued in large quantities and distributed to the clients. In order to establish an image of the destination for the tourists, some important aspects are highlighted:

*Different countries, different customs.* The best way to get to know a foreign country is to understand the people or the folk psychology for that particular tourism area. The tour guide should in an intriguing way pay attention to the clothing that is in accordance not only with the climate, but also with the traditions of the hosting country. National or regional cuisine is also an important destination-specific highlight, especially at a time when digitalisation is replacing the need for direct contact with cultural sites, and at a time of health constraints. In this regard, in Bulgaria, the policy of the executive authority in the last two years has been focused on the creation of national and regional menus that contribute to the identity of the regions as well as helping to bring tourists back to the destination<sup>1</sup>. From this point of view, it is necessary for the tour operator's representative to include such dining and entertainment venues in the tour, as well as being familiar with gastronomic tourism.

*Care for nature:* the tour guide has an influence on whether the "last virgin natural places" should be explored during the excursion. On a safari or excursion, the observation of nature from an appropriate distance must be conducted safely for the travellers and nature. Bulgaria as a tourism destination is popular for its tourism region of the Rose Valley, where the rose plantations are of interest, as well as the lavender ones. To bring tourists back to the destinations, the so-called sensory marketing can also be applied, where the tourist guide draws attention to the scents during the visit to such destinations, as well as reinforces the impact of the memory on the scent, associating it with the specific destination. In this regard, tourists are encouraged to purchase souvenirs, cosmetics and other accessories that will remind them of the specific tourist spot when they return home. Certainly in terms of caring for nature, it is necessary to pay attention to them not to injure, tear, throw away and ruin the relevant plantations. With regard to the internal activities carried out by marketing managers in such tourism areas, it can be added that for the development of sensory marketing, similar scents, recognizable and typical of the destination, can be used in individual tourist accommodations, associating the site with the image of the destination.

*Attitude to the water resources:* clean water is important for life, but in many tourism areas it is a deficit. The guide can encourage the tourists to be as sparing as possible with water and to help keep it clean. For example, to apply sun cream only after bathing in the pool, lake or sea. It also helps to use towels repeatedly to reduce the use of water and detergents.

*Souvenirs:* The skyrocketing worldwide trade in live or dead plants and animals, their parts or products poses a direct threat to many species. Particularly threatening in today's time of mass and inbound tourism is the development of the souvenir trade. The purchase of gifts and souvenirs that are produced in the visited

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.travelnews.bg/bg/news/16232500938629/natsionalnoto-menyu-na-balgariya-veche-e-v-sila>.

country and that do not result in damage to its plant and animal life should be recommended here. The tour guide should note that some plants and animals may be subject to a species protection convention. It may happen that the acquired items may be confiscated when leaving the country and a fine may be imposed.

In order to prove the place and role of the tour guide through his/her participation in the tourism process and to promote the tourism area, it is important to note the participation in the conduct of information tours in Bulgaria, in which the experiences offered to tour operators, journalists and influencers will encourage them to actively promote and advertise the different tourism areas. In this connection, it is necessary to highlight the main characteristics of such events.

Tour guides in info tours are guides of specialised groups, representatives of the tour operator organising the tour, and can also be representatives of the destination itself, which they want to promote and sell. Info tours can be organised for tour operators, journalists and influencers to advertise and promote a tourist area. The cost of such a form of promotion is only justified if the participants can be offered something truly exceptional as an experience. Working with the media is crucial and a strategy needs to be developed for this. It is important to identify which journalists write about tourism in the relevant media. Also send them regular information about what is happening in the area, especially when there are special events and happenings. Before contacting foreign journalists, it is necessary to thoroughly study foreign publications in tourism. If possible, journalists should be invited on an info tour. When inviting foreign journalists, free air tickets can be arranged through some tour operators. It is best to pair the familiarization /often used only as fam/ trip with an impressive event. Special arrangements for guided tours are required when organising info tours. Instructions in organising guided tours are made up of rules that apply to journalists, others to tour operators and others are general. The duration of the tour should be organised within a maximum of 4-5 days, and it should take into account the peak employment periods of the tour companies. The tour operators shall be invited individually to be part of the group if the possibilities allow; if not, groups of 4-5 operators working in similar tourism areas shall be organised. For journalists and influencers, the optimum is in the range of 10-14 people. The tour guide, leading the group, indicates the times of the individual visits, as well as the departure/return to the hotels. The tour guide should try to keep to the advertised times, especially at the end of the 'working day'. If there is still a delay in the program, the participants should be warned and the reason for the delay explained.

The tour guide must adhere to the announced duration of the individual visits. Signs of boredom should be watched for and if they become apparent, simply cut short the visit.

Lunches – it is not recommended to be long. (This applies for the English. Italians, for example, like to have longer lunches.)

Dinners – it is a good idea for the guide to invite local people to join the group for dinner. These do not have to be people directly connected with tourism.

Breakfasts – participants may prefer to have breakfast separately, as and when convenient for each, or together with the guide. Therefore, the breakfast times should be stated and it should be communicated when he/she will be there as well.



It is a good idea to take the participants out of the bus at least once a day and include short outdoor outings (1-2 hours) in the program.

It is necessary to include as much information as possible in the preliminary program. Include the names and positions of the people to be met. If there is a subsequent change, let participants know who the new persons are.

Announce the places to be visited, together with a brief description, so that the participants know exactly why these places are included in the program.

A list of participants is attached to the program. It is sent out as soon as everyone has confirmed their participation. The English like to know in advance who they will be travelling with.

Be sure to mention at the end who is sponsoring the tour; if there are free lunches or dinners, mention the names of the hosts.

Participants should know in advance what they are getting for free and what they have to pay for. Usually the organisers cover the cost of accommodation, meals and transport, and extra things like phone calls, bar bills, newspapers are the responsibility of the participants. It is best to have this specified in advance, and in writing, before departure and have the guide communicate it.

The group should be informed in advance about the climate and what clothes should be brought (e.g., extra sweater or swimsuit, is formal wear necessary for dinner or can only a jacket be brought, etc.), as well as other details such as whether any vaccinations are required, how the local currency and money exchange is handled (carry cash, not travellers cheques).

Various promotional and informational materials are sent with the program, but packages are also prepared and handed out at the welcome by the tour guide. Packages must include a map clearly indicating the places to visit. Placing "Welcome" signs and the hotel's business card in the rooms is a gesture that will be appreciated. Direct quotations with prices can also be prepared for tour operators on the rooms. Members of the press are not interested in looking at hotels, whereas for tour operators this is a must. They need to see 2-3 rooms, the dining venues, the bar as well as the leisure facilities offered (saunas, swimming pools, fitness rooms etc.). It is good if the owners/managers to welcome them personally and within a few minutes to introduce them to their hotel. Finally, tour operators should get promotional material and net prices for the different periods.

Some journalists bring their own cameras, but most prefer to use professional photos. It is best if the local/regional organisation can offer a good selection from their own collection. Otherwise the photographs may be selected and sent later.

The implemented marketing management of a tourism region through one of its external activities, as it is evident, can also be carried out through info tours for tour operators, journalists and influencers. The costs of such a form of promotion are only justified if the tour participants can be offered an attractive way of experiencing the destination by the tour guide, presenting it, when testing the products in the tourism places. In the conditions of crisis in the tourism market, the Ministry of Tourism in Bulgaria will intensify this type of familiarization programs by conducting tours for journalists and influencers from the respective countries to come and write about Bulgaria<sup>2</sup>. It is possible to include in such info tours

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<sup>2</sup><https://bit.ly/3UsmL0b>.

destinations for health tourism, offering experiences for returning back the tourists as well as for the combined satisfaction of two consumer motives. An example of this is the organisation of hot air ballooning sessions in the town of Sandanski, a popular Bulgarian spa destination also visited by many Greek tourists<sup>3</sup>.

Working with the media is crucial and a strategy needs to be developed for this. It is important to identify which journalists write about tourism in the relevant central and local media. They should be regularly sent information about what is happening in Bulgaria, especially when there are special events and happenings.

External destination management is also associated with activities forming customer loyalty to the tourism location or site and with the identification of a brand, its enforcement and promotion by the tour operator and tour guide during the tourism program. Brand loyalty means a consumer preference to consume the products of a particular brand in a particular destination, which occurs when the tourist feels that these themed products offer them the right features, images and/or quality level at the 'right price'. This perception becomes the basis for forming buying habits. Brand loyalty implies both repeated consumption of the specialised product from the tourism area and a lowered price sensitivity of the buyer and lowered sensitivity to similar competing themed destinations. Loyalty is the result of an ongoing experience that creates a lasting relationship between the buyer and the respective brand. In today's competitive environment, increasing loyalty to a tourism destination allows it to establish and maintain a comfortable and lasting position in the market. Branding is one of the most important factors in the success or failure of a themed product, especially one related to experiences, and has a major influence on how the MODs is perceived by potential and actual tourists.

Thus, the above specifics regarding the place and role of the tour guides and their participation in the implementation of tourism programs, prove their importance in the process of promoting the tourism area, as well as the relationship with other actors in the tourism supply for the development and management of tourism areas in Bulgaria, as a participant in the internal and external management of the destination/Organizations for Management of Tourism Areas/.

In this regard, tour operators are one of the main players on the market for the supply of specialised products offered by different tourism areas.

## **Methodology**

In the current research and in proving the thesis will be applied a number of common scientific methods, such as observation, analysis, synthesis, analogy and comparison. In essence, they are tools of the dialectical, historical, inductive-deductive and systemic approach, as well as of comparative analysis.

The following research methods will be used to achieve the objectives of the research project:

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<sup>3</sup><https://bit.ly/3S5MRnu>.

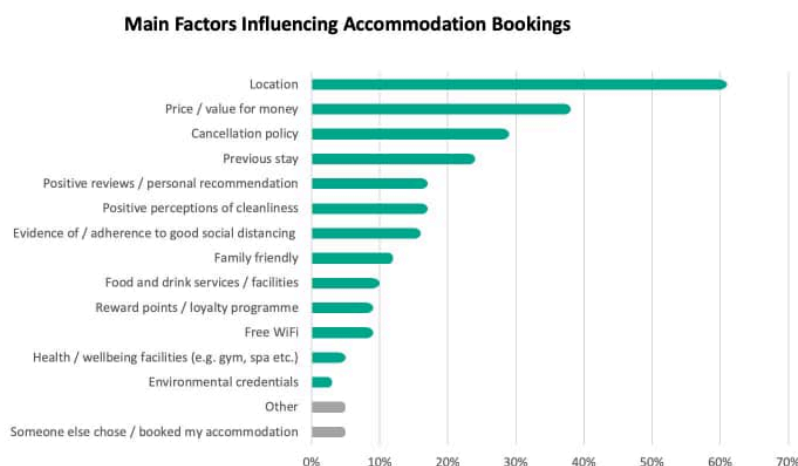
- Review of the theoretical scientific developments of Bulgarian and internationally renowned authors.
- Overview of materials of international and European organizations in the field of tourism.
- Overview of company research in the field of tourism management and specialized products of tour operators.
- Research of the information, published in the website of Ministry of Tourism.

Consumer choice is not a simple sequence of actions and deeds in the marketplace, but a combination of needs, motives, individual experiences, requirements and financial capabilities. The purchase and subsequent evaluation of a tourism product is accompanied by certain feelings and emotions – joy, disappointment, satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the overall perception of the product.

Consumer requirements (Ianeva 2004) in evaluating innovative specialised tourism products implemented by the tour guide during the tourism program in the destination are complex. The main criteria that measure the product, in terms of the provided quality of the tourism program, according to the consumer requirements are the following:

- Reliability of the destination and the specialised products
- Content
- Health and safety (Donaldson 1993)
- Accessibility
- Opportunities for using specialised products
- Duration
- Price
- Price-satisfaction
- Staff remuneration (Lyons 1996)
- Staff qualifications
- Satisfaction from the experienced
- Providing individual needs
- Service level

Criteria that measure the product in terms of quality provided to customers, according to a survey by STR (<https://str.com/>), the most important factors influencing tourists to choose and book certain properties in the destinations are hotel location; price and value for money and cancellation terms. It is the guide of the tourist group that helps in their satisfaction in terms of price-quality ratio. To a large extent, these are also the most important factors to choose before the pandemic of early 2020 (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** *Main Factors, Influencing the Accommodation Bookings*

Source: <https://str.com/data-insights-blog/covid-19-impact-forward-hotel-bookings-key-european-markets>.

As it is evident the main theories from marketing in terms of measurement criteria correspond with the research of different authors nowadays. In the applied research, the authors derive the more important criteria and evaluation indicators on the basis of which the supply is evaluated in specific sites and tourism areas in Bulgaria.

*The reliability that the tour guide creates* is an important criterion for evaluating customer service: if the service is excellent but not reliable the customer will not return to the tourism area again even if it provides them with a specialized product for which they had chosen the destination. *The content* is similar to reliability as it is a way of measuring whether the customer always receives the same level of service. This criterion is linked to the control functions of the group leader, who monitors the quantity and quality of the services offered by the suppliers according to his/her contracts with them and according to the tourism program. The difference is that if you expect the service in the bus, during the transfer of the tourists to be reliable, you expect it to depart and arrive according to the given timetable, but if you expect the same service to be meaningful, then you expect the same level of pleasant service during the return transfer from the destination as you received from different staff during the transfer on arrival at the destination.

Most *health and safety standards* are established through laws, including the health protocols. Therefore, their failure to comply during the tour program can not only result in the loss of customers, but also in claims against the organization. Here again the tourism leader needs to control the provided protocols and standards.

Is the *accessibility* in the tourism infrastructure accessible to people who want to use it? For example, do wheelchairs have accessibility or if not is there a lift? During the program the guide should consider if there are tourists with similar needs that they are catered for.

*Availability and timing*, i.e. are the opening hours of the tourism sites suitable for people who want to use them? For example, are the opening hours at the spa facilities tailored to the specific needs of tourists as well as their other activities, so that they can use them for example after a business event or an experience-related excursion, so that they can then relax in the spa pools. In this respect, the group leader needs to tailor the activities to the specifics of the accommodation.

*Prices* are an important criterion for assessing the quality of customer service. If the customer feels that the attraction was not "worth the money" the reason is that they did not achieve the same satisfaction as they received when spending the same amount of money in another similar destination. If something is a "good deal" it doesn't necessarily mean it has to be cheap. A customer may consider that 50 BGN a day at an amusement park is a "good deal", while a 10 BGN admission to a non-representative exhibition may be considered expensive.

*Staff remuneration* - tourism destinations and their constituent businesses are known to be labour-absorbing i.e., staff costs make up the largest proportion of total expenditure. In this regard, tour operators' package programs choose whether the escorting of the group by a guide should be full or partial i.e. only at the destination. The main reason for this is that some programs are much more expensive than others, often not in offering more services, but in hiring more staff so that the customer can receive better service. When assessing *staff qualifications*, a minimum level of quality must be measured. For example, if the most capable appropriate tour leader for the destination is ill and another one has to be hired, who knows very little about the destination, the fact that he/she is a substitute will not matter to customers who will still expect the same level of service, especially with tourists returning to the destination having purchased a product from the same travel agency.

It is impossible to guarantee that every customer will be *satisfied with the experience* of visiting a certain destination. Satisfaction can often be affected by circumstances over which Destination Management Organisations and tour group leaders have no control, for example if the weather is bad or tourists have problems with their companions. However, the representative should always be focused on how to achieve the best to make sure that tourists are satisfied with the quality of the experience throughout the trip and accompaniment.

In order to *ensure the individual needs* during an organised guided tour, the only way is for the management to be flexible. The requirements of users in evaluating the tourism product in the destination and the program are complex.

As is evident from the results obtained in the study of tourists during a tour in a destination, accompanied by a representative of the tour operator, a particular type of specialized tourism product are associated with the chain of need - desires - interests - ability to pay, which is fundamental for any other type of product. The market research conducted on this basis is tailored to the relevant market segment concerning a certain level of product quality. The need for consumer rating system

studies arises in order for DMOs and the companies offering products to answer the question of what the product is and what is a quality for the defined group of consumers - for example, health, business or experience product consumers. The answer to this question is one of the factors that allows the individual supply-side market players to maintain and consolidate their market positions in the dynamically changing market conjuncture and is also a determining factor in the implementation of the internal activities regarding the marketing management of the tourism regions of the DMOs in Bulgaria.

The purpose of studying the requirements of consumers of specific tourism regions in Bulgaria and the specifics of the offered specialized products is to obtain reliable and comprehensive information necessary to assess the impact of the product in the destination on them. In line with this objective, it is necessary to study the requirements for analysing data from existing national databases, such as those on the specificity of business tourism.

## Results and Discussion

In the context of the derived results regarding the marketing formulations on tourism demand in this study a (survey) research is conducted. It is aimed at the identification of consumer requirements in inbound and outbound tourism regarding the possibilities of offering innovative specialized tourism products in business tourism combined with leisure tourism experiences. It also analyses the possibilities of developing destinations for health tourism – a priority especially in the context of a health crisis, in which different programs can also be offered for sensory experiences to be promoted by the representatives of the tour operators for diversifying the stay and increasing satisfaction in a specific destination specialized in a particular type of tourism.

In this direction, the regulatory frameworks of the legal framework in Bulgaria are assessed and specific recommendations are made to the legislative and executive authorities regarding the development of tourism areas.

The analyses focus on the consumer requirements of Bulgarian tourists (domestic tourism) for business tourism products with a combination of leisure programs during the stay aimed at identifying their expectations with opportunities for innovation applications. The authors' idea is to promote the development and recovery of domestic tourism in Bulgaria in its business tourism part. The authors' arguments are from the point of view of the cardinaly changed conjuncture of the tourism market worldwide as a result of the health and economic crisis in the last year. It has been shown that business tourism has a priority share over other specialised types of tourism in terms of revenue generated from it. With terms of the available resources, namely the available established specialised superstructure in Bulgaria connected to the five-star accommodation (hotels), congress and conference centres, which are visible in the national tourism register<sup>4</sup>, is our next argument regarding the analysis of consumer requirements in this direction. Aimed

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<sup>4</sup><https://bit.ly/3U5n7E3>.

at creating innovative business tourism products with a focus on offering additional components related to experiences during the stay in the destination. Directed by the authors to the marketing managers of specific organizations for the management of tourism areas, which products to be advocated in the regions Sofia, North Black Sea and Thracian Tourism Region.

Based on the existing national tourism register in Bulgaria<sup>5</sup>, a selection of accommodation places, which meet the requirements of the regulation concerning the needed business tourism facilities. The Law on Tourism does not offer a definition and component specification concerning business tourism. The document summarises all business tours as "congress tourism", without providing a specification and division of individual activities and subtypes, as well as outlining parameters determining the formation and conduct of business events. The authors' recommendation is to create a general framework for the management of business tourism as a separate segment of tourism, which would offer definitions, scope and profile of the potential users, directing enterprises specialized in this type of tourism to programs for the creation and management of innovative business products.

According to the Bulgarian legal regulation concerning hotels – the 'Regulation on the requirements for categorised accommodation and catering establishments, also on the procedure for determining the category and the conditions and procedure for registering guest rooms and guest apartments'<sup>6</sup>, the term used is properties for accommodation. In the register of properties for accommodation, there is a subdivision for business hotels, which are categorised as four and five stars. The Ordinance sets out specific requirements that distinguish business hotels from other types, such as a business centre with components available for the purposes of business travellers (computers, photocopiers, printers, etc.), a conference centre, a meeting room, a place to serve coffee and drinks in the hotel and other elements.

According to the regulations in Bulgaria concerning health tourism a number of recommendations for improvement can be made as a result of the following findings. After analyzing the national registers and regulations, we find certain inconsistencies and shortcomings, among which are the lack of a selection for health tourism or spa and wellness tourism in the Regulation on the requirements for accommodation and catering establishments and the procedure for determining the category, refusal, downgrading, suspension and termination of the category; the absence of selections by type of tourism in the Register for accommodation properties<sup>7</sup>, as well as the lack of coherence between the Accommodation Register and the Balneo Register already cited. There are also a number of inconsistencies and impediments to business in Ordinance No 2 / Ordinance No 04-14. Differences are also found in the classifications and definitions of the types of health tourism referred to in the Concept and the centres subject to certification in the Ordinance and the Tourism Act. By studying in detail the regulations related to health tourism, we could conclude that they contradict the current trends of tourism development, with the possibility that establishments offer to combine the satisfaction of several consumer

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<sup>5</sup><https://ntr.tourism.government.bg/>.

<sup>6</sup><https://bit.ly/3Dtsxs2>.

<sup>7</sup><https://ntr.tourism.government.bg/CategoryzationAll.nsf/mn.xsp>.

motives in several types of tourism, such as business with health, recreational with health, mountain with health, sea with health, religious and cultural with health.

When examining the formulations in the regulations related to urban leisure tourism, there is a lack of detailed definition or systematization of this type of product, known in the literature as products related to the economics of experiences and entertainment.

From this point of view, the tourism areas in Bulgaria, as well as the accommodation and catering facilities, and the attractions<sup>8</sup> related to the destination cannot be promoted as complex, which is an obstacle in their development and offering to consumers of specialized tourism product, who, according to the recent trends, are looking for complex satisfaction of their needs when choosing a destination for their holidays. As a consequence, it is important to intensify the activities related to the marketing management of the different tourism areas in Bulgaria at meso- and macro-level, in order to develop the priority types of tourism, set out in the registered activities at their creation.

## Conclusions

The results of the research shows the place and role of the tour guides through their participation in the tourism process, both through their activities of ensuring the quality of the experience during the tour and stay in the destination, and in terms of the control functions they performs for the tour operator in relation to the services offered by the suppliers in the destination, agreed upon according to quantity and quality. Its role in creating experiences for the tourists by promoting additional excursions and events in the destination also promote the tourism area. The tour guide's involvement in conducting informational tours in the destination also supports the activities of the Tourism Management Organizations in Bulgaria. Finally, as a result, we can point the guide's participation in the surveys, given to the tourists during the tourism tour, for identifying their consumer requirements regarding the possibilities of offering innovative specialized tourism products.

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## Exploring the Growing Importance of Cultural Diversity: Case Studies of the Hospitality Industry

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*In environments characterized by extreme cultural diversity, the ability to understand the cultural makeup of the workforce would equip businesses with knowledge required for innovation and enhancing performance. So, managing culturally diverse employees is a key challenge, especially in the hospitality and tourism industry, where people with diverse cultural backgrounds from all over the world interact with each other. This paper is a conceptual research that outlines the concept of cultural diversity in the hospitality industry. In addition, it outlines the benefits and challenges regarding culturally diverse workplace. Furthermore, it addresses diversity management practices and why cultural intelligence is essential when managing employees.*

**Keywords:** *hospitality sector, multiculturalism, diversity management, cultural intelligence*

### Introduction

The tourism and hospitality industry is labor intensive (Marchante et al. 2007) and is considered as one of the most rapidly growing sectors, accounting for more than a third of the total global services trade (Manoharan et al. 2021). This industry has been transformed not only into a global industry but, more importantly, into a highly competitive service and customer-oriented market (Kandampully et al. 2015). The people-centric nature of the industry makes it highly dependent on its employees, who play a critical role in delivering quality service comparable with the needs and expectations of its customers (Bharwani and Butt 2012). The provision of quality service has become a long-term strategy (Yoon and Ekinci 2003). The service-oriented strategy, of course, will lead to enhanced customer satisfaction, loyalty, and positive image (Anderson and Narus 1990, Garbarino and Johnson 1999) that results in an overall advancement in company performance (Homburg et al. 2002).

Globalization has provided more opportunities for people to interact with others from different parts of the world (Reisinger 2009). In fact, cultural diversity

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is an important issue that should be taken into consideration especially in the hospitality industry (Christensen-Hughes 1992). It can be defined as a system that recognizes and respects the existence and presence of diverse groups of people within a society. Diversity helps in bringing new perspectives and innovative ideas to execute events and has many advantages if managed successfully (Thomas et al. 2015). Since 1960, the concept of cultural diversity has gained currency in academic research in areas related to organizational behavior and human resources management and currently touches upon research on organizational communication. Reportedly, initial efforts to address cultural diversity have focused mainly on gender and race (Mousa 2018). However, concerning the social, political, educational and economic changes occurring in both local and international environments, the term “cultural diversity” has remarkably expanded to include gender, race, religion, ethnicity, income, work experience, educational background, family status and other differences that may affect the workplace (Heuberger et al. 1999).

However, with people from diverse backgrounds working together, there is an increase in the number of conflicts in the organization, particularly in the hospitality and tourism industry, which has great dimensions with cultural diversity (Reisinger 2009). Consequently, this situation is greatly conducive to the emergence of cultural intelligence concept by Earley and Ang in 2003 which is commonly interpreted as representing an individual’s capability to interact and respond in cross-cultural settings.

Management of hospitality firms is responsible for ensuring that staffing procedures meet the objectives of having a multicultural environment. It is a demanding project to find a group of qualified, culturally diverse applicants for employment that gives a great help to the organization (Kreitz 2008, Saari and Korjala 2013). Furthermore, training programs regarding diversity, launching events that allow multi-cultured people gather will surely foster organizational success.

Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to overview the growing importance of cultural diversity in the hospitality industry. It also outlines the diversity management practices followed by hospitality organizations in order to enhance their performance. In addition, it explores the benefits of building a culturally diverse workforce as well as the related challenges. Furthermore, the paper explains the concept of cultural intelligence and why it is important to be considered when managing people with different backgrounds. This study is a conceptual research that focuses on gathering information about the cultural diversity. Secondary data such as publications, websites, books and journal articles have been used in order to complete the research. General information regarding cultural diversity and workplace diversity management was collected first and then case studies from the hospitality sector was gathered in order to support the study.

## **Cultural Diversity**

Cultural diversity, known as multiculturalism, is a quality of diverse and many different cultures. The term “cultural diversity” doesn’t only pertain to matters

of race or ethnicities. A culturally diverse workplace also means a system where people are recognized and respected for their different interests, talents, and skills (Reisinger 2009). Cultural diversity is defined as “a characteristic of social grouping that reflects the degree to which objective or subjective differences exist between group members” (Van Knippenberg and Schippers 2007). It refers to the co-existence of people with various group identities within the same organization. Malik et al. (2017) indicate that diversity requires the inclusion of all groups of people at all organizational levels.

Cultural diversity can be classified into two main dimensions. The first dimension which is called visible or primary dimension includes age, gender, sexual orientation and physical abilities which can be easily differentiated from one person to another as it can be visible in the first encounter. The second dimension that is also called invisible or secondary dimension refers to the communication style, educational background, ethnicity, nationality and religion which are not easily visible (Malik et al. 2017) and do not receive adequate attention.

Diversity is also derived from the interaction between visible and invisible diversity, which often generates inferences about the person’s internal attributes. Mazur (2010) added a third dimension which is called tertiary dimension. This dimension addresses beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, attitudes, feelings, values. All these aspects are seen as interacting in creating the identity of the individual, generating similarities and differentiations that affect the work environment. This viewpoint is a response to the conception that prevailed in the organizational field, according to which diversity was only associated with multicultural, multiethnic and multiracial aspects (Mazur 2010).

In the hospitality and business context, diversity is considered a subjective occurrence, initiated by group members themselves, by categorizing themselves as similar or different on the basis of their social identities. Originally, based on Tajfel’s (1982) study, the social identity aspect declares that people describe themselves according to their social environment and recognize others based on perceived similarity and dissimilarity. Individuals are clustered into separate groups based on this idea through the process of social categorization. This categorization results in the viewing of individuals through their common characteristics, rather than their unique attributes (Mousa 2018).

The issue of cultural diversity requires a hospitality organizational culture in which each employee can use his or her full capacity to attain career aspirations without being hobbled on the basis of diversity (Mousa 2018). Hence, Cox and Blake (1991) clarified that an effective management for multi-cultured groups should involve the attainment of both individual outcomes (job satisfaction, job mobility, job involvement and fair remuneration) and organizational outcomes (attendance, turnover, performance and consequently profit). Moreover, Pless and Maak (2004) declare the role of diversity management in creating an inclusive organizational climate where employee uniqueness is acknowledged, maintained and valued, in addition to allowing feelings of organizational citizenship and identification with the workplace.

## **Workplace Diversity in the Hospitality Industry**

Globalization has enhanced the diversity experienced in the hospitality and tourism industry because of its multicultural nature. Tourism refers to the movement of people from their usual surroundings to places of interest either within their country or across the world for leisure, business, or adventure. Hospitality, on the other hand, refers to providing services such as travel, accommodation and entertainment to meet the needs of tourists. Both hospitality and tourism industries aim at optimizing the experience of tourists in cultural environments that is different from those of their home countries or regions (Smith 2011, Man 2021).

These industries present a unique opportunity in understanding new cultural experiences for both employees and the travelers. It is important for employees to understand and appreciate different cultures to enhance their interactions with tourists with different cultures, religions, races, creeds, colors, ages, genders and sexual orientations. It is for this reason that businesses working in this industry must endeavor to train their personnel to appreciate and accommodate people from diverse backgrounds around the world. As such, workplace diversity not only facilitates easy understanding of different cultural, social and economic perspectives but also enhances the delivery of satisfactory services through communication and observation.

The workforce composition in the hospitality and tourism establishments is definitely vast and diverse. Indeed, it is necessary to employ people from all walks of life and nationalities so as to nurture workplace diversity that portends positive influence and enhanced productivity in the hospitality and tourism industry. Workplace diversity also enables businesses to nurture and portray a positive image of inclusive equal employment opportunities for all without regard to race, gender or nationality (Smith 2011, Skolnick 2021).

Workplace diversity in the hospitality and tourism industry is enhanced through vision that promotes equal employment opportunity to cater for the different nationalities in the market. The industry gets to appreciate the world's socio-cultural and economic differences through the recruitment of people of diverse backgrounds. As such, businesses in this industry need to establish organizational policies that not only discourage discrimination but also encourage intercultural activities such as cultural education programs and forums. Businesses should also employ organizational structure that is comprised of people from different regions and races and spread key appointments to qualified staff from across the board (Smith 2011).

## **Diversity Management**

According to Reiners (2022), diversity management is leadership's deliberate effort to plan and implement changes to an organization's systems and practices of managing people, so potential benefits from diversity are fully realized and potential disadvantages minimized. Diversity management refers to "utilizing the organizational culture and human resource management (HRM) practices to

increase or maintain the variety of the human capital on some given aspects and ensure that the variety in the human capital on these given aspects does not hinder the achievement of organizational objectives (Olsen and Martins 2012, p. 1161). Research studies on diversity management in the hospitality and tourism field have focused on various aspects related to diversity management including the business case for diversity (Singal 2014), disability inclusion (Gröschl 2007, Kalargyrou and Volis 2014), ethnic minority (Manoharan et al. 2014), gender diversity (Gröschl and Arcot 2014) and language diversity (Dawson et al. 2011). Gröschl and Doherty (1999) presented one of the earliest studies on diversity management focusing specifically on the hospitality and tourism industry. They recommended hospitality enterprises should highlight their commitment to diversity management by including it in their mission statements and supporting it with policies, procedures and management practices at all organizational levels.

To build a diverse workplace, it is crucial to recruit and hire talented employees from a variety of backgrounds. This requires leadership and others who make hiring decisions to overcome bias in interviewing and assessing talent. If organizations can break through bias and hire the most qualified people, those with the right education, credentials, experience and skills, a diverse workplace should be the natural result. Incorporate a diverse interview panel to ensure candidates are chosen solely based on suitability for the position. Managers should be trained on what can and cannot be asked in an interview. For example, questions about an applicant's personal life, such as religious or political beliefs, are off-limits (Man 2021, Skolnick 2021).

To manage a diverse workplace, organizations need to ensure that they effectively communicate with employees. A standard of rules should be set for all groups of employees regardless of their background. Management should ensure that all employment actions follow the standardized criteria to make sure each employee is treated the same. In addition, managers should avoid making assumptions about employees from different backgrounds. Instead, they should look at each employee as an individual and judge successes and failures on the individual's merit rather than attributing actions to their background (Man 2021, Skolnick 2021).

Language is another area that should be taken into consideration. Policies, procedures, and other important information should be designed to overcome language and cultural barriers by translating materials and using pictures and symbols whenever applicable. Focusing on gender diversity, Doherty (2004) attributed the disadvantage and gender inequality for women in the workplace to their dual roles. For example, discrimination and lack of flexible working hours lead to the failure of women to progress to the most senior levels of management, in spite of making significant progress into middle management in the hospitality industry.

Kalargyrou and Volis (2014) focused on diversity management practices related to disability inclusion. These practices include establishing diversity inclusion councils or teams, providing training and education to non-disabled employees about working and interacting with employees with disabilities, appraising employees with disabilities' performance through formal and informal

performance appraisals, and providing various accommodation practices to support employees with disabilities in the workplace.

Manoharan et al. (2014) identified two contrasting strategies to diversity management: identity-blind and identity-conscious. The former does not take into account any differences among employees for human resource decision-making process, while the latter includes the demographic group in the decision-making process (Manoharan et al. 2014). They explored four functions of the human resource management; recruitment, training and development, performance management, and compensation and concluded that the formal diversity management functions were identity-blind in relation to HRM practices but were identity-conscious in regard to equal opportunity employment and anti-discrimination.

Accordingly, the main goal of diversity training should be a change in attitudes leading to a change in behaviors and should rise above simply raising awareness towards cultural diversity (Dawson et al. 2011). In addition, these training programs should teach employees how to better appreciate the views of others, what actions are offensive and why they are perceived as such, the way to calmly communicate that a co-worker has offended them and the way to resolve the conflict properly.

### **Cultural Intelligence (CQ)**

While there is increasing recognition of the business case for culturally inclusive work settings, there is a critical lack of understanding of how to achieve this. A culturally inclusive workplace requires a culturally intelligent workforce and leadership. Cultural intelligence and inclusion training pass on the foundation of knowledge, skills, and mindsets required to work effectively with culturally diverse stakeholders and to foster culturally inclusive work settings.

The term of cultural intelligence was first coined in 2003 by two researchers, Earley and Ang, from the London School of Business (Kamal Abdien and Jacob 2018, Nosratabadi et al. 2020). They defined CQ as the ability of the individual to interact effectively with people who are culturally diverse with the cultural context of the individual (Nosratabadi et al. 2020). Individuals demonstrating higher levels of CQ are more likely to thrive and flourish in culturally diverse situations than individuals who exhibit lower levels of CQ (Lee et al. 2018).

CQ is one of the dimensions of multiple intelligences and is similar in some respects to social intelligence and emotional intelligence, which focuses on a set of skills for effective behavior in different situations (Moon 2010). For instance, CQ is different from emotional intelligence (EQ) that focuses on the ability of an individual to deal with emotions. A person with high EQ in a specific culture may not be emotionally intelligent in another culture. On the one hand, CQ focuses on cross-cultural interactions in settings with different races, ethnicities, and nationalities; and on the other hand, it supports the practicality of globalization that involves intercultural settings (Kamal Abdien and Jacob 2018, Nosratabadi et al. 2020). Cultural intelligence is a multidimensional concept that involves four



competences; cognitive, metacognitive, motivational and behavioral (Kamal Abdien and Jacob 2018, Nosratabadi et al. 2020, Ang et al. 2006, Van Dyne et al. 2012).

Cognitive CQ refers to an individual's knowledge of the norms, practices and customs of other cultures. This knowledge can be acquired through education or personal experience (Kamal Abdien and Jacob 2018, Nosratabadi et al. 2020). According to Van Dyne et al. (2012), this dimension involves two main elements: culture-general knowledge and context-specific knowledge. Culture-general knowledge is defined as the general knowledge about a specific cultural environment in terms of similarities and differences. Context-specific knowledge provides them with more details about the different cultures to interact effectively with persons from these cultures (Ang and Inkpen 2008, Ang et al. 2006, Brislin et al. 2006, Van Dyne et al. 2012). People with high cognitive CQ can distinguish between the similarities and differences across cultures.

Metacognitive CQ represents the mental processes that individuals use to acquire and understand cultural knowledge. This means that an individual is aware of people or situations in cross-cultural interactions (Ljubica and Dulcic 2012). It makes them aware of their cultural preferences before and during communication and helps them to adapt accordingly. Metacognitive CQ involves three elements; planning, awareness and checking. Planning includes the individuals' careful thinking to develop action plans to be followed in specific cultural contexts. Awareness includes individuals' attentiveness to their cultural habits and how they employ their cultural knowledge to interact effectively with those from different cultural backgrounds, while checking refers to individuals evaluating their mental plans and expectations and to what extent they behaved effectively during the cultural interactions, adapting their knowledge structures (Ang and Inkpen 2008, Ang et al. 2006, Brislin et al. 2006, Van Dyne et al. 2012). A high metacognitive CQ enables hotel managers to isolate themselves from their own cultural background and interact effectively with people from other cultures.

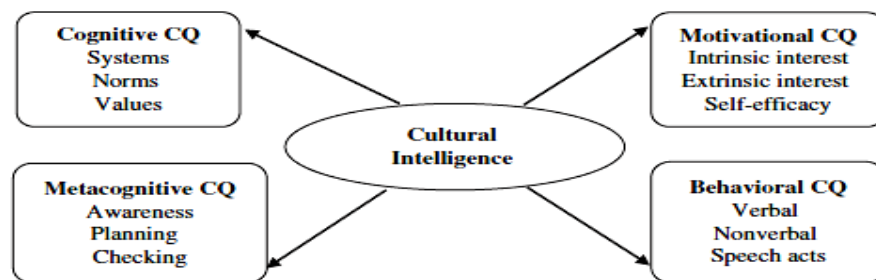
Motivational CQ is the drive one needs to be a part of and succeed in a multicultural environment. It refers to the individuals' concern, confidence and interest to know about different cultures (Ljubica and Dulcic 2012) and their desire to interact with culturally diverse people. It involves three main elements; intrinsic interest, extrinsic interest and self-efficacy (Van Dyne et al. 2012). Intrinsic interest refers to the individuals' real satisfaction from interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds. Extrinsic interest refers to the individuals' tangible returns that can be acquired from cultural interactions or international work assignments such as promotions and rewards. Self-efficacy refers to the confidence to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds and confidence to work in culturally diverse groups (Ang et al. 2006, Brislin et al. 2006, Van Dyne et al. 2012).

Behavioral CQ is the individuals' ability to behave appropriately in different cultural contexts. It involves both verbal and nonverbal actions when communicating with people from different cultures and brings together three main elements; verbal behavior, non-verbal behavior and speech acts (Van Dyne et al. 2012). Verbal behavior includes changing the mode of expression such as the level of warmth, enthusiasm, formality to adapt to the cultural context and flexibility in

using pauses and silence. Non-verbal behavior includes changing gestures, facial expressions and body language to adapt to the cultural context. Speech acts include changing the way to request, invite, apologize, appreciate, disagree and say “no” (Ang and Inkpen 2008, Ang et al. 2006, Brislin et al. 2006, Van Dyne et al. 2012).

To sum up, as mentioned in Figure 1, the cognitive dimension includes systems, norms and values while the metacognitive dimension includes awareness, planning and checking. Furthermore, the motivational dimension refers to the interest and self-efficacy while the behavioral refers to the verbal, non-verbal behaviors and speech acts. According to Ivanova Yordanova and Ivanova Alexandrova-Boshnakova (2011), a high CQ helps individuals to have a broader understanding in multicultural situations and fosters individuals’ abilities to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds (Kamal Abdien and Jacob 2018). In the hospitality industry, CQ is highly significant as hospitality managers interact daily with cultural diversity among their employees and customers. Additionally, hotel managers may be required to perform international assignments where they need to work effectively with other team members from other cultures. Therefore, it is not enough for hotel managers to merely know about business operations such as finance, human resource management or marketing; they also need to have skills and experience in communicating with people from other cultures (Alon and Higgins 2005). Cultural intelligence training programs should be developed for employees in order to be able to interact with culturally different colleagues as well as customers.

**Figure 1.** *Cultural Intelligence Dimensions*



Source: Van Dyne et al. (2012).

### **Benefits of Workplace Diversity**

Kim (2006) introduced a multidimensional structure to diversity management practices with its foundation on the four broad benefits of diversity management. These include the maintenance of a heterogeneous workforce, improvement in firm's growth, alleviation of the firm's image, and adoption of a pool of talented human resources. An organization's success and competitiveness depend upon its ability to embrace diversity and realize its benefits. When organizations proactively assess their handling of workplace diversity issues and develop and implement diversity plans, there are multiple benefits to the organization. Fundamentally,

cultural diversity creates cultural competence for the organization. It has several ways of providing a competitive edge and increased productivity in the hospitality business (Devine et al. 2007).

### *Building Images*

Cultural diversity can help to enhance corporation images. The hospitality industry has been somewhat passive about building a positive industry image for the public (Gong 2008). Hospitality organizations should take some actions to build an image that the industry is willing to recruit more valuable minority employees from diverse cultures. This kind of message can attract more young people to take hospitality as a possible career option. In addition, a culturally diverse workforce can make a company look and feel more like the neighbor communities that it serves. This kind of image can help the companies in the hospitality industry to be better recognized and accepted by diverse communities (Devine et al. 2007).

### *Improved Cultural Awareness and Work Ethics*

Culture and cultural awareness are advantages of employing culturally diverse employees. This is considered to enrich the work environment (Manoharan et al. 2021). When people from different ethnic backgrounds sit together during different activities such as breaks and lunch time, all sitting and talking, they exchange their cultures, traditions and customs that adds benefit to both customers and employees. The number of culturally diverse employees working in hotels reflects the multicultural setting, and can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage, because diversity can bring in a breadth of knowledge and is valuable, rare, and difficult to imitate (Richard 2000). In addition, culturally diverse employees enhance work ethics and broaden the group's perspectives about every culture leading to enhanced performance (Patrick and Kumar 2012, Iguchi 2016).

### *Wide Range of Knowledge*

Cultural diversity enables employees to become more knowledgeable of diverse colleagues and customers of the organization. The quality of ideas and solutions produced by diverse groups is higher than the quality of ideas from homogeneous groups (Manoharan et al. 2021). Culturally diverse employees are unique, bringing broad experience and a wide range of knowledge, which can provide hotel guests with novel, diverse cultural experiences (Guo and Al Ariss 2015, Iguchi 2016). It can help broaden their views and the way they approach problems in the future (Devine et al. 2007). Employees bring experiences and individual skills to the work community as well as more ideas and suggestions that are flexible in adapting to fluctuating markets and customer demands.

*Better Customer Service*

Organizations employing a diverse workforce are supplied with a greater variety of solutions to problems, especially in customer service (Devine et al. 2007). When people have different views and backgrounds, they often perceive a problem from distinct perspectives. Diverse members can better understand and ultimately help those customers who are similar to them. From the customer's perspective, they feel more comfortable when dealing with an organization's employees that are like them. They feel an identity with associates like them and are more willing to interact with organizational employees who are culturally knowledgeable (Iguchi 2016). Also, language proficiency of culturally diverse employees often has a positive impact with guests. Having employees with multilingual abilities in hotels can be a substantial source of competitive advantage (Choi et al. 2017, Markova et al. 2013).

*Commitment to the Profession*

According to Manoharan et al. (2021), Cairncross and Kelly (2008) highlighted the fact that employees from some cultures appeared willing to commit to hospitality as a profession, which meant that they brought to their work a difference in attitude featuring a sense of professionalism, and a willingness to learn and to contribute to the team. It is highly probable that when culturally diverse employees display their commitment to the profession by taking hospitality courses, turnover in hotels is reduced (Manoharan et al. 2021). Cultural diversity also results in more effective execution. It increases productivity on complex tasks. These tasks usually require difficult cognitive input which in turn requires knowledge resources, like information, skills, critical analysis and perspectives that diverse members can provide. Companies, who encourage cultural diversity, also encourage and motivate people to perform to their highest ability. Basically, cultural diversity reinforces continuous improvement. It will result in higher profit, productivity and return on investment (Gong 2008).

**Challenges Related to Cultural Diversity**

Despite the fact that there are benefits to cultural diversity, there are also some challenges. Cross-cultural challenges arise from cultural gaps. As the industry grows, opportunities for misinterpretation and misunderstanding of workforce and customer needs can be enhanced (Rosinski 2003). In order to avoid cultural tensions and frustration and successfully deal with multi-cultured employees, people in the hospitality industry must recognize and understand the importance of cultural differences in meeting diverse coworkers' and tourists' needs. Some of the challenges related to cultural diversity are acceptance, communication challenges, discrimination challenges, training challenges and conflicts relating to work attitudes (Gong 2008).

### *Acceptance*

Companies that seek diversification must ensure that their employees accept it. Often people are distrustful and anxious about things they do not understand. This applies to encountering and working with people with backgrounds different from theirs (Embroke 2022).

### *Communication Challenges*

Communication is a major challenge for culturally diverse workplaces due to perceptual, cultural and language barriers (Devine et al. 2007). Miscommunication is very likely to occur among diverse organization members. Different languages and various cultural backgrounds increase the difficulty of communication between employees in the workplaces. Language is always viewed as a crucial aspect among all the cultural features that make up cultural identity. Understanding of other languages is almost necessary. If there are insufficient conditions for the understanding of the phenomenon of culture, language differences will truly result in miscommunication (Powell 2006).

Even if all the people around a table speak the same language, cultural differences can create strong barriers to understanding (Earley and Peterson 2004). In fact, there may be a group of people who purposely use language that excludes people from certain groups. Particularly, when individuals fail to conduct an effective cultural communication, they may feel themselves excluded. At the same time, some feelings may be provoked such as suspicion, lack of confidence, and even hostility (Aytemiz Seymen 2016). Even simple misunderstandings caused by cultural and other differences in behavior, work attitudes, and communication styles disturb the workforce (Gong 2008). Ineffective communication of key objectives results in confusion, lack of teamwork, and low morale.

### *Discrimination Issues*

Today, it cannot be ignored that cultural differences increase the possibility of discrimination issues among workers. Racism, sexism, ageism, and homophobia are great challenging factors in culturally diverse contexts. Direct and indirect discrimination among workers have continually reported in companies with cultural diversity workforce (Baum et al. 2007). In fact, discrimination not only happen among employees. Sometime employers can also easily involve in discrimination issue. For example, there are indications that some employers only focus on recruiting minority but do not provide career progression for them (Baum et al. 2007). Due to some stereotypes, minority employees get jobs in lower-skill level and might encounter difficulty to be promoted to management level (Baum et al. 2007). Beside the discrimination issues between employees, it also happens between employees and customers or between an organization's rules and customers. For instance, restaurants who refuse to seat guests with mental disabilities or treating them in a way that is different from other customers.

Having a culturally diverse environment means that off-color jokes about ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or religion need to be met with zero-tolerance enforcement. Slurs, name-calling and bullying employees for any reason have no place in today's workplace. Policies should be put in place to handle misconduct and communicate to employees that this type of behavior will not be tolerated (Embroker 2022).

#### *Conflicts Due to Different Working Attitudes and Styles*

Colleagues from different cultures can also bring with them different workplace attitudes, values, behaviors, and etiquette. While these can be enriching and even beneficial in a diverse professional environment, they can also cause misunderstandings between team members. For instance, expectation of formality or relative informality, and even working hours can conflict across cultures. Where a Japanese colleague may not feel it appropriate to leave work before their manager, a Swedish professional may be used to a 6-hour working day (Reynolds 2019).

Additionally, working styles and attitudes towards work can be very different. If these are not recognized and accounted, conflicting approaches to work can put the brakes on productivity. For instance, approaches to teamwork and collaboration can vary notably. Some cultures, including many in Asia and Central America, value collective consensus when working towards a goal. Whereas others, such as Germany and America, place emphasis on the independence of the individual (Reynolds 2019).

#### *Training Challenges*

Diversity training aims at building up respect and increasing sensitivity for all of the differences among employees and customers. In order to develop a diverse workforce, it is essential to reduce cultural ethnocentrism and shortsightedness in employees (Gong 2008). Multicultural training plays a major role in order to increase the awareness of cultural diversity in employees and build up a culturally enriched environment in a company (Baum et al. 2007). Training programs need to be held to employees to help them to understand the requirements and benefits of the cultural diversity. In addition, they should be given training to increase their knowledge and skills in dealing with people having different cultural backgrounds (Baum et al. 2007). Language training and cross-culture-gap training are important and helpful to minority employees, especially to immigrant employees and expatriate managers. However, no single course can sufficiently prepare trainees for interaction with every culture in the world. Besides, how to conduct the training and meantime control the training costs are also challenges to the current hospitality companies who devote to develop cultural diversity.

## **Essential Assessment for Cultural Diversity Awareness**

Sometimes people need to assess their own cultural awareness. Also, employers in diverse workplaces may need to assess the cultural awareness of employees before hiring. So, in order to identify their awareness regarding cultural diversity, there are two assessments interrelated to each other: personality tests and cultural diversity awareness tests. They need to assess their personalities first as personality correlates with cultural intelligence. This happens through personality tests which determine how people think, work and act. The second one is the cultural diversity awareness test which is more comprehensive in cultural diversity.

According to Menzies (2015), there are main personality qualities that correlates with cultural intelligence which are: Extroversion (E), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C), Neuroticism (N) and Openness to experience (O). These personality traits can be assessed through the Big Five Personality Test. Extroversion (E) is the personality trait of seeking fulfillment from sources in the community. Extroverts seek out and enjoy social interactions, including exchanges with individuals from backgrounds different from their own. Agreeableness (A) reflects how individuals adjust their behavior to suit others. This typically means that the person is polite and likes people. Conscientiousness (C) is the personality trait of being honest and hardworking. Individuals who score high on conscientiousness are known for being determined and having strong wills. Neuroticism (N) is the quality of being emotional. Neuroticism tends to lack emotional stability and are often characterized as nervous and moody. Finally, openness to Experience (O) refers to the trait of seeking new experience and intellectual pursuits. Individuals who are open to new experiences are inquisitive and receptive to cultural variations. They are eager to learn about cultural differences and are willing to try new behaviors and consider alternative perspectives (Menzies 2015)

On the other hand, cultural diversity awareness tests provide an in-depth analysis of people's beliefs and behaviors regarding cultural diversity and inclusion. The cultural diversity awareness assessment includes questions regarding how people act in certain situations related to diversity. These tests help identify their extent to which individuals are aware of and understand their prejudices and biases. Furthermore, they help to understand the potential consequences of their approach to diversity in the workplace (Goldberg 1992).

Both types of assessments include a questionnaire of several items mostly rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from never to always. A higher score on these assessments indicates that the person is acutely aware of cultural diversity, and that he is very aware of the impact of his behavior on others. Individuals who score high relate to others in ways that value diversity. On the other hand, lower scores suggest that the person is unaware of prejudice and bias, and that he is not fully aware of the impact of his biased behavior on others. Individuals who score low communicate with others in ways that do not value diversity.

## **Hotels Diversity and Inclusion Programs**

### *Marriott Hotels*

Marriott International Hotel Chain is committed to providing a world of opportunity for its associates, customers, suppliers, owners and many other key stakeholders with meaningful and impactful programs in place. According to Marriott website, their diversity and inclusion programs include: Women's Leadership Development Initiative, The Emerging Leader Program (ELP), Exchanges Program, The Diversity Ownership Initiative, Culture Days Program, Human Trafficking Awareness Training, and Serve 360 initiative (Marriott 2019).

Many initiatives of Marriott were designed and implemented throughout the last 20 years. For instance, Women's Leadership Development Initiative's goal is to develop a strong pipeline of female leaders. Today, women comprise about 54% of Marriott's total workforce and hold some of the most significant policy-making positions in the chain. Another initiative is The Emerging Leader Program (ELP). A key pillar of their diversity and inclusion strategy to increase the numbers of women and minorities in leading roles. More than 1,300 leaders have completed or are currently enrolled in this program. In addition to these initiatives, there is also a program called The Diversity Ownership Initiative. This program introduces the hotel business to successful business owners who are females or people of color. Today, more than 1,300 hotels are owned by diverse and women entrepreneurs (Marriott 2019).

Moreover, "Exchanges" is a Diverse Supplier Program. Marriott International conducts business with more than 4,000 minority-, women-, and disabled-owned businesses annually and has spent over 5 billion dollars with diverse suppliers over the past decade. Furthermore, "Culture Days" is an immersive training program that is designed to build cultural competence and confidence. This program spans 13 countries and cultures, giving attendees a unique opportunity to experience and appreciate appropriate cultural terms, business and social protocols, traditions, trends, cuisine, and clothing. By 2025, Marriott's Serve 360 plan includes investing at least 5 million dollars to increase and deepen programs and partnerships that develop hospitality skills and opportunity among youth, diverse populations, women, people with disabilities and refugees (Marriott 2019).

### *Accor Hotels*

Accor Hotels International is one of the major hotel chains that encourage diversity and inclusion. Their diversity quote is "Welcoming others, giving recognition, drawing on their differences and valuing them: those principles are rooted in our DNA! We celebrate individuality, encourage creativity and reward agility". Their Diversity ambition is structured around four priorities: gender diversity and equality, multi-generational synergy, the integration of people with disabilities and the breadth of ethnic, social and cultural origins. Since 2017, they make every effort to promote diversity and fight against discrimination, particularly in France 2018, a large part of the action plan defined by the Group had been



implemented: awareness-raising sessions, creation of a practical guide and pocket leaflet on recruitment without discrimination (Accor 2019).

Conscious of gender and diversity challenges, they are committed to actively promoting women and young people to management positions in both headquarters and hotels. In 2018, 35% of their general managers were women (scope subsidiaries, franchisees, managed). In 2015, Accor joined “HeForShe”; a solidarity movement for gender equality initiated by UN Women, to ensure that actions to foster gender equality are driven by both women and men (Accor 2019).

As they are focusing on the integration of people with disabilities, Accor is a pioneering member of the ILO Global Business and Disability Network. Launched in June 2011, this United Nations initiative brings together multinational companies committed to including people with disabilities in the workplace. They particularly mobilize their employees to promote the integration of people with disabilities during two major events each year: The International Day of Persons with Disabilities and the Duoday. For instance, during the DuoDay (May 16th, 2019), volunteer employees have the opportunity to work in pairs with people with disabilities all over the world.

In 2017, Accor Hotels launched a pilot intergenerational program. Digital natives, called “smart digits” who have less than five years’ experience with the company get together to share mindset, culture and leadership approach with a “smart leader”; someone who has lived and breathed the organization for longer (Accor 2019).

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

“Diversity is more diverse than ever”. It is clear that globalization will shrink boundaries and cultural diversity will become more important than ever. Diversity will become an essential factor in the hospitality business, both in the workforce and the marketplace. Expanding international trade and immigration flow will continue to develop and the diversity will exponentially grow in the future at the expense of global markets (PwC 2011).

The issue of cultural diversity is revealed as one of the important aspects within the hospitality industry. The purpose of this study was to illustrate the influences of cultural diversity in the hospitality industry and increase awareness of its importance in today’s globalizing industry. It aimed at incorporating some best practices of cultural diversity. In addition, the research gave an in-depth insight into the understanding of the cultural intelligence and its importance in managing a culturally diverse workplace. Furthermore, it highlighted the main benefits of managing a multi-cultured team as well as the obstacles that organizations may encounter during managing those teams (PwC 2011).

Cultural diversity has both pros and cons but there are great solutions available in order to make hospitality organizations more successful through cultural diversity. The benefits are extensive with cultural diversity, but challenges are big as well. Some solutions can bridge the gap between these benefits and challenges. Accordingly, cultural diversity solutions are extremely important for organizations

(Saari and Korjala 2013). First of all, hospitality organizations need to change and reassess their cultural diversity approach and make an effective cultural diversity management plan as a part of their corporate strategy (Friday and Friday 2003). Additionally, the strategy should be convenient in order to implement it in practice, particularly with diversity training.

An organizational strategy is logical in order to achieve movement into a desired goal. It gives guidelines how jobs and people should be organized (Kossek 2000). For an organization to fully practice the complexity of diversity culture change, it needs to pay attention to three major categories: individual attitudes and behaviors, managerial skills and practices, and organizational values and policies (Saari and Korjala 2013). Individual attitudes and behaviors are really crucial to understand. Individuals should think about their behavior and recognize their approaches and actions towards multiple diversity related topics. For example, how they feel if there are several languages spoken in the workplace. In order to change more towards a diverse understanding of their work environment, individuals at work must acknowledge their own behavior and attitudes towards all the diversity factors and respectively appreciate them. These behaviors will eventually influence organizational culture, openness to coworkers as well as customer service. However, individual changes are not that dominant that it would influence to change the corporate culture (Kreitz 2008).

Furthermore, cultural diversity change requires management professionalism. Managerial skills and practices need to be changed to broaden management styles due to the diverse individuals with different skills and perspectives on tasks. The fusion of a culturally diverse workforce needs to be managed actively by supervising, coordinating and directing (Friday and Friday, 2003). One style of management is not possible for an organization with a wide range of employees in order to contribute to the topmost height of performance. In addition, involvement and feedback from employees is recommended for the management in order to improve the needs and equality. Finally, organizational values and policies are the most demanding tasks of the three cultural diversity changes (Saari and Korjala, 2013).

Based on Clements and Jones (2006), one of the most efficient ways to implement diversity to the employees is diversity training. Educating and training the workforce leads to the development of in-house expertise. Organizational efforts to inform and educate employees about diversity benefits to the organization will assist in greater organizational performance. Long-run reassessments are vital in order to improve and measure business performance. The first of these assessments serves as a great benchmarking tool for future assessments. For example, organizations can launch a customizable cultural diversity employee survey as a reassessment method that provides broad reporting from the entire workforce. Reassessments should answer two types of questions, including the process as well as the results in order to benefit the most from the evaluations (Saari and Korjala 2013). Furthermore, valid and reliable performance measurements, such as benchmarking or comparative analyses of other organizations are great assessment tools. To sum up, both evaluations and assessments are an integral part

of management. They will show the current state of the cultural diversity strategic process.

Beside the diversity training programs, leading by example is an effective tool in managing cultural diversity. Managers are not only responsible to be role models, but additionally, all employees at every department must conduct culture infusion and be committed to its practice. This can happen through culture days and events or daily rehearsal examples. Daily rehearsals educate employees concerning different cultures and culture days of the organization allow multi-cultured workers interact together.

Additionally, the Human Resources Department is responsible for taking care of staffing procedures to meet the objectives of having a multicultural workforce (Kreitz 2008, Saari and Korjala 2013). The department should make sure that managers and executive team members incorporate cultural diversity policies into all departments and functions of the organization. Their primary task is to establish a culture that serves most beneficially the organization's cultural diversity plan. Management needs to create an attitude of honesty and openness that employees' ideas and comments are encouraged to be expressed. It also invents a feeling of equal value. For managers, promoting diversity in leadership positions offers visibility and understanding of the genuine benefits of diversity. Managers are recommended to consider a succession plan for identifying and developing a diverse pool of talent for an organization's potential future leaders as well as the recruitment process, which plays an integral part in strategic cultural diversity leadership. It is a demanding project to find a suitable supply of qualified, diverse applicants for employment. These tools will give great assistance to the organization (Kreitz 2008, Saari and Korjala 2013).

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This work presents some limitations. This research is conceptual that focuses only on gathering data. It depends on theories based on existing literature, rather than experimentation and observation, draw conclusions that are less fact-based and may not necessarily be considered reliable. Future research in this field is better to be quantitative. Surveys and field studies with employees asking about the diversity practices in their workplace and barriers they face when working with culturally diverse teams would contribute to the advancement of knowledge about cultural diversity. Furthermore, more research needs to be conducted on cultural diversity training and the different programs established in hospitality organizations and how to improve those training programs.

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