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# Journal of Tourism Theory and Research

## Volume:10, Issue:1, 2024

### Research article

Metaphorical perceptions of undergraduate tourism students towards the concepts of English and Professional English: the case of Türkiye-Spain

*Emre Yaşar, Bedia Ümmü Gafar*

## Metaphorical perceptions of undergraduate tourism students towards the concepts of English and Professional English: the case of Türkiye-Spain

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### Abstract

The primary purpose of this research is to determine the metaphorical perceptions of the student's tourism in Türkiye and Spain regarding the concepts of English and professional English and to compare these perceptions. The phenomenology technique was adopted and used in this research. The data were collected in person using a two-question questionnaire. A purposeful sampling technique was used for this research. Data were collected from May 24 to May 28, 2022. The content analysis method was applied in the analysis of the research data. The results show that students' metaphorical perceptions of English and professional English concepts are positive and different. The research findings show that English and professional English learning interact with the inner worlds of the students.

**Keywords:** *Metaphorical perceptions, Tourism students, Professional English, Spain, Türkiye*

### 1. Introduction

The tourism sector is a direct and indirect economic contributor to countries. The main economic benefits are the increase in foreign currency, employment opportunities development, investment diversification, and the taxes paid by the enterprises providing tourism services (Bunghez, 2016; Demir et al., 2017). The primary driver for achieving these economic benefits is tourism. Tourists are crucial to hosting countries (Zaei & Zaei, 2013). Tourists are required to establish a dialogue and agreement with the employees of the companies providing tourist services in the host country. Nowadays, tourists use English even though it is not their first language (Aldohon, 2014). In host countries, English is at the top of the list of those working in tourism, as in other sectors (Angouri, 2013). Because speaking the same language is necessary to understand and answer the needs of tourists. Tourism companies also want their employees to have a certain level of English and professional English.

Using English at a sufficient level is the main feature tourism sector employees seek (Rao, 2019). This feature is inevitable for the industry to improve service quality and compete (Chang & Hsu, 2010). English is also essential for ensuring tourists' satisfaction as customers (Bobanovic &

Grzinic, 2011). In addition, professional English skills increase job opportunities for tourism professionals (Ghany & Latif, 2012). For this reason, employees need to use professional English skills effectively (Lertchalermtipakoon et al., 2020). Most of the employees in the tourism sector are educated at a university (Demir et al., 2023). English and professional English education are also within this scope (Al-Tarawneh & Osam, 2019). With the successful realization of schooling, students fulfill their responsibilities while working in the tourism sector and can communicate with tourists (Zahedpisheh et al., 2017). Factors that do not originate from students, such as academic education quality and academic conditions, can influence the success of English education. In addition, a significant factor is students' perceptions of English and professional English. Students' perceptions of English affect their tendency to learn the language (Gömlüksiz, 2013). In this context, the perceptions about English in the student's subconscious are decisive in learning English.

Perception is an abstract concept. Metaphors facilitate the conceptual understanding of concepts by concretizing them and, in other words, concretely expressing an abstract concept through metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). Using metaphors in education and language studies is a method

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researchers adopt (Low & Cameron, 2002). When the literature is reviewed, we see that the English language and education are often used in metaphors. In these studies, students' metaphorical perceptions of English teachers (Mudra & Aini, 2020; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008; Zhang, 2016), teachers' metaphorical perceptions of English (Demir, 2018; Su & Yang, 2020; Zambon Ferronato, 2022) and students' metaphorical perceptions of English were examined (Baş & Gezeğin, 2015; Bekdaş, 2017; Duyar & Özkan, 2020; Erdem, 2018; Fang, 2015; Genç, 2017; Hongqin & Jianbin, 2008; Limon, 2015; Pehlivan et al., 2020, Şahin & Kil, 2020; Teskereci et al., 2015; Xu et al., 2022).

In tourism, few studies determine metaphorical perceptions of English and professional English. Özer (2020) surveyed to learn the metaphorical perceptions of English and professional English of tourism students. To the authors' knowledge, there is no other research for tourism education students. In addition, studies both in the field of tourism and in other areas were carried out within the scope of a single sample or country. In line with this information, it is necessary to fill the literature gap and present a different perspective on the literature. In this context, the primary purpose of this research is to determine the metaphorical perceptions of the students studying tourism in Türkiye and Spain regarding the concepts of English and professional English and to compare these perceptions.

Within the scope of the research purpose, it will make essential contributions in two areas. First, determining the professional English metaphorical perceptions of tourism education students will provide a different perspective on the literature. Secondly, it will be possible to compare the English and professional English perceptions of the students who receive tourism education in two different cultures.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. English within the scope of professional terminology

Language is the primary tool for communicating and sharing ideas. Every country has its own national language (Kramsch, 2014). In addition to the national language, each country adopts and learns languages often used in other countries (Melitz & Toubal, 2014). One of these languages is English. The importance of English, a language spoken in almost every country, is indisputable (Ilyosovna, 2020). Today, English is necessary for everyone (Reddy, 2012). It is indispensable, especially for businesses and employees that produce and provide services to people from different countries (Crystal, 2003). English may require people to achieve personal goals (Warriner, 2016). Because with English, people can communicate with the individuals they want and explain their problems (Ryan, 2009). In addition, English allows people to collaborate with people from different countries in their careers (Cargill & O'Connor, 2006). English is also important for countries other than people. English is the common language in the everyday dialogues and agreements of the countries (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996).

English is used in fields such as science, literature, and trade in countries (Lee & Buxton, 2013).

In such an equation, it is necessary to know English and, more specifically, professional English to communicate. Because English is accepted as an international language and is used more frequently with each passing period (Anam & Rachmadian, 2020). Professional English, a particular-purpose English, is used in different fields, especially in-service sectors (Dudley-Evans & John, 1998). General English and professional English have similarities in content. For example, Subjects such as listening, speaking, writing, reading, and grammar are offered within the scope of the training, both at a certain level. Along with this similarity, there are also differences. Professional English is aimed at the sector in the career plan of the individual or student (Demir & Demir, 2016). General English, conversely, is not for the sectoral dimension but for daily life (Kitkauskienė, 2006). General English constitutes the first step in which the individual begins the English learning process. Professional English is the next step for individuals learning general English (Özer, 2020). Students receiving tourism education receive both general English and professional English education. In English education, students understand general rules and logical relations. On the other hand, in professional English, more specific training content is shown and taught, such as welcoming guests, making their reservations, establishing a dialogue for any guests' needs and solving problems, and giving information to the guests about the business or the region. A student or employee who uses professional English effectively facilitates quality service delivery (Leslie & Russel, 2006).

### 2.2. Metaphoric perception

Metaphor, a term of Greek origin, corresponds to expressions that change and carry (Levine, 2005). Metaphors include making meaning changes between concepts (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008). The main reason for doing this is to make that concept more understandable (Adu-Ampong, 2016). Using metaphors, images are compared to something else. Thus, the idea is expressed more memorably (Allan, 2007). The variety of analogies of concepts depends entirely on the perception of the individual's inner world. The individual better explains the thoughts and perceptions in his inner world using metaphors (Levitt et al., 2000). This also increases awareness of the concept explained (Crompton, 2017).

Metaphor is a tool that allows us to recognize thoughts and feelings and simultaneously convey them (Zhang & Hu, 2009). Metaphors enable an individual to introduce himself (Draaisma, 2000) because metaphors show the individual's mindset. How a concept is understood, and its position in life can be learned through metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). Metaphor reflects the individual's subconscious in real life (Botha, 2009). For this reason, metaphor is considered a tool with creative use (Andriessen & Gubbins, 2009). For a concept to be considered a metaphor, it must answer some questions.

These are (Forceville, 2002):

- What is a metaphor analogous and likened?
- What is the conceptual goal and source of the metaphor?
- In what features are the conceptual source and target similar?

These questions question the reality of metaphorical perception. It is determined whether a metaphor is considered a metaphor. In presenting the concept as a metaphor, logical relations are sought. The individual is evaluated to express the metaphor appropriate to the characteristics of the concept.

Within the framework of research purpose, answers to the following questions are sought. These:

1-What metaphorical perceptions of students studying tourism in Türkiye and Spain about English?

2-What metaphorical perceptions of students studying tourism in Türkiye and Spain about professional English?

3-In which categories are the English and professional English metaphorical perceptions of students studying tourism in Türkiye and Spain?

4-Is there a difference in the metaphorical perceptions of English and professional English of students studying tourism in Türkiye and Spain?

### 3. Methodology

This study was carried out with the decision of the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Isparta University of Applied Sciences, dated 24.05.2022, and numbered 107/02.

The phenomenology technique was adopted and used in this research, which was carried out to determine the metaphorical perceptions of students studying tourism in Türkiye and Spain towards English and professional English. Phenomenology is one of the qualitative research techniques. The phenomenology technique provides in-depth information about concepts and phenomena that cannot be understood clearly (Creswell, 2013). This technique offers a concrete understanding of thought structures by examining student perceptions of both English and professional English (Patton, 2014).

#### 3.1. Sample group

The sample of this research is composed of students studying at the Faculty of Tourism of the University of Applied Sciences of Isparta and the Faculty of Tourism and Geography of Rovira I Virgili University. There are reasons to select those countries and universities. The reason behind the selection of Türkiye and Spain is that both countries are located in the Mediterranean region and are generally preferred as destinations in the Mediterranean region. The main reason for choosing universities is that students studying

tourism at two universities take courses in English and Professional English. Moreover, the choice of two universities for data collection was deemed appropriate. Both authors of the research work at Isparta University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Tourism. In addition, the second author's temporary presence in the Tourism and Geography Faculty within the scope of the assignment has effectively selected universities.

#### 3.2. Data collection

The research data were obtained from the students who completed the English and Professional English course. The data were collected in person using a two-question questionnaire. A purposeful sampling technique was used for this research. In purposive sampling, the participants are included in the research due to their characteristics and experiences (Etikan et al., 2016). Data were collected from May 24 to May 28, 2022. The data were obtained from 35 students of the Faculty of Tourism of the University of Applied Sciences in Isparta and the Faculty of Tourism and Geography of Rovira I Virgili University. Data were obtained from a total of 70 students.

Two questions were formed to determine the students' metaphorical perceptions of English and professional English concepts. These questions consist of the sentences "English is like ...because..." and "Professional English is like .....because.....". Students were given a form in which these two questions were written. Before providing the form, students were informed about metaphorical perception. Afterward, students were asked to write their thoughts about English and professional English in the spaces in the questions. The word "like" in the questions allows students to indicate the relationship between the subject and the source of the metaphor. The word "because" in the questions will enable students to state why they use metaphors. The words written by the students constitute the data of this research.

#### 3.3. Data analysis

The content analysis method was applied in the analysis of the research data. Content analysis systematically examines and interprets research data as content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The data are classified with content analysis and become more understandable (Cohen et al., 2002). In this research, content analysis was carried out in four stages. These stages (Creswell, 2013; Saban, 2009):

Coding stage: The metaphors developed by the students were listed, and their suitability for the research was checked. Data that did not explain the concepts of English and professional English metaphorically were not included in the analysis (n:10)

Classification stage: The metaphors developed by the students were rechecked. Generated metaphors have similar and simulated features.

Category development stage: Developed metaphors are associated with a theme. As a result of this stage, categories and themes were determined.



Validity and reliability stage: In qualitative research, detailed explanations of the research process and data acquisition are essential to ensure validity. (McMillian, 2000). This research details the research methodology, research group, data collection process, data analysis, and results to confirm the validity of the research. In the findings section, responses given by students to develop metaphors are provided as direct quotes. While the students' opinions were included, the abbreviation was TS1, TS2..... TS30 for Turkish students, and as SS1, SS2..... SS30 for Spanish students.

To ensure the reliability of the research, the researchers examined the data separately. Following the review, a consensus was achieved on the categories. Following analysis of the data, it was determined that 30 tourism students in Türkiye developed 26 different metaphors in English and 28 in professional English. Thirty tourism students in Spain have made 27 different metaphors in English and 29 in professional English. To increase the reliability of the search, the resulting metaphors and categories were reviewed by a Turkish and Spanish expert. The experts received a list in which the metaphors were written in sequence and asked to match the metaphors to the categories. The correspondence made by the experts and writers in the first part was compared. Following the comparisons, consensus and disagreement rates were determined. Subsequently, the reliability formula developed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was implemented.

The reliability of the investigation was therefore determined. The Turkish expert, whose advice was consulted in connection with the reliability of the decision, examined Turkish students' English and professional English metaphors. The expert placed a metaphor (native language) in English metaphors and two metaphors (course, habit) in professional English metaphors in a different category of writers. In this case, the reliability of Turkish students' metaphorical perceptions of English was determined as  $25/25+1=96\%$ , and the reliability of professional English metaphorical perceptions was defined as  $25/25+2=92\%$ .

The Spanish expert, whose opinion was consulted to determine the reliability, looked at Spanish students' English and English professional metaphors. The expert placed a metaphor in English metaphors (the native language) and one in professional English metaphors (the way to become rich) in a different category of writers. In this case, the metaphorical perception reliability for the concept of English was determined as  $26/26+1=96\%$ , and the professional English metaphorical perception reliability was defined as  $28/28+1=96\%$ . The agreement between experts' evaluations and research authors is 90% or more, indicating that the research is reliable (Saban, 2009).

#### 4. Findings

The metaphorical perceptions of Turkish and Spanish students in English and professional English were examined and explained in separate tables. First, a list of metaphorical

perceptions of students in English and professional English is given. Table 1 shows the metaphorical perceptions of both Turkish and Spanish students. As seen in Table 1, Spanish students developed 27 different metaphors, and Turkish students created 26 different metaphors for the concept of English. The most frequently used metaphor for the idea of English in Spanish students is "superiority" ( $f=3$ ). In Turkish students, the most common "money" ( $f=4$ ) and "sports" ( $f=2$ ) are related to the concept of English. Other metaphorical perceptions about the idea of English were expressed by one student each. Spanish students developed 29 different metaphors, and Turkish students created 28 different metaphors for the concept of professional English. The most frequently used metaphor for professional English in Spanish students is "mathematics" ( $f=2$ ). For Turkish students, the most commonly used metaphor for professional English is "money" ( $f=3$ ). Other metaphorical perceptions about the idea of professional English were developed by one student each.

Table 2 shows the distribution of Spanish students' metaphorical perceptions of English and professional English by categories. When Table 2 is examined, metaphorical perceptions of English and professional English show distribution in 6 different categories. 44.4% of the metaphors developed by Spanish students for English belong to the concept category. The least metaphor for English is the category of living beings, with 3.7%. 27.7% of the metaphors developed by Spanish students regarding the concept of professional English are in the inanimate being category, and 24.1% are in the concept category. In professional English, the least metaphor is in the verb category, with 10.3%.

Table 3 shows the distribution of Turkish students' metaphorical perceptions of English and professional English by categories. When Table 3 is examined, the metaphorical perceptions of Turkish students show the distribution in 6 different categories, as in Spanish students. 34.6% of the metaphors developed by Turkish students regarding the concept of English are in the category of inanimate beings. The most miniature metaphors related to the idea of English are in the categories of food-beverage and verbs, with 7.7%. 53.6% of the metaphors developed by Turkish students related to professional English are in the concept category. The most miniature metaphors related to professional English comprise living beings and verbs, with 7.1%.

Table 4 shows the metaphors of Spanish and Turkish students regarding the concepts of English and professional English in the category of a living being. Spanish students developed metaphors in 1 living creature category related to English and three related to professional English. On the other hand, Turkish students created four metaphors for English and 2 for professional English in the categories of living beings. Spanish students focused on the human metaphorical perception in the living being category. On the other hand, Turkish students developed metaphors in the form of living being, such as trees and cats, as well as human metaphors. The opinions of the students regarding the living being category are as follows:

Table 1. Metaphorical perceptions associated with English and professional English

Metaphorical perceptions associated with English			Metaphorical perceptions associated with professional English	
	Spanish students	Turkish students	Spanish students	Turkish students
1	Human	Game	Several people	Money
2	Mathematics	To do sport	Vehicle	Nightmare
3	Onion	Telephone	Boiled potato	Encyclopedia
4	Driving a car	A small kid	Climbing a mountain	Mountain
5	Cycling	Vehicle	A bumpy road	Need
6	Playing computer game	Music	Cake	Lesson
7	Superiority	Character	Mathematics	Business ethics
8	Superiority	Money	Difficult meal to make	Professional football player
9	Superiority	Cement	Holiday	Stairs
10	Talent	Relationship	Advantage	Love
11	Sun	Weather	Moon	Life
12	Riding a motorcycle	Tree	To play football	Habits
13	Native language	To do sport	A difficult game	Independence
14	Magic	Exercise	Multi-purpose, useful cloth	Sun
15	Communication	Passion	Seascape	Need
16	Advertisement	Money	Mathematics	Socialization
17	Family	Euro	Easy puzzle	Baby
18	Key	Native language	The way to be rich	Business life
19	Strength	Field	Facility	A technical job
20	Roller coaster	Business	Annoying friend	Rent
21	Tolerance and respect	Child	Creativity	Exercise
22	Job	Money	Meal	Money
23	Fun	Cat	Success	Money
24	Life	Money	Freedom	Professional duty
25	Solution	Electric	Defense	Meal
26	Water	Taking vitamins	Scarf	Eat food
27	To do sport	Innovation	Gymnastics	Excess
28	Mobile phone	Creativity	Oxygen	Mathematics
29	Arm	Bike	Ride a horse	Glove
30	Sleep	Water	Doctor	Identity

*“English is like a child because it must constantly be considered.” (TS21)*

*“English is like a cat because it is ungrateful. If it is not studied, it will be forgotten.” (TS23)*

*“English is like a tree because if you don't look at it, it will dry up, and if you don't look at the English language, it will be forgotten.” (TS12)*

*“Professional English is like a baby because it requires constant attention.” (TS17)*

*“English is like a human because it continually evolves.” (ST1)*

*“Professional English is like an annoying friend because although it is annoying, it is indispensable” (ST20)*

Table 5 shows the metaphors of Spanish and Turkish students regarding the concepts of English and professional English in the category of an inanimate being. Spanish students developed metaphors in 4 inanimate beings categories related to English and 8 related to professional English. On the other hand, Turkish students created 9 metaphors for English and 5 for professional English in the categories of inanimate beings. Turkish students mostly used the money metaphor. The opinions of the students regarding the inanimate being category are as follows:

*“English is like a key because it opens many doors for you in the world” (ST18)*

*“English is like a mobile phone because everyone knows of it, but everyone knows how to use it.” (ST28)*

*“Professional English is like multi-purpose, useful cloth because it provides benefits in many business areas.” (ST14)*

*“English is like money because it is needed everywhere.” (TS16)*

*“English is like a field because it does not bear fruit unless the seed is planted; if it is not studied in English, it will not develop.” (TS19)*

*“English is like electric because many vehicles cannot operate without electricity; our skills will be incomplete without English.” (TS25)*

*“Professional English is like a glove because you use it when you need it.” (TS29)*

*“Professional English is like money because the more it is, the better” (TS23)*

Table 6 shows the metaphors related to English and professional English in the concept category. Spanish students developed 12 metaphors for English and 7 metaphors for professional English. Turkish students created 6 metaphors for English and 13 metaphors for professional English. Spanish students used the metaphor of superiority most frequently. The opinions of the students regarding the concept category are as follows:

“English is like a family because it makes me feel good like my family makes me feel good” (ST17)

“English is like fun because funny situation occurs when you use a wrong pronunciation in front of your friends.” (ST23)

Table 2. Spanish students' metaphorical perceptions of English and professional English

Categories	English		Professional English	
	n	%	n	%
Living being	1	3,7	3	10,3
inanimate being	4	14,9	8	27,7
Concept	12	44,4	7	24,1
Term	3	11,1	4	13,8
Food & Beverage	2	7,4	4	13,8
Verb	5	18,5	3	10,3

Table 3. Turkish students' metaphorical perceptions of English and Professional English

Categories	English		Professional English	
	n	%	n	%
Living being	4	15,4	2	7,1
Inanimate being	9	34,6	5	17,9
Concept	6	23,1	15	53,6
Term	3	11,5	3	10,7
Food & Beverage	2	7,7	1	3,6
Verb	2	7,7	2	7,1

Table 4. Category of a living being

Students	Cate-gory	English		Professional English	
		Metaphors	n	Metaphors	n
Spanish	Living being	Human	1	Several people	1
				An annoying friend	1
				Doctor	1
Turkish	Living being	A small kid	1	Professional football player	1
		Tree	1		
		Cat	1	Baby	1
		Child	1		

Table 5. Category of an inanimate being

Students	Cate-gory	English		Professional English			
		Metaphors	n	Metaphors	n		
Spanish	Inani-mate being	Mobile phone	1	Vehicle	1		
		Key	1	A bumpy road	1		
		Roller coaster	1	Scarf	1		
		Arm	1	A difficult game	1		
				Multi-purpose, useful cloth	1		
				Seascape	1		
				Easy puzzle	1		
				Facility	1		
				Game	1	Money	3
				Telephone	1	Mountain	1
Turkish	Inani-mate being	Vehicle	1	Stairs	1		
		Money	4	Identity	1		
		Cement	1	Glove	1		
		Weather	1				
		Bike	1				
		Field	1				
		Electric	1				

“English is like a solution because it solves problems in business life in English as it solves problems.” (ST25)

“English is like superiority because it allows me to stay ahead of others.” (ST7)

“Professional English is like freedom because it gives you a lot of new opportunities and the chance to choose new ways.” (ST24)

“Professional English is like the way to be rich because it allows you to earn more money.” (ST18)

“English is like creativity because it allows us to use the mind to develop new things constantly.” (TS28)

“English is like passion because once you get carried away, you can't let go” (TS15)

“Professional English is like rent because sometimes there will be a problem.” (TS20)

Table 6. Concept category

Students	Cate-gory	English		Professional English			
		Metaphors	n	Metaphors	n		
Spanish	Concept	Solution	1	Holiday	1		
		Magic	1	Superiority	1		
		Communi-cation	1	Creativity	1		
		Strength	1	Success	1		
		Fun	1	Freedom	1		
		Life	1	Defense	1		
		Tolerance	1	The way to be rich	1		
		Sleep	1				
		Job	1				
		Family	1				
		Talent	1				
		Superiority	3				
				Character	1	Nightmare	1
				Relation-ship	1	Need	1
				Passion	1	Business eth-ics	1
Turkish	Concept	Business	1	Love	1		
		Innovation	1	Life	1		
		Creativity	1	Independ-ence	1		
				Socialization	1		
				Business life	1		
				A technical job	1		
				Professional duty	1		
				Excess	1		
				Habits	1		
				Rent	1		

Table 7 shows the metaphors of Spanish and Turkish students regarding the notions of English and professional English in terms. The Spanish students developed metaphors in three categories of terms linked to English and four linked to professional English. In addition, Turkish students have created three metaphors for English and three for professional English in the categories of terms. Spanish students frequently used mathematics in the term category. Turkish students used the metaphor of mathematics in professional

English. The opinions of the students regarding the term category are as follows:

*“English is like a mathematics because everyone should learn it.” (ST2)*

*“English is like a native language because everyone around me knows it.” (ST13)*

*“Professional English is like oxygen because oxygen is needed to live. English is needed to develop and stay active in business life.” (ST28)*

*“English is like the euro because it makes us feel comfortable abroad.” (TS17)*

*“English is like my native language because I studied English as much as my native language. (TS18)*

*“Professional English is like the sun because it enlightens us on business.” (TS14)*

*“Professional English is like mathematics because it requires constant repetition and practice.” (TS28)*

Table 7. Category of terms

Students	Category	English		Professional English	
		Metaphors	n	Metaphors	n
Spanish	Term	Mathematics	1	Mathematics	2
		Native language	1	Moon	1
		Sun	1	Gymnastics Oxygen	1 1
Turkish	Term	Music	1	Encyclopedia	1
		Euro	1	Sun	1
		Native language	1	Mathematics	1

Table 8 shows the metaphors related to English and professional English in the food-beverage category. Spanish students developed 2 metaphors for English and 4 metaphors for professional English. Turkish students created 2 metaphors for English and 1 metaphor for professional English. Meal is a common metaphor for Spanish and Turkish students. The opinions of the students regarding the food and beverage category are as follows:

*“English is like water because you cannot live without water. You cannot find a job in the industry without knowing English.” (ST26)*

*“Professional English is like boiled potato because potatoes mature as they boil. Professional English also improves as you use it.” (ST3)*

*“Professional English is like a difficult meal to make because it's really hard to use right.” (ST8)*

*“English is like taking vitamins because its effect decreases when its use is interrupted.” (TS26)*

*“Professional English is like a meal because food is a need in our life; professional English is a need in business life.” (TS25)*

Table 9 presents the metaphors of Spanish and Turkish students in the verb category for professional English and English concepts. Spanish students developed five metaphors for English and three for the concept of professional English. Turkish students have created two metaphors for the idea of English in the category of verbs and two metaphors for the concept of professional English. The metaphors developed by Spanish students in the category of verbs are more diverse. On the other hand, Turkish students associate English and professional English to sport and exercise. The opinions of the students regarding the verb category are as follows:

*“English is like riding a motorcycle because you will enjoy using it.” (ST12)*

*“English is like playing computer games because it's fun.”(ST6)*

*“English is like cycling because you can't forget when you learn both.” (ST5)*

*“Professional English is like climbing a mountain because it is difficult to learn.” (ST4)*

*“English is like to do sport because if you don't use it regularly, everything will go away” (TS13)*

*“Professional English is like Exercise because constant practice is required.” (TS21)*

Table 8. Food-beverage category

Students	Category	English		Professional English	
		Metaphors	n	Metaphors	n
Spanish	Food & Beverage	Onion	1	Boiled potato	1
		Water	1	Cake	1
				Meal	1
Turkish	Food & Beverage	Water	1	Meal	1
		Taking vitamins	1		

Table 9. Verb category

Students	Category	English		Professional English	
		Metaphors	n	Metaphors	n
Spanish	Verb	Driving a car	1	Climbing a mountain	1
		Cycling	1	To play football	1
		Playing computer games	1	Ride a horse	1
		Riding a motorcycle	1		
Turkish	Verb	To do sport	1		
		Exercise	1	Eat food	1
		To do sport	1	Exercise	1

**5. Discussion and conclusion**

This research aimed to determine the metaphoric perceptions of Spanish and Turkish students studying tourism in

English and professional English. The results show that students' metaphorical perceptions of English and professional English concepts are positive and beautiful. For example, positive metaphors such as "to do sport, playing computer games, cycling, music" were developed for English, and positive metaphors for professional English such as "sea view, riding a horse, playing football, love" were created. The results of the research are consistent with the studies within the reflections. Xu et al. (2022) indicate that English learners have positive metaphoric perceptions. In addition, students see learning English as a fun activity that allows them to communicate with others. Farjami (2012) and Palinkašević (2021) claim that learning a foreign language is a positive process. Some studies also conclude that learning English can be a negative process. (Fang, 2015; Jin et al., 2014; Mudra & Aini, 2020). Students' English and professional English metaphors can also be negative. In this research, some students used metaphors with negative connotations of English and professional English, such as "onion, a boring friend, a nightmare." But generally, students' metaphoric perceptions of English and professional English are relatively positive.

Students are also aware of the contributions of English and professional English. When students' metaphorical perceptions are examined, they perceive English as an "advantage, success." Likewise, professional English is perceived as "money, creativity." Students are aware that they will add value to themselves by learning English and professional English. Boers and Lindstromberg (2012) highlight that language learning occurs within the scope of a specific motivation. Students who are cognitively aware of the positive contributions of learning a language are more motivated. Students see English and professional English as a necessity and product in their lives. The expressions "power, tool" in English metaphor perceptions and "tool, need" in professional English metaphor perceptions indicate this. Bas and Gezeğin (2017) have realized that English is a product, necessity, and necessity. Therefore, students see English as a need in their professional life. Some of the metaphors developed to show that English and professional English are addressed in line with an objective. For instance, the metaphors "superiority" for English and "the way to be rich", for professional English represent an objective. In the metaphor "superiority," students believe that they will surpass other students or individuals as qualifications if they have skills in both English and professional English. In the metaphor of "the way to get rich", students prioritize success in their business life with their English and professional English skills. Özer (2020) found that students justified the road metaphor as an objective. Caballero (2006) also noted that English is perceived as a "journey".

Some metaphors also emphasize the need to learn English and professional English from the primary level. It also points out its difficulty. In this context, the metaphors of "native language" in English and "a difficult meal to make" are in professional English. Learning the first language grows

into a process that starts as a child. For students, this process can coincide with the commencement of their university education. Because this is when they are learning English intensively and at a high level, at the same time from the beginning. The metaphor "a difficult meal to make" for professional English brings attention to a challenge beyond learning English. Plenty of ingredients in a meal are hard to prepare. Because it is necessary to use them correctly and beautifully. That's the way things are in professional English. Words, sentence models, and dialogues should be known professionally. They must be used appropriately. In other words, it's like making a complicated meal. In their work, Mudra and Aini (2020) arrived at the metaphor of "building a home, cooking the first meal" for English. These metaphors demonstrate that students are open to learning and require knowledge of both English and professional English.

The research's findings show that English and professional English learning interact with the inner worlds of the students. The metaphors developed by the students reflect the creativity of the student's inner worlds and the realism of their learning process. This situation motivates students in English and professional English learning and supports the continuation of the information flow. Students are encouraged by their metaphor perceptions of English and professional English. Because metaphors provide an understanding of what is desired to be achieved or thought to be unsuccessful (Gillis & Johnson, 2002). At this point, it is necessary to mention the professors who teach English at universities. Teachers affect students' learning and perception of English and professional English. Zhang (2016) reached a conclusion that supports this view in their research. Accordingly, the teacher is a guide for students to learn English successfully. The teacher knows how the student should know what stage he is in and how the development should be to be successful. Therefore, students trust their teachers more in learning English (Farjami, 2012).

### 5.1. Theoretical implications

In this research, the researchers aimed to learn Spanish and Turkish students' metaphoric perceptions of English and professional English. After the analysis, Turkish students developed 26 metaphors for English, while Spanish students developed 27. Turkish students developed 28 metaphors in professional English, while Spanish students developed 29. When created metaphors are examined, English and professional English appear to have a fun, supportive, and contributory profile. Students are conscious of the added value that English and Professional English provide. The results of this research provide some theoretical implications:

First, the metaphorical perceptions of Spanish and Turkish students in English and professional English are positive. In addition, students know the importance of English and professional English.

Secondly, the metaphors developed by both student groups are distributed in 6 different categories. Spanish

students created the most metaphors for English in the concept category and professional English in the inanimate category. Turkish students developed the most metaphors for English in the category of inanimate objects and the concept category for professional English.

Thirdly, this research has been one of the rare studies that reveal the metaphorical perceptions of professional English within the scope of tourism students. Therefore, the results obtained are essential.

### 5.2. Practical implications

The results of this research provide some practical implications. With this research, students gained awareness of English and professional English and had the chance to express their perceptions. This research gives an idea about the perceptions of Spanish and Turkish students in tourism education about English and professional English. It can provide convenience in understanding these perceptions and facilitating and activating students' learning process. It is seen that students' perceptions of English and professional English are at a positive level. Despite a difficult period in the learning and speaking process, students need to be aware of the importance of English and professional English. To have positive metaphorical perceptions of students, it is necessary to make English and professional English education more enjoyable in universities.

### 5.3. Limitations and future research

There are some limitations to this research. This research was applied only to undergraduate students in tourism education, and the criterion of having attended courses in English and professional English was sought. For this reason, data from the survey were collected from 60 participants, 30 Spanish and 30 Turkish students. Future research may suggest comparing results by conducting similar research in the form of a culture-based comparison. In these studies, the number of participants may be increased, or the criteria may be eliminated. As this research was conducted as part of tourism students, future research can measure English students' professional perceptions in various departments. In addition, the metaphoric perceptions of professional English teachers may be examined. In addition to students and teachers, English and professional English metaphorical perceptions of employees and executives working in the field can be explored.

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#### Author contributions

The author declares that they equally contributed to the design and implementation of the research, the analysis of the results, and the writing of the article.

#### Disclosure statement

The author reported no potential competing interest.

#### Ethics committee approval

All responsibility belongs to the researcher. This study was carried out with the decision of the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Isparta University of Applied Sciences, dated 24.05.2022, and numbered 107/02.



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### Research article

Intrinsic beauty and emotional experiences: How beach appeal shapes tourists' revisit intentions in emerging coastal destinations in Ghana

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## Intrinsic beauty and emotional experiences: How beach appeal shapes tourists' revisit intentions in emerging coastal destinations in Ghana

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### Abstract

*The study aims to explore the tourists' emotional response factors associated with the intrinsic beauty and values of beaches at emerging coastal destinations. The study also examines the influence of tourists' emotional response factors on revisit intentions. Data collected from 602 tourists at Ghanaian beaches were analyzed using Factor Analysis and the Binary Probit Model in STATA. The research identifies seven emotional experience factors: joy, serenity, awe, longing, love, sadness, and regret, which are associated with the intrinsic beauty and values of the beach destinations. The findings also reveal that the emotional experiences of joy, serenity, longing, and sadness significantly influence beach tourists' intentions to revisit emerging beach destinations. Beach destination management should, therefore, adopt sustainable practices that align with tourists' emotional preferences and leverage nostalgia-inducing elements of beach destination attributes.*

**Keywords:** Emotional experience, Beach intrinsic beauty, Revisit Intention, Emerging coastal destinations.

### 1. Introduction

With their unique blend of natural beauty and recreational opportunities (sun, sea, sand), beaches are cherished destinations for tourists. These picturesque landscapes and tranquil waters have evolved into coveted locations, offering aesthetic charm and leisure options for travelers visiting coastal beach destinations (Aref et al., 2019). However, the appeal of beaches extends far beyond their physical attributes, as they evoke deep emotional experiences in visitors. While previous research in the tourism sector often emphasized tangible aspects like service quality and accessibility (Chen & Chen, 2010), the emotional dimension of the tourist experience has gained prominence as a crucial determinant of overall tourist satisfaction, destination loyalty, and revisit intentions (Smith & Johnson, 2020). Travel-related emotions significantly influence decisions, memories, and future intentions, as recognized by Kim et al. (2017). Unexpectedly, despite extensive research into various factors influencing tourist experiences at destinations, more studies need to focus on the emotional responses of tourists to the appeal and value of beaches. The existing research on tourist emotional experiences predominantly leans toward natural settings such as wilderness and park destinations (Canas &

Pettinao, 2016; Du Plessis et al., 2011). Likewise, tourism studies in coastal contexts often center on issues like pollution, accessibility, and infrastructure. Consequently, at the global, regional, and destination levels, a limited number of studies explore how the intrinsic beauty and values of coastal/beach environments impact the emotional experiences and revisit intentions of tourists. This knowledge gap is even more evident in emerging coastal destinations, where there is a noticeable lack of understanding regarding tourists' emotional responses to beach destination appeal and its outcomes (Chen et al., 2019).

This knowledge gap is considerable, given that coastal beaches account for approximately 80% of all global tourism travel and attract around 350 million people annually (Sustainable Tourism International, 2022), contributing significantly about \$143 billion to the gross domestic product of the global economy each year (NOAA, 2018). Tourists frequent these coastal destinations due to their therapeutic landscapes, providing physical and social beauty, features, and values that support physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being, as perceived by those engaging in such activities (Severin et al., 2021). Additionally, various beach environmental factors impact temperature regulation (Völker et al., 2013) and sea spray aerosols (Van Acker,

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2021), which can have noteworthy effects on coastal users' emotional and mental comfort. Furthermore, coastal environments are considered restorative regarding stress reduction, emotional elevation, and restoration of depleted cognitive abilities (Gidlow et al., 2016), given that tourists strongly and consistently react to their immediate environment (Williams, 2019; Williams & Vaske, 2003). Positive emotional experiences and satisfaction are thus expected within coastal destinations, setting the critical basis for beach visits and revisits among tourists (Hosany et al., 2015; Vaz et al., 2016). Consequently, coastal destinations must conduct research and gather data that enables them to comprehend the impact of their destination appeal on tourism experiences, implement sustainable corrective measures when necessary, and enhance user experiences to encourage repeat tourism (Ryan & Gu, 2018; Smith & Johnson, 2020). Nevertheless, such critical studies remain scarce even in established coastal tourism destinations, much less in emerging ones. These gaps hinder coastal managers' ability to consistently implement data-driven measures to enhance tourists' experiences and ensure the sustainability of their destinations.

This research has two primary aims to bridge this knowledge gap and contribute practically to the sustainable development and management of emerging beach destinations. First, it explores the emotional factors associated with beach beauty and values in emerging coastal destinations. Second, it aims to assess the influence of these factors on the revisit intentions of beach tourists in Ghana. This research will provide valuable insights into tourists' emotional responses to the intrinsic beauty and appeal of beach destinations in emerging coastal areas, ultimately informing destination managers, policymakers, and stakeholders about the emotional factors influencing revisit intentions. Understanding and addressing these emotional experiences will create a more balanced and sustainable tourism environment that benefits tourists, destination operators, and local communities (Kim & Scott, 2012; Wong et al., 2020), thus contributing to economic growth and prosperity.

## 2. Literature

### 2.1. *Intrinsic beauty and value of beaches*

Beach intrinsic beauty and value are vital concepts in tourism, profoundly impacting visitors' experiences and destination choices. In context, beach beauty and value refer to the inherent aesthetic, natural, and ecological qualities that make a beach attractive to both tourists and the surrounding environment/community of people (Hosany & Gilbert, 2019; Oh et al., 2007). Researchers have long recognized beaches' magnetic appeal and intrinsic beauty as a driving force for tourism demand (Vaz et al., 2016). This includes scenic allure, biodiversity, ecosystem health, recreational opportunities, cultural and historical significance, and economic contributions, all of which beaches offer. These intrinsic attributes are valuable for tourists seeking relaxation, rejuvenation, and sensory pleasure (Chapman & Ainsworth,

2017). A beach's intrinsic value, however, extends beyond visual appeal to encompass biodiversity, geological formations, and cultural heritage.

Tourism literature consistently emphasizes the enduring appeal of the intrinsic beauty found in coastal landscapes for tourists (Johnson & Brown, 2020; Smith, 2018). Coastal areas, with their unique natural and cultural attributes, consistently rank among the top destinations worldwide, attracting millions of visitors each year (Williams, 2019). This popularity can be attributed, in no small part, to the inherent aesthetic qualities and experiences that the coastal environment offers (Robinson, 2021). One of the central aspects of coastal beauty is the visual allure of these landscapes. Tourists are drawn to the scenic attractiveness of coastal regions, featuring breathtaking seascapes, sandy beaches, rocky shorelines, and the expansive expanse of the ocean meeting the land (Davis, 2022). The dynamic interplay of light and water, the breeze, as well as the ever-changing horizons, sunsets, and sunrises creates an atmosphere of awe and inspiration that tourists find irresistible (Johnson & Brown, 2020). The coastal environment often evokes a sense of serenity and tranquility, providing a welcome escape from the hustle and bustle of urban life (Smith, 2018). In addition to visual appeal, coastal landscapes offer opportunities for diverse recreational activities, such as swimming, surfing, beachcombing, and coastal hiking (Robinson, 2021). These activities enable tourists to interact with and immerse themselves in the coast's natural beauty, fostering a deeper connection to these environments (Williams, 2019). Furthermore, diverse wildlife, including seabirds, marine mammals, and underwater marine life, adds to the intrinsic beauty of coastal areas, offering unique and captivating experiences for tourists (Davis, 2022). Understanding and promoting the intrinsic beauty of coastal environments is pivotal for destination marketing, as it capitalizes on the deep-seated human attraction to these captivating landscapes (Williams, 2019). Ultimately, this drives tourism and sustains the economic vitality of coastal regions.

### 2.2. *Emotional experience in tourism*

Tourist experience is a "subjective mental and emotional state felt by participants during a service encounter" (Otto & Ritchie, 1996, p. 166). Emotional aspects are integral to the tourist experience, shaping perceptions, behaviors, and memories throughout the journey. The tourism industry is inherently challenging and ever-evolving especially. This concept acknowledges that tourism goes beyond the mere consumption of services and destinations; it is deeply intertwined with the emotional aspects of travel (Walter et al., 2010). Hence, there is a consensus on the significance of understanding tourists' diverse experiences, given the profound impact these experiences have on their satisfaction and subsequent behaviors (Maroofi & Dehghan, 2012; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Hence, inquiries have delved into tourists' experiences within natural and heritage environments (Beeho & Prentice, 1997; Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Williams et al., 2020). As an example, Wang and Xu (2012) illustrate

the categorization of tourists according to the nature and intensity of their emotions during activities such as hiking in nature-based destinations like the beach. Additional studies explore tourist experiences in adventure leisure activities (Arnould & Price, 1993; Lee et al., 2017;). The tourism experience, characterized by its uniqueness, emotional resonance, and personal significance, holds a pivotal place (McIntosh & Siggs, 2005). Given that tourist destinations such as beaches are inherently rich in experiential attributes, emotions have a substantial influence within tourism (Gnoth, 1997). Destination characteristics are thus critical determinants of emotional response as they can trigger emotion, particularly in nature-based and distinctive destinations like the beach (Chhetri et al., 2004; Deng & He, 2018; Williams et al., 2020).

Numerous research studies have focused on unraveling the significance of emotions in tourism and recreation. These investigations delve into various aspects, such as understanding the factors influencing post-consumption emotions (Muller et al., 1991), exploring the interplay between emotions and overall satisfaction (Han & Hyun, 2018), investigating their impact on customer loyalty (Barsky & Nash, 2002), behavioral intentions (Bigné et al., 2005; Jang & Namkung, 2009), and considering emotions as a segmentation variable for leisure and tourism services (Bigné & Andreu, 2004). Additionally, some studies examine how emotions influence decisions related to purchasing tourism and leisure services, as exemplified by the work of Xiang et al. (2015) and Chuang (2007). For instance, Kwornik and Ross (2007) demonstrated that tourists undergo a spectrum of positive emotions during the vacation planning phase, including comfort and pleasure. Observably, tourism experiences usually involve the elicitation of positive and enjoyable emotions like joy and awe, happiness, longing for, excitement, and nostalgia (Han & Hyun, 2018; Lee et al., 2017; Yoon & Uysal, 2005), yet negative emotions, such as anger and disappointment, frustration occurs on tourists' trip behavior as well (Kim & Kim, 2018). This is because there are different intensities of these emotions (positive and negative); hence, tourist emotions can fluctuate throughout their destination or service encounter (Lee & Kyle, 2012). Hence, a study of the blend of both positive and negative emotional experiences will be crucial for a holistic awareness and understanding of emotional outcomes encountered at beach destinations.

Moreover, the literature underscores that cultural and natural tourist attractions (Han & Hyun, 2018, Lee et al., 2017; Tuan, 1977; Wang & Xu, 2012), and mobile applications/ "digital detox" (Liu et al., 2017; Litvin et al., 2008; Prebensen et al. 2019) influence tourists' emotional responses during a trip, however, less is known about the influence of coastal landscapes, their beauty and the values attached to them relative to tourists' emotional experience and response. Empirical studies concentrating on the impact of emotions in coastal tourist destinations are notably limited, although it is widely recognized that individuals exhibit

emotional responses to their immediate environment (Machleit & Eroglu, 2000; Williams & Vaske, 2003). Globally and in Ghana, there is limited to virtually no study that has systematically explored the dimensions of tourists' emotional responses to the intrinsic beauty and value of beaches in either well-established or emerging coastal destinations. Coastal destinations, by their very nature, are filled with experiential attributes, amplifying the potential to elicit emotional reactions.

### 2.3. Beach intrinsic beauty/value and emotional experiences

The influence of beach beauty and value on tourists' emotional experiences has garnered significant attention in tourism. Research has consistently shown that a visually appealing environment elicits a range of positive emotions from travelers (Hall & Page, 2019). Hence at beaches, the picturesque scenic beauty, the soothing sound of waves, the captivating landscapes, crystal-clear waters, vibrant sunsets, and the refreshing sea breeze can collectively trigger emotional responses and contribute to memorable experiences creation within tourists (Li et al., 2020; Ryan & Gu, 2018). These sensory qualities result in heightened relaxation, happiness, and overall satisfaction. Intrinsic beach beauty is linked to tourists' aesthetic preferences; aesthetically pleasing beaches often report enhanced emotional experiences, including feelings of awe, relaxation, and tranquility (Fredline et al., 2019). This emotional attachment to the beach's intrinsic beauty often leads to a desire to repeat visits, fostering a sense of loyalty and repeat visitations (Lew et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2020).

Furthermore, a beach's perceived value, whether due to its unspoiled nature, biodiversity, or unique features, can significantly enhance emotional experiences. Pristine and ecologically valuable beaches evoke a sense of wonder and awe among tourists, deepening their emotional connection with the destination (Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989). The intrinsic beauty and value of beaches also trigger feelings of serenity, tranquility, and relaxation, allowing tourists to escape the stresses of daily life (Cackowski & Nasar, 2003). While most studies emphasize the positive aspects of beach beauty, they indirectly suggest that reducing intrinsic beauty may result in a less appealing tourism experience. Beaches lacking intrinsic beauty often induce various negative emotional responses among tourists (Morgan, 1996). These negative experiences can lead to disappointment, frustration, and decreased overall satisfaction with the destination (Hosany & Gilbert, 2019; Tudor & Williams, 2003). Poor beach beauty and value can reduce enjoyment and cause emotional distress (Zielinski et al., 2019).

Understanding the specific emotional responses, such as awe, relaxation, joy, and longing or sadness at destinations, is vital for destination managers and marketers as they aim to create and promote more engaging and memorable beach experiences (Ryan & Kang, 2021; Williams, 2019). Awe, often elicited by breathtaking seascapes, expansive horizons, and serene waters, creates a profound sense of wonder

and inspiration (Johnson & Brown, 2020). The intrinsic value of a beach also includes the opportunities it offers for beach activities. Tourists engage in various activities at the beach, from swimming to sunbathing, contributing to enjoyment (Prayag et al., 2013). A valuable beach offers pleasurable activities like water sports and beach games, fostering carefreeness and excitement (Hosany & Witham, 2010). Relaxation is also often experienced when visitors are immersed in the tranquility of beach environments and stems from the sound of gentle waves, soft sand underfoot, and the rhythmic ebb and flow of the ocean (Robinson, 2021). Moreover, visitors often seek the therapeutic benefits of the coast. Beach environments serve as a potent emotional stimulant. Sensory enjoyment like the sand's softness, the sun's warmth, and seagull sounds can evoke bliss and contentment for de-stressing and escape as well (Chen et al., 2021). Understanding the impact of beach beauty/value on emotions is therefore essential for beach destination management (Cohen et al., 2013; Hosany, 2012), as it can lead to the creation of more emotionally satisfying and sustainable tourism experiences, which is crucial for the sustainable development and management of emerging coastal destinations.

### 2.3.1. Emotional experience and revisit intentions

Revisit intentions refer to the likelihood of tourists returning to a destination. Research by Chi and Qu (2008) has found that revisiting intentions is crucial for the long-term success of a tourist destination. Tourist revisit intentions are frequently shaped by various factors and emotions encountered during a visit to a destination. The interconnection between emotional experiences in tourism and the intention to revisit is intricate and multi-dimensional. However, numerous studies suggest a strong connection between emotional experiences and revisit intentions in tourism. Kim et al. (2017) found that tourists experiencing positive emotions, such as awe and happiness, relaxation, excitement and nostalgia during their visit are more likely to express a desire to return, while those who experience negative emotions such as frustration, disappointment, and stress emotions (Cohen & Prayag, 2018; Hosany et al., 2010; Kim & Kim, 2018; Lee et al., 2014), engendered by these experiences, lead to decreased satisfaction, loyalty and revisit intentions. Noted that emotions have been recognized as fundamental components of travel experiences, and the beach environment provides a unique setting for examining these emotional states. The tranquil and aesthetically pleasing beach landscapes contribute to the overall emotional well-being of travelers, whereas environmentally degraded and poorly perceived beaches lead to negative emotional states, resulting in diminished revisit intentions.

## 3. Methodology

Because this research was a master's students' term project for the 2021/22 academic year, Ethical approval was obtained from the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

Nestled along Ghana's eastern coastline, within latitudes of 5°45 and 6°00 (North) and longitudes of 0°20 to 0°35 (East), the Ada region (Ada East District) was declared a tourism enclave in 2018 by the Ghana Tourism Authority and has since been developing into an enchanting destination that seamlessly intertwines its rich cultural heritage, islands, freshwater and natural beauty. According to data from the Ghana Statistical Service in 2021, the Ada region possesses around 76,000 permanent residents, and its reputation as an enticing and viable tourist hub has steadily grown in recent years. As reported by the Ghana Tourism Authority in 2022, in the same year, the Ada region welcomed approximately 22,000 tourists, allured by its pristine beaches, serene estuary, an array of water sports, vibrant cultural festival (the Asafotufiami Festival), and promising eco-tourism opportunities. This influx of visitors highlights Ada's increasing prominence within Ghana's dynamic tourism landscape, underscoring the importance of research into the aesthetic appeal of its beaches and its impact on tourists' emotional experiences.

Ada's coastal attraction has made the destination assume the position of a premier emerging destination in the eastern coastal region of Ghana, with its unique feature—the Ada Estuary—one of its kind in Ghana. This distinctive natural wonder and the growing development of the many tourist facilities and island tourism attract tourists from diverse backgrounds. Nevertheless, the Ada coastal region grapples with coastal erosion and environmental conservation challenges that directly affect the quality of its valuable natural assets, especially its beach destinations.

### 3.1. Instrumentation and data collection

We employed a final survey questionnaire comprising two sections, the first section contains questions about emotional experience sourced from the works of Bigné et al. (2019), Brown (2020), Hosany et al. (2010), Hosany et al. (2015), Hosany and Gilbert (2019), Johnson and Robinson (2021), Prayag et al. (2013), and Smith and Johnson (2020). Respondents rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale, with options ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree). The second part of the first section was one question measuring revisit intentions with a response category of *Yes* or *No*.

Additionally, we gathered information about the demographic characteristics of tourists, including nationality, age, gender, education, marital status, and the purpose of their visit. The questionnaire was administered through self-reporting using a convenience sampling method. The convenient sampling technique was deemed suitable because it is good for the nature of the population. Tourists are always on the move and do not stay in one place, making it difficult to trace them or use a probability sampling procedure. In recent years, many research have used this sampling method to undertake critical studies involving similar populations (Lee et al., 2014; Muboko et al., 2016; Su et al., 2017; Xu & Fox, 2014). A total of 602 valid responses were collected from

tourists who were actively at the beach and had spent at least one night at beach destination facilities in Ada, Ghana, between November 3, 2021, and April 26, 2022.

### 3.2. Data analysis

The entire statistical analysis was done using STATA version 15. Descriptive statistics are utilized as an initial analysis method to gain insights into the socio-demographic characteristics of beachgoers. Furthermore, an exploratory factor analysis is conducted to identify the factors that influence the emotional experiences of beach beauty and its value to tourists. Additionally, a binary probit model is employed to measure the impact of these factors extracted on revisit intentions, treated as a binary response variable (Uzunoz & Akcay, 2012). The probit model is an appropriate tool for conducting a detailed analysis of tourists' intentions to revisit (Shrestha, 2021; Uzunoz & Akcay, 2012). The factor extraction process employs principal component analysis and the varimax orthogonal factor rotation method, incorporating Kaiser normalization. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test gauges sampling adequacy, and a determinant score is computed to examine multicollinearity among the variables. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha is computed to evaluate the internal consistency of the data (Kaiser, 1974).

A probit model is a statistical probability model designed to handle dichotomous variables of interest, let's say  $Y$ , such as revisit intention (RI), which typically have binary values of "yes" or "no." Frequent studies have demonstrated the utility of the probit model in analyzing binary outcome variables (Alabi et al., 2014; Shrestha, 2021). The key aim in utilizing the probit model is to gauge the probability that an observation, characterized by specific attributes, will be classified into one of two binary categories (Liao, 1994; Long, 1997). The binary probit model has been employed in this research to assess how tourists' emotional encounters with beach destinations' intrinsic beauty and value impact their intention to revisit assessed using a binary scale. The probit analysis yielded statistically significant results, shedding light on which emotional factors do or do not influence the likelihood of beachgoers revisiting. In the context of the binary probit model, a revisit intention was represented as "yes=1" (positive response) and "No=0" (negative response).

In the context of the probit model, the likelihood of choosing any particular alternative is expressed as:

$$P(X=1 | X) = \Theta \left( \sum_{k=1}^k \beta_k X_k \right) = \int_{-\infty}^{\sum_{k=1}^k \beta_k X_k} (\sqrt{2\pi}) \exp(-t^2/2) dt$$

In this context,  $\Theta$  symbolizes the standard normal cumulative distribution function. The formula describing the probability of an event's absence is as follows:

$$P(Y=0 | X) = 1 - \Theta \left( \sum_{k=1}^k \beta_k X_k \right)$$

The interpretation of the connection between a specific variable and the predicted probability is accomplished by examining the marginal effect. When interpreting the probit

model, we scrutinize the partial probability derivatives concerning an independent variable,  $X_k$ . The marginal effect can be derived as follows:

$$\frac{\partial \text{prob}(y=1)}{\partial X_k} = \Theta \left( \sum_{k=1}^k \beta_k X_k \right) \beta_k$$

In this context,  $\Theta$  signifies the standard normal probability density function. The probit model can be stated as:

$$Y = (\beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_k X_k + \epsilon_k)$$

Here,  $Y$  represents the binary dependent variable,  $X$  is the explanatory variable,  $\beta$  signifies the parameters to be estimated, and  $\epsilon$  denotes the error term (Albert & Chib, 1993). Our analysis thus thoroughly examines tourists' emotional experiences and their influence on revisit intentions at Ghanaian beaches, shedding light on the complex interplay of emotions and decision-making in the tourism industry.

### 3.3. Results

As Table 1 indicates, research findings reveal a balanced gender distribution among respondents, with 52.4% male and 47.6% female. The age groups represented a diverse demographic, with 28.1% below 25 years, 39.8% aged between 25 and 40, and 32.1% aged 41 or above. Educational backgrounds varied, with 23.2% having a high school education, 48.2% holding a first-degree qualification, and 28.6% pursuing postgraduate studies. Marital status showed diversity, with 35.8% married, 29.1% unmarried, and 35.1% previously married. Nationality data indicated a balanced representation, with 52.1% domestic and 47.9% international tourists. These findings reflect the inclusive nature of the study's participant demographics, which can enhance the generalizability and relevance of the research results to a broader and more varied audience.

In this beach emotional experience study conducted at Ada in Ghana, tourists' primary reasons for visiting were explored, yielding insights with important implications. The results reveal a diverse array of motivations. Notably, the largest segment, comprising 46.5% of tourists, chose Ada beaches as a destination primarily to seek relaxation and vacation, highlighting the role of the beach as a stress-relief destination and ideal vacation spot (Smith & Johnson, 2020). Furthermore, 21.2% of visitors were attracted to the beach for entertainment, emphasizing its appeal as an enjoyable and entertaining destination. A particularly noteworthy finding is that 16.6% of visitors cited business-related purposes, indicating the destination's attractiveness and adaptability to cater to business travelers. This suggests potential opportunities for local businesses and the tourism industry in the region. Moreover, 8.9% of tourists arrived to admire the area's cultural and scenic attractions and shed light on preserving and promoting the region's natural and cultural heritage to enhance tourism experiences (Johnson et al., 2018). Finally, 6.8% had various other purposes (Table 1), which could further inform strategies for diversifying and catering to a broader range of tourist interests.

Table 1. Respondents' socio-demographic profile (n=602)

Characteristics	n	Percent
Gender		
Male	316	52.4
Female	286	47.6
Age		
<25	169	28.1
25-40	240	39.8
41 above	193	32.1
Educational level		
High school	140	23.2
First degree	292	48.2
Postgraduate	170	28.6
Marital status		
Married	215	35.8
Not Married	174	29.1
Ever-married	213	35.1
Nationality		
Domestic	314	52.1
International	288	47.9
Purpose of Beach Visit		
Relaxation/holiday	2800	46.5
Entertainment	128	21.2
Business	100	16.6
Sightseeing	54	8.9
Others	40	6.8

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Factor analysis of tourist emotional experience

A factor analysis was employed to explore and categorize the key factors of tourists' emotional experiences with beach beauty and value. The 45 items measuring tourists' emotional experiences at the beaches were subjected to Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with orthogonal varimax rotation. Factors with eigenvalues bigger than 1 (eigenvalue >1) and items with factor loadings of at least 0.40, following Stevens' (1992) guidance, were considered. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value surpassed the suggested threshold of 0.6 by Kaiser (1974), with a value of 0.892. Furthermore, the appropriateness of the data for factor analysis was affirmed through Bartlett's test of sphericity, producing a significant result of 15241.21 ( $p = 0.000$ ). This outcome indicates a relationship between the variables. The determinant of the correlation matrix of independent variables serves as an indicator of the extent of multicollinearity. If present in the model, multicollinearity tends to inflate the standard errors of individual coefficients, thereby complicating the results of statistical analysis (Shrestha, 2020). In this particular case, the determinant score of the correlation matrix is 0.022, which is greater than 0.0001, suggesting no multicollinearity among the variables.

The principal Component Analysis (PCA) showed 7 factors constituted by 41 items with a common shared variance of 61.64% within the dataset. These factors were labelled as follows: (1) Joy, (2) Serenity (Calmness), (3) Awe, (4)

Longing, (5) Love, (6) Sadness, and (7) Regrets, encompassing a total of 41 variables. Collectively, these factors elucidated approximately 62% of the variance within the dataset. Factor loadings, consistently robust, were observed, spanning from 0.453 to 0.894, and are detailed in Table 2. Additionally, all seven factors demonstrated strong reliability, exemplified by an overall Cronbach's Alpha of 0.779, signifying internal consistency within the scale. Four items "gladness", "amazing", "worried" and "stressed within" were discarded after they failed to obtain a factor loading of 0.40.

Cronbach's alpha is computed to assess the internal reliability of the dataset. The calculated Cronbach's alpha values for the first (0.789), second (0.813), third (0.712), fourth (0.765), fifth (0.812), sixth (0.733), and seventh (0.754) factors all exceed the threshold of 0.7, as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Additionally, all seven factors demonstrated strong reliability, exemplified by an overall Cronbach's Alpha of 0.779, and the value of the average of variances extracted (AVE) is more than the 0.5 supports value for all 7 factors as they appear in Table 2 in that order, 0.78, 0.82, 0.75, 0.83, 0.74, 0.73 and 0.76 which measures and signifies internal consistency within the scale.

The first factor, labeled as "(Joy)," elucidated the highest variance of 12.10% with an eigenvalue of 9.12. The high contribution of the "Joy" factor indicates that tourists primarily seek positive and joyful experiences when visiting the beach (Deng & He, 2018). The second factor, designated as "Serenity (Calmness)," showed a variance of 11.2% with an eigenvalue of 7.98. Factor three, named "Awe," illuminated a 9.18% variance with an eigenvalue of 5.13. The fourth factor, named "Longing (nostalgia)," produces an 8.94% variance and an eigenvalue of 4.14. The fifth component is captured as "Love," explained by an 8.15% variance with an eigenvalue of 2.14. The sixth component is termed "Sadness" and it elicited 6.12% with an eigenvalue of 1.98. Factor 7 (Regrets) exerted the least influence, representing the smallest proportion of variance in the dataset at 6.03% with a variance and an eigenvalue of 1.54 (Table 2).

#### 4.1.1. Tourist emotional experience with beach intrinsic beauty and values

Analyzing the seven emotional experience factors among tourists reveals intriguing insights about their perceptions of the beach. Leading the emotional spectrum is "Longing (nostalgia)" with an average score of 1.85, highlighting visitors' expressions of nostalgia for the beaches. Following closely is "Serenity (Calmness)" with a mean score of 1.95, underscoring the high-value tourists place on tranquil environments and emphasizing the need to preserve a serene atmosphere. "Awe" registers an average of 2.19, signifying tourists' appreciation for the coastal landscape's beauty. Conversely, "Love" receives a mean score of 2.49, suggesting a subtle emotional connection. Despite tourists prioritizing "joy", an average score of 2.71 indicates room for improvement in enhancing tourists' affection and joy. "Sadness" records an average of 2.84, reflecting mixed reactions,

Table 2. Factors of tourists' emotional responses to beach beauty and values

Latent constructs with their variables	FL	Eig (>1)	VE (%)	$\alpha$	AVE	CR	Mean	Std.D
<i>Joy</i>		9.12	12.1	0.789	0.692	0.78	2.71	
I found happiness in the simple pleasures of this beach.	0.621						3.04	1.02
I experience moments of pure bliss (ecstasy) as I am on this beach.	0.576						2.33	1.01
This beach brings me great enjoyment (joy).	0.592						2.32	1.23
The beach environment excites me and makes me feel carefree.	0.703						2.94	0.91
The thrill of beach use (activities) brings pleasure to my visits.	0.833						3.12	0.96
The overall beach experience brought me delight and serenity.	0.573						2.52	0.21
<i>Serenity (Calmness)</i>		7.98	11.12	0.893	0.618	0.82	1.95	
I experience feelings of tranquillity (calmness/peace) here at the beach.	0.719						1.49	0.98
The gentle sound of the waves and the soothing sea breeze helped me relax.	0.711						2.11	0.54
I often find peace of mind while enjoying this beach's serene atmosphere.	0.710						1.69	0.24
This beach environment has a warmth (calming) effect on me.	0.612						2.41	
By its serenity, I experience a sense of carefree attitude on this beach.	0.615						2.45	0.99
This beach provides a welcome arousal of a feeling of harmony.	0.528						1.46	1.58
The beach environment allows me to unwind and relax.	0.683							1.32
The beach environment helps me de-stress and rejuvenate.	0.728						1.58	1.25
The beach/beach is clean enough to make me feel relaxed (relaxation) to beach on it.	0.742						2.44	1.34
<i>Awe (positive surprise)</i>		5.13	9.18	0.712	0.653	0.75	2.19	
I feel a sense of awe when I observe the natural beauty of the beach.	0.532						2.98	1.09
The beauty of this beach environment left me in a state of admiration.	0.624						2.57	1.04
I find the beach environment to be awe-inspiring.	0.734						2.43	1.12
The sheer magnitude of this coastal landscape evoked a feeling of excitement in me.	0.743						1.43	1.21
I experience a sense of reverence when I see the beauty of this beach.	0.682						2.20	1.31
I feel enthused by the splendour of this beach-setting	0.653						2.40	0.92
The expansive beach horizons and open sea create a profound sense of wonder.	0.633						1.40	0.65
The beauty of the beach leaves me feeling inspired and moved.	0.578						2.14	0.95
<i>Longing (Nostalgia)</i>		4.14	8.94	0.765	0.712	0.83	1.85	
I find this beach to be a fascinating destination for the future.	0.579						1.69	0.74
I have experienced a distinctive (unique) and desiring feeling to always be here.	0.820						1.62	0.78
The experience on the beach made me develop a drive towards coming here again"	0.74						1.57	0.97
This beach provides a perfect setting for me to come to free myself from boredom."	0.714						2.14	0.76
I feel relief and ease as I am on this beach	0.582						2.23	1.02
<i>Love /Affection</i>		2.14	8.15	0.812	0.681	0.74	2.49	
I experience a sense of affection towards this beach destination	0.894						2.98	0.98
This offers breathtaking scenery and clean that kept me attracted.	0.833						1.46	0.67
I feel a sense of positive attachment/arousal towards this beach.	0.721						3.11	
This beach environment made me develop a fondness for this destination	0.592						2.44	0.96
<i>Sadness</i>		1.98	6.12	0.733	0.537	0.73	2.84	
I felt unease or nervousness at this beach destination like this.	0.491						2.14	0.56
The state of the beach environment made me feel unhappy.	0.571						3.10	0.78
I feel insecure or unsafe for being at a beach like this.	0.671						3.12	1.12
The state of this beach environment frustrated me.	0.521						2.69	0.98
I felt sad (unsatisfied) while coming on vacation/trip to this beach.	0.482						3.18	0.89
<i>Regrets</i>		1.54	6.03	0.754	0.546	0.76	3.76	
I feel regret for travelling to this kind of beach.	0.456						3.98	1.01
The state/quality of this beach left me feeling unfulfilled.	0.453						3.57	1.78
Overall, I feel discontent at a beach destination like this.	0.493						3.81	1.98
I felt irritated over experiencing a beach destination like this.	0.472						3.71	1.02
<i>Total Variance explained</i>			61.64	0.779				

Determinant Score = 0.022

KMO = 0.892; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (X<sup>2</sup>) = 15241.21;  $p = 0.000$  $\alpha$  = Cronbach Alpha; VE = Variance Explained; FL = Factor Loading; Eig. = Eigenvalues

Scale: Strongly Agree = 0-1.49, Agree = 1.5-2.49, indifferent = 2.5-3.49, Disagree = 3.5-4.49, Strongly Disagree = 4.5-5.



while “Regrets” scores 3.89, indicating overall positive sentiments and minimal negative emotions. However, the last two factors hint at milder negative emotions that may not favor revisiting intentions for beach destination revisits (Hosany & Gilbert, 2019; Morgan, 1996), emphasizing the need for nuanced improvements.

#### 4.2. Binary probit model

Table 3 showcases the outcomes derived from a binary probit model, utilizing the maximum likelihood method. This probit model is applied to establish a connection between the dependent variable, RI (represented as Yes or No), and all seven emotional experience factors. The independent variables are presumed to exert influence on the decision to partake in repeat tourism, reflecting a priori beliefs regarding the significant factors in the decision-making process for tourist revisit. The model’s parameters are estimated through the maximum likelihood method, and the resulting coefficients, along with their associated standard errors,

unveil the emotional experience factors influencing tourists’ intention to revisit beach destinations (see Table 3).

The results show four factors (Joy, Serenity, Longing, and Sadness) influencing revisit intentions to the beaches. However, when a positive coefficient is statistically significant at a 5% probability level, it suggests that an increase in the value of the independent variable heightens the probability of tourists intending to return (Borooah, 2002).

On the other hand, a statistically significant negative coefficient indicates that a rise in the independent variable is associated with a higher probability of tourists not expressing an intention to revisit the beach destination. Overall, the significance of the model is highlighted by a likelihood ratio chi-square value of 111.38 ( $p < 0.0003$ ), showcasing its superior fit in contrast to the model lacking predictors. The probit regression coefficients account for the change in the z-score or probit index resulting from a one-unit change in the independent variable (Shrestha, 2021).

Table 3. Estimates for the binary probit model

Variable	Coefficient	Std Error	Z-Statistics	Marginal Effects
Constant	-26.03**	6.52	-3.14	-
Joy	0.43**	0.31	1.78	0.042
Serenity (Calmness)	1.24**	0.51	2.11	0.126
Awe	-0.26	0.47	-0.43	-0.032
Longing (Nostalgia)	2.11**	0.62	2.96	0.134
Love/Affection	0.20	0.18	0.22	0.11
Sad	-0.38**	0.19	-0.21	-0.010
Regrets	-0.32	0.41	-0.63	-0.031
Log-likelihood	-21.326		(Akaike IC)	0.293
McFadden Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	0.701		(Bayesian IC)	-816.29
LR Chi <sup>2</sup> (df = 7)	111.38			
Significance level	0.0003			
Percentage Correction predicted	87.8			

\*\* significant ( $p < 0.05$ )

The McFadden Pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> indicates that the model can explain approximately 70.1% of the variance in revisit intention, highlighting the independent variables’ significant influence. The model has a substantial 87.8% correct prediction rate, indicating its accuracy in forecasting outcomes. The research findings hold significant implications for understanding the factors influencing tourists’ revisit intentions at beach destinations.

## 5. Discussions

At Ghanaian beaches, the seven identified emotional experience factors, encompassing joy, serenity (calmness), awe, longing, love, sadness, and regrets, showcase the intricate nature of emotional responses to beach beauty and values, with average scores ranging from 1.85 to 3.89. These results are consistent with existing literature that underscores the profound influence of beach beauty and value on tourists’ emotions and overall satisfaction (Li et al., 2020; Ryan & Gu, 2018). The mean scores delineate a nuanced emotional landscape, spanning from the notably high Longing and

Serenity to the moderately prioritized Love and Joy, and extending to lower-rated Regrets with mixed reactions toward Sadness. This aligns with research emphasizing the positive impact of beach beauty on emotional experiences, including awe, relaxation, and joy, crucial elements contributing to destination satisfaction and loyalty (Fredline et al., 2019; Lew et al., 2017).

The findings stress the significance of effectively managing beach intrinsic beauty to craft emotionally satisfying and sustainable tourism experiences, vital for the appeal and sustainability of emerging coastal destinations (Bigné et al., 2019; Li et al., 2020; Ryan & Gu, 2018). Importantly, comprehending these nuanced emotional dimensions proves crucial for destination managers and marketers striving to enrich beach experiences, aligning with the broader goal of sustainable beach tourism management (Cohen et al., 2013; Ryan & Kang, 2021).

Central to the study was the discovery that tourist emotional experience factors of joy, serenity (calmness), longing

(nostalgia), and sadness significantly influenced tourists' revisit intentions at emerging coastal destinations of Ghana. This suggests that emotional experiences are pivotal in shaping tourists' intentions to revisit beach destinations where distinctive and eco-friendly attraction is desired. Recognizing and harnessing the power of these emotions can lead to improved visitor satisfaction, sustainable tourism development, and a competitive edge for businesses and destinations in this segment of the tourism industry (Bigne et al. 2019; Smith & Johnson, 2020). These findings are particularly relevant for emerging beach destinations and offer insights for beach destination managers in Ghana and beyond. Notably, this study contributes to the limited literature examining tourists' emotional responses to beach intrinsic value and appeal and their impact on repeat visits, particularly within coastal destinations. While the findings provide some consistency with previous studies (Hosany et al., 2015; Lee, 2009), they also challenge the findings of certain studies (Hosany et al., 2013; Lee, 2009), which found the emotional experience of awe, and fear, and anger/regrets as predictors of revisit intentions.

The marginal effects presented in Table 3 further offer crucial insights into the nuanced impact of emotional experiences on tourists' decisions to revisit beach destinations. Specifically, the marginal effect of Joy suggests a 4.2% increase in revisiting likelihood, emphasizing the positive influence of joyful experiences. Serenity exhibits a substantial 12.6% rise, highlighting the significance of maintaining clean and appealing beach environments (Chi & Qu, 2008). Longing contributes significantly, with a 13.4% increase, underlining the importance of nostalgia for fostering revisit intentions. Conversely, Sadness has a negative effect, reducing revisit intentions by 3.1%. This aligns with previous research indicating that positive emotions, such as awe and happiness, foster revisit intentions, while negative emotions lead to decreased satisfaction and loyalty (Cohen & Prayag, 2018; Demir & Dalgıç, 2022; Kim et al., 2017). These findings underscore the need to carefully consider visitors' emotional experiences by beach destination managers to enhance the overall tourist experience and drive positive revisit intentions.

## 6. Conclusion and implications

This study discussed the factors of tourists' emotional responses to beach beauty and values and the influence of those factors on their intention to revisit emerging beach destinations. This study found seven (7) factors of tourists' emotional experiences: joy, serene, awe, longing, love, sadness, and regrets at the beach destinations. Using a binary probit model with the maximum likelihood method, the results demonstrate that four (4) emotional experience factors of Joy, Serenity, Longing, and Sadness significantly influence tourists' beach revisit intentions. These findings hold substantial value for beach management and stakeholders within the tourism industry, providing insights for enhancing visitor experience.

The research bridges the gap between beach intrinsic beauty and values, emotional experiences (responses) and tourists' revisit intentions in coastal destinations, shedding light on the multifaceted dynamics of visitor decision-making. It offers actionable insights for destination managers, aligning their strategies with the emotional expectations of tourists and ultimately fostering a thriving and sustainable tourism industry. The results suggest that by promoting positive emotions like joy, serenity, and longing while working to eliminate tourist sadness, beach managers and stakeholders can improve the overall visitor experience, increasing the likelihood of repeat visits. This could involve strategies such as constantly providing appealing beach endpoints and creating serene, alluring, and relaxing environments, offering beach environments that provide recreational opportunities and support activities, and leveraging nostalgia-inducing elements. Since the emotional appeal of a beach destination plays a crucial role in shaping revisit intentions, marketing, and promotional efforts can be tailored to emphasize the emotional benefits of the destination.

Highlighting the potential for joy, serenity, and nostalgia can be a persuasive marketing strategy to attract and retain tourists. Destination managers can use these insights to engage with tourists more effectively. Understanding the emotional components that matter to tourists allows for personalized experiences. For example, offering activities that cater to joy-seekers, providing serene and calming spaces, and creating opportunities for guests to relive nostalgic memories can boost satisfaction and encourage revisits. Beach destinations that actively manage and curate emotional experiences may gain a competitive advantage (Lee et al., 2014; Prayag et al., 2013). By aligning their offerings with the emotional preferences of their target audience, they can stand out as emerging destinations amidst competition and build a loyal customer base. Ongoing data collection and analysis of tourists' emotional experiences can help destination managers adapt to changing preferences and continuously improve their offerings. These iterative approaches can lead to greater experiences. Visitor experiences and satisfaction can contribute to sustainable tourism by encouraging repeat visits. Sustainable practices that align with the emotional preferences of tourists can ensure the preservation of beach destinations' natural and cultural assets while maintaining visitor satisfaction.

This study, however, utilized cross-sectional data collected through a non-probability sampling method, which may limit the extent to which the findings can be generalized.

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#### Author contributions

Collins Dodzi Dzitse: Conceptualizing and writing the original draft, methodological design, investigations, and formal analysis and interpretation.

Christian Osei Amoah: Methodological design, formal Analysis, and critical review and editing of the paper.

#### Disclosure statement

The author reported no potential competing interest.

#### Ethics committee approval

All responsibility belongs to the researcher. Because this research was a master's students' term project for the 2021/22 academic year, Ethical approval was obtained from the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, to gather data.

# Journal of Tourism Theory and Research

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### **Research article**

Effect of sponsored social media advertisements and word-of-mouth communication on consumer purchasing behavior in tourism: A case study of Facebook

*Sebine Beşirova*

## Effect of sponsored social media advertisements and word-of-mouth communication on consumer purchasing behavior in tourism: A case study of Facebook

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### Abstract

*This paper delves into the intricate dynamics between sponsored social media advertisements and word-of-mouth communication, focusing on their combined impact on consumer purchasing behavior in tourism, specifically within the Facebook platform. Data were collected through a survey using a quantitative research method, with a sample of 250 Facebook users. The SPSS program was employed for data analysis, utilizing t-tests, ANOVA, reliability, and correlation analyses to discern the relationship between consumer purchasing behavior, social media advertisements, and word-of-mouth communication. The research findings indicate that gender and word-of-mouth communication significantly influence Facebook-sponsored advertisements, guiding consumers toward purchasing behavior in tourism.*

**Keywords:** Social media, Advertising, Facebook, Consumer purchasing behavior, Word of mouth communication.

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### 1. Introduction

Social media, a digital environment facilitating content creation and idea sharing without temporal or spatial constraints (Demir & Günaydın, 2023), has become an essential aspect of individuals' lives. As social media usage becomes ubiquitous, people spend a significant portion of their time on these platforms, making a presence on social media a fundamental need (Kim et al., 2023). This trend has led to the prominence of advertising in social media environments (Hanaysha, 2022).

Advertising, an endeavor to persuade the target audience to make purchases, serves as a communication tool conveying information about businesses and the products or services offered (Sreejesh et al., 2020). The prevalence of social media users as recipients of advertisements necessitates advertisers to engage in social media advertising. Effective advertising on social media requires a comprehensive analysis of the target audience's demographic, psychological, socio-cultural, and personal characteristics (Lee & Kim, 2022). Social media platforms offer opportunities to tailor message content accurately, employ effective advertising techniques, and reach the right target audience (Jacobson et al., 2020).

Consumers leverage social media to discover businesses, follow their accounts for product and service information, and make informed choices by comparing offerings from competing businesses (Demir et al., 2023). Analyzing personal, socio-cultural, and psychological factors influencing consumer purchasing behavior becomes crucial to enhance the effectiveness of advertising messages. While various studies explore different facets of "sponsored advertisements on social media" and "Word of mouth communication" (e.g., Chen & Yuan, 2022; Çokyaşar, 2018), comprehensive studies on the "relationship between Facebook sponsored advertisements and word-of-mouth communication's effect on consumer purchasing behavior" are limited, necessitating further research in this area.

This research aims to uncover the effects of sponsored advertisements on Facebook in Azerbaijan on the relationship between consumer purchasing behavior and word-of-mouth communication. Additionally, it seeks to elucidate the impact of advertising and word-of-mouth communication on factors influencing consumer purchasing behavior based on existing literature. Research questions:

1. What is the impact of online ads on word-of-mouth communication?

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2. How do online advertisements impact consumer purchasing behavior in tourism?

3. What is the interaction between consumer purchasing behavior and word-of-mouth communication concepts?

## 2. Literature

### 2.1. Social media

Communication, an essential aspect of human existence, has taken various forms throughout history. As individuals strive to meet their fundamental needs, such as acquiring basic necessities, obtaining information, and sharing experiences, the concept of social encompasses these basic needs (Kim et al., 2023), while media defines the means of communicating with others (Santos et al., 2022). Today, communication occurs through various media tools like writing, television, websites, mobile phones, photography, and video. Media encompasses all technological tools facilitating communication (Uzgören & Korkmaz, 2015).

The internet's rapid development in the last three decades has led to the emergence of social media, where users control their content, share, and interact across online platforms (Ying, 2012). While social media lacks a specific definition, it generally includes websites hosting social content (Köksal, 2013). Social media serves as a platform for individuals to freely express thoughts and feelings, encouraging social interactions and information sharing, with its importance growing daily (Özgen & Doymuş, 2013).

Social media platforms often incorporate features enabling users to communicate in word-of-mouth through commenting, retweeting, replying, and recommending (Jebarajakirthy et al., 2021). Additionally, social media facilitates new channels for obtaining and sharing shopping information (Karabiyik & Çetin, 2022). Social media tools are crucial in reaching target audiences (Çabuk et al., 2019). While social media's primary purpose isn't sales, it aids in sales by enhancing organizations' reputation and leveraging online communication. Facebook, founded in 2004, has emerged as the leading social media platform, boasting the highest number of users globally (Parasnis, 2022).

### 2.2. Advertising

Advertising, recognized as an effective communication method with customers (Demir & Tür, 2019), serves as a tool guiding consumers in choosing products that align with their needs (Özgen & Doymuş, 2013). Social media advertising, a product of advancing technology, has simplified the process of consumers obtaining information in recent years, fostering interactive communication between customers and businesses. The term advertising, derived from the Latin verb "adverte," signifies announcing a service, good, or business to a large audience in exchange for money (Kızgın & Benli, 2019).

Advertising falls under the category of paid and non-personal communication forms. It aims to convey thoughts and

information about products through various media (Kaya-pınar et al., 2017). Advertisements significantly influence customers' purchasing decisions (Ceran & Karaçor, 2013). Social media advertising has proven more effective than traditional media (Creevey et al., 2022; Tanyer, 2018), allowing companies to employ viral marketing strategies more efficiently, thereby enhancing brand awareness (Battallar & Cömert, 2015).

The style, message content, and audiovisual tools used in social media advertisements substantially impact consumers' attitudes toward ads (İnce & Bozyiğit, 2018). The impact of online advertisements hinges on factors like advertisement value, perceived entertainment, information, economy, and reliability (Buzlukçu & Avcıkurt, 2021; Yaşar & Demir, 2021). Advertiser credibility, reflecting the customer's perception of the company as a reliable information source, is influenced by factors like the overall company credibility and the advertisement message.

Facebook has emerged as an alternative advertising medium, affording opportunities for companies, non-profit organizations, and celebrities to promote their offerings (Maru & Sai Vijay, 2024; Mukhopadhyay et al., 2023). Facebook allows small businesses to expand their networks, establish connections with potential customers, and share company information through visual content (Donthu et al., 2021; Kuyucu, 2021). The platform facilitates ad targeting based on users' interests, likes, shares, and demographic characteristics. Facebook leads the social media sphere with \$5 billion in advertising revenues (Köseoğlu, 2013).

### 2.3. Word-of-Mouth communication

Concerning the influence of social media on purchasing behavior, word-of-mouth (WoM) communication plays a significant role. Şener and Yücel (2020) conducted a study revealing that consumers' engagement with brand messages extends beyond mere following and liking, encompassing activities such as commenting on Facebook and tagging other users. The findings underscore the substantial impact of word-of-mouth communication on social media platforms on consumers' purchasing behavior. WoM communication imparts information to consumers, particularly those within their social circles, through individual comments regarding the products or brands they use (Dang & Raska, 2022). Verbal communications influence purchasing decisions, whether recommending products or businesses or not.

WoM encompasses both positive and negative comments from both existing and new consumers about the brand, product, or service (Chen & Yuan, 2022; Kara, 2012). WoM serves as a crucial data source shaping consumers' purchasing behavior (Marangoz, 2007). Consumers tend to share information about products, services, and business experiences with their peers (Çabuk et al., 2019), highlighting WoM as a primary source of information acquisition for consumers from their friends (Fang et al., 2023). This form of communication underscores the pivotal role that

experiences and opinions from fellow consumers play in the decision-making process (Kılıçer & Öztürk, 2012). The impact of WoM communication on consumers' purchasing decisions differentiates it from other communication channels. Nevertheless, contemporary consumers predominantly seek information about prospective purchases online (Kılıçer & Öztürk, 2012), emphasizing the assertion that word-of-mouth communication has evolved into a vital strategy for businesses.

In the literature, WoM communication is alternatively termed "Word of Mouth Marketing," "Buzz Marketing," and "Viral Marketing" (Demir, 2011; Strydom et al., 2023). Within these designations, "Word of Mouth" and "Viral" are considered electronic counterparts to traditional word-of-mouth communication (Gülmez, 2011). Traditional WoM communication revolves around customers expressing satisfaction or dissatisfaction to others (Gülmez & Türker, 2013) and entails interpersonal, non-commercial communication about a brand, product, organization, or service (Ergün & Akgün, 2016). Consumers exposed to WoM typically receive information from their close circles, enhancing the communication's credibility and impact (Müftüoğlu et al., 2018). Evaluations of a product by consumers have perennially held significance for brands. Presently, consumers can make informed purchases by aggregating diverse information through personal sources and word of mouth, circumventing traditional marketing tools and commercial sources such as advertising, packaging, and display (Yaşar et al., 2023).

Viral marketing, a concept that has rapidly gained prominence, pertains to the dissemination of marketing messages through WoM communication on the Internet (Baş & Karaca, 2021). Viral marketing constitutes the manifestation of word-of-mouth marketing online and is often referred to as "e-WoM." E-WoM, a subset of word-of-mouth communication, involves the electronic sharing of information (Yavuzylmaz, 2008). Viral marketing strategies encompass sending messages or advertisements to friends through email lists or social media networks (Sashi & Brynildsen, 2022). Also known as "buzz marketing," viral marketing involves consumers contributing to the brand's propagation by discussing the product, brand, or company (Yavuzylmaz, 2008). In recent years, this term has also been synonymous with "e-WoM," "online buzz," or "internet buzz" (Chatzipanagiotou et al., 2023; Shankar et al., 2022).

#### *2.4. Consumer behavior in tourism*

Consumption is acknowledged as the fundamental condition for ensuring individuals' well-being by fulfilling their needs and is evidenced through consumers' acquisition and utilization of products and services (Fang et al., 2023). In this context, consumption, as an activity, remains a fundamental element persisting throughout human history (Müftüoğlu et al., 2018). Consumers typically partake in diverse activities such as acquiring information from their social circles, comparing product prices, observing advertisements, and

assessing their needs during consumption (Şener & Yücel, 2020). Word-of-mouth (WoM) communication stands out as a crucial factor influencing social media's impact on purchasing behavior. Research findings indicate that consumers' interactions with brand messages encompass not only following and liking brands but also engaging in activities such as commenting on Facebook and tagging other users (Tran & Strutton, 2020). The study underscores the significance of WoM communication on social media in influencing consumers' purchasing behavior. Social media facilitates individuals of all ages and cultures in expressing their personalities and enables rapid, universal communication through online profiles or content creation. When examining individuals' skills, habits, and preferences in social media for effective online communication, the generational conditions of each era should not be overlooked (Ünal & Deniz, 2020). Studies on consumers' purchasing behavior assert that marketing efforts are influenced by four factors: psychological, sociocultural, personal, and situational factors (Gülmez, 2011).

The continual advancement of technology has impacted the tourism sector (Demir & Kozak, 2011). Sharing experiences on social media can influence consumer preferences, prompting businesses to develop various advertising and marketing strategies. Consumers' ages are a pivotal demographic factor in strategic decision-making during the advertising campaign process (Mandıracıoğlu, 2010). Different life stages entail shifts in behavior, such as young individuals gravitating towards sportswear and later considering suits upon entering the business realm. Income level constitutes another critical factor affecting consumers' purchasing behavior (Demir & Kozak, 2011). While a higher income level encourages purchasing behavior, lower income levels may lead to expense reduction and consequent alterations in purchasing behavior. Income and debts are economic features influencing consumers' purchasing behavior (Durgun, 2021).

Gender plays a significant role in product or service acquisition. Beyond the gender of the product or brand user, the influence of the opposite sex on product purchase is noteworthy concerning the impact of gender on consumer behavior (Çabuk & Keleş, 2008). For instance, women may influence men's perfume selection, as they are more attuned to the olfactory impact of men's fragrances. Advertisements for such products often hinge on themes of femininity and masculinity. Education level and profession are additional factors shaping individuals' purchasing behavior (Demir et al., 2013). Consumers' occupations and education levels mold their needs and preferences for specific goods. Furthermore, as consumers' education levels rise, their needs and desires tend to broaden and diversify (Uslu, 2015).

Olgun's (2014) study revealed that participants primarily spent between 2 and 4 hours on social media, during which time they researched their purchasing needs, with a preference for Facebook and Twitter platforms. Canlı's (2015) research demonstrated that well-crafted advertisements



positively impact consumers' preferences and purchasing decisions. Consumers exposed to advertisements expressed a desire to visit the products in-store, establishing a significant relationship between social media advertisements and consumer purchasing behavior. Online advertisements elevate living standards and contribute to the availability of higher-quality products. Additionally, individuals who perceive these advertisements positively often engage in word-of-mouth communication. Young people spend extended durations on social media, utilizing it as an effective information-gathering tool for purchasing goods or services. Furthermore, participants expressed a tendency to find social media advertisements monotonous, leading to reluctance in engaging in purchasing behavior.

The research hypotheses are as follows:

H1 - There is a significant relationship between Facebook-sponsored ads and consumer purchasing behavior in tourism.

H2 - There is a significant relationship between word-of-mouth communication and consumer purchasing behavior in tourism.

H3 - Perceptions and expressions about Facebook-sponsored ads vary according to demographic characteristics.

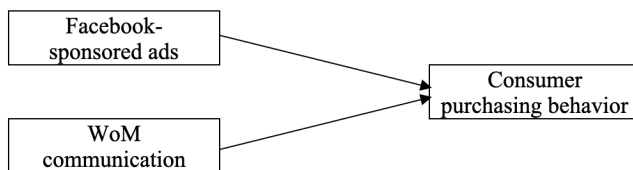


Fig. 1. Conceptual model

### 3. Methodology

Since this study is a graduate course project at Azerbaijan State University of Economics, the Ethics Committee approval process was carried out under the legislation of the relevant university. The data was collected in the period 01.11.2023-01.12.2023.

This research comprehensively addresses the intricacies of social media, Word-of-Mouth (WoM), and consumer purchasing behavior, aiming to delineate the effects of social media advertisements on consumers' purchasing behavior and WoM in the context of tourism. Employing a descriptive and exploratory survey design, the study seeks to generate data for future investigations. The survey, administered to Facebook users, initially profiles participants' demographic characteristics and subsequently delves into their interactions through inquiries about online advertisements, purchasing behavior, and WoM. The overarching goal is to contribute to enhancing social media advertisements in today's highly competitive environment by conducting a comprehensive examination and establishing guiding criteria for marketing. Methodologically, Facebook-sponsored ads and Word-of-Mouth serve as independent variables, while consumer purchasing behavior in tourism is considered the dependent variable. Data analysis is performed using the SPSS

program, with survey questions developed based on scales from the works of Mikalef et al. (2013) and Sun and Wang (2020).

The research adopts a quantitative approach, utilizing the survey method with participants drawn from social media users. The relationship between consumer purchasing behavior, social media advertisements, and Word-of-Mouth is assessed through T-Test, ANOVA, Reliability, and Correlation analyses. The survey instrument comprises two sections with a total of 18 questions. The first segment contains four questions aimed at determining the sociodemographic characteristics of the surveyed sample. Responses to statements in the scales employ a five-point Likert-type metric (1 - Strongly Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - Neutral, 4 - Agree, 5 - Strongly Agree). The research's scope involves the distribution of a simple random survey to a sample group totaling 300 individuals. Commencing on 01.11.2023, the survey concluded on 01.12.2023, with 250 surveys being considered for analysis. Principal limitations of the research pertain to its exclusive focus on Facebook users and the duration of the survey administration.

Table 1. Demographic variables

Age	n	%
18-23	105	42
24-29	83	33.2
30-35	47	18.8
36-41	9	3.6
42+	6	2.4
Total	250	100
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	123	49.2
Male	127	50.8
Total	250	100
<b>Education</b>		
Secondary School	11	4.5
High School	36	14.7
Undergraduate	122	49.8
Master	66	26.9
Doctorate	10	4.1
Total	250	100
<b>Income</b>		
0-500	86	34.5
501-1000	109	43.4
1001-2000	43	17.3
2000+	12	4.8
Total	250	100
<b>Social media</b>		
Facebook	149	59.4
Instagram	69	27.7
YouTube	19	7.6
Twitter	3	1.2
Other	10	4
Total	250	100
<b>Time spent on social media</b>		
less than 1 h	62	24.8
1-2 hours	95	38
3-4 hours	41	16.4
more than 4 h	17	6.8
none	35	14
Total	250	100

#### 4. Findings

The research findings indicate a positive relationship between Facebook-sponsored ads and consumer purchasing behavior as well as Word-of-Mouth (WoM) communication in the context of tourism. Regression, t-test, reliability, and ANOVA analyses reveal a robust association between Facebook-sponsored ads and the variables under consideration. These outcomes signify a rising interest in Facebook-sponsored ads and a substantial connection between consumer purchasing behavior and WoM communication within the tourism sector. Demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1, showcasing a predominantly male sample, with the majority holding undergraduate degrees (49.8%). Facebook emerges as the most frequently used social media platform (59.4%), and 38% of participants dedicate 1-2 hours daily to Facebook usage. Factor analysis was employed to evaluate the relationship between Facebook-sponsored ads, consumer purchasing behavior, and WoM communication in tourism. The "KMO and Bartlett's" test and "Principal components" method were utilized for assessing differences. The KMO Sampling Appropriateness Measurement value exceeding 0.6 ( $0.91 > 0.6$ ) and a p-value below 0.05 validated the appropriateness of the data.

Table 2. KMO and Bartlett's test

Table 2. KMO and Bartlett's test			
KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy			.911
	Approx. Chi-Square	1909.819	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df		66
	Sig.		.000

Table 3. Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Consumer purchasing behavior	3.7496	.91688	250
Facebook-sponsored ads	3.8910	.79839	250
WoM communication	3.9240	.91933	250

The SPSS regression analysis output investigates the relationship between the "Consumer Purchasing Behavior in Tourism" variable and the independent variables "WoM Communication" and "Facebook-Sponsored Advertisements." The primary objective of this analysis is to assess the impact of two independent variables on one dependent variable. In the Descriptive Statistics section, the mean value of the "Consumer Purchasing Behavior in Tourism" variable is 3.74, with a standard deviation of 0.91. The mean value of the WoM variable is 3.92, with a standard deviation of 0.91, while the mean value of the "Facebook-Sponsored Advertisements" variable is 3.89, with a standard deviation of 0.79. Moreover, the Pearson correlation coefficient between these variables is calculated as 0.623, indicating a moderately strong positive relationship between the variables "Word of Mouth" and "Sponsored Advertisements" with "Consumer Purchasing Behavior in Tourism."

In the Variables Entered/Removed section, it is evident that only the WoM and "Sponsored Advertisements"

variables are included in the analysis, signifying the exclusive evaluation of these two variables on "Consumer Purchasing Behavior in Tourism." The Model Summary section presents various statistics to assess the accuracy of the regression model. The R Square value indicates that the independent variables explain 59.4% of the variance in the "Consumer Purchasing Behavior in Tourism" variable. The ANOVA section tests the significance of the regression model, yielding an F statistic of 180.434. The P value is 0.000, indicating the significance of the regression model, with at least one independent variable significantly affecting the dependent variable. The total variance explanation highlights that the factors account for 65% of the total variance. Rotated factor loadings elucidate the explanatory capacity of each variable, with the first factor having the highest variance explanation (55.38%) and the second contributing to a 9.57% explainable variance. These results underscore the high explanatory capacity of factor analysis, with two factors being pivotal in the outcome.

T-test analysis was conducted for consumer purchasing behavior questions, measuring differences through the "Independent Samples" test. The SPSS output encompasses group statistics and independent sample t-test results for the "Consumer Purchasing Behavior in Tourism" variable across two gender groups. In the group statistics section, mean, standard deviation, and standard error values for the "Female" and "Male" gender groups are reported. The number of women responding to the questions is determined as "127" (with an average of 3.8), and the number of men is determined as "123" (with an average of 3.5). In the Independent Sample T-Test Results section, the F value is calculated as 2.55, and the p-value is 0.008, given Levene's test under the assumption of equal variance. Since this value is ( $0.008 < 0.05$ ), a statistically significant difference is observed between male and female participants in terms of "Consumer Purchasing Behavior in Tourism." A "One Way" analysis was selected with different income groups for questions measuring purchasing behavior, and a "Post Hoc Test" was executed to identify possible differences between the groups. Given that the p-values between the "Gender" and "Duration" groups are less than 0.05 ( $0.019 < 0.05$ ) ( $0.016 < 0.05$ ), a significant difference is detected between the groups.

#### 5. Discussion and conclusions

According to the findings of this research, Facebook-sponsored ads appear to be effective in influencing variables such as gender and Word-of-Mouth (WoM) communication, which in turn impact consumer purchasing behavior in the tourism sector. This observation substantiates the accuracy of the proposed hypotheses H1, H2, and H3. The positive and significant relationship between consumer purchasing behavior in tourism and WoM communication, along with Facebook-sponsored advertisements, underscores that enhancing the perception of Facebook-sponsored advertisements among the target audience can stimulate consumer purchasing behavior.

Table 4. Correlation analysis results

		Consumer purchasing behavior	Facebook-sponsored ads	WoM communication
Pearson Correlation	Consumer purchasing behavior	1.000	.728	.623
	Facebook-sponsored ads	.728	1.000	.572
	WoM communication	.623	.572	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Consumer purchasing behavior	.	.000	.000
	Facebook-sponsored ads	.000	.	.000
	WoM communication	.000	.000	.
N	Consumer purchasing behavior	250	250	250
	Facebook-sponsored ads	250	250	250
	WoM communication	250	250	250

Table 5. Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error in the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.770a	.594	.590	.58682	.594	180.434	2	247	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), WoM communication, Facebook-sponsored ads

Table 6. ANOVA results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	124.268	2	62.134	180.434	.000b
	Residual	85.057	247	.344		
	Total	209.325	249			

a. Dependent variable: consumer purchasing behavior

b. Predictors: (Constant), WoM communication, and Facebook-sponsored ads

Table 7. Group statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Consumer purchasing behavior	Female	127	3.8992	.84134	.07466
	Male	123	3.5951	.96817	.08730

Table 8. Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for the Equality of Variances		t-test for equality of means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
Consumer purchasing behavior	Equal variances assumed	2.550	.112	2.653	248	.008	.30409	.11461	.07836	.52982
	Equal variances not assumed			2.647	240.930	.009	.30409	.11487	.07782	.53036

Table 9. ANOVA for groups

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Gender	Between Groups	5.964	12	.497	2.084	.019
	Within Groups	56.520	237	.238		
	Total	62.484	249			
Age	Between Groups	5.725	12	.477	.483	.924
	Within Groups	234.339	237	.989		
	Total	240.064	249			
Income	Between Groups	8.314	12	.693	.978	.471
	Within Groups	167.236	236	.709		
	Total	175.550	248			
Education	Between Groups	6.058	12	.505	.663	.786
	Within Groups	176.742	232	.762		
	Total	182.800	244			
Duration	Between Groups	41.943	12	3.495	2.133	.016
	Within Groups	388.361	237	1.639		
	Total	430.304	249			

Consumer purchasing behavior initiates with perception, necessitating businesses to engage more intensively and establish a presence on social media channels. In this context, businesses should contemplate collaborations with professionals, such as influencers and Social Media Marketing (SMM) experts, to gain a competitive edge in today's markets. The principle of "There is no good or bad advertising" encapsulates the fundamental mission of our subject. According to literature sources (Demir et al., 2021; 2023), the tourism industry has recently shifted its focus toward digital transformation. Strategies and innovations incorporating data-oriented approaches, personalized experiences, and artificial intelligence empower companies to meet consumer expectations. At this juncture, the results of our research find support, indicating that consumers exhibit their purchasing behavior in trustworthy businesses.

As posited by Mladenović et al. (2023), it has been argued that online shopping entails a more rational decision-making process than in-store shopping. Our analysis results demonstrate variations in purchasing behavior between men and women, highlighting the importance consumers attribute to these factors. As emphasized by Sashi and Brynildsen (2022), most daily interactions occur on social media platforms today. Consumers utilize these platforms to gather information about products, brands, and companies, as well as to share their experiences. Such platforms have given rise to new media, providing users with various opportunities. The outcomes of our research indicate that consumers' inclination to share their experiences on online channels facilitates swift actions, such as destination selection and reservation. The findings of this study, coupled with the literature review, affirm that social media, WoM communication, and consumer behavior in tourism are interconnected factors. Businesses in the tourism sector must amalgamate diverse efforts to avoid exploiting consumers' trust and mitigate potential harm. Consumers exhibit a propensity for trustworthy and transparent businesses, a critical factor for the long-term success of these enterprises.

### 5.1. Theoretical implications

The findings of this study contribute significantly to the theoretical understanding of consumer behavior in the context of tourism on social media platforms, particularly Facebook. The research emphasizes the interconnectedness of sponsored social media advertisements and word-of-mouth communication in influencing consumer purchasing decisions. Identifying gender as a significant factor in this dynamic adds nuance to existing theories, suggesting that demographic variables play a crucial role in shaping consumer responses to online advertising and interpersonal recommendations. Scholars and researchers can use these insights to refine existing models and frameworks related to consumer behavior in the digital era, considering the interplay between social media advertising and word-of-mouth as a more nuanced determinant.

### 5.2. Practical implications

This study offers actionable insights for practitioners in the tourism industry, especially those engaged in digital marketing. The demonstrated influence of both sponsored social media advertisements and word-of-mouth communication on consumer purchasing behavior underscores the importance of a holistic marketing approach. Marketers can leverage these findings to design more effective and targeted advertising campaigns on Facebook, considering the gender-specific nuances revealed by the study. Additionally, fostering positive word-of-mouth through social media interactions can be strategically integrated into marketing strategies. By understanding the synergistic effects of these two elements, businesses can optimize their digital marketing efforts, enhance customer engagement, and drive tourism-related sales.

### 5.3. Limitations and future research

Despite the valuable contributions of this research, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The study focused exclusively on Facebook, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other social media platforms. Moreover, relying on a quantitative research method may overlook qualitative nuances that could provide deeper insights into consumer perceptions. Future research could address these limitations by conducting comparative studies across multiple social media platforms and incorporating qualitative methodologies to gain a more comprehensive understanding. Additionally, considering the dynamic nature of social media and technology, longitudinal studies could provide insights into consumer behavior patterns. Exploring the impact of cultural variables on the relationship between social media advertising, word-of-mouth, and consumer behavior could also be a promising avenue for further investigation.

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#### Author contributions

Sebine Beşirova: Conceptualizing and writing the original draft, methodological design, investigations, and formal analysis and interpretation.

#### Disclosure statement

The author reported no potential competing interest.

#### Ethics committee approval

Since this study is a graduate course project at Azerbaijan State University of Economics, the Ethics Committee approval process was carried out under the legislation of the relevant university. The data was collected in the period 01.11.2023-01.12.2023.

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### **Research article**

Analyzing the impact of environmental strategies on corporate governance and long-term performance

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## Analyzing the impact of environmental strategies on corporate governance and long-term performance

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### Abstract

*This study delves into the complex relationships between corporate governance, environmental strategies, and the enduring success of publicly traded companies. Through empirical analysis, the study explores how adopting diverse sustainability measures influences stakeholder involvement, board structure, and shareholder value creation. This study combines an extensive dataset of financial information from listed companies with a quantitative examination of corporate governance practices. It also incorporates detailed case studies of leading firms implementing noteworthy environmental strategies. The study uses correlation analysis to assess environmental strategies' influence on corporate governance dynamics and long-term performance within this sector. The study highlights a positive correlation between robust environmental strategies and enhanced corporate governance practices. These include heightened board diversity, increased stakeholder engagement, and strengthened risk management frameworks. Notably, the study establishes a strong link between proactive sustainability efforts and outstanding long-term financial performance, as evidenced by key performance indicators such as return on equity and total shareholder return.*

**Keywords:** Corporate governance, Environmental strategies, Board composition, Stakeholder engagement, Shareholder value, Sustainability.

### 1. Introduction

Environmental strategies are crucial in shaping corporate governance practices and long-term business performance outcomes. Integrating environmental considerations into corporate governance frameworks ensures organizations prioritize sustainability, accountability, and ethical practices in their decision-making processes. By adopting environmentally responsible strategies, such as reducing carbon emissions, minimizing waste generation, and investing in renewable energy sources, companies can mitigate environmental risks, enhance their reputation, and create long-term value for stakeholders. Recent research highlights the positive correlation between effective environmental governance practices and superior long-term financial performance (Gifford, 2021; Huang et al., 2020). Moreover, embracing sustainability principles in corporate governance fosters innovation, attracts socially responsible investors, and strengthens resilience to environmental challenges, thereby contributing to the overall sustainability of the global economy.

In recent decades, there has been a significant shift within the business community towards prioritizing environmental sustainability, particularly in industries like tourism.

This shift is primarily driven by the implementation of pollution laws and carbon levies by various nations, as exemplified by the Kyoto Protocol, which aims to incentivize businesses to adopt more sustainable practices (Fraj-Andrés et al., 2009; Johnston et al., 2019; Kock et al., 2012; Mandojana et al., 2016). Consequently, environmental sustainability has become an integral component of corporate governance due to these regulatory changes. Stakeholders from diverse backgrounds now demand ecologically legitimate activities, recognizing the urgent need for innovative approaches to corporate governance and business operations to address environmental challenges (Bansal, 2005; Buysse & Verbeke, 2003; Bansal & Roth, 2000). Moreover, firms facing pressure from non-profits and NGOs and a growing market for green products have intensified their efforts to adopt environmentally friendly practices (Irshad et al., 2023; Kasininis & Vafeas, 2006). In this context, the role of corporate governance in ensuring the long-term viability and sustainability of tourism corporations is closely scrutinized by external stakeholders.

Corporate governance practices adopted by tourism businesses play a pivotal role in promoting proactive

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environmental initiatives (Kassinis & Vafeas, 2006; Mandojana et al., 2016; Singh & Pillai, 2022; Walls et al., 2012). Corporate governance mechanisms have historically focused on eliminating CEO duality, increasing the presence of independent directors on corporate boards, and implementing whistle-blower mechanisms to enhance transparency and accountability (Johnson & Greening, 1999). Additionally, the establishment of environmental committees has been recognized as a measure to ensure environmental safety within organizations (Berrone & Gomez-Mejia, 2009; Raimo et al., 2022). Prior research underscores the positive impact of these corporate governance practices on enhancing the environmental performance of businesses (Konadu et al., 2022). However, there remains a need for more rigorous empirical investigation into the relationship between corporate governance and environmental sustainability in the context of tourism businesses. Earlier studies have identified several critical corporate governance attributes positively associated with an organization's environmental performance (Walls et al., 2012).

Previous research has explored how particular corporate governance structures influence environmental performance, aiming to reconcile conflicts of interest between shareholders and managers within the tourism industry. Conversely, environmental considerations impact stakeholder engagement, shareholder returns, and overall business performance (Bansal & Roth, 2000). Companies seek to utilize resources owned or possessed by shareholders due to the resource-based connection between firms and shareholders. However, managers are tasked with safeguarding the interests of shareholders and stakeholders as they contribute essential resources. Consequently, the nexus between environmental sustainability and stakeholder interests becomes particularly significant, especially within lucrative commercial sectors like tourism.

The symbiotic relationship between environmental strategies and tourism is increasingly recognized as vital for sustainable development. Environmental strategies in tourism encompass a range of initiatives aimed at minimizing negative impacts on ecosystems and communities while maximizing the benefits of tourism activities. These strategies include conservation efforts, sustainable resource management, eco-friendly infrastructure development, and community engagement. Implementing such strategies not only preserves natural environments and cultural heritage but also enhances the attractiveness of tourist destinations. For instance, ecotourism and responsible travel appeal to a growing segment of conscientious travelers seeking authentic and environmentally conscious experiences. Recent studies emphasize the importance of integrating environmental considerations into tourism planning and management to ensure long-term viability and competitiveness in the global tourism market (Hall & Gössling, 2021; Prideaux & McNamara, 2020). By prioritizing environmental sustainability, destinations can safeguard their ecosystems, support local communities, and offer enriching experiences to travelers, thus

fostering a mutually beneficial relationship between tourism and the environment.

Within the tourism industry, scholars have long sought to develop models that account for the intricate interplay between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) practices, and governmental performance amidst prevailing social, political, and economic dynamics (Irshad, Safdar, & Manzoor, 2023). Entrepreneurs are pivotal as they act as innovators, leveraging limited resources to create "new uses and new combinations," thereby highlighting the critical role of innovation in driving economic progress. Economic development hinges on fundamental technological advancements that have far-reaching economic impacts. Hence, sustainable development in the tourism sector is underpinned by the triad of economic growth, social justice, and environmental conservation. These principles can be intricately linked through innovative policy frameworks, reflecting a holistic approach to fostering industry sustainability.

Tourism organizations are facing a critical paradox in the twenty-first century. While prioritizing shareholder needs and profitability remains paramount, the imperative for effective environmental management has become increasingly pressing amid the escalating challenges of climate change and resource depletion. This dynamic has spurred a renewed focus on the interplay between environmental strategies, corporate governance, and long-term success. The influence of environmental initiatives on corporate governance practices and organizational resilience and performance over time has emerged as a central area of inquiry in this context.

This research delves into this pivotal intersection, exploring the nuanced relationships among environmental strategies, corporate governance, and long-term performance within the tourism industry. A shift in business objectives has been catalyzed by the growing recognition of the financial implications associated with environmental concerns. Companies are under mounting pressure to embrace more sophisticated sustainability agendas, driven by increasing investor demands for transparency and accountability in environmental matters (Eccles & Krzus, 2010). Manifestations of this pressure include shareholders' calls for environmental expertise on boards and investors' preferences for companies with robust Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) policies (Flammer, 2015).

Given the current environmental challenges, a reassessment of corporate governance practices and policies has become imperative in the context of the tourism industry. Traditional governance models prioritize maximizing shareholder value and often must be revised to address environmental concerns. Consequently, there has been a recent surge in calls for a fundamental re-evaluation of governance frameworks to incorporate environmental considerations (Berrone et al., 2013). Collier and Esteban (2007) advocate for establishing environmental performance-based incentive schemes, integrating Environmental, Social, and

Governance (ESG) metrics into executive compensation packages, and forming environmental monitoring board committees.

In addition to structural adjustments, effective environmental governance demands a cultural shift within organizations. Leaders should promote a sustainable mindset by fostering open communication, teamwork, and risk management practices emphasizing financial and environmental responsibility (Sharma, 2000). Such cultural transformation may yield a more planned and proactive approach to addressing environmental challenges, ultimately enhancing long-term performance and resilience.

While empirical evidence on the relationship between environmental strategy, corporate governance, and long-term performance in the tourism industry continues to evolve, preliminary research suggests a positive correlation. Walls et al. (2012) found that enterprises with robust environmental governance policies tend to outperform in the long run. Similarly, Aguilera et al. (2007) argue that proactive environmental initiatives can enhance a company's reputation and competitive advantage, leading to sustained growth.

However, this partnership has its complexities. Effective environmental strategies require significant investment and seamless integration into existing company systems. Moreover, the long-term benefits of environmental activities may sometimes align with short-term shareholder expectations, potentially leading to conflicts. Nonetheless, navigating these challenges and embracing environmentally responsible practices is increasingly crucial for ensuring long-term viability and success for tourism businesses.

## 2. Literature review

In the tourism industry, current research underscores the intricate interplay among environmental strategies, corporate governance, and long-term performance. While Akram et al. (2018) and De Villiers et al. (2011) accentuate the favorable outcomes of robust corporate governance, particularly concerning board composition and independence, on environmental performance, others, such as Chouaibi et al. (2022) and Said et al. (2017), underscore the significance of moderating factors like social and ethical practices and cultural values. This suggests that more than implementing effective governance mechanisms may be required; aligning with broader sustainability objectives and contextual considerations is imperative.

Moreover, a bidirectional relationship emerges between environmental strategies and performance. As per Ying et al. (2021), heightened performance can spur increased engagement in corporate social responsibility (CSR) endeavors, with corporate governance serving as a mediator. This implies that robust environmental policies can catalyze improved governance, leading to a virtuous performance cycle. Delving deeper, Ateeq et al. (2023) and Ery Yanto (2018) delve into specific environmental initiatives and their

impacts. Ery Yanto (2018) highlights the positive influences of CSR and effective governance on firm value, with profitability amplifying the effect. Meanwhile, Ateeq et al. (2023) scrutinize environmental sustainability-centered business scenarios, revealing the diverse impacts of various environmental initiatives on governance and performance.

Furthermore, insights from Datt et al. (2019) and Luo (2019) shed light on voluntary carbon disclosure as a specific environmental strategy. Datt et al. (2019) uncover a positive correlation between disclosure approaches and carbon performance in the United States, while Luo (2019) underscores the influence of institutional contexts on this relationship. This suggests that the efficacy of environmental solutions, such as disclosure, may vary depending on the specific contextual factors at play.

The intricate interplay among environmental strategy, corporate governance, and long-term performance in the tourism industry presents a multifaceted and evolving landscape. Notable studies by Overell (2007), Yook (2016), Sutantoputra et al. (2012), and Doan & Sassen (2020) reveal a positive correlation between environmental disclosure and performance, suggesting that transparency fosters enhanced environmental practices. However, Aluchna et al. (2023) caution that the phenomenon of greenwashing or manipulation of environmental reporting can potentially undermine the anticipated benefits. Sutantoputra (2021) underscores the pivotal role of stakeholder pressure as a critical moderator, with stakeholder demands exerting considerable influence on the extent of environmental disclosure. This observation aligns with Aluchna et al.'s (2023) call for further exploration into "the moderating effects of governance mechanisms" on the effectiveness of environmental policies. From this perspective, robust corporate governance, encompassing board composition, stakeholder engagement, and ethical standards, may amplify the positive impact of environmental initiatives on long-term performance.

The literature also delves into specific environmental strategies. Overell (2007) highlights the efficacy of environmental audits in enhancing performance, while Yook (2016) explores the role of environmental management systems. Aluchna et al. (2023) underscore the importance of research into "integrated reporting," seamlessly blending financial and environmental data, potentially enhancing informed decision-making and long-term value creation.

Ultimately, existing research paints a nuanced picture of the relationship between environmental strategies, corporate governance, and long-term performance. While environmental disclosure and specialized approaches show promise, their effectiveness hinges on stakeholder engagement, robust governance frameworks, and transparent reporting standards. This study contributes to navigating this complex terrain by investigating specific governance-environment relationships, the impact of stakeholder dynamics, and the efficacy of diverse environmental solutions across varied contexts within the tourism industry.

### 3. Methodology

This research has ethics committee approval from AIMS Institutes on 22/01/2024.

A mixed-methods approach is essential for unraveling the delicate link between environmental strategies, corporate governance, and long-term success. Quantitative surveys of publicly traded corporations will provide information on environmental initiatives, governance standards, and performance measures, enabling statistical analysis such as regression and correlation. Secondary data from sustainability and financial databases will supplement the picture. In-depth interviews with key stakeholders and case studies of successful organizations will provide qualitative insights into motives, problems, and perceived impacts. The combination of these strategies will reinforce your conclusions. Remember to account for confounding variables and to situate your research within applicable theoretical frameworks. This multifaceted approach will shed light on the intricate interplay of environmental initiatives, governance structures, and long-term success, paving the path for informed decision-making and sustainable business practices.

Table 1. Sample distribution

Industry	Firms	%
Mining	14	9.15
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	19	12.4
Estate	18	11.8
Retail Trade	15	9.80
Transportation, communications, electric, gas, and sanitary service	11	7.18
Wholesale trade	17	11.11
Manufacturing	12	7.84
Construction	17	11.11
Services	14	9.15
Non-classifiable	16	10.45
Total	153	100

Table 1 shows a snapshot of the sample distribution in your study, illustrating the wide range of sectors covered. Mining and Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing have the highest shares, accounting for around 9-12% of the 153 total enterprises. The remaining industries have various percentages, with Estates, Retail Trade, and Wholesale Trade hovering around 11% and others, such as Manufacturing and Construction, falling somewhat below. Notably, "non-classifiable" industries account for 10.45% of the sample. When analyzing your findings, keep this industry distribution in mind since individual sector trends or features may have an impact. Overall, the table indicates a relatively fair representation of multiple sectors, improving research findings' generalizability across industries.

### 4. Results and discussion

Table 2 shows an analysis of the critical variables of the impact of environmental strategies on corporate governance and long-term performance. A mean score of 7.2 indicates

that companies in your study reveal a considerable quantity of environmental information on average. The standard deviation of 1.5 suggests that disclosure policies vary across organizations. With a mean of 25%, one-quarter of the board members in your study have some level of environmental expertise. The 12% standard deviation suggests that the proportion of members with knowledge varies significantly between firms. A mean of 67 indicates that corporations in your study engage with stakeholders on environmental issues to a moderate extent. The standard deviation of 18 suggests that engagement techniques vary across firms. A mean of 8% implies that companies in your study generate an average 8% return on their assets. Profitability varies somewhat across organizations, as indicated by the standard variation of 3%. With an average of 1.2 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per production unit, the enterprises in your study have a modest level of carbon emissions intensity. The standard deviation of 0.4 reveals that the intensity of emissions varies between companies. These data provide an overview of the broad distribution—the additional correlations matrix aids in comprehending the links between these variables and drawing valid conclusions.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Environmental Disclosure Score (0-10)	7.2	1.5
Board Environmental Expertise (%)	25	12
Stakeholder Engagement Index (0-100)	67	18
Return on Assets (%)	8	3
Carbon Emissions Intensity (ton CO <sub>2</sub> /unit production)	1.2	0.4

The correlation matrix in Table 3 indicates intriguing linkages between environmental strategies, governance, and performance. Here's a rundown of the essential findings: A strong positive association (0.58) suggests enterprises with higher disclosure scores participate in more active environmental stakeholder interaction. This is consistent with the notion that transparency promotes deeper stakeholder connections.

A somewhat positive correlation (0.35) suggests that companies that provide detailed environmental disclosure may see slightly higher financial returns. This could be because of increased brand recognition, recruiting environmentally concerned investors, or cost savings through resource efficiency. A moderately positive association (0.42) indicates that companies with higher environmental competence are connected with companies that reveal more environmental information. This shows that having competent board members can promote environmental openness and accountability.

A high negative connection (-0.61) between environmental disclosure and carbon emissions intensity paints a

good picture. Companies with better transparency ratings produce less carbon per unit of production. This shows that transparency encourages businesses to lessen their environmental impact. While board expertise and stakeholder participation have lower positive correlations with disclosure, their combined effect may be increased. Furthermore, while the relationships with ROA are moderate, additional investigation may uncover more extensive links depending on the precise environmental techniques.

Table 3 Correlation matrix

Variable	ED	BE	SE	ROA	CO <sub>2</sub>
ED	1.00				
BE	0.42	1.00			
SE	0.58	0.31	1.00		
ROA	0.35	0.28	0.46	1.00	
CO <sub>2</sub>	-0.61	-0.24	-0.39	-0.18	1.00

ED: Environmental Disclosure, BE: Board Expertise, SE: Stakeholder Engagement, ROA: Return on Assets, CO<sub>2</sub>: Carbon Emissions Intensity

Overall, this matrix presents preliminary evidence that environmental initiatives, particularly public disclosure, can favor corporate governance and long-term performance. These linkages, however, represent only one aspect of the puzzle. Further investigation, considering unique methods, industrial contexts, and other pertinent elements, is required to reach solid conclusions and expose the whole picture of this complex dynamic.

#### 4.1. Theoretical implications

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to explore the nuanced interconnections among corporate governance, long-term performance, and environmental strategies within the tourism industry context. Combining quantitative analysis with qualitative insights, the research uncovers significant associations between financial performance metrics, board competencies, stakeholder engagement levels, and environmental disclosure practices. The findings not only enrich the existing body of literature but also align with theoretical frameworks emphasizing the pivotal roles of transparency, stakeholder engagement, and environmental stewardship in shaping corporate governance dynamics and performance outcomes. Moreover, this study offers valuable insights for scholars, industry practitioners, and policymakers navigating the evolving landscape of corporate sustainability and governance, providing a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted factors influencing sustainable business practices through rigorous examination.

#### 4.2. Practical implications

The research underscores the pivotal role of environmental initiatives in fostering sustained prosperity and robust corporate governance within the tourism industry. It posits that companies can enhance their governance frameworks and financial performance by proactively embracing environmental practices, such as fostering transparency, cultivating board expertise in environmental affairs, and engaging stakeholders effectively. These insights offer actionable

recommendations for businesses that embed sustainability into their operational strategies, facilitating informed decision-making and cultivating sustainable business models. With these findings, organizations can bolster their competitive edge in an increasingly sustainability-oriented market while advancing their environmental stewardship efforts and forging a more resilient and prosperous future.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has unraveled the intricate interplay between environmental strategies, corporate governance, and long-term performance within the tourism industry. Environmental strategies significantly influence corporate governance and long-term success. Studies have linked corporate governance variables, such as board independence, diversity, and the establishment of environmental management committees, to enhanced environmental performance (Irshad et al., 2023). Moreover, corporate environmental responsibility (CER) has improved business performance, with green innovation as a mediating factor (Syeda et al., 2023). Engagement in environmental issues has also been associated with reduced long-term debt costs, while participation in social matters benefits both short- and long-term debt (Rismawati & Bawono, 2022). These findings underscore that environmental initiatives bolster environmental performance and positively impact corporate governance and long-term financial performance.

Significant correlations exist between robust environmental initiatives and enhanced corporate governance practices. Greater board diversity fosters valuable insights and strengthens risk management frameworks, reflecting a commitment to sustainability. Furthermore, aggressive environmental endeavors correlate with superior long-term financial performance, evidenced by higher returns on equity and overall shareholder returns. The study underscores the pivotal role of stakeholder engagement. Companies actively involving stakeholders in environmental matters foster a virtuous cycle. Heightened trust and collaboration facilitate better decision-making, risk management, and improved financial returns. These findings move beyond anecdotal evidence, offering empirical data that embeds sustainability into the fabric of business strategy.

This study marks a watershed moment, urging corporate executives and governments to recognize sustainability as a fundamental driver of long-term value creation beyond mere regulatory compliance. Embracing environmental stewardship represents a strategic investment in future prosperity, not just an ethical obligation. Lastly, the intricate interplay between environmental strategies, effective governance, and long-term performance heralds a new era of corporate leadership. Businesses embracing sustainability unleash a wave of advantages that benefit the environment and their bottom lines. The future belongs to those who integrate sustainability into their core operations, viewing it as a pillar of resilience, competitiveness, and sustained success within the tourism industry.

### 5.1. Limitations and future research

Despite its valuable contributions, the study has certain limitations that warrant consideration, particularly within the tourism industry. Firstly, the dispersion of the sample across various industries may introduce bias and limit the broad applicability of the findings. Future research could mitigate this constraint by augmenting the sample size and ensuring a more representative distribution across sectors. Additionally, the study predominantly focuses on quantitative data while neglecting qualitative aspects that could influence the relationship between environmental initiatives, corporate governance, and performance. To attain a more holistic understanding of organizational motivations, barriers, and the impacts of environmental initiatives, future investigations may adopt a more balanced approach by integrating qualitative methodologies.

Furthermore, the study primarily emphasizes correlations rather than causal relationships, underscoring the need for longitudinal research or experimental designs to elucidate the causal links between governance practices, environmental strategies, and long-term performance outcomes. While the study provides valuable insights into how environmental measures influence corporate governance and performance, further efforts are necessary to address its limitations comprehensively and fully grasp this intricate interplay. Overcoming these challenges and building upon the study's findings will empower future research endeavors to continue informing and guiding initiatives to foster sustainable business practices and achieve sustainable long-term value creation within the tourism industry.

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#### Author contributions

Bhaskar Sailesh: Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, and writing.

Kiran Reddy: Formal analysis, supervision, writing, visualization.

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**Research article**

Documenting perceptions and misconceptions of shark conservation among students in  
Ghanaian coastal communities within the context of shark tourism

*Samuel Amponsah*

## Documenting perceptions and misconceptions of shark conservation among students in Ghanaian coastal communities within the context of shark tourism

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### Abstract

*In Ghana, students have rarely been engaged in shark conservation programs. The study aimed to provide the perceptions and misconceptions about sharks among students in Ghana. From the Western region of Ghana, two senior high schools were visited from March to June 2023, and 111 questionnaires were administered to them with the assistance of a resident teacher. Most of these students believe that i) sharks do not eat humankind as food, ii) fishing activities do not affect shark behavior, iii) the decline in fish does not affect the shark population, and iv) fishermen in Ghana face a lot of shark attacks. On perceptions, most of the students perceived that i) shark fishing should not be stopped, ii) shark ecotourism will yield more money than shark fishing, and iii) MPAs will conserve shark population in Ghana. From the study, it was evident that knowledge and attitudes showed a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.61$ ). Therefore, incorporating shark related topics into the curricula of schools, taking students on educational tours to the fishing communities, and engaging them in outreach programs will enlighten their knowledge of sharks and foster their awareness of shark conservation and shark ecotourism in Ghana.*

**Keywords:** Senior high school, Shark fining, Shark tourism, Shark MPAs, Ghana

### 1. Introduction

With community support for protecting aquatic resources, measures for conserving marine biodiversity would likely be possible. As such, stakeholder support and collaboration are necessary to manage aquatic resources. Public engagement is required to support biodiversity conservation and management initiatives, possibly through classroom involvement, outdoor activities, and outreach events. By promoting improved understanding and attitudes regarding local environmental preservation, nature-based educational programs aim to influence the attitudes and behavior of children toward the environment (Pooley & O'Connor, 2000). Education in biodiversity conservation programs may enhance knowledge and skills as well as develop critical thinking, while information alone does not necessarily translate into more environmentally conscious behavior (Christensen et al., 2007; Smith-Sebasto & Cavern, 2006). Additionally, studies have demonstrated that actions and knowledge may change the attitude of people toward the conservation of natural resources (Karris et al., 2020; Martinis et al., 2018).

In some African schools, children do not learn about marine animal ecology as well as the kinds and importance of

these aquatic resources found locally compared to their counterparts in Western schools, even though their community or family livelihoods may depend heavily on the local environment (Kioko et al., 2010). As a result, information from parents, relatives, and peers—frequently the sources of misconceptions - is constantly bombarding the thoughts of these children. Children with such environmental misconceptions spell disaster for conservation efforts since they prevent them from actively participating in any conservation efforts. Children are taught to understand their environment and the need to maintain the resources found there through education programs that strongly focus on biodiversity and ecosystem services (Borressn et al., 2023). Programs for environmental conservation are preoccupied with reversing the alienation from nature by altering knowledge and attitudes (Kioko & Warui-Kiringe, 2010).

According to marine resource users, every public member may participate as an agent of change to solve problems existing in the marine environment by altering their behavior. The constructivist hypothesis states that ideas and interpretations of a subject determine how students understand reality. Ecological knowledge is the critical building block for promoting environmental education among students, and

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if the foundation framework is not constructed correctly, learning advanced ideas, particularly those relating to complicated ecological concerns, would be hindered (Tsoi et al., 2016).

Students are more likely to adopt unfavorable opinions if exposed to misconceptions about unusual creatures or false information in the media. On the other hand, students with more environmental knowledge typically have positive views (Tsoi et al., 2016). Although multiple studies show that people usually show an unfavorable attitude toward large predatory creatures, public support for shark preservation is still required. There are unsettling misconceptions about sharks, particularly the Great White shark, one of the world's most feared and mysterious animals (Tsoi et al., 2016). In view of this, the biological importance of sharks to the marine ecosystem must be well understood and addressed.

Due to the unfavorable view of sharks in most cultures as vicious predators in movies, interest in and support for shark conservation among students is largely limited. Misconceptions about sharks and the general inaccessibility of scientific information on sharks may limit public participation in shark conservation activities (Friedrich et al., 2014). According to Garla et al. (2015), students' knowledge level can strongly influence their unique attitudes and behaviors regarding the conservation of natural resources. Studies have shown that participation in school activities and clubs significantly contributes to increased environmental awareness among students. Also, environmental decisions made by adults are based on the lessons they learned as children.

Furthermore, it has been documented that school activities and organizations have a significant impact on raising awareness of issues bothering on conservation of environmental resources among students (Ajiboye & Silo, 2008). Unfortunately, attitudes and engagement in environmental conservation issues in Ghana among students have been less studied. Given the dire status of many shark populations worldwide, it is critically necessary to identify the misconceptions and perceptions of knowledge on shark ecology, fisheries, and attitudes among students geared toward shark conservation efforts (Acuna-Marreo et al., 2018). Following the paucity of information, the study aimed at i) evaluating misconceptions of sharks and shark fisheries among students, ii) their attitudes towards sharks and perspective on shark conservation, and iii) the relationship between knowledge and attitudes towards shark conservation among students. The knowledge acquired from this study will help promote and foster shark conversation among students in Ghana.

## 2. Materials and methods

Ethics committee approval is subject to the practices of the author's institution. For this reason, the author states that he conducted the research within the framework of ethical principles (25.02.2024).

### 2.1. Study area

The study was conducted in two landing communities along the coast of Ghana. These include Axim and Dixcove (Figure 1). Ghana is a Western African nation bordered by Burkina Faso to the north, Republic of Côte d'Ivoire to the west, Togolese Republic to the east, and Gulf of Guinea to the south. Ghana lies along the Gulf of Guinea and has an area of about 239,000 km (Seidu et al., 2022). The west coast extends from the Ghana-Côte d'Ivoire border to the Ankobra 215 River estuary. From the Ankobra Estuary to Tema, the central coast has rocky headlands and sandbars enclosing coastal lagoons (Seidu et al., 2022).

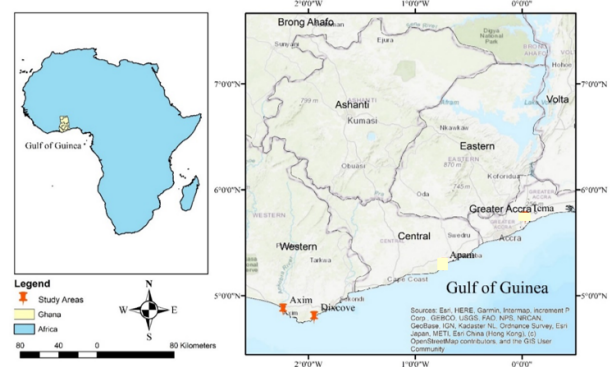


Figure 1. A map showing the study areas

Axim is located in the Nzema East District (N 04.8665° N, N 04.2409° W). There are 13,509 households in the district with a household population of 59,250, and Axim alone has about 5,001 households, 2,951 houses, and a population size of over 9,623 (GSS, 2014). Dixcove community falls within the Nzema East Municipality and Ahanta West. The artisanal fishing port of Dixcove, located in Ghana's Western Region (N 04.79368°, W 01.94612°), consists of three landing beaches, namely the Upper Dixcove, lower Dixcove and Eurom, with over 1,081 fishermen (Dovlo, 2016). Farming is an essential source of livelihood, with about 90% of men engaged in fisheries. Most women process and sell fish landed by the men.

### 2.2. Research technique

From March to June 2023, students from two senior high schools took the validated survey. The choice of the sample design was based on the type of target population (Kothari, 2004). The respondents in this study were between 15 and 18 years of age and students who attended any of the schools in the chosen study areas. These conditions indicated that only students within the defined age ranges and the schools attended could participate in the study. With the assistance of their class teacher, 111 students from the selected schools were given questionnaires to complete. Verbal consent was sought by politely and discretely asking students whether they would mind doing a brief survey. The questionnaire was written in only one language, English, and segmented into three sections: Section A, which deals with socio-demographics; Section B, which deals with shark knowledge;

Section C, which deals with shark fisheries information; and Section D, which deals with attitudes.

2.3. Data analysis

After the interviews, open-ended qualitative questions were coded to analyze the responses collected quantitatively. The normality test was conducted before data analysis to ascertain whether the sample data was normally distributed. By analyzing all response frequencies, the objectives of the study were satisfied. The proportion of binary replies (Yes/No) was examined using Pearson chi-square. This was more suitable given the objectives of the study and the methodology used. Pearson correlation was used to evaluate the association between attitudes and knowledge among students at a significance level of 5%. All analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.

3. Results

Over two-thirds of the students interviewed were females, while 28 % were males (Table 1). The significantly higher number of females than males (Chi-square,  $X^2$  value = 21.631,  $df = 1$ ,  $p$ -value < 0.001) was because one of the schools selected for this study was an all-female school. Less than 30 % of the students said they did not stay within the fishing communities, whereas most affirmatively responded (Table 1). The number of students residing within fishing communities was significantly higher than students outside the fishing communities (Chi-square,  $X^2$  – value = 35.757,  $df = 1$ ,  $p$ -value < 0.001) because these schools are situated within the fishing communities which more accessible to students from the communities.

Table 1. Demography of respondents

Variables	n	%	$X^2$	df	p
<b>Gender</b>					
Female	80	72.1	21.631	1	<0.001
Male	31	27.9			
<b>Staying close to the beach</b>					
No	24	21.6	35.757	1	<0.001
Yes	87	78.4			

More than 70 % of the students knew that sharks are dangerous to humanity and play a predator role within the marine ecosystem. Only 60 % of the students did not agree that fishing affects the behavior of sharks. In addition, a little above 50 % did not believe that the shark population was declining. However, 64 % did not agree that humans are the feeding items of sharks. Regarding attitude towards shark conservation, most students (95 %) agreed that shark fishing brings more money than other target fishes. As a result, the majority of the students (68 %) did not agree that shark fishing should be stopped (Table 2).

Furthermore, only 87 % of the students believed that creating marine protected areas (MPAs) would conserve the shark population in Ghana. A little above 50 % of the

students felt that fishermen face a lot of shark attacks in Ghana. Only 8 % of the students did not believe shark ecotourism would financially benefit fishing communities (Table 2).

Concerning the diets, when asked which feed items sharks consume, more than two-thirds of the students selected fish as the main feed item for sharks. Also, most students (over 70 %) believed that shark catches by fishermen are responsible for the decline in the shark population (Figure 2).

Table 2. Shark knowledge and attitude among senior high school students in Ghana

Shark knowledge, and attitude	No	Yes
Sharks dangerous to mankind (K)	22	78
Fishing activities affect shark behavior (K)	60	40
The decline in fish population affects shark population (K)	53	47
Sharks play predator roles in the marine ecosystem (K)	18	82
Sharks eat humans as their food (K)	64	36
Shark fishing brings more money (A)	5	95
Stop shark fishing (A)	68	32
Shark MPAs will conserve sharks (A)	14	87
Fishermen face a lot of shark attacks in Ghana (A)	43	57
Shark ecotourism will be more money than sharks (A)	8	92

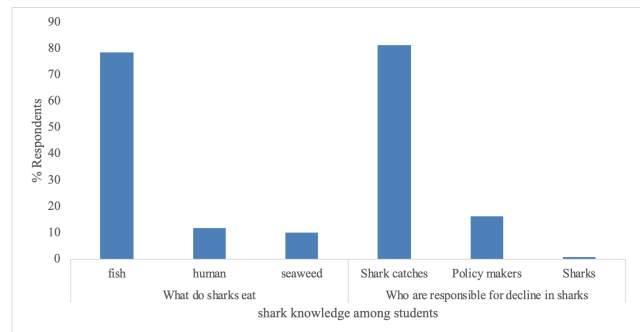


Figure 2. Percentage of students' opinion on some aspects of shark knowledge

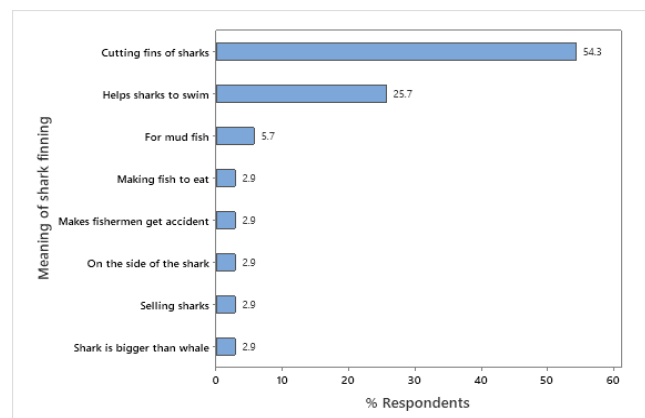


Figure 3. Percentage of students' responses on the meaning of shark finning

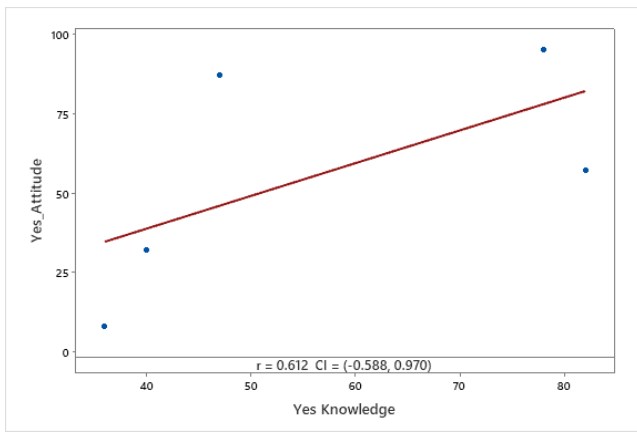


Figure 4. Correlation between the index of knowledge and the index of attitude among students

When asked about the meaning of shark finning, most students had no idea (78 %). However, out of the 22 % of the students who affirmed their understanding of shark finning, 54 % provided correct answers, while 46 % provided incorrect answers. Samples of wrong answers given by these students are shown in Figure 3. Correlation analysis between the index of knowledge on sharks and the index of attitude towards shark conservation showed a strong positive association (Figure 4).

More than 70 % of the students staying within the fishing communities agreed to the following issues of shark fishing in Ghana, namely: i) shark products are consumed locally, ii) shark fishing occurs in Ghana, iii) sharks are accidentally caught in Ghana, iv) shark population affects the catch of fishermen and v) aware of shark finning or trade. However, less than 30 % of students who do not stay within the fishing communities portrayed poor knowledge of shark fishing issues in Ghana (Figure 5).

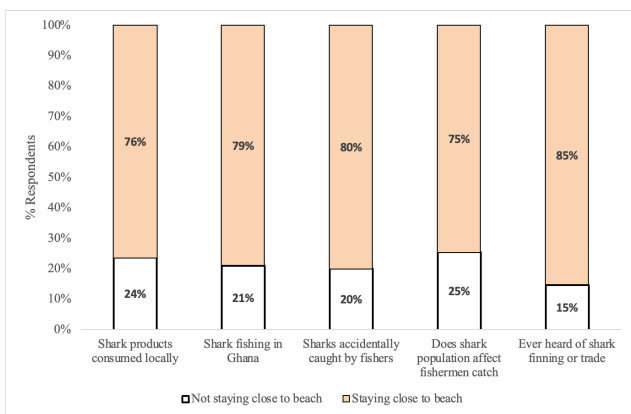


Figure 5. Responses by students staying within and outside the beach on shark fishing issues in Ghana

### 5. Discussion

This research offers preliminary information on student knowledge of shark and shark fishing activities in Ghana with emphasizes on second-cycle colleges. Many students vehemently disputed the following claims: i) fishing operations affect shark populations, and ii) fish populations

decline affect shark populations. In addition, many students provided incorrect responses on shark finning which demonstrates the need for more awareness of shark fisheries among students. During this survey, students also pointed out another misconception about sharks; that is, sharks are dangerous to humankind. Most of these misconceptions about sharks that students hold possibly come from parents, classmates, and media outlets. However, positively framed communications about the conservation of sharks will produce a more positive impact than negatively framed messages (Casola et al., 2020; Jacobson et al., 2019).

Shiffman et al. (2020) posited that people who need to be more informed about biodiversity resources could weaken prevailing successful conservation initiatives by actively pursuing the wrong information dissemination. Students having these misconceptions about sharks are perhaps unlikely to contribute meaningfully to any conservation efforts relating to sharks entirely. Fortunately, a substantial number of the students correctly perceived that i) fish is the primary food source for sharks, ii) sharks play a predatory role, and iii) the decline in shark populations was due to fishing mortality. However, for students to understand these perceptions which are essential for shark conservation, they need to gain knowledge of the trophic interactions between sharks and other marine species as well as the processes by which shark catches are declining in Ghana. For instance, students are unaware that sharks, as top predators, maintain the food webs directly by regulating prey dynamics and behavior. Hence, removing sharks can alter ecosystem functioning and shift food web dynamics (Ferretti et al., 2010; Heithaus et al., 2008).

Regarding attitudes pertaining to shark conservation, many of the students correlated the size of the shark species to financial benefits; hence, the bigger the size, the more valuable the shark is to traders. Clarke et al. (2007) documented that fisherfolks use the thickness, color, length, needle texture, and species type to price shark species in the fishing communities. In addition, Seidu et al. (2022) reported that an average of 90 % of fisherfolks generate more revenue from shark fisheries because fisherfolks receive twice the usual income from shark products and fins. These immense benefits may have fueled the perception among students that shark fishing should continue. On the contrary, studies by Seidu et al. (2022) suggest that fisherfolks should reduce the rate of fishing for sharks in Ghana, especially in the wake of population decline (Ward-Paige et al., 2012). The perceived economic gains from shark fishing may have favored the positive reaction to shark fishing among students.

The support for shark MPAs among students may be motivated by the high economic benefits of the shark fin trade rather than the ecological advantages of MPAs to species conservation. This demonstrates unequivocally that students need to know the environmental advantages of MPAs, in order for the institutionalization of MPAs to achieve their ecological benefits. Many of these students have ethnic links to coastal communities where tourism and fishing are

significant sources of revenue for many locals. As such, these students have first-hand information about the benefits of tourism to the individual, society, and country. Shark tourism is an industry that creates millions of dollars annually and stimulates the development of dependent fishing communities while fostering conservation efforts (Ziegler et al., 2021; Zimmerhackel et al., 2019; Vianna et al., 2018). Therefore, it was not surprising to see most of the students favoring the perception that shark ecotourism is an avenue that will yield more revenue than shark fishing. For shark tourism to gain its full potential in fishing communities in Ghana, further studies are needed to map out shark habitat use as well as shark migrating patterns for feeding and spawning purposes. However, shark tourism should not be viewed as a panacea to the declining trend in shark population in Ghana.

Although sharks rarely attack fishermen (Garla et al., 2015), many students believe such attacks occur frequently. However, such misconceptions about sharks tend to discourage them from partaking in activities inclined to the conservation of sharks. Again, having such misconceptions about sharks coupled with negative attitudes toward shark conservation suggests that additional education on shark fishery is necessary to safeguard the shark population and the integrity of the marine ecosystem of Ghana. The varying views of students staying in and outside the fishing communities about conservation issues may be due to proximity to the beach, access to knowledge, and attitudes (Garla et al., 2015). As such students without close proximity to the fishing communities tend to have inadequate understanding of shark fishing. This demonstrates that having a connection to fishing communities improves knowledge of sharks among students. Furthermore, the lack of knowledge about sharks among students may limit their motivation to protect these vulnerable species. Therefore, regular field excursion to shark fishing communities may deepen their connection to these creatures and instill in them the need to protect these species.

The high positive correlation between the knowledge and attitude indices indicates that having a greater understanding of sharks fosters a good attitude toward shark conservation strategies. As a result, impacting knowledge on sharks will accelerate behavioral change in attitudes toward a positive commitment to shark conservation among students (Agyeman et al., 2021; Fletcher & Potts, 2007; Thompson & Mintez, 2002). Also, increase in education predicts less fear of large carnivorous species with more positive attitudes toward species conservation (Giovos et al., 2021; Le Busque et al., 2021; Bargnesi et al., 2020; O'Bryhim & Parsons, 2015; Friedrich et al., 2014; Kaczensky et al., 2004; Røskaft et al., 2003). Therefore, educating students on issues relating to sharks will be essential in improving their involvement in shark conservation strategies. Thus, to increase the engagement of the next generation in the conservation of sharks in Ghana, scientists and

conservation groups need to educate students with the relevant education materials (Giovos et al., 2021).

## 6. Conclusion

The study sought to identify some misconceptions and perceptions students hold about sharks in Ghana. From the survey, many students displayed poor knowledge of shark ecology, biology, and shark fisheries. The high rate of poor understanding among students demonstrates the importance of providing them with factual education. This activity will strengthen their bond with sharks and fuel their enthusiasm for participating in shark conservation efforts in Ghana. From the study, strategies for involving students in shark conservation in Ghana may include beach outings, awareness campaigns, incorporating shark-related curriculum in schools, and mentoring with conservation groups.

### 6.1. Limitations and future directions

This study only focused on two fishing communities in the western corridor of Ghana. Therefore, future research should include fishing communities from other coastal regions. This will provide a comprehensive view of attitudes about sharks among students. In addition, future studies should consist of other indicators of perception and knowledge among students regarding shark conservation efforts in Ghana.

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The author reported no potential competing interest.

### Ethics committee approval

Ethics committee approval is subject to the practices of the author's institution. For this reason, the author states that he conducted the research within the framework of ethical principles (25.02.2024).