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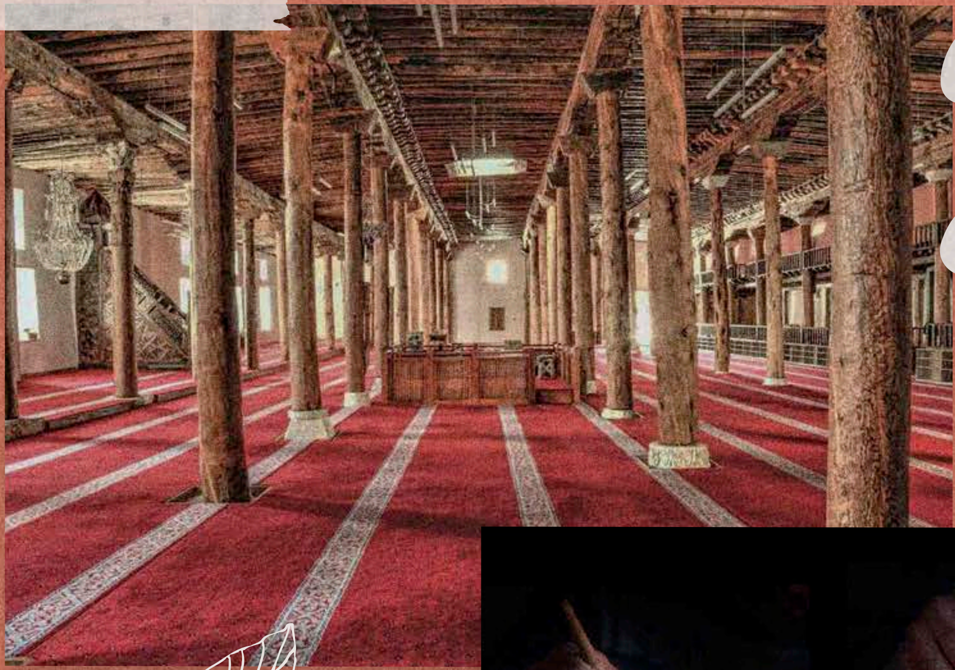

Sivrihisar Ulu Mosque in Eskişehir, Türkiye.
Sivrihisar Ulu Mosque (dates back 1274) is located in Sivrihisar District of Eskişehir Province, in the city centre and the mosque is one of the Wooden Hypostyle Mosques in Türkiye added to UNESCO World Heritage list.
Sivrihisar Ulu Mosque has a total of 67 wooden posts and is one of the biggest mosques with wooden posts in Anatolia
Sivrihisar Ulu Mosque is the surviving representatives the hypostyle type mosques built in a unique wooden structure, where the original timber ceilings composed of wooden beams running perpendicular and/or parallel to the kıbla wall, is carried by wooden posts that have capitals either with wooden muqarnas or marble (spolia). In addition to using wood as load-bearing element, the mosque is of significant historical and artistic value for their skillful woodcarving and workmanship in the architectural fittings and furnishings including doors, minbars, columns, capitals, ceiling beams, and consoles.

Lületaşı (Meerschaum) in Eskişehir, Türkiye.
Meerschaum (in Turkish known as “Lületaşı”) is a mine known as sepiolite. Also it is called as “Rock of Eskişehir”, ”White Rock” and “White Gold”.
It is a soft white clay mineral, which is mainly used to handicraft tobacco pipes called Meerschaum pipes.
Beginning from the 18th century meerschaum was one of the most important export goods of Eskişehir and the Ottoman Empire. And Austria was the import country of this mine, for that reason, it was also called as the “Rock of Wien”.
The opaque and off-white, grey or cream colored mineral is soft when extracted. However, it hardens on exposure to solar heat or when dried in a warm place. This feature allows it to give a permanent shape after carving it at soft state. Meerschaum deposits are found in Eskişehir region, generally at first rank in the world, in depths up to 150 m (490 ft).
Eskişehir is the place where the most meerschaum is found in the world.

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Dear Readers, Researchers and Practitioners,

As we leave another year behind, we are happy to present you with the December issue of the Journal of Tourism Leisure and Hospitality. In this issue, we are committed to providing you with valuable insights that contribute to the existing academic knowledge in the field of tourism. The original research we include in our journal touches on current issues such as green applications, artificial intelligence, and experience while also revealing new knowledge in gastronomy, tourist guiding, and tourism management.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the authors who have entrusted us with their work for this journal issue, and to the referees who have generously shared their expertise and time. Your contributions have been invaluable, and we eagerly anticipate the innovative studies that will enrich the fields of tourism, leisure, and hospitality in 2025.

As we embark on a new year, I extend my warmest wishes for a period filled with hope, success, and inspiration for each and every one of you. May the coming year bring you closer to your academic and professional aspirations.

Wishing you enjoyable reading,

İ. Oya Coşkun, Ph.D.
Editor-In-Chief

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Impact of trustworthiness on tourist satisfaction in Nepal: The mediating role of civilized tourism behavior intention[1]

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ABSTRACT

Tourism spread across all over the globe because of easy global access. Along with it, tourism also expanding. Then, a tourism-based economy focuses on long-term and sustainable tourism growth. As trustworthiness evolved, it optimizes tourist satisfaction, which helps to increase tourist flow. Civilized tourism behavior intention also plays a vital role to improve tourist satisfaction and grow the economy. The civilized tourism behavior intention structures connect tourism-related services to increase trustworthiness, which enhances revenue and stimulates economic growth. This research aims to investigate how tourists' intent to engage in civilized tourism behavior influences their perceptions of Nepalese hospitality and tourism when they travel there and revisit. The current study on civilized tourism behavior intention applied as a mediator for effective trustworthiness on tourist satisfaction in Nepal. It also highlights how important credibility is for raising tourist satisfaction. The study selected 150 samples from the tourism sector to get information through the use of surveys, which were examined using PLS-SEM. The results point to a positive correlation between trustworthiness and tourist satisfaction. The results show that civilized tourism behavior intention greatly affects tourist satisfaction. The results also suggest that civilized tourism behavior intention mediates the relationship between trustworthiness and tourist satisfaction. To ensure that tourists would be satisfied to make civilized tourism behavior intention a priority, the tourism industry and government policy-making agencies should collaborate.

KEYWORDS

Trustworthiness of tourism, civilized tourism behavior intention, tourist satisfaction, Nepalese tourism sector, tourism, and hospitality organization.

[1] This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Xian University of Technology.

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INTRODUCTION

On account of the current global development circumstance, nations worldwide are concentrating on sustainable development that doesn't have any significant adverse effects and keeps expanding; thus, they prefer one of the best in promoting tourism. Tourism development is one of only one long-term profitable investment, with no adverse effects, in tourism, which is perpetually expanding. The degree to which travelers believe the information they get about a tourist location is accurate, trustworthy, and objective is referred to as the trustworthiness of tourism. It is a crucial consideration for travelers when deciding where to go since they want to be sure that the information they receive about the location and its attractions is reliable. The source of the information, the presentation of the material, other people's personal experiences, and the reputation of the location are just a few of the numerous variables that might affect how trustworthy tourist information is. Nepal tourism is quite reliable. Nepal is one of the most popular tourist places. Tourists are more likely to rely on clear, concise, and comprehensible information. The fact that other people have experienced a place firsthand — as opposed to copy provided by the brand or agent service handling group bookings makes them more believable than reviews and information obtained from first-time tourists. Many factors, such as political stability, crime rate, or the sustainability of a destination, can affect how reliable tourism information is. Tourism businesses can increase the reliability of information by ensuring it is accurate and up to date, noting where their source comes from, and clearly expressing written text. Hospitality businesses can foster trust with tourists by responding to their needs and issues as well as offering outstanding customer service. Research on trustworthiness, specifically in tourism, is still sparse, but it should be considered an important area for attention. From the factors affecting trust in tourism information, businesses and even governments can help bring tourists more reliable info, which ensures that they have enough knowledge to base their own travel decisions.

Munar and Jacobsen (2014) systematically reviewed the reliability and trustworthiness of Travel 2.0 applications (social media, travel blogs). The credibility of these apps is the essential phenomenon found out by this research, and it arises from various factors such as how credible their source is or even if they can compete with any other contest or experience that a person has gone through. According to this study, trust in such applications could also lead to satisfaction increase or decrease in tourists. Berhanu and Raj (2020) examine perceived credibility and trust in tourism information among migrant travelers. This study highlights that immigrant tourists place trust only in sources from which information on tourism is found to be credible (i.e., government websites and travel agents). His findings further predict that the moderating effects of review trustworthiness can vary depending on the characteristics of travelers, such as cultural background and travel experience.

The theory of planned behavior is one of the most influential psychological theories, which has been devised based on factors that determine how positively a person decides to perform certain behaviors and subsequently give rise to effective activity. The scale TPB was developed (Al-Suqri & Al-Kharusi, 2015) and is subsequently used in explaining diverse behaviors among other tourist behavior. The TPB is made up of three main ingredients. Attitude: This reflects whether the individual believes that behavior is good or bad. A social norm is how the person thinks other people think they are supposed to be doing. Perceived behavioral control is the belief of how easy or difficult it will be to perform the behavior. According to the framework of TPB, these three constituents directly lead to behavioral intentions. According to the TPB, intentions to engage in behavior are stronger when all three components of attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control are favorable. These intentions may or may not result in actual behavior; other factors, such as availability and resources, could come into play. The trust in tourism influencing tourist satisfaction via civilized tourism behavior intention may be explained by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). When people decide to behave in one way, this decision represents the first of a two-step process documented in social psychology theory called the Theory of Planned Conduct (TPB), where these intentions convert into actual behavior. Regarding the impact of trustworthiness tourism on tourist satisfaction, trustworthiness in this situation can be understood as an influential factor in the attitude supporting component within TPB.

Most of the available research studies have investigated tourists in Western cultures with emphasizing on civilized tourism behavior intentions as mediators between trustworthiness and its influences (Liu, Wang, Fang, & Zhang, 2019). Given the possibility that different cultural contexts have differing expectations and attitudes (Iqbal, Li, Yang, & Sindhu, 2022), it is therefore imperative to investigate how cultured tourist behavior intentions play a mediating role in them. These studies have been carried out on civilized tourism behavior intentions as a mediator factor in the relationship between tourist satisfaction and trustworthiness of tourism, but they mainly centered on popular spots. Researchers need to focus on the mediating role of civilized tourism behavior intentions across types of tourist destinations as this predictive power may differ depending on destination class. The work available in the literature shows that the mediating role of civilized tourism behavior intention on the impact of perceived trustworthiness tourist information to satisfaction has basically concentrated direct effect from perception towards trustworthiness tourist with meanwhile being little attention span over related indirect links. These are the research gaps about mediating effect of civilized tourism behavior on the impact of trustworthiness towards tourist satisfaction. In doing so, we can better understand the influence that tourism information reliability and visitor happiness through intentions for civilized travel behavior have over one another. Businesses and governments can draw on this knowledge to improve the trustworthiness of tourism and make tourists make informed decisions about where they are prepared to go (McCool, 2009). Apart from the gaps, more research is required to elaborate on the above relationship.

Explanation of Hypothesis

This study has four hypothesis developments. The credibility of travel information significantly affects the level of satisfaction among tourists. If tourists feel they have been told the truth about a place, you are more likely to make them happy with their trip. This is because they are more likely to feel confident in their choice regarding destination and activities. Marinao, Chasco, and Torres (2012) claimed that travelers are more likely to be more satisfied if they trust the information about the destination place. This is because they are more likely to feel secure knowing that they act morally and do not harm the destination or local norms, values, culture & population. Civilized tourism behavior means that the tourist agrees to treat both local people and sites responsibly. It is a complex issue that depends on different components, such as the personality of the tourist, his culture, and prior experiences in tourism, to mention only some discriminatory reasons. More studies argue that the intention to practice civil behaviors exerts a positive effect on tourist satisfaction. For example, tourists who behaved appropriately scored higher in satisfaction with their vacation (Qu et al., 2021). The community and ecology can be preserved with the help of considerate tourism. Travelers can help ensure that a location is sustainable and enjoyable for future generations by being aware of their impact on the environment. Civilized tourism conduct can forge positive ties between tourists and the local population. Tourists may make a place more hospitable and inclusive for everyone by showing respect for the native way of life. According to the proposed research model, the trustworthiness of tourism can directly affect tourist satisfaction. However, this influence can be mitigated by engaging in civilized tourism behavior intention. In other words, tourists are more likely to behave civilized and to be more satisfied on their vacations with the additional trustworthiness they perceive a tourist location to be.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Trustworthiness of Tourism and Tourist Satisfaction

The level of satisfaction with which travelers rate their trip experiences is known as tourist satisfaction. It is a subjective judgment and is affected by several things, including the standard of the accommodations, the level of service, and the overall experience. The happiness of visitors is crucial for a variety of reasons. First, it might influence travelers' choices regarding whether to return to a place or refer others to it. Second, as happy tourists are more likely to make larger purchases, it may have an impact on the economic benefits of tourism. Thirdly, it could damage a place's reputation since unsatisfied visitors might spread bad rumors. Two primary elements can affect tourist satisfaction. Firstly, these are the tangible elements of the travel experience, like the standard of the lodging, cuisine, and transportation. Secondly, these are the psychological elements of the tourism experience, such as the sensation of adventure, the feeling of being welcomed, and the general satisfaction with the trip.

The research by Lin et al. (2017) aimed to understand the impact of tourist satisfaction and service quality on Chinese visitors' behavioral intentions while touring Malaysia. Service quality was found to create visitor satisfaction, which in turn leads to a tendency to visit and use word-of-mouth, respectively. It helps sustainable economic growth and development of the specific sectors of the economy (Bhatt, 2024). To measure visitor satisfaction with a place, Kozak (2004) discussed three sets of measurements that are an expectation-disconfirmation paradigm, the overall satisfaction method, and the importance-performance analysis path. The study concluded that the expectations-disconfirmation paradigm would best assess visitor satisfaction. This study examined visitor enjoyment regarding the perception of place in the context of Malaysian cultural tourism, similar to Rasoolimanesh et al. (2019). The research found that destination image played a positive role in tourist satisfaction while tourists' expectations acted as an intervening variable. The study found that satisfaction influenced intention to return positively (Wang, Fong, & Law, 2016).

A study conducted by Zhang and Walsh (2021) found that destination dependability positively influences tourist satisfaction. The research has also identified destination trustworthiness as a mediating variable for tourist satisfaction. The reliability of tourism information positively affected visitor satisfaction, as found in the study by Xiang et al. (2017). The higher trust in the destination will positively impact loyalty, as De La Hoz-Correa and Muñoz-Leiva (2019) concluded that tourists find trustworthy as their tourist destination. The analysis also found that the effect of visitor satisfaction on visitor loyalty was moderated by reliability in tourism destinations. Therefore, hypothesis one is formulated.

H_1: Tourist satisfaction and tourism trustworthiness are positively correlated.

Trustworthiness of Tourism and Civilized Tourism Behavior Intention

Tourist “civilized tourism behavior intention” (CTBI) refers to the will of tourists, which is according to a certain value standard for the environment and local lifestyle as well as tourist culture or history. It is a very complex notion affected by variables such as traveler values, attitudes, and beliefs, which in turn are also intertwined with local social-cultural context. CTBI has great importance in many respects. Hence, the climate of tourist places can primarily be retained while conserving its ecology and local culture. For example, tourists willing to comply with environmental regulations and observe local customs will more likely not trample the fragile natural environment or offend locals. Second, CTBI can enhance everyone's vacation in general. Everyone is more likely to have a great and happy day when tourists respect one another and their surroundings. Finally, CTBI can support the development of a tourist destination's favorable reputation. People are more inclined to welcome visitors back to the area in the future and to recommend it to others if they observe them acting politely. A variety of actions can be taken to promote CTBI. Through educational efforts, visible signage, and other initiatives, tourist locations can encourage respectable tourist behavior.

Qu et al. (2021) national image has a positive impact on civilized tourism behavior, and psychological ownership mediates this relationship. According to a study by Su et al. (2022), Taiwanese tourists' perceived social responsibility, environmental knowledge, and destination image all had an impact on their CTBI. Tourism locations can encourage CTBI by creating educational campaigns, giving tourists clear instructions, and setting an example of appropriate behavior. Xu et al.'s (2023) study of CTBI has several repercussions for tourism stakeholders. First, tourism destinations can create and put into practice campaigns to encourage tourists to learn about CTBI. This could take many forms, such as information warfare, a poster, etc. Second, the tourist providers can play a role in promoting CTBI by informing visitors of what they expect from them and demonstrating this to their guests. Tourism can also enhance CTBI when tourists are careful with their activities and respect the environment or local life, as well as other travelers.

Trustworthiness was found to affect Taiwanese tourists' CTBI (Su et al., 2022). Similarly, a study by Xu et al. (2023) also found that the trustworthiness of tourism operators had an influence on CTBI regarding Chinese tourists. The higher the perceived trust by Taiwanese visitors in this element, the less CTBI will be (Su et al., 2022). The study showed people who believed the place was more stable were "more likely to demonstrate softer forms of travel behavior, such as by respecting local ecosystems and cultures." The study concluded that those who rated the operator as more reliable were also inclined to adopt refined travel habits such as giving way and adhering to instructions. Studies revealed that tourists' perceived trust in the tourist destination and tour operator acts as a full mediator between their CTBI by investigating (Xu et al., 2023). The research finds out that the reported satisfaction of tourists with the tour experience has an indirect impact on CTBI through perceived credibility towards the operator and place.

Trustworthiness of tourism may affect CTBI for a variety of reasons. First, travelers are more inclined to assume that travel vendors are dedicated to sustainable tourism practices if they trust them. Second, travelers who have faith in the services the tourism industry provides are more likely to feel at ease and respected, which can result in more polite behavior. Finally, tourists are more likely to be satisfied with their whole experience, which can also result in more polite behavior if they trust the tourism suppliers. For those involved in the tourism industry, the relationship between CTBI and the credibility of tourism has significant ramifications. By being dependable, honest, and open with their clients, tourism locations and business owners should work to earn the trust of travelers. Tourism destinations may gain the trust of visitors by giving them accurate and current information about the area, enforcing laws to safeguard them from fraud and exploitation, and resolving any conflicts that may arise between visitors and tourism suppliers promptly and equitably. By being truthful about their costs and services, keeping their word, and offering top-notch customer support, tourism providers may gain the trust of travelers. The majority of the studies point to a favorable association between CTBI and tourism trustworthiness. Tourists are more inclined to act in polite tourist behaviors if they believe that tourism providers are more reliable. Consequently, a second theory was created.

H_2: There is a positive correlation between the Trustworthiness of tourism and Civilized Tourism Behavior Intention.

Civilized Tourism Behavior Intention and Tourist Satisfaction

Tourist satisfaction and the intention to engage in civilized tourism behavior (CTBI) are positively correlated. Tourists are more likely to be pleased with their overall travel experience when they exhibit civilized tourist conduct. There are several factors at play in this relationship. First, polite tourist conduct can contribute to a more welcoming and enjoyable environment for all visitors. For instance, visitors who respect the area's ecology and culture are less likely to harm delicate ecosystems or enrage locals. Everyone engaged may have a more gratifying and good experience as a result. Second, polite tourist conduct can foster a stronger sense of kinship between visitors and the locals.

For instance, visitors who take the time to become familiar with the local way of life are more likely to experience a sense of respect and belonging. This may result in a more fulfilling and meaningful travel experience. Finally, polite tourist behavior can simply boost visitors' self-esteem. Tourists are more likely to feel good about their trip and their contribution to the place when they are aware that they are acting with respect and responsibility. This may also result in a more enjoyable travel encounter. For those involved in the tourism industry, the relationship between CTBI and visitor satisfaction has significant ramifications. Tourism sites and businesses should make an effort to promote polite tourist behavior. They can accomplish this by setting clear expectations for visitors and by setting an example of proper conduct for others. Tourism industry players may enhance tourists' overall pleasure and foster a more fulfilling and sustainable travel experience for everyone by promoting civilized tourism conduct.

Su et al. (2022) discovered a favorable correlation between Taiwanese visitors' CTBI and their level of satisfaction as travelers. According to the study, travelers with a higher CTBI were more likely to be pleased with their trip. Chinese visitors' CTBI was a major predictor of their satisfaction as tourists. Xu et al. (2023) state that even after adjusting for other variables like destination image and perceived service quality, the study indicated that travelers with a higher CTBI were more likely to be pleased with their travel experience. Wang et al. (2016) discovered that visitors' CTBI mediated the link between their perception of the tourism destination's authenticity and their level of contentment. The study discovered that travelers' CTBI had an impact on their pleasure both directly and indirectly by how real they regarded their destination to be. For those involved in the tourism industry, this link has several ramifications. Tourism sites and businesses should make an effort to promote polite tourist behavior. They can accomplish this by setting clear expectations for visitors and by setting an example of proper conduct for others. Tourism industry players may enhance tourists' overall pleasure and foster a more fulfilling and sustainable travel experience for everyone by promoting civilized tourism conduct. Most research indicates a positive correlation between CTBI and visitor satisfaction. When travelers behave properly, they have a higher chance of being satisfied with their trip as a whole. This led to the development of a third hypothesis.

H_3: Civilized Tourism Behavior Intention and Tourist Satisfaction are positively correlated.

Trustworthiness of Tourism, Civilized Tourism Behavior Intention, and Tourist Satisfaction

In various ways, CTBI can operate as a mediator between tourist satisfaction and the reliability of the tourism industry. First, travelers are more inclined to assume that travel vendors are dedicated to sustainable tourism practices if they trust them. Since they are aware that they are making a beneficial difference for the place, travelers may feel more satisfied with their overall travel experience. Second, travelers are more likely to feel at ease and respected when they trust travel vendors. Since visitors are more likely to have a good time, this can boost satisfaction with the tourism experience. Last but not least, even if there are a few minor issues or inconveniences, tourists who trust tourism providers are more likely to be pleased with the overall tourism experience. This is because visitors are aware that the tourism service providers are making every effort to give them a satisfying experience.

A variety of implications for tourism stakeholders result from CTBI's mediating role in the relationship between visitor satisfaction and the trustworthiness of tourism. By being dependable, honest, and open with their clients, tourism locations and business owners should work to earn the trust of travelers. They should also show that they are committed to eco-friendly tourist methods. For those involved in the tourism industry, this may have a lot of advantages, such as a rise in repeat business, good word of mouth, and a better reputation.

The association between Taiwanese tourists' tourist satisfaction and their CTBI was mediated by their perception of the dependability of the tourism destination (Su et al., 2022). According to the survey, travelers who thought the place was more reliable were more likely to be pleased with their travels and participate in CTBI. Chinese tourists' perceptions of the tourism operator's dependability acted as a mediating factor in the relationship between their pleasure as tourists and their CTBI (Wang et al., 2016). According to the survey, travelers who thought the operator was more reliable were more likely to be pleased with their travels and participate in CTBI. Xu et al. (2023) discovered that visitors' CTBI mediated the link between their perception of the tourism destination's authenticity and their level of contentment. According to the study, travelers who felt the destination was more authentic were more likely to participate in CTBI and to be pleased with their travel experience. Overall, the research points to CTBI as a potential mediator in the relationship between tourism's dependability and visitor pleasure. Visitors who trust travel vendors are more inclined to participate in CTBI, which can boost visitor satisfaction. As a result, a fourth hypothesis was created.

H_4: Civilized tourism behavior intention mediates the relationship between the trustworthiness of tourism and tourist satisfaction.

Conceptual Model

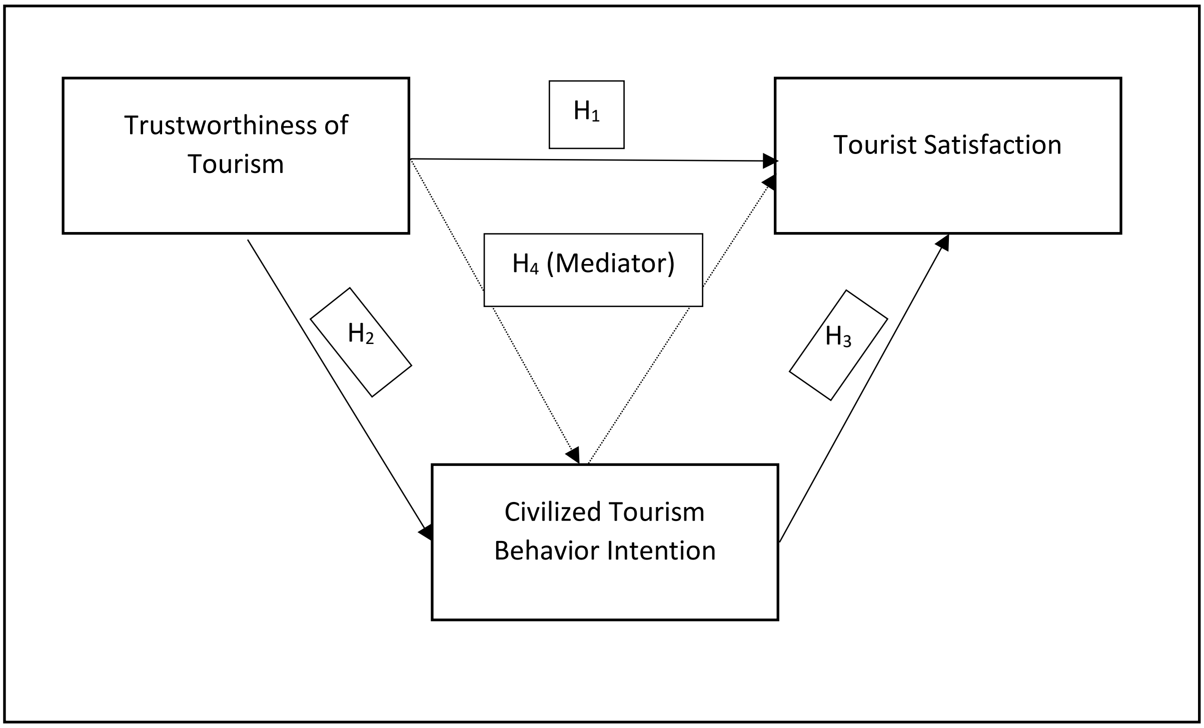

Figure 1. Conceptual Model. (Source: Own research)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology and Data Collection Tools

According to Kothari (2004), research methods are specialized processes or strategies used to locate, pick, process, and analyze data on a particular subject. We used quantitative methodologies to fulfill the dissertation's purpose, research questions, objectives, and hypotheses (Nenty, 2009). The main emphasis was on factors that impact tourist satisfaction, specifically how civilized tourism behavior intention impacts tourist satisfaction. We started with a carefully chosen population, study design, and sampling. Then, we concentrated on the tools utilized, validation techniques, experiments, and data gathering and analysis. As a result, general population objectives were guided by straightforward random sampling techniques, and each member of the population had an equal chance of being chosen for the sample. According to Olken & Rotem (1995), the rationale for simple random sampling is that it eliminates bias in the selection process and ought to result in representative. A closed-ended questionnaire was utilized to collect the data, with each question being presented in a logical sequence and formulated in an unambiguous, straightforward manner. This approach gave participants the chance to clear up any uncertainties of any sort and allowed us to describe the goal of the study in a way that would inspire participants and result in a high rate of questionnaire return (White & Frederiksen, 2005). However, a closed-ended questionnaire was used. The studies focused on registered star and star hotels, resorts, travel and tour agencies, and different registered tourism-related organizations employees from the Kaski district of Nepal, and we selected 150 hospitality and tourism sector-related employees as our sample for this study.

Although the sample size may appear tiny, less than 150 researches have examined the effects of group size and familiarity on visitor satisfaction. Perceived value acts as a mediator (Yen, 2013). The target sample consisted of all registered organizations operating in the Kaski district that offer various services linked to tourism as well as other tourist-related activities.

They were all chosen using basic random sample methods because the population was small and representative. On the other hand, managers, supervisors, owners, and line staff from the hospitality and tourism sector, sales and marketing section, event and promotion section, officers and managers from the front of the office of the hospitality and tourism sector of chosen organizations were the respondents taken using a purposive sample strategy. The selection criteria were based on their management and operational activities with tourists and the frequency of direct interaction with different levels of service present, which were essential for affecting the level of tourist satisfaction.

Data Collection Tools/Methods

This study's data collection strategy, a survey methodology, is frequently connected to deductive methods depending on the quantitative approach used (Rahi, 2017). A survey method gave us complete control over the research procedure. It enabled the production of survey results that were more reasonably priced and representative of the population of hospitality and tourism service provider organizations from the Kaski district in Nepal. According to Bryman (2006), structured interviews and questionnaires are the two primary data collection methods frequently used in survey procedures.

Therefore, the primary source of quantitative data for the current investigation was a self-administered questionnaire. The identical questions about every variable utilized in this investigation were included in each questionnaire. Furthermore, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to examine the data gathered through questionnaires. Both survey managers and respondents may quickly learn how to use the 5-point Likert scale. Higher-point scales require more effort and time to complete. Scales with more points fit screens of mobile devices better. With options, respondents don't feel swamped. Therefore, a 5-point Likert scale with the options strongly agree to strongly disagree was adopted in the current investigation (Finstad, 2010).

Table 1.

Respondents' Characteristics (Source: Own research)

Respondents' characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Men	108	72%
Women	42	28%
Total	150	100
Age group		
Under 25	32	21%
26-35	40	27%
36-45	45	30%
Over 45	33	22%
Total	150	100
Education		
Secondary or Basic	37	25%
Undergraduate	53	35%
Masters	60	40%
Total	150	100
Position		
Supervisor/ Worker	40	27%
Middle Manager	45	30%
Manager	55	37%
Owner/ CEO	10	6%
Total	150	100

The study included 200 participants in total, and 150 valid responses were collected. 42 female individuals comprised 28% of the study's overall number of participants, including 108 male participants, or 72% of the total. There were 150 participants in all, divided into different age groups for the study. In particular, 32 people (21%) were under the age of 25, 40 people (27%)

were between the ages of 26 and 35, 45 people (30%) were between the ages of 36 and 45, and 33 people (22%) were beyond the age of 45.

This study examined the distribution of career levels among four employment roles: manager, owner/CEO, and supervisor/worker. 40 people (27%) in the supervisor/worker position, 45 people (30%) in middle management, 55 people (37%) in the manager position, and 10 people (6%) in the owner/CEO position made up the sample. The participants' educational backgrounds ranged from basic/secondary (37), undergraduate (53), master's (60), and doctoral degree (0). These percentages were 25%, 35%, 40%, and 0%, respectively, according to the degrees. In Table 1, demographic variations and a variety of characteristics of the population are exposed.

Measurement Scale

All thirteen items were adapted from Ghandour & Bakalova (2014) and Coromina & Camprubí (2016) to assess the trustworthiness. For civilized tourism, behavioral intentions were evaluated with three items adapted from Miller, Merrilees, and Coghlan (2015), Qiu (2017), and Kiatkawsin and Han (2017). Tourist satisfaction was also measured using three items from previously validated studies (Jin, Lee, & Lee, 2015; Lee, Lee, & Choi, 2011)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) approach was the one that the researchers favored for data analysis (Jan, Junfeng, & Iqbal, 2023). According to Haenlein & Kaplan (2004), PLS-SEM is a better method than other conventional multivariate ones. Through the application of the bootstrapping procedure, PLS-SEM is a statistical technique that offers a reliable analysis (Bhatt, Ahmed, Iqbal, & Ullah, 2023). Researchers can use this technique to generate standard errors for route coefficients to assess the significance of their findings (Nitzl, Roldan, & Cepeda, 2016). The initial presumptions were examined, including multicollinearity, normality, and common method variance (Tabachnick, Fidell, & Ullman, 2007). Hair Jr, Babin, and Anderson (2010) used a two-step procedure that included measurement and structural models to analyze and explain the data acquired.

Measurement Model Assessment

To investigate the measurement model, it is crucial to evaluate each concept's reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Hair Jr et al., 2010; Iqbal, Li, & Jan, 2023). Since PLS-SEM has been widely embraced by academics across various academic and research fields, it was used for this study. This study is relevant since it used a novel approach to establish criteria for in-depth data analysis (Joseph F Hair et al., 2019). The researchers employed factor loading to evaluate the dependability of each item (Joe F Hair et al., 2012). Joseph F Hair et al. (2019) state that a minimum threshold of value is 0.700 or above, and a maximum threshold lower than 0.950 is necessary. Every outside loading in our investigation complies with the standards, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
Mean SD, CA, CR, and AVE (Source: own research)

Constructs	Mean	SD	CA	CR	AVE
Civilized Tourism Behavior Intention	3.098	0.897	0.732	0.849	0.652
Tourist Satisfaction	3.029	0.911	0.768	0.866	0.683
Trustworthiness of Tourism	3.369	0.882	0.935	0.944	0.565

SD, standard deviation; CA, Cronbach alpha; CR, composite reliability; AVE, average variance extracted.

Internal Consistency

Researchers frequently utilize Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability to evaluate an instrument's internal consistency. The measures often utilize a minimum threshold of 0.700, according to several studies (Bagozzi, Yi, & Phillips, 1991; Joe F Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011; Joseph F Hair et al., 2019; Hair Jr et al., 2021). The internal consistency and reliability of the structures, according to (Bagozzi et al., 1991), are displayed in Table 3. The variance inflated factor (VIF) is a statistical tool for determining the presence of method bias and collinearity effects. That is what Ringle, Wende, and Becker (2015) assert. It is frequently preferable to accept and consider a threshold of value five or less for the VIF, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3.
Factor loadings and variance inflated factor (Source: own research)

Construct	Item	Loading	VIF
Civilized Tourism Behavior Intention			
	CTBI1	0.796	1.414
	CTBI2	0.838	1.563
	CTBI3	0.787	1.410
Tourist Satisfaction			
	TS1	0.840	1.676
	TS2	0.831	1.416
	TS3	0.839	1.745
Trustworthiness of Tourism			
	TW1	0.715	3.555
	TW2	0.813	4.716
	TW3	0.740	3.546
	TW4	0.711	2.304
	TW5	0.722	2.061
	TW6	0.720	2.175
	TW7	0.707	3.067
	TW8	0.803	4.122
	TW9	0.789	5.199
	TW10	0.761	2.810
	TW11	0.788	2.984
	TW12	0.709	2.010
	TW13	0.780	3.184

According to Fornell & Larcker (1981), the average variance extracted (AVE) is utilized to assess the discriminant and convergent validity. Convergent validity is usually established using a minimum criterion of 0.500 or above (Chin, 1998). The findings of the convergent validity research are shown in Table 3. Every latent variable had average variance extracted (AVE) values higher than the chosen cutoff, as shown in Table 3. The square root of the average extracted variance (AVE) was found to be greater than the correlations among the latent components, as shown in Table 4. The current investigation demonstrates acceptable discriminant validity across all dimensions.

Table 4.
Discriminant validity (Source: own research)

Constructs	CTBI	TS	TW
Civilized Tourism Behavior Intention	0.807		
Tourist Satisfaction	0.770	0.827	
Trustworthiness of Tourism	0.828	0.822	0.752

Structural Model Assessment

The R^2 coefficient is a measure of a model's predictive power (Sarstedt et al., 2014). Chin (1998) categorized an R^2 value of 0.60 as vital, 0.33 as moderate, and 0.19 as weak and suggested certain factors for calculating the R^2 value. Table 5 displays the R^2 and Q^2 values for the TS and CTBI variables. The coefficient of determination (R^2) for the TS variable is 0.701, while that for the CTBI variable is 0.686. The Q^2 value for TS was calculated to be 0.471, while the Q^2 value for CTBI was calculated to be 0.441. The results of the F^2 tests for the TW construct (0.365) and CTBI (0.083) suggest that our study model is valid.

Table 5.
Predictive Relevance and Model Fit (Source: own research)

Constructs	Q^2	R^2	F^2
CTBI	0.441	0.686	0.083
TS	0.471	0.701	
TW			0.365

To determine the statistical significance of the hypothesis, the study used the bootstrapping approach, particularly 5,000 bootstrap samples (F. Hair Jr et al., 2014; Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). The data from Table 6 and Figure 2 provide empirical support for Hypothesis 1 (H_1), which postulates a significant and positive correlation between CTBI and TS (β= 0.282, t = 3.865, p = 0.000). As a result, hypothesis H_1 has been verified.

Table 6.
Structural model (Source: own research)

Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta	SE	t-Value	p-Value	Decision
H1	CTBI → TS	0.282	0.073	3.865	0.000	Supported
H2	TW → CTBI	0.828	0.020	41.083	0.000	Supported
H3	TW → TS	0.589	0.065	9.129	0.000	Supported
H4	TW→ CTBI → TS	0.233	0.060	3.881	0.000	Supported

The study's findings showed a statistically significant link between trustworthiness (TW) and civilized tourism behavior intention (CTBI) (β = 0.828, t = 41.083, p = 0.000), supporting Hypothesis 2. The correctness of hypothesis 3 is supported by the numbers t = 9.129, p = 0.000, and β = 0.589. The results of the study supported the idea that civilized tourism behavior intention (CTBI) acts as a mediator in the relationship between the trustworthiness of tourism (TW) and tourist satisfaction (TS). The results of the analysis produced a statistically significant result (β = 0.233, t = 3.881, p = 0.000), confirming the partial mediation theory put forth by Baron and Kenny (1986).

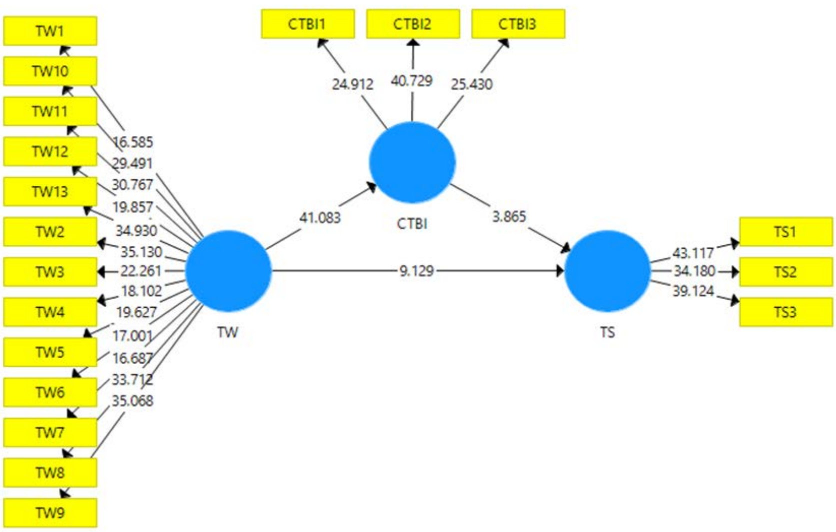

Figure 2. Hypothesis Results (Source: Own research)

DISCUSSION

The current study examined the relationship between the trustworthiness of tourism and tourist satisfaction as well as the mediation function of civilized tourism behavior intention. The results indicated a direct connection between the trustworthiness of tourism and tourist satisfaction. As per tested results, it helps increase tourist flow and revisit ratio of tourists who have already visited. It also helps the tourism sector to have positive marketing in the international market at zero cost. According to this study's findings, travelers are more likely to be happy with their vacation if they feel comfortable and secure and have faith that the tourism sector will give them a positive experience. The purpose of civilized tourism behavior and the reliability of tourism were also found to have a significant impact on tourist satisfaction. The results also demonstrated that the purpose of civilized tourists serves as a mediator in the relationship between trustworthiness and tourist satisfaction. The idea that tourist satisfaction is mediated by tourist trust is also supported by Su, Hsu, and Swanson (2017). This indicates that visitor satisfaction is significantly influenced by visitor trust. The results of this study were similar. Customer satisfaction in the hospitality business is influenced by trust and dedication.

The empirical results demonstrated that while trustworthiness will undoubtedly have a positive effect on visitor pleasure, it can be increased if the purpose of civilized tourism behavior is worn appropriately throughout the social culture and other processes. This implies that if we emphasize the purpose of civilized tourism behavior, every type of tourism trustworthiness also grows, and it helps maintain sustainable tourism with high visitor satisfaction. Visitors are more likely to be pleased with their vacation when they believe they can trust the tourism sector. Satisfied visitors are more inclined to suggest a place to others, revisit it, and spend more money. This may significantly benefit the local economy. Tourist trust has a beneficial influence on the purpose of civilized tourism behavior (Poon & Koay, 2021). Peng et al. (2023) state that the association between visitor happiness and the intention to engage in civilized tourism conduct is mediated by visitor trust and perceived fairness. The purpose of engaging in civilized tourism is a crucial element that can affect visitor satisfaction. Businesses and venues that cater to tourists with civilized intentions are more likely to draw in and keep happy visitors. This study highly values civilized tourism practices that aim to satisfy visitors and promote sustainable growth. Zhang and Walsh (2021) found that the relationship between tourist trust and perceived fairness is mediated by the purpose of civilized tourism behavior and visitor satisfaction. Peng et al. (2023) state that the intention to engage in civilized tourism behavior is a predictor of visitor satisfaction. An essential mediator in the relationship between the credibility of tourism and visitor satisfaction is the goal of civilized tourists. Businesses and travel destinations that aim to encourage civilized tourism behavior can give visitors a more reliable and enjoyable experience, enhancing visitor satisfaction and loyalty. The purpose of civilized tourist behavior is to modulate the link between tourist pleasure and perceptions of fairness and trust (Zhang & Walsh, 2021). Peng et al. (2023) also state that the purpose of civilized tourism behavior and visitor satisfaction serves as a mediator between visitor trust and perceived fairness.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE WORK

This study's goal was to examine the variables that affect visitor pleasure, including the importance of credibility and polite travel behavior. How the development of sustainable tourism and how it relates to Nepal's tourism industry. These findings suggest that preparing a development strategy for the tourism industry depends on several critical steps in sustainable tourism development. These processes include increasing public trustworthiness and civilized tourism behavior on tourism sites. The effectiveness of civilized tourism behavior strategies in Nepal significantly depends on how knowledgeable policymakers and service providers are in this area. What practices do they embrace, and what successful practices do they imply? The tourism industry must also actively participate in tourism-related workshops and training programs to identify, measure, monitor, and regulate various procedures and civilized tourist behavior activities, such as dealings, market requirements, frequency of uses, and operational support for policymakers. This is a great method to improve the financial outlook for the tourism industry. As a result, the study's findings support the notion that trustworthiness significantly impacts visitor satisfaction in areas where suitable mechanisms haven't been implemented to guide policy. It is still important to consider the market's importance, tourism development, greater way of marketing, and sustainable growth, particularly in light of the various tourism sectors with civilized tourism behavior processes and methodologies crucial for economic and sustainable growth. This is true even if the system driving the tourism sector is the most popular way is of correct communication and public civilized behavior. It is underlined that different countries' cultural systems vary and that the methods for establishing market value have flaws and constraints that appear in both typical and unfavorable situations. However, these processes continue to be essential tools in the process of embracing the overall growth of tourism and raising visitor contentment that the tourism industry employs, and their results assist behavior in boosting efficiency in the better outcome for higher visitor pleasure. The impact of tourism's dependability and the mediated role of civilized tourism behavior intention on visitor satisfaction in Nepal were the sole elements that were the focus of the survey in the current study. It is crucial to examine how the Nepalese tourism industry's personnel, policy-making bodies, backing from the government, coordination, reliability, and success in achieving high levels of tourist satisfaction all relate to each other. Only registered organizations in the Kaski district of Nepal were taken for this study. As a result, a later study may encompass more categories, such as other big cities, hotels with higher turnover rates, locations closer to airports and heritage sites, and organizations with a registered interest in tourism.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The process of organizing and directing the expansion and development of tourism at a tourist destination is known as tourism development. Numerous parties are involved, including local communities, governments, tourism companies, and travelers. To meet the requirements of the present without sacrificing the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs, tourist growth should be sustainable. This means that tourism's economic, social, and environmental effects should be considered while planning new tourist attractions. It helps the nation generate long-term money from a one-time investment and aids the local population in obtaining a location and a local product for simple market access in their neighborhood. Local communities should be involved in and profit from community-based tourism development. This can be achieved by ensuring that locals can profit financially from tourism and have a voice in the planning and growth of the industry. The negative effects of tourism on the environment and culture of the destination should be kept to a minimum as part of responsible tourist development. This can be achieved by implementing sustainable tourism methods, such as cutting back on energy use and waste creation and respecting native cultures and customs. By bringing in investment, generating tax money, and creating jobs, tourism growth may help the economy. It contributes significantly to the local area's growth without borrowing from the government budget. Tourism development can support social development by enhancing infrastructure, offering educational and cultural opportunities, and fostering community development. By encouraging sustainable tourism practices and increasing knowledge of the value of conservation, the tourism industry can help to safeguard the environment. With mutually beneficial economic development, environmental and ecological development also improves. This is because credibility can help the tourism industry attract more visitors, and civilized tourism practices can raise visitor pleasure, which promotes the sector's growth and development on all fronts – economically, monetarily, environmentally, and ecologically. However, to reap the greatest rewards, tourism organizations must make sure that their staff members who deal with tourists are adequately instructed on how to treat visitors who are dressed nicely. For instance, the workforce in the hotel and tourism industries can be taught improved behavior, positive traits, and civilized handling techniques to increase visitor pleasure. Additionally, they can learn how to interact with tourists effectively to improve sales, mentally prepare for longer stays, and take advantage of various tourism-related activities.

In conclusion, trustworthy behavior and civilized tourism behavior both have the potential to raise visitor pleasure considerably. The degree of civilized tourism conduct intention determines how trustworthiness affects visitor satisfaction. This could boost the number of tourists visiting more frequently and lengthen their stay. It encourages repeat visits from tourists and effective local and worldwide word-of-mouth advertising. Routinely politely interacting with new tourists helps employees develop their skills and knowledge, which also allows for greater use of marketing tactics.

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Discovering the magical rewards of embracing green practices in the realm of hospitality, with a focus on luxury hotels in Oman[1]

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to understand guests' perceptions of and satisfaction with green practices in luxury hotels. This study used a quantitative research approach and descriptive research design. A purposive sampling technique was adopted for this study, and data were collected through a survey of 153 participants. 79.7% stated that the purpose of their visits was leisure. Green practices include energy and water savings, eco-friendly services, and the recycling of materials. The study found a positive correlation between guest satisfaction, green products, service offerings, and guest content in green environments. However, no association was found between green prices, promotions, and customer satisfaction. Guests' perceptions of luxury hotels in Oman that adopted green practices gained a competitive advantage (4.515). Finally, the study found a positive correlation between luxury hotels' green practices and visitor satisfaction, indicating a significant impact of these practices on guest satisfaction.

KEYWORDS

Green practices, luxury hotels, customer satisfaction, sustainability, perception
JEL Codes: N55, Q01

[1] The ethics committee permission required to collect the data used in this study was obtained from the Oman Tourism College Research Committee on March 21, 2024.

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INTRODUCTION

Green practices significantly impact consumer satisfaction because the public is interested in green products or services and wants to live a green lifestyle (Tan et al., 2020). By the late 1980s and the early 1990s, green marketing gained glory and became in great demand when customers were alerted to the importance of the environment and their own safety (Amin et al., 2013). Punitha et al. (2016) stated that green practices are the process of offering eco-friendly products, applying the reduce, reuse, and recycling principle, reducing the emission of harmful gases into the atmosphere, and thus, adopting environmental practices. Mohamad et al. (2014) stated that customers expect the hotels to adopt green solutions, refraining from waste of food and energy, reducing emissions of toxic waste, and recycling wherever possible. However, Zengeni (2013) stated that in more developed or developing countries, many customers do not mind spending extra money to preserve the environment, but this is not the case in underdeveloped countries. Kathambi (2014) stated that green practices refer to utilizing a company's resources more efficiently and effectively. Besides, Yusof (2014) stated that green practices in the hotel industry are still in their early stages and that hotel management requires practical solutions for their development.

The need to offer more services to potential customers is increasing in an increasingly competitive environment. However, green practices can be innovative and offer competitive advantages (Yusof et al., 2017). By practicing this strategy, an organization may obtain the newest and most innovative products for its customers. Moreover, companies are going green by adopting eco-friendly tools and reaping maximum benefits in terms of customer satisfaction and loyalty (Kathambi, 2014). Kotler and Keller (2016) defined green marketing as the practice of promoting, producing, reclaiming, and packaging products in ways that are environmentally concerned and responsive to ecological interests. Furthermore, the global economy is growing rapidly, which makes hotel competition more important and intense (Djakasaputra et al., 2020). Everyone is in a race to gain maximum profits and customers, and the only choice for the hotel industry is to provide maximum benefits to customers (Yusof, 2014). Amin et al. (2013) stated that the application of green practices in the hotel industry is a significant tool practiced by several hotels, including offering durable and ecological products and services to their customers. However, the adoption of green techniques differs between luxury and middle-to-low-range hotels (Hsiao et al., 2018).

So far, only two studies in Oman have discussed sustainable or green hotel practices. The first study, conducted by Al Ghazali et al. in 2021, focused on sustainable practices in international chain hotels in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman. However, this study focused on hotels in Muscat, the capital city of Oman, and focused on only two luxury hotels with only 40 respondents. The second study conducted by Byrne and Abdul-Ghani in 2016 was on Gauging the Hospitality Industry's Awareness and Commitment to Sustainability Practices: The Case of the Hospitality Industry in Muscat. This study was also conducted in Muscat, and of the 12 surveys collected, three 5-star hotels, five 4-star hotels, three 3-star hotels, and one 2-star hotel responded to the survey. As a result, the present study, which is highly significant and closes the gap in the literature, focuses on luxury hotels throughout Oman, and the study addresses the following research objectives:

1. To determine guests' perceptions of the green practices adopted by luxury hotels in Oman.
2. To analyze the satisfaction of guests with the green practices adopted by luxury hotels in Oman.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hotels that show environmental responsibility are called environment-friendly or green hotels (Gerdt et al., 2019). Abdou et al. (2020) stated that balancing social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and economic prosperity is important to achieve sustainable development. Additionally, Gitobu & Nojoroge (2015) stated that to achieve sustainable development, the foremost purpose of which is to fulfill the needs of the present green hotel industry without compromising the needs of future generations, there is a considerable need to implement effective green practices to fulfill the demand of ultimate hotel industry users (Baker et al., 2014). Sustainability was used to understand the concept of limited growth. However, Nayak and Singh (2013) state that hotels that practice green initiatives will eventually increase their reputation, goodwill, and customer trust. When the majority of customers trust your hotel, they will select it for future use, and they will also promote it. Therefore, it can be said that sustainability brings such customers who have the ability to increase sales volume by promoting the hotel in their social or personal cycle.

Sivesan et al. (2013) stated that the worldwide climatic changes are drastic, such as rising sea levels, melting of the poles, and extreme weather. These issues have made the public much more aware of and sensitive to greener solutions. This allows hotel management to adopt green solutions to earn customer loyalty (Yusof et al., 2017). Gitobu & Nojoroge (2015) also identified another reason for adopting green practices, which is to be at the top of the list in a competitive environment, as competition among hotels has reached its peak, and every hotel is in the race to obtain maximum market share. Chang et al. (2024) discovered strong links between consumers' revisit intentions and eco-friendly hotel services, green procedures, and ecological awareness. Further, Wang et al.'s (2024) study discovered a positive association between sustainable hotel procedures and consumer citizenship behavior, implying that green hotel practices work as an external stimulant that impacts citizenship activity. Additionally, Wong and Lai (2024) discovered that guests are reasonably aware of standard green practices in hotels; they further stated that explicit green messages in hotels have a greater impact than subtle green messages, especially in minimizing hotel shower time and overall water usage.

Baker et al. (2014) and Al Ghazali et al. (2021) stated that it is important to present sustainable products to satisfy the needs and wants of customers in the hotel industry. Hotels may adopt green strategies in various other ways. According to Yusof (2014), hotels must partner with environmentally relevant organizations. For example, many hotels in the United States of America associate themselves with environmentally concerned organizations, such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the United States Green Building Council. These measures were adopted because of the pressure the hotel industry faces from its customers, business partners, environmentally concerned organizations, and global climatic conditions (Hsiao et al., 2018).

Mohamad et al. (2014) mentioned that green hotels and resorts are significant sources of a clean environment, as pollution levels have increased to a dangerous level nowadays. Therefore, there is a need to develop hotels or resorts that can provide a peaceful and healthy environment. Moreover, Zengeni (2013) stated that the area of focus for green hotels and resort management is to train staff to provide their best greening services to customers so that more customers can be attracted to green hotels. This information is beneficial, especially for managers or marketers who aim to establish a green hotel industry in the near future because the treatment or dealing in green hotels differs from other ordinary hotel industries. Moreover, Gitobu and Nojoroge (2015) stated that green hotels must offer suitable prices by considering product characteristics. However, Zengeni (2013) stated that green practices are complex and should include recycling methods. This method includes water conversion from polluted particles to clean water, as is the air pollution cleaning process.

Green Hotel Industry Practices

The hotel industry is one of the many industries that face criticism for being a source of environmental degradation because of its massive power requirement, water usage, heating system, large amount of laundry, high waste output, and non-eco-friendly products being used by housekeeping (Nayak & Singh, 2013). This preceding image of the hotel industry compelled the management to change their ways and become 'green.' Gitobu and Nojoroge (2015) stated that several factors determine hotels' need to adopt green practices. One such factor is the needs and expectations of the customer. To fulfill this need, hotels must provide the green products and services that are in demand, and they also need to provide additional information so that users can easily access the hotel's services (Noor et al., 2014). Moreover, Aljarah (2020) stated that one of the main reasons hotels adopt green practices is competitive pressure and the country's innovation level. Hotels should adopt green practices in the marketplace if competition among rivals is high. Otherwise, it would be difficult for them to survive. Another reason hotels adopt green practices is the fulfillment of corporate social responsibility. It is not a legal obligation of the hotel industry to fulfill its corporate social responsibility, but if a hotel does, it enjoys a massive ratio of customer attention (Aljarah, 2020). As far as green practices and techniques are concerned, the adoption of corporate social responsibility is a significant step forward as it spreads awareness in the general public regarding sustainable development, and with the ever-increasing environmental problems, this is a major achievement for this industry as a whole (Amin et al., 2013).

In addition, Gao and Mattila (2014) argued that the application of green marketing enables hotels to compete in a competitive setting as it provides an extra benefit to the hotel that is applying green marketing to its green customers. It also significantly impacts sustainability because green marketing has made hotel services more efficient and, to date, according to customer needs (Yusof, 2014). According to Sivesan et al. (2013), hotels must exercise methods that will have a reduced impact on the environment, such as the use of renewable energy sources, saving natural resources (especially water), controlling carbon emissions, limiting the use of synthetic materials, increasing the use of organic and biodegradable materials, energy-efficient systems, and recycling where possible. Additionally, Punitha et al. (2016) specified that hotels can implement green practices without much difficulty, for example, replacing conventional fluorescent or incandescent lights with energy savers such as LED lamps, placing recycle bins in hotel rooms and lobby areas, switching power sources from non-renewable to renewable sources, such as solar or hydro, prohibiting waste of resources, especially water, watering lush green lawns with reused water instead of freshwater that can be utilized for drinking and other purposes, and reducing food waste (Al Ghazali et al., 2021). Not all these procedures can be implemented simultaneously; however, hotel management must see which procedures are most vital and which are easy to implement, what can be done right away, and what we can include in a long-term plan (Han & Chan, 2013).

Gheorghe et al. (2023) state that promoting the understanding and awareness of green practices is another measure that hotel management may take to remind individuals, both workers and guests, of their responsibility to make the hotel more ecologically friendly. Punitha et al. (2016) stated that the young generation, especially in developing countries, is very concerned about environmental degradation as they are concerned about their future and future generations, and many such customers are aware of green hotel certification; hence, hotel management must strive to meet certification requirements. Hotels should focus on environmental architecture using sustainable materials and green roofs and aim to obtain green certifications for the hotel, including Green Globe, ISO 14000, and EcoTEL (Verma & Chandra, 2016). According to Sugianto and Kurniawan (2017), green hotels should offer green products and services, including environmental living spaces, such as green architecture, non-smoking floors, plant décor, and green meals, including organic and safe raw ingredients. Furthermore, Faust (2018) claims that green hotels should serve organic meals and, whenever possible, locally acquire food. Times News Service (2024) stated that Alila Jabal Akhdar, a luxury hotel in Oman, started its first hydroponic farm and set a new standard for regional sustainability. Hydroponics, a soilless approach that uses nutrient-rich water, enables the cultivation of organic vegetables and fruits rapidly throughout the year. The harvest includes peppers, cucumbers, leafy greens, tomato varieties, peppers, zucchini, strawberries, and blueberries.

Perceptions of Guests in the Adoption of Green Practices by Hotels

With changes in consumer perceptions, an increasing number of hotels are adopting green practices for hotel management (Verma & Chandra, 2016). According to Sivesan et al. (2013), a satisfied customer leads a hotel beyond its success level and develops loyalty towards that hotel. A loyal customer will never switch companies; instead, they will take more customers to that location. Hotels are adopting greener practices to attract loyal customers. Similarly, Punitha and Rasdi (2013) found that green practices are the biggest reason for customer loyalty, and a loyal customer is a significant asset in the hotel industry because the need to visit hotels can never end; therefore, there is a huge need to retain customer loyalty. According to Verma and Chandra (2016), other features that influence customer perceptions of green hotels include the atmosphere of the hotel, the location of the hotel, its accessibility, eco-friendly products and services they offer to customers, and the standards of their food and other items. However, Damigos (2023) stated that the most important aspect is the hotel's pricing strategy because guests who pay high prices to fulfill their needs expect more from the hotel to provide them with maximum offers and facilities to value their money. Moreover, according to Noor et al. (2014), green hotels utilize natural resources to provide sufficient and adequate facilities to their end users at minimum prices; this strategy attracts more customers to green hotels. Furthermore, Punitha and Rasdi (2013) have mentioned the impact of environmental factors that can also be seen in customers' moods and behavior. If a hotel provides a pleasant atmosphere to its customers, it will be the most attractive tool for gaining maximum customer attention because human nature is highly attached to beautiful surroundings and clean environments. Additionally, Gerdt et al. (2014) reasoned that hotels with some natural sites and locations around them, such as parks, cultural sites, and lakes, are getting more customer visits and eventually earning excessive revenue.

According to Gerdt et al. (2019), hotels that switch to eco-friendly practices gain a two-fold benefit: first, a reduction in costs (energy, water, and other resources), and second, protection of the environment, which results in better corporate image, satisfaction of green customers, and attraction of new eco-friendly customers. These practices help hotels pass through trade barriers and explore business in a novel market (Aljarah, 2020). According to Han and Chan (2013), 83% of English and 40% of American holidaymakers and travelers prefer green hotels over non-green hotels, and 67% of tourists from Kenya do not mind paying extra to obtain eco-friendly services in green hotels. Similar attitudes were observed in Greece and France. However, this eco-friendly inclination is not uniform; this figure is reduced to only 15% when studying consumer behavior in India. The remaining 85% believed that the hotel should bear the costs of eco-friendly practices. Despite these contradictory data, it is generally observed that a large percentage of consumers appreciate substantial development practices by hotel management. However, the willingness to pay extra or compromise on the quality of service or luxury is not appreciated throughout (Damigos, 2023).

Satisfaction of Guests with the Green Practices Adopted by Luxury Hotels

Customer satisfaction is one of the most important concerns in any business. What products or services do customers choose or prefer? This question is of great significance to people in any field related to customer service (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Lee et al. (2018) stated that customer satisfaction can be achieved only by improving the quality of service; good product quality ensures customer satisfaction, and there is no alternative to customer satisfaction than fulfilling customer requirements. With the growing tide of environmentalism and increasingly severe international legislation on implementing sustainable practices, it is beneficial for the hotel business to implement green initiatives (Ndhlovu et al., 2024). This will not only satisfy the environmental needs of the present and cater to the needs of the future, but it will also give the hotel a green image, and as a result, it will earn the loyalty of its 'green customers' (Verma & Chanra, 2016). Pereira et al.'s (2021) study found that customers prefer to stay in hotels that implement green procedures, such as reducing energy and water use, purchasing environmentally friendly items, reducing hazardous products, and recycling rubbish, all of which have a direct influence on customers revisit intentions.

According to Anser et al. (2020), customers view a hotel's use of clean, renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, biomass, and hydroelectric as an "added value" feature that raises their degree of satisfaction. In addition, Chen et al. (2015) indicated that certain hotel environmental activities, such as recycling initiatives, soap and shampoo dispensers, and the use of low-energy light bulbs, have a direct and beneficial impact on guest satisfaction and the likelihood of returning. Similarly, Han and Chan (2013) stated that hotel recycling initiatives are expected to gratify guests and instill a sense of responsibility. Similarly, Berezan et al. (2013)

reported that hotel recycling strategies produce the highest levels of customer satisfaction. Reuse rules for linens and towels have been found to have a more significant impact on customer satisfaction than simple green measures (Mohd Suki, 2017; Al Ghazali et al., 2021). On the other hand, Anser et al. (2020) contend that the influence of hotel "green" activities on visitor happiness depends on guests' awareness and understanding. For instance, if visitors view the reuse of towels and blankets as a 'basic' feature of eco-friendly hotels, they anticipate it, and their experience will suffer if they are not provided. Other actions, such as buying organic and locally produced goods, only serve to increase visitor satisfaction (Berezan et al., 2013). Additionally, hotels that pay special attention to environmentally friendly products and service characteristics boost the level of guest satisfaction (Chen et al., 2015), yet service quality is an essential component for attaining visitor satisfaction (Lee et al., 2018). Furthermore, De Brito (2017) stated that the Six Senses Zighy Bay, a luxury hotel in Oman, increased guests' satisfaction to a new level after it had extended its field to organic produce. Goats, laying chickens, and milking cows are now at the resort. Guests can learn about growing herbs, gathering eggs, milking goats and cows, and preparing meals with fresh products on the farm.

Chang et al. (2024) found a favorable association between hotel visitor satisfaction and revisit intention, as well as readiness to pay a higher price. Similarly, Mohd Suki (2017) stated that green hotels have a friendly environment for their customers, which attracts more customers and provides a peaceful and relaxing atmosphere, which is the biggest reason customers are more loyal to hotels adopting green practices. Furthermore, Nayak and Singh (2013) argued that several factors are involved in customer satisfaction, such as the service quality of hotel staff, green rooms, and food quality provided to customers. However, Lee et al. (2018) stated that although green practices add value to hotel services, their service quality is the primary factor in satisfying customers, specifically in the hotel industry. Conversely, Baker et al. (2014) claimed that visitors behaved differently when staying at a hotel than when they were at home when it came to adopting eco-friendly practices because they thought that the primary reason for visiting a hotel was to enjoy comfort and luxury rather than to contribute to eco-friendly initiatives. Moreover, a happy customer brings more customers; therefore, there is a philosophy that hotels should focus on pleasing their customers instead of generating profits because satisfied customers will automatically increase the revenues of their hotel (Chang et al., 2024).

Research Hypothesis

H_1: There is no significant association exists between green products and guest satisfaction.
H_2: There is no significant association exists between green pricing and guest satisfaction.
H_3: There is no significant association between green locations (places) and guest satisfaction.
H_4: There is no significant association between green promotion and guest satisfaction.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative methodology. According to Bryman and Bell (2015), a quantitative research approach involves gathering and evaluating numerical data using various techniques, including surveys and questionnaires. This study's research aims prompted the decision to adopt a quantitative methodology, which helped present the findings in various ways and generalize them to a more extensive range of target populations (Cresswell, 2014). According to Saunders et al. (2015), the research design is descriptive and is characterized as a research approach that explains the traits of subgroups in the target population or the phenomenon under study. Additionally, according to De Vaus (2014), this methodology emphasizes the study's subject rather than why. In other words, it defines the characteristics of a population group without concentrating on the reason for a specific occurrence. Furthermore, Cresswell (2014) pointed out that descriptive research is well-liked because it measures multiple variables while only requiring the assessment of one. Descriptive research is, therefore, suitable for this study because it adds to the analysis and assessment of technology's potential for maximizing events in Oman and its advantages from the viewpoint of participants.

This study focused on guests aged 21 and above who stayed in five-star hotels, including Omani residents and foreigners. Non-probability sampling, which chooses participants among the population in a subjective (i.e., non-random) way, is a quick, simple, and cost-effective method of data collection since it does not require a whole survey framework, claim Saunders et al. (2015). Purposive sampling was used in this study. Using a method called purposeful sampling, the investigator chose study participants of their own choice, according to Creswell and Clark (2018). This is a specific type of non-probability sample, also referred to as a judgmental or professional one. Purposeful sampling refers to selecting a sample that represents the entire population. Purposeful sampling involves selecting a smaller, typically nonrandomly chosen population fraction. This can be achieved by selecting a sample representing the variance in the background of the population (Bryman & Bell, 2015). A questionnaire survey was used to obtain primary data for this study. According to Creswell and Clark (2018), using a questionnaire to collect data is inexpensive, straightforward, and simple. Furthermore, surveys are more dependable, and all data are up-to-date and real-time (De Vaus, 2014). Relying on prior research projects can aid in tracking the information gleaned from secondary data more precisely. Moise et al.'s (2018) questionnaire was used in this investigation and slightly adjusted to meet the needs of the current study. Six upscale hotels from different parts of Oman with five-star ratings were the target of the investigation. Data were gathered in 2024 between March and April. In total, 164 participants were included in this study. Eleven questionnaires were excluded because they were incomplete. In total, 153 responses were included in the analysis.

This quantitative study analyzed the acquired data using appropriate descriptive statistics, including Pearson's r, frequency range, percentage, rank, and weighted mean. More specifically, frequency distribution is a statistical technique used to determine the distribution of responses and the degree to which they match a particular profile, which could contain characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, or event data. The proportions were used to determine the percentage of respondents who fit a particular profile. The weighted mean was employed to determine how visitors felt about upscale hotels in Oman using eco-friendly measures. The association between the hotel's green policies and visitor satisfaction was ascertained using the inferential statistical tool, Spearman's r.

RESULTS

The respondents' demographic profiles are presented in Table 1, with 38.6% women and 61.4% men. The age group of 36–45 years old accounted for 30.7% of the total number of respondents; the next largest age group was 46–55 years old (25.5%), with 24.8 people falling into the 56+ age group. However, the 20–25 age group accounted for only 8.5%, and the remaining 10.5% were from the 26-35 age group. Regarding employment, 69.3% of respondents reported being employed, 16.3% reported being self-employed, 3.94% reported being unemployed, and the remaining 10.5% were retired. In addition to the types of visitors, 42.5 percent of participants were Omani citizens. Foreign tourists (38.6%) and residents (18.9%) also responded. Additionally, 79.7% of guests at luxury hotels stayed for pleasure- and leisure-related reasons. In comparison, 15.7% came for business purposes, and only 4.6% stayed for other purposes, including meeting friends and family and attending weddings.

Table 1.
Demographic Profile of the Hotel Guests

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Entire group	153	100
Gender		
Male	94	61.4
Female	59	38.6
Age		
20-25	13	8.5
26-35	16	10.5
36-45	47	30.7
46-55	39	25.5
56 and above	38	24.8
Employment		
Self-employed	25	16.3
Employed	106	69.3
Retired	16	10.5
Unemployed	6	3.9
Type of Guest		
Omani	65	42.5
Expatriate / Resident in Oman	29	18.9
Inbound Tourist	59	38.6
Purpose of Staying		
Business	24	15.7
Vacation: Leisure / Pleasure	122	79.7
Other, please specify	7	4.6

Table 2 lists visitors' perceptions of green practices adopted by luxury hotels in Oman. The competitive advantage had the highest mean score (4.515). This indicates that guests believe hotels implementing green initiatives have a competitive edge over rival establishments. Brand image (4.468), guest satisfaction (4.419), and environmental conservation (4.307) had the second, third, and fourth-highest mean values, respectively. This suggests that green hotel practices improve brand image, enhance guest satisfaction, and improve environmental conservation, thus, the hotel's reputation. Additionally, long-term business viability (4.253), government mandates (4.162), and guest loyalty (4.149) are ranked fifth, sixth, and seventh, respectively. On the other hand, the lowest mean scores noted for guests' perceptions of adopting green practices by luxury hotels in Oman were for cost savings and reductions (3.821), climate mitigation (3.753), and consumer demand (3.592). This implies that implementing green hotel approaches in practice can improve climate change mitigation, result in cost savings and reductions, and meet consumer demand.

Table 2.
Guests' Perceptions of Adopting Green Practices at Luxury Hotels in Oman

Guests' perception	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Competitive advantage	4.515	0.921	1
Brand image	4.468	0.854	2
Guest satisfaction	4.419	0.751	3
Environmental conservation	4.307	0.934	4
Long-term business viability	4.253	0.898	5
Government requirement	4.162	0.800	7
Guest loyalty	4.149	0.688	7
Higher Revenue	4.076	0.792	8
Corporate Social Responsibility	4.013	0.862	9
Cost savings and reductions	3.821	0.965	10
Climate mitigation	3.753	0.707	11
Consumer demand	3.592	0.639	12

The three terms guests think when considering green hotels are shown in Figure 1. 'Energy and water savings, eco-friendly services and facilities, and recycling materials' were the top three terms, scoring a perfect 100%. Automatic turn-off appliances ranked fourth (80%), eco-cleaning and biodegradable toiletries fifth (78%), responsible waste disposal sites (75%), and locally sourced food seventh (70%). Additional terms chosen by the participants included limited use of plastic (60%), environmental awareness (58%), efficient operation (54%), social awareness (49%), organic food (33%), and natural setting (30%). The two terms with the lowest percentages were cleanliness (25%) and aesthetics (26%).

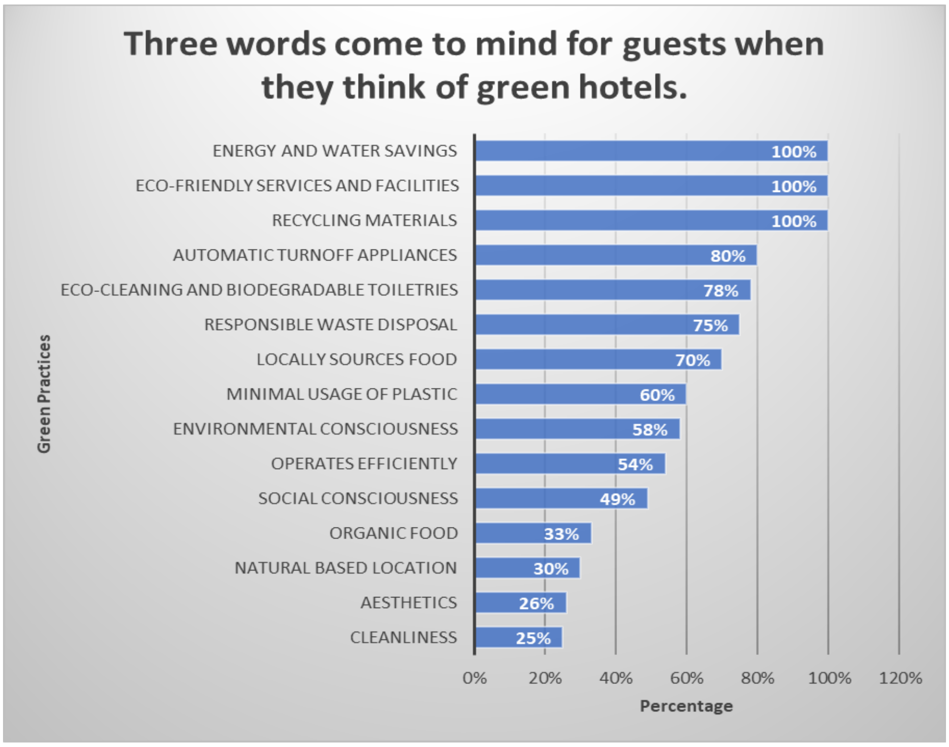

Figure 1. Three Words Come to Mind for Guests When They Think of Green Hotels

Table 3 shows the guests' satisfaction with the green practices luxury hotels in Oman, and the highest mean score noted is for 'the hotel uses energy-saving equipment and solar lights, as well as sensors and smart thermostats, to heat and cool rooms (4.598).' This suggests that hotels use energy-saving equipment, solar lighting, sensors, and smart thermostats to heat and cool rooms and that guests are pleased with it. The second, third, and fourth highest mean scores recorded were: 'the hotel serves locally grown food, organic products, and other freshly prepared food, 4.405'; 'the hotel uses bulk soap and shampoo dispensers instead of single-use ones, 4.368'; 'the hotel's architecture is compatible with the natural environment, and it allows a lot of fresh air and natural light, 4.307'. This suggests that guests are pleased with the hotel's provision of freshly prepared meals, organic and locally grown food, and bulk soap and shampoo dispensers rather than single-use ones. In addition, they are pleased with the hotel's architecture, which blends well with their surroundings and allows for abundant natural light and fresh air.

On the other hand, the lowest mean score was noted for guests' satisfaction with green practice luxury hotels in Oman: 'the hotel educates guests about the ecological diversity around the hotel, 2.668'. This suggests that many visitors believe that the hotel does not focus on informing visitors about the ecological richness of the area. The lowest mean score was noted for 'the hotel put shades on the outside of the windows to keep the glass from heating up, 2.712'. This indicates that to prevent the glass from heating in the summer and cooling in the winter, hotels typically do not install coverings on the exterior of their windows. This is necessary because it can reduce the amount of electricity used. Additionally, the other lowest-rated mean scores include 'the hotel recycles its water and repurposes it, 2.826' and 'the hotel makes efforts to protect and promote cultural, historical, and natural resources around the hotel, 2.871'. This indicates that the hotel recycles and repurposes its water and employs specific procedures to safeguard and enhance cultural, historical, and natural resources in its vicinity.

Table 3.
Guest satisfaction with green practices adopted by luxury hotels in Oman.

Guests' satisfaction with hotel's green practices	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
The hotel uses energy-saving equipment, solar lights, sensors, and smart thermostats to heat and cool the rooms.	**4.598**	**0.853**	**1**
The hotel serves locally grown foods, organic products, and other freshly prepared foods.	4.405	0.767	2
The hotel uses bulk soap and shampoo dispensers, instead of single-use dispensers.	4.368	0.681	3
The hotel's architecture is compatible with the natural environment and allows for a large amount of fresh air and natural light.	4.307	0.924	4
The hotel uses water-saving showers, facets, and flush tanks.	4.257	0.751	5
The hotel uses digital platforms for communication, promotion, and feedback, thereby avoiding wastage of paper and saving the environment.	4.211	0.688	6
The hotel uses glass dinnerware and, steel cutlery and biodegradable disposables.	4.154	0.854	7
The hotel has a towel and linen reuse program in place.	3.956	0.692	8
Hotels encourage the use of reusable bags, and offer cloth bags.	3.878	0.898	9
The hotel has a green landscape design, and grows its own vegetables and leaves for use.	3.815	0.922	10
Hotels use more environmentally friendly transportation such as battery buggies, biodiesel car rentals, and eco-buses.	3.753	0.862	11
The hotel has an environmental recycling program and recycling bins are placed in many places.	3.607	0.726	12
The hotel avoids bottled water and encourages guests to fill bottles.	3.492	0.672	13
The hotel makes efforts to protect and promote cultural, historical, and natural resources around the hotel.	2.871	0.885	14
The hotel recycles and reuses water.	2.826	0.630	15
The hotel shades the outside of the windows to prevent the glass from heating.	2.712	0.733	16
The hotel educates guests about its ecological diversity around the hotel.	2.668	0.664	17

Table 4 shows that the chi-square was significant (sig. value was $0.021 < 0.05$), thus rejecting the null hypothesis. This finding indicates a conclusive link between guest satisfaction and green products and service use. This implies that guest satisfaction is related to luxury hotels' environmentally friendly goods and services.

Table 4.
Chi-square: H_1: No relationship between green products and guests' satisfaction

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.186	16	.021

Table 5 shows that the chi-square test was insignificant (sig. value is 0.217 > 0.05). Therefore, there was no evidence to reject the null hypothesis. This means there was no significant association between green prices and guest satisfaction. This suggests that guest satisfaction is not dependent on the hotel's green price.

Table 5.
Chi-square: H_2: No relationship between green price and guests' satisfaction

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	14.733	20	.271

Table 6 shows that the chi-square test was significant (sig. value was 0.030 < 0.05), rejecting the null hypothesis. This means there was a significant association between green places and guest satisfaction. This indicates that guest satisfaction depends on the green place, which is the hotel itself.

Table 6.
Chi-square: H_3: No relationship between green places and guests' satisfaction

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	20.217	20	.030

Table 7 shows that the chi-square test was insignificant (sig. value was 0.173 > 0.05); therefore, there was no evidence to reject the null hypothesis. This means that there was no significant association between green promotion and guest satisfaction, implying that guest satisfaction is not dependent on green promotions.

Table 7.
Chi-square: H_4: No relationship between green promotion and guests' satisfaction

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.570	16	.173

The results in Table 8 demonstrate a strong and positive correlation between luxury hotels' green practices and visitors' satisfaction levels. The obtained p-value of 0.000 <0.05 and Spearman's coefficient of 0.615 demonstrated this. These findings suggest that luxury hotels' green practices significantly affect guests' satisfaction.

Table 8.
Relationship between hotel green practices and satisfaction among hotel guests

Variables		Hotels' Green Practices	Guest Satisfaction
Green Practices	Spearman's Correlation	1	.615*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	153	153
Guest Satisfaction	Spearman's Correlation	.615 *	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
		153	153

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

After presenting the study's main findings, the subsequent chapter will examine the findings with those determined by the literature review. These findings are discussed along with their significance for further research.

DISCUSSION

Objective One: To determine the perceptions of guests towards adopting green practices by luxury hotels in Oman.

Table 2 presents guests' perceptions of the green initiatives adopted by luxury hotels in Oman. The highest mean score for competitive advantage is attributed to this activity. These findings align with those of Yusof et al. (2017), who found that adopting green techniques could be inventive and provide a competitive edge. In addition, a competitive climate is a factor in adopting green practices, as noted by Gitobu and Nojoroge (2015), as hotel competition has peaked and all hotels are vying for the largest market share. Furthermore, Gao and Mattila (2014) contended that using green marketing by hotels allows them to compete in the market because it gives a specific hotel, using green marketing, an advantage over its environmentally conscious clientele. Table 2 shows that green hotel practices can lead to environmental conservation. According to Figure 1, there are three phrases that respondents ranked highest in what comes to mind when they think of green hotels: energy and water savings, eco-friendly services and amenities, and recycling materials. These findings were consistent with those reported by Chang et al. (2024), Punitha et al. (2016), Yusof (2014), Mohamad et al. (2014), Sivesan et al. (2013), Pereira et al. (2021), and Gerdt et al. (2019) stated that green initiatives practiced by hotels can contribute to environmental conservation, ecological balance, and resource sustainability for future generations. The second-highest mean score was noted for guests’ perceptions of adopting green practices in luxury hotels in Oman: Guest loyalty. These findings are consistent with those of Kathambi (2014) and, Yusof et al. (2017), Sivesan et al. (2013), Punitha and Rasdi (2013), and Verma and Chanra (2016). According to the authors, guests are particularly pleased with and loyal to hotels that embrace green practices.

Objective two: To analyze the satisfaction of guests with the green practices adopted by luxury hotels in Oman.

Based on Table 3, guests’ satisfaction with the hotel's services includes serving locally grown food, organic products, and other freshly prepared foods (4.405). These findings correspond to those of Sugianto and Kurniawan (2017), De Brito (2017), Al Ghazali et al. (2021). and Faust (2018), who indicated that green meals include organic and safe raw ingredients and, whenever possible, locally obtained food. Another result for guest satisfaction is that the hotel’s architecture is compatible with the natural environment and allows a lot of fresh air and natural light (4.307). These findings match those of Sugianto and Kurniawan (2017) and Verma and Chandra (2016), who stated that green hotel architecture is important as it minimizes environmental impact and promotes natural living. The findings in Table 4 demonstrate a conclusive link between guest satisfaction and the use of green products. This implies that guest satisfaction is related to the environmentally friendly goods and services offered at luxury hotels. The findings in Table 6 show a significant association between green places and guest satisfaction. This means that guest satisfaction depends on the green place, which is the hotel itself. These findings were consistent with those reported by Wang et al.'s (2024), Tan et al. (2020), Punitha et al. (2016), Hsiao et al. (2018), Baker et al. (2014), Gitobu and Nojoroge (2015), Al Ghazali et al. (2021), and Chen et al. (2015) stated that green initiatives could boost a hotel's image and reputation, and the commitment they make to sustainable products and services positively ties with customers. This can lead to improved consumer loyalty, trust, and favorable word-of-mouth. Furthermore, the results shown in Table 8 demonstrate a strong and positive correlation between luxury hotels' green practices and their visitors' level of satisfaction, suggesting that luxury hotels' use of green practices significantly impacts guest satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

The majority of respondents wanted to stay at luxury hotels for leisure or pleasure. Guests' perceptions of adopting green practices at luxury hotels in Oman. The study concluded that hotels adopting green practices can gain a competitive advantage, improve their brand image, improve guest satisfaction, and conserve the environment. The three words that come to mind for guests when they think of green hotels are energy and water savings, eco-friendly services and facilities, and recycling materials. According to the data, guests are satisfied with hotels that utilize energy-saving equipment, solar lighting, sensors, and smart thermostats to heat and cool rooms. The hotel prepares meals with locally grown organic products and freshly prepared dishes. It employs bulk soap and shampoo dispensers rather than single-use dispensers, and guests enjoy the hotel's design, which is environmentally friendly and allows plenty of fresh air and natural light. The study discovered a link between guest satisfaction and hotels' green product and service offerings, as well as a link between guest contentment and hotels' green environments. This implies that guests appreciate green products and places. However, there is no association between green prices and customer pleasure or green promotion and satisfaction. A hotel's green prices and promotions generally do not lead to customer satisfaction. Finally, there is a strong positive correlation between luxury hotels' green practices and their guest levels of satisfaction. These findings suggest that green practices of luxury hotels have a significant impact on guest satisfaction.

Recommendations

The study recommends the following.

- Hotels in Oman are advised to improve their organic food offerings, develop natural surroundings, and improve their aesthetics, as they are important for guests who stay in green hotels.
- Hotels should educate guests about their recycling programs to eliminate waste.
- Hotels should inform their guests of the ecology, biodiversity, and natural resources surrounding them, as they would like to visit them.
- Hotels should install window shades wherever possible to prevent the glass from heating during summer and cooling during winter.
- Hotels should recycle and repurpose their water whenever possible, and, more importantly, they should educate their customers about it so that they can be part of it.
- Hotels must avoid using plastic water bottles whenever feasible, urge guests to use reusable bottles, and provide water dispensers on hotel premises.
- Wherever feasible, the hotel should take steps to conserve and promote cultural and historical sites in the surrounding areas as guests would like to experience them.

Limitations of the Study

This study had certain limitations that must be considered. Only 153 participants completed the survey, suggesting that larger sample sizes are necessary for future studies. Furthermore, data were collected only from four luxury hotels in Oman. A wider range of other hotels in Oman should be covered to obtain a more representative sample. This study employed quantitative methods; however, future research should focus on qualitative approaches to better understand how guests perceive and are satisfied with Oman's luxury hotel green practices. Future studies should focus on other hotel types, such as four- and three-star hotels. This study focused solely on tourists' perceptions of and satisfaction with green practices. Future studies should focus on the challenges faced by guests and suggest solutions. Future studies could also focus on implementing green practices from the hotel's perspective.

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An investigation of Google comments on experience museums in Türkiye[1]

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ABSTRACT

Experience museums, which have recently started to serve, offer different experiences to visitors by bringing technology and history together. Bringing a new perspective to museum activities, experience museums offer visitors an interactive and participatory experience. This study aims to analyze Google comments on experience museums in Turkey. For this purpose, the qualitative research technique was used. The study included 406 comments about Hagia Sophia History and Experience Museum, 217 comments regarding Ephesus Experience Museum, and 219 comments about IMM Kültür AŞ Digital Museum on Google until April 27, 2024. The data were analyzed using the qualitative analysis program MAXQDA. In light of the findings, codes were created positive and negative themes. It was determined that visitors were generally satisfied with the experience museums, and the most common complaint was about museum entrance fees.

KEYWORDS

Ephesus Experience Museum, Hagia Sophia History and Experience Museum, IMM Kültür AŞ digital experience museum, Google comments

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INTRODUCTION

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) defines museums as “permanent non-profit institutions that research, preserve, interpret and exhibit tangible and intangible heritage. Museums provide experiences for education, information, and entertainment and contribute to the development of societies” (ICOM, 2024). The Ministry of Culture and Tourism, on the other hand, defines museums as “educational, scientific and artistic institutions that identify, examine, protect, promote, exhibit and raise public awareness about historical artifacts” (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2024a). Museums contain elements of culture, art, and science and, at the same time, guide society. The main purpose of museums is to contribute to the development of society while transferring cultural assets to future generations (Sürme & Atılgan, 2020, p. 1796). Museums located in important places such as libraries and universities contribute to the formation of national cultural awareness and social identity (Köroğlu et al., 2020, p. 7).

Museums can be classified according to their characteristics, themes, and affiliated institutions. According to the affiliated institution, museums are grouped as museums affiliated to the ministry, museums affiliated to national parks, museums affiliated to the national palaces department, museums within universities, museums affiliated to the general staff and force command, museums affiliated to local governments, museums affiliated to various public institutions, museums of commercial organizations, foundation museums, and private museums (Madran, 1996). The general classification of museums worldwide includes art museums, history museums, anthropological museums, nature and history museums, science and industry museums, and museums related to various fields of specialization. In Turkey, museums are grouped as history and art museums, archaeology and ethnography museums, archaeology museums, ethnography museums, monument museums, museum houses, revolutionary museums, military museums, private museums, and open-air museums (Ministry of Culture and Tourism ebook, 2024). However, this classification is becoming increasingly diversified with the impact of today's technological developments. New alternatives, such as virtual reality and experience museums, have been added to the list.

Museums are one of the important elements of the tourism sector that increases the number of tourists by creating a tourist attraction and contributing economically to the region. For this reason, museums, considered part of the destination, are considered one of the integral parts of the tourism sector (Kervankıran, 2014, p. 348). Effective use of museums in tourism is one of the main goals. According to the 2023 Turkey Tourism Strategy, ‘Establishing city museums at international standards’ is clearly stated as a target for tourism development. It is also emphasized that museums should be used to diversify tourism activities. In order to increase tourism diversity, it is suggested to ‘open museum houses where the ethnographic and ecological characteristics of the region are exhibited’ and ‘open research stations and diaboli museums that will enable the research of the characteristics of the region and provide a scientific demonstration of this’ (Turkey Tourism Strategy, 2023).

One of the most important features of museums that create attraction is that they offer experience to tourists. According to Prentice (1996), museums are experience-oriented places that offer the opportunity to observe and contact cultural heritage elements. With the development of technology, museums are not only limited to providing experience but also provide a participatory and interactive experience opportunity (Sylaiou et al., 2010). In particular, Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) applications in museums have made visitors a part of the experience. After AR, VR, and virtual museum applications have been used in museums in recent years, experience museum initiatives have started today. Experience museums allow visitors to experience stories visually and audibly as if they were real using ‘Immersive’ technologies.

Determining visitors' thoughts after the experience is essential in determining the steps to be taken in the future. Visitor experiences also provide destinations with the opportunity to improve themselves and are effective in the formation of visitor loyalty. In this context, this study aims to analyze Google comments on experience museums serving in Turkey. For this purpose, the qualitative research technique was utilized in the study. Within this scope, 406 comments about Hagia Sophia History and Experience Museum, 217 comments related to Ephesus

Experience Museum, and 219 comments regarding IMM Kültür AŞ Digital Museum on Google until April 27, 2024, were included in the analysis. Thus, this study aims to contribute to the literature since there is no study on the visitors who visit the experience museums serving in Turkey in the relevant literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Technology and Museum

Rapidly developing technology causes changes in businesses in different fields. Especially with the widespread use of the internet, radical innovations have been experienced in social and business life. That is to say, technology has been included in business life in many areas, from the private sector to public institutions and organizations (Ersöz & Özmen, 2020). The first time museums were introduced to technology was when they were used in clerical work to make inventories of artifacts. Technology was limited to inventorying and used to track, secure, and preserve the artifacts. Technological developments, which facilitated the work of museum staff until this date, have affected visitor experiences as of the 1990s (Kahraman, 2021, p. 149). Thanks to digitalization, interaction has emerged, bringing the concept of experience to the forefront. Therefore, museology has turned into an experience-oriented space with the effect of technology over time (Ergin, 2022; Kervankıran, 2014). The increasing involvement of technology in museum activities has led researchers to conduct studies on these two topics. Kılıcı & Köroğlu (2023) conducted a bibliometric analysis of articles published in the field of museology and found that 17 articles were on science and technology.

With the integration of technology into museums, museum visits have become a multi-sensory experience. Audio and touch features replace written texts, while interactive exhibitions collect, analyze, and respond to data. In this way, visitors have a more vivid and dynamic experience (Barry et al., 2012, p. 42). For example, a study shows that the technological applications used in the Hatay Archaeology Museum positively affect visitors' experiences. Visitors state that thanks to this experience, they better understand the living conditions in ancient times, imagine themselves living in those times, and get away from everyday life (Varnacı Uzun, 2023). Toksöz (2018) states that the technologies in museums effectively recognize different traditions and cultures, as well as reveal visitors' sense of belonging and awareness of their own culture. Therefore, it can be said that the correct use of technology in museums indirectly contributes to the sustainability of cultural values.

The concept of immersive, which offers the visitor the opportunity to be a part of the experience, is explained in the simplest definition as the combination of virtual and real (Agrawal et al., 2019). Immersive technology, which covers AR, VR, and MR technologies used in museums, has added a new dimension to the museum experience. This technology has created deeper connections between visitors and museum content, and visitors' active participation has been ensured. Experience museums, which focus on the visitor experience, allow visitors to explore cultural heritage elements in more immersive and different ways (Li et al., 2023). Experience museums operate in many parts of the world for visitors who want to experience different experiences. Van Gogh the Immersive Experience in London, Frameless Immersive Art Experience in Amsterdam, and Fabrique des Lumières experience museums can be given as examples (Kahraman & Candan, 2024).

Experience Museums in Türkiye

Visitors have many different motivations for experiencing museums. Museums, generally visited to escape from routine, have fun, enjoy, and learn (Chan, 2009), attract millions of visitors annually. In 2023, the most visited museums and archaeological sites affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism were Konya Mevlâna Museum with 15.8 million visitors, Denizli Hierapolis Archaeological Site with 11.2 million visitors, and Izmir Ephesus Archaeological Site with 9 million visitors. In total, 30 million 488 thousand 975 people visited museums and archaeological sites (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2024b). In recent years, in addition to physical visits, visitors can also experience virtual museums through remote access, thanks to technology. Thus, it can be said that the number of visitors is much higher.

Experience Museums, a new initiative in Turkey, aims to offer visitors an interactive and participatory experience. Experience museums offer visitors a rich and immersive experience using immersive technologies while utilizing audio and visual opportunities (DEM Museum, 2024a). As of 2024, there are three active experience museums in Turkey. Ephesus Experience Museum and Hagia Sophia History and Experience Museum by DEM Museology are the first examples of these initiatives. At the same time, according to the information on the DEM Museology website, the infrastructure works of Hierapolis and Cappadocia experience museums are continuing. IMM Kültür AŞ Digital Experience Museum, which opened in Istanbul, has brought a different perspective to experience museums with its technological innovations.

Ephesus Experience Museum was opened in 2023. Consisting of three different halls, the museum offers audio guidance in 16 languages, and the experience lasts approximately 25 minutes. Ephesus Experience Museum allows visitors to experience the ancient city, which has a history of 8 thousand years, using technological facilities (DEM Museum, 2024b). The Ephesus Experience Museum received the "best museum" award at the Mondo-Dr Awards, one of the most distinguished awards in the world, held in Las Vegas on June 12, 2024 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2024c).

Hagia Sophia History and Experience Museum started its service in 2023. The museum consists of two separate sections that complement each other and offers audio guidance in 23 languages. The digital experience lasts approximately 25 minutes. On the first floor of the Hagia Sophia History and Experience Museum, there are artifacts exhibited for the first time. On the upper floors, traces of the Ottoman and Roman empires are presented with technology. In this respect, the museum is a special place where both technological experiences and historical finds are presented together. (DEM Museum, 2024a).

IMM Kültür AŞ Digital Experience Museum was opened in 2024. IMM Kültür AŞ Digital Experience Museum is a different museum that was founded by Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Kültür AŞ and offers digital experiences to visitors. The museum has a digital room, virtual reality room, immersive experience room, digital corridor, and augmented reality room for visitors. At the same time, one of the most striking areas in the museum is the area where Nikola Tesla and his inventions are exhibited (Digital Experience Museum, 2024).

Studies on Experience Museums

África et al. (2023) analyzed the comments of the visitors who participated in the 'Van Gogh: The Immersive Experience' event. The researchers analyzed the comments about the post-experience of the visitors with emotional analysis. According to the analysis results, the highest emotion scores were for expectation, joy, and trust. The most prominent negative comments about the exhibition were the high entrance fee and the lack of information about Van Gogh's life and art.

Errichiello et al. (2019) aim to investigate the role of smart technologies in facilitating visitors' experiences in destinations and cultural attractions. The research was conducted at the San Teodoro Palace, where VR technology provided visitors different experiences. According to the research results, visitors stated that they experienced destinations from different perspectives and had better access to information than traditional tours thanks to technological opportunities.

Kahraman and Candan (2024) examined the Ephesus Experience Museum in Turkey by comparing it with experience museums in the West. In the findings of the study, it was determined as an important deficiency that the Celsus library, one of the important structures of the ancient city of Ephesus, was not included in the narrative. Compared with the technologies of other experience museums worldwide, the absence of technologies such as AV, VR, and MR in the Ephesus Experience Museum was stated as an important deficiency.

Soylu (2024) examined visitors' Google and TripAdvisor comments on the Ephesus Experience Museum within the scope of museum experience and behavioral intentions. According to the analyses, hedonism, participation, novelty, knowledge, meaningfulness, and social interaction themes emerged under the unforgettable museum experience. In addition, it was observed that most of the visitors intend to revisit the museum and recommend it to their friends. The most common words used by visitors to describe the museum were 'visual feast,' 'time travel,' 'time machine,' and 'unforgettable journey.'

Yang and Zhang (2022) aim to determine the impact of smart tourism technologies (such as AR, VR, and AI) on museum services and visitor intentions. The data used in the study were collected online from 365 people in four different museums. Research findings show that smart tourism technologies positively affect unforgettable tourism experiences, revisits, and intention to make recommendations.

According to research, technology is used increasingly in museums every day. Metaverse technology has recently started to be used in museums in addition to immersive AR, VR, MR, AI, hologram, simulation, and 360-degree video mapping. Today, metaverse museums are actively serving Turkey and the world (Doğruer, 2023). The rapid progress of technology in museology has led some researchers to believe that AR and VR technologies will dominate museums in 2095 (Mavrin et al., 2023, p. 288).

METHOD

Consumers today frequently use the internet to share their positive and negative experiences directly with businesses. In this way, they easily express their opinions after the experience through the official accounts of the business or social media platforms. The comments are very effective in the preferences of potential consumers. For this reason, businesses should follow the comments and respond if necessary. In addition, the comments allow businesses to see the existing problems and deficiencies. Researchers examine visitor comments to measure satisfaction (Göktaş & Dinçer, 2017; Korkmaz, 2020; Yeşilyurt & Arıca, 2018) and complaints (Köroğlu et al., 2017) after the museum experience. In the research findings, it is seen that the connotation of the ancient city, the quality of artifacts and sculptures, relevant personnel, ease of access, interior design, explanatory signs, surrounding spaces, suitability for disabled people, cleaning and maintenance, contemporary museology, cleanliness of the space, free entrance, authentic atmosphere, adequacy of shopping places, museum architecture, collections and artifacts exhibited in the museum, use of technology, presentation style, and information content positively affect the experience (Çuhadar, 2024; Sop et al., 2020; Korkmaz, 2020). It was observed that the small size of the area, insufficiency of information materials, lighting problems, the lack of a sales store, the crowd, and the atmosphere of the atmosphere being like a workshop negatively affected the experience (Çuhadar, 2024; Sop et al., 2020).

Within the scope of this study, 406 comments about Hagia Sophia History and Experience Museum, 217 comments about Ephesus Experience Museum, and 219 comments related to IMM Kültür AŞ Digital Experience Museum until April 27, 2024, on Google were examined. Only Google comments were included in the study because the number of visitor comments on Google is higher than on other platforms. The comments obtained were analyzed using the content analysis technique, one of the qualitative research analysis techniques. In addition, MAXQDA, a qualitative analysis software was used for the analysis.

Content analysis is defined as bringing similar data together to form codes and themes and interpreting and processing these concepts (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). For this purpose, the researchers classified the comments under specific codes and themes. The researchers carried out the coding and theme creation process separately, and then common codes and themes were determined. In addition, direct quotations were included to better understand the codes obtained from the analysis program.

Data on comments about experience museums were obtained via Google. Some criteria were determined while analyzing the comments. Comments that were only rated were not included in the analysis. In addition, only Turkish comments were used to ensure the integrity of meaning. Since the comments of those whose location could not be determined under Google comment ethics were automatically deleted by the system, it is assumed that everyone who commented has experienced the museum experience. Ephesus Experience Museum and Hagia Sophia History and Experience Museum were opened in 2023, and IMM Kültür AŞ Digital Experience Museum was opened in 2024. The comments included in the analysis cover the comments from the museum's opening date until 27.04.2024. After the analysis, 1,046 codes were obtained from 842 comments. Similar codes for each museum were brought together and stated under positive and negative themes. While determining the themes and codes, the relevant literature was utilized (Göktaş & Dinçer, 2017; Sarı Gök & Şalvarcı, 2021; Sop et al., 2020).

FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the number of comments and scores related to the three experience museums.

Table 1.
Number of Visitor Comments on Museums

Museums	Number of Comments	Score (5)
Ephesus Experience Museum	217	4,6
IMM Kültür AŞ Digital Experience Museum	219	3,9
Hagia Sophia History and Experience Museum	406	4,6

Table 1 shows that the museum with the highest number of comments is the Hagia Sophia History and Experience Museum, followed by IMM Kültür AŞ. Digital Experience Museum, and Ephesus Experience Museum. On the other hand, IMM Kültür AŞ. Digital Experience Museum received the most negative comments. It is seen that the number of negative comments about the museums is generally low and that they receive an average of 4 stars from visitors.

Findings of the Content Analysis

Experience in tourism is a subjective and mental state consumers feel (Otto & Ritchie, 1996). As a result of the experience, positive or negative emotions are formed. For this reason, visitor comments on experience museums were coded under positive and negative themes, and their frequencies and percentages were calculated.

Table 2.
Codes and Themes Regarding Ephesus Experience Museum Comments

Themes	Codes	Frequencies	%
POSITIVE	Price	10	4,40
	Staff	54	23,80
	Content	25	11,00
	Experience	105	46,25
	Atmosphere	6	2,65
	Technological Infrastructure	27	11,90
TOTAL		227	100
NEGATIVE	Price	23	54,77
	Content	13	30,95
	Experience	3	7,15
	Atmosphere	3	7,15
TOTAL		42	100

Table 2 shows the codes, frequencies, and percentages of the comments about the Ephesus Experience Museum. Accordingly, it is seen that the most frequently repeated code in the positive comments about the Ephesus Experience Museum is “experience” (n= 105, %.46,25). Visitors expressed their comments as “a different experience,” “an experience far above expectations,” and so on. This was followed by “staff” (n=54, 23.80%), “technological infrastructure” (n=27, 11.90%), and “content” (n=25, 11.00%). The most frequently repeated code in negative comments was “price” (n=23, 54.77%). Although some visitors consider the museum entrance fee normal considering their living standards, some visitors complain about the entrance fee. Some visitors also complained about the limited content of the museum (n=13, 30.95%). Visitors stated that they expected a more extended experience and that topics other than Artemis were not addressed much. No negative comments were made about the staff and technological infrastructure.

Some of the positive comments by visitors to the Ephesus Experience Museum are as follows;

"There is heavy criticism that the price is too high. What is cheap in this country :-) when it comes to the service and the quality, I can't be too strict. I think it's a great experience. You can't put a price tag on some moments."

"First of all, I would like to thank the kindness of the staff and the fact that they were helpful enough to share their own umbrellas during the rain."

"...it was an experience far beyond my expectations."

"The museum is brilliantly designed with three separate rooms, each taking you to a different era in the past. It is like stepping into a time machine! The attention to detail in each room is remarkable and brings historical periods to life. This is an immersive experience that not only educates but also entertains."

"You learn and live the history of Ephesus through spectacular visual, audio, and sometimes fog-accompanied reenactments."

Some of the negative comments of visitors to the Ephesus Experience Museum are as follows;

"The only thing I will criticize is that they should lower the entrance fee. A family of 4 cannot afford 425 TL. We, husband and wife, paid 850 TL."

"...It's nice but don't have high expectations."

"There is a very superficial narration, when we entered, we thought that it would take us through the streets of Ephesus, we thought that we would be able to see the theater, the library of Celcius as it was in those times. But the only time the street is shown is when Cleopatra and Alexander the Great greet the people."

"Especially the second part is very effective in terms of visualization and animation. However, the information is not enough for a city like Ephesus."

Table 3.

Codes and Themes Regarding Hagia Sophia History and Experience Museum Comments

Themes	Codes	Frequency	%
POSITIVE	Price	19	3,73
	Staff	75	14,73
	Content	57	11,20
	Experience	178	35,00
	Atmosphere	76	15,00
	Physical Properties	8	1,60
	Technological Infrastructure	96	18,90
TOTAL		509	100
NEGATIVE	Price	37	57,00
	Staff	1	1,54
	Content	13	20,00
	Experience	7	10,77
	Physical Properties	2	3,77
	Technological Infrastructure	5	7,70
TOTAL		65	100

Table 3 shows the codes, frequencies, and percentages of the comments about the Hagia Sophia History and Experience Museum. Accordingly, it is seen that the most frequently repeated codes in the positive comments about Hagia Sophia History and Experience Museum are "experience" (n=178, 35.00%), "technological infrastructure" (n=96, 18.90%), "atmosphere" (n=76, 15.00%) and “staff” (n=75, 14.73%). On the other hand, in the negative comments, the codes “content” (n=13, 20.00%) and “experience” (n=7, 10.77%) are repeated the most. It is seen that no negative comments were made about the atmosphere.

Some of the positive comments by visitors to the Hagia Sophia History and Experience Museum are as follows;

“The entrance fee is 250 TL. Considering other museums, it seemed expensive, but it is worth every penny.”

“The welcome and guide service at the entrance is very nice. You feel special.”

“As an art historian, it was an excellent experience for me to access the academic information I listened to in my classes supported by visuals in the museum.”

“I also admired the artifacts exhibited in the museum. Many were exhibited for the first time and were pieces not even found in Hagia Sophia.”

“I recommend it if you want to have an amazing experience and if you want to experience time travel.”

“I have visited so many museums. This was the only place I visited with great excitement every moment.”

“An amazing museum supported by artificial intelligence and 3D modeling technologies. You can listen to the history of Hagia Sophia in 10 languages with translation headsets. The Turkish voice-over by Selçuk Yöntem adds an incredible mystical atmosphere.”

Some of the negative comments by visitors to the Hagia Sophia History and Experience Museum are as follows;

“Don't you think 250 lira is too much for Turkish citizens? Why is the museum card not valid? Why is there no student-teacher discount?”

“The video in the museum switched from English to Turkish and the attendant did nothing.”

“...but short in terms of duration and detail.”

“First of all, it was a new museum, but the background noise was so loud that I couldn't hear the audio guide very well.”

“Apart from the digital presentations, the exhibits were below our expectations.

Table 4 presents the codes, frequencies, and percentages of the comments about IMM Kültür AŞ. Digital Experience Museum. Accordingly, it is seen that the most frequently repeated codes in the positive comments about IMM Kültür AŞ. Digital Experience Museum are “experience” (n=53, 50.00%), “atmosphere” (n=14, 13.20%), “content” (n=11, 10.38%), “physical infrastructure” (n=11, 10.38%), and “technological infrastructure” (n=11, 10.38%). On the other hand, the codes for negative comments were “atmosphere” (n=42, 43.30%), “experience” (n=17, 17.52%), and “content” (n=13, 13.40%).

Some of the positive comments of visitors to the IMM Kültür AŞ. Digital Experience Museum is as follows;

“The interest and kindness of our friends inside was amazing.”

“I liked the content in general, by the way, Tesla's content was very instructive for young people, and the interactive structure of the content was also very nice.”

“VR and immersive room were my favorites.”

“The light shows are very nice. You can have a nice experience with VR glasses in the virtual reality room.”

“...it was an impressive experience.”

Some of the negative comments by visitors for IMM Kültür AŞ. Digital Experience Museum is as follows;

“There are sections inside that you can see in 5-10 minutes.”

“I came with high expectations after seeing it on social media, but it was a disappointment.”

“There should be a separate day for children under the age of 15 or a separate day for adults only. It was like a playground. One gets overwhelmed by the noise and hustle and bustle”

“Great labor, but you don't understand anything when you visit the playground.”

“At this level of virtual reality, the image shown was extremely bad. Even the worst VR game for 15 TL on Steam is much better than this.”

"Most of the time is spent waiting in queue. It is small and crowded inside. It is noisy and gives me a headache."

Table 4.
Codes and Themes Regarding the IMM Kültür AŞ. Digital Experience Museum Comments

Themes	Codes	Frequency	%
POSITIVE	Price	4	3,77
	Staff	2	1,89
	Content	11	10,38
	Experience	53	50,00
	Atmosphere	14	13,20
	Physical Properties	11	10,38
	Technological Infrastructure	11	10,38
TOTAL		106	100
NEGATIVE	Price	6	6,19
	Staff	4	4,12
	Content	13	13,40
	Experience	17	17,52
	Atmosphere	42	43,30
	Physical Properties	5	5,15
	Technological Infrastructure	10	10,30
TOTAL		97	100

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is aimed to analyze the comments on experience museums in Turkey through content analysis. For this purpose, a total of 842 comments on Google that met specific criteria were included in the study, and content analysis was conducted. While creating themes and codes, studies in the relevant literature were utilized. According to the data, 14 codes were created under the main themes of "positive" and "negative." When the comments regarding all three museums were analyzed, it was determined that the number of positive comments was higher than the number of negative comments. When the positive comments in the museums are analyzed, it is seen that experience has the most effect on satisfaction. It has been proven in previous studies that experience affects satisfaction (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Maklan & Klaus, 2015), loyalty (Chang & Lin, 2015; Maklan & Klaus, 2015), and recommendation intention (Hosany & Wihham, 2010; Maklan & Klaus, 2015). Positive perception of the experience positively affects satisfaction, and people who are satisfied intend to recommend it to others (Özer et al., 2013; Radder & Han, 2015). On the contrary, it is known that people who leave with a negative experience transfer this experience to their environment (Litvin et al., 2008).

When the positive comments on the Ephesus Experience Museum are analyzed, experience, staff, and museum content come to the fore. Visitors state that while experiencing museums, they get away from daily life, have the feeling of living in ancient times, and experience the magic and effect of the moment, which is consistent with studies conducted in other museums (Arıca & Yeşilyurt, 2018; Varnacı Uzun, 2023). There are also various positive opinions about the staff of the Ephesus Experience Museum. Attitude, service, and staff training are important factors affecting satisfaction (Emekli, 2003; Göktaş & Dinçer, 2017). For this reason, it is important to employ educated and emotional laborers who can speak different languages, especially in tourist destinations. When negative comments about the Ephesus Experience Museum are analyzed, complaints such as the high price, invalid museum card usage, and lack of discounts are emphasized.

When the positive comments on Hagia Sophia History and Experience Museum are analyzed, experience, technological infrastructure, and atmosphere come to the fore the most. On the other hand, when the negative comments are analyzed, it is seen that the most common complaint is about the museum fee. In most studies examining the comments of museum visitors, museum prices were found to be expensive by visitors (Göktaş & Dinçer, 2017; Köroğlu et al., 2017). Accordingly, it may be helpful to provide discounted or free admission by organizing public days on certain days and dates to encourage visitors. At the same time, students or visitors with special needs can also visit the museums at a discounted price.

When the positive comments about IMM Kültür AŞ Digital Experience Museum are analyzed, experience and atmosphere are focused on the most. However, when negative comments were analyzed, the atmosphere was found to be the most recurring code. Visitors explained this by saying that although they liked the atmosphere and environment of the museum, they were disturbed by the behavior of other visitors. In particular, there are complaints about the noise made by child visitors. One user expressed his thoughts: *"There is a nice visual show, but there should definitely be a separate day for children under the age of 15 or 'a separate day for adults only' like a playground, noise, noise, running around, people get overwhelmed."* This suggestion can be taken into consideration by museum managers to solve the problem. Visitors also complain that the museum environment is crowded and stuffy. Museum management can limit the number of visitors in the museum to eliminate this situation. Thus, the crowded and stuffy environment will be relieved. As a result, it is seen that visitors are generally satisfied with the experience museums, which can be considered a new initiative. The use of the obtained findings in the new experience museums to be opened or experience museums currently in service will contribute to visitor satisfaction. In future studies, other experience museums to be opened can also be included in the sample. At the same time, the findings obtained by conducting face-to-face interviews with visitors who visit the museums may help reach a deeper understanding of the issue. As in every study, there are some limitations in this study. The data used in the study covers a specific date range. However, Google comments are updated every day. For this reason, this study should be conducted again at different date intervals, and the development should be monitored. In addition, only Turkish comments were taken into consideration in the study. Future studies can expand the data by including comments in different languages in the analysis.

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Eskişehir's gastronomy businesses walking routes[1]

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ABSTRACT

At present, when tourism activities are differentiated and diversified in line with the demands and needs of people, there is a need for destinations and different routes that can meet these expectations and respond to current tourism demands. Although route identification studies are increasing daily in line with the need, no systematic studies exist. From this point of view, this study aims to create specific gastronomy routes in Eskişehir using a systematic approach. For this purpose, a multi-layered research was conducted. In the research, which was designed in a mixed design, the Delphi technique, focus group interviews, interviews including experts and businesses, and mapping were carried out in the last stage. For this purpose, the Delphi results were evaluated with descriptive statistics, and the data obtained from focus group discussions with expert participants and stakeholders representing different groups were evaluated using content analysis. It is thought that the walking routes proposed as a result of the research will contribute to the tourism activities in the city and will provide a source for similar studies in other destinations with the model proposed.

KEYWORDS

Walking route, route themes, route criteria, Gastronomy tourism, Eskişehir

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INTRODUCTION

Today, tourism activities have spread to different areas and diversified within the scope of special interest. While the classical understanding of vacation in the sea-sand-sun triangle continues, new vacation concepts and destinations are rising in tourism activities. In particular, routes created according to different interest groups are attracting interest from a wider audience. Routes that have been realized for years within the scope of traditional cultural tours are now being created for different interest groups. Thus, alternative tourism routes have started to emerge. Gastronomy routes are one of them. Gastronomy routes bring together gastronomic values and offer them to visitors. For this reason, gastronomy routes to be created provide the productization and promotion of the gastronomic values of destinations and thus increase the competitiveness of the destination in the tourism industry. The competitiveness of a destination in tourism is affected by how it presents its values as a product to visitors. For this reason, destinations transform their values and attractions into defined products. Today, the gastronomy of a destination is recognized by visitors as an important attraction element. Gastronomic attractions cover a wide range of areas, such as the food culture of that region, recipes, gastronomy businesses, agricultural products grown, and geographically marked products. In this respect, identifying all the attractions in a destination and turning them into products is important.

Different dynamics can be influential when creating routes for special interest groups in a region. Tourist typology, the socio-cultural structure of the region, the size of the city, transportation facilities, etc., can create differences in route creation. Especially in destinations new to tourism activities, routes are created based on popular places and businesses. On the other hand, different searches begin to emerge in destinations where tourism has become one of the important economic elements of the city or region. At this point, creating "special" routes for different destinations and special interest groups with a "systematic" method is important. From this point of view, this study aims to create walking routes according to the themes of gastronomy establishments operating in the Eskişehir sample. Thus, it will be possible to reveal the gastronomic aspect of Eskişehir, whose tourism potential is growing daily, and various routes suitable for different tastes will be provided. In addition, alternatives to different accommodation times and different routes will be created. With the creation of gastronomy routes, the gastronomic identity of the regions will be highlighted, the gastronomic potential of the province will be recognized, and it will be a reference source in the development of gastronomy tourism. The routes to be prepared with a thematic approach will mainly have the feature of responding to different tourist expectations. The preparation of gastronomy routes is also important in terms of developing and enriching the gastronomic culture of the city. In this study, the routes will be prepared based on the structure of the city, courtesy of expert opinion and the Delphi technique, which will bring together the strong features of Eskişehir. The study also differs from the literature in terms of using different scientific methods and creating themes.

RELATED LITERATURE

Adapting to the changing understanding of consumption is of great importance in the tourism sector, as in every sector. Especially the interest in alternative tourism areas, such as gastronomy tourism, is increasing daily (Barros et al., 2008; Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2010). Gastronomy tourism is a relatively new concept for tourism. Countries that want to increase their tourism revenues should make good use of the potential of this new and popular concept, such as gastronomy tourism (Sarıışık & Özbay, 2015). Gastronomy tourism has emerged as eating and drinking have gone beyond satisfying physiological needs and have become a search for different, new, or better flavors (Scarpato, 2002). In short, gastronomy tourism is the realization of tourism activities by tourists for eating and drinking.

Gastronomy tourism can be carried out to a single destination or in the form of gastronomy tours that include many destinations through gastronomy routes. For this reason, the interest in gastronomy routes has increased along with the interest in gastronomy tourism. An example is the growing interest in wine routes (Bruwer, 2003; Ergüven, 2015). In order to realize gastronomy tours, gastronomy routes are needed. Although gastronomy routes have been studied in the literature for many years, the interest in the tourism market is increasing rapidly. Arts and gastronomy constitute one of the four important reasons for European tourism movements (Gheorghe et al., 2014). Developments in the consumption consciousness of travelers can explain this trend. Today, while some tourists are still oriented towards the former type of tourism activities, a significant portion have different expectations and searches.

Creating routes is one of the most important factors in ensuring sustainability in the tourism sector (Lourens, 2007). Gastronomy routes also contribute to sustainability. Gastronomy heritage tourism routes have started to be used in tourism models. In this context, routes can be organized according to various areas of gastronomy, such as gastronomy festivals, products, traditional techniques, and business routes. (Espinosa et al., 2022).

The concept of gastronomy routes created to highlight the gastronomic elements of a destination is realized through gastronomy tours to that region. In this context, gastronomy tours can be defined as 'tours where destinations provide tourists with an experience in all aspects of gastronomy.' This experience can be product-based or in every area where local cuisine culture is introduced. For example, the way of service, the ambiance and decor of the environment, etc., are among the experiences that gastronomy tours aim to offer tourists. Gastronomy tours contribute to cultural sustainability, generate economic development, and are usually organized through travel agencies (Başoda et al., 2018). Gastronomy routes may be designed as tour programs according to location and time intervals (Vorasiha, 2018), or they may be designed according to digital environments such as android applications with the development of today's technological possibilities and changing consumer expectations (Turgarini et al., 2021).

Routes are predetermined routes that enable tourists to engage in tourism activities on foot, by horse, or by various motorized vehicles in destinations with natural or cultural attractions (Silbergh et al., 1994). Routes in tourism are divided into two categories: themed and product-based (Rogerson, 2007). Gastronomy routes fall within the scope of themed routes together with cultural routes, nature routes, etc. Product-based routes focus on individual products at the destination. Wine routes or cheese routes are examples of product-based routes (Lourens, 2007). It is seen that gastronomy falls within the scope of both themed and product-based routes.

By linking independent destinations with each other, routes help to attract attention to destinations that have not attracted attention or have received little attention before. In this way, gastronomy routes also enable the discovery of hidden gastronomic elements. Routes become a guide for tourists to choose various activities (Kervankıran & Çuhadar, 2014). They benefit from destination marketing, destination image, and destination promotion. Durlu Özkaya and Kaya (2021) mentioned the importance of creating routes for gastronomy tours for the tourism sector in their study. They mentioned that these routes create easy access to regions rich in gastronomic elements. In addition, gastronomy routes allow tourists to carry out their individual or group tourism activities independently without needing tours. In this way, tourists can discover an unfamiliar region on their own.

Many different routes are discussed when the literature on gastronomy routes is examined. Gastronomy routes are generally created for gastronomic products. The most common routes are wine routes, yet cheese, beer, olive, and olive oil routes are also common. Among the most successful gastronomy routes are wine routes in North America, Europe, and Australia (Telfer, 2001). Another example of a successful route is the Bregenzerwald cheese route in Austria (Bregenzerwald, 2020).

Looking at how gastronomy routes are applied, it is seen that they are applied within the scope of gastronomy tours. An example of a gastronomy tour using gastronomy routes worldwide is the Barcelona gastronomy tour, where local foods are tasted (Devour Barcelona Food Tours, 2020). Other examples include the Berlin gastronomy tour (Berlin Food Stories, 2020), where local food is tasted; the Porto gastronomy tour (Taste Port, 2020), where tour guides accompany tourists; and the Naples gastronomy tour (Culinary Backstreets, 2020), where local products are sold and alcohol is tasted. The duration of these tours varies between 3-6 hours on average, depending on the length of the route and the number of establishments on the route. Gastronomy tours in Turkey, on the other hand, usually last for a few days with accommodation facilities. An example of a gastronomy tour in Turkey is the Western Black Sea gastronomy tour. Compared to gastronomy tours in Europe, the Western Black Sea gastronomy tour takes three days as it covers several cities instead of being within walking distance (Jolly Tour, 2020).

While scientific studies on the subject gain importance, it is noteworthy that there are some inadequacies in the sector. It is seen that travel agencies organizing gastronomy tours in Turkey do not have sufficient knowledge about gastronomy tours (Yücel Güngör et al., 2021). For this reason, it can be said that it is of great importance to create gastronomy routes and provide these routes with the opportunity to be used in gastronomy tours. A well-established gastronomy route has the potential to provide significant benefits to people and institutions, such as tourist guides, travel agencies, etc., that carry out gastronomy tours. In addition, gastronomy routes have the potential to provide significant benefits to the selected destinations and, thus, to the local economy.

METHOD

The study adopted a mixed research approach. Accordingly, it plans to use different research designs that include philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. Since the subject may include regional differences, it is planned to examine the case of Eskişehir.

Research Area

Eskişehir is one of the interesting destinations in the new vacation concept. Many tourists visit Eskişehir for a day trip or with accommodation, as it evokes the concept of "modern city" and "urbanism." Gastronomy, a part of culture, is one of the issues that should be emphasized in the city where more culture-oriented trips are made.

There are numerous food and beverage establishments that are important representatives of gastronomy in Eskişehir. These businesses serve in various areas, such as artisan restaurants, a la carte restaurants offering world cuisine, ready-to-eat caterers, taverns, and local caterers. In the touristic sense, a few businesses stand out with various advertising and promotional activities. However, the ability of these businesses to represent Eskişehir's gastronomic identity is debatable.

The food and beverage business in Eskişehir dates back quite a few years. Eskisehir, frequently brought to the agenda, especially with city tourism, became an important destination in 2000 and after. Historical Odunpazarı Houses, Porsuk Stream, City Park, Sazova Science, Art and Culture Park, and museums such as Yılmaz Büyükerşen Wax Sculptures Museum, Kurtuluş Museum, Meerschaum Museum, Contemporary Glass Arts Museum, Eskişehir Eti Archeology Museum, Yunus Emre Museum have been effective in positioning the city's image in a very good place (Aydın, 2016). In addition, transportation facilities in the city have also contributed to the development of tourism activities. The fact that Eskişehir was selected as the Cultural Capital of the Turkish World in 2013 was another factor that positively affected tourism (Eskişehir Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2019).

The gastronomy establishments of Eskişehir province are the subject of the study. The habit of eating out in Eskişehir dates back to the first years of the Republic. Eskişehir's gastronomic culture, shaped by the influence of historical civilizations and migrations, shows richness, especially regarding social life. In addition, while the universities developed in the last 50 years have increased the need for eating out, it has also led to the development of food and beverage establishments in Eskişehir and increased their diversity. In this study, food and beverage establishments, which have an important place in the gastronomic values of a destination, are included. Food and beverage establishments are classified according to their themes and characteristics, and routes are planned to connect them, especially within walking distance.

Research Questions and Data Collection Techniques to be Used

The research questions were used to decide on the design. The study has three main questions.

Question 1: According to which themes should the walking routes of gastronomy establishments in Eskişehir be based?

Question 2: Which criteria should be used to evaluate gastronomy establishments in creating a route in Eskişehir province?

Question 3: Which businesses in Eskişehir province should be included in the gastronomy route?

In line with these fundamental questions, using more than one technique in the research was found appropriate. In the realization of the research, the following method steps were applied respectively:

- Delphi study
- Focus group interview
- Evaluation and compile a list
- Interviews with business officials
- Mapping

Since the Delphi technique is based on the principle of creating new question forms according to the steps within itself, the researchers deemed it appropriate to explain the research method used in the findings section. Since the focus group interview, which constituted the second part of the study, and the expert interviews, which constituted the third part, were also structured based on the Delphi results, explanations regarding these methods are also given below.

FINDINGS

A complex structure emerges since more than one data collection and analysis technique was used in the research. For this reason, the findings are presented in the same flow with the method steps used to better comprehend the research process and results in this part of the study.

Delphi Study: Rand developed and used the Delphi technique to collect expert opinions (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963). The aim of developing the Delphi study was to obtain the consensus of a group of experts in the most reliable way. The technique is based on confidentiality, repetition, controlled feedback, and statistical analysis (Nevo & Chan, 2007). It is a technique used in many fields, such as articles, economic research, technology forecasting, new trend research, etc. (Lindstone & Turoff, 2002). According to Linstone and Turoff (2002), the Delphi technique is used when there is a problem that is difficult to solve with analytical techniques but can be solved by collecting subjective judgments when individuals who do not have sufficient communication history need to contribute to the examination of a large or complex problem according to their expertise and experience when a large number of people who are thought to be more effective than face-to-face communication are needed when it is not possible to hold frequent group meetings in terms of time and cost. It is a method frequently used when the effectiveness of face-to-face interviews is desired to be increased with an additional group communication process when it is desired to protect the confidentiality of the participating experts and the communication process from being through a referee due to serious disagreements between individuals or political contradictions, and when it is desired to protect the heterogeneity of the participating experts by eliminating the effects such as majority and personal powers to ensure the validity of the results (Şengür, 2010). In this study, the Delphi technique was preferred, considering the necessity to scientifically evaluate subjective judgments in Eskişehir and the possibility that face-to-face interviews may interrupt the process due to the nature of the stakeholders. In the research, data was collected from the managers and owners of restaurants, artisan restaurants, taverns, bars, entertainment venues, patisseries, and coffee shops, as well as from the Chamber of Tradesmen and Craftsmen, Chamber of Restaurateurs, relevant officials from Eskişehir Metropolitan Municipality, Tepebaşı Municipality, Odunpazarı Municipality, and academicians. Thus, in Delphi, the need for experts to represent different groups of participants was ensured. In practice, 20 to 30 participants are considered sufficient (Aydın, 1999). Within the scope of the research, at least one representative was selected from each stakeholder group, and individuals who could represent the views of these groups were selected as participants. In the research, Delfi was planned to be divided into three rounds. The Delphi rounds were conducted face-to-face, through online services (zoom), and via e-mail (third round). Data were collected from 20 experts from the beginning to the end of the Delphi. In the first round, the first two main questions of the research were communicated to the participants in open-ended form. Two topics (themes and criteria) were evaluated separately in the rounds. At the end of the first round, transcriptions were made. Content analysis was applied to the data obtained in the first round. Analyses were reported, and a new questionnaire was created for the second round. The third-round questionnaire form was created by applying simple statistics (frequency, percentage, 1st quartile, 3rd quartile, mean, and standard deviation) to the data obtained at the end of the second round. The same statistics were applied to the data obtained at the end of the third round, and theme and criteria lists were created. The theme list is given in Table 1, and the criteria list is in Table 2. These lists were then used in the focus group interview, which was the next stage of the research.

Table 1
Route Alternatives in Different Themes

Theme	1^{st} Q	Med.	3^{rd} Q
Breakfast route	3	5,5	7
Lunch route	5,25	7	7
Dinner route	4,25	5,5	7
Domestic product route	3,25	5,5	6,75
Local food route	4	7	7
Eskisehir cuisine	1,25	7	7
World cuisine	3	4	5
Regional cuisine	1	3,5	5
Healthy nutrition in local dishes	1,25	3,5	4,75
Light calories for young people	1	2,5	4,75
Historic restaurants	1,25	5	7
Geographically marked products	3,5	6	7
Çibörek	5	7	7
Migration cuisine (Crimean-Tatar, Balkan, Caucasian)	5	7	7
Soup	1,25	3	3,75
Fast food	1,25	4	6
Dessert establishments	2,5	6	7
Phrygian cuisine	1,5	5	7
Tavern	4	5	6
University (dishes made by gastronomy students)	1	3	4,75
Balaban	4,25	5,5	7
Third-generation coffee shop	4	5	6
Artisan shops (e.g., met halva, boza)	6	7	7
Forgotten products	2	5,5	7
Drinking places	2,25	5	5,75
Nostalgic places	3,5	6	6,75
40 years of business	4,5	6,5	7
From appetizer to dessert (e.g., soup in one restaurant, main course in another)	1	3	6

Table 2
Criteria to be Considered in Route Determination

Criteria	1st Q	Med.	3rd Q
Suitable for the social structure of the region	5,25	7	7
A service for everyone	4	5,5	7
Offering dishes that highlight the agricultural criteria of the region	4,5	6	7
Serving forgotten dishes	5	6	7
Serving dishes made in home kitchens	1,75	5	6,75
Using local seeds	3,25	5	7
Highly rated	5	6	7
Big	4	5	6,75
Sterile	6	7	7
Decent	6	7	7
Easy to reach	6	6	7
High level of staff training	6	7	7
Reflecting Eskişehir culture with its atmosphere	6	7	7
History	5,25	6,5	7
Good customer reviews	5	6,5	7
Affordable	1,75	5,5	7
What the locals like	5	6	7
Using traditional products and methods	5	6,5	7
Will meet tourists' expectations	6	7	7
With a story	6	7	7
Serving local dishes	5,25	7	7
Staff who can tell the stories of the dishes	6,25	7	7
According to the distance of businesses (the route should not be too long)	1,75	6	7
Quality service	6	7	7
Caring and knowledgeable staff (who can describe the dishes)	6	7	7
Knowledge of foreign languages in the business (staff or menu items written in a foreign language)	6	6,5	7
Price/quality balance	6	7	7
Authentic	4,25	6	6,75
Boutique	4	5	6,75
Peaceful and comfortable physical space	6	7	7
The behavior of the staff is decent	4,25	7	7
Serving delicious food	6,25	7	7
Ethnic	4	6	6
A la carte/fine dining (in response to fast food)	3,25	5	6
Famous (old, known)	5,25	6	7
Permanent/likely to be permanent (less likely to close)	3,75	6	7
Clean	7	7	7
Using healthy products	7	7	7
Trained staff	6,25	7	7
With friendly staff	6,25	7	7
Stylish	2,25	6	7
Sufficient number of staff	6	7	7
Short service time	2,75	6	6,75
Early service	1,75	5,5	6,75
Non-industrial (must rely on human labor)	1,5	4,5	6
Focusing on only one product (specialization)	1,5	5	6,75
Local food presentations	2,25	7	7

Focus Group Interview: In addition to the Delphi technique, focus group interviews were conducted to answer the first and second questions of the research. In focus group interviews, a group of people with certain characteristics on a specific topic are brought together, and a one-to-one mutual discussion environment is provided to reach a common conclusion on the subject (Kozak, 2015). Researchers use different numbers to express the ideal group size for a healthy interview. In their study evaluating focus groups, Çokluk et al. (2011) stated that researchers generally define groups of 4 to 10 people as ideal. In interviews with more than 10 participants, it is thought that group dynamics may be negatively affected. Voluntary representatives of the participants of the Delphi study and researchers were preferred for the focus group interviews. At this stage, the focus group interview was conducted with the participation of four people. The interviews were conducted on 05.10.2023 at the Faculty of Tourism and lasted 92 minutes in total. Six themes and 17 criteria were identified as a result of the interviews. The finalized themes and criteria are given in Table 3.

Table 3
Themes and Criteria Determined for Eskişehir Gastronomy Routes

Themes	Criteria
Old (nostalgic/historical) restaurants	Sterile
Artisan restaurant	Decent
Immigrant cuisine	Reflecting Eskişehir culture with its atmosphere
Dessert (as a business)	Will meet tourists' expectations
Gastronomic product	With a story
Student /for young people	Staff who can tell the stories of the dishes
	Quality service
	Caring and knowledgeable staff (who can describe the dishes)
	Price/quality balance
	Peaceful and comfortable physical space
	Serving delicious food
	Clean
	Using healthy products
	Trained staff
	With friendly staff
	Sufficient number of staff
	Close to tourist attractions

Evaluation and List Formation: At this stage, the expertise of sector representatives was consulted. First, an enterprise expert opinion form was created using the themes and criteria finalized in the focus group interview. Then, in-depth interviews were conducted with six experts between 01.11.2023 and 30.12.2023. As a result of the interviews, 25 businesses were listed on the historical-nostalgic route, 21 on the artisan restaurant route, 13 on the immigrant cuisine route, 12 on the dessert route, 15 on the gastronomic product route, and 19 on the student (young) route.

Interviews with Business Officials: To avoid the inability to reach the enterprises in the draft list decided as a result of the interviews, professional chambers and people with a good command of the sector were selected for the interviews. Thus, if there were businesses that were closed or suspended their activities, they were not included in the list even if they met the criteria. Considering the intensity of the sector and working hours, interviews with the authorities should be conducted following the interviewee's schedule. For this reason, appointments were made with the enterprises, and interviews were conducted with each enterprise official individually. Enterprise interviews could be completed on 25.03.2024 due to sectoral intensity. The number of businesses that could be reached, whose approval was obtained and included in the map is as follows: 6 businesses on the historical-nostalgic route, 7 on the artisan restaurant route, 4 on the immigrant cuisine route, 4 on the dessert route, 7 on the gastronomic product route, 8 on the student (young) route.

Mapping: A preliminary feasibility study was conducted to create the routes. Thus, the applicability, walkability, or accessibility of each route, the problems that may be experienced on the route, the density of the route, etc., were clarified. In the mapping phase, the location information of the businesses that want to participate in the gastronomy route to be created was obtained during the interviews. Thematic routes were created with geographical information systems (GIS) in line with the business's location information. Thematic routes were obtained using the ArcMap interface of the ArcGIS 10.8 program. For this purpose, first of all, location information was categorized according to the determined themes and digitized. Databases were created for processing in GIS through MS Office Package Program Excel. Then, thematic routes were obtained by extracting the data suitable for the routes to be created with the ArcMap interface of the ArcGIS program from the database.

Location information of the establishments wishing to participate in the gastronomy route within the scope of the study was obtained during the interviews. The thematic routes created using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) in line with the location information of the businesses are presented below.

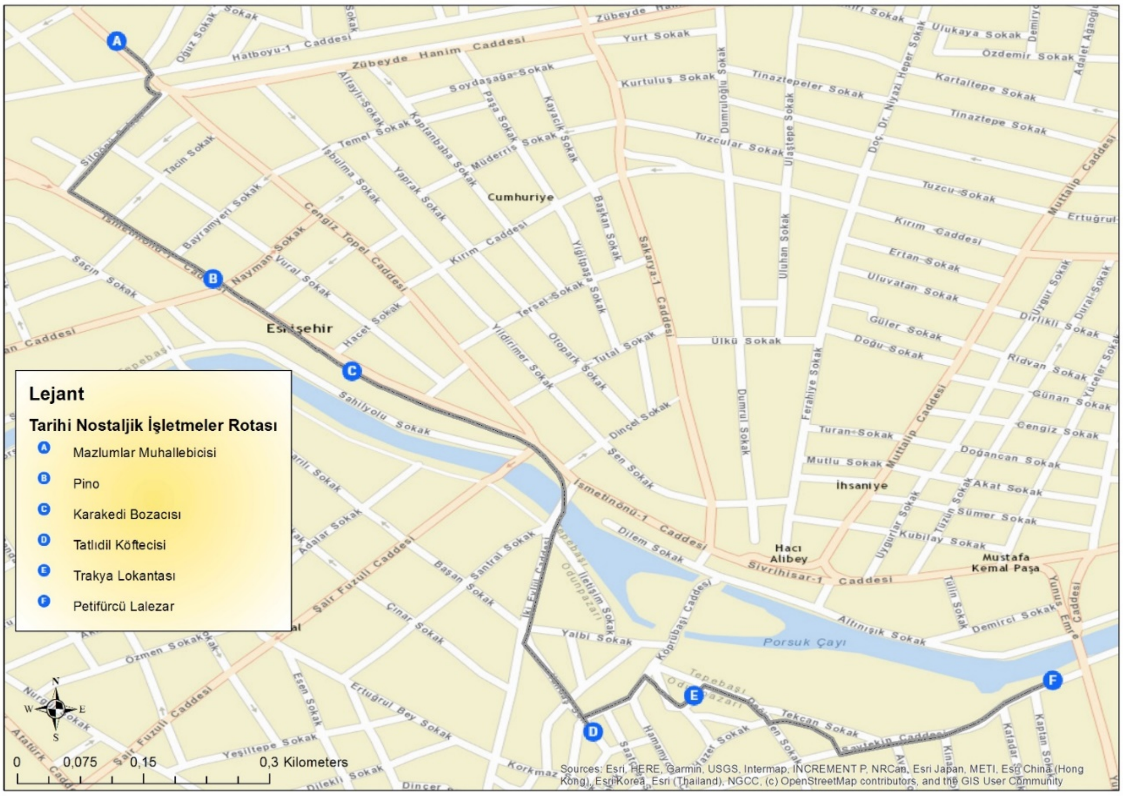

Figure 1. Historical and Nostalgic Business Route

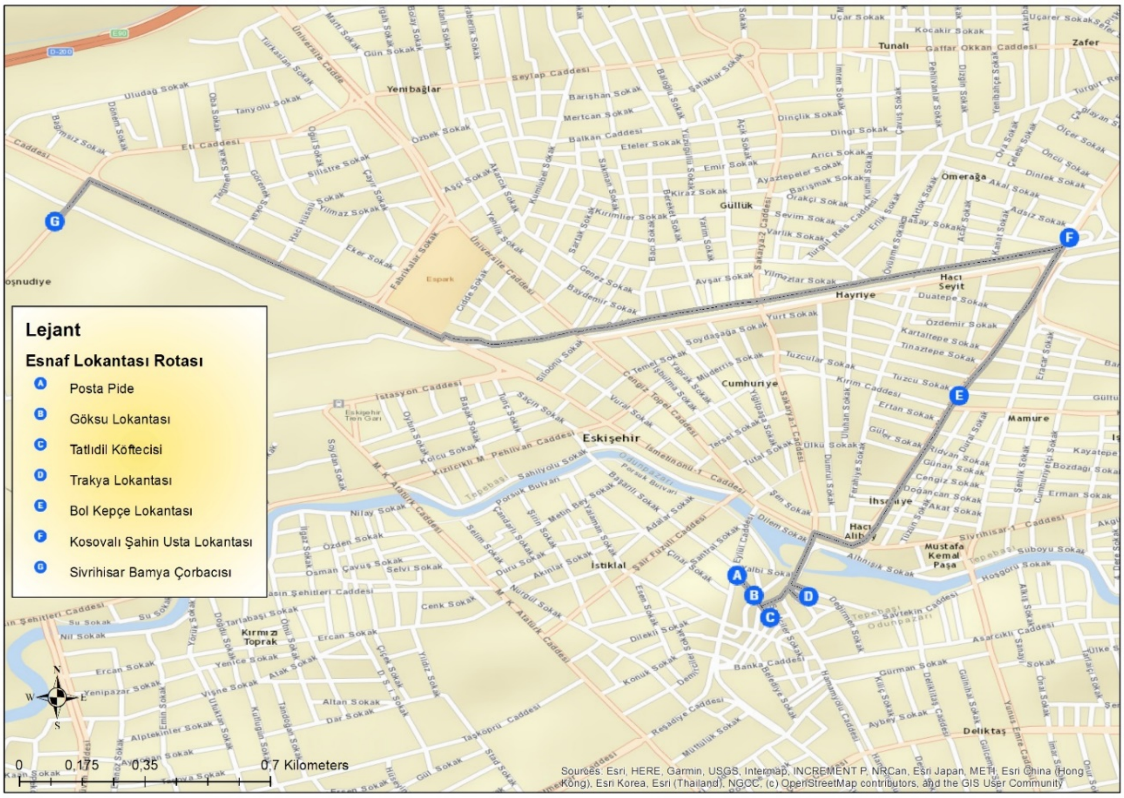

Figure 2. Artisan Restaurant Route

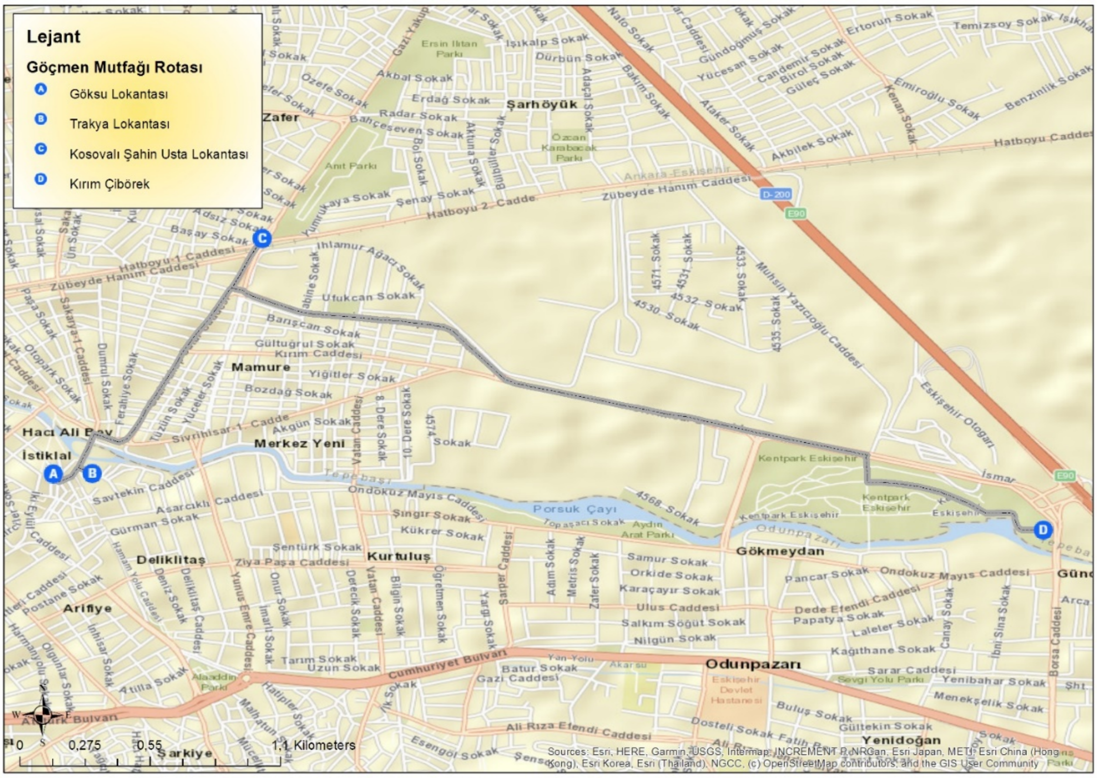

Figure 3. Immigrant Cuisine Route

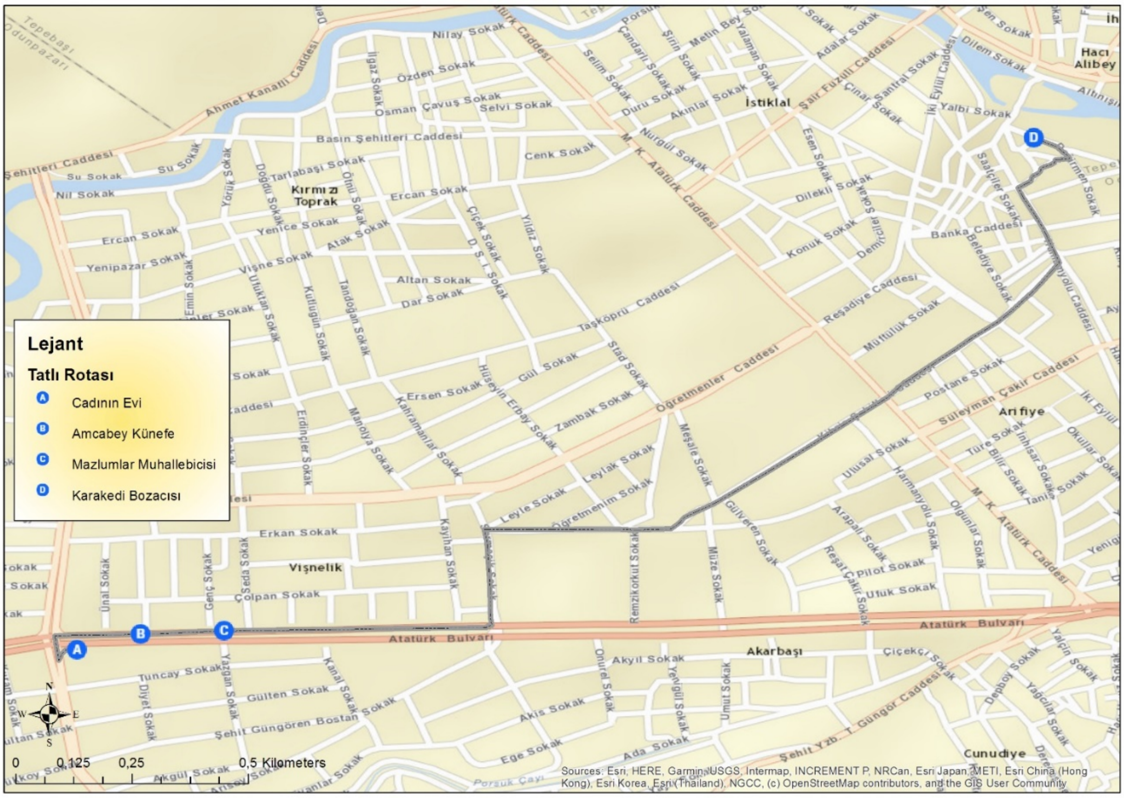

Figure 4. Dessert Route

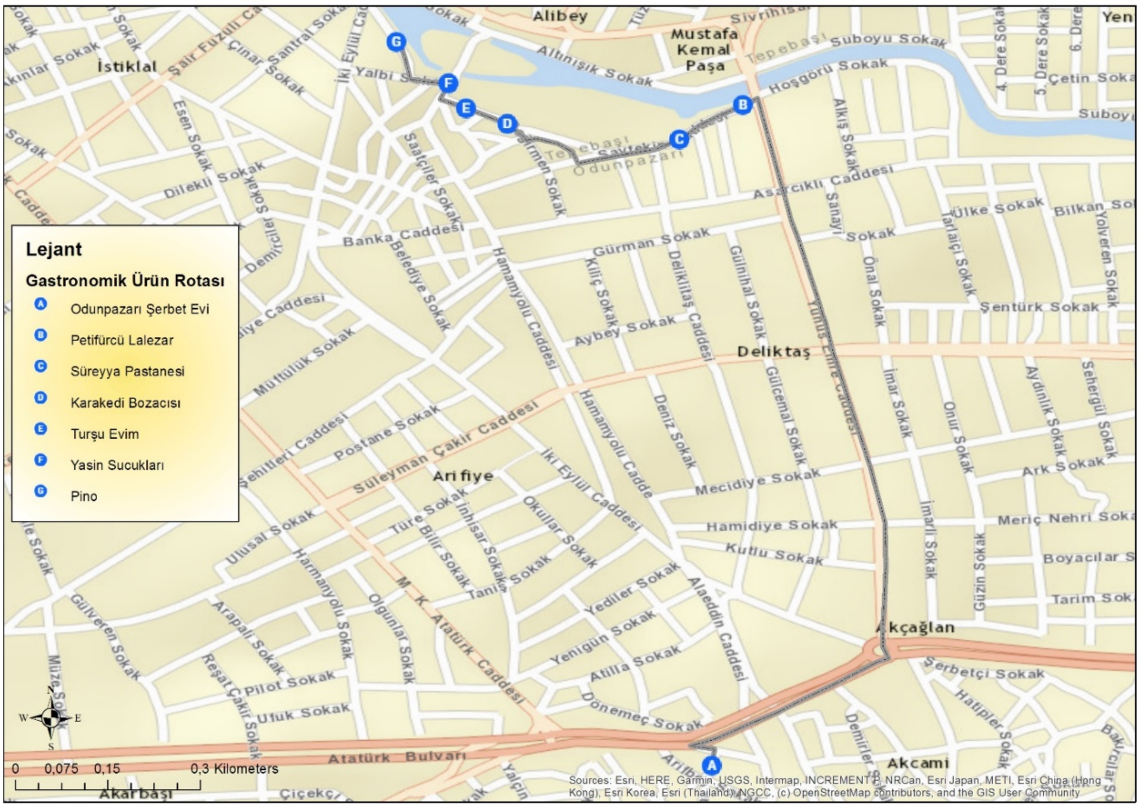

Figure 5. Gastronomic Product Route

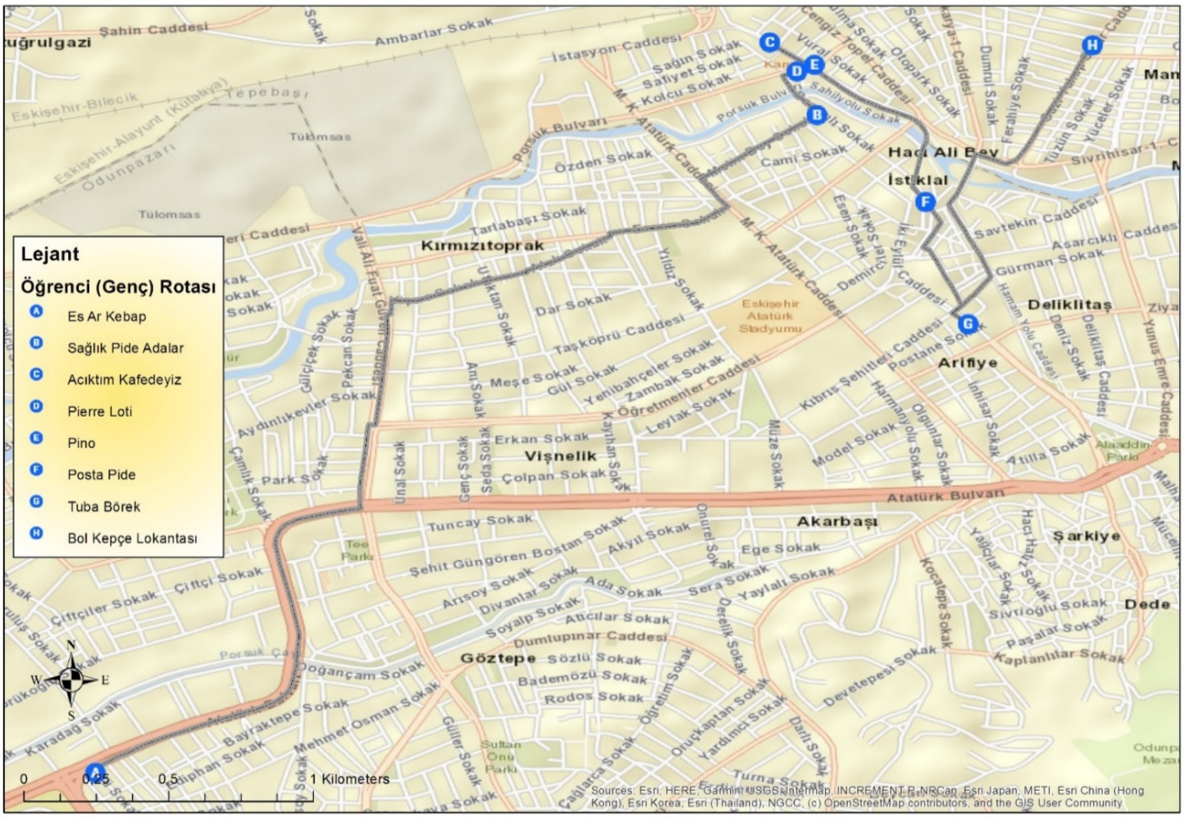

Figure 6. Student (Youth) Route

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Urban identity contains important cultural elements. The larger the city, the more extensive and more diversified the cultural sphere it encompasses. In addition to being a metropolitan city with an urban identity, Eskişehir has a multicultural structure. In the last two decades, the developments in Eskişehir's urbanism have reached such a level that it has ceased to be a classical Anatolian city and has begun to be known by different labels such as "Modern city," "Student city," "City to live in." These developments have given Eskişehir an incredible tourism potential. While the number of hotels in the center was around 10 in the early 2000s, it exceeded 100 in 2024, according to official data from the Turkish Tourism Promotion and Development Agency. Tourism, which creates an attraction factor for such an image, shows a culture-based demand. In this context, it would be appropriate to present Eskişehir tourism within a plan that reflects the city's identity and culture. One of the starting points of this study is to contribute to Eskişehir in this direction.

This research was carried out to create walking routes according to the themes of gastronomy establishments in Eskişehir. It is concerned with creating a specific systematic for this purpose; it tried to determine the criteria to be sought in the businesses to be included in the route and the themes. In this way, it was aimed to ensure better representativeness with businesses above certain standards. Determining the criteria is important in terms of guiding the businesses that want to enter the routes. Preparing routes with different themes offers alternatives for destinations with a large tourism volume and hosting groups with different characteristics.

As a result of the study, it was seen that Eskişehir's potential for gastronomy tourism is important, and many opportunities can contribute to tourism activities in this field. In particular, creating routes that emphasize the gastronomic characteristics of Eskişehir and bring together food and beverage establishments according to themes can increase the city's tourism potential. These routes can offer visitors the opportunity to experience the city's rich gastronomic culture while at the same time increasing the awareness and touristic attractiveness of local businesses (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020). From this point on, an effective communication strategy should be defined for the promotion and orientation of the routes. This strategy can include various channels such as digital platforms, brochures, guides, and events, as in Turgarini’s study (2021). However, making these routes attractive to tourists and locals is important. Local people's interest and contribution to these routes is one of the issues to be considered for the sustainability of gastronomy tourism (Sorcaru, 2019). With the implementation of these recommendations, Eskişehir's gastronomy tourism potential will be further strengthened, and the city can increase its potential to offer a notable gastronomic experience to tourists.

Finally, this study is noteworthy as a model for Eskişehir and other destinations with similar characteristics. Many studies on the routes of cities have been conducted before. There are also different route studies in Eskişehir in the literature. Differently in this study, gastronomy routes were created within the framework of different themes reflecting the culture of the city. A scientific method was followed while creating the routes. Thus, it is an answer to the deception and inconsistency of social sciences, which is one of the controversial issues of the scientific world.

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A bibliometric analysis of studies on social media marketing and tourism published in Web of Science Database

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ABSTRACT

With the widespread use of social media, the application areas of social media marketing are expanding. Tourism is one of these areas. Especially the fact that consumers include tourist activities in their social media posts has made the necessity of social media marketing inevitable for tourist businesses. This situation enables word-of-mouth marketing, one of the main objectives of marketing, to be realized in the digital dimension. This relationship between social media marketing and tourism has led academics to conduct studies in the related field. This study aims to reveal the importance of studies published on social media marketing and tourism and take a snapshot of the development of studies on this subject. In this context, 234 academic publications on social media marketing and tourism were accessed from the Web of Science (WoS) database covering the period between 2009 and 2024. The publications obtained from WoS were analyzed in terms of number of publications, number of citations, countries of publication, study type, citation topics, WoS index, Web of Science categories, and most chosen keywords, and bibliometric analysis of these publications was performed with VOSviewer software. According to the study findings, there has been a steady increase in the number of publications every year. In addition, the most preferred type of publication is the article. The country with the most publications is the USA, followed by China. Looking at the WoS index, it is seen that most studies are published in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI). When the most used keywords are analyzed, the keyword social media marketing is followed by social media. The study results are expected to be instructive for both businesses and academics.

KEYWORDS

Social media marketing, tourism, bibliometric analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Digital marketing can be considered as all marketing activities carried out on electronic platforms with any technological device (Kotler et al., 2017). Social media marketing, considered within the scope of digital marketing, can be expressed as the realization of marketing activities on social media platforms. With the contribution of social media to businesses, social media marketing is among the popular concepts of today's marketing (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Businesses have detailed information about customers thanks to the databases provided by social media (Minazza, 2015). According to the WeAreSocial 2024 report, the most common purposes for people to use social media are to stay in touch with friends and relatives and to follow brands. Social media marketing contributes to increased interaction with customers and individualization of communication. Customers feel more special with individual marketing than with mass marketing; in this case, they establish a closer bond with the business (Wirtz et al., 2013). In addition, the business can better follow the current trends in the market and accordingly become aware of changes in consumer behavior and adapt to them quickly.

Tourism is a significant sector contributing to countries' development and economic growth. Tourism, one of the most up-to-date sectors in which marketing is applied, actively uses social media marketing to convert potential global customers into actual customers (Sigala, 2011). In the tourism sector, social media marketing has become attractive in bridging consumer expectations, perceived quality and satisfaction, and destination image that encourages consumers to purchase (Leung et al., 2013).

Within the scope of the research, a bibliometric analysis was explicitly conducted on social media marketing in tourism. As will be explained in more detail in the literature section, bibliographic analysis has been conducted many times in the field of tourism, as it is frequently done in social media, social media marketing, and digital marketing. For example, Bastidas et al. (2020), according to their bibliometric analysis, revealed which research areas stand out for technological tourism solutions. Evren and Kozak (2014) analyzed tourism articles published in academic journals in Turkey between 2000 and 2010 and tried to express academic trends on this subject. Ülker et al. (2022) examined 136 bibliometric studies and analyzed collaboration networks. In studies on food and gastronomy research in tourism, it was emphasized that the majority of the studies covered in the scope of the study need advanced methodologies (Bendegul et al., 2018; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Ellis et al., 2018; Sims, 2009; Everett & Aitchison, 2008). In the studies conducted within the scope of sports tourism, important issues in sustainable sports tourism research have been emphasized (Jimenez-Garcia et al., 2020; Weed, 2008; Higham & Hinch, 2018; Gibson, 1998; Chalip, 2006). In studies on artificial intelligence applications in tourism, future research areas of artificial intelligence applications were tried to be expressed (Knani et al., 2022; Tussyadiah, 2020; Ivanov & Webster, 2019; Li, 2021; Neuhofer et al., 2015). In tourism research on sustainability within the scope of tourism, the main trends of the field have been addressed (Garrigos-Simon et al., 2018; Bramwell & Lane, 2005; Sharpley, 2009; Hall, Gössling & Scott, 2015; Saarinen, 2006). However, since there are few studies on tourism and social media marketing, this field needs to be analyzed. This research aims to reveal the trends in this topic to contribute to future studies on social media marketing and tourism. It also aims to highlight the importance of social media marketing practices in the tourism sector and provide recommendations to tourism businesses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media's worldwide resonance has mobilized marketers. The strength of social media marketing is that it offers consumers direct and live communication independent of time and space (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The communication here is reciprocal, and it is possible to establish a strong bond between the business and the consumer thanks to the interaction created through methods such as likes, comments, and messages (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The tourism sector also benefits from this connection and makes its brands heard from the other side of the world (Sigala, 2011). The recognition of both national and international tourist places has increased with social media. These and similar posts have become increasingly widespread as consumers share the places they visit, eat, and drink on social media (Leung et al., 2013). With social media marketing, businesses mobilize potential consumers by implementing various campaigns to ensure that potential consumers share posts like others (Hajli, 2014). With the digital word-of-mouth marketing provided, tourist attractions tend to become more popular (Litvin et al., 2008). In addition, tourism and social media have led third parties to open more social media accounts with a variety of tourism information, and these pages have attracted much attention from consumers and have many followers (Gretzel et al., 2006).

When social media marketing is associated with tourism, it is seen that there are studies that can contribute to both the literature and the sector (Katsikari et al., 2020; Hays et al., 2012; Cheng & Edwards, 2015; Leung et al., 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Katsikari et al. focused on push and pull travel motivation in segmenting the Greek market for social media marketing in tourism. The result of the study suggests a roadmap for a successful social media marketing strategy based on the wants and needs of specific target audiences (Katsikari et al., 2020, p. 14). Another study on social media as a destination marketing tool focused on the social media marketing practices of national tourism organizations and found that the use of social media by destination marketing organizations is mostly trial and error and that their social media marketing strategies are very different from each other (Hays et al., 2012). Cheng and Edwards evaluated social media in tourism with a visual analytic approach. Accordingly, three insights on the impact of a social analytical approach on the travel news that Chinese consumers follow were revealed: potential tourist-generating regions, tourists' travel policy, and the lifespan of travel news (Cheng & Edwards, 2015). Leung et al. (2013) emphasized the importance of social media marketing in tourism competition in a literature review on tourism and hospitality. In addition, Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) encouraged a comprehensive study of the impact of social media on the tourism industry. After discussing the literature on social media marketing and tourism, it would be appropriate to mention the bibliometric analysis studies on social media marketing within the scope of the analysis method of this study. First of all, when the studies in the literature on this subject are examined, it is observed that the studies reveal various implications for marketing practices specific to social media marketing (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Kietzmann et al., 2011). Some studies have tried to capture the main trends and gaps in social media marketing studies (Gretzel, 2011; Dwivedi et al., 2015; Sigala, 2018; Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Constantinides, 2014). Different bibliometric studies have also been conducted on social media marketing, providing suggestions for future research (Leung et al., 2013; Tuten & Solomon, 2017; Felix et al., 2017; Michaelidou et al., 2011). Finally, according to the literature review, some studies express the development and future of social media marketing (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011; Berthon et al., 2012; Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Hudson et al., 2015; Trainor et al., 2014; Kim & Ko, 2012).

Within the scope of the research, many studies focused on social media, social media marketing, digital marketing, and tourism were analyzed. Many of these studies emphasize that the relationship between social media marketing and tourism should be addressed regularly (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Leung et al., 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Therefore, this research aims to assess the intensity and contribution of academic studies on the relationship between social media marketing, which has attracted more attention, especially in the last decade, and tourism.

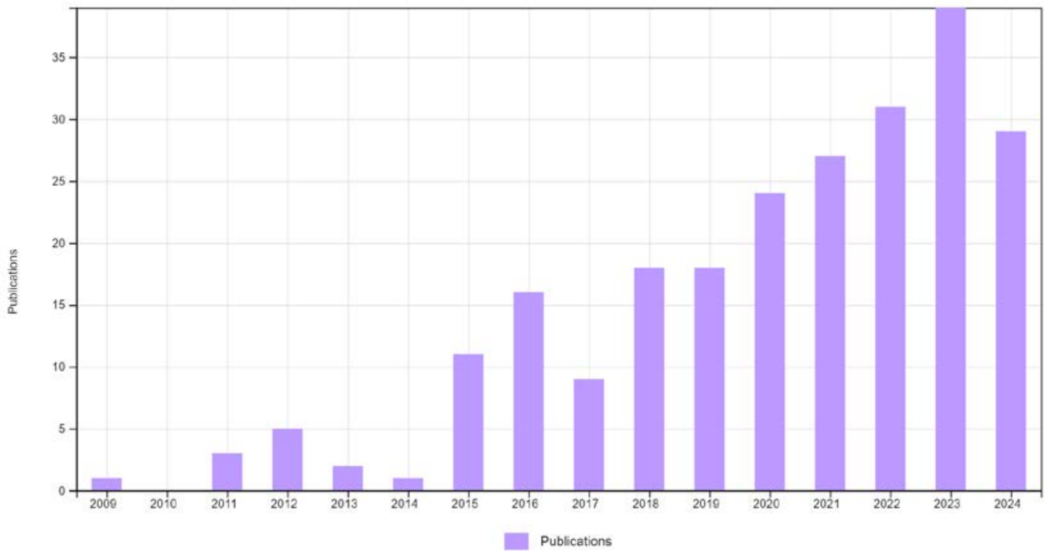
METHODOLOGY

Today, social media marketing is successfully applied in many areas. Touristic locations are the most common locations where consumers take photos and/or videos and post them on social media (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Social media is overflowing with vacation, food, and travel posts, highlighting the popularity of visual content and user engagement in the tourism sector (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). This fact reveals the prevalence of social media marketing in tourism. In this context, the existence and continuity of academic studies related to social media marketing and tourism are important (Hudson & Thal, 2013; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). This research aims to take a snapshot of the academic studies on social media marketing and tourism through bibliometric analysis and to reveal trends in the field through various statistics about these studies. The purpose of bibliometric analysis is to share comments and findings that will contribute to scientific development within the scope of various documents such as documents, articles, and books and to reveal remarkable indicators regarding both publications and authors (Donthu et al., 2021; Metin, 2013; Al, 2008).

Web of Science (WoS) is one of the databases widely used by academics and frequently preferred in bibliometric analysis (Donthu et al., 2021). The search conducted on October 18, 2024, consisted of studies between 2009 and 2024, and a total of 234 studies were accessed. Since the studies on social media marketing and tourism were first included in the Web of Science database in 2009, the studies conducted as of 2009 were considered within the scope of the research. The 234 studies were analyzed in terms of the number of publications, number of citations, countries of publication, study type, citation topics, WOS index, Web of Science (Webos) categories, and most chosen keywords, and each parameter was grouped according to years. In light of the data obtained from the WoS database, as a result of the analyses made in VOSviewer, tables, graphs, and figures were created, and relevant findings on the subject were reached. VOSviewer is a software that analyzes the data obtained from databases with visual support (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Since the use of the WoS database for the realization of the research means that the academic studies subject to the research are limited to the resources in this database, this situation expresses the research limitation (Zupic & Čater, 2015).

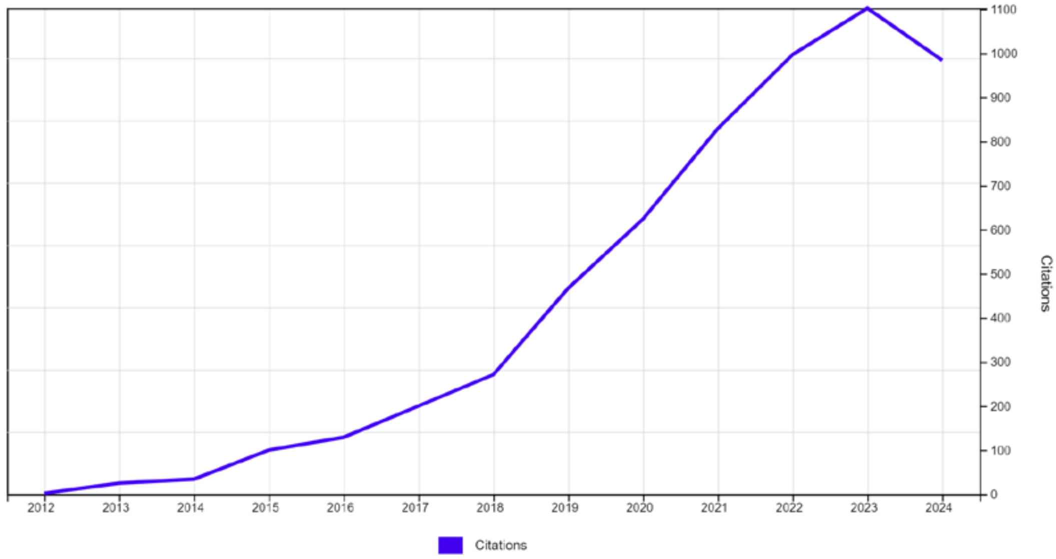
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Within the scope of the research, data obtained from the WoS database were used. The data collected for studies on social media marketing in tourism were analyzed according to the parameters of number of publications, number of citations, countries of publication, study type, citation topics, Wos index, Web of Science (Webos), and most chosen keywords categories. In this section, research findings are expressed in various graphs and tables.



Graph 1. Number of Publications

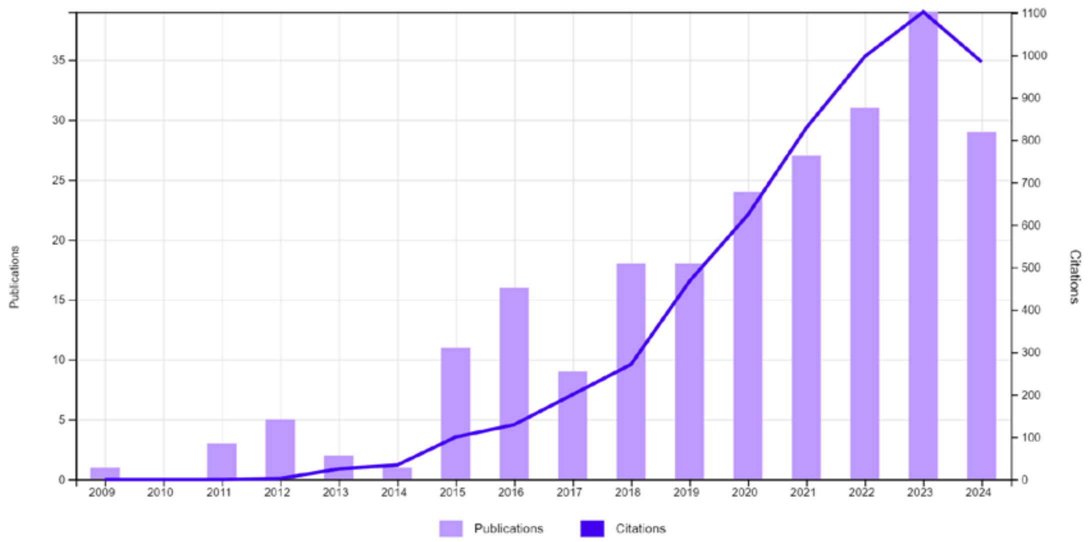
Considering the number of publications on social media marketing in tourism, a total of 234 studies were accessed. Looking at Graph 1, while there was a maximum of 5 publications between 2009-2014, there has been a steady increase in the number of publications on this topic, especially as of 2017; only in 2024, there was a decrease compared to the previous year. It would be appropriate to wait until the end of 2024 to make the most transparent assessment. However, it is possible to say that an increase in the number of studies in this field is usually parallel with the increase in the prevalence of social media and social media marketing practices in the tourism sector. Another study investigating the impact of social media in hospitality similarly found that the number of publications on this topic has steadily increased since 2014 (Jimenez et al., 2024, p. 3). In addition, the number of publications in a bibliometric study on user-generated content in social media for hospitality has started to increase as of 2019 (Kitsios et al., 2022, p. 6). It can be stated that social media has impacted academic publications on different topics over different years. This graph shows that the topic of social media marketing in tourism is trending among researchers.



Graph 2. Number of Cites

Graph 2 shows the number of citations received by the studies according to years. It is possible to say that the number of citations is in parallel with the number of publications. Compared to the number of publications, it can be said that there has been no decline over the years, and it draws a continuously increasing line. It can be thought that the decline only occurred in 2024, maybe because the data for 2024 was collected before the end of the year. In a study investigating the relationship between social media and tourist experience, the increase in the number of articles and citations was not as consistent as in this study (Idbenssi et al., 2023, p. 6). The reason for this situation, which presents a contrary view, may be that social media marketing was not the focus of the other study.

Graph 3. Number of Cites and Publications



Graph 3 shows that the increase in the number of publications and citations is directly proportional. In this case, it is possible to say that the increasing number of citations and publications on a particular topic support each other.

Table 1.
Publications by the Countries

Countries	Frequency	%
USA	51	21.795
PEOPLES R CHINA	43	18.376
INDIA	21	8.974
AUSTRALIA	14	5.983
MALAYSIA	14	5.983
ENGLAND	12	5.128
ITALY	11	4.701
INDONESIA	10	4.274
SPAIN	10	4.274
TURKEY	10	4.274

Table 1 shows the top ten countries with the highest number of publications. Accordingly, the USA has the highest number of publications, with 51, followed by China, with 43. India ranks third with 21 publications. In tenth place, Turkey has 10 publications. According to the data obtained from WoS, a total of 234 publications were published by 60 different countries. This situation reveals that although there has been an increase in the number of publications on the subject over the years, academic studies on this subject are insufficient in terms of global dissemination.

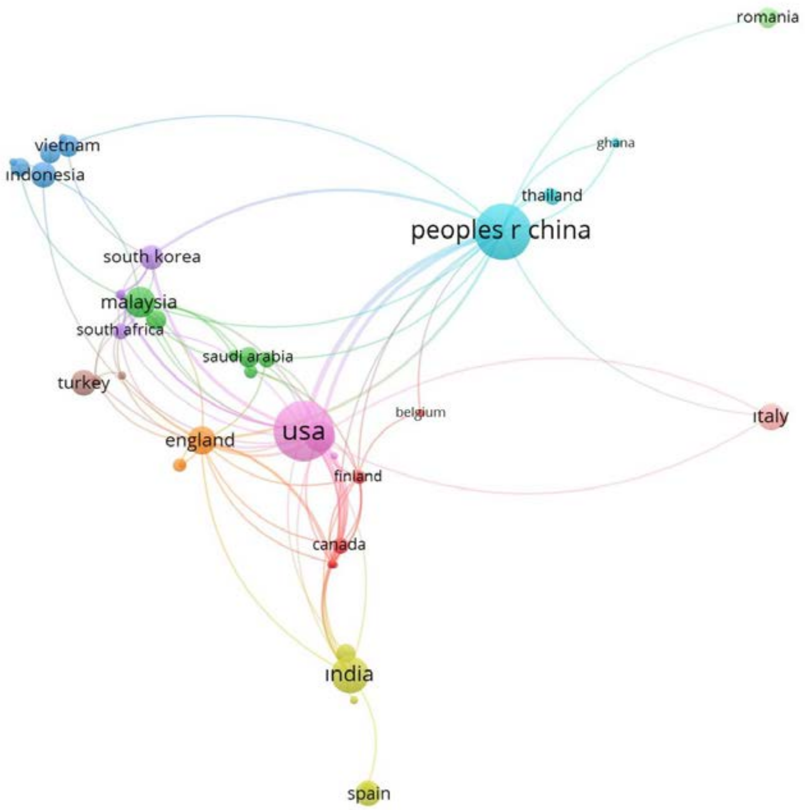
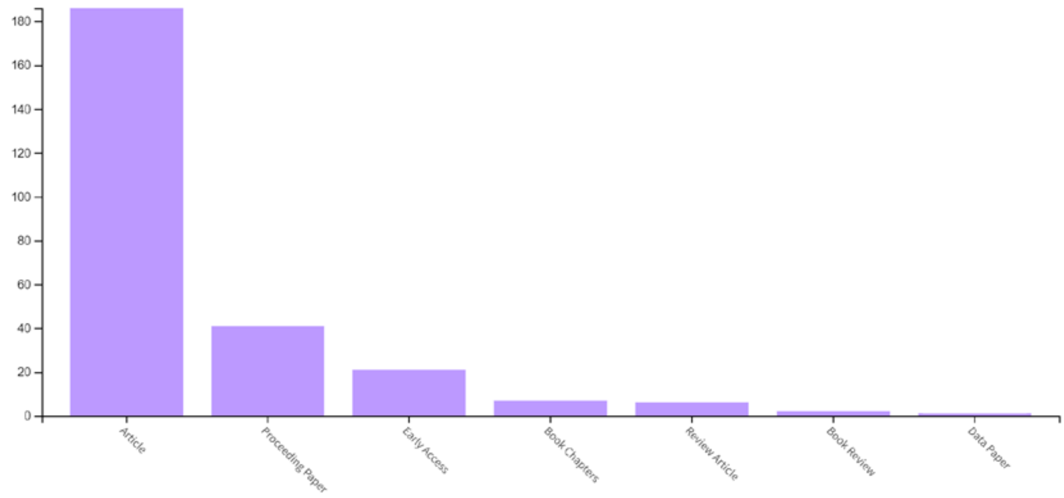


Figure 1. Countries and Links

Concerning the number of publications of the countries in Table 1, Figure 1 shows the international collaborations of the authors publishing in the relevant countries with other countries. According to Figure 1, prepared through VOSviewer, 37 of the publications in the USA, 32 of the publications in China, and 11 of the publications in India have emerged through international collaborations. Only 1 out of 10 publications in Turkey resulted from author collaboration; that country was Hungary.



Graph 4. Document Types

Graph 4 shows that most publications on social media marketing in tourism are articles. 79.4% of 234 publications, in other words, 186 of them are articles. Book chapters and review articles are arranged close to each other as 7 and 6, respectively. This data reveals the academic dominance of articles on this subject.

Table 2.
WoS Index

z	Frequency	%
Book Citation Index – Social Sciences & Humanities (BKCI-SSH)	7	2,99
Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)	85	36,33
Conference Proceedings Citation Index – Social Science & Humanities (CPCI-SSH)	27	11,54
Conference Proceedings Citation Index – Science (CPCI-S)	16	6,84
Science Citation Index Expanded (SCI-EXPANDED)	18	7,69
Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI)	99	42,31

According to Table 2, the indexes in which the articles on social media marketing in tourism are most frequently indexed within the scope of WoS are SSCI with 99 articles, followed by ESCI with 85 articles. There are considerable differences in the number of articles between these two indexes, followed by other indexes. This finding supports Graph 4 and shows the prevalence of articles on the relevant study topic.

Table 3.
WoS Categories

z	Frequency	%
Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism	111	47,44
Business	61	26,07
Management	32	13,68
Environmental Studies	15	6,41
Economics	13	5,56
Environmental Sciences	11	4,7
Green Sustainable Science Technology	10	4,28

Web of Science categories classify completed academic studies under various categories. Table 3 shows the categories in which the studies on social media marketing in tourism are most frequently categorized within WoS and the number of studies in these categories. In addition, WoS categories with at least 10 studies are presented in Table 3. Accordingly, the "Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism" category leads the WoS categories with 111 studies and 47.44% of the studies. The second category is "Business," with 61 studies and 26.17% of the studies, and the third category is "Management," with 32 studies and a 13.68% share. With 10 studies and 4.28% of the studies, the "Green Sustainable Science Technology" category is at the bottom of the table. In another study that conducted a bibliometric analysis of bibliometric analysis studies in the field of tourism and hospitality, similarly, the category "Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism" was the most used. However, in the same study, the " business " category was expressed as the fifth category (Ülker et al., 2022, p. 805). The reason for this may be that the concept of marketing is not a keyword in the research.

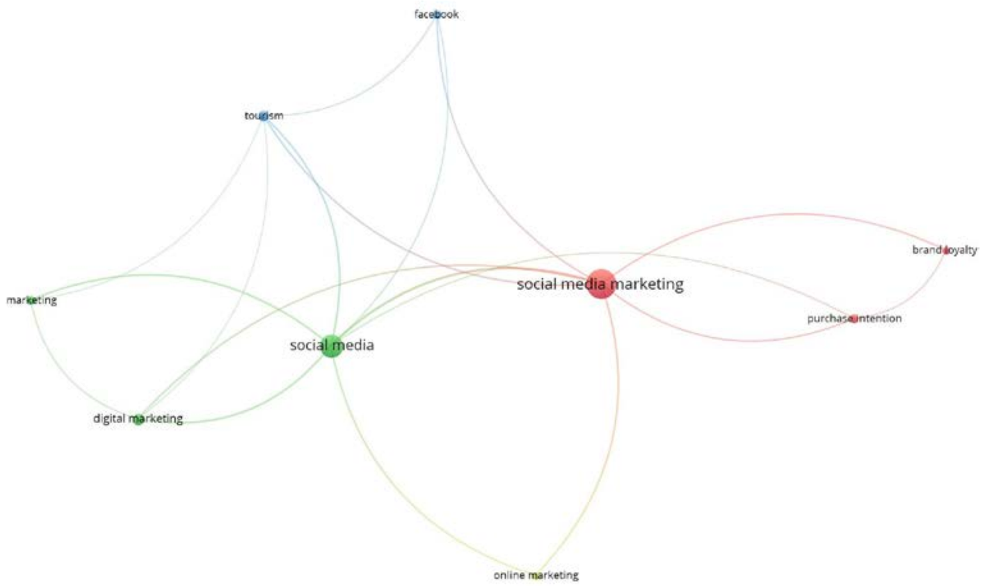


Figure 2. Most Chosen Keywords

A total of 794 keywords were used in tourism and social media marketing studies. Figure 2 shows the 9 most used keywords. Accordingly, social media marketing was used 100 times, social media 58 times, and tourism 14 times, sharing the top three places. In addition, in Figure 2, the link between keywords is drawn to show the other keywords where the 9 keywords are used together the most. Similarly, in Idbenssi et al.'s study (2023), "social media" was the most preferred keyword.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As social media continues to be widespread and consumers have smartphones in their hands at all times, social media marketing is a topic that remains attractive for businesses. In addition, the fact that many tourism-based posts are made on social media and that new pages are being created daily on social media solely on tourism reveals the relationship between tourism and social media. This situation emphasizes the importance of social media marketing in the tourism sector for both businesses and academic studies.

This research was conducted to reveal the trends and the big picture of research on social media marketing in tourism within the scope of the WoS database. Studies conducted from 2009 to the present day have been discussed within the scope of the research. As of 2009, the fact that the number of studies that started to emerge almost every year is an indication of how interesting this topic is. Parallel to this result, studies have emphasized that social media is a turning point in tourism and encourages information sharing (Leung et al., 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). It is recommended that researchers continue to produce new studies on this topic for different purposes. According to another conclusion, it would be appropriate for European countries, which are not in the top five when looking at the countries where the studies are published, to focus on more academic studies on this subject to take place in the first upper steps in the publication ranking.

As in almost every subject, the article is the most common type of study published on social media marketing and tourism. Similarly, Xiang and Gretzel (2010) stated that books and book chapters are not sufficiently emphasized in tourism. In order to increase the diversity of publications, it may be appropriate to create and disseminate an incentive system in terms of academic promotion criteria, academic work awards, etc., that will mobilize researchers to increase the number of book writing, book chapter writing, and proceeding papers. According to the WoS index, the publication rate in Book Citation Index - Social Sciences & Humanities (BKCI-SSH) is at the bottom with 2.99%. Various incentives and guidance would be appropriate to emphasize the importance of writing books and/or book chapters for researchers. It was revealed that the “Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism” category was the most used in the Wos categories, with a rate of 47%. However, when social media marketing and tourism issues are considered, it may be preferable to create a separate category called “Gastronomy” since gastronomy has become widespread worldwide and attracts attention in the tourism sector, and undergraduate education is given in universities under the name of Gastronomy. In support of this study, Garcia-Rosell and Makinen (2013) emphasized the importance of social media marketing in promoting gastronomy tourism. Although the study emphasizes the importance of social media marketing in the tourism sector, there is also a study that states that social media cannot always have a positive contribution and that negative comments that can spread quickly, especially in times of crisis, can damage the image of tourism destinations (Sigala, 2011).

It is important that future bibliometric studies on social media marketing and tourism are conducted regularly and at regular intervals to reveal the trends in this field. Likewise, with the emergence of new social media networks suitable for use within the scope of tourism, new research can be conducted on this subject, and even comparing the marketing methods among social media networks with the tourism dimension will contribute to this field. In addition, tourism businesses need to remain active in social media marketing. Especially with social media marketing, which provides individual rather than mass communication, it may be possible to provide e-wom by increasing consumer interaction. As a limitation of the research, it can be stated that only the data within the scope of WoS were analyzed. A bibliometric analysis using other databases will provide helpful information on the trend of research on social media marketing in tourism.

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BIOGRAPHY

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Sustainable tourism development in post-war settings: The influence of the slow city movement[1]

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ABSTRACT

Wars can inflict profound harm upon a nation's cultural, historical, and natural treasures, jeopardizing tourism resources and potentially leading to their depletion or destruction. However, meticulous and judicious post-war tourism development planning can transform these crises into opportunities. However, it is rare to find countries that have emerged from conflict and shifted their focus toward tourism. This research delves into such a nation, one scarred by the ravages of war, to evaluate its tourism potential and its challenges as perceived by stakeholders. The study examines the current state and forecasts future implications for urban tourism development amidst the seldom-addressed post-war obstacles in tourism literature. Analysis of participant responses revealed a prevailing positive sentiment towards the Slow City Movement, with a majority expressing willingness to support a potential membership process actively. Its primary goal is to delineate the perspectives of local stakeholders on tourist development in a post-war context and to elucidate the role of revitalization in catalyzing the Slow City Movement's growth. The study closely intertwines with pertinent literature by employing qualitative data collection and analysis methodologies. MAXQDA, a robust qualitative data analysis program, facilitates data analysis, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of stakeholder perspectives and insights into post-war tourism development.

KEYWORDS

Slow City Movement, post-war, sustainable tourism, Azerbaijan, tourism development

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INTRODUCTION

The ongoing clashes between Azerbaijan and Armenia began in 2010 and eventually turned into a full-blown war on September 27, 2020. The conflict ended after 44 days with the ceasefire agreement signed on November 10, 2020, ending the Second Karabakh War. As a result, five provinces, four towns, and 286 villages that had been under Azerbaijani occupation for nearly 30 years were liberated (Çeliksoy, 2021). The war's end opened up new opportunities for Azerbaijan in the form of tourism. The natural beauty, historical artifacts, and cultural riches previously under occupation showcased Azerbaijan's tourism potential (Mammadov, 2022). Against this backdrop, tourism has gained increasing importance in recent years due to significant oil and natural gas price imbalances (Binns & Nel, 2002). Tourism is an affordable and popular tool for developing countries and regions to foster development (Qureshi & Dada, 2019). Additionally, tourism can help facilitate post-war recovery and development and can be used to develop war-affected regions quickly. However, a firm tourism policy and plan are necessary for sustainable post-war tourism development (Hall, 2003). Tourism holds immense potential in alleviating poverty through its ability to generate employment opportunities, bolster foreign exchange earnings, and stimulate economic growth, particularly in regions grappling with the aftermath of conflict. Its close alignment with sustainable practices further underscores its role as a catalyst for positive change. In post-war settings, promoting tourism emerges as a strategic avenue for fostering socio-economic development in affected areas or nations (Samarathunga, Cheng & Weerathunga, 2020). Recognizing its transformative impact, numerous international bodies, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), and the European Union (EU), advocate for leveraging tourism to facilitate poverty reduction, economic diversification, cross-border integration, peacebuilding, post-conflict stabilization, and socio-economic revitalization (Novelli, Morgan & Nibigira, 2012). Tourism is a pivotal sector driving national economies, injecting significant contributions to economic growth through travelers' expenditures and fostering employment opportunities within communities. However, establishing a meticulously planned and sustainable tourism strategy is imperative to foster enduring economic progress. The notion of sustainability gained paramount importance in literature during the 1970s amid concerns over environmental degradation and resource depletion. Given that nature is a primary draw for tourism, it is imperative to formulate development blueprints that align with sustainable principles. The overarching aim of sustainable tourism policy lies in nurturing the preservation of natural resources for posterity while facilitating the sustainable advancement of the economy. A sustainable economic framework not only bolsters regional advancement but also markedly enhances the well-being of local populations. The ultimate objective of sustainable tourism development resides in ensuring that tourism serves as a boon to the environment and local communities, fostering social, cultural, and economic benefits, with the community at the core of sustainable tourism endeavors (Park & Kim, 2015).

Specific movements advocate for alternative development paradigms, exemplified by the Slow City movement, also recognized as Slow City. These movements have arisen in reaction to apprehensions regarding the enduring consequences of relentless pro-growth capitalism and the perceived trend toward global homogenization (Mayer & Knox, 2006). Predominantly found in smaller municipalities, these movements prioritize endorsing local identity, sustainability, and domestically-driven economic systems (Servon & Pink, 2015). Slow cities are places where local leaders and residents rely on the unique local context and history to guide better and more sustainable urban development practices. The slow city approach emphasizes the connection between sustainable urban development, including the economy, environment, and equity, and the importance of preserving local uniqueness (Mayer & Knox, 2006).

Numerous studies have suggested that sustainable tourism planning and activities are effective solutions for destinations to revive their economic growth after wars (Dayoub et al., 2020; Sivesan, 2020; Lokuhetty, Jayawardena & Mudadeniya, 2013; Kamble & Bouchon, 2014). Previous research has shown a positive relationship between sustainable tourism and membership in the Slow City Movement (Park & Kim, 2015; Ekinci, 2014; Presenza, Abbate &

Perano, 2015; Özgeriş & Karahan, 2021). However, a comprehensive literature review has identified the gap in how Slow City Movement membership can be used as a solution for sustainable tourism planning in post-war destinations. Therefore, this study is unique and should be considered.

This study aims to explore the possibility of Azerbaijan joining the Slow City Movement. Since gaining independence in 1991, Azerbaijan has faced economic challenges, making it crucial to focus on sectors that can significantly contribute to the country's economy, such as tourism. Azerbaijan has abundant tourism opportunities due to its natural, cultural, and historical resources. It is important to preserve and sustain these values, and the Slow City Movement can aid in this regard, ensuring the development of Azerbaijan's tourism sector and the protection and utilization of its existing resources. The study offers recommendations for local and national decision-makers, tourism enterprises, and future studies. This research is significant as no previous study has been conducted on Azerbaijan's potential for membership in the Slow City Movement. With the reintegration of the regions liberated from occupation, Azerbaijan is expected to experience significant tourism growth. However, not being a member of the Slow City Movement can be a significant weakness in the tourism sector. The study involved managers from the Azerbaijan State Tourism Agency (ADTA), who were interviewed about their perceptions of sustainable tourism and their opinions and ideas regarding the Slow City Movement's contribution to post-war tourism development. Assessing the contributions of Slow City Movements to a post-war tourism destination by understanding its advantages among managers and their meanings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Slow City Movement and Sustainable Tourism

In 1999, four Italian towns—Greve in Chianti, Bra, Orvieto, and Positano—collaborated with the Slow Food Association to establish Slow City (Cittaslow, 2011). This initiative aimed to foster local identity by integrating the Slow Food philosophy into urban planning within small communities. Slow City's primary objective is to amalgamate historical wisdom with contemporary prospects, fostering a comprehensive approach to community development (Mayer & Knox, 2006). A Slow City emphasizes sustainability and excellence, ensuring the preservation and enhancement of cultural heritage and community values. It advocates for bioarchitecture, organic farming, and the preservation of landscape biodiversity. Additionally, Slow City prioritizes traditional production methods, items, and craftsmanship while encouraging innovative techniques that uphold traditional production and spur the advancement of regional products. It prioritizes the vitality of communities, maintains their infrastructure, and opts for sustainable solutions that safeguard the future development of subsequent generations (European Manifest Cittaslow, 2012).

Azerbaijan and the Slow City Principles

The Slow City Movement, established in a small town in Italy in 1999, has gained worldwide recognition for its commitment to sustainability and the preservation of local natural and cultural characteristics. Member cities benefit economically by promoting their unique identities while adhering to the movement's principles. The Cittaslow Association, an international organization, invites municipalities with populations under 50,000 to join the movement by adhering to the principles of Slow Food and enhancing conviviality while preserving local environments. The certification process evaluates towns against 72 quality criteria, grouped into seven categories: Energy and Environmental Policies, Infrastructure Policies, Quality of Urban Life Policies, Agricultural, Touristic, and Artisan Policies, Policies for Hospitality, Awareness and Training, Social Cohesion, and Partnerships (Cittaslow, 2023).

With its diverse climates and rich natural resources, Azerbaijan aligns well with these principles and holds great potential to meet the Slow City Movement's membership criteria. The country boasts two of the 13 known global climate zones, encompassing 65% subtropical and 35% temperate regions (Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, 2022). Its flat terrain is complemented by prominent mountain ranges, including the Greater Caucasus, Lesser Caucasus, Talysh, and South Iran (Valiyev & Agaoglu, 1997). Azerbaijan's commitment to environmental policies is evident in initiatives such as the 2018-2022 national strategy for solid waste management, the Action Plan for Effective Water Resources Use (2020-2022), and the Azerbaijan 2030 strategy prioritizing socio-economic development (Presidency of Azerbaijan, 2022). These efforts reflect a strong foundation for meeting Slow City's environmental and socio-economic sustainability goals.

Another criterion is "Infrastructure policies". In recent years, much work has been done in Azerbaijan to increase the number of bicycle lanes. In addition, 120 pedestrian crossings were built on 27 streets to ensure smooth movement of pedestrians. One of the works carried out in Azerbaijan is the Smart City project. With this project, many cities in Azerbaijan are expected to be technology-equipped and people-oriented (Valiyev, 2022). The quality of urban life policies criterion has been included among the priority areas in Azerbaijan. The initial policy under discussion is a decree signed by President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan in 2021. Entitled "Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-economic Development," this decree outlines significant themes and proposed objectives. These objectives, aimed at fostering the socio-economic advancement of the nation, include (1) sustainable economic restructuring, (2) fostering a dynamic, inclusive, and socially just community, (3) cultivating competitive human capital and a modern innovation landscape, and (4) facilitating substantial progress in the recently liberated territories (Presidency of Azerbaijan, 2022). Within the realm of agricultural, touristic, and artisan policies, agriculture holds pivotal importance in Azerbaijan, given the deep historical connections its people have to this sector. Consequently, the government has devised numerous strategic roadmaps to propel agricultural development, with one notable example being the "Strategic Roadmap for the Production and Processing of Agricultural Products in the Republic of Azerbaijan," enacted in 2016. In hospitality, awareness, and training policies, the Republic of Azerbaijan is dedicated to fostering innovation in the tourism sector and ensuring its prominence among other industries through aligned initiatives and investments. The Decree "Strategic Road Map for the development of specialized tourism industry in the Republic of Azerbaijan" signed in 2016 is of great importance for this development (Azerbaijan State Tourism Agency, 2016).

Azerbaijani people have permanently attached great importance to hospitality due to their roots. However, ADTA and tourism enterprises are taking many important steps to professionalize this work further. For example, in 2021, ADTA and the Tourism Training and Certification Center of the Azerbaijan Tourism Bureau (ATB) organized a seminar called "Certified Hospitality Training." The seminar was organized in cooperation with the American Hotel and Lodging Institute. The seminar was attended by 17 tourism industry stakeholders, hotel representatives, and representatives from ADTA and ATB (Salimov, 2022). One of the other issues that the Azerbaijani government attaches importance to is training individuals in the tourism sector. Due to this policy, educational institutes that can directly affect the tourism sector have been established in the country. One of these is the Azerbaijan Tourism and Business University. The university has set the goal of raising educated individuals for the country's tourism sector. Currently, 1,980 students are studying at the university. The university has so far trained 4,481 graduates for Azerbaijan's tourism sector (Azerbaijan Tourism and Business University, 2022). Baku Tourism Vocational College and Mingachevir Tourism College also operate. Within the scope of social cohesion, great importance has always been attached to solving problems such as unemployment and poverty in the country. At the same time, significant steps are being taken to integrate disabled citizens into society. The government provides different monthly and collective allowances to the elderly, disabled, unemployed, and disadvantaged groups (Veliyev, 2022). At the same time, the government provides much assistance to unemployed citizens in finding a job (Azerbaijan Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, 2021). Regarding partnership policies, ADTA concludes partnership agreements at the national and international levels to ensure the growth of the tourism sector in Azerbaijan. Since 1992, 12 memorandums of understanding (MoUs), 31 agreements, including 27 international ones, and two cooperation programs between 2020 and 2022 have been signed.

METHODOLOGY

This research aims to evaluate Azerbaijan's potential to join the Slow City Movement. The study was focused on employees of the Azerbaijan State Tourism Agency. Since it is impossible to include the entire population in the scope of the research in terms of time and cost, the sample of the research consists of 14 people working in managerial positions in the Azerbaijan State Tourism Agency (ADTA). Purposive and convenience sampling methods, which are non-probability sampling methods, were used in the study. In the purposive sampling method, the group or groups that are suitable for the research and predetermined and defined for this purpose are included in the sample (Kozak, 2001). The convenience sampling method aims to include individuals from whom information and data can be easily collected (Kurtuluş, 2010). The interview technique, frequently used in qualitative research, was used in the study. The main reason for using the interview technique in the study is that it enables in-depth information to be obtained from the participants. The interview form was prepared after a literature review to ensure the interview was positive and productive (Mayer & Knox, 2006; Park & Kim, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2016). The interview form consists of two parts. In the first part, questions were asked about age, gender, education, and employment to learn the demographic characteristics of the participants. In the second part, questions were asked about Slow City, and the aim was to learn their opinions on these questions. In the interviews with the participants, an informative presentation was made about the concept of a "Slow City," and following the presentation, the interview questions were directed to the participants. Before the interview started, it was explained to the participants that their answers would remain confidential and would not be shared with third parties. After the presentation to the participants on 15.02.2023, interviews were conducted between 15.02.2023 and 27.02.2023.

In this study, data analysis was conducted with MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis program. The primary purpose of data analysis is to reveal the original meaning and source of information of the collected data. Without making any changes to the data received from the participants, the data's value was measured through the analysis program, and the results were included in the study without any changes. Another stage of the study is coding. The coding stage is considered the most important stage in qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Participant responses are deciphered through this coding, and analyses are divided into the right topics. At the same time, coding also supports the reliability of participant responses. The researchers transcribed the data in a computer environment, creating transcripts. No changes were made to the research texts. However, while writing the research findings, some texts were translated into academic language for easier understanding (Kozak, 2001). While creating the transcripts, the real names of all administrators were hidden, and codes were given as P1 and P2 for each participant.

RESULTS

This section of the study provides the findings of the participant interview analysis. The data was coded using an inductive method to ensure objective analysis. The initial questions asked of the participants were about their age and year of residence. The obtained results are displayed in Table 1.

Upon analyzing the table, it is evident that the number of participants aged 25 and below is higher. Additionally, when the years of residence of the participants are analyzed, it is observed that most of them have lived in the region for 31 years or more. This implies that many of the participants possess a good understanding of the area and can provide a better assessment of the suitability of the Slow City Movement for the country.

Table 1.
General Information About Research Participants

Participant	Age	Education	Duration of Residence in Azerbaijan (years)
P1	32	Bachelor	32
P2	30	Bachelor	30
P3	42	Master	42
P4	24	Master	24
P5	35	Bachelor	35
P6	22	Master	22
P7	33	Master	32
P8	22	Bachelor	22
P9	25	Bachelor	25
P10	27	Bachelor	27
P11	32	Master	32
P12	25	Bachelor	23
P13	21	Master	21
P14	20	Bachelor	20

When asked about their knowledge of the concept of a "Slow City," 71.4% of the participants stated that they were familiar with it, while 28.6% claimed otherwise. However, the responses varied when participants were asked to define what a "Slow City" meant to them. Most of the answers indicated that the concept promotes environmental friendliness and contributes to the sustainability of a city's ecological structure.

P7: *"Ecologically clean city, use of organic, non-GMO products, use of solar energy, use of traditional products and recipes in the concept of slow food."*

Participants highlighted that the movement contributes to both ecological structure and sustainability and preserves historical city structures.

P4: *"In my opinion, this concept is important for cities to preserve their historical characteristics. It is a concept in which cities preserve their characteristics in order not to be similar to each other".*

The participants were asked if they knew the cities of the Slow City Movement, and their answers were recorded.

According to most participants, limited infrastructure and technology access in certain regions may negatively impact the membership process.

P2: *"I think that there are enough cities/regions in the regions that can meet the general criteria for implementing the concept of the Slow City Movement. But first of all, several factors, such as lack of favorable infrastructure, late diffusion of technological innovations to the regions, and low access to financial opportunities for the development of local production in the regions, seem to be factors that will limit the implementation of the concept in Azerbaijan".*

P5: *“Azerbaijan's potential for membership in this movement to be weak.”*

P5: *"I consider the potential to be weak because for the movement to be implemented in the country, the highest level of support for joining the movement is required."*

The majority of participants believe that membership will positively impact sustainable tourism.

P6: *"This could attract tourists who want to vacation in environmentally friendly places and are willing to support sustainable tourism. In addition, the membership of a Slow City can help promote local traditions and culture, which will attract tourists looking for an authentic and unique experience."*

Regarding the positive impact of the Slow City Movement on Azerbaijan's sustainable tourism, the statements of P2 and P4 below have come to the fore.

P2: *"One of the most fundamental conditions for sustainable tourism is to ensure that existing resources are used in a planned and 'fair' way to meet the needs of future generations. In this context, the membership of Slow City can ensure the development of communities by protecting local production, ensuring ecological sustainability with a more environmentally sensitive approach, and at the same time reducing the impact of pressures on communities."*

P4: *"I do not think it can be interesting for tourists who like to visit shopping centers in cities while traveling, but I think it can attract tourists who like authenticity and have a positive impact on tourism."*

Table 2.
Member countries or cities known to participants

Participant	Country / City
P1	Italy and Turkiye
P2	Seferihisar and Halfeti (Turkiye)
P3	Austria: Hartberg Turkiye: Ahlat, Akyaka, Arapgir, Egirdir, Foça, Gerze, Gökçeada, Göynük, Güdül, Halfeti, İznik, Köyceğiz, Mudurnu, Perşembe, Seferihisar, Şavşat, Taraklı, Uzundere, Vize, Yalvaç, Yenipazar
P4	Italy and Turkiye
P5	I don’t know
P6	Germany, Italy, Hungary
P7	Bad Essen, Svetlogorsk, Amalfi, Bazzano, İznik
P8	Seferihisar (Turkiye)
P9	I don’t know
P10	Italy and Germany
P11	I don’t know
P12	Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany
P13	Zurich (Switzerland) and Bergen (Norway)
P14	I don’t know

In recent years, one of the most significant advancements in Azerbaijan's economic landscape is its notable shift away from reliance on oil revenues. Central to this diversification strategy is emphasizing bolstering sectors beyond the oil industry, with particular attention to tourism. Azerbaijan has implemented numerous initiatives to nurture its tourism sector's growth, resulting in substantial progress. Notably, experts predict that embracing the principles of the Slow City Movement will play a pivotal role in further enhancing Azerbaijan's economy. Feedback from stakeholders overwhelmingly suggests that participation in this movement would significantly benefit the non-oil economy.

P7: "*If we take into account the diversification process of our country's economy into the non-oil sector and the contribution of tourism in this direction and the inevitability of sustainability processes in the world, it can make positive contributions*."

P6: "*Participating in the Slow City Movement can help improve environmental standards in cities, which can lead to lower treatment costs for diseases related to environmental pollution. This can improve population health and ultimately increase labor productivity. Membership in a Slow City can attract tourists looking for environmentally friendly and safe accommodation. This can increase tourism revenues and create new jobs in the hotel and restaurant industry as well as other tourism-related fields*."

P2: "*Membership in the Slow City Movement can help solve the problem of unemployment and rural-urban migration and partially remove the constraints on social development currently observed in the regions and promote economic revitalization*."

P9: "*It can strongly influence the development of the non-oil sector*."

When asked about the potential impact on Azerbaijan's cultural and social structure if it were to become a member of the Slow City Movement, the following answers were given:

P1: *"Both positive and negative. The negative side is that tourists bring culture with them, and this does not affect the national culture."*

P2: *"Communities will more actively help preserve historical and cultural values, which will strengthen community identity and support more inclusive development."*

P3: *"It prevents rapid gentrification of residential areas, creates an environmentally friendly production environment, and reduces pollution levels."*

P7: *"I think it will have a positive impact on society. It encourages the maximum protection of our ecology, the economical use of the resources we have, and the consideration of future generations."*

P9: *"It can strongly support the preservation of environmental greenery and its transfer to future generations."*

To the question of how Azerbaijan's membership in the Slow City Movement would impact the country's natural and environmental structure, the answers are as follows:

P7: *"The air of our city will be cleaned; it can affect the more efficient use of natural resources."*

P13*: "A cleaner environment, a decrease in diseases caused by GMO foods, and noise pollution can be affected."*

P2: *"It will help protect the environment, more sustainable use of land and other natural resources."*

P4: *"Since urbanization will decrease, member cities and villages will become more environmentally friendly."*

Within the Slow City Movement framework, a key priority in member countries is obtaining institutional approval before implementing any changes within member cities. This approach ensures the preservation and respectful utilization of each city's distinctive character and heritage. During discussions with participants, inquiries were made regarding the Citizens' Movement's influence on conservation efforts and sustainable usage practices. The consensus among the majority of respondents is that membership in the Slow City Movement significantly enhances the preservation of these cities' historical fabric and unique charm.

P3: *"Positive, preservation of historical-cultural heritage, community traditions, enrichment of local flora and fauna."*

P6: *"Azerbaijan's membership in Cittaslow can help Azerbaijan find a balance between protecting the environment and using its resources. The Cittaslow Association promotes sustainable development that preserves natural resources while providing economic growth and meeting the needs of the population."*

P9: *"The fact that member cities are not subject to change without the approval of the association affects continuity."*

In response to the question about the impact on the city and the local population if Azerbaijan becomes a member of the Slow City Movement and the participants' support for the membership process, 71% of the participants had a positive opinion, and 29% had a negative opinion.

P2: *"In general, I think that a Slow City will only be beneficial for destinations, but it is necessary to take into account that the transformation of a city into a Slow City can lead to a rapid increase in interest, tourist flows, price increases, as a result of which the local population will become strangers in their own country. After a certain period, therefore, it is extremely important to correctly define the concept of development of the respective destinations and to implement it in a planned manner."*

P7: *"At this stage, I do not see the negative side, but I think it will take a long time to see the positive results of this process and to influence society."*

When participants were queried about the potential impact on local communities and businesses should Azerbaijan join the Slow City Movement, the responses were diverse. Among them, 43% expressed optimism that membership would spur regional economic growth, another 43% believed it would yield positive outcomes overall, while 14% saw it as a potential remedy for unemployment issues.

P2: *"It will make a great contribution to solving problems such as unemployment in the regions."*

P9: *"It can contribute to the economic development of the regions."*

P8: *"It will make a great contribution to the further development of businesses and increase the economic freedom of local people."*

When participants were surveyed regarding their inclination to support the membership process, the results revealed that 57.1% favored "Yes," 28.6% remained undecided, and 14.3% expressed opposition to "No."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research aims to investigate the potential of Azerbaijan to be accepted into the Slow City Movement and, at the same time, to help shed light on the process in case Azerbaijan can become a member of the movement. The fact that sustainability is one of the pillars of the concept increases its importance. Considering that, the sustainability of the tourism sector in the globalizing world is predicted to be achieved more easily with membership, which further increases the importance of the movement. When we look at the examples in the world, we see different, creative, and ultimately investing in the future of calm and people. Each practice inspires other members and/or prospective members of the movement and encourages them to improve themselves. From this point of view, it is possible to say that member cities and prospective cities of the Slow City Movement support each other intensely with the integrative effect of the Slow City Movement (Çakır et al., 2014).

When examining Azerbaijani tourism literature, the absence of prior research on the subject underscores the significance of this investigation. This study fills a crucial gap and sets a precedent for guiding future research and potentially influencing similar contexts in other countries. Analysis of participant responses revealed a prevailing positive sentiment towards the Slow City Movement, with a majority expressing willingness to support a potential membership process actively. Given Azerbaijan's heavy reliance on oil and natural gas, which hampers the development of non-oil sectors, the Movement holds promise for fostering economic diversification. Furthermore, the involvement of state institutions signals substantial government support for the Movement's initiatives. The nation's persistent high unemployment rate is a pressing concern, and membership in the Slow City Movement is anticipated to alleviate this issue by fostering job creation opportunities. Despite Azerbaijan's status as an oil-dependent economy, this study sheds light on the potential for the country to engage in the Movement, thereby bolstering its non-oil sectors such as tourism.

Environmental degradation emerges as a paramount global threat in the era of globalization. The Movement's emphasis on environmental stewardship underscores its importance, with participants showing keen interest in sustainable practices to preserve nature. Promoting sustainable development principles, including enhanced quality of life, ecological consciousness, and local governance, is poised to yield substantial benefits at both local and national levels. Participants affirm Azerbaijan's viability as a member of the Slow City Movement, advocating for its integration. To advance future research, it is imperative to solicit perspectives from diverse stakeholders beyond ADTA employees, including residents, tourism enterprises, and NGOs. Exploring the potential of formerly occupied regions and cities to embrace the Movement could further bolster sustainable tourism nationwide.

Involving all stakeholders in post-occupation regions is critical for effective implementation. While the Movement can boost tourism, locals often express concerns about cultural erosion and ethical dilemmas. Thus, community education initiatives must foster understanding and mitigate negative impacts. To fortify Azerbaijan's identity as a Slow City, collaborative efforts among educational institutions and public bodies should focus on environmental conservation and public awareness campaigns. Additionally, exploring opportunities for Slow Food Movement membership in Azerbaijan and its liberated regions could further solidify the nation's commitment to a sustainable, culturally rich future.

The findings of this study align with prior research on the benefits and challenges associated with adopting the Slow City Movement. Similar to findings by Mayer and Knox (2006), participants emphasized ecological sustainability, the preservation of local traditions, and the movement's potential to foster sustainable tourism. Additionally, consistent with Miele (2013), participants highlighted how adopting Slow City principles could improve urban livability, protect historical heritage, and enhance economic opportunities through tourism. However, the challenges noted by participants, such as inadequate infrastructure and technological access, echo the findings of Yurtseven and Kaya (2011), who identified similar barriers in other regions striving to meet Slow City criteria. Unlike other studies emphasizing rapid benefits, participants in this study suggested that tangible outcomes may take longer to materialize.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on sustainable urban development by providing a region-specific analysis of Azerbaijan's potential for adopting the Slow City Movement. It extends theoretical frameworks on Slow City by incorporating participant-driven insights into the movement's implementation challenges and benefits. The inductive approach used to analyze participant feedback offers a methodological contribution, demonstrating how qualitative methods can enrich the understanding of global movements in local contexts.

Practically, the study offers valuable guidance for policymakers in Azerbaijan. It highlights the potential of the Slow City Movement to diversify the non-oil economy, address unemployment, and promote cultural preservation. Furthermore, the findings suggest that targeted investments in infrastructure and technology, combined with community engagement, could help overcome barriers to membership. The study underscores the importance of a phased and planned approach to avoid rapid gentrification and its potential adverse effects on local communities.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample size is relatively small, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Second, while rich in detail, the focus on qualitative methods might benefit from complementary quantitative analysis to provide broader insights. Third, the study primarily draws on participant perceptions, which may not fully capture systemic or institutional challenges. Lastly, the research focuses on Azerbaijan, and the findings may not be directly transferable to other contexts with differing socio-economic and cultural dynamics.

Future studies could explore comparative analyses between Azerbaijan and other regions that have successfully adopted the Slow City Movement. Longitudinal research could provide insights into the long-term impact of membership on local economies and communities. Additionally, integrating perspectives from government officials, business owners, and other stakeholders would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the movement's feasibility and impact.

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Food styling and food photography with generative AI[1]

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to evaluate the aesthetic suitability of generative AI food images and to examine the potential role of AI in food styling and photography, including its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In this research, eight dishes from Turkish cuisine, Imambayıldı and Zeytinyağlı enginar (artichoke with extra virgin olive oil) for the olive oil theme, Adana kebab and Hünkâr beğendi for the main course theme, fırında sütlaç (baked rice pudding) and pumpkin dessert for the dessert theme, çay (Turkish tea) and Turkish coffee for the beverage theme, were produced separately using Adobe Firefly 3 and DALL-E 3 Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications. Real food photographs were also included for comparison. Thirty-one professional food stylists and photographers volunteered and participated in the study. Consequently, a total of 24 food images were created and evaluated by professionals according to six aesthetic criteria: lighting, color, composition, presentation, appropriateness of the props and background, and the creation of a mouth-watering sensation. The findings reveal no significant difference between the food photographs produced using the AI 1 application and real food photographs. Half of the images created by the AI 2 application also showed no significant differences compared to real images. However, significant differences were observed in five images between the two AI applications. Participants highlighted low costs, fast production, and flexibility as strengths of AI applications in food styling and photography. Conversely, weaknesses included the production of surreal images and aesthetic concerns. Opportunities were identified in fostering innovation, creativity, and new perspectives, while potential threats involved ethical and copyright concerns, overdependence on AI tools, and potential job displacement.

KEYWORDS

Aesthetic, AI, Artificial Intelligence, Food Styling, Food Photography

[1]. Ethical approval was given by the Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University Ethics Commission on 17.07.2024, with the number 280014.
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INTRODUCTION

Food styling and food photography, which form an integral part of the culinary arts, engage many neurological and cognitive perceptions of the human brain, including those related to vision, taste, smell, hearing, and touch (Gambetti & Han, 2022). Visually appealing food photography is not limited to a single field; instead, it is employed in many contexts, including education, the food and beverage industry, social media, gastronomic tourism, advertising, and promotional activities (Custer, 2010).

In the contemporary era, the utilization of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming increasingly prevalent across a multitude of domains, particularly in the realms of education, healthcare, and service-oriented jobs (Denecke et al., 2023; Sperlich et al., 2023; Zaman, 2023; Rony et al., 2024), production of educational content (Greif et al., 2024), innovation (Mingjing, 2024) and finance (Burger et al., 2023). Simultaneously, food styling and visualization have undergone significant advancements driven by the integration of AI technologies.

Food styling and photography represent a complex and highly specialized discipline. It is anticipated that generative AI will facilitate this visual art, enabling faster and more innovative production of creative visual content. Generative AI offers gastronomy researchers a unique perspective on the following questions: "Can AI-generated visuals achieve hyper-realistic effects if light, color, composition, presentation, and the relationship between subject and background are accurately rendered?" "Can these images be distinguished from real photographs?" "Is it possible to produce reliable and valid AI-generated content?" "How can AI support professionals working in visual gastronomy?"

Aesthetics is a field of philosophy that examines concepts and questions associated with the arts, architecture, and design (Brady & Prior, 2020) and is typical to identify beauty (Padenet al., 2013). Aesthetic theory teaches us that mental pleasure may be stimulated by natural, artistic, and moral beauty (Sisti et al., 2021). Aesthetic evaluation is a challenging process, and there is no consensus on the criteria that should be used (Conolly & Haydar, 2003). The aesthetic criteria used in evaluating food photographs in the research are adapted from the works of professional food stylists and photographers already working in this field. The aesthetic criteria employed in the study can be listed as follows: the utilization of light, the selection of an appropriate color for the background of the figure, composition, presentation, the choice of appropriate props and background, and the creation of a sensation of a mouth-watering nature (Custer, 2010; Dujardin, 2011; Young, 2011; Gambetti & Han, 2022).

This study evaluates AI-generated and real food images based on these aesthetic criteria by food styling and photography professionals. Its objective is twofold: first, to assess the aesthetic compliance of AI-generated food images as perceived by a panel of expert food photographers utilizing established aesthetic criteria; second, to analyze the potential implications of AI in this field, examining its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Although the foundations of food styling and photography can be traced back to the 1950s, it has become a popular field of study and practice, particularly since the 2000s (Cankul et al., 2021). Researches show that the visual composition of the food on the plate affects people's thoughts about the food (Michel et al., 2015). Designing foods with visual aesthetic elements increases people's tastes and affects their consumption behavior (Michel et al., 2014). Food styling can be summarized as the art of preparing food for the camera, and the food stylist prepares food to feed the eyes and the imagination (Custer, 2010). Food photographs give people more satisfying experiences through emotions such as entertainment, personal identity, and social interaction (Liu et al., 2012). The domain of food photography is a synthesis of compositional techniques, stylistic approaches, creative expression, and conceptual inquiry (Dujardin, 2011). Food photography aims to evoke the perception of flavor in food visuals by engaging all five senses of the human being (Young, 2011). The stylization and visualization of food and the photography of visuals appeal to people's cognitive perception and increase their aesthetic appreciation.

Generative AI is a technological approach that uses computational techniques to create novel and meaningful content based on relevant datasets, including text, visuals, and audio

(Feuerriegel et al., 2024). The latest technological advances have enabled AI to be utilized in various fields (Değerli & Tatlısu, 2023). AI applications such as Dall-E 3, OpenAI ChatGPT, Microsoft CoPilot, and Google Gemini facilitate human-information interaction. While the use of generative AI is also developing in the domain of food and beverage (Kumar et al., 2021), AI tools facilitate the creation of visuals through the use of prompts (Kolides et al., 2023).

AI tools have been increasingly utilized in gastronomy, with several studies highlighting their diverse applications. Examples include development of a food aesthetic evaluation model (Gambetti & Han, 2022), recipe invention (Şener & Ulu, 2024), formulation of nutritional recommendations (Ponzo et al., 2024), development of dietary recommendations for individuals with food allergies (Niszczota & Rybicka, 2023), menus designs (Khan & Hoffmann, 2003) and creation of vegetarian menus (Göktaş, 2023). Ulu (2024) also demonstrated using Bing Image Creator to generate food images. Despite these advancements, studies focusing specifically on food styling and photography remain scarce in the existing literature.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The quantitative component evaluates differences among 24 food images based on aesthetic criteria. In contrast, the qualitative component utilizes a case study design to analyze the demographics of the participants as well as the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of AI usage interview questions in food styling and photography. Content analysis was used to process qualitative data. The objective of qualitative research is to gain an understanding of the subject under investigation (Haradhan, 2018). The case study design allows for analyzing a situation, event, action, or process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The research universe was expert food stylists and photographers in Türkiye. The sample was designed as a non-random, purposeful, typical sample (Baştürk & Taştepe, 2013) from thirty-one volunteer food stylists and photographers who were deemed the most appropriate for the research. The data collection occurred between July 18, 2024, and August 23, 2024. The number of participants in a sampling process can range from 10 (Sandelowski, 1995) to 30 (Boddy, 2016), with 20-30 participants typically used in grounded theory and 15-30 participants used in case studies. It was presumed that the study participants possessed the requisite knowledge and equipment to engage with the subject matter of food styling, aesthetics, and visual arts.

The research used Adobe Firefly 3 and OpenAI Dall-E 3 as AI visual development tools. AI images were created by using a prompt. For instance, in the context of the dessert theme, the AI was initially queried about Turkish desserts. Subsequently, the definition of a baked rice pudding dessert was requested. The AI system was then instructed to generate a visual representation based on the provided prompt. The final sample prompt was as follows;

"A photograph of fırında sütlaç, or Baked Rice Pudding, is required. This Turkish dessert is prepared with rice, milk, sugar, and is baked in the oven until a golden, caramelized layer form on the surface. The top layer should be caramelized. This dessert is renowned for its creamy texture and delicate sweetness. It should be served in a small clay pot with small pieces of walnut on top. The dish should be placed on a blue table with a small spoon next to it. The upper right corner should contain a glass of Turkish tea".

Later, the use of AI in producing food images was combined with the input of real artists, and the resulting images were then subjected to expert evaluation to enhance the reliability of the research process. The aesthetic evaluation criteria employed were correct use of light (natural, at the right angle), suitable color on the figure background (color harmony, brightness, contrast, clarity, natural colors), composition (story, main theme, appropriate clarity, balanced and organized according to the rules of composition), presentation (size, texture, theme, portioning, realism, naturalness, freshness and garnish), suitable prop and ground, and mouthwatering, sensation of eating (appetizing, attractive, including details) (Custer, 2010; Dujardin, 2011; Young, 2011; Gambetti & Han, 2022). In addition, two expert photographers were consulted to validate the criteria.

Aesthetic evaluation criteria for food photographs are shown in Table 1. Consequently, eight dishes were selected based on four themes: olive oil dishes, main course, dessert, and beverage. For each of these eight foods, images were created using AI Tool 1 (AIT1), AI Tool 2 (AIT2), and real photographs, resulting in a total of 24 images being evaluated. Visual content was presented without disclosing whether it was AI-generated or real to ensure unbiased evaluations. While the limited number of real and AI-generated visuals can be considered a limitation, this decision was made to accommodate the time commitment required from volunteer expert evaluators. Additionally, the perspectives of expert photographers on the use of AI in food styling and photography were explored through the following interview questions: "What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of using generative AI in food styling and photography?" The collected data were analyzed using content analysis techniques.

Table 1.

Aesthetic Evaluation Criteria (AEC) (Source: adapted from Custer, 2010; Dujardin, 2011; Young, 2011; Gambetti & Han, 2022)

		Bad							Good		
#	**Criteria**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
AEC1	Correct use of light	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
AEC2	Suitable color on the figure background	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
AEC3	Composition	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
AEC4	Presentation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
AEC5	Suitable prop and ground	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
AEC6	Mouthwatering, sensation of eating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University on July 17, 2024 (approval no. 280014). All participants provided informed consent. Participant anonymity was maintained by coding responses with unique identifiers (e.g., P1, P2, ..., P31).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Information of the Participants

The demographic characteristics of the 31 food stylists and photographers who participated in the study are presented in Table 2. The participants had an average age of 45.4 years and an average professional experience of 19.9 years. Educational qualifications included undergraduate degrees for 58.0% of participants, followed by graduate degrees (32.3%). Geographically, participants were based mainly in Istanbul and Ankara (51.6% and 32.2% respectively).

Table 2.

Demographic Information of the Participants in the Study

Participants	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Age	56	40	45	44	42	58	35	33	48	53	49	41	46	48	37	46	48	40	42	49	39	42	43	54	50	43	54	47	50	40	44
Education*	U	U	U	G	U	U	U	G	G	H	U	G	G	G	U	U	E	U	U	U	U	U	U	G	G	U	G	U	U	H	G
Experience(y)	30	15	27	10	19	30	15	10	19	22	24	18	13	30	14	11	30	20	17	24	15	20	14	30	30	13	28	16	19	25	8
City**	A	I	I	I	Be	A	A	A	N	I	A	A	I	A	Bu	I	I	I	A	A	E	I	I	I	I	A	I	I	I	Iz	I

*****U: Undergraduate, G: Graduate, H: Highschool, E: Elementary

******A:Ankara, Be: Berlin (Germany), Bu: Bursa, E: Eskişehir, I: Istanbul, Iz: Izmir, N: Newyork (USA)

Evaluation of generative AI usage from the perspective of food stylists and food photographers

Participants assessed the food photographs based on the aesthetic criteria outlined in Table 1. Three groups of photographs represented each dish: AI Tool 1 (AIT1), AI Tool 2 (AIT2), and real images. AI-generated food images were created using prompts. A total of 24 food images were then presented to professionals for evaluation, with no indication provided as to whether the images were AI-generated or real.

The dishes to be evaluated were compiled from the book Turkish Cuisine with timeless recipes (Eker, 2020). The selected dishes were as follows: İmambayıldı and zeytinyağlı enginar (artichoke with olive oil) for the olive oil theme, Adana kebab and Hünkâr beğendi for the main course theme, fırında sütlaç (baked rice pudding) and pumpkin dessert for the dessert theme, çay (Turkish tea) and Turkish coffee for the beverage theme.

İmambayıldı is a beloved Turkish dish known for its rich flavors and aromatic ingredients. It is a dish cooked with onion, green pepper, tomato, garlic, and olive oil in aubergines and served cold (Oktay & Guden, 2021). Zeytinyağlı enginar (artichoke with olive oil) is a popular and refreshing dish in Turkish cuisine, particularly during spring and summer, served cold. Adana kebab is widely regarded as one of the most delicious and famous varieties of kebab in Turkish cuisine. The specific *"Adana kebab"* designation is attributed to its historical provenance in Adana, Türkiye (Turkish foodie, 2024a). Hünkâr beğendi, or the dish known as *"Sultan's Delight,"* represents a classic example of Turkish cuisine, combining a rich, creamy aubergine purée with a tender lamb stew. This dish was thought to be a particular favorite of the Ottoman sultans (Turkish Foodie, 2024b). Fırında sütlaç (baked rice pudding) is a traditional Turkish dessert characterized by a creamy texture, subtle sweetness, and a golden crust. Kabak tatlısı (the pumpkin dessert) is a traditional Turkish confection comprising slow-cooked pumpkin slices sweetened with sugar and frequently garnished with crushed walnuts or tahini. Çay (Turkish tea) is a fundamental element of Turkish culture, widely recognized for its robust and complex flavor profile and distinctive deep red hue. It is traditionally served in small tulip-shaped glasses. Turkish coffee is served with a glass of water on special occasions, holidays, and when neighbors visit (Karhan, 2021). It is very finely grounded.

A series of statistical tests were conducted to ascertain whether there is a significant distinction between food photographs created with the assistance of AI and those captured using conventional methods. The initial step assessed whether normalization had been applied for each of the eight foods, as the sample size exceeded thirty. Normality tests were conducted using the statistical software package SPSS. Firstly, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov or Shapiro-Wilk normality tests were conducted, after which the skewness and kurtosis values were evaluated (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov or Shapiro-Wilk normality tests yielded statistical Sig. ($p > 0.05$) The eight food photographs indicate that the samples can be considered normally distributed. Furthermore, the data revealed that the skewness and kurtosis values for each food type fell within the range of -1.5 to +1.5 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

The Repeated Measures ANOVA method was employed since the samples were normally distributed (parametric test), and the differences between more than one group (Kul, 2014) in eight food types were analyzed. The results of the SPSS Repeated Measures ANOVA indicated that there was no significant difference between the AIT 1 samples, AIT 2 samples, and real food photographs for İmambayıldı(1), Zeytinyağlı enginar(2), and Hünkar beğendi(4) dishes (sphericity assumed sig. $p > 0.05$ and pairwise comparisons $p >= 0.05$). The results of the repeated measures ANOVA are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.
The "Repeated Measures ANOVA" of 24 (8X3) food photographs

Theme	Food class	Foods (n=8)	1-AIT 1 samples	2-AIT 2 samples	3-Real samples	Sphericity assumed sig.	Pairwise comp. (sig.)	Difference* x, n>m
Theme 1	Olive oil dishes	İmambayıldı (1)	x	x	x	< 0.235	1-2: <0.728 1-3: 1.000 2-3: <0.514	x (no significant difference)
		Zeytinyağlı Enginar (2)	x	x	x	<0.342	1-2: <0.673 1-3: 1.000 2-3: <0.845	x (no significant difference)
Theme 2	Main course	Adana kebab (3)				<0.001	1-2: <0.001 1-3: 1.000 2-3: <0.001	significant difference 2>1/ 2>3
		Hünkâr beğendi (4)	x	x	x	<0.067	1-2: 1.000 1-3: 0.050 2-3: <0.058	x (no significant difference)
Theme 3	Desert	Fırında Sütlaç (5)				<0.001	1-2: 0.040 1-3: 0.130 2-3: <0.001	significant difference 2>1/ 2>3
		Kabak tatlısı (6)				<0.001	1-2: <0.001 1-3: 1.000 2-3: <0.001	significant difference 2>1/ 2>3
Theme 4	Beverage	Çay (7)				<0.001	1-2: <0.001 1-3: 1.000 2-3: <0.001	significant difference 2>1/ 2>3
		Türk kahvesi (8)			x	<0.013	1-2: 0.039 1-3: 0.112 2-3: 0.578	significant difference 2>1

Difference*: x (no significant difference), n>m (n is more significant than m).

There was no significant difference between the AIT 1 samples and real food photographs. But there was a significant difference between AIT 2 and real food photographs (2>3) for Adana kebab(3), fırında sütlaç(5), kabak tatlısı(6) and çay(7) images. The aesthetic evaluation of the images produced with the two different AI applications revealed a significant difference in the images (2>1) of Adana kebab(3), fırında sütlaç(5), kabak tatlısı(6), çay(7) and Turkish coffee(8). The images produced with AIT2 were more meaningful than those produced with AIT1. Figure 1 illustrates the variations in the visual representation of food, as evaluated according to aesthetic criteria.

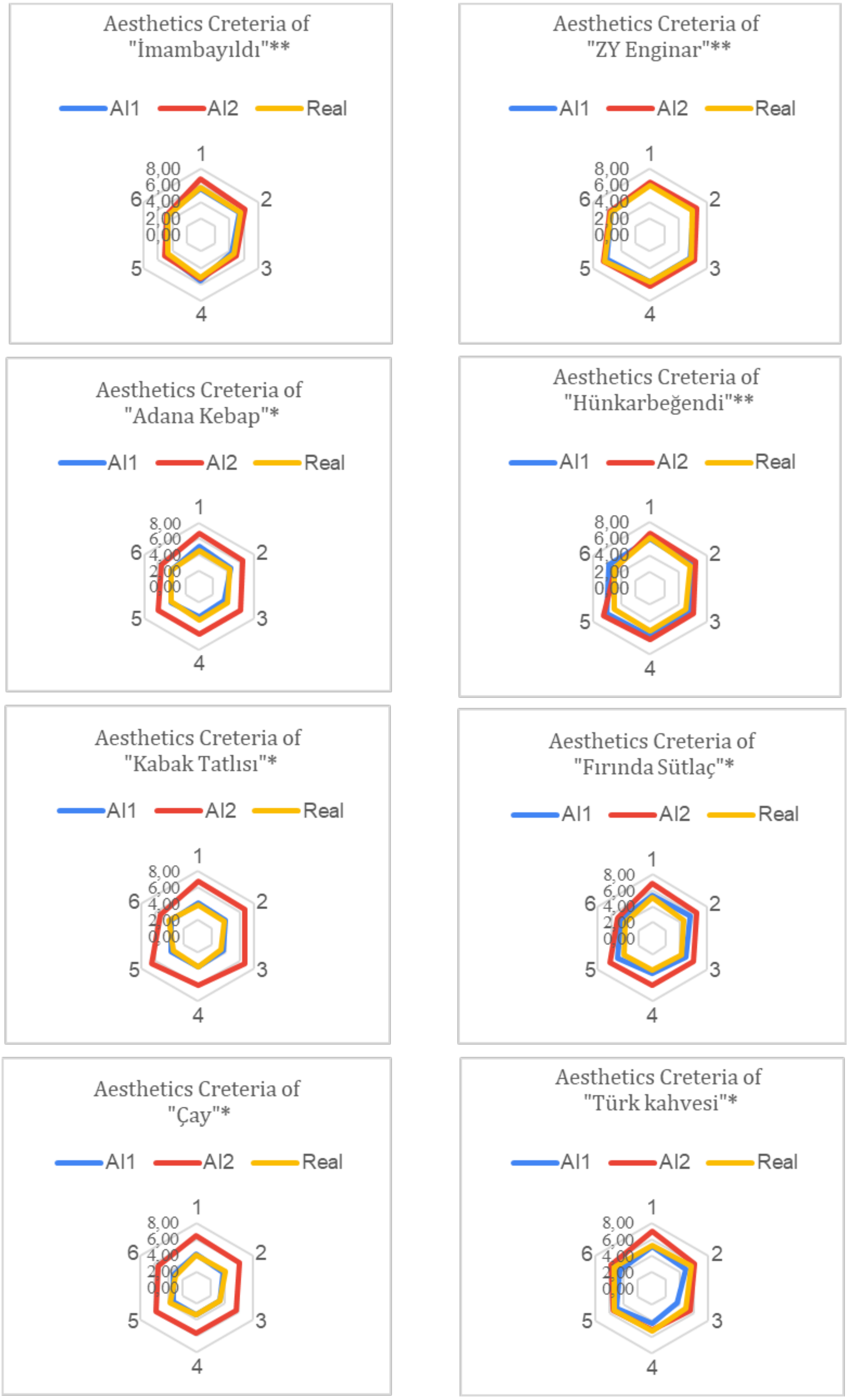

Figure 1. Radar Graphics of Food Photographs with Significant*/ No Significant Differences** (1-6 shows aesthetic evaluation criteria (AEC) in Table 1)

There is no significant difference in the images produced for all dishes between AIT 1 and real ones, and there is a significant difference of 50.0% of AIT2 images compared to real food photos. For example, visual illustrations of fırında sütlaç, which showed a significant difference, and imambayıldı, which showed no significant difference, are presented in Figure 2.

Fırında sütlaç (AIT 1) Fırında sütlaç (AIT 2) Fırında sütlaç (Real)

(Hakan Güleç archive)

İmambayıldı (AIT 1) İmambayıldı (AIT 2) İmambayıldı (Real)

(Hakan Güleç archive)

Figure 2. Food Photography of AIT 1, AIT 2 and Actual Fırında Sütlaç and İmambayıldı

SWOT Analyses of Using Generative AI in Food Styling and Food Photography

In the study, participants frequently identified the *"low cost"* of generative AI utilization in food styling and photography as a key strength. This was mentioned twenty-four times, representing 77.4% of the total participants. P4 states definitively that low-cost casting shoots are the way forward. Moreover, P4 says, *"We will no longer require an art director, studio, or model stylist in the near future."* The P10 is noted for being inspiring and providing high imagination for adverts. P20 also draws attention to the reduction of setup costs.

Among the weaknesses of generative AI in its use in food styling and food photography, the expression *'creating surreal images'* is the most common, with eighteen repetitions. This phrase corresponds to 58.1% of the participants. P3 points out the following weaknesses: *"Although the AI images produced comply with basic norms in terms of lighting and composition, the overly mathematical composition of the compositional set-ups and the overly artificial appearance of the dishes have negative consequences on appetite."* P17 says *"every chef's touch is different, so AI cannot fully replace food photography."* And P21 adds for the weakness *"perfect image of AI, surreal image is not convincing."* Tang (2023), in his study of AI, mentions that with AI, reality disappears, and a virtual world is created. Moreover, shares the concern of AI to manipulate public aesthetics. Bhattacharjee (2023), in his study of art and photography with AI, draws attention to the need for deep knowledge of software and technology. The weaknesses identified by the AI studies in the literature are consistent with the participants' statements. Table 4 illustrates the potential impact of generative AI in food styling and photography, including an analysis of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Table 4.
The most commonly used expressions in the SWOT analysis of AI utilization in food styling and photography

Strengths	f *	Weakness	f *
Low-cost	26	Creating surreal images	18
Fast and flexible production	24	Aesthetic concerns	13
Rich content	14	Dependence on AI application maturity	13
Real/realistic image	12	Expertise in AI applications	10
Opportunities	**f ***	**Threats**	**f ***
New perspectives to educators, photography artists, and researchers	20	Copyright concerns	19
Innovativeness and creativity in visuals,	20	Ethical concerns	17
Helps gastronomy professionals in business life	17	Overdependence on AI applications	16
		Substitution of human labor	8

* f (frequency)

Participants used the phrase *"new perspectives for educators, photographic artists, and researchers"* and *"innovation and creativity"* 20 times to describe the opportunities of AI in food styling and food photography. This phrase of opportunities corresponds to 64.5% of the participants. For this, P21 and P25 state, *"All food photographers have a prop archive. In the future, we will use AI in props; we will not necessarily need an olive oil bottle. There will also be many options for the ground. It will definitely help to understand the light and increase creativity."* In addition, P29 adds that AI-powered drafts will help and make things easier. Gross (2024), in his analysis of AI in photography, highlights creativity and innovation among the opportunities. The techniques of the Generative Adversarial Networks (GAN) of AI allow photographers to create new images or combine several images (Marr, 2023). Professionals' new perspectives and innovative and creative statements overlap with AI studies in the literature.

Most repeatedly, 19 (%61.3) participants see AI as a threat to copyright. Ethical and moral concerns are expressed as the second major threat. P17 states, "impossible, fake dishes will be revealed". P14 adds, *"Very soon this will not be a business. No photographer will be needed."* Chen (2024), in his study on AI technology in photography and future challenges and reflections, draws attention to ethics, morality, copyright, and reduction in photography related jobs among the challenges. Gross (2024) also emphasizes that art production produced by AI should be managed ethically. Mingjing (2024) also sees AI's displacement of human jobs as a threat. Sperlich et al. (2023) cite an over-reliance on AI technology and less involvement of human expertise as a threat. The responses from participants that the use of AI in food styling and photography threatens ethics, morals, and copyright are similar to other AI threats in the literature.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings of this study reveal that among the 24 food photographs evaluated based on aesthetic criteria, there was no significant difference between the AIT1 samples and real food photographs. Similarly, no significant difference was found for half of the AIT2 samples compared to real images. However, AIT2 images were more aesthetically meaningful than those produced by AIT1 in five cases. These findings support Cross's (2024) study that artificial intelligence can easily produce aesthetically pleasing images. Tang (2023) also states that AI can quickly produce visual photos. In their study on using AI in the kitchen, Califano et al. (2024) found no difference in confidence between AI and traditional recipes for standardized dishes. An analogous situation can be seen in food photography. In Califano and Spence's (2024) study evaluating the visual appeal of real and AI-generated food images, it is stated that AI images are frequently preferred. However, the quality of images produced by different AI tools may vary depending on factors such as the richness of their libraries, their learning capabilities, and the level of detail in the prompts used. Although significant differences exist between AI-generated and real food images, no clear aesthetic superiority of one over the other has been established at this time.

In the research, participants emphasized that low cost, fast production, and flexible production are strong points when using AI in food photography. Weaknesses include surreal images, aesthetic concerns, dependence on the maturity of AI tools, and expertise in AI tools, respectively. For opportunities, new perspectives and innovative and creative approaches to food photography come to the fore. Among the threats, copyright, moral and ethical concerns, and over-dependence on AI tools are among the first. Another major threat in the future is job loss. According to research conducted by Goldman Sachs, the implementation of generative AI in the next decade is projected to increase global gross domestic product (GDP) by 7% and replace three hundred million knowledge-based jobs (Goldman Sachs, 2023).

The assessment of opportunities and threats presented by the utilization of AI for the creation of gastronomic visual content, coupled with an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses inherent to AI-driven visual production, has the potential to unlock new avenues of exploration for researchers engaged in this domain.

In the literature, it is seen that similar determinations are made for the use of AI technologies in areas such as information technology, education, healthcare, production, nutrition, and finance (Yıldırım & Yıldırım, 2022; Burger et al., 2023; Greif et al., 2024; Ponzo et al., 2024; Rony et al., 2024). Yavuz (2021) also states in his research that AI and machine learning will not need a camera in visual and photo production. Rich, fast, and flexible production and low cost confirm the findings in the literature.

However, ethical, moral, and aesthetic concerns are frequently expressed in fields such as art, where the concept of aesthetics comes to the fore. In the future, the use of AI is thought to be important in the field of food photography, but human creativity in art should not be ignored (Bhattacharjee, 2023).

Researchers can extend this study by exploring different food themes and employing alternative AI tools like OpenAI ChatGPT, Midjourney, or Anthropic AI. Furthermore, future studies could evaluate the impact of AI on our understanding of fine arts and aesthetics. Longitudinal, time-dependent research would also provide valuable insights into AI technologies' development and evolving capabilities.

In terms of its first theoretical impact, it can be stated that characterizing the aesthetic quality of real and AI-generated food images offers an innovative perspective for researchers working in the cognitive field with gastronomic experience in food styling. Secondly, from the perspective of food content creators, a SWOT analysis of AI images can be predicted to open new horizons for researchers.

In terms of its practical effect, it can be postulated that this will prompt all food professionals to consider their limits, thereby opening the doors of innovation and creativity for those engaged in the production of food visuals with aesthetic concerns, food and beverage operators, social media content producers, those working in the field of food advertising and marketing.

It is important to note that the research is subject to temporal constraints. Furthermore, the number of volunteer food stylists and photographers participating in the study in Türkiye represents a limitation. The AI tools employed are Adobe Firefly 3 and Google Dall-E 3, which represent a limitation.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research. The study was conducted within specific temporal constraints, and the number of volunteer food stylists and photographers in Türkiye may represent a limitation. Additionally, the AI tools used, Adobe Firefly 3 and Google DALL-E 3, also impose constraints, as the findings may vary with different tools.

This study contributes to the growing literature on AI applications in gastronomy by comprehensively evaluating AI-generated food images and a SWOT analysis of their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. By addressing the potential and challenges of generative

AI, the research highlights its transformative potential while advocating for responsible and ethical use. Future research should continue exploring AI's evolving role in creative and professional domains, emphasizing fostering collaboration between human creativity and machine efficiency.

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Bibliometric mapping of the studies on noise related to tourism

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to provide an overview of the development of tourism-related "noise" studies in the academic process. Thus, the most current research stream on the subject is clarified. First, a systematic literature review was conducted, and then bibliometric analysis was applied to the data obtained via VOSviewer. This article examines 102 studies published in the Elsevier SCOPUS database until January 2024. The journals in which the studies on the related topic were mainly published were identified, and it was found that in most of the tourism journals with a high impact factor, there were no related studies. The thematic evolution of the topic was determined in the framework of the network relationship drawn for the common keywords used. It was found that the Covid-19 pandemic shaped the field of study. In addition, a link map was drawn for all relevant researchers and studies. This paper provides a research agenda for future researchers.

KEYWORDS

Tourism, noise, sound pollution, sustainability, bibliometric analysis, VOSviewer

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism has emerged as a leading global industry, providing significant economic benefits and facilitating cultural exchange and preservation. However, alongside its positive outcomes, it also has negative impacts that need to be considered (Frent, 2016). Tourism can create additional employment opportunities and improve infrastructure, although it may increase the overall cost of living (Brankov et al., 2019). It also has the potential to cause changes in social and family frameworks and cultural traditions that are modified according to visitors' preferences. When looking at the negative environmental effects attributed to tourism, noise comes to the fore. In the dynamic environment of the tourism sector, it is important to evaluate the effects of noise pollution, or in other words, noise, on tourists and surrounding communities (Frent, 2016). The noise problem has become an important and urgent issue that needs to be solved, especially in tourist centers with large groups, busy transport networks, and entertainment facilities that operate until late at night (Brankov et al., 2019). As various sources show, noise in tourist destinations is caused by factors such as emissions and noise from aircraft, noise, and pollution from tour boats, water consumption and waste produced by hotels, litter produced by tourists, and pollution of beaches (Tsaligopoulos et al., 2023; Wadle & Martin, 2021).

Noise is a complex topic that has attracted considerable attention from a variety of scientific disciplines, including environmental engineering (Sharma & Bhattacharya, 2014; Vogiatzis et al., 2009), psychogeography (Long, 2014), sound science (Brown et al., 2011), architecture (Merchan et al., 2014) and psychology (Stansfeld & Matheson, 2003). As travelers seek new and exciting destinations, the impact of noise on the overall experience has become a growing concern, and this concept has begun to be addressed in tourism studies. As noise negatively affects the health and well-being of tourists, it also affects tourist satisfaction (Ma et al., 2021; Oquendo & Santos, 2020). Whether it is the bustling streets of a popular city, loud music at a beach resort, or the constant drone of aircraft flying near an airport, noise has the potential to negatively impact the tourism experience and cause discomfort for both visitors and residents (Gursoy et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2018).

As the tourism industry continues to develop, managing the impact of noise on tourist destinations is important for the sustainability of the sector. For this reason, "noise" is a topic that has been addressed in academic studies over the last decades. This article aims to present a bibliometric map by analyzing the evolution of the focus of tourism-related "noise" studies in the academic process. The reason for this is the contribution to academic knowledge by creating a future research agenda for researchers.

Bibliometric analysis is an important tool for assessing scientific productivity and research quality. This analysis involves studying scientific publications using mathematical and statistical methods and is widely used in various fields. Bibliometric parameters are important for measuring the productivity and impact of authors and journals and for mapping the intellectual structure and development of a given field of research (Choudhri et al., 2015; Durieux & Gevenois, 2010; Gutiérrez-Salcedo et al., 2018).

In this study, bibliometric analysis was used to identify the leading studies, researchers, and journals on the subject and to identify the main keywords through which the subject has developed.

The bibliometric analysis was used to identify the leading studies, researchers, and journals on the subject and to reveal the keywords through which the subject has developed. At the end of the research, recommendations are listed for both researchers working in the field and tourism stakeholders in the position of practitioners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Noise

In academic studies, interest in the acoustic environment is increasing daily. Studies generally focus on a single aspect of sound. This aspect of sound is the concept of noise or, in other words, "unwanted sound" (Yang, 2005). In general, the importance of definitions for thought has been discussed since the early days of philosophy. Words have connotations, ideas, or meanings besides their primary meaning. Fink (2019) Fink (2009) defines noise as "unwanted and/or harmful sound." Dodd (2001) proposed a different definition of noise: "Noise is the subjective sound that we prefer not to listen to." A sound is transformed into noise according to a subjective interpretation. In some cases, mixing different sounds creates a white noise effect that makes it impossible to distinguish the individual sounds. For example, many birds singing very loudly simultaneously in spring makes it impossible to distinguish individual species, but the resulting sound is generally "pleasant." On the other hand, some types of music may be perceived as annoying by some people and considered as noise (Farina, 2014).

Noise research mainly focuses on developing statistical methods to analyze measurable physical and psychological effects. As a result of noise studies, many indices have been developed to indicate acceptable or desirable sound levels in the home. However, sound is one of the fundamental means by which individuals make sense of and communicate with the world, and this aspect of sound is often overlooked (Yang, 2005). Noise is very subjective. A noise perceived as loud and unpleasant for one person may be pretty acceptable for another (Spon, 1991). The sound itself is ecologically neutral, and the desirability of such a sound depends on the physiological and psychological parameters of the receiver. It is important to consider the context of a sound as well as where and when it occurs (Yang, 2005).

The use of pleasant sounds for therapeutic purposes is a method that has been used since ancient societies. In addition to music, psychotherapists use sounds such as streams, waterfalls, wind, waves, and birdsong in nature. Such sounds effectively reduce depression and stress (Ay & Günay, 2023). Sound is measured using a sound level meter, also called a noise level meter or decibel meter, in units of Decibels (dB) or Pascal. Sound becomes noise when it causes discomfort to the ear. The pressure change representing the human ear pain threshold is about 140 dB, equivalent to a jet aircraft's sound (Wawa & Mulaku, 2015). Humans are susceptible to noise in the 20-200 Hz frequency range, and this level must be considered for health reasons (Murphy & King, 2014). Noise has become a significant problem in the modern world and is constantly growing with each passing year. The soundscape intensity of a modern city can be as high as 90 dB. This figure is generally above 80 dB and is getting higher every year. It is estimated that the soundscape growth rate of cities is around half a decibel per year. Thus, it is possible to say that cities are twice as noisy as they were twenty years ago (Treasure, 2011).

Physiological experiments on humans have shown that moderate noise levels affect people indirectly but cause similar health problems to those caused by high levels of direct noise. Therefore, acute noise effects can occur not only at high sound levels but also at relatively low ambient sound levels (Hurtley, 2009). Noise has many physiological and psychological negative consequences. Sociologically, it affects the quality of life of the individual. Noise disturbs sleep, increases stress, and causes distraction. Prolonged noise exposure can cause hearing loss. High noise levels can cause cardiovascular effects by increasing blood pressure (Wawa & Mulaku, 2015). Sleep disturbance due to noise may cause people to become angry at the noise source. It can make it difficult for people to communicate through speech. Several experimental studies have shown that high noise levels can seriously affect productivity and efficiency and that fewer mistakes are made when noise levels are reduced. Noise also weakens the individual mentally. It can, therefore, be said that noise can cause hearing loss, mental illness, reduced productivity, and even loss of life (Spon, 1991).

The Noise in Tourism

Before explaining the concept of noise in the field of sustainable tourism, it is necessary to mention the effects of tourism. Because one of the significant environmental impacts of tourism is noise (Çakır et al., 2018). The impacts of tourism can be categorized as economic, socio-cultural, and environmental (Us Saqib et al., 2019). In addition to its positive economic effects, such as employment and income generation, it can also have negative effects, such as local inflation and opportunity costs (Li et al., 2017). From a social and cultural perspective, it has positive and negative effects on the quality of life, values, norms, habits, community models, and cultural structure (Pramanik & Ingkadijaya, 2018). Tourism also has both positive and negative impacts on the environment. However, the negative effects are ignored because of the predominance of the economic return aspect (Bertan, 2009). Positive environmental impacts such as the protection of natural habitats (Andereck et al., 2005), the protection of archaeological and historical sites (Yoon et al., 2001), the landscaping of cities (Perdue et al., 1987), the enhancement of people's environmental awareness (Guerreiro et al., 2016) and the improvement of infrastructure and superstructure facilities (Kolupaev et al., 2018) can be listed. When analyzing the negative environmental impacts, the first thing that comes to mind is the negative impact on water. Sewage, garbage, fuel waste from facilities and water transport vehicles, garbage left by tourists, chemical waste such as sunscreen, etc., cause water pollution (Zhong et al., 2011). Studies have shown that fuels used in facilities and transport vehicles and tourist mobility cause air pollution (Sunlu, 2003). Minimizing all these negative impacts and protecting the natural and social environment are among the objectives of sustainable tourism (Battaglia, 2017).

In the relationship between noise and tourism, it is seen that both affect each other, especially with the development of mass tourism. While mentioning the existence of noise from touristic activities, it is necessary to emphasize the impact of noise from other sources on tourism (Ay & Günay Aktaş, 2019). The presence of a favorable soundscape is important for the sustainable development of tourist destinations (Qiu, Zhang, & Zheng, 2018). Tourism-related crowding of people and vehicles has a negative impact on tourist destinations, natural areas/parks, and oceans (Guerra et al., 2014; Kavallinis & Pizam, 1994; Kimbrough et al., 2013; Lobo Soares & Bento Coelho, 2016; Sharma & Bhattacharya, 2014; Yuen, 2014; Zannin et al., 2002). Noise caused by tourism negatively affects tourists as well as local people. In addition to its negative environmental impact, noise also has a negative economic impact on these areas. It may negatively impact tourist satisfaction in destinations and cause tourists to dislike these areas. This situation negatively affects all stakeholders in the industry (Merchan et al., 2014; Montazerolhodjah et al., 2019). Tourists who come to have fun, get away from the daily routine, relax, and have a good time are adversely affected physiologically and psychologically as a result of exposure to disturbing noise levels (Belsoy & Korir, 2012; Hasan & Siddique, 2016; Kimbrough et al., 2013; Nejati et al., 2014; Pramanik & Ingkadijaya, 2018; Wawa & Mulaku, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

Within the scope of this study, a systematic literature review on the concept of "noise" has been carried out with a holistic approach within the tourism literature. The bibliometric mapping method was used in this study to examine the status of the concept in tourism studies. Bibliometric mapping is a widely used research method in various scientific fields (Ahmad & Slots, 2021; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Merigó, J. M. & Yang; J. B., 2017). It provides researchers with a comprehensive perspective on the flow and development of knowledge in a particular field by visualizing the links and relationships in the scientific literature (Arslan, 2022). Figure 1 presents the flowchart of the analysis.

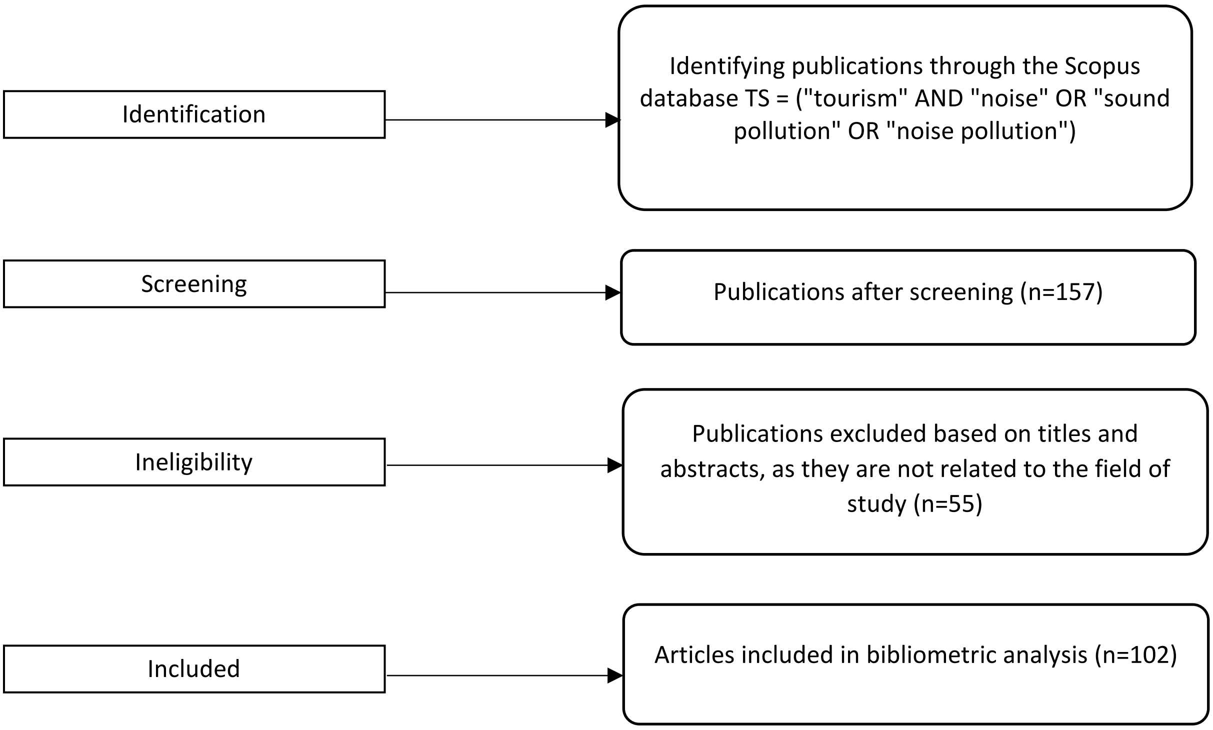


Figure 1. Flowchart for Bibliometric Analysis (Source: Own research)

Data Collection

Firstly, the terms to be used in the search were determined in line with the purpose of the research. The terms "tourism" AND "noise" OR "sound pollution" OR "noise pollution" were searched in titles, abstracts, and keywords in The Elsevier SCOPUS database collection. SCOPUS database was preferred due to its broader scope and resources than other databases (Salisbury, 2009). No date range was selected in the query. Thus, all studies conducted on the subject were accessed. The query ended on January 10, 2024. The search results were refined as open-access studies written in English. 157 English-accessible studies were found. The researcher then reviewed each study individually to eliminate duplicates and publications that did not meet the relevant criteria. A total of 102 studies were finally included in the review, including 95 articles, 5 conference proceedings, 1 review, and 1 book chapter.

Data Analysis

Bibliometric studies allow researchers to access the information distilled from the articles on the subject and to understand the subject in more detail (Palmer et al., 2005). Bibliographic matching was used to combine scientific articles with similar intellectual content that addressed the concept of "noise" in tourism studies (Kessler, 1963).

VOSviewer is a bibliometric analysis software that is freely available to researchers. Developed by Van Eck and Waltman (2010), VOSviewer allows researchers to construct and display bibliometric maps. VOSviewer provides a viewer that allows you to examine bibliometric maps in detail. It has scrolling, zooming, and searching functions that make it easy to examine a map in detail. Most computer programs (Bibliometrix, R Package, Bibexcel, etc.) used to construct bibliometric maps cannot produce such maps at this level.

The VOSviewer software uses several analysis techniques. One is citation link analysis, which shows the connection between two studies when they cite another. The VOSviewer software uses several analysis techniques. One of the analyses used in this study is the co-citation analysis. Co-citation analysis was used to identify and link groups of publications with a similar consensus, forming an intellectual basis through common references. This analysis helps identify and link publication groups on the same topic (Braam et al., 1991). Co-citation refers to the presence of two studies in the same sources or citing them together. The country bibliographic coupling analysis was used to determine which countries have productivity related to the research topic (Toker & Emir, 2023).

In order to identify the most important concepts of the studies, a co-occurrence analysis was carried out by evaluating the keywords of the studies. This analysis scans the entire literature and categorizes it into clusters representing different research foci, thus organizing the body of knowledge in the field in a systematic way (Arslan, 2022).

FINDINGS

Findings on the Development Trend

The studies examining the concepts of tourism and noise together are shown in Figure 2.

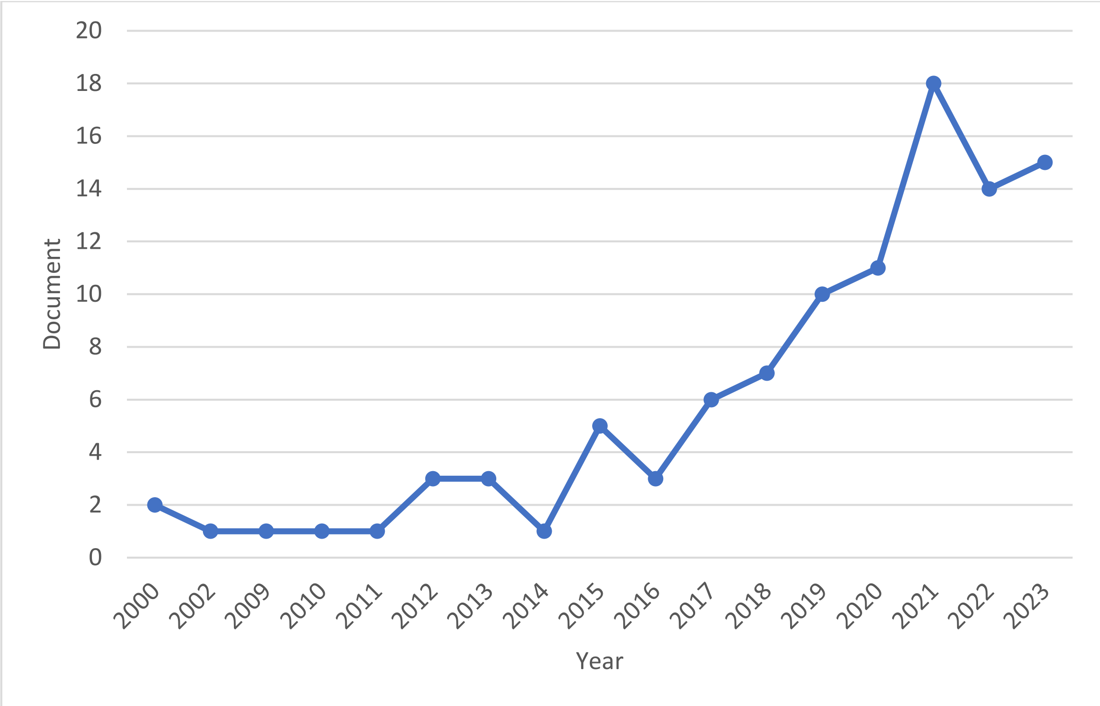
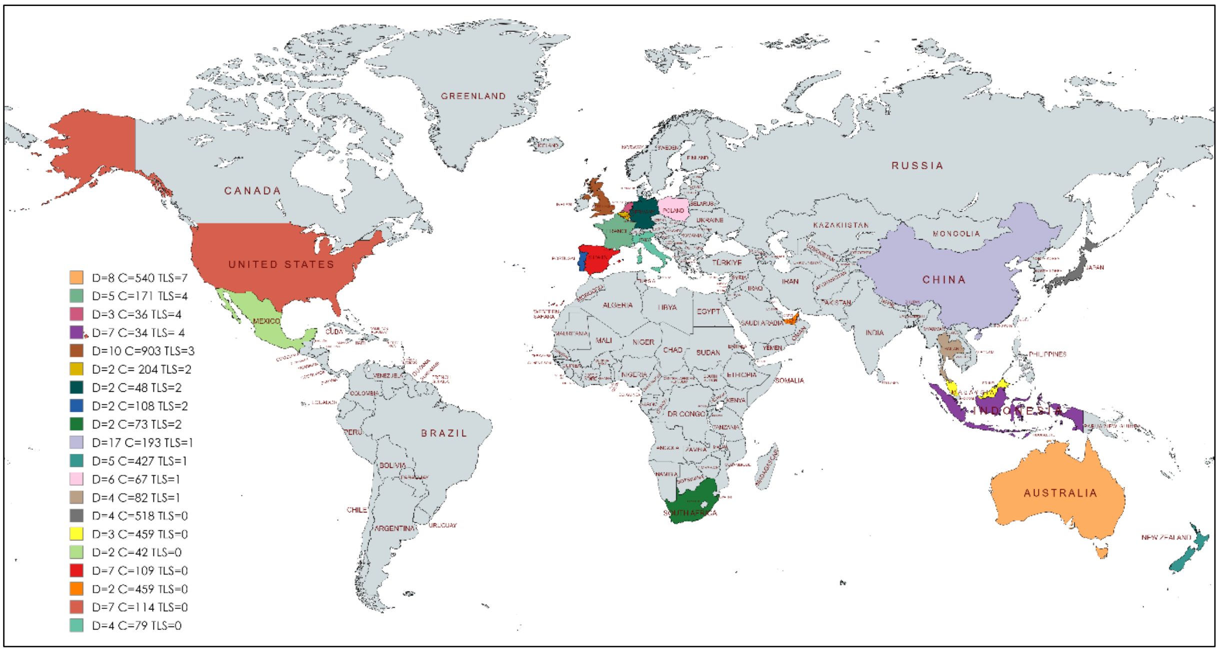


Figure 2. Annual Scientific Production in Sound Pollution Research in Tourism

The annual scientific output is presented from 2000 to 2023. Although there was a slight increase in the number of publications in 2012 and 2013, there was no significant increase until 2014. A significant increase can be seen from 2017 onwards. In 2021, the number of publications on this topic reaches its peak. A decline can be expected after this date.

Distribution of Publications by Countries

It was found that the studies included in the analysis were published in 51 different countries. A threshold of two for the number of studies published from a country and a threshold of 30 for the number of citations received was set and analyzed. It was determined that 20 countries met the threshold (Figure 3).



(D=documents, C=citations, TLS=Total link strength)

Figure 3. Distribution of Publications by Countries

China (17 studies) and the United Kingdom (10 studies) are the countries with the highest academic production. The United Kingdom, which ranks second in terms of the number of studies, is the country that contributes the most to the field regarding the number of citations. When we look at the bibliographic matching of China, although it is the country with the highest number of studies, the number of citations it receives is relatively low. Although Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates have produced few studies, it is understood that their contributions to the field are high according to the number of citations they have received. Australia ranks first in terms of total number of links. France, the Netherlands, and Indonesia rank behind Australia.

Sources Co-citation Analysis

It was found that there were a total of 2913 references in the studies considered in this study. Depending on the intensity of the number of studies, a lower limit can be set to identify the most related studies (McCain, 1990). To perform the source co-citation analysis, studies that met the criteria of a minimum number of citations to a source 20 were included in the analysis, and the source co-citation network map was created with 11 studies that met these conditions (Figure 4).

According to the results of the analyses, Tourism Management (f=133) is one of the journals with the highest number of citations for tourism-related studies dealing with the concept of noise. This journal is also the journal with the highest total link strength. Other journals are as follows: Annals of Tourism Research (f=90), Sustainability (f=65), Journal of Travel Research (f=44), Journal of Acoustical Society of America (f=39), Journal of Sustainable Tourism (f=39), Tourism Management (f=35), Plos One (f=31), Science of The Total Environment (f=27), Marine Mammal Science (f=24) and Marine Pollution Bulletin (f=22).

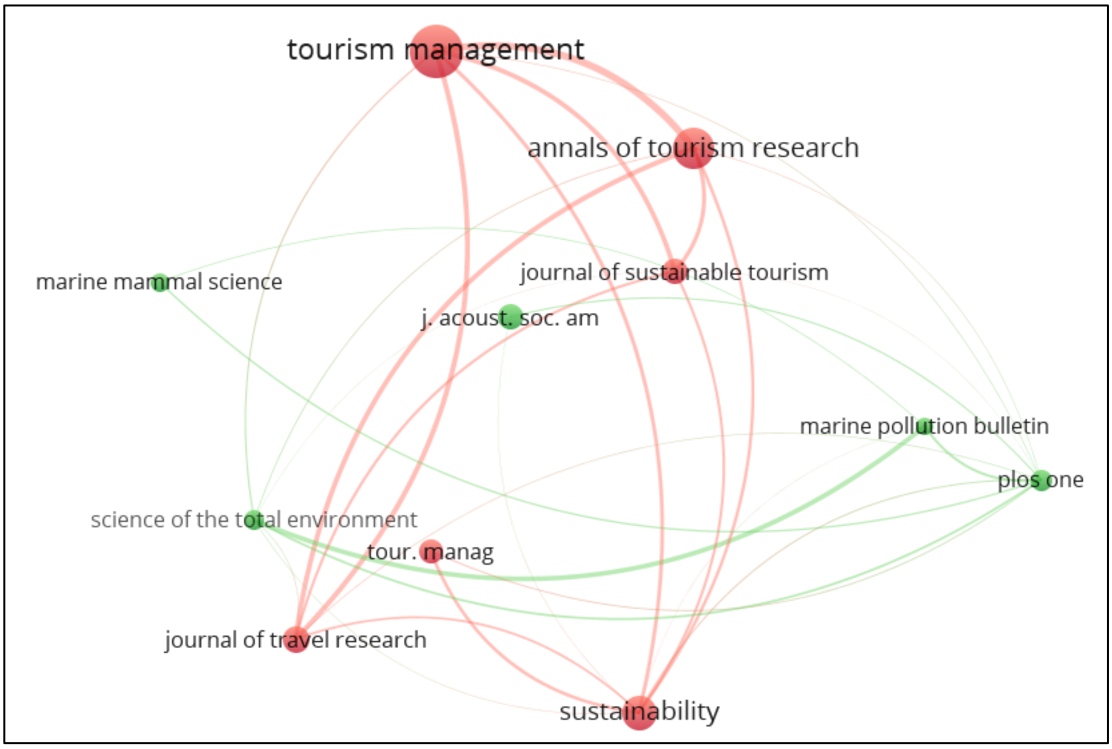


Figure 4. Bibliographic Network Map of Sources Co-citation Analysis

Co-occurrence-keywords Analysis

Out of 1142 keywords, those with at least 2 co-occurrences were analyzed. It was found that 175 keywords meet the given criteria. The density map in Figure 5 shows the most frequently used keywords in this field.

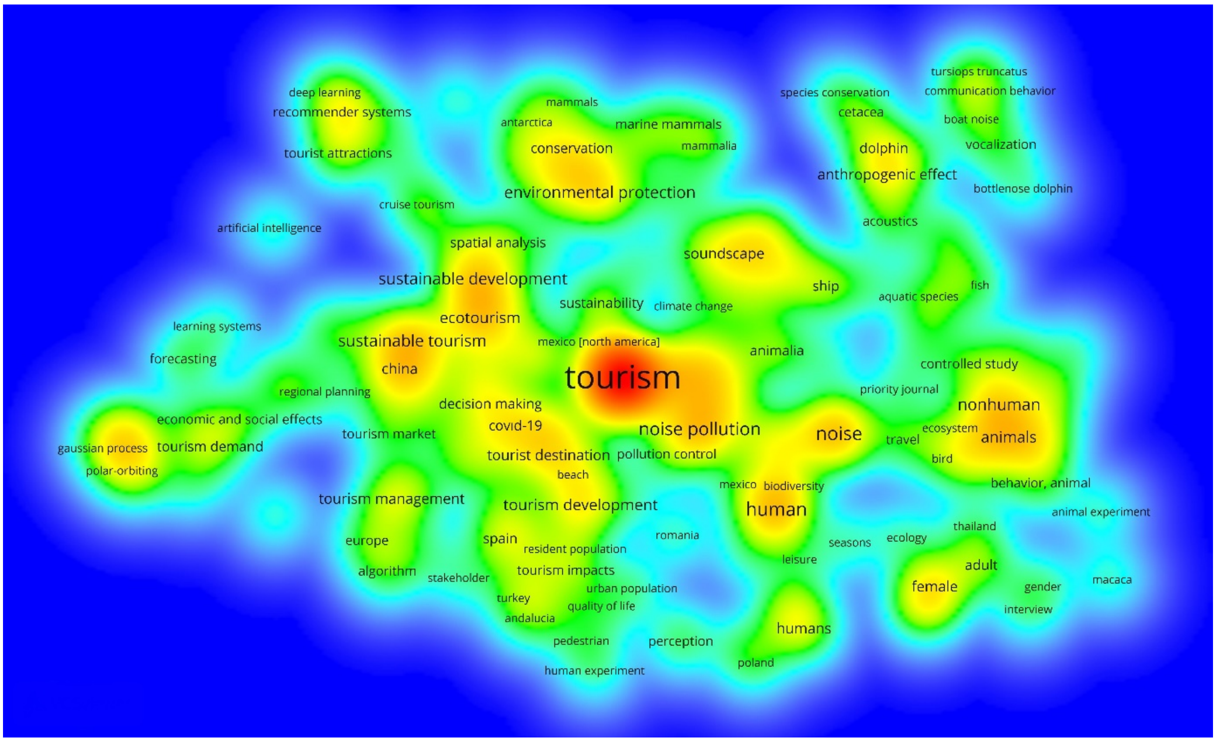


Figure 5. Density Map of Co-occurrence-keywords Analysis

Accordingly, there are nine clusters formed by 174 keywords. It was found that 174 related keywords formed 1785 links, and the total link strength was 2213. The most common keywords in the field are "tourism," "human," "noise," "noise pollution," "nonhuman," "sustainable development," "environmental protection," and "sustainable tourism."

Bibliographic Coupling Analysis

A bibliographic coupling analysis was performed to determine the bibliographic consistency of the studies. The lower limit for the number of citations of a study was 10 citations, and a total of 41 studies were analyzed (Figure 6).

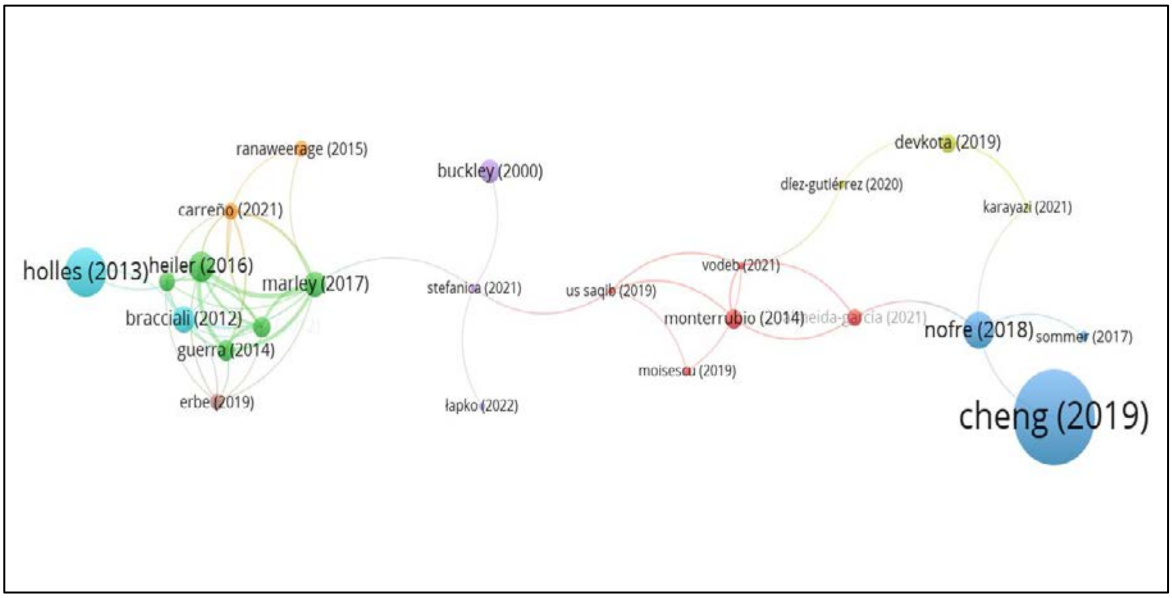


Figure 6. Bibliographic Network Map of Bibliographic Coupling Analysis

In bibliometric maps, arrows indicate link networks, while dots indicate the peaks where link networks intersect. The size of the dots indicates the citation frequency of the article. The articles in a similar cluster are assumed to have a strong relationship based on a common idea. Here, the articles were textually analyzed individually, and their research bases were analyzed.

In the same cluster, Carreño and Lloret (2021), Erbe et al. (2019), Marley et al. (2017), Heiler et al. (2016), Ranaweerage et al. (2015), and Guerra et al. (2014) examined the impacts of tourism in the sea. In particular, it was concluded that noise from tour boats negatively affects aquatic mammalian organisms. In another cluster, Holles et al. (2013) and Bracciali et al. (2012) examined the effects of tourism on other marine organisms. In another cluster, Karayazi et al. (2021), Cheng and Jin (2019), Nofre et al. (2018), and Sommer and Helbrecht (2017) analyzed the effects of tourism in urban areas and historical tourist sites. Again, these studies revealed the effects of tourism-related noise on both residents and tourists.

Almeida-García et al. (2021), Monterrubio and Andriotis (2014); Us Saqib et al. (2019) and Vodeb et al. (2021), Almeida-García et al. (2021), Monterrubio and Andriotis (2014), Us Saqib et al. (2019) and Vodeb et al. (2021) constitute another cluster that examines the environmental, social and economic impacts of tourism. In these studies, attention was drawn to the negative effects of tourism-related noise on people. These studies draw attention to the negative effects of tourism-related noise on people.

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This article aims to highlight the stages of development of noise research in the field of tourism. At the same time, it presents a future research agenda for researchers working on this topic using a bibliometric analysis approach. The journals in which most studies on the subject are published, the network relationship of the keywords used, and the change of the subject in the process is defined, and a link map between all studies and researchers is drawn.

It was found that the relevant studies were published in journals with a high impact factor, except in tourism. In other words, it was found that there were no noise studies in other social science journals on tourism with a high impact factor. It was assumed that the studies on the subject intensified from 2000 onwards and were effective in the field. Looking at the number of studies, an increase was observed after the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Based on this information, it is clear that tourism studies focus on the environment. In order to talk about the existence of tourism, positive environmental conditions must exist. From this point of view, it can be said that the importance of sustainability has increased even more and that academic researchers are turning to these issues. When evaluating the thematic development of the studies, it was observed that the focus of the keywords changed from 2021 onwards. Based on this data, it can be said that the Covid-19 pandemic has also influenced the focus of academic studies.

Due to several resource demands, tourism negatively impacts the social, cultural, and physical environment (McKercher, 1993). The concept of noise is addressed in studies of tourism impacts. However, it is recognized that studies in this area are limited. The negative effects of tourism should be reduced to ensure the sustainability of tourism in a world with increasing environmental problems. Therefore, academic initiatives in this area are important. In this way, practitioners can be educated and encouraged.

People generally travel to get away from their daily routine and relieve all the fatigue of the working season. However, being in an environment with disturbing sounds can adversely affect them physically and mentally (Ay & Günay Aktaş, 2019). Scientific studies have shown that sound-related factors can also affect tourist satisfaction and perceptions of service quality (He et al., 2019; Jiang et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2022; Qiu, Zhang, & Zheng, 2018). The impact of tourism-related noise on animals and plants is an issue that has been studied extensively (Bracciali et al., 2012; Carreño & Lloret, 2021; Erbe et al., 2019; Guerra et al., 2014; Heiler et al., 2016; Holles et al., 2013; Marley et al., 2017; Ranaweerage et al., 2015). If we look at the classification of scientific journals already published, we see aquatic science, environmental science, ocean engineering, water science, global and planetary change, and animal science. However, studies on the relationship between tourists' psychological well-being and noise (He et al., 2019; Qiu, Zhang, Zhang et al., 2018; Wadle & Martin, 2021) are limited. This situation can also be observed as a deficiency in practice. The common contributions of academic publications in the field of tourism to practice are improving tourism activities, improving service quality, ensuring tourist satisfaction, and increasing the economic benefits of tourism. As the focus of tourism is on people, it is recommended that more studies be carried out on the effects of noise on the mental and physical well-being of tourists. In parallel with this, it is a practical suggestion that stakeholders control the soundscape of touristic areas and take necessary measures to prevent noise, if any, to ensure service quality and touristic satisfaction. However, this study has limitations. The scope of the research data is only the studies written in English in the Scopus database. It may be possible for future researchers to expand the knowledge network of the subject by working on studies written in different languages in different databases.

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Swimming in dangerous waters: A phenomenological study of the risk management of tour guides[1]

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to explore the risk management experiences of tour guides by using a phenomenological approach. Tour guiding involves providing historical and cultural information, managing complex human interactions, ensuring safety, and overcoming logistical challenges. The study adopts a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of 19 active tour guides in Eskişehir who are registered with the Ankara Chamber of Tour Guides. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using descriptive and content analysis. Four main themes emerged: Challenges of the tour guiding profession, preparation before the tour, risks before the tour, and risks during the tour. The findings highlight that risk management strategies are critical to ensuring both guest satisfaction and guide well-being. Tour guides emphasize the importance of flexibility, crisis management skills, and proactive planning. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing insights into the real on-site experiences of tour guides and by offering actionable recommendations for improving risk management training. Safety standards and the guest experience can be significantly enhanced by improving tour guides' preparedness. Therefore, this study contributes to the current body of knowledge as it offers a framework for risk management of tour guides, tour guides' relevant solutions and strategies. Finally, it provides recommendations for theorists, practitioners, and other researchers. It is essential to address the underlying cause of the problem in order to resolve the situation effectively. When a risk is identified, it is crucial to remain calm and seek the most efficient and optimal solution.

KEYWORDS

Risk management, tour guiding profession, challenges of tour guide, risks during the tour

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of tourism is typically associated with notions of pleasure and leisure. As in all areas of life, there are risk factors in the tourism sector. By its very nature, tourism presents many types of risk and is affected by many different issues. Risk is often perceived as an inherent adversity to be circumvented or, at the very least, as an underlying potential threat. While risk may occasionally detract from the experiences and, in some cases, the lives of individual tourists, it is not a central aspect of tourism. Indeed, risk is seen as the antithesis of pleasure, and mass pleasure tourism is predicated on the apparent absence of risk. With the globalization of the world, crises affect not only the regions where they occur but also the whole world. Sectors such as tourism, which have both a global structure and a delicate balance, are quickly affected by security, environmental, political, and economic crises (Yetgin, Yılmaz & Çiftçi, 2018).

Tour guides are professional tourism workers who provide professional support to tourists, make informative explanations about the visited place, guide them, and stay in contact with tourists the most in tour programs (Kavak, Emir & Arslantürk, 2024a, p. 60). Guiding is a dynamic profession that involves not only the transmission of historical and cultural information but also complex human interactions, safety management, and logistical organization. Tour guides have several responsibilities, such as managing tourists' experiences, providing information, and ensuring their safety while at the same time promoting tourist destinations. One of these responsibilities is to manage the risks that guides face (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005). Situations such as incoming tourists not wanting to leave the hotel due to security reasons, not participating in cultural tours, cancellation of cultural tours in Turkey by tour operators abroad, and lack of travel insurance affect the service area of tour guides more. For this reason, compared to the number of tourists coming to the country for sea-sand-sun, it is thought that the target group served by tour guides is lower. A tour's quality depends on the guide's ability to give an expert interpretation, perform well, and transfer their knowledge to the group (Kalyoncu & Yüksek, 2020). All these situations have a negative impact on tour guides, and they can even lead to unemployment and economic difficulties. This means a tour guide who cannot perform their job must consider economic concerns (Yetgin & Benligiray, 2019; Kaya, Yetgin Akgün & Çiftçi, 2020). Tour guides, as professionals who communicate directly with visitors and guide them throughout the tour, have had to adapt to change in this sector where the use of new technologies has become widespread (Kavak, Emir and Arslantürk, 2024b, p. 1410). Tour guiding is, by its very nature, a field full of uncertainty and variability, and guides are likely to encounter unexpected situations at any time (Baum, 2006). In this context, the risk management skills of tour guides stand out as a factor that directly affects their professional success. Tour guides manage risks from accidents, health emergencies, and natural disasters. Effective response plans and partnerships with local authorities are crucial in mitigating these risks (Cohen, 1985; Wang & Chen, 2019). Otherwise, the guide's aggressive behavior in a difficult situation could undermine their overall positive qualities (Kalyoncu & Yüksek, 2017, p. 16).

Risks can come in many different forms in tour guiding. Physical hazards, problems in group dynamics, efforts to meet tourists' expectations, and environmental factors are common challenges that guides face daily (Mason, 2015). Additionally, risk is accepted in such a crisis because of its process. Crisis management is not only an activity that covers the period after a crisis. In this context, crisis management also includes activities that need to be carried out in the period until the emergence of the crisis, such as identifying warning signals and establishing protection and prevention mechanisms (Köroğlu, 2004). In particular, the hazards that guides face are not only limited to direct physical harm, but they are also exposed to psychological pressures, time management stress, and the expectations of individuals within the group and tour guiding profession, including lack of job security (Pearce, 2011; Nyahunzvi & Njerekai, 2013). Furthermore, the challenges that guides face in carrying out their work are related to individual experiences as well as the overall dynamics of the tourism sector. Relationships with government agencies, tourism companies, and other stakeholders are critical external factors that shape guides' risk management strategies and decisions. Boksberger et al. (2007) examined risk perception in commercial air travel, identifying six specific perceived risk dimensions: financial risk, functional risk, physical risk, psychological risk, social risk, and temporal risk.

This study aims to determine tour guides' risk management experiences and how these experiences help them cope with the challenges they face in their profession. It also aims to contribute to training programs in the sector by providing new insights into tour guides' strategic and operational practices in their profession. A better understanding of guides' ability to manage risk can contribute to their professional development and the tourism sector's safety standards. In this context, the research findings can provide recommendations for industry professionals and tour guide candidates to manage the risks tour guides face more effectively. This study contributes to previous research on the tour-guiding profession and provides a new perspective on the practical strategies tour guides develop to deal with their challenges (Pearce, 2011). Filling the gaps in the literature in this area and developing practical strategies to manage the risks tour guides face better should be a shared goal of professionals and researchers in the field.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is thought that the word "*risk*" came into our language from the Greek word *"rhiza,"* meaning rocky. The word *"rhiza*," expressing danger, was transferred to Italian as "risco" and from there to English as 'risk.' In Turkish, it was first used as "riziko" but later as 'risk.' "Risk" can be defined as "the probability of occurrence of an event that may result in damage or loss" (Çetinsöz & Ege, 2013). While risk is a known possibility, uncertainty does not have a known probability. Risk is a calculable and predictable situation, and its effects can be managed. While we have certain information in risk situations, it can be said that uncertainty usually arises due to a lack of information (Karamustafa & Erbaş, 2011, p. 108). Risk is a phenomenon of life. Individuals must take action and make decisions in the face of risk, but taking risks may lead to unexpected and undesirable results (Çetinsöz & Ege, 2013).

Despite the challenging circumstances, the tourism industry can minimize disruptions and facilitate a swift return to normal operations through effective risk management (Ural, 2015). The first step in effective risk management in tourism is the identification of potential risks. The next step is to assess the risks identified and assign responsibilities. Once the possible risks in tourism have been identified, measures can be taken to minimize their impact. Regular reviews and monitoring of all actions are essential for effective risk management. Furthermore, all stakeholders involved in tourism safety should be trained to identify, analyze, assess, and respond to risks and to monitor, review, and communicate with stakeholders at every stage of the process (Payam, 2020).

Pioneering studies, such as those by Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992), categorized tourism risks into physical-equipment, holiday, and destination risks. Recent research has expanded these categories to include financial, psychological, social, and temporal risks (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007; Wang & Chen, 2019). Fuchs and Reichel (2006) investigated the destination risk perception of foreign tourists in Israel. Their study identified six risk perception factors: human-induced, financial, service quality, social–psychological, food safety problems and weather, and natural disasters and car accident risks. Tour guides, as frontline workers, face unique risks stemming from their direct interaction with tourists and the operational demands of their profession (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005).

Risk management is a comprehensive process that begins with the identification of risks and continues with their assessment, the determination of responsible individuals and units, the selection of risk transfer methods, the implementation of these methods, the monitoring of the risks, and the evaluation of the process (Akkoç, 2020). It can be defined as the careful and detailed definition of potential risks and implementing measures to minimize or eliminate them. This process involves preventing losses and maximizing the benefits of the tourist experience. However, the strategies that guides use to manage risk have not been sufficiently explored in the literature. How guides respond to the risks they face and which internal and external factors are effective in this process are not fully understood (Mason, 2015). Therefore, understanding the risk management experiences of tour guides is an important area of research for both the academic literature and professional practice. As the tour's leader, the tour guide has much to do before, during and after the tour. Being a tour guide is a different job in the tourism sector because of its nature. The tour guide is not only a service provider but also the leader of the tourist. The tour guide profession is perceived as simply providing information to tourists. However, the profession encompasses a wide range of roles that go beyond superficial tasks. Köroğlu (2012) found that several factors contribute to the preference of the tour guiding profession among the younger generation. These include the elevated risk of unemployment and job insecurity, the lengthy working hours, the extensive travel, and the increased prevalence of health issues with age. Tour guides act as interpreters of culture, facilitators of experiences, and mediators between tourists and destinations (Cohen, 1985). Tour guides not only act as guides during the trip but also have the role of ‘special diplomats’ who can communicate professionally (Yüksek, Coşkun and Günay Aktaş, 2017). Risk management encompasses all the strategies that guides develop to deal with this diversity of risks

Tour guides are key actors in the tourism industry, acting as facilitators, mediators, and risk managers. Their responsibilities go beyond providing information, as they ensure the safety and well-being of tourists while managing different types of risks, such as physical, cultural, environmental, and social (Cohen, 1985; Ap & Wong, 2001). Cultural misunderstandings can affect the tourist experience and damage the relationship between the host and the community. Tour guides act as cultural mediators, ensuring respectful and appropriate interactions between tourists and local cultures (Ap & Wong, 2001; Huang & Weiler, 2010). Risks can be managed in various ways, including direct interaction with tourists. Therefore, Effective communication is crucial for managing risks during tours. Previous research has identified several communication skills, including the ability to maintain a sense of humor, eye contact, compliance with tourists, the use of body language, and courtesy to group members as key determinants of tour guides' performance in providing a satisfactory tour experience for tourists (Sezgin & Düz, 2018). In ecotourism and adventure tourism, guides are responsible for minimizing environmental degradation. They promote sustainable practices such as waste management and adherence to ecological guidelines (Black & Ham, 2005; Weiler & Black, 2015). Managing group dynamics, resolving conflicts, and addressing inappropriate tourist behavior is essential to maintaining a positive group atmosphere and avoiding social disruption (Zhang & Chow, 2004; Tarlow, 2006).

Tour guides must possess the qualifications required by their profession, address any current deficiencies, and engage in continuous professional development. The absence of the requisite qualifications among guides results in a reduction in the quality of service and an increase in customer complaints (Düz, 2017). Professional training increases the capacity of tour guides to manage risks. Programs that focus on crisis management and emergency response improve preparedness (Ap & Wong, 2001; Weiler & Walker, 2014). Mobile applications, GPS tracking, and other technologies enable tour guides to communicate effectively and respond quickly in emergencies (Leung et al., 2013; Xiang et al., 2021). Pre-tour briefings, risk assessments, and the development of contingency plans are standard practices that increase tourist safety and satisfaction (Huang & Weiler, 2010; Tarlow, 2006). Tour guides often face stress and uncertainty in risk scenarios. Building psychological resilience through support systems and training is increasingly recognized as critical (Cohen et al., 2002; Wang and Chen., 2019). Tour guides explore the integration of risk management technologies, the role of emotional intelligence in crisis scenarios, and comparative studies on risk management practices across different cultural contexts (Weiler & Walker, 2014; Xiang et al., 2021). This study builds on previous research by focusing on the lived experiences of tour guides in managing risks. It addresses gaps in the literature by providing a more detailed understanding of how guides navigate complex challenges and pre-tour and during-tour risks, intending to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in this field.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

While preparing the data collection tool, questions were adapted from studies on perceived risk, risk management, and the challenges of the tour guiding profession (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992; Sheng-Hshiung, Gwo-Hshiung and Kuo-Ching, 1997; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005; Nyahunzvi & Njerekai, 2013). Then, the opinions of four experts in the fields of tourism management and tour guiding were consulted. The questions in the form, in which the necessary arrangements were made in line with the expert opinions, are as follows:

- How old are you? What is your language of tour guiding? How long have you been working actively as a tour guide?
- What are the challenges of tour guiding profession that affect you?
- What preparations do you make before you go on tour?
- What risks might you face before you go on tour? Do you take any precautions against these risks?
- What risks do you encounter during the tour? How do you eliminate the risks you come across during the tour?

This study adopts a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of tour guides regarding risk management. Phenomenology enables researchers to understand how individuals perceive and interpret specific phenomena (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, the aim of the phenomenological design is not to generalize but to define the reality of the phenomena (Akturan & Esen, 2013, pp. 84-85; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p. 78). The ethics committee permission required to collect the data used in this study was obtained from the Anadolu University Ethics Committee with protocol number 56806. The research was conducted in Eskişehir, which has a unique character and features, such as historical buildings, green parks, and convenient local transportation, making it a popular destination for domestic and foreign travelers. Before the interview, each participant was provided with an informed consent form, which outlined the confidentiality of their responses and ensured their willingness to participate (Seidman, 2006). The universe of the study is 109 Eskişehir tour guides. Data was collected from 19 active tour guides registered with the Ankara Chamber of Tour Guides (ANRO). Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure the representation of diverse professional experiences so that they could see the experienced guides and the new tour guides, as Eskişehir has become the most visited destination in domestic tourism and a very crowded destination on weekends. It is thought that the visit of these crowded groups also causes an increase in the risks of the tours. In-depth and face-to-face interviews lasting 20 to 60 minutes were conducted in September 2024. All data were anonymized to protect participant confidentiality.

Data Analysis

This research aims to explore the risk management experiences of tour guides using a phenomenological approach. Phenomenological research offers a different perspective on the educational process, one that is subjective and goes beyond the rational points of view that situate the mind at the center. In this respect, phenomenological self-understanding offers a perspective that differs from the mainstream education theories (Jardine, 1987). The phenomenological studies presented here are essential in eliminating the traditional approaches in which the learning phenomenon is presented separately from the body and the context.

Methodologically, grasping learning based on interdisciplinarity, power balances, and context reveals the learning process in a more nuanced way. Phenomenology is a method used to explore how individuals perceive and make sense of particular experiences (Creswell, 2013). This method will provide an in-depth perspective to understand tour guides' emotional, psychological, and social experiences concerning the risks they face. The phenomenological approach will help us explore the 'real' experiences, challenges, and solutions that tour guides go through during their work in detail. Descriptive and content analysis are used in the analysis phase of the research data. In the light of the data obtained, information was obtained on what are the challenges of the tour guiding profession, what kind of preparations tour guides make before going on tour, what kind of risks they face before going on tour, and whether they take any precautions against the risks they face.

FINDINGS

The data was organized and described in accordance with the principles of phenomenological design as they relate to qualitative research to identify quotations in the interviews. The tour guides' responses were identified and grouped according to the themes that emerged from the data. The four themes are the challenges of the tour guiding profession, pre-tour preparation, pre-tour risks, *and risks during the tour*.

To ensure consistency and avoid any potential bias caused by the self-reporting of the guides, the frequency of the codes was used as a basis for the analysis. It was, therefore, decided that only those codes repeated by at least two guides would be included. The codes were then transformed into categories. At this stage, it was possible to either use predetermined categories or to allow new categories to emerge (Dawson, 2016). The demographic characteristics of the tour guides, the themes, sub-themes, and codes that emerged from the content analysis applied to the data obtained from the participants, and their frequencies are presented in the tables below.

Table 1.
Demographic characteristics of the Tour Guides

Tour Guide	*Age*	*Gender*	*Language*	*Experience (Year)*
TG1	32	Male	English	9
TG2	42	Female	English	12
TG3	31	Male	English	10
TG4	32	Male	German	9
TG5	31	Male	German	7
TG6	65	Female	English	34
TG7	26	Female	English	5
TG8	30	Male	English	5
TG9	51	Male	English	31
TG10	27	Male	English	4
TG11	27	Male	English	5
TG12	29	Male	English	7
TG13	41	Male	English	15
TG14	43	Female	English	5
TG15	28	Male	English	6
TG16	38	Male	English	15
TG17	28	Male	English	5
TG18	30	Male	Russian	5
TG19	33	Female	English	9

Table 1 demonstrates the characteristics of the tour guides. The average age of the participants is 34 (the youngest is 26 years old, and the eldest is 65 years old). The 14 participants are male, and the five of them are female. The interviewed tour guides generally speak English. Also, German and Russian are two of their foreign language. The average tour guiding experience is 10 years (at least 4 years and at most 34 years). All the tour guides who participated in the study work as freelancers and are paid daily wages.

Table 2.
The Challenges of Tour Guiding Profession

Theme 1	*Sub-themes*	*Codes*
The Challenges of Tour Guiding Profession	*Tourist Behaviour*	Apathetic behaviours (9) Different expectations (5) Unpleasant arguments (3)
	Working Conditions	Intensive tour programs (8) Seasonal profession (6) Low wages (5)
	Interaction with Other Service Providers	Travel agency issues (12) Decreasing solidarity in the sector (7) Problems with the drivers (5)

As seen in Table 2, the challenges of the tour guiding profession are grouped under three sub-themes: *tourist behavior, working conditions*, and *interaction with other service providers*. According to the answers given by the tour guides, it can be said that in the sub-theme of *Tourist Behavior*, they mainly complain about the apathetic behaviors of the tourists. "*The purpose of the tours is to take photographs rather than to learn about history and culture,*" declares TG1. This situation causes the guides' narratives to fail to achieve their goals and their motivation to decrease. According to TG10, tour guides are bored with the different expectations of the tourists: "One of the difficulties of this job is that people from different personalities and origins are together, *and it is necessary to be able to address them all at once* (TG12)". Besides, arguments between tourists or communication problems with the tour guide disrupt the group dynamic during the tour and require crisis management by the tour guides. TG11 commented, "*Not playing music on the bus and not entertaining the guests is also rewarded with the label "bad guide" in the surveys at the end of the tour (!). Apart from that, when the lies told by the agencies to sell the tour are revealed during the tour, it is tiring and frustrating to be the guests' interlocutor*." These codes are evaluated in the *tourist behavior* sub-theme.

The second sub-theme of the challenges of the tour guide profession is *working conditions*. It was noted that tour guides generally have to work to tight and time-consuming tour programs. This situation can have a negative impact on the performance of the guides by causing physical and mental fatigue. TG4 points out, "*Sometimes we experience physical and mental fatigue, and there is a risk of accident*. The tour guides point out that the tour guiding profession generally depends on a certain season, bringing along the lack of income security and continuous employment opportunities for tour guides. TG6 expresses that "*Seasonality; lack of job security; limited job opportunities; excessive responsibility imposed on the guide during the tours; the fact that the tours last until late hours and there are no set hours...*" this situation is considered as one of the difficult working conditions of the tour guiding profession. Guides state that despite the knowledge and skills required by the profession, they generally work for low wages. TG7 expresses that "*Agencies trying to reduce the guide wage by negotiating are forcing me*." may negatively affect the prestige and attractiveness of the profession.

The third sub-theme of the challenges of the tour guide profession is *interaction with other service providers*. Tour guides face various problems due to insufficient support from travel agencies or poorly planned programs. Another issue is that the travel agencies do not design the tour itinerary logically while preparing the tour programs*. "Especially in daily tours, running to catch up with many places increases the dissatisfaction of the guests" (TG17).* Intensive or unrealistic tour programs make it especially difficult for tour guides. Besides, The decreasing solidarity and collegial support in the sector causes tour guides to feel lonely. TG9 states, *"Declining solidarity and respect in the sector makes me feel sad."* In addition, tour guides draw attention to safety problems due to the inexperience of drivers and lack of sleep.TG18 stresses that *"I face risks with drivers and tour guide apprentices. Because they can be exhausted and reckless."* In certain instances, it was asserted that the unprofessional conduct of the drivers impeded the tours.

Tour guides undertake meticulously planned actions before embarking on tours, ensuring seamless execution and optimal participant satisfaction. This study analyses the preparations made by tour guides before embarking on tours, categorizing them under three main themes: *operational preparations, narrative preparations, and personal preparations*. Table 3 illustrates the analysis of the extent of interdisciplinary skills and preparation processes required by those engaged in guiding.

The operational preparations sub-theme covers destination and tour route check, reservation check, and tour planning. TG2 says, "I carefully check details such as traffic on the tour route, road conditions, and the opening hours of the places to be visited." This preparation helps flow the tour program easily and reduces potential disruptions. Making and confirming reservations for restaurants, hotels, and places to visit prevents tour disruption. TG8 supports that "If we have got appointments booked in, I always check the number of people coming, etc., the day before." Confirming reservations for a range of establishments, including restaurants, hotels, and tourist attractions, prevents any potential disruption to the tour. TG5 supports that "I verify the requisite bookings that I have to make." The guides also organize the flow of the program, taking into account the expectations of the group members, time constraints, and itinerary details. TG13 says, "I organize the time planning of the tour." TG3 estimates the risk by saying, "I plan that tour in my head and try to live it." Thus, flexibility and problem-solving skills have been upgraded.

Table 3.
Pre-tour Preparation

Theme 2	*Sub-themes*	*Codes*
Pre-Tour Preparation	*Operational Preparations*	Destination and Tour Route Check (11) Reservation Check (7) Tour planning (5)
	Narrative Preparations	Enrichment of narration (9) Getting information about the group (6) Planning the narration (5)
	Personal Preparations	Personal Care and Appearance (14) Choosing suitable clothes for the tour and weather (11) Sufficient sleep and rest (6)

The second sub-theme of pre-tour preparation is *narrative preparations.* Tour guides refresh their knowledge to enrich their stories and present them effectively. They revisit the destination and work on their weaknesses. TG14 highlights, "*Even if I know the area very well, I usually reconstruct what I have to say in my head."* Tour guides should have an in-depth knowledge of the historical, cultural, and geographical characteristics of the place visited. They should be able to present rich and compelling information during the narration. TG15 says*, "I organize the flow of the program, taking into account the expectations of the group members, time constraints, and itinerary details."* This process requires flexibility and problem-solving skills.

The third sub-theme of Theme 2 is *personal preparations*, which covers the physical and mental preparation of the guides for the tour and emphasizes their responsibilities. TG16 says, *"Before the tour, I care about myself both physically and mentally."* The fact that the tour guides take care of their appearance is an important element that strengthens the perception of professionalism. TG4 explains, "I check the weather conditions, *and if it is a long journey, I will be rested and vigorous and ready for the tour."* Choosing appropriate clothing for the tour and the weather will help impress the tourists. TG8 explains, *"I always sleep well before I go on tour, I always eat breakfast, I have to have good energy."* The tour guides' physical and mental strength contributes to the tour's success.

Tour guides indicated that they may be exposed to risks of different magnitudes before going on a tour. These risks cover various issues, including health, logistics, human relations, and operational processes. Participants indicated that they try to ensure the smooth running of their tour programs by taking various precautions against these risks. The results can be analyzed under four sub-themes: Health and Safety Risks, Operational Risks, Tourist Relations Risks, and Pre-Tour Risks.

The *health and safety risks* sub-theme covers *accident and disease risks* and the *risk of getting lost*. The risk of participants experiencing emergencies such as health problems and accidents was indicated. TG8 stresses, "*I look at the location of health facilities on the road in case of physical ailments."* The risk of disappearance, especially in groups of children, is a significant concern for counselors. TG9 says, *"When I go on tours with small children, I think that I may face the risk of children getting lost, so I warn teachers or parents about this."*

The second sub-theme of pre-tour risks is *operational risks*. Urban crowding and traffic are among the risks that disrupt plans. Therefore, the guides see this as one before the tour. TG3 points out that *"especially in crowded urban areas and traffic problems."*

Intensive and low-feasibility tour programs prepared by agencies pose a risk for tour guides. TG7 explains, "Sometimes the agencies overfill the tour program, making it impossible to complete the program, sometimes it may take a long time to determine the dining places and their capacities without considering them*.”*

Table 4.
Pre-Tour Risks

Theme 3	*Sub-themes*	*Codes*
Pre-Tour Risks	*Health and Safety Risks*	Accident and disease risks (8) Risk of getting lost (7)
	Operational Risks	Traffic and crowd (10) Intensive tour programs (7)
	Tourist Relations Risks	Fear of lousy group interaction (11) Fear of bad relations with other service providers (9)
	Solutions to Pre-tour Risks	Being ready for every crisis (13) Double-check for every detail (8) Working with familiar travel agencies (6)

The third sub-theme of the pre-tour risks is *tourist relations risk*. Tourist relations risks have two codes: Fear of lousy group interaction and fear of bad relations with other service providers. TG17 states, *“There is also the risk that someone in the group will know more than me and use it to feed their ego or humiliate me.”* The inability to harmonize with the group, conflicts between group members, or underestimation of the group's leadership can cause a risk. Whether other service providers, such as agents or captains, are professional people is perceived as a risk factor. As seen in the answer of TG2, whether other service providers, such as agents or captains, are professional people is perceived as a risk factor. *“Inexperience or incompatibility of agency personnel (e.g., captains) may cause operational disruptions.”* (TG2)

The fourth sub-theme of the pre-tour risks is solutions of Pre-tour Risks. Being ready for every crisis, doubling for every detail, and working with familiar travel agencies are the codes of solutions of the pre-tour risks sub-theme. Preparing for every crisis is a critical solution for tour guides to conduct their business professionally. It is based on recognizing risks in advance, taking preventive measures, and responding quickly and effectively in a crisis. TG15 primarily advises that *“Tour guides should be prepared for instant problem solving and any crisis. They should be aware that this is a people-oriented profession that operates on a multivariate, slippery ground and should be treated accordingly.”* TG7 emphasizes double-checking all restaurant and museum reservations in advance and adjusting the route according to density. She says*, “It is essential to check every detail to minimize the risk of overcrowding at lunch (TG7).”* Tour guides state that working with familiar travel agencies can reduce the risks of the tour. TG18 confesses, "Working with captains that I have previously known how to behave helps me *reduce the risks I feel before the tour. I prefer to go on tour with familiar agencies and captains to reduce the risks.”*

Risks during the tour are divided into three sub-themes: *internal risks, external risks*, and *solutions to risks during the tour*. Internal risks are compiled from three codes. One of the critical internal risks is health. For guests with mobility difficulties, injuries, or illnesses, occasional food-related illnesses can be complicated for the tour guides. TG1 states, "*Guests suffering from illness,* *rare food-borne illnesses, airborne illnesses, and physical fatigue are very common during the tour."* TG10 states, *"When I encounter a problem during the tour, I stay calm and try to produce the most permanent and fastest solution. When necessary, I get support from the necessary places (such as health, security, etc. services, officials, etc.)"* Non-compliance of participants with the program, overly busy programs, and time constraints can be problems for the tour operation. TG5 notes, "*The most important risk that may be experienced during the tour is that the group may act independently of the group by ignoring the tour program, and therefore, the group's gathering times may be delayed."* The following issues have been identified as requiring further attention: conflicts among guests change the group dynamics. TG13 states, *"I often come across situations where the guests are not tolerant and respectful to each other. Sometimes, they can argue among themselves and bring it to the level of a fight."*

Table 5.
Risks during the Tour

Theme 4	*Sub-themes*	*Codes*
Risks during the tour	Internal Risks	Health issues (15) Operational issues (11) Group dynamics (7)
	External Risks	Transport and traffic (16) Safety risks (9) Service quality-based risks (5)
	Solutions to Risks During the Tour	Cooperation and information sharing (14) Problem solving and flexibility (11) Crisis management (10) Being calm and cool-blooded (6)

The second sub-theme of risks during the tour is External Risks. Traffic congestion, road closures, and route changes are consistently among the most critical risks during the tour. TG7 especially states, "*The presence of traffic represents a considerable hazard, both in terms of safety and crowd control. As tour guides, we are exposed to significant risks pertaining to the loading and unloading of passengers, particularly in areas characterized by high levels of congestion."* Cases such as disappearance, theft, and snatching are external risks that make safety necessary; as TG4 emphasizes, *"Theft and snatching incidents. Risk of getting lost and losing belongings, money, and similar items in younger school groups."* Problems such as poor service quality in catering and restaurants and long waiting times for guests can leave a negative impression during the tour. TG3 explains, "Overcrowding in museums, restaurants or archaeological sites; poor service, lack of reservations and unavailability of tables."

The third sub-theme of the risks during the tour is solutions to risks during the tour. Cooperation and information sharing, problem-solving and flexibility, crisis management, and being calm and cool-blooded are the codes that can prevent risks during the tour. Seeking help from experts when needed, developing solutions by coordinating with company, institution, or agency representatives. According to TG6, "I try to eliminate the risks by keeping in touch with my colleagues, finding out where it is busy or not on the day of the tour, and asking for help if necessary." Most participants aim to solve the problem as soon as possible. In this process, getting external help when necessary is also mentioned as an essential solution. TG9 stresses "developing fast and effective solutions to problems, organizing the tour program flexibly when necessary." Making solution-oriented strategic decisions in instant crises reveals the importance of crisis management. As TG6 says, "I am using my crisis management skills." Remaining calm and cool-headed is vital when faced with stressful and complex situations. TG8 supports that with this answer: "I always try to stay cool and calm and find a solution in the shortest and best way. I think the most important thing is to stay calm and think calmly."

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

When the guide takes the group and starts the tour, they are now the only authorized and responsible person, the most critical person in bringing all the services together and presenting them to the tourist (Ön, Akyurt Kurnaz and Güzel, 2021, p. 202). It is widely acknowledged that most tour guides interact with a considerable number of guests daily. They are required to operate within a highly relational working environment, and they have to manage all of the risks. Tour guides assess potential risks before the tour and inform the guests about them. They make flexible program arrangements to develop quick and practical solutions to problems that arise during the tour. Occupational accidents and diseases are a significant problem today, negatively affecting the social and economic life of individuals. Like many other professions, the tour guide profession is challenging and requires physical and mental strength due to the working conditions. In other research, it is found to be the most critical reason behind work-related ill-health, followed by structural factors including long journeys, unemployment, working conditions, and constant responsibility (Chowdhary & Prakash, 2008; Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013; Ababneh, 2017). Besides, the tour guide profession requires frequent travel, and it can be described as a tiring and stressful profession, with risks of accidents, an intense pace of work, and long working hours (Ulusoy Mutlu, Balıkoğlu, Akgül & Köroğlu, 2024). Tour guides plan to deal with situations such as the risk of guests getting lost. The risk management strategies of tour guides are critical for the safety and satisfaction of guests. Tour guides' flexibility, crisis management skills, and planning ability contribute to effectively managing risks. Tour guides should be encouraged to receive more training on risk management and share their experiences. Remaining calm and cool-headed is a vital solution when faced with stressful and complex situations, and it is one of the most essential skills of guides.

Theoretical Implications

Tour guides should identify the locations of nearby health facilities in case the participants need medical assistance due to physical ailments. Determining museums' opening and closing hours is important in reducing the risk. Tour guides generally stated that tour programs designed by the travel agency without enough thought create risks. This result of the research is similar to the results of Arslan and Akkuş (2024) in that the agencies sometimes make it impossible to complete the tour program by overfilling it (Arslan & Akkuş, 2024, p. 1983). Sometimes, travel agencies create significant risks by making reservations without considering the restaurants and their capacities. To avoid these potential pitfalls, the details of the itinerary must be discussed in advance with the relevant agency staff to develop practical solutions to facilitate the necessary arrangements. Tour guides have expressed concern that they will be unable to reach the places they are most needed. They explained that they initially informed the tour group about this and took precautions by requesting the group follow the planned itinerary. The results of this research are similar to the results of Chang, Shen, and Li (2018) in terms of factors such as occupational safety and risk management, financial risks, personal risks, work risks, service tourist route and tipping issues, tourist visa and passport duration, hijacking and plane crash, baggage loss and damage, document and asset theft, and measures and strategies to be taken for the management of risks (Chang, Shen and Li, 2008). Considering that there is a risk of children getting lost, especially on tours with young children, tour guides stated that they warn teachers or parents accompanying groups of school children. In addition, the risks related to crowding and traffic in the city were also mentioned significantly. The ability of guides to remain calm in times of crisis, to act quickly to find solutions, and to cooperate with their colleagues when necessary is key to eliminating such risks. These approaches are key factors in ensuring that tours run smoothly.

Practical Implications

Eskişehir is regarded as a favored destination for domestic tourism due to its historical, cultural, and tourist attractions. Several potential risks are associated with the tour guiding profession in Eskişehir. The tour guide assumes the role of leader and thus bears the responsibility of managing numerous concurrent tasks. In this context, guides must be able to identify potential risks in advance and implement strategies to manage them. Identifying risks perceived by tour guides in Eskişehir and the subsequent development of solutions to mitigate these risks will benefit both the guides currently operating in the region and those seeking employment as guides in Eskişehir. It was emphasized that to minimize the risks faced by those in this profession, it is necessary to increase awareness and consciousness among both those who perform this role and the guests. Furthermore, they said they interact with other colleagues during the tour by learning whether it is busy or not and asking for assistance if necessary. Additionally, according to the density situation, they aim to implement prompt solutions to circumvent disruptions in the tour program. Tour guides must possess crisis management abilities and maintain composure during negative occurrences. Also, it is essential to address the underlying cause of the problem to resolve the situation effectively. When a risk is identified, it is crucial to remain calm and seek the most efficient and optimal solution. The tour guides residing in Eskisehir stated that they made a preliminary assessment of possible risks at the beginning of the tour and warned the guests in advance about the situations they might encounter. However, they stated that they used instant crisis management skills to address most of the risks that emerged during the tour. The future of the tourism sector needs to reveal the problems perceived by professional tour guides to perform their profession better. In addition, it is pointed out that the work programs of guides should be planned well; they should not work below the base wage, and illegal guides should be prevented by increasing inspections.

- Tour guides can consider the following suggestions to eliminate risks.
- Risk management training can be given to tour guides.
- A review of risk factors should be made at the start of the tour.
- Tour guides should warn guests about possible risks.
- To minimize possible risks, the awareness and consciousness of all service providers and tourists involved in the tour should be increased.
- Tour guides should be able to take initiative. They should have crisis management skills.
- In unexpected situations, tour guides should discuss the problem with the relevant business-institution officials and propose applications to produce solutions.
- Tour guides should try to remain calm when faced with any risk.

In light of the findings of this study, several recommendations can be considered in the existing literature. The initial recommendation pertains to prospective research endeavors. It is anticipated that this study will inform future research concerning guides' experiences in risk management. In this regard, the findings of this study can be generalized by investigating the following: (1) how guides address risk management, (2) the solutions they propose, and (3) the actions that should be taken before and during the tour to ensure its success. This can be achieved through a quantitative research approach. In Eskişehir, the factors that create risks in tours can be identified, and these risks can be eliminated through stakeholder interviews.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has certain limitations. First of all, this research contains the experience of tour guides of Eskişehir. So, there is no expectation of generalizing the research results. Similar studies to be conducted in other countries will shed more light on the risk management of tour guides. Secondly, in the research, the risks experienced by tour guides within the scope of risk management and their solution proposals were discussed from the perspective of tour guides. In this way, the studies to be carried out with the various parties involved in the issue can provide a more comprehensive picture. This study sheds light not only on tour guides but also on tour guide candidates, who have mostly not experienced being tour guides. For this reason, future studies should also pay more attention to the issues mentioned above. Future research can interview tour guides speaking other foreign languages to enhance the variety of tour guides as they can see the different risk management styles.

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Examining the relationship between presenteeism, professional commitment, and the intention to leave the profession among tour guides[1]

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the relationship between presenteeism, professional commitment, and the intention to leave the profession among tour guides. A quantitative research method was employed to collect primary data to achieve this. The study utilized the "Stanford Presenteeism Scale" developed by Koopman et al. (2002), the "Professional Commitment Scale" developed by Meyer et al. (1993), and the "Intention to Leave the Profession Scale" developed by Weng and McElroy (2012) as data collection tools. The study population consisted of licensed tour guides registered with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and currently employed in the field. A total of 461 questionnaire responses were collected for the research. However, incomplete questionnaires were excluded, resulting in 456 valid responses that were analyzed. The results of the study revealed a significant positive correlation between tour guides' presenteeism behaviors and their professional commitment, as well as a significant negative correlation between presenteeism behaviors and their intention to leave the profession. Additionally, the study found a negative relationship between the level of professional commitment of tour guides and their intention to leave the profession.

KEYWORDS

Presenteeism, professional commitment, intention to leave the profession, tour guides

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INTRODUCTION

Tour guiding is a labor-intensive profession characterized by an intensive work schedule and demanding conditions. Tour guides play a crucial role in contributing to the tourism sector, destinations, and the economy of their respective countries, both socially and economically. As a result, tour guides are expected to exhibit high levels of professional commitment. However, the demanding nature of the profession, coupled with individual health issues, may lead to illness or other ailments. Despite these challenges, tour guides often continue working unwell to avoid job loss or complete their tours. This behavior aligns with the concept of "*presenteeism*," defined as attending work despite being unable to perform at full capacity. Tour guides may engage in presenteeism for various reasons, such as economic anxiety, fear of job loss, a desire to maintain their standing in the sector, or workplace competition. Karanika-Murray et al. (2015) state that one of the factors influencing presenteeism could be professional commitment. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that presenteeism behaviors may contribute to tour guides' intention to leave the profession. In this context, examining the levels of presenteeism, professional commitment, and intention to leave the profession among tour guides and the relationship between these factors is essential. Additionally, understanding the potential negative impacts of presenteeism behaviors on the profession may raise awareness among tour guides about the importance of taking necessary precautions. This study is expected to contribute to the theoretical and practical literature on the subject.

Therefore, determining the relationship between presenteeism with professional commitment and intention to leave the profession of tour guides constitutes the main purpose of the study. In this direction, the following questions were sought to be answered:

- What is the level of presenteeism behavior of tour guides?
- What is the level of professional commitment of tour guides?
- What are the intentions of tour guides to leave their profession?
- Is there a relationship between tour guides' presenteeism behaviors and their professional commitment?
- Is there a relationship between tour guides' presenteeism behaviors and their intention to leave the profession?
- Is there a relationship between tour guides' professional commitment and their intention to leave the profession?

In the related literature, various studies addressing professional commitment (Arslantürk, 2016; Özoğul, 2017; Yetgin, 2017; Özoğul & Eğe, 2018; Ateş & Pelit, 2022; Agustina, 2023; Huyen et al., 2023; Yang & Choi, 2023) and intention to leave (Gökdemir & Hacıoğlu, 2018; Xu et al., 2018; Yumuk & Koçoğlu, 2020; Dalkılıç Yılmaz et al., 2021; Rahimiaghdam et al., 2024) the profession of tour guides were found, but no study was found to address presenteeism behaviors in tour guides. In addition, there is no study in which these concepts are addressed together. Accordingly, it is thought that this study is important to fill a gap in the literature and has a high original value.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Presenteeism

The concept of presenteeism is derived from the English word "presence," which refers to the state of "*being present*" or "*being there*." From this meaning, it can be understood that presenteeism refers to the condition of being physically present (Çiftçi, 2010). The term was first introduced by Cooper (1996), who defined it as "*the state of being physically present but not functionally present at the workplace.*" This definition is further elaborated as "*going to work despite being unwell and needing rest at home*" (Akdoğan et al., 2018; Karanika-Murray & Cooper, 2018). Cooper (2018) also described it as "*the problem of employees being at work but unable to work fully due to illness or other medical conditions*." Presenteeism is often associated with the tendency of employees to attend work despite illness, injury, or anxiety, which can lead to decreased productivity (Abasilim et al., 2015; Prater & Smith, 2011). Sanderson and Andrews (2006) and Dewa, McDaid, and Ettner (2007) define the concept as "*coming to work but being unable to work due to functional impairments.*" Another definition characterizes it as "*the* *phenomenon of people coming to work despite medical complaints and health problems that require rest and absence from work"* (Aronsson & Gustafsson, 2005). In other words, it can be described as "*the situation in which an employee attends work despite a medical illness that prevents them from working fully*" (Widera et al., 2010). Based on these definitions, presenteeism is a global phenomenon, commonly defined as "*frequently going to work sick*" (Lohaus & Habermann, 2019). The common point in the definitions of presenteeism is that "*employees are present at work despite physical and mental health problems, and their productivity decreases*" (Öztürk & Öztürk, 2023). Karanika-Murray et al. (2015) defined presenteeism as working at low capacity and argued that presenteeism is a combination of physical presence and psychological absenteeism. In this case, employees may be mentally distracted from work in case of illnesses but still feel obliged to be physically present at the workplace (Şeremet et al., 2023; Çelik & Durmuş, 2024). The concept of presenteeism is discussed under the following headings in the context of the theoretical framework (Johns, 2010; Lohaus & Habermann, 2019):

- **Health**: Health should be recognized as a subjective concept. Health and illness are two opposite poles of a continuum, and in relatively non-serious health events, employees make decisions based on their assessment of where they see themselves on the continuum.
- **Presenteeism and Absenteeism:** The relationship between presenteeism and absenteeism should be considered. Studies show both positive and negative correlations between these two concepts.
- **Job Insecurity**: The job insecurity thesis should be developed. This tends to be contradictory with downsizing and temporary employment. It is stated that job insecurity should be measured directly instead of inferring it from organizational practices.
- **Individual Characteristics**: An individual's personality, work attitude, and experience should not be excluded. Considering the motivational component of presenteeism, employees' characteristics, such as conscientiousness, self-esteem, resilience, and job-related attitudes, such as organizational citizenship behavior and job satisfaction, as well as their subjective experiences of stress and organizational justice levels, should be considered.
- **Social Dynamics**: Attention should be paid to social dynamics. These may include gender and social expectations regarding an employee's interaction with team members, supervisors, and customers. Depending on the type of work and organization, some situations may encourage a culture of presenteeism, while others may encourage absenteeism.

Employees often continue to work despite poor mental or physical health, which suggests that their presence in the workplace may be insufficient, potentially leading to issues arising from presenteeism (Karagöz & Bektaş, 2020). In this context, presenteeism represents a risky form of organizational behavior, particularly for employees who are unwell but remain at work. Delaying or postponing sick leave may result in minor health issues becoming more serious (Avcı, 2023). Within the conceptual framework of presenteeism, "*illness*" encompasses both acute and minor health problems, such as the common cold, and chronic and more serious conditions, including diabetes, arthritis, and irritable bowel syndrome (Lohaus & Habermann, 2019). Other health issues that may contribute to presenteeism include allergies, asthma, heart disease, hypertension, migraines, respiratory infections, neck and back pain, along with mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, burnout, stress, family issues, and financial difficulties (Abasilim et al., 2015).

Presenteeism, which negatively affects individual productivity, is more costly than absenteeism. There are also uncertainties, as it is usually impossible to say when or how much an illness or medical condition hinders a person's performance (Cooper, 2018). Although presenteeism is an interdisciplinary subject, it has not yet been fully explained (Çiftçi, 2010). In recent years, significant research has been conducted on the concept from a range of disciplines and perspectives, including work psychology, work and management, occupational health, public health, and economics (Aronsson & Gustafsson, 2005; Karanika-Murray & Cooper, 2018).

However, in the years when the concept of presenteeism was first introduced, it was explained in terms of illness and feeling unwell. In later years, the definition of the concept evolved into "not doing or not being able to do work for whatever reason." Although the concept has been handled in the context of the body and thought in the studies on the subject, it is stated that observable behaviors can determine the concept, and this determination is difficult (Yılmaz & Söyük, 2024). Therefore, it can be said that it is a controversial concept in the relevant literature, and there is no single definition or clear consensus on the conceptual framework.

Job insecurity (employees' uncertainty about their jobs) (Menéndez-Espina et al., 2020) and financial concerns are among the most common reasons why employees go to work despite being sick (Aronsson & Gustafsson, 2005; Bergström et al., 2009; Widera et al., 2010; Prater & Smith, 2011; Bierla et al., 2013; Lohaus & Habermann, 2019; Ardıç, 2024). Workplace-based situations such as workplace norms, workplace climate, and managers' approaches also cause individuals to exhibit presenteeism behavior (Karanika-Murray & Cooper, 2018; Akyol & Evren, 2022).

Presenteeism has adverse individual effects, such as a decrease in employees' productivity, deterioration of their health conditions, and negative organizational effects, such as general workforce productivity and corporate culture in the long term (Dökmeci & Ertürk, 2024). In addition, the consequences/outcomes of presenteeism include the need for additional time to complete tasks, a decrease in the quality and quantity of work performed/impairment in service quality, functional disorders in the execution of work, decreased performance capacity, deterioration of social relations with colleagues, and decreased motivation (Abasilim et al., 2015).

The literature reveals a notable presence of studies that address the concept from a theoretical perspective (Sanderson & Andrews, 2006; Dewa et al., 2007; Çiftçi, 2010; Johns, 2010; Widera et al., 2010; Abasilim et al., 2015; Karanika-Murray et al., 2015; Cooper, 2018; Lohaus & Habermann, 2019; Karanika-Murray & Cooper, 2018; Tok et al., 2022; Yılmaz & Söyük, 2024). There are also empirical studies on the concept of presenteeism in different fields and disciplines (health, psychology, public administration, education, business, commerce, textile, sports) (Aronsson & Gustafsson, 2005; Bergström et al., 2009; Prater & Smith, 2011; Bierla et al., 2013; Akdoğan et al., 2018; Seçkin Ağırbaş & Çakmak Yıldızhan, 2019; Çiçek & Kılınç, 2020; Karagöz & Bektaş, 2020; Akyol & Evren, 2022; Bakan et al., 2022; Karaçınar & Özdemir, 2022; Şahin & Kanbur, 2022; Avcı, 2023; Oğuz, 2023; Özel & Erbaşı, 2023; Şeremet et al., 2023; Türkkan & Soyman, 2023; Ardıç, 2024; Çelik & Durmuş, 2024; Dökmeci & Ertürk, 2024; Öztürk & Hırlak, 2024; Sarı & Demirbağ, 2024). In addition, presenteeism has also been a concept studied in the tourism literature. The concept of presenteeism has been addressed in the context of variables such as job insecurity, emotional exhaustion, burnout, personality traits, life satisfaction, physical and mental well-being, emotional commitment, organizational silence, perceived servant leadership, organizational alienation, and job satisfaction in the tourism literature (Güdü Demirbulat & Bozok, 2015; Erbaş & Yeşiltaş, 2017; Çiçek & Aknar, 2019; Özdemir & Yılmaz, 2019; Karagöz & Uzunbacak, 2020; Yücel, 2020; Özer & Atay, 2021; Öztürk & Öztürk, 2023).

Professional Commitment

The concept of professional commitment has its roots in studies on the concept of "career" (Greenhaus, 1971). However, career and professional commitment have been re-evaluated recently, leading to a consensus that these terms are essentially interchangeable. In their study, Lee et al. (2000) suggested that the terms "career" and "occupation" are sometimes used interchangeably in the commitment literature, emphasizing that this distinction is largely a matter of perspective. They argued that "occupation" is the most appropriate term for such evaluations. The literature indicates a growing number of studies on the concept of commitment. As more researchers engage with the topic, the concept has become more clearly defined, moving away from its previous complexity and multifaceted nature (Meyer et al., 1993). Consequently, commitment theory and research have been the subject of numerous critical reviews (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Morrow, 1983; Reichers, 1985).

Professional commitment can be defined as "*a psychological bond between an individual and his/her current or future occupation*" (Lee et al., 2000). This bond is based on an emotional response to the profession and the desire to stay in that field. It also creates an idea of satisfaction and determination to stay in the same profession/field in the future. The more an individual identifies with his/her profession (or field of work) and the more positive feelings he/she has about this field, the higher his/her level of professional commitment (Blau, 2003; Schmidt et al., 2022). Professional commitment is also defined as "*a concept associated with an individual's understanding of the importance of his/her profession in his/her life as a result of his/her skills and expertise*" (Özdevecioğlu & Aktaş, 2007). In other words, professional commitment can be explained as "*an individual's perception of the importance of his/her profession in his/her life and how central it is as a result of his/her studies to gain skills and expertise in a certain field*" (Baysal & Paksoy, 1999). Factors affecting professional commitment include (a) *personal factors* (gender, age, education level, personality traits, values, etc.), (b) *role-related factors* (role ambiguity, role conflict, etc.), (c) *professional experience factors* (working experience, satisfaction, etc.), (d) *cultural factors* (differences in management ideas and practices in the context of culture, etc.) (Ağdoğdu & Aşıkgil, 2011; McCarthy, 2014). The consequences of professional commitment are examined under four headings: professional performance, work withdrawal, absenteeism, and intention to leave the profession (Aydoğdu & Aşıkgil, 2011):

- **Professional Performance**: Performance can be evaluated from different perspectives, such as participation in work, fulfillment of assigned tasks, and behavioral processes. Performance evaluation can be obtained from various sources such as employees themselves, their managers, and output measurements (sales or production figures, etc.) (Arbak & Kesken, 2005; Derin et al., 2017; Karimivand, 2023; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Randall, 1990).
- **Work Withdrawal**: When professional commitment is low, employees do not try to do their jobs and cannot make sacrifices for their jobs. The motivation levels of these employees also decrease (Arbak & Kesken, 2005; Karimivand, 2023; Meyer et al., 2002).
- **Absenteeism**: Research shows a negative relationship between absenteeism and professional commitment. In other words, employees with lower levels of professional commitment are more likely to be absent (Arbak & Kesken, 2005; Karimivand, 2023; Randall, 1990).
- **Intention to Leave the Profession**: Research in this area shows that there is a negative relationship between intention to leave and professional commitment (Arbak & Kesken, 2005; Derin et al., 2017; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Uştu & Tümkaya, 2017).

In the related literature, Meyer & Allen (1984) suggested that professional commitment may have two dimensions, namely "affective commitment" (meaning an emotional attachment, identification, and involvement in the organization) and "continuance commitment" (reflecting the perceived costs associated with leaving the organization). However, Allen & Meyer (1990) suggested that "normative commitment" (reflecting a perceived obligation to stay in the organization) could be added as a third dimension (Meyer et al., 2002).

Three distinct themes have been identified based on the definition of commitment in the existing literature. These themes are explained as affective commitment (emotional attachment to the organization), continuance commitment (perceived cost of leaving the organization), and normative commitment (obligation to remain in the organization). The commonality among these three themes is that commitment is a psychological state that defines the employee's relationship with the organization, influencing the decision to continue or terminate membership. However, each form of commitment differs due to the nature of the psychological state involved. Employees with strong affective commitment remain with the organization because they want to; those with strong continuance commitment stay because they need to; and those with strong normative commitment stay because they feel they should (Meyer & Allen, 1991). In light of this information, professional commitment is conceptualized as a three-dimensional model. These dimensions include affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Affective commitment arises when involvement in the profession is a satisfying experience, such as when an individual can engage in fulfilling work or develop valuable skills. Continuance commitment emerges when an individual makes investments—such as the status associated with membership in a particular occupation or the time and effort spent acquiring occupation-specific skills—that would be lost or diminished if they were to change careers. Finally, normative commitment develops through internalized pressures to adhere to specific actions and the receipt of benefits that create a sense of obligation to reciprocate. For instance, belonging to a family with a history in a particular profession or receiving financial support to pursue a career can foster normative commitment (Meyer et al., 1993). Further details on the dimensions of professional commitment are provided by Scholl (1981), Wiener (1982), Hartmann and Bambacas (2000), and Ağdoğdu and Aşıkgil (2011).

- **Affective Commitment**: This dimension refers to the sense of belonging and commitment to the profession. It is associated with personal characteristics such as pay, supervision, role clarity and skill diversity, organizational structures, and work experiences.
- **Continuance Commitment**: It is associated with the perceived cost of leaving the profession. Investments made directly or indirectly in the profession are included in the perceived costs. Demographic factors such as age, educational attainment, and professional experience are expected to show the most substantial relationship with continuance commitment.
- **Normative Commitment:** It refers to an employee's feeling of obligation to remain in the profession. Therefore, employees with strong normative commitment stay in the profession because they believe it is the “right and moral thing to do.” Normative commitment is developed through social experiences that show that it is appropriate for the employee to remain loyal to the profession and through benefits (tuition fees, training, etc.) that create a sense of obligation to reciprocate.

Professional commitment is a concept studied in tourism literature and different fields and disciplines. In the tourism literature, professional commitment has been discussed in the context of variables such as tourist incivility, job stress, job satisfaction, career commitment, work-family conflict, tourism education, intention to leave the profession, burnout, and economic anxiety (Özdevecioğlu & Aktaş, 2007; Arslantürk, 2016; Yetkin, 2017; Ağca et al., 2018; Özoğul & Eğe, 2018; Yumuk & Koçoğlu, 2020; Akgündüz & Eser, 2022).

Intention to Leave the Profession

Intention to leave the profession is “*a situation that arises due to negative perceptions formed by the individual towards the profession he/she is practicing and reflects attitudinal tendencies accordingly*” (Çiftçioğlu, 2011). According to another definition, the concept is also expressed as "*a conscious decision or intention of employees to leave the organization or profession*.” Intention to leave the profession, which is related to the desire or plans of employees to leave their profession, is defined as “*the probability that an employee will leave his/her current profession within a certain period of time*.” In other words, the intention to leave the profession is “*the situation in which employees have the desire to switch to another profession due to dissatisfaction with the organizational work environment or the work performed*” (Büyükyılmaz et al., 2020). Leaving a job or profession is a time-consuming process that requires actions such as forming ideas and reviewing new job alternatives (Özçelik-Bozkurt & Bayram, 2020).

The action of leaving the profession can occur voluntarily (e.g., desire to quit, resignation, finding a better job, etc.) or as a result of external factors (e.g., dismissal, retirement, death, or disability) (Çiftçioğlu, 2011). Accordingly, it can be said that personal characteristics, relationships at the workplace and organizational culture, the characteristics of the work performed and the remuneration received in return, career opportunities, and future expectations are practical on the intention of employees to quit the profession (Büyükyılmaz et al., 2020). Individuals with negative perceptions may think of changing their profession and turn to different occupational groups. For this reason, leaving the profession is shown among the behaviors that these individuals frequently exhibit (Blau et al., 2003; Arıkan Saltık et al., 2016). Therefore, it is seen that the intention to leave a profession is a different concept than the intention to quit a job.

Intention to leave a profession is defined as the intention to act entirely outside of one's profession and career path (Hayne, 2009).

The intention to leave the profession has been studied in tourism literature and other fields. In tourism studies, it has been examined concerning factors such as professional commitment, individual-occupation fit, social status of the profession, burnout, job insecurity, working conditions, job satisfaction, crisis, perceived organizational support, and perceived professional barriers (Arıkan Saltık et al, 2016; Avcı et al., 2017; Gökdemir & Hacıoğlu, 2018; Seçilmiş et al., 2019; Özçelik Bozkurt & Bayram, 2020; Yumuk & Koçoğlu, 2020; Dalkılıç Yılmaz et al., 2021).

Tour guides are tourism professionals who accompany local and foreign tourists to their desired destinations, explaining the natural, cultural, and historical attractions in the language preferred by the tourists. They guide visitors throughout the tour, helping to create a unique experience. The level of professional commitment among tour guides is crucial for promoting the tourism sector, destinations, and countries (Yumuk & Koçoğlu, 2020, p. 190). Nevertheless, tour guides also have some problems like other tourism employees. Presenteeism, expressed as being unable to go to work due to illness or different reasons but still being at work, can negatively affect tour guides in their professional lives and cause them to spend the tour inefficiently. Accordingly, it is predicted that the professional commitment of tour guides will be negatively affected, and tour guides may intend to leave the profession. Although intention to leave the profession is one of the results/outputs of professional commitment, it is stated that there is a negative relationship between these two concepts (Ağdoğdu & Aşıkgil, 2011; Karimivand, 2023). On the other hand, it is stated that professional commitment is closely related to presenteeism (McKevitt et al., 1997; Bierla et al., 2013; Karanika-Murray et al., 2015).

RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses and the theoretical background/theoretical supports of the research are presented below.

Organizational commitment leads employees to invest their full energy and effort for the organization's benefit, often resulting in behaviors such as continuing to work despite illness, exceeding job expectations, and working beyond legal obligations (Kaygın et al., 2017). The development of organizational commitment encourages employees to engage in work behaviors that contribute to organizational effectiveness. Key positive work behaviors include reduced absenteeism, decreased intention to leave, and lower levels of tardiness (Selamat et al., 2013). Strong attachment to one's job, a sense of moral obligation, or fear of job loss (job insecurity) can all contribute to presenteeism (Johns, 2010). When presenteeism is driven by an employee's concern about negatively impacting the organization, it can be viewed as a specific outcome of organizational commitment (Kendir et al., 2018). Organizational commitment is also closely related to professional commitment (Blau, 2003; Meyer et al., 1993). Based on this understanding, the following hypothesis (H1) was developed:

H1: There is a positive relationship between tour guides' presenteeism behaviors and their professional commitment.

Individuals who try to fulfill their duties by forcing themselves despite the negativities (excessive workload, stress, etc.) in the business environment exhibit presenteeism behavior. Ultimately, these negative situations lead to the emergence of the intention to leave the profession and a process that leads to quitting the job completely (Türkan & Soyman, 2023). When employees feel obliged to go to work despite being sick, after a while, this state of obligation can reduce their commitment to the organization and cause them to intend to leave (Quazi, 2013; Chun & Song, 2020). Employees with presenteeism behavior may feel independent from the organization after a while and may have a higher intention to leave the profession (Amponsah-Tawiah et al., 2016). A person who needs treatment or rest is likely to continue working (presenteeism) and wear himself/herself out physiologically or psychologically and intend to leave over time. In this respect, presenteeism should be considered among the antecedents that increase employees' intention to leave (Kendir et al., 2018). In light of this information, the following hypothesis H2 was created.

H2: There is a positive relationship between tour guides' presenteeism behaviors and their intention to leave the profession.

Commitment to the organization means that the employees view themselves as an integral part of the organization and are not inclined to leave the job. This emotional state requires the employee to actively work for the organization's benefit (Güven & Kaplan, 2017). It is generally accepted that employees with a strong bond with their organization are much less likely to leave (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Professional commitment refers to the way individuals are interested in their profession. Professional commitment is linked to important outcomes such as reduced intention to leave and higher satisfaction levels at both organizational and occupational levels (Bline et al., 1992). It is observed that when individuals are provided with a work environment that is suitable for their work requirements, their organizational and professional commitment increases. In contrast, employees' professional commitment decreases in the opposite case (negative work experiences). Employees who decide to leave the organization due to negative work experiences also tend to leave the profession (Ayree & Tan, 1992; Cohen, 2000). Based on this information, the following hypothesis, H3, was formulated.

H3: There is a negative relationship between tour guides' professional commitment and their intention to leave the profession.

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

The population of the study consists of licensed tour guides who are actively working and authorized by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Collecting data from the entire population is considered comprehensive, whereas gathering data from only a subset is known as sample-based data collection. Comprehensive data collection is superior to sample-based data collection in terms of providing a precise idea about the population. However, this method is more problematic as it is time-consuming and costly (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2004). Therefore, in this study, data were collected by determining the sample group. From this point of view, firstly, the size of the entire population was determined, and then the number of the sample was determined. According to the information obtained from the Turkish Tourist Guides Association (TUREB), it was determined that the number of tour guides registered to the chambers of tourist guides and working actively in 2024 was 10,709 (tureb.org.tr.2024). The research employed the convenience sampling technique, wherein individuals who volunteer to participate are included in the sample (Ural & Kılıç, 2011). The sample size was determined using a population-based formula widely accepted for quantitative research, and it was calculated that the minimum required sample size should be 371 (Altunışık et al., 2012). Tour guides from this population who agreed to participate in the survey were included, resulting in a total sample size of 462 individuals.

Data Collection Tools and Techniques

A quantitative research approach was employed in this study, with the questionnaire technique used to collect primary data. The questionnaire was developed based on the theoretical insights from the literature review. The questionnaire consists of four sections. The first section includes the "Presenteeism Scale" developed by Koopman et al. (2002) and adapted into Turkish by Baysal (2012) to assess the level of presenteeism behavior among tour guides. This scale comprises six items and was initially analyzed as a single dimension. However, subsequent factor analysis revealed that the scale actually comprises two factors: completing the work and avoiding distraction (Karagöz & Bektaş, 2020). Three items in the scale (Items 1, 3, and 4) were reverse scored, and these were calculated by reversing their values during scoring. The second section features the "Professional Commitment Scale" developed by Meyer et al. (1993) and adapted into Turkish by Tak and Çiftçioğlu (2009) to measure the professional commitment levels of tour guides. This scale contains 18 items, analyzed across three dimensions: professional continuity, normative, and affective commitment. Five items in the scale (Items 2, 4, 5, 11, and 14) were reverse scored and recalculated by reversing their scores. The third section of the questionnaire includes the "Intention to Leave the Profession Scale" developed by Weng & McElroy (2012) and adapted into Turkish by Arıkan Saltık et al. (2016) to assess tour guides' intentions to leave their profession. This scale consists of four items and was analyzed as a single dimension. The fourth section comprises ten questions aimed at capturing the socio-demographic characteristics of the tour guides participating in the study. The questionnaire was created and distributed online between May and September 2024 to facilitate the data collection process.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS statistical software following the study's objectives and hypotheses. The dataset was first examined for missing data, extreme values, and outliers during the data analysis process. Outliers were identified using the Mahalanobis method, ensuring that the criterion for multivariate normality was met. A box-plot test was applied to 462 questionnaire forms, and 6 questionnaires found to have extreme values and outliers were removed from the data set. The study continued with a total of 456 questionnaires. Afterward, "Reliability Analysis" was conducted to test the reliability of the scales used in the study. The suitability of the data for parametric tests was determined by a normal distribution test, and then "Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)" was performed for each scale to test the construct validity. Finally, the strength of the relationship between the variables in line with the established model was indicated using correlation analysis.

FINDINGS

As part of the research, the socio-demographic characteristics of tour guides were analyzed. The findings revealed that 59.2% of the participants were male, while 40.8% were female. The majority of the participants were aged 21-40 (Generation Y) at 46.5%, followed by those aged 41-55 (Generation X) at 37.7%. Additionally, 53.7% of the participants were married. Most tour guides were found to hold a bachelor's degree (45.8%) or an associate degree (26.3%), indicating that they are well-educated individuals.

An analysis of the findings related to the professional lives of the participating tour guides shows that the majority are experienced, with 42.3% having over 10 years of experience and 28.4% having 6-9 years of experience. Regarding employment status, 35.1% of the participants identified as self-employed, 31.8% reported working under an agency, and 33.1% indicated working both under an agency and as self-employed. Additionally, 45% of the participants obtained their licenses by completing a university program in tourism guidance or tour guiding, while 18.6% acquired their licenses through ministry-run courses. Examining their service types, the majority of tour guides conduct daily tours (33.2%), followed by package tours (30.9%).

When the answers to the question of willingly choosing the profession directed to tour guides and their satisfaction with the profession are analyzed, the majority (79.2%) chose their profession willingly and stated that they are satisfied with the tour guiding profession (66.3%).

As a result of the reliability analysis of the Presenteeism scale, Cronbach's Alpha value was calculated to be 0.77. This value exceeds the 0.70 threshold, which is considered the minimum acceptable value for reliability analysis (Bayram, 2004, p. 128; Altunışık et al., 2012, p. 126), indicating that the scale is 'highly reliable' (Kayış, 2010, p. 405). The mean level of participants' agreement with the items on the scale ranged from 3.49 to 3.67. Based on these results, it is evident that tour guides exhibit a high level of principled behavior ($\bar{X}$ = 3.57), meaning they remain at their jobs and complete their tasks even when sick or otherwise unable to perform fully.

Table 1.
Distribution of Participants According to Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Variables		*n*	*%*
Gender	Female	186	40,8
	Male	270	59,2
Age	20 years and younger	8	1,8
	21-40 years	212	46,5
	41-55 years	172	37,7
	56-74 years	64	14
Marital Status	Single	211	46,3
	Married	245	53,7
Education Level	High School	43	9,4
	Associate Degree	120	26,3
	Bachelor's Degree	209	45,8
	Postgraduate	84	18,4
Guidance Experience Duration	1 year or less	32	7
	2-5 years	100	21,9
	6-9 years	131	28,4
	10 years or more	193	42,3
Work Type	Agency	145	31,8
	Self-employed	160	35,1
	Both agency tours and self-employed	151	33,1
License Acquisition Method	Associate Degree Program	83	18,2
	Undergraduate Program	205	45
	Master's Program	83	18,2
	Course by the Ministry	85	18,6
Service Group	Transfer	183	19
	Night Tour	162	16,9
	Daily Tour	318	33,2
	Package Tour	296	30,9
Voluntary Choice of Profession	Yes	361	79,2
	No	95	20,8
Occupational Satisfaction	Very Satisfied	122	26,8
	Satisfied	180	39,5
	Undecided	99	21,7
	Dissatisfied	48	10,5
	Very Dissatisfied	7	1,5
Total		456	100

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to assess the construct validity of the Presenteeism scale. Before the EFA, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity were applied to determine whether the sample size was adequate for factor analysis. The KMO value for the scale was 0.740 ($\chi^2 = 1275.020$; df = 15; $p < 0.05$), which is above the acceptable threshold of 0.50, indicating good suitability for factor analysis (Sharma, 1996, p. 116). It was found that the factor loading values for the scale were all greater than 0.50 (ranging from 0.851 to 0.896). The scale, comprising six items in total, was divided into two dimensions: "Completing the Work" and "Inability to Concentrate on Work." The two dimensions of the Presenteeism scale accounted for 77.707% of the total variance.

Table 2.
Explanatory Factor Analysis Results of the Presenteeism Scale

Item	Statement	Factors	
		Completing Work	Avoiding Distraction
6	Despite having my (health problem), I felt energetic enough to complete all my work.	0,896	
5	At work, I was able to focus on achieving my goals despite my health problems.	0,889	
2	Despite having my (health problem), I was able to finish hard tasks in my work.	0,851	
1	Because of my health problem, the stresses of my job were much harder to handle.		0,884
3	My health problem distracted me from taking pleasure in my work.		0,877
4	I felt hopeless about finishing certain work tasks due to my health problem.		0,855
Factor Eigenvalues		2,851	1,811
Variance Explained by Each Factor (%)		39,135	38,572
Total Variance Explained (%)		77,707	
Overall Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient		0,778	
Overall Arithmetic Mean of the Scale		3,57	
Overall Standard Deviation of the Scale		,83113	
KMO Value		0,740	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approximate Chi-square	1275,020	
	df	15	
	Sig.	0,000	

As a result of the reliability analysis of the Professional Commitment Scale, Cronbach's Alpha value was calculated to be 0.914. This value exceeds the 0.70 threshold, the minimum acceptable value for reliability analysis, indicating that the scale is 'highly reliable' (Kayış, 2010, p. 405). The mean level of participants' agreement with the items on the scale ranged from 3.46 to 3.84. These results show that the level of professional commitment among tour guides is high ($\bar{X}$ = 3.61).

The KMO value for the Professional Commitment Scale was 0.933 (χ^2 = 3953.648; df = 105; $p < 0.05$). This value is well above the minimum threshold of 0.50, confirming that the scale is highly suitable for factor analysis (Sharma, 1996, p. 116). Following the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), three items were removed from the original 18-item scale due to redundancy. The factor loading values for the remaining items ranged from 0.618 to 0.817, all exceeding the 0.50 threshold. After the removal, 15 items were grouped into two dimensions: 'Professional Continuance and Normative Commitment' and Affective Commitment.' The total variance explained by the two dimensions of the Professional Commitment Scale was found to be 61.718%.

As a result of the reliability analysis of the Intention to Leave the Profession Scale, Cronbach's Alpha value was calculated to be 0.773. This value exceeds the 0.70 threshold for reliability, indicating that the scale is 'highly reliable' (Kayış, 2010). The mean level of participants' agreement with the items on the scale ranged from 2.22 to 3.32. Based on these results, it is evident that the intention of tour guides to leave their profession is low ($\bar{X}$ = 2.28).

Table 3.
Explanatory Factor Analysis Results of the Professional Commitment Scale

Item	*Statement*	Factors	
		Professional Continuance and Normative Commitment	Affective Commitment
16	Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel that it would be right to leave the tourist guidance profession now	0,817	
10	It would be costly for me to change my profession now.	0,794	
9	Too much of my life would be disrupted if I were to change my profession.	0,784	
17	I would feel guilty if I left the tourist guidance profession.	0,773	
12	Changing the profession now would require considerable personal sacrifice.	0,761	
15	I feel a responsibility to the tourist guidance profession to continue in it.	0,756	
8	Changing the profession now would be difficult for me to do	0,718	
18	I am a tourist guide because of a sense of loyalty to the profession.	0,693	
13	I believe people who have been trained in a profession have a responsibility to stay in that profession for a reasonable period of time	0,618	
7	I have put too much into the profession to consider changing now	0,607	
2	I regret being a tourist guide.		0,747
5	I do not identify with the tourist guidance profession.		0,745
3	I am proud to be in the tourist guidance profession.		0,742
1	Being a tourist guide is important to my self-image.		0,686
6	I am enthusiastic about being a tourist guide.		0,679
Factor Eigenvalues		7,301	1,956
Variance Explained by Each Factor (%)		39,182	2,5362
Total Variance Explained (%)		61,718	
Overall Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient		0,914	
Overall Arithmetic Mean of the Scale		3,61	
Overall Standard Deviation of the Scale		,73250	
KMO Value		0,933	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approximate Chi-square	3953,648	
	df	105	
	Sig.	0,000	

The KMO value for the Intention to Leave the Profession Scale was 0.700 (χ^2 = 360.931; df = 3; p < 0.05), exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.50 and indicating that the scale is suitable for factor analysis at a good level (Sharma, 1996). Following the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), one item was removed from the original four-item scale due to redundancy. The factor loading values for the remaining items ranged from 0.819 to 0.838, all above the acceptable threshold of 0.50. After item removal, the remaining three items were grouped under a single dimension, which dimension accounted for 68.807% of the total variance in the Intention to Leave the Profession Scale

To determine whether the scales used in the research followed a normal distribution, the Kurtosis and Skewness values of the scale items were calculated. These values fell within the range of +1 and -1, indicating a normal distribution (Hair et al., 2014, p. 34). Consequently, Pearson correlation analysis was employed to test the study's hypotheses.

Table 4.
Explanatory Factor Analysis Results of the Intention to Leave the Profession Scale

Item	*Statement*		*Factor*
3	I intend to ask people about new job opportunities.		0,838
2	I am planning to look for a new job.		0,832
1	I am thinking about leaving this organization.		0,819
Factor Eigenvalues			2,064
Variance Explained by Each Factor (%)			68,807
Total Variance Explained (%)			68,807
Overall Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient			0,773
Overall Arithmetic Mean of the Scale			2,28
Overall Standard Deviation of the Scale			,91510
KMO Value			0,700
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		Approximate Chi-square	360,931
		df	3
		Sig.	0,000

Upon examining Table 5, the results of the correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant and positive relationship between tour guides' presenteeism behaviors and their professional commitment ($r = 0.672$; $p = 0.00$). Based on this finding, the hypothesis "H1: There is a positive relationship between tour guides' presenteeism behaviors and their professional commitment" is supported. In contrast, the analysis of the relationship between tour guides' presenteeism behaviors and their intention to leave the profession indicates a statistically significant and negative relationship ($r = -0.473$; $p = 0.00$). Therefore, the hypothesis "H2: There is a positive relationship between tour guides' presenteeism behaviors and their intention to leave the profession" is not supported. Finally, the correlation between tour guides' professional commitment and their intention to leave the profession shows a statistically significant and negative relationship ($r = -0.555$; $p = 0.00$). As a result, the hypothesis "H3: There is a negative relationship between tour guides' professional commitment and their intention to leave the profession" is accepted.

Table 5.
Correlation Analysis Results

	Presenteeism	Professional Commitment	Intention to Leave
Presenteeism	1	,672**	-,473**
p	-	,000	,000
Professional Commitment	,672**	1	-,555**
p	,000	-	,000
Intention to Leave	-,473**	-,555**	1
p	,000	,000	-

Significant correlation at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it has been concluded that tour guides exhibit high levels of presenteeism. This behavior indicates that tour guides often participate in tours despite experiencing fatigue or illness, exerting considerable energy and effort to ensure that the tours proceed without disruption. Similar to many other professions, tour guiding is highly demanding, requiring significant physical and mental resilience due to its challenging working conditions. Although the profession necessitates frequent travel, it is frequently described as tiring and stressful, with inherent risks such as occupational accidents, an intense work pace, and prolonged working hours. These demanding factors contribute to a variety of health problems among tour guides. Consequently, the profession is recognized as one prone to occupational health issues, including accidents and work-related diseases, within the tourism sector (Ulusoy et al., 2024). Despite these challenges, tour guides often continue their work, driven by concerns such as avoiding the loss of assignments, financial considerations, and the need to maintain their professional presence in the field. These motivations are reflective of presenteeism behaviors. Another significant finding of the study is that tour guides demonstrate high levels of professional commitment and a low intention to leave the profession despite its demanding nature. This situation highlights that tour guides possess a deep affection for and strong identification with their profession. Indeed, previous research in the literature indicates that tour guides exhibit high levels of professional commitment (Yumuk & Koçoğlu, 2020; Özoğul, 2017; Yetkin, 2017; Arslantürk, 2016). When examining the dimensions of professional commitment, affective professional commitment emerges as the predominant type within the tour guiding profession. Affective commitment reflects a positive emotional connection to one's profession, motivating individuals to enhance their skills and knowledge with a strong sense of dedication. Tour guides who exhibit affective commitment tend to have favorable attitudes toward their profession, perform their duties willingly, and show a low tendency to leave the profession. In addition to their affective attachment, tour guides are believed to remain in the profession and demonstrate low intention to leave due to their vocational training and significant professional investments. These factors further reinforce their commitment to the profession and reduce their inclination to seek alternative career paths.

When evaluating the hypotheses in this study, it was determined that there is a significant and positive relationship between tour guides' presenteeism behaviors and their professional commitment. In other words, as the presenteeism behavior among tour guides increases, their professional commitment also increases. This finding supports the expectation that tour guides with high professional commitment are more likely to continue participating in tours despite health issues. This result aligns with previous studies conducted on different sample groups in the literature. For instance, Mürtezaoğlu (2021) identified a positive correlation between presenteeism and professional commitment in a study on teachers. Similarly, Özmen (2011) found a positive and significant relationship between presenteeism and affective and normative commitment—sub-dimensions of organizational commitment—in a study on textile workers. Additionally, Kaygın et al. (2017) observed a moderate positive and significant relationship between organizational commitment and presenteeism among public employees. Şahin (2016) also reported a significant relationship between employees' organizational commitment levels and their presenteeism behaviors in a study involving hotel employees. Erbaş and Yeşiltaş (2017) concluded that there is a weak positive relationship between presenteeism and affective commitment in their study on travel agency employees.

The research findings revealed a significant and negative relationship between tour guides' presenteeism behaviors and their intention to leave the profession. In other words, as the level of presenteeism behaviors among tour guides increases, their intention to leave the profession decreases. This result contradicts the expectation that tour guides exhibiting presenteeism behaviors would, over time, experience burnout, reduced productivity, and, consequently, lower performance, ultimately leading to a higher intention to leave the profession. This finding diverges from some studies in the existing literature. For example, Kendir et al. (2018) found that the inability to avoid distractions—a dimension of presenteeism—had a weak positive effect on the intention to leave among hotel employees. Similarly, Yean et al. (2020) concluded in a study on academics that employees with high presenteeism exhibited a lower intention to stay. In the study conducted by Wynen et al. (2022), the intention to leave and presenteeism behaviors of public employees were examined in response to organizational changes. The findings revealed that reactions to change were associated with increases in both intentions to leave and presenteeism behavior, with these two variables progressing in parallel. In the present study, it is suggested that tour guides tend to remain in their profession despite exhibiting presenteeism behaviors because of their high level of professional commitment, which serves as the other key variable in this research. The results indicate that the tour guides participating in the study continue to work and are likely to persist even under challenging conditions because they love their profession and strongly identify with it.

The research findings revealed a significant and negative relationship between the professional commitment of tour guides and their intention to leave the profession. Specifically, as the level of professional commitment among tour guides increases, their intention to leave the profession decreases. This result supports the expectation that tour guides passionate about their profession will likely remain in the field. This finding aligns with the work of Yumuk and Koçoğlu (2020), who found that the affective and normative commitment dimensions of professional commitment have a significant negative effect on the intention to leave, with the dimension of "affective commitment" having the most decisive influence. Therefore, the results of this study are consistent with existing literature on the topic.

Based on the research findings, several recommendations are offered for tour guides, travel agencies, and tour operators employing tour guides, and professional institutions and organizations.

- The persistence of presenteeism behaviors among tour guides may result in more significant long-term issues, including job and income losses. Therefore, it is recommended that tour guides undergo regular health checks to maintain their physical and mental well-being and reduce the occurrence of presenteeism behaviors.
- Ignoring tour guides' health concerns could lead to more severe health problems and the development of permanent occupational diseases in the future. Consequently, tour guides should prioritize their health by adopting habits that positively influence their well-being, such as maintaining a balanced diet, taking necessary supplements, engaging in regular exercise, and ensuring adequate rest.
- Travel agencies and tour operators should ensure that tour guides undergo health checks at regular intervals and require documentation of these checks. This approach will help guarantee that health assessments are not neglected and that the tour schedule is not disrupted due to health issues with the guide.
- The rest periods of tour guides employed by travel agencies and tour operators should be regulated by the agencies themselves. On the other hand, self-employed tour guides should be encouraged to prioritize their own rest and well-being by adhering to appropriate rest periods.
- The Turkish Tourist Guides Association (TUREB) and the professional chambers under it should organize in-service training programs to enhance tour guides' physical and mental health. Additionally, concrete steps should be taken to address key professional issues (e.g., wages, regulatory oversight, and legislation) to increase their professional commitment further.

The theoretical framework of this study is limited to the accessible domestic and foreign literature, and the research part is limited to the field research conducted on tour guides serving in Turkey. The fact that the research data were obtained through surveys conducted with tourist guides between May and September 2024 causes the research to be limited to tourist guides serving in this period. In addition, according to the data of TUREB, it has been determined that the number of actively working tourist guides is 10,709. In this framework, the research is limited to 456 tourist guides taken as the sample group due to the problems of time, cost and accessibility.

Future researchers interested in this topic could explore the relationship between the presenteeism behaviors exhibited by tour guides and other variables such as burnout, job satisfaction, job stress, and similar factors. Additionally, by selecting diverse populations and samples and employing various research methods and data collection techniques (e.g., interviews), researchers could not only confirm the existence of these relationships but also identify their underlying causes. In addition, the mediating effect of the professional commitment variable between presenteeism and intention to quit the profession can be examined.

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ANADOLU UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF TOURISM

TOLEHO

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The School of Tourism and Hotel Management established in 1993 was transformed to the Faculty of Tourism by the Decision of the Council of Ministers published in the Official Gazette dated 10 January 2012 (2011/2605). Faculty of Tourism is established to provide qualified labor force with the highest intellectual and cultural knowledge, in addition to professional skills and to contribute to the development of the tourism industry in Turkey. After a four-year undergraduate education, the students are employed in different sectors of the tourism industry. The main aim of the Faculty is to train tourism managers, tourist guides and gastronomy and culinary arts professionals in accordance with the department curricula. Students gain professional skills and abilities with the support of application classes and laboratories in addition to the compulsory internship program. The foreign language classes in the curricula give the opportunity to learn different languages and the students have the opportunity to work in domestic and abroad.

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