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# Hospitality and Leisure Industry

From Customer Experience  
to Sustainability Practices

*Edited by Tatjana Pivac,  
Ivana Blešić and Klodiana Gorica*





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# Hospitality and Leisure Industry - From Customer Experience to Sustainability Practices

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Hospitality and Leisure Industry – From Customer Experience to Sustainability Practices

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# Meet the Series Editor



Prof. Choudhry holds a BSc degree in Economics from the University of Iowa, as well as a Masters and Ph.D. in Applied Economics from Clemson University, USA. In January 2006, he became a Professor of Finance at the University of Southampton Business School. He was previously a Professor of Finance at the University of Bradford Management School. He has over 80 articles published in international finance and economics journals. His research interests and specialties include financial econometrics, financial economics, international economics and finance, housing markets, financial markets, among others.



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# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>XV</b>
<b>Section 1</b>	
Sustainability, Ethics, and Local Development in Hospitality and Tourism	1
<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>3</b>
Fostering Local Development through Regenerative Tourism: A Collaborative Case Study of Platres, Cyprus <i>by Panayiotis Papadopoulos and Electra Pitoska</i>	
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>25</b>
Exploring the Drivers of Ethical Standards among Tourists <i>by Mokhlesur Rahman</i>	
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>39</b>
From Flavors to Footprint: Gastronomy Tourism and the Evolution of Hospitality toward Sustainable Practices – Case of SADC <i>by Edinah Tendani and Blessing Muchenje</i>	
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>59</b>
Sustainability Practices in the Latvian Restaurant Industry <i>by Laura Pole and Baiba Rivza</i>	
<b>Section 2</b>	
Innovation, Service Quality, and Workforce Transformation	79
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>81</b>
Smart Solutions and Digital Spaces for Cultural Heritage <i>by Stefano Fricano</i>	
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>99</b>
A Conceptual Review of Hospitality Restaurant Service Quality Management: A Recipe for Hotel Profitability, Growth, and Sustainability <i>by Were Simon O</i>	

<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>121</b>
Reshaping the Hungarian Tourism Workforce: Labor Market Challenges and Adaptation Strategies in the Post-COVID Era <i>by Tamas Glazer and Csaba Balint Illes</i>	
<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b>137</b>
A Framework for Measuring Personalization in the Luxury Hotel Industry <i>by Kyle Liao and Leila Halawi</i>	

# Preface

This book responds to the growing need for a deeper understanding of the transformations within the Hospitality and Leisure Industry. Sustainability imperatives, digital innovation, and evolving consumer expectations increasingly shape this sector. The collected chapters provide insights into diverse yet interconnected aspects of the industry, ranging from sustainable and regenerative practices, workforce challenges, and ethical standards among tourists, to the role of gastronomy, cultural heritage, and personalization in hospitality services.

The volume aims to bridge theoretical perspectives with practical implications, offering readers both conceptual frameworks and case studies from diverse geographical contexts, including Cyprus, the USA, Southern Africa, Latvia, Hungary, and beyond. By showcasing examples of collaboration for local development, strategies to improve service quality and profitability, and smart solutions for digital transformation, the book highlights how innovation and sustainability together shape the present and future of the sector.

Upon completion, readers will gain a comprehensive understanding of operational, strategic, and ethical choices that influence success in the rapidly evolving hospitality and tourism landscape. The interdisciplinary and international scope of the contributions ensures a valuable resource for academics, practitioners, and students interested in the dynamics of hospitality, gastronomy, cultural heritage, and sustainable development.

Contemporary tourism and the hotel industry are undergoing profound transformations resulting from global social, technological, and environmental changes. The need for sustainable, ethical, and innovative approaches has become crucial to the sector's future. At the same time, interdisciplinary research enables a deeper understanding of the complex relationships among local development, cultural identity, digitalization, and market dynamics. This collection brings together chapters that bridge theory and practice, offering contemporary insights, models, and recommendations to develop a resilient, responsible, and competitive tourism system.

The chapters in Section 1 focus on the interconnection between sustainability, ethics, gastronomy, and local development in tourism and hospitality. Together, they illustrate how responsible practices, community collaboration, and awareness of environmental and cultural values can redefine tourism's role in fostering inclusive and resilient destinations.

The first chapter explores the potential of regenerative tourism to support local and economic development in the mountain village of Platres, Cyprus, emphasizing collaboration among small and medium-sized enterprises and the importance of cultural identity in creating value-added experiences. The second chapter examines the moral dimension of tourism, highlighting travelers' ethical standards as key to building trust, encouraging respect, and fostering socially responsible behavior globally. The third chapter focuses on gastronomic tourism within the Southern African Development Community (SADC), showing how culinary heritage, local food systems, and

environmental stewardship contribute to sustainable practices and hospitality development in the region. The final chapter analyzes sustainability initiatives in the Latvian restaurant industry, presenting innovative approaches to reducing food waste, improving service quality, and integrating sustainability principles into everyday operations. Together, these chapters emphasize that the transformation of tourism and hospitality depends not only on economic and operational innovation but also on ethical awareness, local identity, and shared responsibility for sustainable growth.

The chapters in Section 2 explore the transformative impact of digitalization, innovation, and adaptation in the tourism and hospitality industry. Collectively, they demonstrate how technological progress and human creativity intertwine to redefine the cultural, operational, and experiential dimensions of contemporary tourism. The first chapter examines the integration of smart technologies in the management and preservation of cultural heritage, highlighting how digital tools enhance accessibility, visitor engagement, and the preservation of identity in the digital era. The second chapter provides a conceptual understanding of service quality management in the hospitality industry, emphasizing its key role in achieving profitability, guest satisfaction, and long-term sustainability in the restaurant sector. The third chapter analyzes labor market challenges in Hungarian tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic, offering valuable insights into the shortage of skilled labor, resilience building, and the growing role of digital transformation in creating sustainable hotel operations. The final chapter introduces a framework for measuring personalization in the luxury hotel industry, emphasizing the strategic importance of digital marketing and customized guest experiences in enhancing competitiveness and loyalty. These chapters contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital innovation, service excellence, and workforce adaptation are shaping the future of tourism and hospitality in a rapidly changing global environment.

This collection also reflects the importance of international collaboration, knowledge exchange, and academic dialogue among researchers, educators, and practitioners. In the spirit of joint creation and understanding, the publication encourages further research that will contribute to the development of sustainable, innovative, and socially responsible models in tourism, hospitality, and the leisure industry, aligned with the global challenges and values of the 21st century.

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Section 1

Sustainability, Ethics, and  
Local Development in  
Hospitality and Tourism

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## Chapter 1

# Fostering Local Development through Regenerative Tourism: A Collaborative Case Study of Platres, Cyprus

*Panayiotis Papadopoulos and Electra Pitoska*

### Abstract

As the tourism industry evolves to address pressing environmental, social, and cultural challenges, regenerative tourism emerges as a transformative framework that moves beyond sustainability toward holistic revitalization. This study investigates the implementation of regenerative tourism principles in the mountain village of Platres, Cyprus, through the formation of a thematic tourism cluster composed of local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Employing qualitative research methods—including focus groups and semi-structured interviews—the study reveals that collective storytelling, intersectoral collaboration, and the embedding of cultural identity into immersive tourism experiences enhance both the resilience and the perceived value of the destination. The Platres case contributes to regenerative tourism literature by operationalizing theoretical principles into a replicable model of place-based development. It strengthens existing frameworks on tourism clustering and SME empowerment by demonstrating how regenerative practices can be integrated into local governance and innovation processes. This applied model offers practical insights for other mountainous and rural regions seeking sustainable and culturally anchored tourism development.

**Keywords:** regenerative tourism, SMEs, experiential tourism, mountain tourism, cultural heritage, collaboration, Platres

### 1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the most dynamic sectors of the global economy. However, its environmental, social, and cultural impacts have raised concerns regarding the sustainability of tourism practices. The concept of regenerative tourism has emerged as a novel approach that goes beyond sustainable tourism, focusing not only on preserving resources but also on generating a positive impact for destinations and their communities [1].

Regenerative tourism promotes a deeper connection between the visitor and the place, encouraging participation, respect, and the strengthening of local identity. It seeks not only to mitigate negative effects but to restore and regenerate local systems—ecological, social, and cultural—through tourism activity. While sustainable tourism focuses on minimizing negative impacts and maintaining existing environmental, cultural, and economic systems, regenerative tourism takes a step further by aiming to actively restore, renew, and revitalize destinations. This approach shifts from sustaining the status quo to creating net-positive contributions to the places visited. The **Table 1** below highlights the key differences:

This distinction frames the originality of the present study, highlighting how Platres serves as a practical implementation model of regenerative tourism—an approach that is proactive, participatory, and place-based.

This approach, aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, serves as a tool for social and environmental innovation, gaining importance in the post-pandemic context of reimagining travel.

This chapter examines the case of the Platres Resort in Cyprus as a representative example of community activation through the empowerment of SMEs and their collaboration in forming a coherent tourism ecosystem. Platres, with its historical and natural backdrop, is at the heart of new strategies by the Deputy Ministry of Tourism of Cyprus and the National Strategy for Mountain Area Development, representing a testing ground for innovative practices [2].

Aspect	Sustainable tourism	Regenerative tourism
Core aim	Minimize negative impacts and maintain systems	Create positive impacts and regenerate systems
Focus	Conservation and efficiency	Restoration, renewal, and thriving ecosystems
Community role	Engagement of stakeholders	Cocreators and leaders of tourism development
Tourist experience	Enjoy responsibly	Deep, immersive, transformative experiences
Economic contribution	Support the local economy	Build resilient local economies through innovation and value creation
Time horizon	Short- to medium-term mitigation	Long-term systemic transformation

**Table 1.** *The key differences between sustainable and regenerative tourism.*



**Figure 1.** *Conceptual diagram illustrating the regenerative tourism framework applied in the study.*

The study seeks to highlight how collaboration, storytelling, and participation can act as catalysts for strengthening local ecosystems. It focuses on empirical data collected through focus groups and interviews with local entrepreneurs, analyzing the opportunities, challenges, and strategies that position regenerative tourism as a tool for sustainable rural development (**Figure 1**).

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Theoretical foundations of regenerative tourism**

In recent years, regenerative tourism has emerged as an advanced form of sustainable tourism, aiming not only to avoid the degradation of destinations but also to actively contribute to their well-being. As emphasized by Bellato et al. [1], it represents a holistic approach that reconsiders the relationship between tourism and socio-ecological systems. According to the European Travel Commission [3], the core principles of regenerative tourism include local community participation, preservation and enhancement of cultural identity, and strengthening of ecosystem resilience.

Recent studies further delve into the theoretical and practical framework of regenerative tourism. Bellato [4] proposes five design dimensions and seven implementation principles, offering concrete guidance for the development of sustainable tourism interventions. In a subsequent study, Bellato et al. [5] present regenerative tourism as a tool for social and ecological transformation, while Bellato and Pollock [6] examine the misconceptions and challenges hindering its spread, highlighting the need for genuine community engagement.

The regenerative tourism approach is closely linked to the theory of place-based development, which stresses the importance of leveraging endogenous resources and a place's identity to achieve sustainable prosperity. Cavagnaro and Staffieri [7] emphasize the significance of "reconnection" between people and landscapes as a means to activate cultural and social capital. Within this framework, tourism ceases to be merely an economic activity and becomes a process of transformation for both the visitor and the destination.

### **2.2 Tourism clusters in mountain regions**

The concept of tourism clusters has been widely examined in the literature as a critical development model, particularly in mountainous areas. Porter [8] introduced the notion of clusters as geographic concentrations of interdependent businesses and organizations. Novelli et al. [9] and Baggio and Cooper [10] stress that such structures promote innovation, competitiveness, and resilience, while Saxena [11] underscores their role in strengthening social capital. Ramukumba's [12] research confirms that tourism SMEs in rural areas view collaboration as a key governance tool.

Specifically for mountain regions, studies such as those by Hajilo et al. [13] and Gherdan et al. [14] emphasize the importance of spatial analysis and systematic SME support in tourism planning. In the Almaty region case, Issakov et al. [15] document the formation of a tourism cluster leveraging natural and cultural resources in collaboration with the local community. Moreover, European initiatives such as the EuroCluster Rural Tourism program [16] offer successful examples of SME support

through EU funding and technical assistance across 19 countries, showcasing the value of transnational cooperation and innovation in rural tourism.

Overall, the literature confirms that collaborative tourism clusters, when incorporating storytelling strategies, community empowerment, and respect for local identity, can serve as regeneration pillars for rural and mountainous areas.

### **2.3 Cultural heritage and storytelling in tourism**

SME empowerment is foundational in the literature on local tourism development. Porter [8] and Novelli et al. [9] have shown that tourism clusters and synergies between small businesses create multiplier benefits, fostering innovation, competitiveness, and resilience. The network-based approach described by Baggio and Cooper [10] is crucial for knowledge exchange and optimization of tourism flows, especially in remote areas. Saxena [11] adds that local collaboration enhances social capital, essential for achieving collective outcomes.

Meanwhile, modern tourism theory highlights the value of immersive experiences and emotional connection with place. The concept of “slow tourism,” as developed by Heitmann et al. [17], reinforces a sustainable, deeper mode of exploration respectful of locality and communities. Regenerative tourism incorporates these principles by promoting forms of tourism that revitalize not only the environment but also social and cultural structures. The ethics of hospitality, as framed by Lashley [18], promote tourism as a mutual relationship of trust and empathy between visitors and host communities.

In cultural interpretation, the literature emphasizes the role of storytelling and authentic experience. Timothy and Boyd [19], as well as Moscardo [20], document that integrating cultural heritage into the tourism experience enhances authenticity, differentiates the destination, and creates strong emotional bonds between visitors and communities. Richards [21] also highlights creativity’s role in strengthening local identity and developing cultural products with added value. Cohen [22] introduces the notion of the “cultural meaning of travel,” noting that tourism becomes meaningful when tied to memory, storytelling, and collective identity.

### **2.4 European and Mediterranean best practices**

Strategic approaches for mountain regions, as outlined in the Action Plan for the Development of the Troodos Mountain Areas [23], emphasize the need to strengthen local entrepreneurship, improve infrastructure, and leverage cultural and natural heritage. Similarly, the Deputy Ministry of Tourism’s strategy for Cyprus’s mountain areas highlights the importance of local partnerships, experiential approaches, and connecting tourism with agrifood and creative crafts. The institutionalization of the concept of “Sustainable Mountain Destination” by Greece’s Ministry of Tourism [24] further supports this direction, promoting standards for tourism that are green, authentic, and socially inclusive.

Finally, international experience shows that regions implementing collaborative and experiential development models—such as South Tyrol (Italy), Zagori (Greece), Alsace (France), or Val d’Aran (Spain)—exhibit higher levels of economic diversification, cultural integration, and environmental management. These cases serve as best practices, reinforcing the value of locality and cross-sectoral collaboration within regenerative tourism.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research methodology**

To explore the role of local social, institutional, and business actors in promoting sustainable and regenerative tourism practices, a research project was organized. Specifically, the research aimed to capture how the developmental empowerment of local communities can be achieved through the design and implementation of collaborative tourism strategies.

The research questions were:

1. How do local stakeholders and residents perceive the concept of sustainable tourism development?
2. What is the role of local media, cultural organizations, and entrepreneurs in shaping the tourism identity of the area?
3. What are the prospects for developing tourism clusters, and which factors influence their success?
4. How can local cultural heritage, nature, and social practices be utilized as elements for differentiation and enhancement of the tourism experience?
5. What are the main obstacles that local communities face in their efforts for sustainable tourism reconstruction?

The present study follows a qualitative research approach, leveraging the rich history and culture of the resort village of Platres, which flourished during the decades of the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, as an example of applying the principles of regenerative tourism. The choice of qualitative methodology is based on the need to explore the experiences, opinions, and expectations of local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which form the core of tourism development in the area. Through qualitative in-depth analysis, it becomes possible to understand the complex social relationships, local knowledge, and perceptions of those involved—elements that often include quantitative analysis.

A qualitative research approach was chosen, combining various qualitative methods. This choice was guided by the need to explore the experiences, opinions, and expectations of local SMEs, which form the core of tourism development in the area. Qualitative methods provide the necessary depth to understand complex social relationships, local knowledge, and the perceptions of those involved—elements that are often not captured by quantitative data. Furthermore, qualitative techniques allow for a rich exploration of the cultural, historical, and social contexts that influence collaboration and the implementation of regenerative tourism. This methodological stance enables the production of actionable knowledge directly usable by local stakeholders, setting a solid foundation for future initiatives and empirical evaluations in similar mountainous regions. The research adopted a multilevel qualitative methodological approach to deeply understand the social, cultural, and tourism dynamics of the community. This choice reflects not just a research strategy but an interpretive stance aimed at shedding light on complex social interactions and highlighting the meanings that participants assign to their lived experiences [25, 26].

The methodological strategy involved two main data collection techniques: semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The design followed the logic of empathy and participation to highlight the richness of experiences and the dynamics of collaboration within the community.

Semi-structured interviews served as a key tool for research depth. This method maintains a balance between predetermined themes and the flexibility needed as discussions evolve. The ability to revisit, clarify, and adapt questions was crucial for gathering rich narratives and fostering a dialogue that strengthened trust between the researcher and participants.

The results of the interviews formed the basis for themes discussed in the focus groups, which involved experts in each thematic area, leveraging their knowledge and experiences, and people who had lived through the prestige and uniqueness of Platres.

### **3.2 The case study**

Platres is a mountain community in the Limassol district of Cyprus, known for its natural beauty, rich history, architectural diversity, cultural capital, and tourism development during the 1920s to 1950s. Situated at an altitude of around 1100 meters, it is surrounded by the lush Troodos forest, offering a cool climate, especially pleasant during the summer months.

During the Ottoman Empire in 1881, Platres had only 100 residents. With the arrival of the British in 1901, the population increased to 154. Tourism development, especially after the British discovered the village in 1878, led to significant growth, reaching 502 residents by 1946.

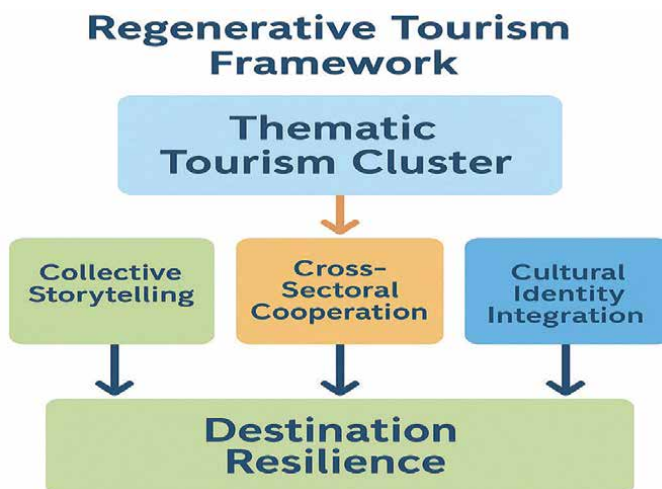
However, after Cyprus gained independence and coastal areas developed, the population began to decline, dropping to around 200 permanent residents.

Today, due to changing tourism trends, integrated soft tourism development, and recent investments, the number of permanent residents is gradually increasing. Platres has 1000 houses, and during the summer months, its population rises to about 5000, with an additional 1000 visitors staying in hotels.

The community now boasts modern tourism infrastructure, a cultural center showcasing its history as part of a cultural route with dedicated cultural corners honoring figures such as the Greek novelist George Seferis, the famous writer Daphne du Maurier, King Farouk of Egypt, and the British Royal Family. It also has a recently renovated sports center, contributing to the village's development. Additionally, four major investors are preparing the next level of tourism offerings, matching the village's historical grandeur.

Platres' strategic approach, historical legacy, and organized tourism offer provide the foundations for regenerative tourism. Combined with the development of collaborative partnerships and tourism clusters, these factors can drive smart, sustainable, and participatory development. This research aims to highlight the role of local actors, small businesses, and local companies in shaping a local tourism policy model based on place identity empowerment.

Platres, as a case study of such collaboration, exemplifies a resort where the past dialogs with the future through cultural management, thematic tourism, and the strategic use of local heritage. The study contributes to understanding the potential of mountain tourism as a tool for local and regional regeneration (**Figure 2**).



**Figure 2.**  
Conceptual model illustrating the regenerative tourism framework and collaboration process among SMEs.

### 3.3 The research

To carry out the research, an initial mapping of stakeholders and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in Platres was conducted, and a list was compiled. A total of 30 individuals, considered knowledgeable and appropriate for the study, were identified:

*Hotel owners/managers in Platres (nine individuals)*

- Forest Park Hotel – Managing Company Director and Executive Director
- Pendeli Hotel – Managing Company Director
- Petit Palais Hotel – Owner and Managing Company Director
- New Helvetia Hotel – Owner/Promotions Director
- Kallithea Inn Hotel – Managing Director/Chef
- Semiramis Hotel – Managing Company Director

*Restaurant and café owners/managers in Platres (10 individuals)*

- Orosimo Café – Director
- Kleopatra Café-Bistro – Executive Director
- Anoi Restaurant – Director
- Sky Light Restaurant – Director

- Village Tavern – Director
- Antonis Café – Director
- Platres Restaurant and Café – Director
- Psilo Dentro Restaurant and Trout Farm – Director
- Tegridy Park Bar and Café – Director
- Le Marquis Pub – Director

*Owners/managers of small companies in Platres (five individuals)*

- Lambouri Winery/Lion Distillery – Director
- Cyprus Chocolate Workshop Platres – Director
- Aglais Natural Cosmetics – Director
- Petit Patisserie – Executive Director
- Lavender Thematic Center – Director

*Owners/managers of sports activities in Platres (three individuals)*

- Platres Arena – Sports Center Director
- Sparti/Adventure Park – Director
- NextBike – Director

*Cultural and youth activity representatives in Platres (three individuals)*

- Platres Youth Center – President
- Ladies Association – President
- Platres Cultural Association – President

Participants were selected based on their involvement in tourism, willingness to collaborate, holistic representation within the community, and diversity of professional perspectives. A purposive sampling method was used, complemented by the principle of theoretical saturation to ensure thematic coverage and analysis completeness (Appendix B).

A semi-structured questionnaire combining open and closed questions was utilized. It included four sections: two with Likert scale questions (rating agreement from 1 to 5), one with closed Yes/No questions, and one open-ended section allowing respondents to share insights based on their knowledge and experience (Appendix A).

*Section one: tourism issues in Platres*

Assessed problems hindering tourism development in Platres (e.g., lack of identity, promotion, infrastructure, and collaboration).

*Section two: strengths of the tourism product of Platres*

Identified existing strengths (e.g., authenticity, collaboration with local entities, variety of activities, cultural festivals).

*Section three: awareness of tourism clusters*

Explored familiarity with clusters, previous involvement, and perceived benefits/challenges.

*Section four: suggestions for improving tourism in Platres*

Collected three open-ended ideas per respondent for enhancing the community's tourism.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the first phase and addressed:

- Perception of regenerative tourism and sustainability
- Existing collaboration practices and challenges
- Expectations from tourism cluster participation
- Needs for support, training, and institutional strengthening

Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, was recorded with consent, and was fully transcribed. Anonymity and confidentiality were preserved using codes.

*Focus groups*

Focus groups followed the interviews to deepen understanding and collaboratively interpret the opportunities and challenges of cooperation. Sessions were moderated by the Troodos Network and included:

- Presentation of initial findings
- Discussions on specific themes (e.g., storytelling souvenirs, immersive routes)
- Use of creative tools (e.g., concept cards, photos, experience maps)

*Focus group 1 (nine participants)*

Focused on transport connectivity and legal framework issues for community clustering. Participants included community council representatives (President and Vice-President), youth center leaders (President and Vice-President), and representatives from Troodos Regional Tourism Board ETAP (President and Vice-President), Troodos Development Company (President and Vice-President), ANET, and the director of the Troodos Network of Thematic Centers.

*Key suggestions:*

- Develop a circular bus route linking Platres to Nicosia and Limassol
- Engage with the Union of Communities on cluster governance issues

*Focus group 2 (eight participants)*

Discussed staffing shortages and the need for tourism education, marketing, and upgrading infrastructure. Included hospitality and F&B representatives, three hoteliers representing the Platres Hoteliers and three restaurant and café owners representing the Platres F&B, the Director of the Regional Tourism Board ETAP, and the Director of the Troodos Network of Thematic Centers.

*Key suggestions:*

- Meet with the Minister of Labour to simplify work permit processes for seasonal workers.
- Attract a Swiss tourism university to establish a local branch.
- Expedite hotel renovation permits for product improvement and community rebranding.

*Focus group 3 (eight participants)*

Focused on developing experience-based tourism and funding strategies for experiential sites. Included hotel and F&B representatives, the President of the Platres Hoteliers and President of the Platres F&B, the Director of the Regional Tourism Board ETAP, the Director of the Troodos Network of Thematic Centers, the Director of the Platres Cultural Center, the Director of the Platres Sports Center, and two representatives of the Platres small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) dealing with tourism.

*Key suggestions:*

- Create joint tourism packages, enhancing the visitor experience.
- Promote traditional workshops as attractions, showcasing product creation and heritage.

*Focus group 4 (nine participants)*

Concluded the process by integrating views across sectors. Discussed how smart specialization and destination branding can enhance innovation, human resources, and competitiveness in Platres. Participating in this focus group are all the Platres small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) dealing with tourism as the Director of the Winery, the Distillery, the Chocolate Workshop, the Natural Cosmetics and Soaps, the Lavender Thematic Center, the Petit Patisserie, the Sparti Rope Park, the Platres Arena, and the Platres Cultural Center.

### **3.4 Key findings**

Clusters can be tools for sustainable development, promoting competitiveness, alternative tourism, social entrepreneurship, and effective marketing.

*Participant quotes:*

“We must work together as a team to build and promote Platres as a unique destination.”

“Clustering, led by the Troodos Network, can be the structure we need.”

*Data analysis.*

Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke [27], with manual coding revealing recurrent themes and deeper insights into cooperative tourism development in Platres (**Table 2**).

Research question	Data collection method
How do local stakeholders and residents perceive sustainable tourism development?	Semi-structured interviews
What is the role of local media, cultural bodies, and entrepreneurs in shaping the tourism identity?	Semi-structured interviews
What are the prospects for developing tourism clusters, and which factors influence their success?	Semi-structured interviews and focus groups
How can local heritage, nature, and social practices enhance the tourism experience?	Semi-structured interviews and focus groups
What are the main barriers to sustainable tourism reconstruction for local communities?	Focus groups

**Table 2.**  
*Research questions and data collection methods.*

### 3.5 Findings and discussion

After coding the collected data, the following key themes emerged:

#### 3.5.1 *Perceptions of tourism and sustainability*

Participants showed awareness of the negative impacts of mass tourism and emphasized the need for a model based on respect for the locality and community involvement. As one entrepreneur stated, “We do not need many people. We need the right people—those who appreciate who we are.” Narratives revealed a strong link between the SMEs’ economic survival and the preservation of local identity and the natural environment. Many highlighted that protecting natural resources is a prerequisite for sustaining their businesses and redefining the “tourist” as a conscious guest.

#### 3.5.2 *Dynamics and challenges of collaboration*

Despite the absence of formal structures, most participants expressed a strong willingness to collaborate. The need for an intermediary coordinating body and a shared action framework was highlighted. References to past failed collaborations were reevaluated in light of a new collective maturity. Key elements identified included mutual trust, joint training initiatives, and a supportive institutional framework to facilitate collective action (**Table 3**).

#### 3.5.3 *Creating a shared narrative and local identity*

A significant convergence point was the call for a cohesive and authentic narrative unifying local products and experiences. Participants emphasized the importance of “products with stories”—souvenirs that embody the culture and character of the place. A winemaker stated: “I want my wine to tell a story that begins in the soil and ends at the visitor’s table.” This need for “storytelling souvenirs” was tied to a broader vision: building a Platres brand based on experience, artisanal quality, and timelessness.

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Pre-collaboration (Baseline condition)</b>	<b>Post-collaboration (Cluster implementation)</b>
Business interconnectivity	Fragmented, isolated operations with minimal interaction	Regular interaction and integrated tourism experiences (e.g., joint packages, cross-promotion)
Tourism experience	Traditional, product-focused (lodging, food)	Experiential, narrative-based, and heritage-linked offerings
Marketing and visibility	Individual efforts, low digital presence	Shared branding, thematic storytelling, and enhanced online visibility
Economic resilience	Vulnerable to seasonality and market shocks	Diversified revenue streams and cooperative marketing boost stability
Innovation and learning	Limited knowledge sharing, low uptake of new practices	Peer learning, exchange of best practices, and adoption of sustainable innovations
Cultural engagement	Culture, seen as a static attraction	Active incorporation of local heritage into experiences (e.g., lavender, chocolate, wine stories)
Environmental practices	Sporadic or absent sustainability actions	Coordinated actions for regenerative impact (e.g., local sourcing, waste minimization)
Social capital	Low trust, competition-oriented	Increased trust, shared goals, and community pride
Visitor satisfaction	Standard service, transactional relationships	Deeper engagement, memory-driven experiences, and return visits
Policy influence	Little input into local/regional planning	Cluster is seen as a stakeholder in governance, co-creation of strategies

**Table 3.**  
*Comparative analysis of pre- and post-collaboration impacts among SMEs in Platres.*

### *3.5.4 Designing experiences and integrated packages*

There was strong interest in developing thematic experiences that integrate various aspects of local life—workshops, tastings, walks, and storytelling. Proposed packages might include nature walks, hands-on soap or chocolate making, followed by cultural storytelling in courtyards or cellars. Emphasis was placed on linking experiences with a continuous narrative that evolves throughout the journey, enhancing immersion and emotional connection.

### *3.5.5 Training, know-how, and institutional support needs*

Participants called for access to training and support, particularly in digital presence, branding, experience management, and environmental practices. They also advocated for the inclusion of SMEs in strategic tourism planning and policymaking. The need for flexible funding tools, mentoring structures, and exchange programs with similar communities was also stressed.

### *3.5.6 Summary and recommendations*

The case of Platres illustrates how a local community can transform by adopting regenerative tourism principles. Findings show that when small businesses operate within a collaborative and strategic framework, they can not only survive but also generate added value for the broader community. Platres offers a model emphasizing cultural identity, locality, and immersive experiences as core elements of a positive-impact tourism strategy (**Figure 3**).



**Figure 3.**  
Visual flowchart showing how storytelling, cooperation, and cultural identity contribute to tourism resilience.

Additionally, this case highlights the critical role of social and institutional cohesion. Collective memory, civic participation, and trust were key drivers of the initiative's success. The research confirms that preserving cultural heritage and leveraging local knowledge can serve as catalysts for social cohesion and sustainable prosperity.

*Key takeaways from the study:*

- The need for institutional support for SMEs and alignment with development strategies
- The importance of collective storytelling and culturally enriched products
- The potential to combine sectors (gastronomy, culture, nature) to create high-value experiences
- The readiness and capability of businesses to collaborate given clear frameworks and structures
- The role of social and cultural participation as foundations of tourism sustainability

### 3.6 Comparative analysis: Platres as a regenerative implementation model

The application of regenerative tourism principles in Platres becomes especially insightful when examined in comparison with other European and Mediterranean mountain areas. Many of these regions face similar challenges—remoteness, seasonality, depopulation, and economic dependence on unstable tourism flows.

Regions such as Zagori and Metsovo in Epirus, Arcadia in the Peloponnese, Val d'Aran in Spain, and South Tyrol in Italy have adopted models based on synergies between culture, nature, and local production. These examples share many characteristics with Platres in terms of social structure and tools used (clusters, local partnerships, thematic routes, cultural tourism).

However, Platres stands out in its use of storytelling and immersive experiences as core components of its tourism identity. The systematic integration of storytelling into products, experiences, and local branding—as well as the emphasis on continuous consultation and community participation—makes Platres a model of integrated implementation. Unlike many initiatives driven externally or implemented in fragmented ways, Platres' initiative originates from within the SMEs and the community itself. This internal activation significantly enhances the project's sustainability and highlights the importance of grassroots engagement in regenerative tourism.

The alignment with strategic tools like the Action Plan for Mountain Areas and the Cyprus Deputy Ministry of Tourism's strategies boosts the institutional dimension and expands the impact. Platres can serve as a pilot model for similar regions and be included in EU networks for sharing best practices. Moreover, Platres has creatively incorporated elements of cultural and gastronomic experiences into a unified tourism narrative. The businesses involved do not merely offer products but convey stories, emotions, and experiences that transform a simple visit into a personal journey. Through immersive techniques, storytelling, and authentic souvenirs, Platres becomes a place with a strong emotional and cultural identity.

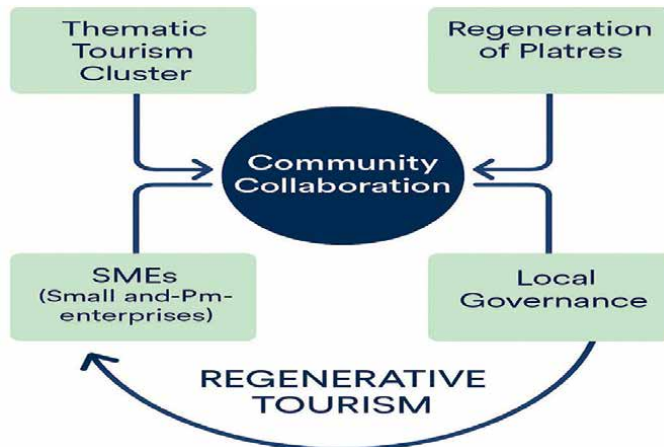
The comparative analysis also highlights Platres' advantage in adopting technological innovations to support experiential tourism. Integration of augmented reality (AR), mobile apps with interactive maps, and QR codes at points of interest enrich the visitor experience and enhance cultural engagement. The inclusion of educational activities in Platres' strategy is also noteworthy, offering experiential learning programs for students and visitors of all ages. Through storytelling, workshops, and interactive tours, a cultural education environment is created that transmits values, history, and environmental awareness.

In summary, Platres not only provides a model for Cyprus but also represents a comparative European hub for implementing regenerative policies. The way local resources are utilized, collective action is fostered, and cultural content is produced makes this example not just replicable but inspiring for new modes of tourism and community development. This case study illustrates how tourism can evolve from a mere economic activity into a vehicle for social cohesion, cultural revival, and environmental empowerment. Through SME collaboration and focus on local identity, the community has developed a model that honors its place and people.

Regenerative tourism is not just a theoretical framework but a practice with tangible outcomes when adopted with strategic planning, community participation, and an emphasis on quality. Platres shows that real change comes not only from top-down strategies but primarily "from the inside out," driven by the community and its values. The challenge now lies in dissemination, institutional support, and long-term commitment. If we start viewing tourism as an act of caring for a place—not merely a product to be consumed—then the Platres approach can serve as a guide for the future of tourism in rural and mountainous areas of Cyprus, the Mediterranean, and Europe.

This vision is realized through a unified cultural route—Platres as an open-air museum. With stations dedicated to historical figures, events, and narratives, the route offers visitors a journey through both the natural landscape and the cultural memory of the place. From Queen Victoria's corner and King Farouk and Egyptian investors to nobelist poet George Seferis and writer Daphne du Maurier, each stop is linked with lavender, nature, and unique architecture, highlighting the identity of Platres. Combined with QR codes, mobile applications, and partnerships with SMEs (chocolate workshop, winery, distillery, natural cosmetics lab, and the Lavender Centre), Platres becomes a living example of a storytelling destination, where cultural souvenirs serve as carriers of history and symbols of identity (**Figure 4**).

The development of thematic cultural routes is paired with educational components, offering programs for students and youth connected to local history and ecology. Additionally, the adoption of technological innovations—such as virtual tours and digital interaction—enhances accessibility and offers a multifaceted experience rooted in authenticity. Through storytelling souvenirs, cultural routes, and immersive experiences, Platres is not merely a tourist destination but a model of regenerative cultural and economic revitalization.



**Figure 4.**  
Graph model illustrating the community collaboration process in regenerative tourism.

The whole infrastructure, in combination with the tourism experiences, develops under the model of regenerative tourism, becoming a unique M.I.C.E.D destination.

#### 4. Conclusions and recommendations

This study demonstrates how regenerative tourism can be implemented through grassroots collaboration, cultural integration, and place-based innovation. The case of Platres highlights the transformative power of uniting local SMEs around shared values of identity, storytelling, and environmental stewardship. Consolidated insights point to the critical roles of collective branding, immersive experiences, and strategic coordination in strengthening rural tourism ecosystems.

To enhance clarity and utility for practitioners and policymakers, the recommendations are structured into short-, medium-, and long-term strategies:

*Short-term strategies (1–3 years):*

- Develop a unified Platres tourism brand centered on storytelling and authenticity.
- Launch digital storytelling training for SMEs.
- Install QR-coded plaques and create immersive virtual tours linked to local products and sites.
- Initiate monthly meetings coordinated by the Troodos Network to align SME collaboration efforts.
- Establish a formal tourism cluster governance structure with local stakeholders.
- Promote local workshops and product-making experiences as core attractions.

- Develop joint tourism packages that integrate culture, gastronomy, and nature.
- Foster regional and EU partnerships for knowledge exchange and funding access.

*Long-term strategies (3–5 years):*

- Position Platres as a recognized Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) destination with a regenerative identity.
- Embed regenerative tourism principles in regional policy and education curricula.
- Expand digital infrastructure and innovation capacity for sustainable growth.
- Institutionalize monitoring and impact assessment tools to ensure long-term resilience and adaptation.
- Foster regional and EU partnerships for knowledge exchange and funding access.

By refining its collaborative framework, leveraging cultural heritage, and embracing innovation, Platres offers a replicable model for sustainable rural regeneration grounded in community-driven tourism.

## Appendix A.

### Questionnaire

Please complete the questionnaire below which aims is to develop TOURISM CLUSTER as a tool for Sustainable development of the Platres Community

---

Scale explanation:	1 = not at all	2 = little	3 = average	4 = Very	5 = Very much
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---

Aim in the first section of questions is to record the current situation and the problems faced for the development of Tourism in Platres Community

---

<b>Problems of the tourism in Platres community</b>
The lack of tourist destination identity
The lack of tourist infrastructure
The clustering of Platres Community with the Communities of Troodos Cluster
The lack of cooperation of Local Government
The lack of cooperation of tourism stakeholders
The lack of daily connection of tourist line with the airports
The lack of regular connection with the cities
The lack of staff in the tourism professions
The need of an upgraded marketing for the Tourist Product
The lack of development of the tourist experience

---

---

**Problems of the tourism in Platres community**

---

The lack of open workshops

---

The lack of quality tourist accommodation

---

The lack of quality restaurants

---

Aim in the second section to record the current situation and the strengths of the Platres Tourist product

---

**Strengths of the Platres tourist product**

---

The authenticity of the tourist product

---

The tourist promotion that takes place

---

The tourist infrastructure of Platres

---

The operation of Troodos Regional Tourism Board

---

The operation of the Troodos Development Board

---

The operation of the Troodos Network of the Thematic centers

---

The cooperation of local stakeholders in tourism

---

The variety of activities you can do

---

The short distance from the cities

---

The traditional products of Platres

---

The open workshops of traditional products

---

The network of nature trails

---

The network of bicycle routes

---

The establishment of the Troodos Geopark

---

Platres

---

The aim of the third section is to explore the knowledge for the development of tourist Clusters

---

**You have heard of them again about clusters?**

---

You have joined someone again in a cluster?

---

Do you know the advantages of cluster operation?

---

Do you know the disadvantages of cluster operation?

---

Do you know how they can contribute to the sustainable development of the region?

---

The aim of the fourth section is your own suggestions through your experience in Platres

*Write 3 ideas that could significantly improve Platres tourism*


Other remarks/comments:

.....  
 .....  
 .....

## Appendix B.

### Demographic overview of research participants

Category	Organization/ business	Role/title	No. of participants	Age range	Gender	Education level
Hotel owners/ managers	Forest Park Hotel	Managing Company Director & Executive Director	2	30–45 45–60	M/M	University Degree/ University Degree
	Pendeli Hotel	Managing Company Director	1	45–60	M	University Degree
	Petit Palais Hotel	Owner & Managing Company Director	2	30–45	M M	University Degree University Degree
	New Helvetia Hotel	Owner/ Promotions Director	2	45–60	M M	University Degree University Degree
	Kallithea Inn Hotel	Managing Director	1	30–45	F	University Degree
	Semiramis Hotel	Managing Company Director	1	45–60	F	University Degree
Restaurant and café owners/managers	Orosimo Café	Director	1	20–35	M	University Degree
	Kleopatra Café-Bistro	Executive Director	1	30–45	M	University
	Anoi Restaurant	Director	1	45–60	F	Vocational Training
	Sky Light Restaurant	Director	1	45–60	M	Vocational Training
	Village Tavern	Director	1	45–60	F	Secondary School
	Antonis Café	Director	1	45–60	F	Secondary School
	Platres Restaurant and Café	Director	1	45–60	M	Secondary School
	Psilo Dentro Restaurant and Trout Farm	Director	1	45–60	F	Secondary School
	Tegridy Park Bar and Café	Director	1	30–45	M	University
Le Marquis Pub	Director	1	30–45	F	University	


Category	Organization/ business	Role/title	No. of participants	Age range	Gender	Education level
Small business owners/managers	Lambouri Winery/ Lion Distillery	Director	1	45–60	M	University
	Cyprus Chocolate Workshop Platres	Director	1	45–60	F	University
	Aglais Natural Cosmetics	Director	1	45–60	F	Vocational Training
	Petit Patisserie	Executive Director	1	30–45	F	University
	Lavender Thematic Center	Director	1	45–60	F	University
Sports activity providers	Platres Arena	Sports Center Director	1	20–35	M	University
	Sparti/Adventure Park	Director	1	45–60	F	University
	NextBike	Director	1	30–45	M	University
Cultural and youth representatives	Platres Youth Center	President	1	20–35	F	University
	Ladies Association	President	1	45–60	F	Secondary School
	Platres Cultural Association	President	1	45–60	F	University

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## Chapter 2

# Exploring the Drivers of Ethical Standards among Tourists

*Mokhlesur Rahman*

### Abstract

As global travel continues to grow, so does the need for a stronger ethical foundation in tourism, one built not just by governments and businesses, but by travelers themselves. This framework explores how tourists' ethics can help build trust, strengthen community relationships, and support responsible travel practices. While not legally enforceable, ethical standards for tourists should be applied fairly and embraced globally, because they shape the quality and sustainability of travel for everyone involved. Tourists' values—like respect, responsibility, and care for both people and the planet—play a key role in how destinations are experienced and impacted. These values are deeply rooted in universal human principles, such as tolerance, humility, and a sense of justice. Ethical tourists understand their influence and act accordingly, becoming quiet ambassadors of peace and integrity wherever they go. Ethical awareness does not just guide behavior—it also affects the choices travelers make: what they buy, where they stay, and how they engage. Personal beliefs, cultural background, and exposure to global issues all influence these choices. That is why the ethics of individual travelers are closely tied to broader challenges in the tourism industry, from sustainability to local equity. Ultimately, ethical standards in tourism benefit everyone, from host communities and businesses to the environment itself. By embracing these values, travelers help shape a more sustainable, respectful, and meaningful future for global tourism.

**Keywords:** ethical standards, responsible tourism, tourist values, sustainability, community impact

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background and importance of ethics in tourism

As global tourism continues to grow, so does its influence on local communities, cultures, and the environment. With this expansion comes a heightened awareness of the need for ethical behavior in travel. Increasingly, travelers and industry stakeholders recognize the importance of acting responsibly—supporting sustainability, preserving cultural heritage, and minimizing harm to destinations [1].

Ethical standards serve as a moral compass for tourists. While not legally enforced, these standards shape behavior through shared values and personal responsibility [2]. They encourage travelers to act with respect, tolerance, and care for both people and the planet [3].

What makes ethical tourism so valuable is its potential to build trust between tourists and the communities they visit. When visitors act ethically—by respecting traditions, supporting local economies, and choosing environmentally friendly options—they help create lasting, positive relationships [4, 5]. These actions not only contribute to sustainability but also inspire tourism businesses to adopt more responsible practices [6].

In a world where tourism sometimes leads to cultural exploitation and environmental harm, ethical standards offer a path forward. By following these principles, tourists help protect destinations for future generations and uphold tourism as a positive global force [7, 8].

## **1.2 Research objectives**

This research aims to explore the role of ethics in tourism by focusing on four main objectives:

- a. Identify the key factors—cultural, psychological, and situational—that influence tourists' ethical standards.
- b. Understand how tourists' ethical views translate into real-world behavior during their travels.
- c. Examine how ethical standards help build trust between tourists and host communities.
- d. Investigate the impact of personal values on tourists' spending habits and preferences for responsible tourism.

Together, these objectives will provide deeper insight into what drives ethical behavior in tourism and why it matters.

## **2. Research questions**

To meet these objectives, the study will address the following questions:

- a. What are the main influences that shape ethical behavior in tourists?
- b. How do tourists' ethical beliefs affect their actions in different travel settings?
- c. How do ethical standards help foster trust between visitors and locals?
- d. In what ways do personal ethics influence tourist spending and choices related to sustainable travel?

## **3. Scope of the study**

This research looks at what shapes ethical behavior among tourists and how that behavior affects the broader goals of sustainable tourism. It focuses on how cultural norms, individual values, and specific travel situations guide decision-making [3]. Both domestic and international travelers are included to compare universal patterns

with context-specific behaviors [1]. The study examines how ethical tourism impacts relationships with host communities, supports environmental protection, and influences the economic well-being of destinations that depend heavily on tourism [5]. It intentionally focuses on voluntary ethical conduct rather than legal regulations. Special attention is given to case studies from ecotourism areas and cultural heritage sites, offering real-world insights into ethical tourism practices [4].

## **4. Review of literature**

Ethical tourism has gained increasing attention in recent years as travelers become more conscious of their impact on destinations, local communities, and the environment. Ethical standards among tourists encompass behaviors such as respecting local cultures, minimizing environmental harm, supporting fair trade, and avoiding exploitative activities [9]. This literature review explores the key drivers influencing ethical decision-making among tourists, including personal values, social influences, awareness and education, and situational factors.

### **4.1 Personal values and moral obligations**

One of the primary drivers of ethical behavior among tourists is personal values. Schwartz's [10] theory of basic human values suggests that individuals with strong self-transcendence values (e.g., benevolence and universalism) are more likely to engage in ethical behaviors, including responsible tourism. Studies have shown that tourists who prioritize sustainability and social responsibility are more inclined to make ethical choices, such as staying in eco-friendly accommodations or purchasing locally made products [11]. Additionally, moral obligation plays a crucial role, as individuals who feel a personal responsibility toward environmental and social causes are more likely to act ethically while traveling [12].

### **4.2 Social influences and normative pressures**

Social influences, including peer behavior and societal expectations, significantly impact tourists' ethical standards. The theory of planned behavior [13] posits that subjective norms—perceptions of what significant others expect—can shape ethical decision-making. Research by Lee et al. [14] found that tourists are more likely to engage in ethical behaviors if they perceive that their social circle values sustainability. Furthermore, social media has amplified the role of social proof, where tourists emulate the responsible behaviors of influencers and online communities [15].

### **4.3 Awareness and education**

Knowledge about the consequences of tourism plays a critical role in fostering ethical behavior. Studies indicate that tourists who are well-informed about the negative impacts of mass tourism—such as overtourism, cultural commodification, and environmental degradation—are more likely to adopt ethical practices [16]. Educational campaigns and certification programs (e.g., Fair Trade Tourism, Global Sustainable Tourism Council) have been effective in raising awareness and encouraging responsible choices [17]. However, a lack of accessible information remains a barrier for many tourists, highlighting the need for better communication strategies [18].

#### **4.4 Situational and structural factors**

External factors, such as destination policies, availability of ethical options, and economic constraints, also influence ethical behavior. While some tourists may intend to act ethically, structural barriers—such as limited eco-friendly accommodations or higher costs of sustainable products—can hinder their ability to do so [19]. Conversely, destinations that facilitate ethical choices through clear guidelines and incentives (e.g., recycling programs, community-based tourism initiatives) encourage higher compliance [20].

### **5. Methodology**

This chapter explores the drivers of ethical standards among tourists by employing a qualitative research design, incorporating literature review, thematic analysis, and case study examination to identify key influences on tourist ethics and their impact on sustainable tourism. The methodology is structured to align with the research objectives, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of how ethical values shape tourist behavior.

#### **5.1 Research design**

This study adopts a descriptive and exploratory approach, synthesizing existing literature while analyzing real-world applications of ethical tourism principles. The research design includes:

- **Systematic Literature Review** – A thorough examination of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and industry reports on ethical tourism, sustainability, and tourist behavior [1, 3, 5].
- **Thematic Analysis** – Key themes such as cultural respect, environmental responsibility, economic equity, and personal values are extracted from the literature to identify patterns in ethical decision-making [21].
- **Case Study Analysis** – Selected examples from ecotourism destinations and heritage sites illustrate how ethical standards are applied in practice [4].

#### **5.2 Data collection**

Given the theoretical nature of this study, data is gathered from:

- **Academic sources:** Scholarly articles and books on tourism ethics, sustainability, and behavioral psychology (e.g., [2, 3]).
- **Industry reports:** Publications from the United Nations World Tourism Organization [1] and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

**Case studies:** Documented examples of ethical tourism initiatives, such as community-based tourism projects and eco-certified travel programs [22].

### 5.3 Data analysis

The collected data is analyzed through:

- Content analysis – Identifying recurring ethical principles in tourism literature [23].
- Comparative analysis – Examining how different cultural and economic contexts influence ethical behavior among tourists [24].
- Ethical framework development – Synthesizing findings into a cohesive model of tourist ethics, integrating environmental, sociocultural, and economic dimensions [25].

## 6. Discussions

### 6.1 The tourist’s role in ethical travel

Tourists are not just passive consumers—they are key players in shaping how ethical the tourism industry becomes [26]. Whether it is choosing an eco-certified hotel, avoiding unethical animal tourism, or spending money at local markets, individual decisions make a collective impact [27]. Responsible tourists help raise standards across the industry by demanding transparency, sustainability, and fairness. All are briefly presented in **Table 1**.

### 6.2 Ethics, trust, and professionalism in tourism

For tourism to be truly sustainable, it needs more than just good intentions—it requires ethics, trust, and a strong sense of professional responsibility. Ethical behavior ensures that local communities are respected, workers are treated fairly, and the environment is protected [3]. Trust creates better relationships across the board—between tourists, businesses, and communities [41]. And professional

Section	Key points	References
How tourist demand shapes the tourism economy	Tourist preferences influence business practices (e.g., green accommodations, fair labor). Ethical spending supports fair trade and community-run tourism, while price-driven demand can encourage exploitation. Voluntourism and social media amplify ethical concerns.	Goodwin [27]; UNEP and UNWTO [28]; Fennell [3]; Wearing and McGehee [29]; Gretzel et al. [30]
How ethical perception affects tourist behavior	Tourists avoid destinations/businesses perceived as unethical (e.g., labor abuses, environmental harm). Ethical businesses gain trust and loyalty. Conscious tourists prioritize green hotels, respectful engagement, and moral concerns over price. Social media strengthens ethical branding.	Han et al. [31]; Kim and Stepchenkova [32]; Carrigan and Attalla [33]; Dolnicar et al. [34]; Gretzel et al. [30]
Personal ethics and buying decisions	Travelers increasingly align purchases with ethical values (e.g., sustainable tours, fair wages). Younger generations (Millennials, Gen Z) are willing to pay more for ethical products. However, limited availability and affordability can hinder ethical choices. Businesses offering ethical options at fair prices gain a competitive edge.	Schwartz [35]; Auger et al. [36]; Nielsen [37]; White et al. [38]; Carrington et al. [39]; Bray et al. [40]

**Table 1.**  
*Factors influencing ethical tourist behavior and economic impact.*

Section	Key points	References
Building trust through ethical practices	Trust is built through transparency, fair wages, and sustainability. Ethical actions foster loyalty among employees, tourists, and communities.	Jones et al. [42]; Fennell [3]
How tourist behavior affects host community trust	Respectful tourist behavior (cultural sensitivity, local spending, environmental care) strengthens community trust. Poor behavior leads to resentment and resistance.	Sharpley [5]; Doxey [43]; Mbaiwa [22]
The importance of professional commitment	Ethical leadership, employee engagement, and fair practices improve sustainability. Training and ethical standards ensure long-term success beyond profits.	Sheldon and Park [44]; Davidson et al. [45]; Kim and Brymer [46]; Torres et al. [47]

**Table 2.**  
*Foundations for building trust in tourism.*

commitment pushes the industry toward continuous improvement and high standards (Table 2) [44].

### 6.3 Building trust through ethical practices

Trust in tourism is not built overnight—it grows through consistent, ethical behavior. Whether it is transparent communication, fair wages, or sustainable operations, doing the right thing builds confidence and loyalty [42].

At the individual level, employees trust employers who treat them well. At the community level, locals are more welcoming when tourists and businesses show cultural sensitivity and environmental care [3]. When all parties act ethically, the result is a cycle of mutual respect and lasting partnerships (Table 3).

Section	Key points	References
How tourist behavior affects host community trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourist actions directly impact local perceptions</li> <li>• Respectful behavior (following cultural norms, supporting the local economy, and environmental protection) fosters a welcome</li> <li>• Poor behavior causes resentment and tourism resistance</li> <li>• Ethical tourism enables long-term sustainable relationships</li> <li>• - Foundation for community-based tourism models</li> </ul>	Sharpley [5] Doxey [43] Mbaiwa [22]
The importance of professional commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethical tourism relies on professionals (guides, staff, owners, policymakers)</li> <li>• Professional commitment drives quality, accountability, and sustainability</li> <li>• Engaged, ethical employees improve retention and performance</li> <li>• Ethical leadership strengthens teams</li> <li>• Socially responsible entrepreneurs innovate while maintaining values</li> <li>• Training, fair pay, and ethical standards create a workforce committed to holistic success</li> </ul>	Sheldon and Park [44] Davidson et al. [45] Kim and Brymer [46] Torres et al. [47]

**Table 3.**  
*Factors influencing host community trust in tourism.*

## **7. High-level Ethics: Our responsibility to people and the planet**

We live in a time of deep global interconnection—and mounting global challenges. From climate breakdown and biodiversity loss to social injustice and technological upheaval, it is clearer than ever that we need a strong ethical compass. “High-level Ethics” is about more than following the rules or chasing profit. It calls for a heartfelt, long-term commitment to human dignity and the health of our planet.

This way of thinking recognizes that thriving as a species does not come from exploiting nature or marginalizing people—it comes from caring for both with wisdom and fairness. High-level Ethics asks us to protect human rights and promote equity across borders and generations, while also respecting the natural world and its limits. It invites us to see all forms of life as valuable, not just because they serve us, but because they have a right to exist.

Instead of chasing short-term gains, this approach urges regenerative coexistence, where people, economies, and ecosystems grow together in harmony. As we face climate emergencies and dwindling natural resources, these ethics offer a path forward: helping governments, companies, and individuals make choices that honor both humanity and our shared planet. This is not just a lofty vision—it is a necessary shift in how we define progress and success.

### **7.1 Caring for both cultural and biological diversity**

We have a pressing moral duty to protect both the rich variety of life on Earth and the cultures that have evolved alongside it. Cultural diversity includes the languages, traditions, and knowledge systems that people have developed in close relationship with their environments. Biological diversity refers to the ecosystems, species, and genetic variety that keep the planet alive and resilient. These two forms of diversity are deeply connected, and protecting one often helps protect the other.

Ethically, we are called to respect and support Indigenous and local communities who are stewards of both nature and culture. Their traditional ecological knowledge is key to sustainable living. If we allow languages, cultural practices, or species to disappear, we lose irreplaceable knowledge and weaken our planet’s resilience.

Our responsibilities include:

- Preserving vital ecosystems and cultural landscapes.
- Defending Indigenous land rights and self-governance.
- Preventing the exploitation of cultural and biological heritage while ensuring fair benefits for local communities.

Failing to meet these obligations not only harms the planet but also deepens social inequalities and betrays future generations.

### **7.2 Conservation and tourism: A moral partnership**

Tourism and conservation are not separate goals—they are part of the same ethical commitment to protect the Earth and honor the people who call it home. At its best, travel deepens our relationship with the natural world and reminds us of our shared responsibility to care for it. That means choosing travel experiences that do

not just minimize harm but actively support the regeneration of local environments, cultures, and livelihoods. It is about more than eco-labels or green tours; it is a shift in mindset—from consuming places to stewarding them. This includes limiting access to fragile sites, respecting wildlife by following ethical viewing standards, supporting locally owned and eco-certified businesses, and hiring community guides who can share stories from within the culture rather than outside it. When tourism revenue stays in the hands of local people and reinforces conservation efforts, it creates a virtuous cycle of care and resilience. Ultimately, ethical tourism reflects how much we value justice, dignity, and life itself. If we want the places we love to thrive for future generations, we must travel in ways that nurture rather than deplete them—because protecting what is sacred is not just good practice, it is the right thing to do.

### **7.3 Tourists as ambassadors of peace and ethics**

Tourism, when approached with care and consciousness, can be a powerful tool for peacebuilding and ethical engagement. Every traveler has the potential to act as a quiet ambassador, fostering understanding, empathy, and dialog between cultures. This role goes beyond sightseeing; it is about creating meaningful human connections that dissolve prejudice and promote harmony. Ethical travelers do not just consume experiences—they participate in them with mindfulness and integrity, ensuring that their presence brings positive value to the places they visit.

Being an ethical tourist involves several interconnected responsibilities. *Cultural respect* is fundamental: this includes dressing modestly where appropriate, honoring local traditions and social norms, and steering clear of exploitative or staged cultural performances that misrepresent communities. *Environmental care* is equally essential, and ethical travelers make conscious efforts to minimize their footprint, such as reducing plastic use, conserving water and energy, and choosing environmentally responsible accommodations and tour operators. *Economic fairness* also plays a crucial role, as tourists support the local economy by shopping at small, locally owned businesses, choosing fair trade or handmade products, and avoiding companies that exploit labor. Lastly, *animal welfare* cannot be overlooked. Ethical travelers refuse to support attractions that involve animal suffering, such as elephant rides, tiger selfies, or marine parks with captive dolphins. Instead, they seek out sanctuaries and wildlife experiences that are respectful, transparent, and conservation-focused.

By embracing these principles, tourists contribute to a culture of peace, justice, and mutual respect. In a world marked by division and inequality, ethical travel becomes a quiet yet powerful form of diplomacy—one that honors both people and planet.

## **8. Practicing what we preach: Why ethical consistency matters**

In tourism, values like sustainability, respect, equity, and cultural sensitivity are often highlighted in brochures, websites, and mission statements. But values only hold weight when they are reflected in daily practice. *Ethical consistency* means aligning what we say with what we actually do, across all levels of the tourism industry.

This is not just a matter of branding or public image—it is about integrity. It is easy to claim that a business supports local communities or protects the environment. But what happens behind the scenes? Are local artisans being paid fairly? Are tour operators genuinely minimizing their ecological footprint, or are they just using green

language to attract customers? Are marginalized voices included in decision-making, or are they just featured in photos?

Living our values requires honesty, humility, and accountability. It means:

- Paying fair wages and ensuring safe, dignified working conditions for all staff.
- Including communities in decisions, not just using them as backdrops or marketing tools.
- Being transparent about environmental impacts—and working to reduce them in real, measurable ways.

Owning up to mistakes, learning from them, and committing to do better.

This kind of consistency is not always easy. It can be more expensive, more complex, and more time-consuming. But it is essential—because without it, trust erodes. Tourists are becoming more conscious. Communities are speaking up. Employees are asking hard questions. And all of them are looking for proof that the values being preached are lived.

When ethical consistency is practiced, tourism becomes more than a commercial transaction. It becomes a space for mutual respect, authentic connection, and shared growth. It builds trust—trust that creates long-term relationships, loyal partnerships, and a positive legacy that lasts well beyond the trip itself.

## 9. Key results

See **Table 4**.

Key concept	Summary of influence	References
a. Tourist demand shapes ethical tourism practices	Tourist preferences drive industry standards toward sustainability. Demand for eco-certified accommodations and fair trade products encourages ethical business adaptations, while price-driven tourism risks exploitation.	Goodwin [27]; UNEP and UNWTO [28]; Fennell [3]
b. Ethical perception guides tourist behavior	Tourists avoid destinations/businesses perceived as unethical. Ethical branding builds trust and loyalty. Social media amplifies ethical concerns, making transparency crucial for reputation.	Han et al. [31]; Kim and Stepchenkova [32]; Gretzel et al. [30]
c. Personal ethics influence travel choices	Younger generations (Millennials/Gen Z) prioritize ethical alignment in purchases, supporting sustainable tourism. Limited affordable options can hinder ethical decision-making.	Nielsen [37]; White et al. [38]; Carrington et al. [39]
d. Trust is built through ethical consistency	Fair wages, cultural sensitivity, and environmental care strengthen trust between tourists, businesses, and communities. Poor tourist behavior damages community relations.	Jones et al. [42]; Sharpley [5]; Doxey [43]
e. Regenerative tourism as the future standard	Goes beyond sustainability to actively restore ecosystems and empower communities. Integrates environmental, cultural, and economic well-being for long-term resilience.	Mbaiwa [22]; Sheldon and Park [44]

**Table 4.**  
*The cycle of ethics, demand, and evolution in tourism.*

## 10. Conclusion

Ethical tourism represents a transformative approach to travel, where tourists, businesses, and host communities collaborate to foster sustainability, equity, and cultural preservation. This chapter highlights how tourist demand shapes industry practices, with ethical consumption driving businesses toward fair wages, eco-certification, and community-based tourism. However, price-driven tourism risks exploitation, emphasizing the need for conscious consumer choices. Ethical perception strongly influences tourist behavior, as travelers increasingly avoid destinations associated with environmental harm or social injustice, while rewarding transparent and responsible businesses.

Personal values, particularly among younger generations, play a crucial role in travel decisions, though affordability and accessibility remain barriers. Trust, built through ethical consistency, such as cultural sensitivity, fair labor practices, and environmental stewardship, strengthens relationships between tourists and host communities. Conversely, irresponsible behavior damages these bonds, reinforcing the need for ethical education and accountability. The shift toward regenerative tourism marks a critical evolution, moving beyond sustainability to actively restore ecosystems and empower local economies. By embracing ethical standards, tourists become ambassadors of peace, fostering cross-cultural understanding and environmental stewardship. However, true progress requires integrity; businesses must align their practices with their stated values, ensuring fair wages, community inclusion, and measurable sustainability efforts.

Ultimately, ethical tourism is not just a trend but a necessity for long-term resilience. It calls for collective responsibility, where travelers, industry leaders, and policymakers prioritize people and the planet over short-term gains. By committing to these principles, tourism can become a force for global good, preserving cultural heritage, protecting biodiversity, and promoting justice for future generations.

### Author details

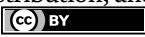
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# From Flavors to Footprint: Gastronomy Tourism and the Evolution of Hospitality toward Sustainable Practices – Case of SADC

*Edinah Tendani and Blessing Muchenje*

## **Abstract**

Gastronomy tourism has emerged as a powerful driver of cultural identity economic development, and sustainable hospitality in the twenty-first century. In Southern Africa particularly within the Southern African Development Community (SADC), there is a growing recognition of the region's rich culinary heritage and its potential to contribute to sustainable tourism. This study explores how flavor which are the sensory impressions we experience when eating or drinking play a significant role in our enjoyment and food choices, and gastronomy footprint which is the sum total of environmental impacts linked to our food choices, from farm to fork and beyond shape the evolution of hospitality practices in SADC countries toward sustainability. It analyzes the integration of local food systems indigenous knowledge, environmental stewardship, and socioeconomic empowerment in the hospitality sector in the SADC region. Drawing on case studies from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique, and Tanzania, the study highlights successful models and ongoing challenges. The study utilized the desk research methodology relying on the analysis of existing literature, reports, policies, and case studies from the above-mentioned countries. The study concludes that gastronomy tourism, when rooted in local culture and environmental consciousness, can play an informative role in the region's sustainable development agenda. The study recommends that research of this type be done in all countries of Africa. There is also need for the integration of more disciplines (food science anthropology, history, nutrition and dietetics, botany and ethnobotany, economics, environmental science, cultural studies, public health, cultural ethics, tourism and hospitality, marketing and branding, design and sensory, education and pedagogy, and geography and media) which contributes to gastronomy sustainability, environmental sustainability, and economic sustainability.

**Keywords:** culinary, culture, environmental tourism, gastronomy, heritage, ecosystem

## **1. Introduction**

The hospitality industry is undergoing a profound transformation, propelled by the escalating demand for gastronomy tourism and the imperative for sustainable practices. This chapter delves into the intersection of gastronomy tourism and sustainability within the hospitality sector, illuminating the challenges and opportunities that emerge from this convergence. It scrutinizes the methods by which hospitality providers are adapting to fulfill the evolving expectations of tourists, who are increasingly seeking authentic, locally sourced culinary experiences that also bolster the sustainable development. The chapter offers insights into the latest trends, innovations, and exemplary practices in gastronomy tourism and sustainable hospitality through exploring how flavor and gastronomy footprint shape the evolution of hospitality practices in SADC countries toward sustainability.

Flavors are the sensory impressions we experience when eating or drinking, primarily driven by the interplay of taste and smell, but also influenced by texture, temperature, and other factors [1–3]. It is believed that taste buds tell us if a food is sweet, sour, salty, bitter, or umami; but the flavor of a particular food is also determined by aromas picked up by your nose [2]. According to Abeydeera and Karunasena [4], flavors are how we perceive the taste and aroma of food, and they play a significant role in our enjoyment and food choices. Related to the flavors are the gastronomic footprints which [5, 6] defines as the sum total of environmental impacts linked to our food choices, from farm to fork and beyond. According to this definition, one must pause to think about where your food originates, the journey it undertakes to reach your plate, and the echoes of that journey on our planet. This is basically the footprint meaning. These two components, that is, flavor and footprint determine the sustainability of the environment with regard to the evolution of the hospitality industry in this twenty-first century.

It is believed that sustainable practices in the hospitality industry encompass a wide range of eco-friendly and socially responsible measures to minimize the environmental impact and promote community well-being [7–9]. These practices include reducing waste, conserving energy and water, sourcing local and organic products, and adopting responsible tourism practices. The essence of implementing these measures is to reduce operational costs, improve brand reputation, and enhance guest satisfaction while contributing to a more sustainable future. Some scholars [10, 11] assume that, as more environmentally conscious consumers change their habits, sustainability becomes a significant trend that reshapes the hospitality sector to quickly adapt to incorporate practices that have a reduced environmental impact and to support socially responsible initiatives.

## **2. Literature review**

The general trend is that climate change is driving the world's agenda and business leaders everywhere are wrestling with how to respond to rising public and political pressure and align their systems and operations with the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement, established to keep global warming below 2°C and ideally 1.5°C [12–15]. Sustainability is no longer an optional consideration for the hospitality industry but it is now a business imperative. Along with hotels, the transportation and Food and Beverage industries are all major contributors to carbon emissions, which lead to climate change [4, 16, 17]. It is believed that each meal leaves a trace that is not always visible to the naked eye, yet it is profoundly real. The trace encompasses everything

from the water consumed to grow ingredients, the land utilized for farming, the emissions released during transportation, and even the waste generated after we have finished eating [18]. Understanding this trace is the initial step in lessening our impact and making more mindful choices. Travelers believe that sustainable travel is essential, and the demand for eco-friendly hospitality is growing dramatically [17, 19]. Sustainable tourism is defined by the UN Environment Program and UN World Tourism Organization as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities” [20, 21].

## **2.1 Gastronomy/culinary/food tourism**

In recent years, tourism has experienced a significant transformation, surpassing mere leisure pursuits to uphold cultural, environmental, and socioeconomic dimensions. Gastronomy tourism, driven by the appeal of local cuisine and beverages, has emerged as a pivotal trend within this evolution. Often referred to as culinary or food tourism, gastronomy tourism has solidified its status as a significant segment of the global tourism industry [22]. It encompasses travel primarily motivated by the desire to immerse oneself in a destination’s culinary culture, including local dishes, ingredients, cooking techniques, and food heritage [23].

Food that has historical transmission and cultural roots, and are frequently made with locally sourced ingredients and techniques that have been handed down through the generations are referred to as traditional dishes [24–26]. These foods frequently represent the cultural significance in terms of heritage, values, and beliefs of a particular ethnic group or society [23, 27–30]. Cultural significance refers to how traditional foods help preserve customs or rites, transmit heritage, and shape social identity. Culture has power to influence people’s choice of food, when to eat, how to eat, and the culinary institutional set-up [31]. In addition to being manifestations of collective memory and identity, these foods frequently have symbolic importance [32, 33]. The degree to which a population’s traditional foods are still being prepared, served, and consumed illustrates how common and easily accessible these cuisines are in homes, dining establishments, and social gatherings [34–37]. The frequency, trends, and inclinations of traditional food consumption among people or communities are referred to as consumption, [38–40]. Modern tourists search for unique and local tourism products including food and in order for tourism to develop in an area, it depends on the society’s acceptance and efficient consumption of local traditions and sources [23, 41, 42]. Cultural tourism came to forefront as a new touristic product within the international tourism sector as individuals know more about the historical and cultural values [43–46]. As the basic aspect of gastronomy tourism, cuisine holds the property of art where culture and people’s demands shape its form starting from the beginning of humanity. Historically, people could eat within the order and habits of the society that they live in. However, due to the passage of time, changes occurred in the food habits of people as the new flavors were introduced [2]. Such changes brought in new footprints that have implications to the environmental and tourism industry sustainability which the culinarians need to be aware of and monitor.

## **2.2 Sustainable practices**

Sustainability, as articulated in Ref. [47, 48], is a multi-faceted concept that encompasses social, environmental, cultural, and economic dimensions, with a

primary emphasis on conserving biodiversity, strengthening communities, and preserving indigenous food systems. Furthermore, Refs. [49–51] assert that the domain of gastronomic tourism exemplifies environmentally conscious sourcing, the reduction of food waste, and the protection of sociocultural heritage. The slow food movement serves as a quintessential illustration of this integration through its advocacy for cuisine that is not only exquisite but also clean and equitable. Additionally, eco-gastronomy champions biodiversity, ethical procurement, and a minimized environmental footprint [22, 52–54]. According to Refs. [49, 55], urban gastronomic tourism, when aligned with local heritage and seasonal produce, significantly enhances the sustainable development of urban areas. The travel and tourism industry finds itself at a pivotal juncture; despite its success in showcasing the splendor of our planet, its footprint frequently contributes to environmental degradation [56]. Sustainable practices in the tourism and hospitality industry are a priority as they involve minimizing environmental impact and promoting social responsibility through resource conservation, waste reduction, sustainable sourcing, and energy efficiency [57, 58].

Food plays a pivotal role in every social occasion wherein individuals, communities, or neighborhoods engage and cultivate relationships [30, 59, 60]. Culinary traditions are fluid manifestations of cultural identity [28], acquiring new and modernized expressions while retaining their hallmark characteristics [29, 30, 61]. This dynamic is of considerable importance, as environmental changes necessitate corresponding to adaptations in culinary offerings [62, 63]. However, the erosion of cultural diversity and agricultural biodiversity is exacerbated by the imposition of institutional frameworks and the marginalization of indigenous knowledge.

Indeed, traditional food practices have been forsaken, resulting in grave consequences for society, including the health of affected communities, food security [64], local economies, and sustainable agriculture [59, 65–67]. The proliferation of unhealthy processed foods has given rise to diseases that have afflicted Zimbabwe and other developing nations, such as diabetes and cardiovascular ailments [68, 69]. This dietary transition has precipitated a significant decline in food diversity in the region, thereby undermining local agricultural resilience and intensifying reliance on external food aid. For instance, agricultural policies in Zimbabwe preferentially support maize cultivation, despite the fact that indigenous grains are markedly superior to maize in terms of drought resistance, food security enhancement [70], and the promotion of agro-biodiversity [71–73]. The decline of indigenous grains due to neglect equates to a loss of genetic resources and contributes to the obliteration of established traditional agricultural knowledge systems [74]. Researchers must delve beyond mere recipes and ingredients to comprehend the broader sociocultural context in which these cuisines are entrenched. This exploration includes scrutinizing local agricultural practices, traditional processing methodologies, the role of local markets and trade networks, and the social significance of specific foods within celebrations, rituals, and everyday life.

Concurrently, sustainable practices in tourism have garnered worldwide attention, emphasizing environmental conservation, social equity, and economic responsibility [57]. The intersection of gastronomy tourism and sustainability presents a dynamic arena that integrates cultural preservation with environmentally and socially responsible tourism. Globally, destinations are leveraging their culinary assets to attract visitors [53], promote cultural exchange, and drive sustainable development [75, 76]. In the Southern African Development Community (SADC), this shift is particularly salient. Home to diverse ecosystems, ethnic groups, and culinary traditions, the region harbors untapped potential for the advancement of gastronomy.

Simultaneously, the hospitality sector is increasingly aligning with global sustainability objectives, endeavoring to minimize environmental impacts while maximizing sociocultural benefits. This study investigates how gastronomy tourism in the SADC is influencing sustainable hospitality practices, employing both theoretical frameworks and empirical case studies to elucidate this dynamic relationship.

Globalization and urban lifestyles have stimulated a profound transformation in urban consumption patterns, with many Zimbabweans, particularly the younger demographic [77], gravitating toward Westernized fast food [22, 60, 78, 79]. This paradigm shift has elicited concerns regarding the erosion of culinary traditions, especially in urban centers such as Harare, where fast food establishments outnumber traditional food vendors. Several scholars assert that traditional cuisine remains deeply entrenched in Zimbabwean culture despite these transitions [80]. Many Zimbabweans continue to harbor a profound appreciation for traditional meals, particularly during familial gatherings and public holidays, as articulated by Magede [79], who assert that food serves as a crucial conduit of cultural values. Efforts to rejuvenate traditional dishes have thrived through various avenues, including local eateries, Zimbabwean cuisine festivals, and social media influencers advocating for indigenous foods.

### **3. Case studies**

In Zimbabwe's Matabeleland North province, nestled within the majestic Matopos mountains, an annual Amagugu Traditional Food Festival unfolds, dedicated to the celebration and promotion of indigenous culinary traditions and food systems [76]. The Amai's Cookout Competition, conceived by the First Lady of Zimbabwe, Dr. Auxillia Mnangagwa, was inaugurated in 2019 with the aim of showcasing and honoring the country's rich cultural diversity, advocating for healthy eating practices, and addressing pressing food security challenges.

Establishments such as KwaTerry in Mhondoro, as well as Gava and Kapoto in Harare, have emerged as cultural epicenters, enchanting both local and international patrons by presenting the traditional dishes in both authentic and innovative formats. Furthermore, Zimbabwe's tourism strategies are increasingly prioritizing culinary tourism to highlight the nation's cultural heritage. In a bid to attract foreign visitors in pursuit of authentic Zimbabwean experiences, establishments like Hyatt and Holiday Inn Harare have seamlessly integrated traditional cuisine into their menus.

South Africa has instituted a National Gastronomy Framework that aligns seamlessly with UNWTO standards, exemplified by initiatives such as the Cape Winelands, which employs participatory methodologies. One of the primary objectives of the National Gastronomy Framework is to bolster the development of culinary tourism, with a particular emphasis on the promotion and cultivation of gastronomic experiences throughout South Africa, showcasing the nation's rich history, diverse heritage, cultures, and the unique geographic and agricultural plurality. Another key objective is to establish a comprehensive framework that delineates the essential requirements to ensure a pronounced focus on transformation through the community development and poverty alleviation, particularly emphasizing the empowerment of women and youth, thereby fostering sustainable tourism. Within this framework, there exists a remarkable level of innovation among chefs who are skillfully incorporating indigenous ingredients from South Africa. In a similar vein, Zimbabwe has pioneered community-based tourism initiatives, particularly

in Matabeleland and Masvingo, that intricately weave together food storytelling, culinary demonstrations, and rural homesteads. These initiatives not only empower women but also play a crucial role in preserving culinary heritage.

Namibia's approach to food tourism is profoundly shaped by its arid climate and the indigenous knowledge surrounding desert edibles, such as resilient melons and wild game meats. Eco-lodges nestled in the Namib Desert offer sustainable dining experiences that harmoniously blend conservation, gastronomy, and cultural immersion, often involving local San communities in the culinary preparation and the sharing of ancestral narratives. Numerous eco-lodges emphasize sourcing ingredients from local producers and farmers within the Namib region, thereby mitigating the carbon footprint associated with long-distance transport and bolstering the local economy.

For an authentic cultural experience through cuisine, dining opportunities may feature traditional Namibian dishes and flavors, potentially employing indigenous plants and time-honored cooking methods, thereby providing guests with a palpable taste of the local culture through its culinary offerings. The utilization of renewable energy sources, such as solar power, for cooking and other facilities, coupled with the implementation of waste management systems to minimize environmental impact, exemplifies the sustainable practices embraced by these lodges. Establishments like Sossusvlei Desert Lodge and Beyond Sossusvlei Desert Lodge are esteemed for their luxurious offerings within the Namib, indicating a steadfast commitment to a refined, and likely sustainable, guest experience.

Mozambique's cuisine exemplifies a harmonious amalgamation of Portuguese, Arab, and indigenous influences, with seafood occupying a paramount position. Gastronomic experiences along the coastline including vibrant seafood markets, traditional dhow dinners, and coconut-infused curries are increasingly integrated into tourism offerings. Furthermore, sustainable fishing practices are actively championed as a facet of responsible tourism development. The culinary experience of Mozambican seafood is incomplete without acknowledging the traditional technique of grilling fish over an open flame, simply seasoned with lime and a hint of piri-piri, which accentuates the natural sweetness of the catch against the smoky undertones. This method of preparation, frequently found in beachside eateries, provides an authentic taste of the local culture. Mozambique's culinary landscape reflects its rich history, diverse culture, and the abundant natural resources that grace its land and waters. The traditional cuisine of Mozambique invites diners to immerse themselves in a realm of robust flavors and exotic spices, serving as a poignant reminder that food transcends mere sustenance, becoming an art form that encapsulates the essence of a nation's soul.

Mozambique is advancing in sustainable gastronomic tourism by intertwining community-based culinary experiences, locally sourced ingredients, and marine conservation with social and environmental stewardship. Community-based tourism (CBT) initiatives in regions such as Gorongosa and the Quirimbas Archipelago offer visitors authentic gastronomic experiences, including homestays, collaborative cooking with locals, and farm-to-table meals utilizing regional produce and seafood, thereby preserving culinary traditions and directing tourism revenue straight to community members [81]. In addition, Mozambique supports community-centered, agroecological farming and value-chain development through empowered beekeeping initiatives that bolster both biodiversity and rural livelihoods. Moreover, the country has established the national dietary guidelines to promote nutrient-rich local diets, which are garnering increasing grassroots interest in farm-to-table dining and culinary festivals [82].

Tanzania has emerged as a prominent gastronomy tourism hub, with Arusha epitomizing a model city for local food governance. This encompasses initiatives designed to mitigate farm-to-market waste and regulate the informal food sector. The policy framework reflects a commitment to the sustainable development goals (SDGs), underscoring nutrition, local economic advancement, food safety, and the enhancement of capacity-building through chef training, which can lead to improved food preparation and culinary arts. Furthermore, the promotion of eco-tourism capitalizes on natural resources for sustainable development and economic benefit.

#### **4. Challenges**

Besides the aforementioned endeavors by SADC nations to adopt sustainable tourism practices, challenges such as the lack of standardized recipes, constrained supply chains for indigenous produce, and the prevailing perception of traditional meals as “food for the impoverished” hinder the comprehensive commercialization and revitalization of traditional cuisine, particularly in Zimbabwe [83–85]. This underscores the necessity for both cultural and economic strategies to enhance traditional food systems within urban settings [86]. Traditional dish consumption in metropolitan awareness emphasizes that while traditional dishes preserved fast and imported foods are increasingly displacing local cuisine. They identified the primary obstacles to the embrace of traditional foods in cities such as Harare as labor-intensive preparation, the absence of contemporary marketing, and the preferences of younger generations. These findings are corroborated by Refs. [80, 87], which delineates generational disparities: younger urban Zimbabweans demonstrate a predilection for processed foods and convenience over traditional fare.

Furthermore, in their discourse regarding policy implications in sub-Saharan Africa, emphasize that the lack of supportive agricultural policies for traditional crops such as millet, sorghum, and sweet potatoes [67] constrains their availability and diminishes consumption, a challenge equally salient in Zimbabwe and the SADC region [88]. Obstacles persist in scaling up and enhancing infrastructure. Inadequate gastronomy-specific policies and insufficient funding opportunities stifle innovation [89]. Numerous SADC nations contend with substandard storage chains and limited market access, which present formidable challenges for sustainable gastronomy [84, 90]. Furthermore, the erosion of culinary knowledge and the absence of protection for indigenous culinary intellectual property remain pressing issues [91, 92]. The excessive consumption of water and energy in tourist facilities, coupled with deficient waste management systems, has been documented throughout the SADC region and across the African continent [75]. Climate change-related disruptions adversely affect crop yields and the availability of indigenous ingredients [29, 50, 93]. Poor coordination among tourism, agriculture, and heritage ministries undermines the efficacy of sustainability in the provision of culinary goods, while notable capacity gaps in training and education pertaining to sustainable culinary tourism are prevalent across Africa [94].

#### **5. Methodology**

This research employed a desk research methodology, augmented by a comparative analysis of South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique, and Tanzania.

The study meticulously examined gastronomy tourism, frameworks, policy interventions, community engagement, and sustainability within the aforementioned case studies. The sources utilized for South Africa encompassed a gastronomy framework, academic research conducted by Rand et al. [95], alongside national statistics pertaining to food and beverages. For Zimbabwe, information was procured from the UN World Tourism report and media releases from the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority regarding provincial cook-out competitions [96, 97]. Data concerning Mozambique was derived from the Strategic Tourism Development [81], as well as regional traveler reviews and a seafood gastronomy profile. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2025 guidelines constituted another source of information, in addition to the Sonambulass, Traditional Mozambican Cuisine. In the case of Namibia, the sources included community-based natural resource management frameworks, the Namibia Tourism Board Act, and reports from the Namibian Organic Association and eco-friendly Sossusvlei desert lodges. Finally, for Tanzania, data was sourced from the Arusha Urban Food Policy Initiative [98]. Collectively, these sources provided desk research data that was analyzed to elucidate the current status of gastronomy tourism in SADC with regard to sustainable practices for the future of the tourism industry.

## 6. Results

(See Table 1).

Country	Policy status	Community engagement	Sustainability focus	Gaps identified
South Africa	National framework	Chefs, entrepreneurs and local communities	Inclusivity eco-dining transformation	Need for scaling grassroots impact
Zimbabwe	Multi-ministerial	Provincial cookouts, colleges	Nutrition, rural empowerment, indigenous system.	Limited formal measurement tool
Mozambique	No formal framework	Sea food and heritage cuisine	Marine conservation (not gastronomy-linked)	Policy absence and weak data collection.
Namibia	Legal eco-tourists	Conservancy food systems	Organic farming resource rights, NRM	Gastronomy not a policy priority
Tanzania	Farm-based emerging	Urban and national scaling	Farm-to-table informal food inclusion	Needs long-term framework alignment.

*Source: Author (2025).*

**Table 1.**  
*Summary analysis of the five countries.*

## 7. Findings analysis

The findings reveal that Zimbabwe has cultivated substantial national momentum in gastronomy tourism, propelled by the First Lady, the Ministry of Tourism and

Hospitality Industry, alongside community-centric culinary events that celebrate indigenous cuisines and traditional knowledge, exemplified by the Amagugu Traditional Food Festival. This initiative encompasses policies meticulously designed to empower rural women, youth, and individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, there exists a concerted effort to integrate nutrition, educational agriculture, and food sovereignty, with a pronounced emphasis on safeguarding traditional food systems and enhancing local value chains. According to the event strategist of the Amagugu festival [99–101].

*“Our objectives include promoting Zimbabwean cuisine and culture, providing a platform for local chefs and food vendors to showcase their talents, bringing together people from different backgrounds and age groups to celebrate the universal language of food, and contributing to the growth of the local economy through tourism and job creation.”*

*Amagugu Festival aspires to celebrate and promote the rich tapestry of indigenous Zimbabwean cuisine and cultural heritage, concurrently featuring a symposium on indigenous food systems where participants engage in the exchange of culinary wisdom rooted in traditional food resources [100]. The Amagugu Festival takes place in May, a month dedicated to cultural celebrations across Africa. In Zimbabwe, the theme for 2025 was “Our Food, Our Heritage, Our Future.” This theme was meticulously delineated into three principal areas of focus: “Our Heritage,” which delves into the historical significance of African foods and the influence of migration on culinary evolution; “Our Food, Our Future,” which contemplates contemporary food trends and the prospective trajectory of African cuisine as a distinguished culinary art; and “Family Day,” which honors the values and importance of indigenous African foods. The overarching objective was to position indigenous food at the nucleus of Zimbabwe’s cultural renaissance.*

In addition, Mbulelo [100] asserts that the focus is on traditional culinary knowledge, methods, and the cultural narratives interwoven within each dish, celebrating not merely the essence of food but also identity, while reviving ancestral flavors and reestablishing connections among communities through shared tastes and timeless recipes. Since the inception of this event, it has flourished steadily, attracting over 400 participants in 2019. To facilitate the reconnection of communities to their heritage, the director of the Amagugu International Heritage Centre (AIHC), [101], states,

*“Through this expo, we aim to identify basic food trends that our forefathers enjoyed and use this knowledge as a blueprint for future food models.”*

This follows the fact that [101] says,

*“African cuisines are slowly fading away due to new worldviews, rapid urbanization and the lingering effects of colonization. We continue to host this expo to celebrate our Africanness through our dishes and the stories attached to them.”*

Collaboration among a diverse array of stakeholders including historians, culinary experts, agriculturalists, students, artists, and policymakers during the expo is pivotal for the cultivation of innovative food paradigms anchored in local resource management, ultimately nurturing rural entrepreneurship [101].

To fortify the Amagugu Traditional Food Festival, which commenced in 2017, the First Lady of Zimbabwe, Dr. Auxillia Mnangagwa, inaugurated the “Amai Cookout Competition” in 2020. This initiative aspires to elevate gastronomy tourism, cultural preservation, healthy dietary practices, and economic empowerment by showcasing the rich tapestry of Zimbabwe’s traditional cuisine. Initially concentrated on traditional dishes, the competition has since broadened its scope to encompass diverse categories, including professional chefs, tertiary students, community members, and individuals with disabilities, thereby exemplifying inclusivity and national pride. The program’s resounding success culminated in the establishment of a regional cookout competition and its subsequent delegation to the Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality Industry, with the First Lady continuing to serve as a prominent patron. The competition has evolved into a pivotal component of Zimbabwe’s endeavors to celebrate its cultural heritage and position itself as a nexus for culinary arts, as articulated by the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority.

In light of the study’s title, *“From Flavours to Footprint: Gastronomy Tourism and the Evolution of Hospitality Towards Sustainable Practices,”* Zimbabwe has made commendable progress in revitalizing traditional cuisine that embodies our African identity while simultaneously addressing the food security challenges exacerbated by climate change [70]. The hospitality sector is embracing traditional culinary offerings at an encouraging pace, with establishments such as Garwe, Kapoto, and KwaTerry exclusively presenting traditional dishes and beverages as their primary focus. Additionally, numerous hotels, including the Hyatt in Harare, have begun incorporating traditional fare into their menus [53].

This development aligns with Ref. [51], which posits that contemporary travelers seek unique and authentic tourism offerings, particularly in the realm of cuisine. For tourism to flourish within a region, it is contingent upon the community’s embrace and effective utilization of local traditions and resources. The consumption of traditional food and beverages extends beyond the realm of tourists in Zimbabwe; it also caters to local residents who have become increasingly health conscious, as evidenced by their heightened patronage of traditional restaurants, especially during weekends and public holidays. The widespread availability of unhealthy processed foods has precipitated a surge in diseases that have beset Zimbabwe and other developing nations, including diabetes and cardiovascular conditions [68, 96, 102]. Consequently, many families have turned to traditional meals, either by deliberate choice or out of necessity, owing to the prevailing economic challenges, as most traditional products are readily accessible at affordable prices.

On the other hand, these traditional foods often embody the cultural significance [103, 104] pertaining to the heritage, values, and beliefs of a specific ethnic group or society [30]. Consequently, many Zimbabweans residing in the diaspora exhibit a preference for their own ethnic cuisines whenever feasible [53]. As some individuals return home from abroad, they associate traditional meals with familial reunions, as food plays a crucial role in every social occasion where individuals, communities, or neighborhoods engage and nurture relationships [35]. This perception of traditional food consumption has serendipitously addressed the ongoing regional food scarcity crisis exacerbated by drought, a phenomenon driven by climate change [70]. However, Zimbabwe has yet to establish a formal framework to assess the success and effectiveness of its notable Amagugu Traditional Food Festival and Amai’s Cook Out competition in fostering a comprehensive understanding among the populace regarding the intrinsic value of traditional foods for their well-being and health.

Conversely, Mozambique possesses untapped potential in marine gastronomy. Findings suggest that marine ecotourism, particularly in the Baaruto Archipelago and Inhambane, presents substantial culinary opportunities. While the Portuguese-African culinary heritage remains vibrant, it is currently under exploited, and a formal gastronomy policy framework has yet to be established. Nevertheless, avenues exist to amalgamate sustainable seafood tourism with conservation-led tourism, although a conspicuous lack of culinary policy alignment persists [82].

Namibia exemplifies a successful integration of conservancy-based agritourism, wherein community conservancies function as legal entities for eco-tourism and local food production. The country boasts an organic food market complemented by the participatory certification models. Namibia distinguishes itself as a nation with robust environmental policy integration, effectively linking agro-ecotourism with indigenous knowledge systems related to food (Community-Based Natural Resource Management; Namibia Tourism Board Act & Namibian Organic Association reports).

Tanzania has established itself as a gastronomy tourism nexus, with Arusha serving as a paragon of local food governance. This includes initiatives aimed at minimizing farm-to-market waste and regulating the informal food sector. The policy framework reflects alignment with the sustainable development goals (SDGs), underscoring nutrition, local economic development, food safety, and enhanced capacity-building through chef training and eco-tourism.

## **8. Conclusions**

This desk research elucidates the multifaceted advancements across five nations, with South Africa and Zimbabwe leading the charge, exemplifying well-structured gastronomic strategies. In contrast, Tanzania reveals significant potential through policy-driven urban initiatives. Namibia seamlessly integrates sustainability through its conservation endeavors, while Mozambique presents uncharted opportunities in marine gastronomy. A strategic alignment with national developmental frameworks in tourism and agriculture is crucial for the enhancement of food tourism and the promotion of sustainability [53]. UN Tourism 2024 reports that in recent years, Gastronomy Tourism has emerged as a significant travel motivation, offering authentic experiences that resonate with the growing interest in food among travelers who are also looking for a more profound connection with local communities during their trips. This trend presents vast opportunities for sustainable development, cultural exchange, and community empowerment [53]. Acknowledging the pivotal role of gastronomy in tourism development, the First UN Tourism Regional Forum on Gastronomy Tourism for Africa aimed to discuss the challenges and opportunities of its promotion as a key driver for Africa's competitiveness in the global tourism landscape.

Following the first UN Tourism Regional Forum in the previous year, the UN Tourism 2025 report on the 2nd UN Tourism Regional Forum on Gastronomy Tourism for Africa that was held in Arusha in April 2025 underscored the need to strengthen local food ecosystems by engaging with producers, safeguarding culinary heritage through the promotion and use of native crops, documentation of products, processes and traditional recipes, and more sustainable food systems.

Africa's gastronomic heritage is rich and diverse, yet often overlooked by tourists. Its flavors tell stories of cultural traditions, from ancient recipes to modern innovations as demonstrated by the traditional food festivals in Zimbabwe, Namibia, and

Tanzania. African cuisine reflects a fusion of influences, merging ancestral recipes with the creativity of chefs, who sublimate local specialties and ingredients, inviting the world to experience the richness of African gastronomy. Through knowledge exchange and the sharing of best practices, the UN Tourism Forum aims to harness the power of gastronomy tourism for the benefit of local communities and the environment, fostering regional cohesion and resilience [53].

South Africa has managed to come up with a Gastronomy Framework aligned to the UNWTO Gastronomy objectives. If other countries like Zimbabwe and Tanzania that have hosted the UN Tourism Regional Forum on Gastronomy Tourism for Africa together with Mozambique and Namibia could structure their frameworks too, the sustainable gastronomy tourism can become sustainable.

Recommendations are there for SADC states to support the UN Tourism Regional Gastronomy Tourism for Africa with adequate resources. More studies are to be done for the whole of Africa as it is rich with diversified ethnic cultures.

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## **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## **Acronyms and abbreviations**

AHA	American Heart Association
EHL	Ecole hotelier de Lausanne
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
HA	Hospitality Academy
OECD	Organization for Economic C-operation and Development
SDGs	sustainable development goals
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UN	Tourism United Nations Tourism
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
NRM	Namibia Resource Management


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## Chapter 4

# Sustainability Practices in the Latvian Restaurant Industry

*Laura Pole and Baiba Rivza*

### Abstract

The tourism sector includes a variety of services, with restaurants being a vital component of it. It is directly linked to two crucial factors—customer service and sustainability. According to the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, every year, nearly three billion tons of waste from food is created by the restaurant companies. Globally, restaurants and food businesses lose \$2.6 trillion each year due to food waste. The goal of this chapter is to narrow the understanding divide among theory and practice in implementing sustainability in the restaurant industry, while also examining the role of sustainable practices in customer attraction through a case study from Riga, Latvia. Sustainability encompasses economic, social, and environmental aspects. In Latvia, the restaurant industry was the first to develop a Memorandum based on an extensive self-initiated study, promoting awareness and implementation of sustainability principles in food service operations. The Memorandum includes principles of sustainable business, grounded in internationally recognized industry standards and best practices.

**Keywords:** sustainability, restaurant industry, food waste, sustainable development, zero waste

### 1. Introduction

Many sectors of the modern economy see the need for sustainability, indicating a global trend toward environmental knowledge and accountability [1]. The restaurant sector does not seem friendly to the environment overall. In addition to using a great deal of water and power, restaurants produce a significant amount of food waste, garbage made of plastic, and polluting substances. The restaurant industry is critical to addressing sustainability challenges across all industry sectors due to their significant impact on resource loss and waste generation. Sustainable catering techniques are becoming increasingly important as environmental concerns grow globally. This study focuses on the Latvian restaurant industry and its use of sustainable techniques.

There are multiple evaluations, publications, papers, and viewpoints on sustainability. As more individuals realize how important sustainability is in everyday life, as well as the sustainability of human life on Earth, its significance grows. Sustainable activities benefit the environment, society, and the economy. Sustainability involves using resources responsibly and understanding their long-term impact. Sustainability refers to the environment we want for future generations [2]. Sustainable development is

increasingly important to and applied within the food and beverage sector. Interestingly, efforts in this field often prioritize environmental issues above social ones [3].

In 2019, sustainability was one of the most popular words of the year, appearing both in business and in the world at large. The UK marketing agency ‘Enviral’ even called 2019 the ‘year of sustainability’. It is gaining momentum and becoming a global trend. In essence, it is a set of actions aimed at restoring balance on the planet. This may include avoiding plastic, treating employees ethically, recycling and reusing items, reducing the costs of transporting goods, and so on [4].

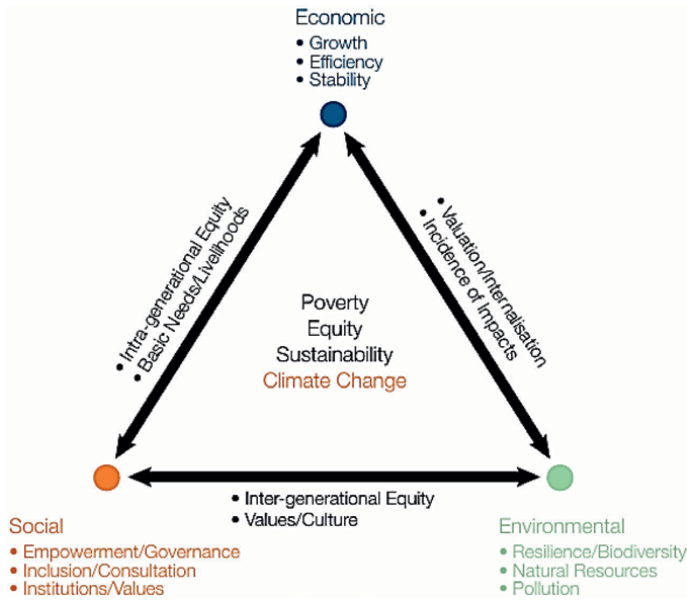
## **2. Definition and pillars of sustainability**

In its 1987 Brundtland report, the World Commission on Environment and Development published the first explanation for sustainable development, ‘Our common future’, as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ [5, 6]. To raise everyone’s standard of living, this theory emphasizes how essential it is to establish a balance between environmental, social, and economic factors [7]. The report was a key document in raising global awareness about the interconnectedness of environment and development. It created the fundamental ideas of sustainable development as it is generally understood [8]. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development came into effect in September 2015 and includes 17 sustainable development goals that the EU is dedicated to attaining [5]. The idea of sustainable development has developed to include all three primary elements of sustainability—economic, social, and environmental—despite the absence of a broadly recognized practical definition [9, 10].

The triple bottom line method of evaluating a company’s performance is comparable to sustainability, which is typically defined as the three columns that include economic, social, and environmental challenges [11, 12]. These pillars represent the core areas that must be addressed to achieve true sustainability, and they are interconnected, with each influencing and depending on the others (e.g., **Figure 1**) [12].

Economic sustainability is always responsible for creating jobs and thereby promoting economic stability in a region. Contributions to the economy generate funding and expand employment prospects [13]. Millions of workers are needed to prepare, serve, and deliver food in restaurants, businesses, and schools. In fact, in 2022, approximately 13.9 million people were employed in the food service industry. Thanks to public restaurant companies, nearly 14 million people have found employment and continue to work in this field [14, 15].

Social sustainability must start from the top, with leaders setting a positive example to make a good work culture in the restaurant industry a reality. A key part of understanding the restaurant industry’s sustainability challenges is understanding the organizational culture within the sector. Organizational culture is defined as a shared set of values, beliefs, and expectations that people carry in their minds, and it is reflected in leadership styles and how organizational success is defined in employee relationships, as well as in existing symbols and daily routines [16]. In the restaurant industry, social sustainability is still not very well known, with challenges in attracting/retaining staff due to low wages and poor working conditions [17]. In our daily lives, we too often forget the essence of work: people matter. As sustainability is set to become a central focus of restaurant operations due to increasing resource limitations, taking a long-term approach and investing in people will help drive the industry forward—benefiting



**Figure 1.** Sustainable development triangle, between economy, society and environment [12].

the planet and overall well-being. Focusing on a positive work culture and social sustainability can promote both economic sustainability and the adoption of environmentally friendly practices. Organizations that prioritize workplace culture and make social sustainability a key objective—putting people at the heart of their efforts—are increasingly seeing greater economic benefits and higher employee engagement. This is especially true when staff actively participate in the organization’s environmental initiatives, assuming those goals are clearly communicated [16].

The third principle of sustainability is considered an essential part of business operations in today’s world—environmental sustainability.

Environmentally friendly restaurant operation methods and ethical dining have only been briefly discussed in a few studies. Recently, researchers shared an example that illustrates what is happening in our time: “Imagine walking into a supermarket with your family, buying three bags of groceries, and then, as soon as you leave the store, immediately throwing one of those bags away. That is the reality of our time. According to statistics, this is exactly what is happening with our food today — the amount of waste that ends up in the environment each day from every household” [18]. Clients who care about the environment are urging the restaurant and hotel sector to embrace and support sustainable and ethical company practices. A large quantity of energy and resources are required to produce food. Because of this, focusing on circular manufacturing is important to meeting long-term food security goals [19].

### 3. Importance of food waste

Few nations have consistently gathered reliable data on food waste throughout time. As more information is discovered, countries are realizing that a significant portion of garbage in landfills is food waste and that there is a chance to improve food safety, save spending, and meet climate goals. Estimates of food waste are

predicted to rise as more nations begin measuring their consumption of food waste in the commercial and food service fields and as their measurements encompass more subsectors than they do now. Reducing food waste in these environments can assist businesses in cutting expenses associated with operations and garbage disposal; and it is therefore essential that information imbalance be filled through additional measurement [20]. Increasing greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental effects related to food waste are among the primary problems facing the world. Food waste is a major issue on a global scale. The entire food production supply chain involves the consumption of fresh water and additional sources. The food that was wasted may have given people in food-insecure regions or underdeveloped nations much-needed nourishment. One in nine individuals worldwide suffer from hunger (**Table 1**) [21].

Every year, around 43 trillion dollars’ worth of food, including inedible food components, is thrown away or wasted globally, accounting for 13% of all food. Approximately 20% of all food that is accessible for eating is represented by this astounding amount. Households generate 60% of this waste, followed by catering companies (28%), and the retail sector (12%) (e.g. **Table 2**) [28].

Food wastages are getting a lot of publicity lately and have become the primary concerns in both national and international policies [29]. As public and political sectors have been more concerned and focused on wasted or lost food over the last few years, an increasing number of studies have measured food wastage at the national, regional, and international levels throughout the supply chain of food [30]. Food loss and waste is food that is never eaten for reasons such as spoilage, overproduction or simply tossing out perfectly good food [31]. It is an issue of public concern that affects the entire world, both economically and environmentally. The amount of food that is wasted is between 33 and 50% of the food produced worldwide going uneaten [32]. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that around 40% of food produced for human consumption is wasted globally, which means that a significant portion of the resources required to produce food are wasted, as well as the greenhouse gas emissions from food production [30].

Several additional investigations have also documented comparable levels of food wastage at the national or regional level, along with the major impact it is having on the environment, economic growth, and food safety. For instance, the EU-28 has been projected to produce over 100 million tons of wasted food every year [29]. As a result, decreasing waste and loss of food has been included in the political list of priorities both nationally and internationally. By 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN call for decreasing food wastage in production and supply chains and decreasing the amount of food wasted globally per person at the level of consumers and retailers [29]. It is a critical part of the global solution to the triple challenge facing food systems [31]. The United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development contains two primary aims: ‘Zero Hunger’ and Sustainable Production

Sector	Global average (kg/capita/year)	2022 total (million tons)
Household	79	631
Food service	36	290
Retail	17	131
Total	132	1052

**Table 1.** *Estimates of global food waste in 2022 by food waste index report 2024 [20].*

Principle	Example	Main sources
Paying taxes	The company pays all taxes and fees prescribed by law, and deferred payments are not delayed.	[22, 23]
Investment in green technologies	The company invests in 'green technologies', new products and services, as well as innovations.	[24, 25]
Develop and preserve present and future employment.	Encourage employment by implementing modern techniques that have positive effect on the environment and communities in many ways. Research shows that staff more likely stay in job longer if there is positive environment.	[26, 27]

**Table 2.**  
*Economic sustainability (made by author).*

and Consumption'. The smaller objectives are 'halving per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels' and 'reducing food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses. Achieving these goals will require individuals, corporates, and countries to commit to the cause. While at an individual level, education and the resultant changes in habits will be key to reducing food waste, there is much that can be improved on a systemic level by corporates and the government [33].

#### 4. Sustainability in food and beverage industry

Restaurants are in the business of providing food services at remote sites such as hotels, hospitals, pubs, airports, cruise ships, parks or event venues. The restaurant service industry is a special category of the service industry, which emphasizes the provision of food, beverages, and related services [34]. Sustainable hospitality refers to the practice of hotels, restaurants, and other establishments in the hospitality industry adopting and implementing strategies that minimize their negative impact on the environment, society, and local communities. It encompasses a holistic approach that considers not just environmental factors but also social and economic dimensions [35]. Hospitality businesses are well-placed to drive sustainability change because they operate on the interface of multiple stakeholders. By using their businesses as models of sustainability, hospitality leaders provide educational opportunities and advocate for sustainable practices. Various studies highlight the value of studying businesses that are exemplary of sustainable practice, but within the hospitality food waste literature only Eckstein and Young (2018) have explored a case of best practice and what can be learnt from them [36].

Reducing the environmental impact has been a challenge for many sectors, including the food industry. The concept of 'food system sustainability' is precisely the link between sustainability and actions related to food businesses. Consumers are more concerned about the origins and integrity of their food, and restaurants are urged to make operational changes in 'areas of food procurement, service provision, waste management, energy efficiency, and water conservation' [37].

The trend in recent decades for local people to use as many local products as possible is justified by the perception of local products as more sustainable, environmentally friendly choices or more socially responsible behavior [38]. From the perspective of restaurant owners, understanding client's preferences is critical to delivering a service that meets their needs, and restaurant consumers are increasingly difficult to satisfy [37].

Sustainable hospitality is the practice of hotels, restaurants, and other hospitality businesses adopting and implementing ways to reduce their negative impact on the environment, society, and local communities. It takes a comprehensive approach, considering not just environmental but also social and economic concerns. For the tourism industry, food has become a crucial element in determining shifting customer flows [39].

Sustainability in hospitality goes beyond just being environmentally friendly. It encompasses different dimensions. The hospitality industry, being one of the largest sectors globally [35], is a massive consumer of resources and can have a substantial impact on the environment and local communities and [40] has a significant impact on natural resources, energy consumption, waste generation and carbon emissions. By adopting sustainable practices, the industry can significantly reduce its environmental footprint [35].

Survey conducted by Lightspeed HQ, with over 8000 hospitality workers and customers from around the world, underscores the importance of sustainable practices in the hospitality industry and how operators worldwide are recognizing and adapting to this demand [41]. According to the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership, tourism contributes about 5% of global greenhouse gas emissions—a figure expected to rise by 130% by 2035 [33].

Sustainable hospitality involves integrating eco-friendly practices into every aspect of the industry's operations, encompassing waste reduction, conserving energy and water, sourcing local and organic products and adopting responsible tourism practices [42]. The three key areas of the negative environmental impact of hotel industry are energy, water, and waste [43].

There is no single definition of environmentally friendly eating, but usually environmentally friendly eating is regarded as something that leads to one or all of the following:

- A reduction in the thorough put of resources (e.g. energy, water another resources).
- The conservation of biodiversity.
- Reduced production of waste [44].

What is sustainable catering, and how do we get there? There is no consensus as to what a sustainable diet is and thus about what sustainable catering is. Of course, much research is being carried out on what a more sustainable diet looks like. Based on research of sustainable value chains for sustainable food systems, we can derive what elements we could influence to get to a diet with less negative impact. Eight principles, derived from existing research, that together lead to a more sustainable offering. These eight principles are—less food waste, labels and fair trade, locally produced, seasonal, health, packaging, innovation and last but not least, more plant-based and less animal-based [45, 46].

Smaackmakers created eight food sustainability guidelines to help restaurant sector offer alternatives that are better for the environment. These guidelines are:

1. To become less animal-based and more plant-based.
2. Minimizing the disposal of food through innovation and control.
3. Branding & Fairness.

4. Use locally manufactured food.
5. Use seasonal goods in food preparation.
6. Nutritious, considering the entire product and composite dishes have balance.
7. To use quality packaging that improves the date of expiration.
8. Innovation created from fresh goods and approaches to representing the restaurant sector as an environmentally friendly value chain [47].

The trend of the restaurant industry is to introduce new products occasionally; as a result, these companies have the ability to introduce new sustainability methods at the time of changing the menu or changing the concept of action that is done at the company. Each small activity in the direction of sustainability already makes major changes and improves the company's action against the environment. The introduction of various sustainability practices is not only good for nature, but they also often have a positive impact on their implementation directly for the company itself [48]. From this point of view, not only the big food and beverage companies but also the small restaurant businesses get positive results by inventing sustainability principles, it is a positive act on the environment.

## **5. Memorandum for sustainable business in the restaurant industry**

Businesses are still far from sustainable development that addresses the core environmental issues of entrepreneurship, and some companies may use sustainability strategies to justify growth and continued resource use. It can be argued that sustainable business is still fundamentally about the sustainability of big business, rather than the sustainability of people and the environment. Sustainability is a challenge because the global economy depends on mass retail and increasing consumption [49]. It is no secret that public restaurant businesses are among those that consume the most electricity, water, and various equipments that run continuously without being turned off (refrigerators, freezers, etc.). Due to the enormous resource consumption, a huge amount of carbon dioxide is released, which spreads quickly and pollutes the environment, making it worse not only for employees but also for guests. A large amount of waste from products and other sources not only causes pollution but also emits greenhouse gases. Therefore, the topic of sustainability is becoming increasingly relevant in public catering establishments. In order to attract people, every restaurant business must follow regulations and implement new practices to ensure that the company is profitable and, equally importantly, environmentally friendly. Studies have shown that if your business is eco-friendly and you promote it, the company has a better chance of achieving greater sustainability. This is especially important because the service sector includes not only restaurants but also hotels, which contribute significantly to environmental pollution and climate change, as well as generating large amounts of plastic in the form of disposable containers, food waste, and more.

In the European Union and globally, there is no unified legislation outlining the specific criteria by which a restaurant business must operate. However, there are many scientific articles, books published and written at universities, and numerous

studies conducted by professors and researchers that identify and demonstrate the criteria through which a business can be sustainable.

At present, the restaurant industry in Latvia has entered a significant phase of transformation, during which companies and organizations have agreed on the principles of sustainable business. These principles include economic, sustainable management, social, and environmental aspects. The public food and beverage sector is the first industry in Latvia to begin considering and actively working to improve sustainability aspects in its operations. The Ministry of Economics, for its part, has promised to support the industry in its efforts to strengthen not only environmental protection but also social justice, economic viability, competitiveness, innovation, and greater public trust.

On October 31, 2023, the restaurant industry became the first sector in Latvia to define its future operational principles based on a self-initiated, extensive, and in-depth study and detailed criteria, to guarantee the standards for sustainable entrepreneurship in the restaurant industry in Latvia. A memorandum was signed between industry entrepreneurs, employers, higher education institutions, the Ministry of Economics, and the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, thereby demonstrating the commitment of all parties to uphold and support the defined principles and to move toward a transparent, fair, green, and sustainable restaurant industry in Latvia [50]. The purpose of the memorandum is to promote awareness of sustainability principles among the public and, in particular, among stakeholders involved in the restaurant industry, as well as to encourage the integration of these principles into the provision of catering services. The memorandum includes principles of responsible and sustainable business practices, developed based on globally recognized sustainability aspects of the sector, considering international best practices in sustainability assessment, as well as recommendations from industry representatives and other stakeholders [51].

The sustainability aspects in the memorandum were prepared based on interview questions, as well as drawing from guidelines and best practices in the industry. Some of these include:

- UN Sustainable Development Goals
- UN Global Compact
- Global Reporting Initiative
- Latvia 2030
- EU ‘Green Deal’
- Paris Climate Goals
- ISO 26000.

The following areas or aspects of activity were mentioned as the most typical examples of changes in regulatory frameworks:

- Insufficient or non-existent waste sorting infrastructure.
- Inadequate treatment of centralized tap water (specifically, softening and iron removal).

- Definition of an effective and environmentally friendly product supply chain in public procurement; agricultural cooperatives in the agricultural sector.
- Encouraging development, particularly the expansion of the packaging deposit system and the unification of packaging [52].

The memorandum was also joined by the Ministries, Associations, largest Universities and largest suppliers.

## 6. Methodology

The research's theoretical basis is founded on secondary data like monography, research papers, government documents, sustainability reports, etc. In this study, the primary research method used is literature review, especially using a systematic review approach to compile and examine a collection of literature regarding sustainable restaurant business practices, in the restaurant industry. A review of the literature was conducted using research databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, EBSCO and others, after the keywords were selected.

A literature review is a scientific research method that enables the discovery of theoretical foundations investigated in previous research. This strategy does not collect primary data but rather relies on secondary data from academic sources. The goal is to analyze existing research on sustainability in the restaurant industry by reviewing and identifying key sustainability principles that enterprises may use in order to promote sustainable entrepreneurship in this sector.

As the theoretical framework already explained that sustainability is described through the model of 'three pillars' related to economic, social, and environmental issues. In accordance with theoretical framework, author structured findings of sustainability principles based on these three main pillars. The results are summarized in tables that provide characteristics of each study: sustainability principle in each category of sustainability pillars, example on how it can be applied in food and beverage business and main scientific sources. Given the specific factors that are related to food and beverage industry, the author added principles of sustainable management and supply chain sustainability to provide a more industry-specific perspective.

## 7. Results and discussion

Table on economic sustainability principles (e.g. **Table 2**) highlights important factors for the food and beverage industry, compliance with legal responsibilities, such as timely payment of taxes and fees, increases financial transparency. Investment in green technologies can demonstrate an intelligent approach to innovation that not only improves operational efficiency but also meets environmental and customer needs. Furthermore, the Latvian restaurant industry's commitment is to increase and preserve employment, both current and future, emphasizes its role in promoting economic resilience and contributing to community well-being. These strategies can help to achieve long-term economic growth.

One of the most highly regulated industries in the economy of Latvia is the food and beverage industry, and companies operating at every stage of the food chain need to be prepared to comply with to a range of requirements. These consist of

Cabinet of Ministers laws, legislation of the Republic of Latvia, and EU directives and regulations as well as regulations of Food and Veterinary service. The operational foundation of any food business is food safety, and to guarantee this, regulations are established at the EU and Member State levels to control the food industry. Food safety principles, measures and systems are similar in different countries, but their practical solutions may differ slightly.

HACCP is a system of management that analyses and controls physical, chemical, and biological hazards to ensure food safety. It is a vital element of the CODEX General Principles of Food Hygiene and must be implemented in all food and beverage operations, regardless of size, when producing food, ingredients, and beverages. HACCP goes hand in hand with transparency on what food and beverage companies are offering to customers and transparency to monitor and identify any food or component added to a food throughout the whole manufacturing, processing, and distribution process. Without implementing HACCP in your Food and beverage establishment, it is not possible to open business according to the Food and Veterinary Service of Latvia (e.g., **Table 3**).

The topic of discrimination at the workplace gained importance only in 1964 in the United States. However, it was not until the last few decades that we started to take employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, or sex seriously. Equal treatment and human rights for all employees must not be something exceptional in the workplace but a standard that must be implemented in everyday actions. Unfortunately, due to the statistically high number of females working in food and beverage industry, harassment is still seen very often in Latvia and worldwide. And it is important to provide a sustainable work environment that provides social and emotional support and the well-being of employees (e.g. **Table 4**). Another important aspect of the food and beverage industry is not only to feed customers but also to educate society. The food and beverage industry are not only about fancy restaurants but also about schools, hospitals, etc. Therefore, healthy and nutritious food is not only one of the sustainability principles but also regulated by the law. Educating customers on healthy food, local and traditional food as well as telling tourists about local traditions can also be part of sustainable growth. In this case, Latvia’s restaurant industry is considered relatively green and sustainable, as local restaurants are making efforts to use local products and promote traditional food, organizing food festivals on traditional food like ‘Riga Street food’, healthy eating festivals, like vegan festival ‘Augam’, trade fairs, like ‘Riga food’, that not only promote local food producers, but offer seminars and lectures on sustainability and new technologies.

Principle	Example	Main sources
Implementing HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points)	Implementing HACCP promoted food safety and reliability, which not only improved profits, but also reduced waste and supported the local community – clearly economic and social sustainability in one solution.	[53–55]
Promoting Transparency and Ethical Practices	The company implements open governance principles by publishing information about values, social responsibility, defining norms of behavior in a code of ethics (e.g., , by standing up against corruption and creating whistleblowing mechanisms, as well as actively involving employees and suppliers in understanding and practicing these norms and principles).	[56–58]

**Table 3.** *Sustainable management principles (made by author).*

The food and beverage industry is significant users of natural resources. Refrigeration equipment is essential to the food industry's ability to maintain product freshness. It is a significant source of energy consumption as well. The use of innovative technologies could generate mutual benefits and resolve certain difficult

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Main sources</b>
Commitment to Equal Treatment and Human Rights for All Employees	The company ensures equal treatment of all employees, regardless of the form of employment, respecting the employee's human rights, including non-discrimination based on age, gender, physical abilities, ethnic or religious affiliation, and sexual orientation.	[59, 60]
Promoting Employee Health, Well-Being, and Professional Development in a Sustainable Work Environment	The company ensures conditions favorable to the health and well-being of employees, promoting the prevention of occupational disease risks, promoting and encouraging the physical well-being of employees and offering them emotional and social support by respecting work and private life balance. Making certain that the workplace is secure and well-equipped and raising staff qualifications on their understanding on sustainability issue.	[26, 61]
Fostering Diversity and Knowledge Continuity Through Generational Balance in Personnel Management	The company is implementing diversity principles in personnel management, with the aim of balancing the age structure of employees, creating opportunities for generational change, and ensuring continuity in knowledge transfer. Hospitality organizations need to understand their multi-generation workforce and to ensure assimilation among them.	[62, 63]
Zero Tolerance for Discrimination: Protecting Employees from Harassment	The company has a non-discrimination policy that protects employees from harassment by their employer and/or customers. Implementation of zero-tolerance bullying policies. Especially women that must often tolerate inappropriate behavior from customers, co-workers, and management.	[64–66]
Investing in Professional Education to Drive Industry Growth and Development	Today's leaders and business world really understand the importance of training and development of employees. The company invests time and knowledge in improving professional education, thus also contributing to the development of the industry.	[26, 67, 68]
Supporting the Community: Donations, Volunteering, and Promoting Healthy Eating Education	The company supports the community by donating financial resources, food products and employee time, promoting health as well as educating residents (educational institutions, colleges, nonprofit organizations, etc.) to learn about healthy eating.	[69, 70]
Accommodating Dietary Needs: Special Menus and Product Substitutes for All	The company offers a special menu and substitutes for specific products or is preparing to create such an offer to accommodate various dietary restrictions. Sustainable diets and touch on strategies for environmental and nutritional education, restaurant menu selections, including these foods based on data, could potentially have a beneficial effect on customers' sustainability.	[71, 72]
Empowering Healthy Choices: A Menu Focused on Nutrition and Wellness	The company informs customers about healthy choices and ensures the availability of a healthy menu. The need for consumer education and accurate nutrition labels has grown because of poor nutritional and improper eating habits.	[8, 72]

**Table 4.**  
*Social sustainability principles (made by author).*

waste management problems. Educational signs for customers and employees about saving water and electricity can be small steps with large positive impact on the environment.

The control of food waste and zero waste concepts has gained popularity in recent years in the context of sustainability. It is considered that zero-waste restaurants are not only minimizing food waste but usually implement other sustainable practices, like composting, recycling, using eco-friendly cups and takeaway boxes, etc. (e.g., **Table 5**). Since 2016, Latvia has introduced a ‘Zero Waste’ organization, that with the aim of finding out the demand of potential customers for zero-waste lifestyle products, developing a zero-waste concept store in Latvia and attracting like-minded people to implement the idea. ‘Zero Waste Latvia’ organizes various master classes, conducts lectures to educate the public and companies about environmentally friendly alternatives to polluting habits, services and products, and promotes their adoption in the wider society.

Delivery logistics is important for the food supply chain’s success in delivering products from all over the world to restaurants. It is not in discussion that the delivery process must transform into more sustainable solutions, like reducing the cost of delivery, maintaining delivered food safety and making delivery more efficient. Pollution caused by supply chains can come from manufacturing, distribution and transportation. Smart logistics can be key to that by navigating and managing optimal use of traffic systems and logistics.

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Main sources</b>
Minimizing Environmental Impact: Committed to Sustainable Practices and Resource Conservation	The company has assessed the environmental impact of its operations and implements responsible business practices to save resources and avoid causing significant harm to the environment and people. Restaurant and food service operations can be developed to minimize environmental impact, for example, saving electricity, natural resources, etc.	[73, 74]
Zero-Waste Commitment: Responsible Waste Management and Sustainable Practices	The company implements responsible practices in the management of non-food, food and hazardous waste, educating employees about the full use of food in the food preparation process (zero-waste approach), with the aim of reducing food waste and promoting waste recycling. A restaurant that produces no trash and concentrates on reducing its carbon impact can be identified as a zero-waste restaurant.	[75, 76]
Energy Efficiency First: Promoting Sustainable Use and Conservation in Daily Operations	In the process of producing, preserving, and distributing food a considerable amount of energy is consumed. The company can establish principles for the efficient use and conservation of electricity and other energy sources, inform employees about them and implement the mentioned principles in its daily operations.	[77–79]
Water Conservation: Implementing Efficient Practices for Sustainable Use	The company has established principles for efficient use and conservation of water and has implemented the principles mentioned in its daily operations and encourages employees to contribute to water saving ideas.  To direct dietary and culinary professionals toward more sustainable policies and better environmental practices, it is also critical to gather the evidence about the carbon and water footprints of food.	[79–81]

**Table 5.** *Environmental sustainability principles (made by author).*

Principle	Example	Main sources
Delivery policy, purchase specification and transparency	The company has a defined specific delivery policy or ordering guidelines that encourage the buying of sustainable and locally produced food items which can be verified with appropriate certification and for which the supply chain can be easily traced.	[44, 82]
Knowledgeable employees	Since employees handle food waste and carry out other environmentally friendly actions, it has been noted that a company's ability to successfully adopt an ecological approach depends on its personnel. Employees of the company must be informed about the origin of the products used, their certifications, and the producers, and this information is also readily available to customers.	[53, 83]

**Table 6.**  
*Supply chain sustainability principles (made by author).*

One of the main principles to reach the goal of a sustainable food and beverage industry is knowledgeable employees. Addressing a business's ability to successfully implement and sustainable approach, an important indicator is employee engagement, retention, performance, and well-being (e.g., **Table 6**).

Overall, these principles, if implemented in the action of companies in the Latvian restaurant industry, can become more sustainable, considering economic, social and environmental aspects. Following the trends of sustainability and responsible business, more companies must understand that they need to make their contribution to environmental impact and social impact in order to remain competitive in this industry. The Latvian tourism industry has achieved several recognitions, some of which are well-known across the globe. Hotels in Latvia, such as the Islande hotel and the Radisson Blue Latvia, have received the Green Key certification for tourism sustainability. The restaurant 'Pavāru māja' has received international acclaim for sustainable enterprise thanks to its Michelin Green Clover Star rating. Numerous eateries in the capital of Latvia, including Mazā Terapija, Hercogs Garden Taste, Miitt Coffee, KozyEats, Doctor Chef Food and Store, Cafe M (zero-waste) and others, incorporate sustainable methods into their daily operations.

Sustainable food systems are an essential part of a sustainable society. Catering service providers have the opportunity to comply with sustainability policies, whether issued by the state, local government, individual institutions or business organizations. The development of sustainability dimensions of social, economic and environmental policies should take into account local initiatives and local conditions. A good starting point is to consider sustainability aspects in the restaurant industry, which can provide catering services to customers not only in an economically beneficial way but can also help achieve sustainability goals. These goals are based on healthy people, a stable environment and a strong economy.

## 8. Conclusions

In recent years, consumers are increasingly paying attention to the way food is prepared, for example, whether the requirements of the circular economy are met. Sustainability can have an impact on economics, the environment, and social impact. Unfortunately, the restaurant industry is far from being sustainable, even though more restaurants nowadays are implementing sustainable practices, going to zero-waste practices or reaching for Michelin green stars to show restaurant's sustainable approach.

Research shows that to implement sustainable practices in everyday work, first, it is necessary to have organizational plan by setting up clear goals, engaging employees and monitoring everyday process. Even small steps can make a large impact on the restaurant industry. Educating employees through training sessions about sustainable practices can reduce not only food loss but also save energy, like electricity and water. Simple steps like switching off electricity when leaving the room, closing water, managing overproduction, ordering only how much is necessary, making new recipes from leftovers, etc. can make huge impact for restaurant business being sustainable.

Following HACCP and transparency principles, having fair trade partnerships with suppliers and having transparency in delivery documents and products can not only make the company more sustainable but can also attract customers.

The research has limitations. The analysis is based on Latvian laws as well as the sustainability guidelines that have been suggested and applied by the sector thus far. However, this study might serve as an outline for further research on businesses in the restaurant industry, as well as for analyzing the sustainability of the industry in other nations. Companies can create their own sustainability plan or guidelines to evaluate how sustainable their businesses are based on the sustainability principles identified for this study. Future researchers can expand on this study by using the observation method to examine the sustainability of the restaurant industry in its various sectors using the selected sustainability criteria.

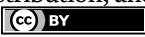
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Section 2

**Innovation, Service Quality,  
and Workforce Transformation**

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## Chapter 5

# Smart Solutions and Digital Spaces for Cultural Heritage

*Stefano Fricano*

### Abstract

The integration of smart solutions and digital technologies has significantly transformed the management, accessibility, and experience of cultural heritage. This chapter explores the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in reshaping cultural narratives, tourism, and urban spaces. Smart tourism, augmented and virtual reality, and geospatial tools enhance visitor engagement while offering new opportunities for heritage preservation. However, challenges such as data privacy, the digital divide, and the risk of cultural commodification require critical examination. The expansion of interactive digital guides and user-generated content fosters participatory heritage experiences, while artificial intelligence and big data optimize resource management. The concept of “phygital” heritage, merging physical and digital elements, reflects the evolving relationship between technology and cultural identity. As digital transformation progresses, interdisciplinary research and inclusive policies are essential to ensuring the ethical and sustainable application of smart technologies in cultural heritage management.

**Keywords:** smart tourism, digital heritage, augmented reality, cultural identity, smart cities

### 1. Introduction

In the expanded yet paradoxically confined space of contemporary times, new information and communication technologies have played a crucial role in globalization dynamics. On the one hand, they have made it possible to share information, ideas, languages, imaginations, and worldviews globally. On the other hand, they have served as useful tools for conveying specific identities, virtually reproducing places and cultures, and projecting their images outward. The spatial-temporal compression of the present era, large migratory flows, and the spread of the internet have challenged the stable coherence of place [1, 2]. Increasingly, new technologies are tasked with circulating identity representations based on cultural heritage specifics. Digital solutions contribute to creating spaces that resemble reality, effectively responding to the need for a stable anchor, that is, the idea of place as a safe space rooted in local heritage. In an increasingly urbanized world [3], smart solutions are offered as tools to promote the local dimension as the foundation of city branding [4, 5]. Urban images produced and reproduced through new technologies are primarily intended to capture

global flows of temporary city users, seeking places shaped as authentic through a heritage presented as intact and unspoiled. Staged authenticity, theorized by MacCannel in 1973, is effectively produced through digital technologies, which reconstruct environments and portions of history that aspire to reflect presumed original models [6]. Cultural heritage declared intact and authentic by UNESCO, clearly lends itself to these new demands, which interpret and re-signify the tourist space for commercial purposes. It is no coincidence that cultural heritage and tourism are increasingly intertwined fields of application for digital solutions and are therefore considered jointly by scientific literature [7]. Numerous studies focusing on specific technologies, such as augmented or virtual reality, QR codes, and smart objects, have demonstrated the central role of digital tools not only in enhancing and protecting heritage spaces and elements [8] but also in promoting tourism through improved access to cultural heritage [9]. The Smart City has been variously defined, and this proliferation can be considered an epistemological limitation [7].

Despite this fluidity of meaning, many scholars agree on recognizing the main focus of the concept on the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as drivers of sustainable urban development [10]. Technologies are considered a key element in ensuring competitiveness and a more sustainable future for cities, based on urban performance in relation to six dimensions: economy, environment, mobility, governance, people, and social well-being. According to the European Commission's definition, a Smart City is a place where traditional networks and services are made more efficient through the use of digital solutions. To be smart, a city must also perform well in relation to transport networks, water supply, waste disposal, building lighting and heating, citizen engagement and well-being, and public space safety.

Similarly, Smart Tourism has been associated by Molz with the following characteristics: connectivity through web-based applications with localization capabilities, the role of tourists as co-producers of destination content, enhancement of experiences through new technologies such as augmented reality, connection and interaction with local communities and other tourists at the same destination, and the enhancement of social and environmental sustainability [11]. Both the concept of Smart City and Smart Tourism include multiple dimensions but primarily refer to the enhancement of resources through technologies. The spread of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has profoundly transformed conventional tourism, leading to the emergence of new forms of tourism that differ from mass tourism in terms of modes, times, and places. Examples include relational tourism [12, 13] and sensory tourism [14, 15], which offer less standardized and repeatable experiences. While digital technologies offer numerous benefits for tourism and cultural heritage, it is crucial to recognize the potential drawbacks of excessive digitalization. One significant concern is the exclusion of certain groups. Digitalization could inadvertently marginalize individuals who lack access to digital technologies or who are not digitally literate. This digital divide can create barriers for older adults, economically disadvantaged populations, and those living in regions with limited internet connectivity. As a result, these groups may be unable to fully participate in or benefit from digital heritage experiences, leading to a less inclusive approach to cultural preservation and tourism. Another potential drawback is the homogenization of the tourist experience. The widespread use of digital technologies can lead to more standardized and less authentic interactions with cultural heritage. For instance, virtual tours and augmented reality applications often present curated and idealized versions of heritage sites, which may not accurately reflect the site's true character or the local

culture. This can result in tourists having similar experiences regardless of the destination, diminishing the uniqueness and authenticity that are central to cultural heritage tourism. Moreover, the reliance on digital tools can overshadow the importance of physical presence and direct engagement with heritage sites. While virtual experiences can enhance accessibility, they cannot fully replicate the sensory and emotional connections that come from being physically present in a location. This shift towards digital experiences may reduce the incentive for tourists to visit sites in person, potentially impacting local economies that rely on tourism. Additionally, the focus on digital solutions can lead to the commodification of cultural heritage. Heritage sites may be marketed primarily for their digital appeal, rather than their historical and cultural significance. This commercial approach can undermine the integrity of cultural heritage, transforming it into a product rather than a valuable and meaningful aspect of human history.

Despite this, these technologies are widely used in the tourism industry, giving rise to the concept of Smart Tourism [16]. This term refers to the use of the internet, mobile device software, and related formats, such as augmented reality, for data collection and providing support services to all stakeholders of a tourist destination. The prefix “smart” refers to specific technological characteristics identified as connectivity and intelligence [17].

Smart Tourism focuses on using advanced technologies to improve the overall tourist experience and the quality of life for residents in tourist destinations. This includes the use of mobile apps, augmented reality, and data analytics to provide personalized and efficient services to tourists, while also promoting sustainable tourism practices and enhancing local community engagement [17–19]. Smart Heritage refers to the integration of smart city principles with cultural heritage management. It combines the autonomous capabilities of smart technologies, such as IoT and AI, with the contextual interpretation of historical and cultural elements. This approach aims to enhance the preservation, accessibility, and engagement of heritage sites through innovative technological solutions. Digital Heritage, on the other hand, encompasses resources that are either created digitally or converted into digital formats to be preserved as part of our common heritage. This includes digital archives, virtual reconstructions, and other digital representations of cultural artifacts and sites. The primary goal is to ensure the longevity and accessibility of cultural heritage in the digital age.

## **2. Smart tourism and the digitalization of places: Digital heritage**

The proliferation of new technologies and the rise of new tourism forms have been identified as key elements in the transformation of tourism [20]. This change is considered substantial and irreversible, to the extent that some scholars have theorized the era of post-tourism [21, 22]. Additionally, to denote the multitude of apps and digital tools for the tourism sector, the definition of Smart Tourism Technologies (STT) has been recently introduced [23–25]. These include the Internet, social media, mobile devices, virtual and augmented reality, digital guides, gamification, 3D modeling and printing, the Internet of Things, QR codes, etc. [26]. The increasingly widespread use of mobile technologies, connected to smartphones or other portable devices, has significantly influenced the development of smart tourism and has been extensively explored in scientific literature, which can be classified into three types: studies focusing on the consumer perspective, those addressing the technological

aspect, and those examining the supply perspective [27–29]. Some of these studies, focused on mobile technologies and applications, share the goal of providing research directions and data useful to tourism supply actors to help them achieve competitive advantages for destinations.

It is widely recognized that, through ICT, tourists or visitors can enhance their experience of a destination, while tourism service providers can benefit from better resource management. To achieve these objectives, numerous applications promote virtual interactions with the cultural heritage of tourist destinations. Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality are among the most studied technologies and are generally used in the field of cultural heritage to improve accessibility by overcoming environmental and/or user limitations [30, 31]. They offer the possibility of narrating spaces and history through immersion in a virtual world, the overlay of virtual elements with the real world, or using both possibilities simultaneously (Mixed Reality). Applications can employ gamification techniques to present themselves more attractively through user interaction [32] or use biophysical data to investigate the effects of a Virtual Reality experience, which can enable the formation of lasting memories, for example, by offering the user unusual perspectives [33]. Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality can be used to explore urban environments and are widely employed in museums, where AR had its first application in 2001 [32, 34].

The technologies available in this field are numerous and varied, and they have been categorized into those for indoor use, such as multimedia stations, touchscreens, virtual tour software, etc., and those for outdoor use, such as websites, social networks, databases, and online archives [34]. Current technological developments offer new mobile tools that increasingly blur this distinction, as content can be accessed both online and on-site. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the proliferation of interconnections between studies on various types of smartness and those on cultural heritage has led to an expanding reflection on the concept of Smart Heritage [35]. This recent definition highlights the need to consider the growing autonomy of technologies from human intervention and develops notions that previously expressed the relationship between technology and heritage. For example, Digital Heritage was defined by UNESCO as the set of resources created digitally or converted into digital format to be preserved as common heritage [36].

In scientific literature, the connection between digital solutions and heritage experience has been explored through terms like Digital Heritage, Augmented Heritage, and Virtual Heritage, summarizing the increasingly pervasive role of digital technology in the enjoyment of cultural heritage. New technologies are believed to offer dynamic and participatory heritage experiences through augmented reality [9], influence visitors' intentions to visit heritage sites [37], and foster positive and engaging experiences through potential applications of the Internet of Things, which connects objects in a smart environment [8]. Given the new potentials offered by technology, the connection between digital solutions and heritage experience has been further explored in scientific literature, leading to the recent definition of Smart Heritage. The new paradigm, also referred to as Smart Cultural Heritage, has solidified in recent years as an interdisciplinary discourse with multiple fields of application [38]. It was defined in 2021 as the convergence between the Smart City and heritage disciplines, intertwining the autonomous and automatic capabilities and innovations of smart technologies with the contextual and subjective interpretation of the past [39].

The convergence of technology and heritage is now widely recognized, prompting the need to formulate new expressions to explore emerging opportunities. The autonomy attributed to technologies suggests that they may increasingly play a significant

role in uncovering alternative heritage narratives, potentially challenging authorized discourses and reshaping the imaginary geographies of places. In the context of tourism, future scenarios, as envisioned by Urry and Larsen [22], include the potential for new technologies to mitigate the consequences of excessive tourist mobility. They hope that software and digital experiences can more effectively replace physical travel with virtual journeys, while the internet can reveal the pleasures of proximity and promote a local, de-globalized perspective focused on nearby attractions rather than exotic, distant ones. From the era of mobility to spaces congested by tourism, new technologies have made virtually reproduced places and heritage accessible, mobilizing objects, cultures, images, representations, and meanings. Today's digital tools are smarter, offering increasingly individualized, flexible, and interactive products that can directly impact the territories and people involved. The outcomes will depend on how innovation is interpreted and translated into the decision-making processes of the actors involved. These and other challenges will shape the future of digital solutions, cultural heritage, and tourism, and their interrelationships. The ongoing evolution of technology will continue to influence how heritage is experienced and interpreted, offering new ways to engage with and understand cultural assets. As digital tools become more sophisticated, they will provide opportunities for more immersive and participatory heritage experiences, influencing visitor intentions and fostering positive, engaging interactions with cultural sites. The integration of technologies like the Internet of Things will further enhance these experiences by connecting objects in smart environments and creating dynamic and interactive heritage spaces. New technologies have profoundly transformed traditional systems of protection, management, and enhancement of cultural heritage, as well as the ways in which culture is disseminated [40].

In a world characterized by intense global flows of people, capital, information, and images, and an unprecedented centrality of culture in territorial development trajectories, digital technology helps shape heritage as a resource. Since leveraging the cultural and creative potential of a tourist destination is considered crucial for economic growth [41], smart solutions position territories in the global arena, promoting selected heritage elements as symbols of success, ideally recognized by international organizations like UNESCO.

Some important and recognized examples are as follows:

1. *Louvre Museum's Augmented Reality (AR) Exhibits*: The Louvre Museum in Paris uses AR to overlay digital content onto physical artifacts. This technology provides interactive and educational experiences, allowing visitors to see detailed reconstructions and contextual information about the exhibits. For instance, AR can animate historical objects, offering a dynamic way to learn about art and history [42].
2. *Smart Dubai Initiative*: Dubai's Smart Dubai project integrates various smart technologies to enhance urban living and cultural heritage. Mobile applications like DubaiNow provide residents and tourists with access to a wide range of services, including cultural events and heritage site information. This initiative aims to create a seamless and efficient urban experience while promoting the city's rich cultural heritage [43].
3. *Natural History Museum of London's AR Applications*: The Natural History Museum in London employs AR to bring exhibits to life. Visitors can use their

smartphones or tablets to view animated versions of fossils and other artifacts, providing a more engaging and informative experience. This use of AR helps to make learning about natural history more accessible and enjoyable [44].

4. *GIFT City in India*: Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City) in India is an example of a smart city that incorporates cultural heritage into its development. The city features centralized district cooling and automated solid waste collection systems, which contribute to sustainable urban living. Additionally, GIFT City promotes local culture and heritage through various smart initiatives, ensuring that technological advancements support cultural preservation [45].

The application of technology to heritage and tourism is increasingly pervasive, impacting the construction of contemporary spaces. The effects of new technologies on tourism lead to profound transformations in the involved territories. The introduction of digital technologies, particularly mobile ones, has had significant outcomes for both demand and supply [46]. Regarding demand, temporary city users can experience urban spaces differently than in the recent past, correlating them with digital information available online and through mobile applications [9]. Technologies play a crucial role in the travel planning phase, shaping the destination's image and expectations, during the trip, in selecting stops and acquiring information about places and products, and after the trip, when digital space hosts various forms of experience sharing (reviews, posts, etc.). Digital solutions enhance destination credibility, convey user opinions, influence purchasing decisions and demand for goods, and contribute to forming the reputation of offered products and services. Like the web, tourism has been defined as 2.0 to highlight its transition from a passive to a participatory, shared, and personalized experience [46].

This form of tourism relies on digital word-of-mouth, enabling users to share content in real time while experiencing it and afterwards benefiting other potential visitors. The conveyed information enriches a spontaneous database that serves as an informative source for future potential tourists and impacts brand reputation [47]. New technologies have transformed tourist demand, altering access and information transmission methods. Quantitative and qualitative methods have been employed to analyze and relate this vast amount of digital data, offering useful directions to supply actors. Sentiment analysis, for example, is used to identify and extract opinions from texts produced in the tourism sector [48]. Online territorial narratives can be analyzed as micro-narratives to interpret territorial perceptions, senses of place, urban images, and imaginaries [49]. The systematization of big data, populating the web and produced through mobile devices, attracts the interest of various tourism supply chain actors, keen to intercept and meet consumer needs. Regarding supply, new technologies serve as useful tools primarily to reflect and project the destination's image. If the tourist space is primarily an image [50], digital solutions are now its privileged vehicle. In cyberspace, sequences of stimuli, sensations, memories, and meanings that define city perceptions are configured. Image transmission, primarily entrusted to new media, plays a central role in the process of choosing and purchasing tourist experiences and products. Strategic use of technologies by supply actors is therefore highly sought after and is a subject of scientific reflection. Most studies emphasize the positive effects of digital solutions, including the ability for users to solve problems, share experiences, or archive memories more effectively [51]. Many studies have shown that the use of technology, particularly mobile devices, increases tourist

satisfaction by improving their overall experience. The impact of technologies on tourist motivation has also been widely explored.

Among the most investigated issues are the role of destination image in determining tourist behavior and how perceptions of presence and authenticity can influence visitor choices [52]. New technologies are also seen as a solution to the negative effects of mass tourism. The undesirable consequences of tourism in popular destinations or protected areas, such as those included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, are considered a particularly urgent issue. A solution is found in mobile technologies, increasingly used for better management of visitor flows and the impacts of tourism on heritage and places. Excessive tourist flow, exceeding a destination's carrying capacity, can generate immediate problems (such as overcrowding, increased crime, noise, environmental damage, etc.), structural transformations (such as gentrification processes, conversion of buildings and economic activities, deterioration in service provision, etc.), appropriation of urban space for tourist accommodations, and cultural commodification [53]. The perception of these consequences can also generate conflicts between the local population and tourism supply actors. Given the relevance of the issue in destination management, studies proposing various governance strategies and alternative ways of enjoying excessively frequented destinations and points of interest are increasingly current. Among the solutions offered by new technologies, recommender systems are considered particularly effective in directing visitors to less crowded areas by providing personalized information tailored to users' specific preferences and constraints [54].

Mobile applications, with their geolocation features, offer significant benefits to both tourists and destination managers. Tourists can use these apps to choose places to visit, access information on opening hours, and check crowd levels, while managers can use them to better manage destinations and attractions. One of the central themes in scientific and public debates is the co-creation of the tourist experience. Studies have shown the importance of adopting smart solutions to promote direct interaction and active participation of tourists. Digital guides and apps like Google Maps Reviews and izi.TRAVEL allow tourists to contribute content, enriching the narratives of the places they visit. These platforms enable users to leave reviews, share experiences, and provide valuable insights for future visitors [55, 56]. Gamification can also enhance tourist mobility and consumption by offering new opportunities and benefits, such as increasing the time spent at points of interest (POIs) and balancing tourist distribution within a destination [57]. From the supply perspective, there is extensive reflection on the innovative functionalities of digital technologies. Implementing these technologies consciously is considered necessary to achieve competitive advantages in tourism and hospitality. While the positive effects of smart solutions for the enjoyment and management of tourist destinations have been widely explored, literature has also discussed the critical aspects and negative outcomes of these technologies. Privacy issues and risks associated with digital tools have been highlighted as relevant for tourism management [17]. Other studies have focused on social divides related to varying availability of infrastructure and technological knowledge, which manifest as fundamentally geographical fractures. This perspective challenges the presumed democratization of resources and tools in the era of globalized communications. Disparities are evident in two dimensions: the digital divide, referring to an unequal provision of resources and infrastructure, and the knowledge divide, referring to cognitive gaps and poor digital literacy (also termed digibetism or digital illiteracy), which hinder conscious use of the internet and full awareness of smart solutions' potential [58].

The spatial dimensions of social inequalities effectively reveal the potential negative effects and underlying mechanisms of new technologies. The power geometries produced by new technologies, hidden in the apparent obviousness of the visible and the coherent narratives, have been a subject of geographical literature. The study of geographies produced through digital means has highlighted the importance of multiple voices and visions in spatial narratives. Since the introduction of the first computers, digital geographic knowledge has been of interest to the discipline, which has also aimed to identify and map digital geographies, the spatialities of technologies [59], and examine the geographies produced by digital means, the transformations of everyday geographies [60]. Today, digital technology has drastically transformed both the production of geographic knowledge and space itself, making the establishment of the specific domain of digital geography conceivable. An interdisciplinary perspective is considered more useful for examining the multiple ways in which digital technology can mediate the constructions of spaces and knowledge [59]. The role of new technologies in narrating places and heritage elements has significant spatial implications. While new media convey dominant representations proposed by urban elites for local users and visitors, they can also produce alternative images, often dissonant and distant from the global city narrative. These counter-geographies can challenge and even subvert dominant images. Positioned beyond the shared discourse, they give voice and visibility to subjects excluded from the mainstream and to places erased or forgotten in the selective memory process [61].

### **3. The integration of physical and digital reality in cultural heritage**

New technologies offer multiple uses that manifest in the virtual dimension but have real outcomes in physical space. The performative action of digital tools and their role in producing city images and visions require further reflection. The effects of new technologies impact not only tourist demand and supply but also entire territories. Far from being passive subjects, these territories actively engage through all their actors and relationships. In this network, smart solutions have revolutionized geographical practices and world geographies, configuring new spatialities and conceptions of places.

Mobile applications, platforms, and digital guides have introduced new communication modes, and the possibility of experiencing virtual and augmented realities has created new geographies, transforming travel experiences and reconfiguring destinations. Places are endowed with new attributes through new technologies, and digital space increasingly resembles a social space, a plaza where relationships multiply. On the interconnected threshold between real and virtual, places become denser, and traditional maps can no longer be considered exhaustive. Technological solutions increasingly blur the boundaries between 'real' geographical worlds and those imagined and digitally simulated. Two transformative events have played a decisive role in this reconfiguration. Firstly, the introduction of mobile devices and the connectivity between smart objects have altered the relationship between digital objects, subjects, and spaces. PCs, once static and separate from the user, have been replaced by elements integrated ubiquitously and invisibly into broader geographical environments, constantly interacting with extended and enhanced bodies [8, 62, 63].

Secondly, the spread of immersive technologies has enabled access to virtual or augmented geographical spaces through digitally simulated bodies (avatars), in a process of overlaying with the real world that is set to intensify. These new forms of

mediated interaction with places have transformed the organization and use of physical space. Through the rigor of proposed representations, which aim to be increasingly close to the physical experience of space, the meanings attributed to places by those with the power to imagine are made visible and obvious. These winning images are conveyed and projected externally by new technologies, and the effects of this process are tangible. Technologies are both means and messages, reflecting specific expectations, purposes, and visions that shape spaces. Those selected to be included in narratives mediated by digital solutions can be transformed for tourist use. Digital guides, in particular, orient users in choosing spaces to traverse and transform, the time to dedicate, and the meanings to attribute. These applications guide tourists and visitors on where to go, what to see, and how to interpret places [64]. However, thanks to the interaction possibilities offered by new technologies, users are no longer passive consumers but can contribute to the representation of the place. The new function of guides accessible via the web or mobile devices is not just to tell a story but to offer stories to tell. Travelers contribute to the narrative by sharing comments, photos, reviews, or other georeferenced content in real-time or after leaving the destination, creating the place and expectations for other tourists. Platforms like OpenStreetMap play a significant role in digital cultural heritage by allowing volunteers worldwide to contribute geographic data. This collaborative approach enhances the knowledge and resilience of communities, making heritage more accessible and interactive. This opportunity represents the main innovation of currently available solutions. Traditional tourist guides constructed the destination by establishing precise discourses, prescribing the tourist's movements within it and ways of enjoyment, preparing their gaze to observe selected spaces and indicating the best viewpoints for the cognitive appropriation of the place.

The storytelling proposed by digital guides is explicitly linked to the co-creation of content by all potential users of the applications, including the inhabitants of the narrated places. Participation is a key theme in scientific and public discourses related to these technologies, as well as in urban planning processes and UNESCO's actions concerning cultural heritage. The current centrality of participation generates tangible effects and deserves attention, although it should be critically assessed. Participation cannot be understood as actual equality, as it is not universal but bound to the position subjects occupy in space. The term 'co-creation' is more suitable to define a collaborative project that does not exclude the purposes and goals of its proponents but aims to give voice to subjects normally excluded from the narrative of places. Involving other actors in the proposals for enjoying tourist destinations would transform tourists, residents, and city users in general from mere consumers to producers of meaning: prosumers.

The resources co-produced by this new type of actor in tourism take many forms and are increasingly widespread. Digital guides for cultural heritage enjoyment were initially adopted in the early 1990s to replace traditional museum tours, later used for outdoor visits, and saw the greatest boost with the introduction of Global Positioning Systems (GPS). These systems, capable of identifying the absolute position of people and places, have had multiple applications in tourism: transmitting information about points of interest and tourist services to users on-site [65] or mapping tourist movements for predictive and analytical purposes for destination management and marketing. Location information can also be used to create or modify maps. Georeferenced content is increasingly produced by users and shared voluntarily, uncoordinated, and not necessarily professionally. Volunteered Geographic Information allows online maps to be implemented with various types of geographical information, including explicitly subjective and emotional ones. Thanks to web 2.0

developments, this specific type of user-generated content has revolutionized how maps are created and used. Collaborative mapping, co-created online by users, has been linked to the origin of neogeography, an evolution of the discipline based on the voluntary sharing of spatial information by non-expert users, also defined as geography for the masses. Creating content for implementing and personalizing online maps represents a particular form of crowdsourcing, a term used to indicate “methods of data creation, where large groups of users who are not organized centrally generate content that is shared” [66].

The proliferation of software enabling the co-production of spatial data raises numerous issues regarding the quality and accuracy of disseminated geographical information, privacy, copyright, and access limitations. These challenges complicate the uncritical acceptance of the democratization process associated with these tools. However, the impact of opening up the ability to create, manage, and share spatial data to a broader audience cannot be denied. Geo-social networks like Facebook Places, Foursquare, and Gowalla increase the presence of user-associated content on the web, exchanged in real-time within new social spaces. Google My Maps, introduced in 2005, allows the creation and sharing of personalized maps through specific software like GMap Creator or MapTube, and open-source geographic projects like OpenStreetMap and Wikimapia. These technologies also enable the geolocation of heritage elements and other points of interest, finding extensive applications in the cultural and tourism sectors. Alongside numerous digital guides developed for museums and libraries, various applications offer city itineraries that provide new ways to experience spaces. These digital solutions offer forms of urban navigation that can be co-produced by users. Among the most innovative guides are those that incorporate sensory tourism into the digital space [49].

In the era of globalization, which has leveled the tourist experience and revolutionized perceptions of distance and the past, the search for elsewhere and otherness is found in the emotions associated with places, making travel experiences unique and subjective. Several guides have been developed to narrate places through the voices of their users. Proposed itineraries are based on perceptions of cities, personal and collective stories, and emotions related to places by residents and visitors, converging into sensory maps. Experiencing the emotions that places can transmit seems to be the most urgent need of contemporary tourism, which digital guides aim to address increasingly effectively. These tools are designed not only to narrate and allow emotional experiences of lived territories but also to offer sensory experiences of digitally reproduced places. Virtual reality enables increasingly realistic traversals of digital territories without requiring the user’s physical presence. Thus, travel can consist of an alternative experience of the place, aiming to engage the senses just as effectively.

However, augmented reality is where the most vibrant initiatives and interests in heritage and tourism converge. Mobile apps are considered ideal tools for applying augmented reality, offering new challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, real integration of these technologies into territories, capable of enhancing local resources not only for tourism but also for effective and efficient governance, seems distant. Exploring digital solutions for cultural heritage reveals a renewed focus on authenticity, perceived as a key value and tool to enhance the attractiveness of places. Authentic heritage experiences are now a guiding principle for offerings, a cornerstone for international institutions, and a central theme in heritage studies. Authenticity is essential for a site’s inclusion in world heritage lists, yet the concept has sparked numerous debates highlighting its complexity. The shift from an essentialist to a more constructed and situated notion of authenticity has influenced both scientific

literature and UNESCO documentation. Geographical studies increasingly examine how specific conceptions of authenticity are tied to the places where knowledge is generated and consumed. Skepticism towards a universal narrative has led scholars to adopt a postmodern notion of authenticity, termed post-authenticity, rooted in specific sociocultural contexts and values.

This perspective has also been gradually adopted by institutions, with the UNESCO World Heritage Committee outlining its stance in ongoing revision documents. A significant outcome of the theoretical discussion on authenticity is the London Charter for the digital visualization of cultural heritage. Proposed in 2006 and updated since the Charter establishes principles to ensure intellectually and technically rigorous digital heritage visualization. Key terms include intellectual integrity, rigor, reliability, and scientific authority, emphasizing the importance of transparent research sources and their potential ideological, historical, and esthetic influences. For heritage providers, authenticity is an indispensable value, with its boundaries still being defined. This quality is crucial for consumers evaluating their heritage experience and seeking an authentic connection with the past.

Consequently, providers strive to create competitive products presented as sincere and realistic. New technologies offer unprecedented opportunities in this direction. Recent digital solutions enable immersion in a fully virtual world, overlaying virtual elements in the real world, or visualizing both dimensions simultaneously. Virtual reality, augmented reality, and mixed reality offer knowledge experiences compatible with visitors' conceptions of the past. Conformity to personal images is an urgent need for consumers and a global competitive imperative for companies. The renewed interest in authentic tourist experiences is reflected in the significant increase in scientific publications on the topic, many employing quantitative methods to measure visitors' perceptions of this central factor. Given the attraction potential of perceived authentic experiences, new digital tourism practices exclude fictional elements. Although some studies show that authenticity perception is not necessarily tied to the correct geographical context, and digital formats can be free from the user's physical presence, most tourism technologies do not use fictional storytelling to attribute meanings to places [65]. Digital guides, for example, often draw on historians' expertise to make past knowledge accessible, raise awareness of real heritage importance, and narrate the true, official, and winning story to a broad audience.

Digital solutions make the authenticity of cultural heritage experiences visible and seemingly obvious, challenging rigid spatial divisions. Real and virtual overlap in the multidimensional present, reflecting and reproducing societal and power structures. Tangible world characteristics are sublimated in the virtual dimension through increasingly sophisticated tools. Maps have expanded material support possibilities through digital connections, enabling access to audio, textual, and visual content, georeferenced data production by users, and sharing of territorial experiences and knowledge. The term "phygital" has been proposed to conceptualize the integration of physical and digital, aiming for mutual enrichment. Digital technologies offer benefits such as access to vast content, personalized information based on user characteristics and constraints, and immersive digital space experiences that can engage the senses credibly. Physical reality characteristics, like tangible form and spatial context, provide undeniable advantages for cultural heritage, facilitating understanding and making experiences more intuitive and memorable. Tangible User Interfaces (TUIs), such as 3D replicas and touchscreen devices, are increasingly common in cultural contexts, with immersive exhibitions often including interactive elements. Physicality thus makes the experience more convincing, intuitive, effective, and consequently attractive.

## **4. Conclusion**

The integration of smart technologies into cultural heritage management has profoundly transformed the way heritage is preserved, experienced, and interpreted. The paper explores how Information and Communication Technologies, including augmented and virtual reality, geospatial tools, and artificial intelligence, have redefined cultural narratives, urban spaces, and tourism dynamics. These digital advancements offer immersive, participatory, and enhanced accessibility to heritage sites, making cultural heritage more interactive and engaging for a global audience. The emergence of “phygital” heritage, blending physical and digital elements, exemplifies how technological innovations continue to shape cultural identity and heritage experiences.

Smart tourism has been a focal point in the evolution of digital heritage, leveraging mobile applications, location-based services, and user-generated content to provide tailored and dynamic experiences. These technologies empower tourists to co-create content, share experiences, and navigate cultural sites more efficiently, contributing to a richer and more personalized engagement with heritage. Virtual reality and augmented reality applications, in particular, allow users to explore historical reconstructions and immersive storytelling, enhancing their understanding and appreciation of cultural sites.

However, despite the vast potential of smart technologies in cultural heritage, challenges remain. Issues such as data privacy, the digital divide, and cultural commodification require a critical assessment to ensure that technological interventions serve ethical and inclusive purposes. The reliance on digital tools also raises concerns about the authenticity of cultural representations and the sustainability of heritage management in the face of rapid technological advancements. The adoption of smart solutions must be guided by interdisciplinary research and inclusive policies that prioritize cultural integrity and community involvement.

Moreover, digital technologies have reshaped urban landscapes by influencing city branding and heritage tourism. Smart cities integrate ICT to optimize urban resource management while enhancing the visibility and appeal of cultural landmarks. By providing real-time data, interactive guides, and gamified experiences, digital solutions help mitigate over-tourism and promote responsible travel practices. Additionally, the increasing use of big data analytics supports the efficient management of visitor flows and heritage conservation efforts, ensuring that cultural sites remain accessible and well-preserved for future generations.

The concept of Smart Heritage has emerged as a critical discourse in contemporary cultural management, reflecting the convergence of technology and heritage studies. As digital heritage evolves, so does the need for sustainable and adaptive strategies that accommodate technological progress while safeguarding cultural authenticity. The role of participatory heritage, where visitors and local communities contribute to heritage interpretation, underscores the shift towards a more inclusive and dynamic approach to cultural preservation. Crowdsourced mapping, social media engagement, and interactive digital storytelling are pivotal in fostering collective heritage stewardship.

So, the intersection of smart technologies and cultural heritage presents both opportunities and challenges. While digital innovations enhance heritage accessibility, engagement, and management, they must be implemented responsibly to ensure ethical and sustainable outcomes. As cultural heritage continues to be shaped by digital transformation, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and inclusive governance will be key to preserving its significance and authenticity. The future of smart heritage lies in balancing technological advancements with cultural responsibility,

ensuring that digital tools serve as facilitators rather than disruptors of heritage experiences. Through thoughtful integration, smart solutions can continue to enrich cultural heritage while maintaining its historical and social relevance in an increasingly digital world.


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## Chapter 6

# A Conceptual Review of Hospitality Restaurant Service Quality Management: A Recipe for Hotel Profitability, Growth, and Sustainability

*Were Simon O*

### Abstract

This book chapter presents an in-depth literature analysis of quality service with a specific focus on the food and beverage service sector. This is based on the current role of service quality in the competitiveness of organizations, not only within the hospitality industry but in the larger services industry. Much emphasis has been laid on customer-employee related efforts toward ensuring quality food and beverage service delivery, and thus enhancing customer relationships between restaurant personnel and clientele, which definitely yields customer satisfaction and retention. First, the chapter presents key interpretations, explanations as well as the applicable customized models in the field of food and beverage service quality for a profound and better understanding of the concept under appraisal. Further, the chapter identifies, consolidates, and elucidates the main customer food service quality control approaches into three categories including tipping, on-the-spot customer complaints, and customer satisfaction surveys. Thus, the chapter not only discusses but also proposes the application of key strategies in hotel restaurant operations to ensure quality food and beverage service. These proposed approaches have one thing in common: a recipe for profitability, growth, and sustainability of the entire hospitality industry in the long run.

**Keywords:** restaurant service, service quality, quality control, service management, service recovery

### 1. Introduction

From a global perspective, the hospitality industry is known to provide two products, which are accommodation as well as food and beverages. Thus, hospitality clients will always patronize hotels with the desire either to sleep or to have a meal in the restaurant [1]. However, there are myriad other supplementary services offered within hotels, depending on numerous factors. The food and beverage products of

the hospitality industry can be accessed by hospitality clientele from restaurants and bars, either being part of the entire hotel facility (dependent) or in isolation (independent). Originally, the food and beverage industry was designed to provide a trip in an eccentric city, a place to enjoy a meal and drink, provided in a decent manner, or at least palatable and nontoxic to consume. In recent years, however, the restaurant industry has grown, both in concepts and menus to incorporate the most diverse and complex offers. Moreover, that growth has resulted to the spread of restaurants to more and more locations including multinational companies, making restaurant food service not only readily but also easily accessible. Numerous efficacious chain restaurants have taken on well-known brand names to which travelers are accustomed.

Davis et al. [1] allude that the provision of food and beverages away from home forms a substantial part of the activities of the hospitality industry and, indeed, the economy as a whole. In terms of performance, though, the accommodation section of the hotel is known to yield more revenue, followed by the food and beverage section, and the banqueting section in that order [2]. Nonetheless, the contribution of the food and beverage business to the sustainability of the larger hotel industry cannot be underestimated.

Notwithstanding, food and beverage operations are characterized by their diversity, including private and public sector establishments, and range from small independently owned and operated units to large multinational corporations managing global brands, and from prison catering to catering in the most luxurious hotels in the world [2]. In fact, today, many hotel and restaurant chains, have spread exponentially across the world. It is never a surprise to find Hilton hotels, for example, in the United States, Europe, Africa, Asia, and many other parts of the world. Even the 'local' brands are no longer local as they may be found across the borders of a number of countries on the one hand, or alternatively, many outlets of the same brand operating within the same Country. As such, there is increased concentration of hotel and restaurant brands, and thus a recipe for stiff competition. According to Parasuraman et al. [3, 4], today's competition is differentiated by service quality. This means that hotel that invests well in their service protocols are well placed on a global basis in terms of completion. Service quality in the food and beverage sector, and more importantly in the hotel restaurant sections, therefore, remains an important area of focus.

Generally, managing hospitality service quality particularly demands that managers need to be conversant with two things: (i) the way in which customers evaluate quality; and (ii) how to manage quality in a systematic manner [5]. This book chapter, therefore, sought to explain how restaurant clientele judge the quality of food and beverage by looking at different ways in which quality can be defined, supported with models and theories that can help in making this clear in different contexts. The second aspect of the focus of the chapter is to examine ways to manage quality in the restaurant section of the hotel industry.

## **2. A general overview of service quality in the hospitality industry**

It is common for hotel guests to complain over various service-related failures during their stay. Service failure encounters may include rude front-of-the-house staff, below-standards service, sluggishness in service, poor accommodation, poor cleanliness and hygiene, cold food, poorly cooked and/or prepared food orders, poor hotel location and associated difficulties [5, 6]. Even though guest complaints may reinforce the service failures encountered within the hotel, and therefore make the

hotel staff embarrassed, it is an important avenue through which the hotel can collect valuable feedback for purposes of continuous improvement. Thus, guest complaints not only point to the areas of service failure but also help the hotel to adjust the methodology of service delivery in order to satisfy its clientele base. In fact, today's competition among not only hospitality players, but all service organizations is based on quality [3]. Nonetheless, Parasuraman et al. [4] conducted a study on service research, and hence came up with 10 lessons on offer. These lessons have been found essential for improving hotel service quality, and by extrapolation may be applied across the general service industries as well [4].

1. *Listening*. Hospitality professionals are required to comprehend what customers really want through continuous learning about the expectations and perceptions of customers as well as potential customers. This could be achieved through a service quality information system, among many other methodologies, depending on the policy and status of the hotel facility.
2. *Reliability*. Reliability is one of the pillars of the service quality model. It constitutes one of the tenets under the five dimensions of service quality according to Parasuraman et al. [4]. As the single most important dimension of service quality, reliability must be a service priority.
3. *Basic service*. Service companies, including hotels, must deliver the basics and do what they are supposed to do: Keep promises, use common sense, listen to customers, keep customers informed, and be determined to deliver value to customers.
4. *Service design*. It is an obligation for the organization's personnel, both managerial and non-managerial working in service organizations to develop a holistic view of the service while managing its many details.
5. *Recovery*. In order to attract the attention of management and service personnel in general, customers who encounter a service problem, are encouraged to complain. Nonetheless, the service organization has to make it easy for them to do so, respond quickly and personally, and develop a problem-resolution system.
6. *Surprising customers*. Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithmal proposes that reliability is the most important dimension in meeting customers' service expectations [4]. However, process dimensions proposed by Parasuraman et al. [4] including assurance, responsiveness, and empathy are known to be the most important in exceeding customer expectations. This may include surprising hotel customers with happy hours, special occasion's celebrations like birthdays, discounts, courtesy, competence, commitment, and understanding [4].
7. *Fair play*. Generally, service organizations including hotels and restaurants must make special efforts to be fair and to demonstrate fairness to their customers and employees.
8. *Teamwork*. Teamwork is not debatable within the hospitality industry, both in and between departments. This is what enables large service organizations including hotels, to deliver service with care and attentiveness by improving employee motivation and capabilities.

9. *Employee research*. Hospitality professionals and, precisely, marketers should conduct research with employees to reveal why service quality failures occur and what these companies must do to solve problems. Research is the tool that may be used by organizations, including hotels, to breath 'new life' in their service delivery loop.
10. *Servant leadership*. Quality hotel service comes from inspired hotel leadership throughout the organization; from excellent service system design; from the effective use of information and technology; and from a slow-to-change, invisible, all-powerful, internal force called corporate culture.

## **2.1 The nature of hotel restaurant service quality and management**

Restaurant service quality management emphasizes inspection, which employs quantifying, estimating, and categorization in order to ensure quality food and beverage provision. Thus, standard operating procedures (SOPs) are very critical, alongside supervision and staff training, as they are used to provide guidance on the step-by-step procedures that would yield hotel service quality as expected by the hotel clients and therefore minimize customer dissatisfaction as a result of service failures. By applying these principles in the food and beverage operation of a hotel, it not only minimizes service failures but also creates customer confidence in the hotel brand, instills loyalty, which is important in determining customer revisit, and thus 'return guests'.

Nonetheless, during the quality control era, the use of statistical process control was most often applied in many organizations including service firms [7]. As a result, the quality assurance stage beheld the establishment of standards, which were crafted by many organizations for the purpose of ensuring quality in the products and services. Further, these standards were consolidated to constitute and repackaged in the hotel industry to yield standard operating procedures (SOPs), at every departmental level of operation, administered and assessed both internally and externally [8]. Common quality standards and systems found in the broad hospitality and leisure-related industry include the SOPs in the hotel operational sections, Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme (VAQAS), ISO 9000 family, Investors in People (IIP), and Michelin Stars among others [9]. Whereas Dale [10] sees the movement as progressive in nature, Garvin [11] considers it a chronological evolution of quality management where new organizations join at the later stages.

Hotel restaurants' food service quality refers to consumers' judgment of overall peculiarity and hegemony of the restaurant food services provided [4]. Thus hospitality industry scholars [12] posit that service quality has remained an important subject of research involving not only food and beverage departments but also all the other operational departments of hotels, as it is a precursor to guest satisfaction and, consequently, retention, hence customer loyalty. As noted by Lillicrap and Cousins [13], Davies, Ioannis, and Alcott [1] as well as Foskett and Patricia [14], hospitality services are highly perishable, and thus the need for managers to have a great concern over the quality of these services to achieve a competitive edge.

Hotel service quality scholars [15] define good service as in reference to uninterrupted service with precision and flexibility, which may be ably applied in the food and beverage service sections. It is important for hotel restaurants to consistently offer quality service every time and all the time across their customer base. This calls for effortless application of continuous enhancement concepts for purposes of not only meeting but also exceeding customer expectations in the ever-changing era of customer needs. However, hospitality's food service quality remains a fickle concept based on the individual customer.

Thus, from the hospitality professional point of view, food and beverage service quality is an intricate construct and therefore difficult to define and measure, and thus finely tuned research into the broad subject of food and beverage service quality is required.

In order to gain a subterranean comprehension of the hospitality food service quality concept, Garvin [11] carried out a benchmark study of both products and services, which by extrapolation may similarly be applied in hospitality based on the product-service mix nature of the industry operation. Consequently, Garvin [11] classified quality in five ways:

- i. *Transcendent quality*: Based on Garvin's study [11], this service quality aspect fluctuates between and among individuals over time. In view of this quality, therefore, restaurant clientele will hold dissimilar views in relation to hospitality food service quality, even though having similar food and/or drinks, being served by the same food and beverage service staff, and under the same restaurant environment. Moreover, this ideology holds that restaurant food service quality can be understood in the common phrase '*I know it when I see it*' demonstrating the importance of visual component of hospitality foodservice marketing approach which may include showmanship applied in cooking methods such as flambé, garnishing as well as decoration, in addition to graphical use on menus.
- ii. *The expert view of quality*: Most often, hotels receive and serve clientele from different walks of life including professional hoteliers as well as people with a good clench of gastronomy, mixology, and food and beverage service. It is therefore very easy for such clientele to identify mishaps in the food and beverage service cycle, whether in food production or the service process. Thus, errors as a result of failures in the recipe and/or service method design and specification will be easily singled out.
- iii. *User-based quality*: This is centered on the restaurant clientele's feedback on the food service quality experience within a hotel set-up. While in part it is based on individual judgment of the food service experience, it is also the basis of hotel food and beverage service consumer regulation, presenting the test of merchantability, which requires restaurant food and beverage on offer to be fit for customer consumption, thus important in developing standard recipes [4].
- iv. *Manufacturing (Production) quality*: Food production is the process through which food and beverages are made palatable, which normally takes place in the hotel kitchen in part, and the bar section. Nonetheless, food and beverage production may also be carried out in hotel restaurants for the clients. This involves cooking as well as the preparation of food, in addition to a combination of other ingredients in accordance with the standard recipe of the hotel. Standard recipes are utilized mainly to minimize deviations from the standards set in the hotel's technical specifications.
- v. *The value-based quality*: Generally, customers all over the world would like to get value for their money, which also applies to the restaurant clientele of the hotel industry. Thus, according to Garvin [11], the value is generally regarded as meaning the delivery of more of some desired attributes of the restaurant food service than the customer expected.

### **3. Service quality models and theories**

The concept of service quality is not very new, and its application in hospitality management in order to yield quality services is of great importance in ensuring customer satisfaction, retention and therefore loyalty. Various scholars have come up with models on service quality and its applicability in the hospitality industry, including the Importance-Performance and Gap Analysis (IPGA) model [16], Decision Making Trial and Evaluation Laboratory (DEMATEL) approach as well as Service Quality (SERVQUAL) model [4].

#### **3.1 Decision-making trial and evaluation laboratory (DEMATEL)**

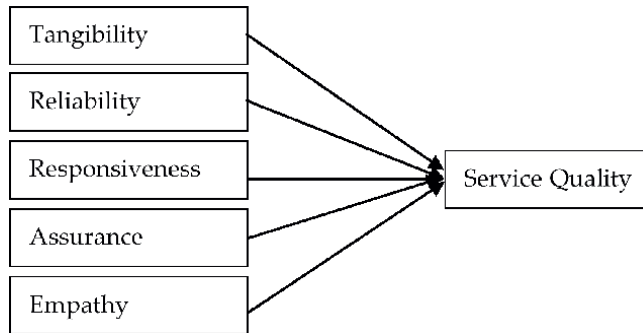
Decision Making Trial and Laboratory (DEMATEL) approach was developed by Bettele Geneva Institute [16, 17]. Moreover, this technique was first employed by Fontela and Gabus in 1976 [16]. From inception to date, the DEMATEL technique has succeeded in disentangling many comprehensive, intricate problems in scientific, political, and economic domains. Nonetheless, this approach may be applied in the services industry, including hospitality, by considering experts' conclusions. Food and beverage department, and mostly the food and beverage production section, may ably employ the principles of DEMATEL in developing innovative menus based on customer trends. Thus, the hotel's food and beverage section is required to focus more on the ever-changing customer needs and provide food services that satisfy these needs. Nonetheless, this approach has been parsimoniously utilized in hospitality services management studies as well as in the practical world. As such, minimal publications may be accessed on the utilization of the DEMATEL approach in the general hospitality services quality management studies.

#### **3.2 Importance-performance and gap analysis (IPGA) model**

The IPGA model is a product of the original importance-performance analysis (IPA) model [18]. Thus, due to the inefficiencies witnessed in the IPA model, the IPGA model was developed with the hope of solving the problem of inefficiency previously seen in the IPA model. Nonetheless, the resultant IPGA model was found to be unable to explore the connection between service quality attributes, and therefore making it still unsuitable. Thus, IPGA is seldom applied not only in hospitality but also in the entire services industry as it can easily lead to decision-making errors of service quality management [18]. Thus, the IPGA model is not used widely in current studies on service quality, and therefore rarely applied in hospitality service quality management studies as well.

#### **3.3 SERVQUAL model**

The SERVQUAL model was developed by Parasuraman in 1988 [4]. Albeit the model has been disparaged by many researchers, it has been proven to be the best applicable model in the general study of service quality in the service industry and therefore appropriate for application within hospitality industry and specifically in the food and beverage service quality [19, 20]. Nevertheless, this model has been widely used by scholars across the world [21]. Parasuraman et al. [4], intertwined the five dimensions to yield the Parasuraman dimensional SERVQUAL management framework, as shown in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.**  
*SERVQUAL model.*

### 3.3.1 Tangibility

Al Rousan [22] defines tangibility as the service dimension that makes a product or service practical and usable for customers. According to Parasuraman et al. [4], it refers to the corporeal evidence of service in relation to food service including physical facilities, appearance of personnel, tools, and equipment used to provide the service. This dimension is therefore important in instilling the tangibility component in food and beverage service sections, even though tangibility is one of the characteristics of service.

### 3.3.2 Reliability

Reliability is the ability of the service supplier, including hospitality service providers, to promptly deliver a good quality of service. Quality food and beverage service is paramount within hospitality operations to ensure customer satisfaction and retention, which of course remains key for hotel business sustainability. According to Al Rousan [22]), observing service delivery conventions, pricing, and complaints handling are all important for a hospitality restaurant business. This dimension of service quality involves the ability to perform the service dependably, consistently, and accurately [4, 12]. There should never be room for inconsistency in the food and beverage service delivery between customers, food and beverage personnel, or even based on the days of patronage.

### 3.3.3 Responsiveness

This dimension denotes the agreeableness to help guests by providing immediate service as soon as the request is received [22]. Given the different types of guests in the hotel restaurant, many hospitality organizations have tried to ensure immediacy of service by the application of various strategies including provision of both a la carte and table d'hôte menus, increasing the number of food and beverage personnel during peak hours, opening more service points, etc. The food and beverage service personnel are expected to provide soon and prompt attention to all the guest requests, questions, and suggestions [22]. Furthermore, this dimension involves the willingness to help restaurant customers and provide prompt service [4].

### *3.3.4 Assurance*

This is with considerations of the service quality detention, which considers on the capability to activate trust and confidence in the service provided. Parasuraman et al. [4] explain this dimension as the knowledge and courtesy of foodservice employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence. Today, many hospitality organizations insist on employing qualified people in order to ensure customer satisfaction and retention. Further, hotel organizations also have specialized training programs for their staff geared toward quality service provision as well as customer care. These programs ensure that the dimension of service assurance is adequately addressed and thus yield quality service provision.

### *3.3.5 Empathy*

This is the service quality manner that stresses the contact with the food and beverage sections' patrons as personalized [4]. According to Parasuraman et al., this dimension is concerned with caring and individualized attention to customers [4]. The situation, though, may not be uniform across the entire hospitality industry based on the type of operation. For example, a comparison between fine dining restaurants and casual restaurants will give a totally different approach in addressing empathy. The fine dining restaurants will tend to have sufficient service personnel and therefore more personalized service as compared to casual restaurants. Nonetheless, customers in fine dining restaurants are charged higher to cater for the personalized service. This also applies to the different star rated hotels, with five star hotel restaurants having a more personalized service experience as compared to four, three, two and one star hotels, but charging damn expensively for their services.

## **4. Technical/outcome quality**

Technical quality, also referred to as outcome quality, is what customers are left with after the consumption of services [23]. The food and beverage service staff plays a key role in determining the quality of services offered to customers through their technical capabilities. This applies to both the kitchen brigade and the food and beverage service personnel of a hospitality organization. Service quality scholars affirm that technical quality attributes of the food and beverage service staff, in relation to service quality, are scanty in the literature, having been ignored by most of the researchers.

Grönroos [23] developed the technical and functional quality model of service quality, which comprises two dimensions: technical and functional quality. Technical quality refers to what is delivered, while functional quality refers to how it was delivered [23]. Contextually, technical quality in the food and beverage service sections has more to do with the menus on offer and the quality of the menu products. However, outcome quality, on the other hand, denotes the way these menu products are delivered to the customer for consumption. Of course, it is worth mentioning that these two quality aspects go hand in hand, which calls for teamwork between the food and beverage production and the food and beverage service teams in order to ensure customer satisfaction, retention, and loyalty. For purposes of this chapter, the technical quality aspect was considered as the functional aspect, which was covered by the five dimensions of the service quality of the SERVQUAL model. However, according to this service quality model, it yields three dimensions.

#### **4.1 Sociability**

According to Faizal et al. [24], sociability in relation to outcome quality aspect refers to the number, type, and behavior of people within the service setting. In relation to the SERVQUAL five dimensions of service quality, it depicts more of the empathy, assurance, responsiveness, and reliability dimensions which are important in ensuring not only personalized attention, but also more professional customer-driven attention. In fact, Stephen et al. [25] denote that this is a key dimension in investigating the technical aspect of service quality, and especially in the service industry such as the food and beverage services of the hotel industry [25].

#### **4.2 Valence**

This is a dimension of technical quality that refers to customers' post-consumption assessment of whether the service outcome is acceptable or unacceptable [24]. Various factors may be considered by the restaurant client in arriving at the final decision on whether the service outcome is acceptable or unacceptable. In comparison with the Parasuraman SERVQUAL model, and by extrapolation, acceptable service may be that which satisfies the five dimensions of service quality: tangibility, assurance, reliability, empathy, and responsiveness [4]. In relation to food service quality, therefore, restaurant customer post-consumption assessment could be properly carried out through either structured or unstructured guest feedback collection strategies, manually or electronically.

#### **4.3 Waiting time**

The amount of time that customers spend waiting to be attended to [24], including reception, order taking, service, crumbing-down, and billing, is of utmost importance in assessing the hotel restaurant service quality. Restaurant menus, which serve as the marketing tools for food and beverage sections, may indicate the waiting time, for example, especially for the preparation of ala' carte menu [2]. It is important for the food service personnel to be cognizant of the stipulated time and request the client for an adjustment just in case the deadlines may not be honored.

### **5. Food and beverage service quality control**

This may be a function of both the employees and the hospitality clientele. Studies in this area provide the basic foundations of service quality control in the overall services industry as well as restaurant food and beverage service quality in hospitality. Consequently, numerous investigators in the broad specialized services industries have also carried out substantial studies related to customer quality control, which provides significant efforts to draw the client closer to the organization, which applies to hospitality operations as well. For purposes of this chapter and in relation to food and beverage service quality control, three approaches related to service quality control were identified.

However, it is worth noting that there have been no studies that measure the effects of perceived control in the actual exchange between service employees and customers, including hospitality-related service delivery systems [26]. Therefore, the limited scholarly literature on this topic has identified, appraised, examined,

and structured various divergent customer control functions in the food and beverage section of the hotel, including tipping, on-the-spot customer complaints, and customer satisfaction surveys aimed at controlling food service quality within the hospitality restaurant business.

## **5.1 Tipping**

Tipping is one of the variables that is thought to directly influence restaurant food service quality in a hospitality set-up. This applies to specific countries to which tipping is allowed, since some countries do not allow the act of tipping [26–28]. Nonetheless, tipping provides an avenue through which hospitality restaurant clientele may participate in determining the quality of service they obtain when patronizing hotel organizations. However, the tipping act may also be determined by numerous factors. A number of researchers have carried out studies on variables that affect tipping, and investigations on the various interactions between these variables and restaurant food service quality have also been moderately addressed in relation to the subject [27, 28]. According to Megan [29], three justifications are proposed in the explanation of hospitality's food and beverage service tipping model as a customer relationship management act, although performed by the restaurant customer in the customer-employee encounter approach. These justifications include: incentives/rewards for outstanding or superior service, attempts to improve/enhance future service, as well as a social norm.

### *5.1.1 Rewarding food service quality*

In many instances, tipping only happens at the conclusion of restaurant service, normally at the bill clearance stage. As such, the act of tipping plays a vital role in determining the quality of restaurant food and beverage service, as miserable service may attract small tips. Moreover, the tipping act is dependent on specific percentages contingent on the restaurant clientele's perceived food service quality. However, Were et al. [30] explored the impacts of tipping on restaurant food service quality, and found out that tipping is the cause of dissatisfaction among back-of-the-house staff as well as unhealthy competition in the workplace among food and beverage service staff. Thus, restaurant clients who are thought of as non-tippers may not be given quality food and beverage service attention. Moreover, Bigler et al. [29, 31, 32] emphasize that fiscal benefits in terms of tips affect worker motivation, and therefore validate earlier findings that tips do increase with customers' perception of service quality. By extrapolation, therefore, the act of tipping is considered as one of the most active and effective measures used by restaurant food service clientele to control quality.

### *5.1.2 Incentives for improved future service*

The model of tipping in the context of gratifying future service assumes the Bodvarson and Gibson [33] principle. According to this ideology, the tipping process operates on the basis of reciprocity theory, according to which tipping is thought to be realizing the purposes of 'soliciting' improved future food and beverage service. Based on this principle, however, it may only be applicable to food and beverage service patrons who expect to revisit the hospitality restaurant. Besides, this principle may not be fully appropriate as a result of the variable nature of services, thus making the food and beverage service component variable, which ultimately leads to

variability in the food service quality. Nonetheless, tipping provides a virtuous form of incentives for improved future food and beverage service, thus playing a pivotal role in the customer food service quality control.

### 5.1.3 Social norm

Wang [34] accounts that the act of tipping started as a sign of appreciativeness and prestige, went through various transformational stages including gradual conversion to incentive, and finally a norm. Thus, today, tipping is far less linked to anything above and beyond acting in a socially and globally satisfactory manner. Intrinsically, the act of restaurant tipping is considered a norm in many countries around the world. Whereas some countries frown at the act of tipping, others have been found in the middle and therefore accommodating of both tipping and non-tipping norm, while a sizable number consider the act as a norm. In relation to psychology studies, individuals do not want to risk social disapproval and, as a result, will opt to fulfill the norm of tipping in accordance with **Table 1**.

## 5.2 On-the-spot customer complaints

Customer complaints provide an opportunity through which clients can freely express their displeasure, while hospitality professionals are able to get feedback concerning the quality of restaurant food services provided. It is from these complaints that hospitality restaurant service providers get a chance to review the organizational food and beverage service design processes in order to ensure customer satisfaction. Within hospitality's food and beverage service sector, all laborers concerned have a duty to assume their respective responsibilities for the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of restaurant customers [35]. According to Ford and Heaton [36], hospitality administrators spend time overseeing, training, inspiring, and rewarding employees to produce excellent restaurant guest experiences through quality food and beverage service in order to minimize customer complaints and thus build confidence and positive guest relations. However, hotel restaurant guests are frequently in contact with food and beverage service teams, chatting with them and observing their job performance. So, they have the greatest prospect to regulate employees' activities and respond when they experience service failures [21]. Many hospitality restaurant customers, therefore, do have the willingness and the necessary competence to signal nonconformance to food and beverage service quality standards in the activity of frontline staff [37], and more than that, they can take corrective actions through undesirable comments, and compliments [38]. Thus, food and beverage service staff should organize, adopt, and review on a timely basis the best mechanisms to entice, seize, document, and resolve on-the-spot complaints from clients. Generally, there are a number of complaint types that emanate from guests, which include;

- a. *Mechanical complaints*: Majority of complaints from hospitality restaurant guests relate to the hospitality restaurant equipment's malfunctions. His expertise encompasses problems with hotel air conditioning, lighting systems, electrical connectivity, restaurant furnishing, and operation of vending machines, ice machines, plumbing, and television issues. As a result, and in the application of corrective measures, effective use of maintenance work orders may help to reduce the frequency of the aforementioned and many more mechanical complaints.

Country	Restaurant tip	Country	Restaurant tip
Argentina	10%	Italy	10%
Armenia	10%	Japan	Prohibited
Australia	10%	Luxembourg	5–10%
Austria	5%	Morocco	Leave loose change
Belgium	10%	New Zealand	None
Bolivia	10%	Nicaragua	10%
Brazil	10–15%	Norway	10%
Brunei	None	Oman	None
Bulgaria	10%	Paraguay	10%
Canada	15%	Peru	Up to 10%
Cayman	15%	Philippines	10%
Colombia	10%	Portugal	10–15%
Cuba	1%	Russia	10–15%
Denmark	None	Saudi Arabia	10–15%
Ecuador	10%	Scotland	10–15%
Egypt	5–10%	Singapore	None
England	10%	South Africa	10%
Fiji	None	South Korea	None
Finland	10%	Spain	7–10%
France	5–10%	Sweden	10%
Greece	5–10%	Turkey	Round upward
Holland	5–10%	United States	15–20%
Ireland	10–15%	Vietnam	None
Israel	12–15%	Wales	10%

**Table 1.**  
*A summary of the tipping norm.*

b. *Attitudinal complaints:* Hospitality’s restaurant personnel do come across instances when restaurant guest complains of disrespectful, unprofessional, and indifferent behavior of staff members. The moment a hotel employee falls into a disagreement with a restaurant guest, the conflict commences, which often leads to guest complaints. Hospitality guests could express attitudinal complaints when they feel outraged by rude or tactless restaurant staff members, or sometimes guests overhear staff exchanges. Managers and supervisors should pay attention and attend to the complaints and problems of hospitality’s restaurant guest. This can be critical especially maintain good guest relations.

c. *Service-related complaints:* The guest may experience a problem with restaurant services and may get dissatisfied. It can be of wide ranging and about such things as long waiting time for service, lack of assistance, untidy restaurant room, cold or ill prepared food or ignored request for additional supplies.

The front-of-the-house staff generally receives more service-related complaints when the restaurant is operating at or near full occupancy.

- d. *Unusual complaints*: Hospitality's restaurant guest sometime expects the administrative staff to resolve or at least pay close attention to such kinds of complaints, which are unusual, particularly where the restaurant management appears to have no clear-cut decision. Sometimes hospitality's guests demand for unwarranted or impossible deliverables such as the absence of a bar, lack of recognition, bad weather, and so on. Organizations generally have very diminutive or no control over the circumstances surrounding unusual complaints.

Hospitality's restaurant food and beverage services, just like any other type of services, have a great propensity to fail due to their intangible and pragmatic nature or the instantaneous production, sales, service, and consumption [2]. Furthermore, the high level of human-contact related interactions between the food and beverage service staff and customers gives rise to variability of restaurant food and beverage services, thereby increasing the chances of service failure [39]. Nonetheless, today's hospitality restaurant guests are extra arduous, widely traveled, with extensive exposure to international hospitality service experience and therefore highly informed, so it is not only difficult to meet but also outstrip their expectations which is the ultimate goal of food and beverage service staff [40]. According to Lugosi [26], there are three categories of service failures, which this chapter will review on a one-by-one basis;

### *5.2.1 Unprompted and unsolicited employee actions*

Hospitality restaurants, just like any other establishments, are not crisis or vice-free zones. Being a point of convergence of human beings from all walks of life, many of them come along with intolerable characters and/or behavior that would impact negatively on the perceived food service quality experience. Such behaviors are bound to influence customer relationship management approach within the restaurant outlet, and therefore, appropriate measures need to be taken. Thus, unprompted and unsolicited employee actions may include events and restaurant employee behaviors that are truly unexpected from the hospitality restaurant customers' point of view and therefore have a direct effect on the clientele's meal experience [2]. Such events would expose the restaurant outlet's ability to take charge of its customer service management through apt corrective measures, which would ultimately assure the client of the hospitality organization's commitment to quality food service, hence, customer satisfaction and retention.

On the other hand, though, satisfactory foodservice incidents represent very pleasant surprises or special attention, while dissatisfactory foodservice incidents comprise negative and unacceptable employee behavior such as wrong order delivery, incorrect charges, and, in extreme cases, rude behavior of employees, discrimination, ignoring the customers, and stealing from them. Hospitality administrators should never assume that such incidents will not happen within their organizations; therefore, they should prepare adequately just in case such incidents are brought to their attention. Such incidents represent truly unexpected and unrequested employee behaviors that either enhance or detract from the delivery of core quality food and beverage service [41]. However, negative employee actions are normally moderated by hospitality restaurant clientele by either being specific to the staff to offer them

service, or bringing such acts from staff to the attention of managers, who thereafter have a responsibility to reprimand the staff through disciplinary action. However, regular staff training is also important in order to help staff grow in their ability to handle the most challenging scenarios during restaurant operations. Thus, today, training on customer care for the general hospitality employees is advocated.

### *5.2.2 Service system failure*

Whereas a restaurant's food and beverage service delivery system is often bound to fail, frontline hospitality's food service employees are required to respond to the complaints or dissatisfaction [41]. This will only happen if the staff are well prepared through proper training and development on foodservice quality and customer relationship management approaches, in order for them to be able to handle such eventualities. It is in the best interest of the respective hospitality organization for all frontline employees to be appropriately primed on matters of customer satisfaction and retention. Even though the products offered for sale may not be of super-quality, effective customer care approaches can still create a yearning desire in the client to continue patronizing the organization.

Restaurant foodservice system failure incidents are related directly to failures of core food and beverage services, such as the dining room, restaurant meal service, or food and beverage production models. However, hospitality organizations would claim to be suitably prepared throughout the operating cycle; inevitable restaurant food service system failures occur for even the best of hospitality restaurants, and therefore, no outlet may claim to be off the hook. In the hospitality restaurant food and beverage service function, service system failures may include: cold food, slow service, insect problems, dirty silverware, and crockery [8]. However, the hospitality restaurant clientele brings to the attention of both the food service staff and management of such a restaurant the service system failures. For the purpose of not only satisfying but also retaining the customer, hospitality professionals more often carry out service recovery, with the aim of maintaining their customer base through customer relationship building, hence not only focusing on customer satisfaction but also profitability and business sustainability.

### *5.2.3 Failures in implicit or explicit customer requests*

Many times, specific restaurant foodservice customer requests may be missed out, either consciously or subconsciously, through an assumptive nature and/or non-attentiveness of hospitality's food service employees [8]. It is therefore important for hospitality frontline employees to be trained on all aspects of customer care, in addition to professionalism in welcoming, greeting, conversing and seating of guests, offering menus and drinks lists, order taking techniques with respect to key aspects on the degrees of cooking, hotness, etc., food and beverage service, of course with the right food service methodology being applied in the right manner and equipment, cramping down, clearing, and billing [2, 5]. Further, the applicable six food service techniques must be well grasped and applied for effective results.

Failures in implicit or explicit customer requests are incidents that contain an explicit or inferred request for customized service and may include: food not cooked to order or lost reservations, which in most cases may provoke client disapproval of the restaurant's commitment to service quality [41]. Whereas such incidents

are uncontrolled, it calls for proper customer relationship strategies by hospitality restaurant employees to avert the situation, provide solutions, and build brand loyalty across the market niche [8]. These may be a result of customer requests related to customer preferences, special needs, or even disruptions from other customers in the service area.

### **5.3 Customer satisfaction surveys**

Hospitality's restaurant customer surveys have become an extensively used barograph of business performance over the past decade, and hospitality's food and beverage operations are no exception [8]. It is therefore important for hospitality restaurant business managers to design, plan, and utilize both formal and informal methodologies in soliciting customer feedback for purposes of corrective action as well as continuous improvement. It is true that customer feedback constitutes a blueprint of products and services from the customers' perspective. By interrogating hospitality's restaurant customers through feedback, it forms the basis upon which food and beverage product and service innovation, design, and development are attained in the 'eyes of the customer' and not the restaurateur.

#### *5.3.1 Employee-generated guest feedback*

It is important for hospitality food and beverage management to be informed on the status of guest satisfaction in order to make decisions in relation to the food and beverage product and/service. It is only through such feedback that the management team of the hospitality food and beverage sector is able to directly read the 'mind' of the client. Centering on these responses, therefore, the hospitality organization is able to take strategic approaches toward ensuring food and beverage guest satisfaction, retention, organizational profitability, and thus business sustainability. Consequently, employee-generated restaurant food and beverage guest feedback constitutes an ingenious prospect for both the client and organization to nurture, develop, and adopt a healthy restaurant's food and beverage customer relationship approach for the benefit of the client as well as the employees.

Hospitality's restaurant employee-generated guest feedback adopts a structured interview or survey method through which employees gather restaurant customers' perceptions of the food and beverage service delivery. When objectively gathered, these restaurant food and beverage guest feedback provide a golden opportunity for the food and beverage service recovery process [5]. Hospitality's restaurant food service operations know that recovering from food and beverage service failures yields greater hospitality customer loyalty and repeat visits, while employees know that management places greater credibility on service recovery feedback obtained directly from guests, and thus, effective employee-customer encounter [42].

#### *5.3.2 Comment cards*

Comment cards are practically comparable in functionality to employee-generated feedback, although they tend to depend more on voluntary restaurant food and beverage customer participation. Hospitality guests rank the quality of food and beverage service experience by responding to a few simple questions on a conveniently obtainable form and depositing the form in a box, returning it to the service provider, or mailing it to the hotel and/or restaurant corporate office. Their comments may be

interesting and helpful to hospitality food and beverage management in understanding the service experience [42]. However, typically only 5 percent of hospitality customers return comment cards, either the delighted or the dissatisfied, while the majority, constituting 95 percent say nothing [1]. Nonetheless, this methodology provides a good basis for hospitality customer relationship management within the hospitality restaurant business.

### *5.3.3 Personal interviews or surveys with guests*

Apart from the supplementary formal ways of interacting with restaurant clients, management should also consider personal interviews with food and beverage clients in order to carry out in-depth interrogation and/or probing on matters that may not be clear. Face-to-face interviews can uncover previously unknown glitches or a new twist in a known problem that cannot be addressed in a pre-printed questionnaire [43]. However, personal interviews are costly because of the expense of employing trained interviewers, the custom of designing interview instruments, and the inconvenience to hospitality food and beverage guests. Nonetheless, this method of hospitality customer relationship management creates an opportunity through which foodservice guests may register their displeasure directly to the staff, while the staff may also apologize and if possible extend food and beverage service recovery to the affected guests.

### *5.3.4 Telephone/online surveys with guests*

In the larger hospitality food service industry, some organizations telephone customers to acquire criticism about a recent vacation, hotel room, or food and beverage experience [44]. Although telephone interviews disregard the inconvenience of gathering information while guests are still at the hotel, they present other challenges. This method also depends on retrospective information, which can be blurred by more current experiences. In addition, hospitality food and beverage guests regard telephone surveys as intrusions on their time and violations of their privacy.

Moreover, with the advent of information technology and its application in hospitality operations, the internet has also provided a connection through which restaurant customer-employee encounter is made possible. First, the restaurant management may develop a questionnaire and share it through online platforms for the patrons to respond. This could be through Google Forms, which has gained popularity in the current age in comparison to the use of printed forms. Furthermore, hospitality restaurants may provide a platform on their website for guests to give their views about their experience, mainly referred to as guest reviews. Apart from online surveys being cost-friendly, it is the easiest method to collect guest views from a global perspective, as they are conducted in real-time. Nonetheless, this method is dependent on the Internet, which might work against those clients not connected to the internet as well as those who may not be conversant with computer use.

### *5.3.5 Use of mystery shoppers*

Although being a rarely utilized hospitality restaurant customer relationship management approach, mystery shoppers afford management with an objective

snapshot of the food and beverage service experience within the hospitality restaurant sections of the hotel set-up [45]. While posing as hotel guests, these trained observers methodically sample both the restaurant food and beverage service and its delivery and compile a detailed report of their service encounters, which generally include numerical ratings of their observations so that the hospitality restaurant food service quality of the service experience can be compared over time.

## **6. Conclusion**

The hospitality industry concentrates on the production and sale of accommodation, food, and beverage products to its clients. However, some other services are also offered for sale, although supplementary to the two broad categories of products. Still, food and beverage remain the most challenging component in the general management of hospitality products and therefore present challenges in the management of service quality in this section across all the hotels.

Service quality has become an important subject for consideration in hospitality as a result of increased complaints as a result of rude staff, poor standards of service, sluggishness in service, poor accommodation, poor cleanliness and hygiene, cold food, poorly cooked and/or prepared food orders, poor hotel location and associated difficulties. Nonetheless, in order to deal with customer dissatisfaction in hospitality, Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithmal provide 10 lessons for application: listening, reliability, basic service, service design, recovery, surprising customers, fair play, teamwork, employee research, and servant leadership. In order to understand the concept of service quality, Decision Making Trial and Evaluation Laboratory (DEMATEL), Importance Performance and Gap Analysis (IPGA) as well as SERVQUAL models may be adequately utilized.

Several strategies have been applied in ensuring food service quality in a hospitality set-up. These include tipping, a very common practice within the food and beverage service sections of the hotel, on-the-spot customer complaints, and customer satisfaction surveys. Through the application of the three control measures, the hotels food and beverage service sections will be able to ensure quality service and therefore customer satisfaction, retention, profitability, and hence business sustainability.

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# Reshaping the Hungarian Tourism Workforce: Labor Market Challenges and Adaptation Strategies in the Post-COVID Era

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic posed severe challenges to the Hungarian hotel industry, including a drastic drop in revenues, business closures, loss of skilled labor, and declining service quality. Although governmental support and the lifting of restrictions enabled a gradual recovery, the sector continues to face difficulties in achieving sustainable and profitable operations. Labor shortages and digitalization have emerged as critical factors in post-pandemic resilience. This paper presents a qualitative study examining how digital transformation and labor market shifts influence hotel operations in Hungary. The research involved a questionnaire survey conducted in 2024 among employees in managerial positions at 50 hotels—each with at least 100 rooms and a minimum four-star rating—resulting in 45 completed surveys, of which 40 were suitable for analysis. This was complemented by 13 in-depth interviews with general managers. Findings show that AI-based tools and automation are increasingly used to cut costs and enhance guest experience, though skill shortages and implementation costs remain significant barriers to digital sustainability.

**Keywords:** labor market, digitalization, hotel industry, COVID-19, new tourism

## 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only posed an unprecedented health crisis but also triggered profound disruptions in the global tourism industry. Hotel operations across the world were particularly vulnerable, as lockdowns, mobility restrictions, and shifting consumer behaviours challenged the very foundations of service delivery and business continuity. These disruptions brought to the surface existing structural weaknesses, including overdependence on human labor, underinvestment in digital infrastructure, and the lack of crisis-resilient operating models.

As a result of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, the tourism sector worldwide—including in Hungary—has faced severe challenges due to lockdowns and travel restrictions. This situation has especially affected the hotel industry. In addition to the drastic decline—or in some cases, complete loss—of revenue-generating capacity,

the sector has experienced a decrease in the number of businesses, their exit from the market, deterioration in service quality, and the migration of skilled labor to other economic sectors. These factors have only worsened the economic difficulties.

Despite government measures aimed at mitigating the crisis and the lifting of restrictions, demand has been gradually recovering. However, a portion of the remaining — and newly emerging — tourism businesses continue to struggle to remain sustainably in the market and achieve predictable, profitable operations. They are striving to attract guests who generate revenue and to maintain the quality of their services [1].

One of the most critical and high-risk aspects of ensuring service quality continues to be the availability of skilled labor. The integration of digital solutions into the hotel industry is considered indispensable. Following the coronavirus pandemic, digitalization has assumed even greater significance and is increasingly regarded as one of the foundational pillars of sustainability within the framework of “new tourism.” Using modern technology, applications and social media tools are essential for tourism attractions to improve visitor experience and increase tourism attractiveness [2].

It is important to emphasise that the relationship between digitalization and human factors has complex and multi-layered effects on the tourism industry. For a successful digital transformation, businesses must take into account human behaviour, needs, and capabilities, and apply digital solutions that align with these for sustainable development and competitiveness [3].

Remaining in the market — or entering it — requires not only the quality satisfaction of consumer demands but also nearly real-time, ongoing economic analysis at the corporate level, where efficiency depends on finding the right balance between digital solutions and the indispensable human factor.

Furthermore, while digitalization offers many advantages, tourism businesses must implement adequate security measures to protect against online data breaches and cyberattacks. The increasing dependence on IT systems also introduces new challenges for organisations in terms of data security and business continuity [4].

The aim of this research is to identify the key changes, challenges, and emerging opportunities brought about by the digital transformation of the tourism industry. The study further seeks to explore the complex relationship between digitalisation and human factors within the sector, in order to support successful digital transitions in tourism enterprises. This requires the consideration of human behaviour, needs, and capabilities and the implementation of digital solutions that align with these aspects to promote sustainability and competitiveness.

The central hypothesis of the present study is that, although human labor remains essential in the sector, increasing emphasis should be placed on the implementation and continuous development of digital technologies and solutions — particularly artificial intelligence — in order to optimise costs, maximise revenues, mitigate operational risks, and strengthen crisis resilience.

## **2. Sectoral disruptions and the strategic importance of digital transformation in tourism**

In recent years, the importance of digitalization has become unquestionable in the labor-intensive tourism sector, including the hotel industry [5]. The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, the escalation of the Ukrainian-Russian armed conflict, and the ongoing Arab-Israeli and Persian-Israeli conflicts in the Middle East have

all contributed to rising energy prices, economic recession, and a significantly transformed labor market (labor shortages), negatively impacting the efficiency and competitiveness of tourism service providers.

This situation is particularly true in Hungary, as the country shares a direct border with Ukraine. Examining the relationship between digitalization and human factors at the corporate level is especially timely, as these crises have fundamentally altered travel habits and target groups in the region. On the supply side, revenue-generating capacity has decreased, while demand has become more price-sensitive — all of this occurring as the Hungarian economy has technically re-entered a state of recession. This situation requires new managerial solutions and a proactive approach. However, as the crises are different, the issue of resilience became more important in recent years [6].

In this changed supply-and-demand environment, tourism providers — in addition to adopting new technologies — have recognised the heightened importance of professionally trained staff and strategic, capable management. These roles cannot be fully replaced or substituted by digital solutions.

Tourism consumers' expectations have also shifted significantly in the digital age. Customers increasingly seek more convenient and personalised experiences, and digital solutions enable businesses to better meet these needs. Consequently, in terms of market competition and efficiency, digitalization provides new market players with better planning opportunities, which in turn increases competition and supply [7].

Businesses that effectively implement digital technologies will become more competitive and better able to meet market demands. At the same time, they can create an alternative form of security by mitigating risks associated with workforce adaptability [8].

### **3. Changing consumer trends**

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about profound changes in travellers' habits and expectations, prompting tourism service providers to make significant operational adjustments in order to maintain their competitiveness. One of the most notable shifts has been the prioritisation of health and safety, as consumers have become increasingly aware of health risks and the importance of crisis preparedness. This has been accompanied by a marked preference for nearby destinations and domestic tourism over international travel, as well as a growing interest in acquiring private holiday homes or secondary residences to ensure more controlled and personalised travel experiences.

Moreover, there has been a discernible shift toward the use of individual modes of transport instead of public options, reflecting the continued relevance of social distancing practices. Travellers are also placing greater emphasis on sustainability and environmentally conscious travel, contributing to the decline of traditional mass tourism in favour of alternative, less-crowded experiences.

In response to these changes, digital solutions such as contactless check-ins, mobile bookings, and other tech-enabled services have become increasingly important. Consumers now expect a high degree of flexibility from service providers — particularly in terms of cancellations and rescheduling — and demonstrate a growing tendency toward last-minute decision-making and spontaneous trips [9].

The need for more physical space during travel and accommodation remains a priority for many, with a continued preference for natural environments and

eco-tourism destinations. This transformation has also broadened the entrepreneurial spectrum within the hospitality sector, allowing for the emergence of innovative and sustainable business models and niche services [10, 11].

In parallel, virtual tourism and augmented reality-based travel experiences have expanded, offering new forms of interaction with destinations. Additionally, consumer preferences have shifted toward shorter stays and more frequent getaways — often in the form of long weekends — as well as accommodations that minimise personal contact, such as private rentals and apartments, rather than traditional hotels [12].

#### **4. Priority areas for restarting tourism**

According to the Secretary-General of the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) [13], five strategic priority areas are considered essential for the successful relaunch and recovery of the tourism sector, especially in light of the significant behavioural shifts induced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first priority is securing the livelihoods of workers. Tourism, along with closely related sectors such as accommodation and food services, is among the most labour-intensive industries worldwide, employing approximately 150 million people. Notably, around 80% of these workers are employed by micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), which are particularly vulnerable in times of economic uncertainty. Therefore, ensuring a stable economic environment for these enterprises is of paramount importance for the sector's recovery.

The second priority is enhancing competitiveness and building resilience. For MSMEs to survive and thrive, a favourable and stable business environment must be established. In addition, the tourism sector now requires increased levels of flexibility and adaptability to respond effectively to the rapidly evolving consumer expectations and behavioural patterns triggered by the pandemic.

The third area identified is fostering innovation and digital transformation in tourism. The pandemic underscored the need for rapid, technology-driven responses to systemic disruptions. Digital solutions and technological innovations are indispensable not only for maintaining continuity during crises but also for reskilling and reintegrating workers who lost their jobs into newly emerging sectors.

A fourth strategic priority is promoting sustainability and green growth. The global travel slowdown provided a unique opportunity to reposition sustainability at the core of tourism development. With international travel restrictions in place, domestic tourism and a renewed appreciation for natural environments emerged. This has driven greater attention to environmental protection, investment in renewable energy, and the promotion of green initiatives across the sector [14].

Lastly, the fifth key priority is fostering coordination and partnerships to achieve sustainable development goals. The recovery and transformation of the tourism sector must place people at its centre, requiring strengthened collaboration between stakeholders. Such cooperation is crucial to responsibly and coherently lifting travel restrictions and to building long-term sustainability and resilience into the tourism ecosystem.

#### **5. The emergence and characteristics of the “new tourism”**

The transformed circumstances in global tourism following the COVID-19 pandemic have led to the emergence of a new conceptual framework known as “new

tourism.” As defined by Mammadova and Egedy [15], this concept reflects a paradigmatic shift in the tourism industry, as it moves beyond traditional approaches and begins to prioritise new consumer demands, digital and technological innovations, strengthened sustainability objectives, and evolving traveller expectations.

A defining characteristic of new tourism is its commitment to technological innovation. Although various digital tools had already been introduced into the tourism sector prior to the pandemic, the crisis greatly accelerated their development and integration. During periods of lockdown, digital technologies became essential for maintaining daily routines and services until vaccines were widely available. Tourists began demanding online booking systems, contactless payment methods, and technologically enriched experiences such as AI- and augmented reality-based tourism services. In parallel, tourism service providers placed increasing emphasis on big data analytics, personalised digital marketing strategies, competitor analysis, and real-time monitoring.

Sustainability is another core element of the new tourism model. The enforced slowdown brought about by the pandemic caused many people to re-engage with nature, and this renewed environmental awareness has translated into stronger demand for eco-friendly and responsible travel options. In response, many service providers began prioritising local sourcing, eco-conscious packaging, alternative forms of green transportation, and the preservation of local natural and built heritage.

A further key component of new tourism is flexibility and digitalization. As travel restrictions fluctuated frequently during the pandemic, travellers began to expect more adaptable conditions regarding cancellations and rescheduling. In this context, mobile applications became the most practical tools for managing bookings and accessing services, prompting tourism businesses to accelerate their digital development processes.

In addition, health and safety considerations have taken on heightened significance, with a strong emphasis placed on hygiene compliance and infection prevention across the entire travel value chain.

The rise of individualised travel habits has also become evident. Mass tourism is increasingly being replaced by nature-oriented, peaceful, and experience-focused forms of travel, where the guest’s personal journey and connection to place are more strongly emphasised than ever before.

Moreover, new tourism marketing strategies have emerged, particularly in terms of smart spatial usage. As the tourism industry redefines scale and value, a more bottom-up approach to destination branding and identity building has taken shape. Here, the use of space is not only functional but symbolic: it reflects personal identity, cultural belonging, and the thoughtful management of local values. Smart spatial strategies rely on structured and relevant information flow among both internal and external stakeholders.

Finally, the mission of new tourism also includes a stronger commitment to involving local communities. More active partnerships between tourism providers and local actors — such as artisans, food and beverage professionals, and independent service providers — contribute to sustainable economic growth, the creation of local jobs, and a stronger respect for regional traditions and cultural values, regardless of the tourism destination’s size or fame.

Taken together, these elements point to a more resilient, flexible, technologically advanced, and sustainability-driven tourism paradigm that is better equipped to respond to contemporary global challenges [16].

In response to the workforce disruptions caused by the pandemic, and to address the shortage of qualified professionals, many hotels were compelled to revise their existing employment models and implement alternative strategies aimed at maintaining sustainable operations.

To that end, several practical and policy-level measures have been proposed and implemented. These include the adoption of atypical forms of employment, such as part-time, seasonal, or project-based contracts that better align with fluctuating service demands. During peak tourism periods, temporary staffing solutions have also been utilised to meet sudden increases in workload.

Hotels have increasingly sought to leverage tourism-related vocational training opportunities to attract and prepare future employees, while simultaneously investing in automation and digital technologies to reduce reliance on human labour in specific operational areas.

Another notable trend is the creation of multifunctional job roles and interdisciplinary teams, allowing existing staff to assume diverse responsibilities and thus enhance overall operational flexibility.

In order to remain attractive as employers, many tourism businesses have also emphasised competitive compensation, clear career development pathways, and the outsourcing of non-core tasks to specialised external providers. Collectively, these strategies represent the sector's attempt to adapt to new labour market realities and to meet the demands of "new tourism" in a sustainable and future-oriented manner.

## **6. Atypical employment and temporary staffing as flexible solutions in Hungarian tourism**

In Hungary, the dominant form of employment remains the standard model: indefinite, full-time contracts with a 40-hour workweek, where employees work exclusively for a single employer at a designated workplace. However, Hungarian labour law also allows for atypical forms of employment, which differ from the standard model in terms of working time, location, duration, job content, or the number of employers involved.

These atypical arrangements include fixed-term contracts, simplified employment or occasional work, part-time employment, on-call work, job sharing, flexible working hours, telework, remote work from home, piecework arrangements, temporary agency employment, and employment relationships established by multiple employers. Despite their legal availability, these models are still relatively rare in Hungary and in other EU member states—particularly within the tourism sector.

A key reason for this limited uptake is employer reluctance. Many managers fear they will lose control over the volume and quality of work, especially when employees are not physically present, as in telework scenarios. However, such fears are largely unfounded. Atypical employment does not inherently reduce control – it simply requires different managerial skills, which are currently lacking in many tourism organisations. For these models to be successfully implemented, leadership development and the acquisition of modern management competencies are essential.

It is equally important to consider the employee side of atypical work. These employment forms demand different skills and attributes from workers – not every employee is well-suited to such flexible arrangements. As a result, dedicated training and upskilling initiatives are necessary to prepare employees for these roles.

Although research highlights numerous advantages of atypical employment for both employers and employees – such as increased flexibility, better work-life balance, and resource optimization – these arrangements remain unpopular among workers. As Vámosi [17] points out, such jobs are often associated with lower wages, which in some cases may not provide a livable income. This creates a sense of vulnerability and can limit opportunities for career progression within the workplace.

In parallel, temporary staffing has emerged as an important strategy to manage the uneven labour demand characteristic of the tourism sector. This form of employment involves workers who are officially employed by a staffing agency but carry out their work on-site for the client company. The contractual relationship is established between the staffing agency and the client. In Hungary, temporary staffing operates primarily through three channels: student cooperatives, pensioner cooperatives, and traditional labour leasing. While this approach offers considerable flexibility, staffing agencies often face challenges in recruiting workers from different regions of the country. Low labour mobility within EU member states and a general reluctance to relocate for work hinder the effectiveness of this solution.

## **7. Challenges and development needs in Hungarian tourism vocational training and workforce retention**

A comprehensive analysis of the tourism labour market in Hungary must include an examination of the current state of training for future tourism professionals. In Hungary, tourism-related education is provided across three levels: secondary, higher, and adult education. Despite this multi-tiered system, the sector is experiencing the most severe labour shortages in occupations that require mid-level vocational qualifications.

Several structural and systemic issues contribute to this shortage. First and foremost, the prestige of tourism vocational education remains low, resulting in a declining number of students choosing this path each year. Moreover, the curricular content fails to keep pace with the rapidly evolving technologies and operational trends in the accommodation and hospitality sectors. This gap is further exacerbated by the fact that many training kitchens and workshop facilities used in education are outdated and lack modern, industry-standard equipment. Consequently, students often graduate with obsolete or incomplete skill sets.

A further challenge is the ageing teaching workforce in the vocational training sector. Attracting and retaining new educators is increasingly difficult, and there is currently no mandatory system of continuous professional development in place to ensure that teachers stay up to date with industry advancements. Additionally, the regional distribution of training opportunities does not reflect actual labour market demands, leading to mismatches between graduate specialisations and the geographic availability of jobs. Finally, the examination and assessment system also require revision to ensure that it reflects contemporary market expectations and produces graduates with genuinely job-ready skills [18].

To address these challenges and secure a sufficient supply of skilled labour, both in terms of quantity and quality, a comprehensive restructuring of Hungary's tourism vocational training system is urgently needed.

In response to immediate operational demands, some service providers have adopted the establishment of multifunctional roles and teams as a practical measure. In such arrangements, employees are partially or fully retrained to perform duties

beyond their original scope. For instance, a housekeeping staff member may also assist in food service, thereby improving workforce flexibility and reducing overall staffing needs. However, it is important to note that not all roles can be effectively combined, and attempting to do so above a certain service standard may negatively affect the guest experience.

In the context of recruitment and retention, particularly at the higher service levels within the hospitality and catering industries, offering competitive benefits and structured career development is critical. Without this, attracting and keeping qualified workers becomes increasingly difficult. Competitive compensation must be complemented by a well-designed benefits package that supports work-life balance, offers training and advancement opportunities, and includes clear career development pathways.

Additionally, employee satisfaction and loyalty can be significantly enhanced through wellness initiatives and programmes aimed at maintaining physical and mental health. As noted by Bassa Scheresberg [19], such measures are not only effective in improving workplace morale but also contribute to long-term staff retention and organisational stability.

## **8. The role of digital technologies and the emergence of new competencies in the tourism sector**

In the contemporary tourism industry, the role of digital technologies—particularly artificial intelligence (AI)—has become both inescapable and transformative. As Csendes and Kis [20] noted, AI has already permeated nearly all areas of life, and its application within tourism is no longer optional but rather a necessity for maintaining competitiveness [20]. While AI is not yet capable of fully substituting entire job roles, it can significantly enhance efficiency, reduce operational costs, and support human employees across a variety of positions.

Currently, AI can perform or assist with numerous functions within tourism operations. For example, in the role of reservation agents, AI-powered chatbots are increasingly capable of handling bookings and offering basic guidance to tourists. Customer service representatives are also supported by chatbot technologies that address frequently asked questions, manage routine complaints, and facilitate responses to online guest feedback. Travel agents are seeing the traditional scope of their work reshaped by AI-driven search engines and recommendation systems, which allow travellers to generate personalised travel plans within minutes.

Language remains a key barrier in tourism, and AI as a language translation tool or interpreter can now enable smooth communication between service providers and international tourists—opening the industry to new target groups who might previously have been excluded due to linguistic limitations. Similarly, AI-based tour guide applications offer customised tour routes with interactive map integration and audio descriptions of landmarks, potentially transforming traditional guided tours into personalised, self-directed experiences.

In more data-intensive functions, AI acts as a powerful data analyst, processing vast volumes of information to reveal actionable insights. It can also serve as a pricing manager, optimising price strategies based on real-time supply and demand metrics, analysing competitor rates, and recommending optimal pricing schemes accordingly.

Beyond operational tasks, AI contributes substantially to sales, marketing, and communication. It aggregates online search behaviour, identifies consumer needs,

supports personalised offer generation, and facilitates automated yet targeted communication across digital platforms.

While the advantages of AI are often associated with large corporations, it is important to stress that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) also stand to benefit from these technologies. In fact, SMEs may find AI particularly useful in compensating for a lack of specialised personnel across multiple roles [21].

Parallel to the integration of these digital tools, the competencies required for tourism workers have also evolved significantly. Whereas only a few decades ago digital literacy was limited to a handful of positions, today basic digital skills—such as using smartphones, managing emails, editing documents, and navigating online resources—are considered essential across virtually all roles. However, due to the rapid pace of technological change, it is difficult to predict precisely which competencies will be required in the near future. It is highly likely that some of the tools and platforms workers will rely on in the next 3–5 years do not yet exist or are still under development—just as the early stages of e-tourism disrupted traditional hospitality operations prior to the pandemic [22].

What is clear, however, is that AI literacy is emerging as a core competency across both front-office and back-office positions within tourism [23]. Most tourism employers now recognise the need for ongoing digital skills development among their employees. Yet, many businesses still lack the technological infrastructure or training systems necessary to support this evolution. Consequently, much of the responsibility currently falls on employees themselves, with companies benefiting greatly from individuals who are intrinsically motivated, curious, and open to experimenting with new technologies.

As Hadjielias et al. [24] point out, workers who demonstrate an openness to innovation and who can easily integrate digital tools into their daily tasks will likely enjoy a substantial competitive advantage in the future labour market [23]. Thus, the cultivation of digital competencies—particularly those involving AI—represents not only an organisational necessity but also a personal investment in long-term employability within a rapidly changing sector.

## **9. The impact of digitalization on tourism operations: A Hungarian research**

### **9.1 Research aspects**

The research focused on several key aspects that illustrate the multifaceted impact of digitalization on tourism enterprises. One of the primary areas of investigation was customer service and customer experience. It was observed that digitalization significantly influences the quality of customer interactions and the overall travel experience. Online booking systems and chatbot technologies offer rapid, automated communication, facilitating efficient service provision. Nevertheless, personal interaction continues to play a vital role throughout the customer journey. Another important research focus was the transformation of job roles and required expertise within the tourism sector. As digital tools become more integrated into daily operations, there is an increasing demand for skills in digital technologies, data analysis, cybersecurity, online marketing, and digital communication.

Closely related to this is the issue of workforce efficiency and productivity. The study found that digital solutions — including automated administrative processes,

cloud-based systems, and mobile applications — significantly enhance the efficiency and flexibility of tourism operations, improving both geographical mobility and task-based adaptability. The research also examined the field of product development, where digital tools were found to support more effective and targeted service innovation. These technologies enable deeper consumer insight through data analysis, the creation of virtual prototypes, and improved responsiveness to customer needs, thereby enhancing user experience from the planning phase through to post-service feedback.

In terms of pricing strategy development, digitalization has introduced sophisticated tools for data-driven decision-making, including dynamic pricing models and AI-based forecasting systems. These allow tourism enterprises to respond in real-time to market fluctuations, monitor competitors, segment their audiences more precisely, and introduce tailored promotions and loyalty programs.

Service quality measurement and customer feedback mechanisms have also been transformed by digital technology. The use of online surveys, chatbots, and customer service platforms enables more immediate, interactive, and accurate evaluation of customer satisfaction. Analytical tools provide valuable insights that guide service improvements and strategic adjustments. The study further addressed the role of simulation and forecasting, highlighting how digital models and trend analyses aid in long-term planning and scenario-based strategy development. These tools enhance organisational resilience by improving predictive accuracy.

Attention was also given to employee engagement and motivation, with digital tools proving to be effective in creating supportive work environments. Investment in employee training and access to modern technologies fosters satisfaction, retention, and workplace loyalty. Moreover, the cultural and social impacts of digital transformation were explored. Online experience-sharing, digital communities, and social media presence increasingly shape travel habits, influence destination popularity, and affect the public perception of tourism services.

Finally, the research examined data protection and ethical considerations, acknowledging that the expansion of digital services also raises concerns about information security and privacy. Ensuring responsible data handling and regulatory compliance is essential for maintaining customer trust and safeguarding business continuity.

## **9.2 Material and method**

The research applies qualitative methods, primarily interviews and questionnaire-based surveys, alongside the analysis of secondary sources to better understand the post-COVID labour market and digital trends in tourism.

The questionnaire survey was sent to employees in manager positions between 2020 and 2024 at 50 hotels in Hungary. These hotels were all classified as having a minimum of four stars and at least 100 rooms. Prior to sending the questionnaire, a courtesy contact was initiated. This courtesy outreach was successful with 38 managers, while 12 managers could not be reached via phone or any other communication channel. The invitation to complete the questionnaire was sent on September 13, 2024. The questionnaire was created using the Google Forms platform and respondents were given 14 days to complete it. Out of the 50 questionnaires sent, 45 were completed, of which 40 were fully usable and suitable for analysis.

Subsequently, for the purpose of conducting in-depth personal interviews, 22 hotel general managers were contacted in November 2024. However, only the verbal

responses of 13 hotel managers were suitable for evaluation and further analysis. Among these 22 hotel managers, 10 had already participated in the questionnaire-based research, while 12 might have been aware that their subordinate managers had been contacted. Of the 13 valid in-depth interviewees, eight hotel general managers had completed the questionnaire, while five had not; for the latter group, a summary of the questionnaire topics had to be provided.

### 9.3 Results

Empirical findings from the research indicate that digitalization is already prevalent in the hotel sector. The majority of hotels surveyed reported the use of at least one digital solution—such as online booking systems, automated check-in options, or guest communication applications. This widespread adoption suggests a general recognition within the industry of the need to implement digital technologies. However, it remains uncertain whether this digital expansion represents an irreversible, long-term transformation. In order to ensure the sustainable integration of such tools, it is essential to pair technological deployment with ongoing knowledge sharing, employee training, and proactive management of perceived tensions between digital automation and human labour.

When examining the motivations behind technological investment, most respondents cited the dual goals of enhancing customer experience and increasing competitiveness. Automation and AI-driven solutions are primarily viewed as means to reduce operational costs and to optimise time efficiency.

The role of AI and data analysis is also becoming increasingly prominent. Many hotels already utilise chatbots and automated communication platforms to assist with guest interactions. In addition, data collection and analysis are widely applied to personalise the customer journey and improve service outcomes. The responses indicate a rising trend in the adoption of AI-based tools throughout the sector.

Despite these positive developments, several challenges and limitations were also identified. Chief among them are the high initial costs associated with acquiring and implementing digital technologies, as well as a lack of technical expertise and supporting infrastructure in many organisations. Furthermore, some respondents stressed that digital tools—while useful—cannot fully replicate the nuance and authenticity of personalised, human-driven guest service.

From a financial perspective, cost reduction was highlighted as one of the most tangible benefits of digital transformation. Automated systems such as self-service kiosks and online reservations contribute to lower staffing needs and streamlined operations, resulting in more cost-effective service delivery.

In parallel, revenue growth is increasingly driven by enhanced data analytics and customer segmentation. These tools enable more targeted marketing efforts, as well as the implementation of upselling and cross-selling strategies that can directly boost profitability.

That said, the overall impact on business outcomes is contingent not only on the initial purchase of digital tools but also on their ongoing operation, continuous development, and the quality of data provided. While many respondents observed measurable gains in revenue, they also noted that maintaining and evolving these systems entails ongoing investment. If not carefully managed, such costs may erode profitability over time, underscoring the importance of strategic digital planning and resource allocation.

## **10. Conclusions**

The findings of the study clearly demonstrate that the integration of digital solutions in the hotel industry contributes significantly to improving operational efficiency and enhancing overall competitiveness. Digital tools streamline administrative and service-related processes, enable real-time responsiveness, and allow for more targeted customer engagement – each of which supports better business performance.

Moreover, the implementation of digital technologies has a direct and positive impact on customer experience and satisfaction. By facilitating faster communication, personalised services, and convenient access to information, these tools help hotels to meet and even exceed modern traveller expectations, which in turn strengthens their market position.

The research also highlights that hotels which adopt digital technologies at a higher level tend to achieve more favourable business outcomes than those that limit their use to basic applications. However, while digitalisation offers significant advantages, it is not a substitute for human contribution.

The human factor – characterised by creativity, professional expertise, and emotional intelligence – continues to play an essential role in shaping the quality of customer service and ensuring adaptive, high-level performance within hotel operations. Personalised guest interactions, nuanced problem-solving, and service empathy remain attributes that digital tools alone cannot replicate.

Therefore, the study concludes that the optimal strategy lies in the balanced integration of digital technologies with human input. The synergistic combination of automation and human sensitivity not only maximises efficiency and profitability but also ensures the kind of high-quality, authentic guest experience that forms the cornerstone of long-term success in the hotel industry.

Despite the strengths of this study, certain scope-related considerations should be noted. The research focused specifically on large, four-star hotels in Hungary, which allows for a detailed exploration of this segment but may limit the applicability of findings to smaller or differently positioned establishments. Additionally, the use of self-reported data reflects perceptions and experiences at a given time, which—while valuable—could benefit from complementary longitudinal or observational methods. Future research could extend these insights by including comparative analyses across different hotel categories or geographic regions, and by examining the long-term impacts of digital transformation strategies on performance and service quality.

### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.


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## Chapter 8

# A Framework for Measuring Personalization in the Luxury Hotel Industry

*Kyle Liao and Leila Halawi*

### Abstract

The primary purpose of this research is to develop a point of view on the most effective metrics for assessing the success of digital marketing personalization strategies in the luxury hotel industry in the United States. This qualitative study involves interviews with marketing managers and is supported by secondary data from online resources. A total of 7 marketing managers were involved in the study. They share comparable strategic frameworks and professional vocabularies specific to luxury hospitality, enabling more profound exploration of nuanced variations within established practices rather than broad conceptual differences. This specialized expertise provides intensive insights into luxury hospitality marketing nuances that generalist marketers would lack, making theoretical saturation achievable when no new substantive themes emerge from this expert population. The findings related to the essence of personalization in improving marketing effectiveness, the importance of personalization in maximizing revenue and upselling opportunities, how personalization drives customer loyalty, satisfaction, and repeat business, personalization's reputation in creating unique and memorable experiences, and customer experience. Key themes emerged as the most efficient metrics for measuring personalization in luxury hotels in the United States: conversion rates, customer satisfaction, revenue, return on investment, and engagement metrics. The findings of this research will contribute to understanding how luxury hotels can better evaluate and implement personalization initiatives while maintaining the high standards of service and exclusivity their guests expect. The researchers emerged with a theory, "The Personalization-Enhanced Experience Framework."

**Keywords:** personalization, digital marketing, luxury hotel, campaign measurement, key performance indicators [KPI]

### 1. Introduction

The United States hotel industry represents a significant economic force, generating billions in annual revenue and serving as a critical component of the national economy [1]. This market is characterized by intense competition among diverse property types, ranging from large full-service establishments to boutique hotels

and vacation rentals, with major brands such as Marriott, Hilton, Four Seasons, and InterContinental dominating the landscape [2]. Competitive success within this sector is determined by multiple variables, including strategic location, pricing structures, amenity offerings, and customer satisfaction metrics [3].

The digital transformation has fundamentally altered consumer behavior, creating obstacles particularly for smaller establishments lacking resources to match larger chains' extensive digital marketing investments [4]. Modern marketing technology prioritizes customer-focused approaches, allowing organizations to better understand and engage target audiences through detailed behavioral insights [5]. This approach has developed into sophisticated personalization strategies that use guest data to create tailored experiences, including customized room preferences and targeted promotional communications [6]. Luxury hotel personalization strategies are grounded in marketing theories emphasizing customer-centricity. Relationship marketing builds long-term connections through tailored experiences, while service-dominant logic positions guests as value co-creators via personalized touchpoints. Experience economy frameworks prioritize individualized experiences over standardized services. For luxury hotels, this extends to exclusive, prestige-oriented experiences reflecting brand heritage, using high-quality visual content and targeted marketing to reach specific demographics while differentiating from competitors and enhancing loyalty [7–9].

Despite increased adoption of personalization strategies, the hotel industry faces a critical measurement gap. Traditional marketing metrics often fail to evaluate personalization effectiveness, missing nuanced customer interactions and long-term relationship building [10, 11]. This challenge grows due to difficulties linking bookings and revenue directly to specific campaigns, making return on investment calculations complex and unreliable [12]. The demand for comprehensive, standardized frameworks has become urgent, requiring metrics that provide real-time insights for actionable decision-making [13–16]. Personalization implementation demands careful attention to data privacy and security concerns, balancing benefits with responsible data handling practices that comply with changing privacy regulations while maintaining guest trust [17]. Incorporating personalization into business analytics offers opportunities for deeper customer understanding through advanced segmentation, helping hotels identify segment-specific patterns that support more informed strategic decisions [18, 19]. This study examines the critical need for effective measurement frameworks in hotel industry personalization efforts, particularly focusing on luxury operations. This study addresses the critical gap in measurement frameworks for hotel industry personalization, particularly in luxury operations. Theoretically, this study contributes to hospitality management literature by developing comprehensive evaluation mechanisms that extend customer relationship management theory for high-touch service environments where exclusivity is paramount. The study provides hotel managers with validated measurement tools to assess personalization ROI, maintain service excellence while implementing technology-driven strategies, and make data-driven decisions that enhance guest satisfaction. The findings offer actionable insights for balancing automation with a human touch, while providing scalable frameworks that can be adapted across different hotel segments for industry-wide optimization of personalization efforts.

## **2. Literature review**

Luxury is inherently subjective and varies between individuals, making it challenging to define luxury hotels universally [20]. Research involving 27 interviews

with luxury hotel managers across the USA, U.K., Australia, and Greece found that desires for self-actualization determine luxuriousness through knowledge, beauty appreciation, spiritual sophistication, and cultural esthetics [21]. Personal differences in ethnicity, culture, education, and experiences make luxury highly subjective. What constitutes luxury for one person may be considered a necessity for another.

Digital marketing effectiveness in luxury hotels is evaluated through quantitative and qualitative metrics, providing comprehensive insights into campaign performance and guest engagement [22]. Reviews and Ratings are fundamental indicators of guest satisfaction and influence booking decisions. Hotels can monitor these through platforms like TripAdvisor, Yelp, and Booking.com, using specialized software to track trends and respond promptly to feedback [23]. Conversion Rate Metrics measure the proportion of website visitors who complete desired actions such as reservations or form submissions. Hotels can optimize these rates through A/B testing, personalized landing pages, retargeting strategies, and monitoring performance using Google Analytics and Adobe Analytics [14, 24]. Return on Investment (ROI) quantifies digital marketing effectiveness by calculating revenue minus advertising expenditures. To allocate budgets effectively, hotels can track ROI across various channels, including SEO, PPC, social media, and email marketing [25]. Revenue per Available Room (RevPAR) and Revenue per Room (RPR) are crucial financial performance indicators. RevPAR divides total hotel income by available rooms, while RPR measures revenue generated per room per day. Both metrics help hotels assess the impact of digital marketing on revenue generation and identify successful campaigns [26]. Brand Reputation is measured through Net Promoter Score (NPS), social media monitoring, and review analysis. Luxury hotels can enhance their reputation through guest satisfaction surveys, content marketing, and influencer partnerships [27]. Social Media Engagement tracks interactions across platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, measuring likes, shares, comments, and community-building efforts. Tools like Hootsuite and platform-specific analytics help monitor engagement effectiveness [28, 29]. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Metrics include organic search traffic, search engine rankings, bounce rates, and average time on site. Hotels use Google Analytics and Search Console to monitor these metrics while implementing keyword optimization and content marketing strategies [30, 31]. Key Performance Indicators for Personalization include: Click-through Rate (CTR) measures personalized communication effectiveness, with higher rates indicating relevant, well-timed offers [32], Customer Retention Rate evaluates long-term personalization success, as customized experiences enhance satisfaction and loyalty [33] and Repeat Business Rate tracks returning customers, with studies showing personalized recommendations can increase repeat business by up to 50% [34].

In consumers' eyes, the "right" experience constantly evolves, requiring businesses to see every physical and digital touchpoint as a chance to add value and relevance for customers through effective personalization [35]. Personalization should be a crucial part of every company's overarching business strategy, defined as the capacity to draw on customer information and context to produce a customized, consistent, and relevant experience for each customer, ultimately leading to more desirable and lucrative customer journeys [36]. While 65% of personalization decision-makers claim their organizations have implemented or are planning personalization strategies, most businesses remain in early stages, focusing on short-term objectives like boosting customer satisfaction and attracting new clients rather than deeper initiatives like identifying customer segments or building brand loyalty [37–40]. However, personalization initiatives can provide businesses with clear competitive advantages in today's market,

as companies employing these strategies benefit from improved customer experiences, greater loyalty, and increased likelihood of customer retention [41]. Although personalization software and tactics have been robust for years, technologically savvy consumers now demand exceptional, digital-first customer experiences, making it more important than ever to take a strategic approach to personalization given the enormous shift in consumer behavior and exponential rise in data complexity [36].

Ardani and Harianto [42] examined social media marketing within the hospitality industry, specifically focusing on the accommodation sector and hotels due to their recent growth and academic attention, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of social media and user-generated content on hotel performance is constantly growing [11], making it essential to measure these effects for the hospitality sector [42, 43]. Before implementing any social media strategy, companies must define their unique business objectives and set measurable goals [23, 44]. Various scholars define social media as Internet-based applications facilitating user-generated content creation and exchange [45], representing a shift from one-to-many broadcast mechanisms to many-to-many conversational models [46]. With over 1.5 billion people worldwide having Internet access [47], hospitality operators must embrace the online world and ensure transparent brand delivery across multiple channels. Transparency is crucial for increasing brand credibility, as customers can access vast information through platforms like TripAdvisor, which customers frequently visit before making decisions [47, 48]. Minazzi [49] states that success requires clearly defining objectives, markets, and target prospects while building a strong brand presence through a focused content strategy.

Retargeting allows businesses to provide real-time product recommendations to customers through personalized recommendation systems that display previously viewed products, potentially boosting sales [50]. Dynamic retargeting ads show customers images of identical items they previously explored on websites they left without purchasing [51], and this targeted approach appears logical since marketing literature suggests tighter customer targeting should improve relevance and response rates [51]. Industry data indicates significant effectiveness improvements, with tailored retargeted advertisements being four times more effective than generic retargeted ads and six times more effective than regular banner ads [52], leading to widespread adoption by retargeting providers like Next Performance, which has served 30 billion retargeted impressions and reached 500 million unique visitors [50]. However, while there is considerable enthusiasm for dynamic retargeting among internet advertising professionals, empirical evidence does not fully support its effectiveness compared to internal website recommendations, and advertisers still lack clear guidance on when and how to implement highly relevant retargeted content [18, 50].

Traditional one-way business communication has evolved into interactive approaches as companies rebuild consumer trust, with interaction defined as “the extent to which two or more communication parties can act on each other, on the communication medium, and on the messages and the extent to which such influences are synchronized” [53]. When companies meet consumers’ interactivity expectations, trust, satisfaction, and commitment increase; failure to do so erodes trust [54]. Computer-mediated communication struggles to convey emotional nuances due to missing nonverbal cues, leading to misunderstandings and reduced human connection. To address this, businesses increasingly use emoticons [“keyboard characters representing facial expressions or emotions”] and emojis [“pictograms of objects, animals, and facial features”] in digital communications, which enhance enjoyment, interpersonal interaction, and perceived information richness while humanizing business communication [53–55].

In luxury hospitality, personalization initiatives significantly boost customer loyalty and repeat business by creating memorable experiences that exceed expectations, driving revenue growth and positive word-of-mouth [56]. Effectiveness is measured through conversion rates, engagement levels, customer satisfaction surveys, and financial metrics like Average Order Value and Customer Lifetime Value, with personalized marketing encouraging increased guest spending [56, 57]. Tracking ROI for personalized campaigns is essential for optimizing marketing budgets and resource allocation [14]. At the same time, comprehensive monitoring of these metrics provides hotel analytics departments with quantifiable insights to refine personalization strategies and maximize their effectiveness in driving customer loyalty within the digital marketing landscape [58].

### **3. Methodology**

This study employed a constructivist grounded theory [CGT] approach to investigate personalization in digital marketing within the luxury hotel industry. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with marketing and data analytics managers from luxury hotels in the United States, utilizing homogeneous expert sampling to access individuals with specialized knowledge and decision-making authority. Participants were recruited through direct contact, snowball sampling, and social media platforms, with interviews conducted via phone or online platforms, averaging 59 minutes, using open-ended questions designed to elicit rich, detailed responses. All participants face similar competitive landscapes and market pressures, allowing for focused inquiry into sophisticated responses rather than fundamental definitional discussions. Data analysis followed the iterative grounded theory process, involving constant comparison between data collection and analysis through three coding stages: open, axial, and selective. Secondary data from industry reports, literature, and social media analytics were integrated to triangulate findings and comprehensively understand the research topic. Memoing was employed throughout the analysis to capture insights, track understanding development, and maintain awareness of theoretical perspectives and potential biases. The study maintained methodological rigor through systematic data collection and evidence-based analysis while incorporating researcher creativity in theory development with continuous reflexivity to examine assumptions, biases, and values throughout the research process. A pilot study with three participants helped refine the research design by identifying problematic questions and unclear language that needed adjustment. Based on feedback, the researcher reframed yes/no questions into scaled responses, simplified confusing terminology, and made wording improvements. The pilot validated the methodology, assessed feasibility, and ensured the main study would produce reliable results with improved protocols.

### **4. Results**

#### **4.1 Volunteer demographics and data saturation**

Seven marketing managers from luxury hotels across the United States participated in this grounded theory study (six male, one female). Data collection occurred through diverse interview formats (audio-recorded, video, and telephone interviews)

between August and September 2023, with interview durations averaging 59 minutes. Data saturation was achieved after six interviews, with a seventh conducted for confirmation. Manual grounded theory analysis followed established protocols.

#### **4.2 Effectiveness of personalization in digital marketing: Four key metrics for luxury hotels**

This study identifies four critical themes for assessing personalization effectiveness in digital marketing initiatives within the luxury hotel industry. The findings reveal that these metrics provide individual and compound benefits to ensure a holistic view of effectiveness and performance in personalized marketing campaigns.

##### *4.2.1 Theme 1: Conversion rate*

Conversion rate emerged as the most popular metric among respondents, measuring the percentage of website visitors who complete desired actions such as reservations, newsletter signups, or brochure downloads. The effectiveness of personalized content is demonstrated through performance differentials. A comprehensive evaluation requires integration with supplementary metrics. The literature supports the adaptation of existing frameworks for personalization measurement. While not specific to personalization, the Conversion Rate Optimization (CRO) framework can be modified to evaluate personalization impact on conversion rates through user behavior analysis, A/B testing, targeted messaging, and user experience optimization [59, 60].

##### *4.2.2 Theme 2: Engagement metrics*

Engagement metrics constitute a critical evaluation dimension, encompassing time spent on personalized landing pages, click-through rates, and social media engagement. Time-based engagement measurement provides valuable insights into content effectiveness. Research validates the importance of engagement metrics in personalization evaluation. Rodriguez [61] establishes that engagement metrics provide insights into user interaction with personalized content, with higher engagement levels suggesting effective customer connection creation. The adoption rate of personalized features reflects the extent of customer engagement with personalized offerings [62, 63].

##### *4.2.3 Theme 3: Customer satisfaction*

Customer satisfaction represents a critical yet challenging metric for evaluating personalization effectiveness. Survey-based feedback constitutes a primary method. Scholarly research confirms the positive relationship between personalization and customer satisfaction in luxury hotels. Padma and Ahn [64] found that personalization achieves customer satisfaction by catering to individual needs, creating exclusivity, and tailoring experiences. Tai et al. [65] demonstrated personalization's positive influence on satisfaction and loyalty through value creation and brand connection. Measurement methodologies include surveys and feedback mechanisms [66], Net Promoter Score [NPS] for loyalty assessment [67], and online review analysis [68]. These approaches provide comprehensive insights into guest satisfaction with personalized experiences.

#### 4.2.4 Theme 4: Revenue metrics and return on investment

Revenue-related metrics are essential for assessing personalization’s financial impact. Return on Investment [ROI] measures financial returns from personalization initiatives compared to investment costs. ROI calculation involves a comprehensive cost–benefit analysis. Positive ROI indicates substantial financial impact and investment justification [14]. Research supports positive relationships between personalization and revenue metrics. Li et al. [69] found that personalization initiatives positively impact average revenue per guest through premium pricing and increased spending. Morosan and DeFranco [70] established personalization’s significant contribution to revenue growth through enhanced engagement and increased cross-selling opportunities.

**Table 1** presents the four key themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis of the interview data. Direct quotes from participants accompany each theme.

Themes	Participants direct quotes
Theme 1: Conversion Rate	<p>Respondent 1 explained, “We track the conversion rate for personalized content or offers compared to non-personalized content to assess the effectiveness of personalization in driving our desired actions.”</p> <p>Respondent 2 noted, “I typically implement A/B testing or similar techniques. I create two marketing campaign versions, one with personalized content or offers tailored to individual customers’ preferences and another with non-personalized content.”</p> <p>Respondent 5 observed, “When comparing the conversion rates, if the personalized content or offers consistently outperform the non-personalized content, personalization effectively captures customers’ attention and interest. Higher conversion rates indicate customers are more likely to respond positively to personalized content, resulting in increased engagement and desired actions.”</p> <p>Respondent 4 emphasized, “I use other metrics in conjunction with conversion rates to gain a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of personalization. I analyze key performance indicators like click-through rates, time spent on personalized content, and bounce rates to evaluate customer engagement and satisfaction with personalized experiences.”</p>
Theme 2: Engagement Metrics	<p>Respondent 4 highlighted, “I also include information such as time spent on landing pages, click-through rates on personalized offers, or social media engagement. Higher engagement indicates that my firm’s targeting of our clients resonates with the users and captures their attention.”</p> <p>Respondent 1 stated: “We have a system that allows our IT professionals to measure the duration our guests spend on our company’s landing pages, tailored to their preferences and interests. Longer durations on our sites indicate that guests actively explore the content and find value in our personalized recommendations”.</p> <p>Respondent 5 acknowledged, “Click-through rate is used in our organization to measure the effectiveness of our ads in driving guest action and conversions. Whenever we place an ad with higher click-through rates, we congratulate ourselves for our efforts because we understand that the guests find our customized offers relevant and appealing.”</p> <p>Respondent 3 shared a transformative experience: “I remember in 2018 our profits were going down, and we were receiving negative reviews on TripAdvisor. Using Facebook, we converted many of our customers into our brand advocates.”</p>

Themes	Participants direct quotes
Theme 3: Customer Satisfaction	<p>Respondent 1 noted, “Whenever I create a personalized message campaign for my client, I always try to get their responses. Customer satisfaction reflects how well the hotel understands and fulfills guests’ unique needs, preferences, and desires.”</p> <p>Respondent 2 explained: “We conduct regular voluntary surveys where we ask our guests questions about how well they were served as per their needs, satisfaction, and suggestions for improvement.” Online reviews and ratings provide additional satisfaction indicators.</p> <p>Respondent 3 elaborated, “Customer satisfaction is an effective metric for measuring personalization efforts. In my case, I tend to review the guest loyalty and repeat business; it is common knowledge that a satisfied customer keeps coming back, and there is a high customer retention rate.”</p>
Theme 4: Revenue Metrics and Return on Investment	<p>Respondent 1 noted, “As an IT marketing manager, I always analyze metrics such as average revenue per guest, upsell/cross-sell revenue, or repeat bookings from guests who have experienced personalized offerings. Whenever I realize increases in these metrics, I uncover the effectiveness of personalization in driving financial success.”</p> <p>Respondent 4 discussed comparative analysis: “I always compare CLV between guests who have experienced personalized offerings and those who have not. This helps me determine if personalization leads to higher customer lifetime value over time.”</p> <p>Respondent 2 explained their departmental approach: “Our department compares costs associated with implementing personalization technologies, data analytics tools, or staff training with the revenue or cost savings generated.”</p>

**Table 1.**  
*Emergent themes and supporting interviewee quotes.*

## 5. Findings and standardized framework

In the luxury hotel industry, where personalized experiences and tailored marketing efforts play a crucial role, measuring the effectiveness of digital marketing campaigns becomes paramount. Various metrics have been employed to evaluate the success of these initiatives, and they were also supported [71, 72]. Conversion rates emerge as the most efficient metric for measuring digital marketing effectiveness in luxury hotels, representing the percentage of website visitors who complete desired actions such as booking rooms or subscribing to newsletters [71–73]. Multiple studies demonstrate a positive correlation between personalization efforts and conversion rates, with personalized email campaigns significantly outperforming generic marketing messages [74, 75]. Personalized content across digital channels enhances customer engagement, leading to higher conversion rates [61]. Click-through rates [CTR] serve as valuable indicators of personalization effectiveness, with tailored content and offers capturing potential guests’ attention more effectively [76]. Personalized recommendation systems integrated into hotel websites demonstrate increased conversion rates, as customers receiving personalized recommendations show higher booking likelihood [77]. Time spent on websites represents a critical engagement metric, with personalization enhancing user experience through relevant content presentation [78, 79]. Customers who perceive that websites understand their preferences spend additional time exploring offerings, allowing

hotels to gauge interest levels generated through personalized experiences [78]. Social media platforms provide opportunities for personalized engagement through targeted content and interactive campaigns, with likes, comments, shares, and mentions indicating customer interest and strategy effectiveness. User-generated content engagement, including reviews and testimonials, increases when customers experience personalized services, providing insights into satisfaction and brand perception. Personalized experiences drive customer loyalty, which correlates with higher conversion rates [80]. Revenue metrics, including average spend per visit and customer lifetime value, demonstrate the financial benefits of personalization, with studies showing positive correlations between personalized recommendation systems and revenue generation [81]. Customer satisfaction increases through personalization initiatives that meet expectations, leading to repeat business and positive word-of-mouth [17].

Return on Ad Spend [ROAS] quantifies revenue generated per advertising unit, helping assess digital marketing campaign efficiency. Research emphasizes ROAS's importance in evaluating personalized marketing impact and optimizing advertising budget allocation in luxury hotels.

## **5.1 Standardized framework**

The luxury hotel industry lacks universally accepted frameworks specifically designed to measure personalization effectiveness in digital marketing. However, existing models like the Digital Marketing Measurement Model by Pauwels et al. [82] and Net Promoter Score [NPS] provide valuable foundations. A practical measurement framework should incorporate customer journey mapping to identify key personalized touchpoints, A/B testing for experimental comparison of strategies, customer segmentation for targeted analysis, and data analytics tools to track relevant metrics. The framework development process requires collaboration among digital marketing experts, IT managers, data analysts, and customer experience professionals to establish clear objectives aligned with marketing goals, including enhanced customer satisfaction, increased loyalty, improved revenue generation, and positive word-of-mouth promotion. Critical metrics should encompass customer satisfaction scores, retention rates, repeat bookings, revenue per guest, customer lifetime value, and personalization-specific indicators such as customization levels, recommendation accuracy, and perceived exclusivity.

Research identifies four primary measurement areas: conversion rates, engagement metrics, customer satisfaction, revenue metrics, and return on investment analysis. Personalization significantly impacts customer loyalty and repeat business by creating unique, memorable experiences that exceed expectations, leading to improved conversion rates, higher engagement levels, increased Average Order Value, and enhanced Customer Lifetime Value, reflecting long-term financial benefits. The framework should undergo prototyping and refinement through testing with sample initiatives, incorporate stakeholder feedback, and emphasize continuous evaluation through regular monitoring and guest feedback collection. Once finalized, the framework should be disseminated throughout the luxury hotel industry via publications, conferences, and professional forums to promote widespread adoption and enable hotels to gain quantifiable insights into personalization impact, guiding strategy refinement and optimization to maximize effectiveness in digital marketing.

## 5.2 The personalization-enhanced experience framework, measurable impact, and business outcomes

The Personalization-Enhanced Experience Framework (**Figure 1**) establishes that luxury hotels must transcend traditional service delivery to create unique and memorable guest experiences. This model recognizes that effective personalization involves crafting tailored interactions that resonate with individual preferences and needs, forging lasting emotional connections. The framework establishes two critical success drivers: sophisticated personalization that anticipates guest expectations at every touchpoint [83] and customer experience delivery that creates positive emotional connections throughout the guest journey [84]. Under intense competitive pressure [85], luxury hotels leverage digital marketing opportunities for targeted messaging and data-driven insights, integrating personalization initiatives across multiple platforms. Implementation strategies include leveraging customer data and insights, utilizing technology and automation systems, training hotel staff in personalization techniques, and developing personalized offerings that create cohesive experiences across all touchpoints.

The framework generates measurable outcomes that directly impact guest satisfaction and business performance. Revenue maximization occurs through enhanced upselling opportunities, increased guest spending, and stronger repeat business relationships [86]. Marketing effectiveness improves through enhanced customer targeting, increased message relevance, and boosted campaign performance.

Four primary metrics demonstrate personalization effectiveness: conversion rates reflecting improved customer decisions, customer satisfaction scores indicating emotional connection success, revenue metrics including improved REVPAR, and engagement metrics capturing customer interaction depth. These outcomes create a cycle where enhanced satisfaction leads to loyalty, repeat business, positive word-of-mouth, and customer advocacy [87]. The framework acknowledges implementation challenges, including complex data integration [88], privacy compliance, technological infrastructure development [89], and cross-functional collaboration requirements [90]. Success depends on cultivating organization-wide data-driven



**Figure 1.** Personalization-enhanced experience framework.

decision-making and maintaining alignment between personalization initiatives and strategic business objectives.

## **6. Limitations, recommendations and future research**

The study's small sample size of only 7 participants, primarily marketing managers rather than IT marketing specialists, limits the generalizability of findings to the broader luxury hotel industry in the United States. Data collection relied on qualitative interviews that may be subject to response bias, as participants might avoid appearing unknowledgeable about the subject matter. The research did not fully account for external factors such as economic conditions, competition, or evolving consumer behavior that could influence personalization effectiveness in digital marketing. The brief two-month study duration restricts capturing long-term industry trends and changes. Additionally, the timing coincided with the hospitality industry's incomplete recovery from COVID-19, potentially affecting the reliability and representativeness of the results. The compressed timeframe may not have captured the complete recovery trends from the pandemic's impact on the luxury hotel sector.

Luxury hotels should establish clear personalization objectives targeting customer satisfaction, conversion rates, loyalty, and revenue growth, measured through customer lifetime value and engagement metrics. The foundation requires IoT devices and sensors to collect real-time guest preference data, enabling automatic room adjustments and personalized amenity delivery via mobile applications that are compliant with GDPR and CCPA regulations. Machine learning algorithms should power recommendation engines suggesting personalized offers based on guest preferences and historical data, while content personalization spans all digital touchpoints, including websites, emails, and marketing materials. Throughout the guest journey, hotels should deploy personalized check-in services, room customization, concierge services, and AI-powered chatbots providing 24/7 customer service based on guest profiles. Technology implementations must provide guests control over room settings while maintaining robust data security through authentication and encryption protocols. Hotels should establish digital feedback platforms and implement guest segmentation algorithms based on demographics, behavior, and loyalty status. The personalization framework requires validation through case studies and pilot programs to prove strategy efficacy.

Future research should explore longitudinal studies tracking personalization outcomes, AI and virtual reality applications, comparative analysis across luxury brands, and the relationship between personalization initiatives and employee engagement to understand how staff satisfaction influences personalized service delivery and customer satisfaction.

## **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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This book will address the growing need for a comprehensive understanding of the hospitality and leisure industry, a sector that continues to evolve and shape global economies. The book will give readers a thorough understanding of the industry's many facets, such as customer experience, service management, and sustainability practices, in an easy-to-read and succinct manner. It will also emphasize how important innovation and technology are to changing industry business structures and consumer expectations. The book will attempt to close the gap between theory and practice by providing practical tactics for success with an emphasis on real-world applications. Along with exploring important industry themes like sustainability, personalization, and digital transformation, the book will give readers a road map for negotiating these changes. It will look at how companies can handle operational difficulties, adjust to shifting consumer tastes, and produce customer loyalty-boosting memorable experiences. The book will also provide case studies and industrial examples to show how concepts are applied in real-world situations, making for a comprehensive and interesting educational experience. Upon completion, readers will possess a more profound comprehension of the operational and strategic choices that influence success in the always-changing hospitality and leisure sector.

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