



# JOURNAL OF TOURISM, SUSTAINABILITY AND WELL-BEING

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VOLUME 13  
NO 2/25

CIN  
TURS

Editor-in-Chief: Patrícia Pinto

# TECHNICAL INFORMATION

## JOURNAL OF TOURISM, SUSTAINABILITY AND WELL-BEING

2025, VOL. 13, NO. 2

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### Publisher:

Research Centre for Tourism, Sustainability and Well-being - CinTurs  
University of Algarve, Gambelas Campus, Faculty of Economics, Building 8, 8005-139, Faro | [cinturs@ualg.pt](mailto:cinturs@ualg.pt) | [www.cinturs.pt](http://www.cinturs.pt)

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### Open Access Policy:

This is a blind peer-reviewed journal.

Articles submitted to this journal should not have been published before in their current or substantially similar form.

The JTSW is diffused by all links related to the Research Center for Tourism, Sustainability and Well-being and is continually online (<https://www.jsod-cieo.net/journal-tsw/index.php/jtsw/index>)

This journal is supported by National Funds provided by FCT- Foundation for Science and Technology through project UID/04020/2020 - CinTurs: Research Centre for Tourism, Sustainability and Well-being.

### Indexation:

RePec-Ideas | Directory of Open Access Journals | Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) - Clarivate | Latindex | Academia.edu | Google Scholar | RCAAP

### Networking and Indexing:

Marlene Fernandes | Sílvia Fernandes

### Editorial Assistant:

Marlene Fernandes

### Design and Cover Concept:

Bloco D, Design e Comunicação

### Cover Image:

Photo by Tasha on Unsplash

### Quarterly Edition

ISSN: 2795-5044

CinTurs, Faro, Portugal

## AIMS & SCOPE

The **Journal of Tourism, Sustainability and Well-being (JTSW)** is an international open-access academic journal in the tourism field that publishes high-quality, refereed articles that advance science widely available so that tourism can serve the society, enhance a sustainable development of the destinations, and positively impact the well-being of stakeholders.

JTSW offers itself a multidisciplinary and all-inclusive bridge between theoretical and practical aspects of tourism and the emerging interdisciplinary aspects that can revolutionise the tourism and hospitality industries. While the JTSW maintains its traditional focus on original research, both conceptual and empirical, that clearly contributes to the theoretical development of the tourism field, it also has a far more inclusive and broadened scope to keep up with the new problems that challenge academics and practitioners working in private, public and non-profit organisations globally. JTSW encourages research based on a variety of methods, qualitative and/or quantitative, based on rigorous theoretical reasoning and supported by a strong methodology. Criteria for evaluation include significance in contributing new knowledge, conceptual quality, appropriate methodology, technical competence (of theoretical argument and/or data analysis), and clarity of exposition.

JTSW promotes research on a broad range of topics that explore major trends in the study of relationships between tourism, sustainable development of destinations and well-being of tourism-related stakeholders. Contributions can be from all disciplinary perspectives, with interdisciplinary approaches especially welcomed as far as they apply to the tourism research field. All policy, planning and management aspects of tourism are also encouraged.

The journal is published as a quarterly international review in open access, mainly composed of thematic special issues. The publishing schedule is the last working day of March, June, September and December. Any interested scholar can submit a proposal for the guest-edition of a special issue to the Editor-in-Chief. The proposal should follow the guidelines provided in the Guide for Guest Editors. Each article must follow the publication rules as in the Author Guidelines. The Guest-Editors and the Editor-in-Chief are responsible for the implementation of a double-blind review process. This method ensures that the author(s) and the reviewers remain anonymous to guarantee a fair and impartial review of the submitted manuscripts.

JTSW is published by the Research Centre for Tourism, Sustainability and Well-being (CinTurs), settled at the University of Algarve, Portugal. This journal is funded by National Funds provided by FCT- Foundation for Science and Technology through project UID/04020/2020 - CinTurs: Research Centre for Tourism, Sustainability and Well-being.

The Editorial Board gathers world-renowned experts in different scientific areas, with a striving balance in geographic and gender diversity.

## EDITORIAL

Tourism research continues to reveal the dynamics between visitor experience, community involvement, and workforce well-being. Study 1 highlights how electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) significantly shapes destination image and revisit intentions in cruise tourism, emphasizing the emotional and cognitive connections that promote long-term loyalty. Study 2 explores weddings as staged experiences, where servicescape elements such as venue aesthetics and staff interactions influence guest satisfaction and online recommendations. Study 3 examines the mediating role of social sustainability, showing that while community participation alone may not guarantee support for tourism, its effects are shaped by factors like host-guest conflict and social acceptance. Building on this, Study 4 demonstrates that sustainable tourism fosters income diversification for local communities through the mediating effect of community empowerment, thus reinforcing the importance of inclusive development. Finally, Study 5 shifts the lens to tourism labour, revealing that family responsibilities impact job performance differently among migrant and non-migrant female hotel workers, highlighting the need for socially responsive employment policies. Collectively, these studies underscore that sustainable tourism growth depends on digital influence, experiential quality, empowered communities, and supportive labour practices.

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# The Connection between Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication, Destination Image, and Revisit Intention in Cruise Tourism

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## ABSTRACT

Understanding tourists' word-of-mouth communication, destination preferences, and revisit intentions is important in the rapidly growing cruise tourism industry. Focusing on Amasra, an emerging cruise destination on the Black Sea coast of Türkiye, this study examines the connection between electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), destination image (DI) and tourists' revisit intentions (RI). Structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis of data collected from 235 tourists. The analysis results proved that eWOM has an influence on DI and RI, DI has an influence on RI, and there is a mediating role between eWOM and RI. These findings highlight the potential for developing destinations such as Amasra to promote the natural beauty, old texture and ethnic richness of the region to a wider audience and to create long-term loyalty by strengthening tourists' emotional attachment to the destination. The research highlights the role of relevant factors in the sustainable success of cruise destinations. Focusing on these factors can increase tourists' intention to revisit the destination through strategic marketing, public relations, and destination management efforts. This can support both economic gains and the long-term competitiveness of the destination.

## KEYWORDS

Communication, Tourism communication, Electronic Word-of-Mouth, Destination Image, Revisit Intention, Cruise Tourism

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 24 October 2024 Accepted 20 April 2025

## 1. Introduction

The tourism sector has shown significant growth globally, increasing its impact on national economies. This growth has deepened its interaction with various sectors, such as public relations, marketing, and promotional activities. The growth of the tourism sector has brought significant revenues, numerous employment opportunities, and diversification, thus affecting the standard of living of many people around the world (Hung & Khoa, 2022). Tourism is a geographically diverse activity that attracts diverse travellers with unique preferences, leading to the emergence of specialized market segments (Sousa et al., 2019). There are many types of tourism that attract tourists within the sector. At this point, cruise tourism includes many different opportunities based on sea travel and offers a fun and social experience by visiting different destinations.

Cruise tourism involves holidaying on a sizable passenger vessel, which usually follows a set itinerary that includes multiple stops. These cruises provide a range of amenities and activities, such as dining options, entertainment, and recreational facilities. The destinations that cruise ships explore can vary significantly, encompassing everything from wonderful beach locales to historical cities and cultural sites (Islam et al., 2024). In 2023, a total of 1,542,522 passengers visited Turkey's 19 ports by cruise ships, with the majority of these tourists coming to the ports of Kusadasi and Istanbul. Among the 5 ports in the Black Sea region, which is especially preferred by Russian tourists due to its geopolitical location, the port of Amasra (14,962 passengers) was preferred by the majority of cruise passengers (Directorate General for Maritime Affairs, 2024). In 2024, 26 cruise ships docked at Amasra Port and a total of 25,116 passengers visited with an increase of approximately 60% compared to the previous year (Directorate General for Maritime Affairs, 2025). Amasra, where the first cruise ship departed from the Russian port of Sochi in 2022, has become the new favourite of cruise tourism (Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, 2022).

According to the 2024 global cruise industry status report, cruise passenger numbers in 2023 reached 31.7 million passengers, 107% of 2019 levels. Millennials are emerging as the most enthusiastic future cruise travellers, with Gen Z also emerging as a significant potential market. The cruise industry has generated a global economic impact of \$138 billion, with 1.2 million jobs and \$43 billion in wages worldwide. In this context, the cruise industry has shown steady growth and is emerging as a niche form of tourism, although it represents only 2% of the travel and tourism sectors (Cruise Lines International Association – CLIA, 2024).

As cruise tourism becomes a growing industry worldwide, it has become important to identify the destination characteristics that make a difference in satisfying cruise ship passengers through eWOM communication about their satisfaction and experiences, and to understand the factors that influence their intention to visit again (Brida et al., 2012; Ozturk & Gogtas, 2015). eWOM is when individuals share their experiences about products and services with other individuals (Lee & Youn, 2009; Rossmann et al., 2016). In tourism, eWOM has become even more effective, especially through the internet and social networking sites (Luo & Zhong, 2015). DI means the general idea that tourists have of a tourist destination (Quynh et al., 2021; Udden Babar et al., 2025). RI is a concept that refers to the desire of an individual to return to a particular place or space in the future (Siregar et al., 2021; Gangadhari et al., 2025). Understanding the influence of these concepts on each other is key for destination marketers and policymakers to properly manage and promote tourist destinations.

In the literature review conducted within the scope of the study, it has been indicated that much academic research has been carried out on eWOM, DI, and RI (Aviana & Alversia, 2019; Al-Htibat & Garanti, 2019; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Amaro et al., 2021; Maulina et al., 2023; Pahrudin et al., 2023; Chaieb & Chaieb, 2023; Nazarian et al., 2024). On the other hand, among the academic studies on the subject, Phillips et al. (2011) investigated word-of-mouth communication and revisited the intentions of tourists toward rural tourism destinations in North Dakota, USA. Jalilvand et al. (2013) examined the connection between tourists' attitudes towards Islamic destinations, eWOM, and travel intentions in Iran. Zhang et al. (2021) investigated Chinese tourists' travel contentment, revisit intention, and eWOM in the frame of cultural intelligence. Ran et al. (2021) examined the impact of eWOM and DI on US tourists' intention to travel to China. Saad et al. (2022) investigated the travel experiences of tourists from Europe and Oceania to Malaysia. Nguyen and Hsu (2022) investigated the connections between eWOM, destination image, and intention to revisit India among Southeast Asian female tourists.

This study addresses a critical gap in the existing tourism literature by examining the complex interplay between eWOM, DI, and RI within the specific context of cruise tourism, an area that has witnessed substantial growth yet remains relatively under-researched in this regard. Focusing on Amasra, an emerging cruise destination on the Black Sea coast of Türkiye, this study aims to reveal the connection between eWOM, DI, and RI, and to provide valuable insights for both academia and the tourism industry. By doing so, this study will not only contribute to the theoretical understanding of tourist behaviour but also offer practical implications for tourism communication strategies, public relations, destination marketers and policymakers seeking to enhance destination attractiveness, develop effective marketing strategies, and foster long-term tourist loyalty.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

### 2.1 Electronic Word-of-Mouth

With the rise and expansion of the Internet, eWOM became one of the most effective informal communication channels as an evolution of traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). eWOM has been found to have a stronger impact on factors such as attitude, destination image, and travel intention than face-to-face WOM (Jalilvand & Heidari, 2017). The increasing use of eWOM has attracted many fields, especially tourism (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2022). Utilising eWOM data, especially in marketing strategies, offers a new perspective (Nessel et al., 2021). In addition, eWOM is also utilised in the experience of AI-enabled services (Alam et al., 2023). An important factor in eWOM is to understand how one person's sharing can influence and potentially trigger other people's sharing (Ke et al., 2024). Because user comments can be a driver of behaviour change and have a big impact on preferences (Gellerstedt & Arvemo, 2019). With omnipresent smartphones and the active use of media platforms, eWOM has become even more important as tourists can more easily share and interact with their travel experiences. With eWOM, tourists can exchange information about destinations, accommodations, and activities and overcome geographical barriers by digitizing traditional communication methods. As a result, eWOM has an important role to play both in framing the image of a destination and in determining tourists' return intentions.

### 2.2 Destination Image

Destination image is a multifaceted concept that encompasses potential visitors' perceptions of a destination. These perceptions can be based on both tangible attributes (prices, transport, accommodation) and intangible attributes (safety, hospitality, atmosphere). Destination image encompasses how individuals perceive specific attributes and how the overall destination appears (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). The components of the destination image are the knowledge and credence collected through various sources of information, like word of mouth and personal experience (Farrukh et al., 2022). Destination image is widely recognized as a significant element in successful tourism growth and destination marketing. It affects both the supply and demand sides of marketing (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). It is a key element that influences tourists' choice of a holiday destination, their intention to visit a particular place, their loyalty towards the destination, and their likelihood to recommend it to others (Chon, 1990; Benslimane & Semaoune, 2021). Therefore, it is of great importance for destination marketers to create a strong and positive destination image. Especially in the digital age, the synergy between eWOM and destination image is becoming increasingly important in shaping tourists' destination perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. The experiences, comments, and recommendations tourists share on online platforms can drastically change potential visitors' image of the destination and revisit intentions, which in turn can directly affect destination success.

### 2.3 Revisit Intention

Tourists' intention to come back to a destination is crucial to the success and sustainability of the destination. Among the factors affecting this intention, tourist satisfaction comes first (Rahman et al., 2022).



Revisit intention is seen as an extension of satisfaction rather than a trigger for the commitment to do so (Um et al., 2006). Content tourists are more potential repeat visitors to the destination. This increases the total number of visitors and tourism revenues of the destination (Cheng et al., 2019). Moreover, tourists' intention to revisit varies according to which values they attach importance to. While functional and emotional values are at the forefront for international tourists, social values may be more decisive for local tourists (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023). For example, providing memorable tourism experiences that appeal to emotions can significantly affect tourists' revisit intentions (Tiwari et al., 2023). However, people's preferences and needs are constantly changing and diversifying from various perspectives. Therefore, a complete comprehension of the behaviour of tourists and the ability to predict their intentions to return to a destination subsequently are needed (Chang et al., 2014). Destinations must, therefore, be aware that different tourist segments have different expectations and needs. By sharing their experiences and providing positive feedback, tourists can help influence the decisions of other potential visitors and increase the likelihood of returning to the destination.

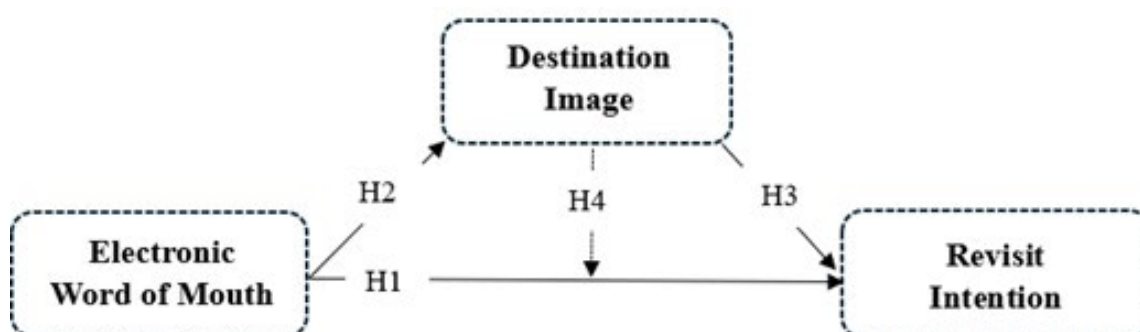
### 3. Methodology

The aim of this study is to explore the effect of eWOM on RI and DI, the effect of DI on RI, and the mediating role between eWOM and RI. Accordingly, the quantitative research method was adopted to test the structural equation model created in the research. The questionnaire method was applied as the data collection instrument. The questionnaire used in the study has three parts. The first part includes questions about the demographic features of the participants, the second part contains questions about the travel behaviour of the participants, and the last part contains scales related to the dependent and independent variables.

Within the scope of the research, a 6-item scale developed by Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011) on brand equity and later adapted by Jalilvand et al. (2012) for international tourists was used to evaluate the participants' eWOM. The 5-item scale developed by Lee and Lockshin (2011) was used to measure destination image, and the 3-item scale used by Jalilvand et al. (2012) was used to assess revisit intention. The statements adjusted for Türkiye were evaluated with a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree).

The participants of the study are tourists visiting Türkiye. The sample of the study consists of tourists who visit the destination of Amasra within the framework of cruise tourism. Purposive and convenience sampling methods were used together in the study. Thus, face-to-face surveys were collected by the researchers from tourists coming to Amasra destination within the scope of cruise tourism in October 2023 and February 2024. A total of 250 surveys were collected, 15 surveys were eliminated after the examinations, and 235 surveys were deemed valid. To test the model developed in the study, in the first step, the measurement model was put to the test using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and the outcome regarding the validity and reliability of the scales was obtained. In the second stage, the hypotheses of the study were tested using structural equation modelling (SEM).

**Figure 1.** Research Model



## Hypotheses

- H1.** eWOM has a statistically positive and significant effect on RI.  
**H2.** eWOM has a statistically positive and significant effect on DI.  
**H3.** DI has a statistically positive and significant effect on RI.  
**H4.** DI has a mediating role in the effect of eWOM on RI.

## 4. Results

Information on the participants' demographic features is shown in Table 1. An analysis of the demographic information of the participants was that 59.1% were female, 50.7% were single and 48.5% were university graduates. In addition, 73.6% of the participants in the study were Russian tourists, and 43.4% of them were born after 1999.

**Table 1.** Information on Demographic Features of the Participants

Demographic Features	Category	Frequency (n=235)	Percentage (%100)
Gender	Female	139	59.1
	Male	96	40.9
Marital Status	Married	99	42.1
	Single	119	50.7
	Other	17	7.2
Education	Primary	28	11.9
	Secondary	38	16.2
	University	114	48.5
	Postgraduate	55	23.4
Birth Interval	Born in 1999 and later	102	43.4
	Born between 1981-1998	91	38.7
	Born between 1965-1980	34	14.5
	Born between 1946-1964	8	3.4
Nationality	Russia	173	73.6
	Kazakhstan	35	14.9
	Uzbekistan	7	2.9
	Germany	2	0.9
	Other	18	7.7

Source: Own Elaboration

The results of the participants' travel behaviour are presented in Table 2. Almost half of the participants stated that their purpose for visiting Turkiye was travel and entertainment. It is seen that 37.9% of the respondents travelled to Turkiye for the first time. It was also indicated that 68.9% of the participants did not have any difficulty communicating with local people during their visits to Turkiye. It was found that almost all of the participants had positive attitudes towards local people during their travels.

**Table 2.** Findings on Participants' Travel Behaviours

Variables		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Purpose of your visit	Travel and leisure	115	48.9
	Visiting relatives and friends	36	15.3
	Cultural activities	43	18.4
	Other	41	17.4
Frequency of visit	First time	89	37.9
	I have been to Turkiye once again	86	36.6
	Three and above	60	25.5
Communication with local people during your visit to Turkiye	It was hard to communicate	73	31.1
	I had no difficulty	162	68.9
The attitude of the local people towards you during your visit to Turkiye	They showed a negative attitude	22	9.4
	They showed a positive attitude	213	90.6

Source: Own Elaboration

The results for the first association that comes to mind when participants think of Turkiye are presented in Table 3. In order to get an overview of the findings, the results are divided into 11 thematic categories. It can be seen that 27.7% of the participants have the highest participation in the category of food and beverages, followed by 27.2% in the category of places and tourism. Historical and cultural references (13.7%) and symbols and icons (10.2%) are other prominent findings.

**Table 3.** Findings on Participants' Most Common Associations with Turkiye

Category	Item	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Food and Beverages	Baklava	27	11.5
	Tea	10	4.3
	Doner	8	3.4
	Kebab	6	2.5
	Turkish Food	5	2.1
	Turkish Delight	3	1.3
	Turkish Coffee	3	1.3
	Hot Simit/Ice Cream/Fish	3	1.3
	Places and Tourism	Istanbul	19
Sea		13	5.5
Nice Place		8	3.4
Tourism/Holiday		6	2.5
Rest/Entertainment/Recreation		4	1.7
Amasra		4	1.7
Antalya		3	1.3
Izmir		2	0.9
Sister City		2	0.9
All-inclusive		2	0.9
Aegean		1	0.4

	Atatürk	12	5.1
	Historical	5	2.1
	Culture	4	1.7
Historical and Cultural References	Roksalana/Hurrem Sultan	4	1.7
	Ottoman Empire	3	1.3
	Sultan Suleiman	2	0.9
	Museums/Old Buildings	2	0.9
Nature and Climate	Sun	6	2.5
	Nature	4	1.7
	Wonderful	2	0.9
People and Hospitality	Nice People/Good People	14	5.9
	Kindness	3	1.3
	Family	1	0.4
Symbols and Icons	Flag	11	4.7
	Mosques/Sultanahmet Mosque	6	2.5
	Cats	4	1.7
	Muslims/Religion/Islam	3	1.3
Entertainment and Media	Turkish TV Series	6	2.5
	Galatasaray	3	1.3
	Turkish Sports Teams	2	0.9
	Besiktas	1	0.4
	Singer Tarkan	1	0.4
Miscellaneous	University/Studies	3	1.3
	Public Bazaar	3	1.3
	Clothes	1	0.4

Source: Own Elaboration

Cronbach's alpha values for scale reliability were discovered to be 0.92 for eWOM, 0.89 for DI, and 0.79 for RI. These values indicate that the scales are at an acceptable level (Murphy & Davidshofer, 1988). In addition, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to assess the validity of the scales used. In this context, the one-factor structure of the eWOM, DI, and RI scales was tested (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Confirmatory Factor Analysis for the Measurement Model

Scales / Dimensions	Scale Items	Average	Standard deviation	Standardised Factor Loadings	t-value	p-value	AVE	CR	CA
Electronic word-of-mouth							0.66	0.92	0.92
	eWOM1	3.319	1.175	0.740	*fixed	***			
	eWOM2	3.485	1.174	0.816	12.634	***			
	eWOM3	3.514	1.095	0.833	12.915	***			
	eWOM4	3.587	1.122	0.844	13.106	***			
	eWOM5	3.446	1.132	0.802	12.402	***			
	eWOM6	3.570	1.127	0.840	13.040	***			

Destination image							0.64	0.90	0.89
D11	3.719	1.069	0.688	*fixed	***				
D12	3.957	0.994	0.875	12.240	***				
D13	4.034	0.982	0.919	12.728	***				
D14	4.051	1.011	0.778	11.026	***				
D15	3.787	1.044	0.731	10.405	***				
Revisit intention							0.56	0.79	0.79
RI1	3.978	0.921	0.720	*fixed	***				
RI2	3.927	0.841	0.785	9.928	***				
RI3	4.000	0.847	0.747	9.526	***				

(\*) The indicator is fixed at 1. (\*\*\*)  $p < 0.001$   
 AVE: Average Variance Extracted; CR: Composite Reliability; CA: Cronbach's Alpha  
 $\chi^2$ : 194.393 df: 74  $\chi^2/df$ : 2.627 CFI= 0.943 NFI= 0.912 TLI= 0.930 RMSEA= 0.083  
 Source: Own Elaboration

Standardised factor loadings for the constructs measured are expected to be at least 0.50 and ideally higher than 0.70. Loading values of this magnitude or higher indicate that the indicators are tightly related to their respective constructs as evidence of construct validity (Hair et al., 2010). When social and behavioural sciences are examined, it is seen that a value of 0.30 is common (Merenda, 1997). As seen in Table 4, the standardised factor loadings for each variable of the scales in the measurement model vary between 0.688 (DI 1) and 0.919 (DI 3), and the  $t$  values of the variables are at an acceptable level and significant (\*\*\*) ( $p < 0.001$ ) ( $\geq 2.58$ ) (Byrne, 2016; Kline, 2016; Hair et al., 2017).

Discriminant validity was examined after it was determined that the convergent validity of the measurement model was met. The Fornell-Larcker criteria were used to test the discriminant validity of the measurement model. The corresponding results are presented in Table 5. According to the Fornell-Larcker criteria, the square root of the AVE calculated for each factor should be higher than the correlation of the factors to which they are related (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This is all to say that the square root of the average variance explained by each factor must have the highest value in the row and column. When analysing Table 5, it can be seen that this criterion is met. Therefore, it can be said that each of the dimensions in the measurement model created in the research measures different elements and differs from each other (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Fornell-Larcker Discriminant Validity Criteria

Factors	CR	AVE	MSV	eWOM	DI	RI
eWOM	0.92	0.66	0.38	0.813		
DI	0.90	0.64	0.38	0.622***	0.803	
RI	0.79	0.56	0.30	0.287***	0.548***	0.751

(\*\*\*)  $p < 0.001$   
 CR: Composite reliability; AVE: Average variance extracted; MSV: Maximum shared variance; eWOM: Electronic word-of-mouth; DI: Destination image; RI: Revisit intention  
 Source: Own Elaboration

In Table 6, the simple effect model is constructed to test the effect of eWOM on RI. The goodness-of-fit values of the model are within the limits of good fit and acceptable fit ( $\chi^2 = 77,924$   $df = 26$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.997$ ; CFI = .957, NFI = .937; TLI = .940; RMSEA = .092) According to Table 6, it is found that eWOM affects the RI ( $\beta = 0.209$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, this means that the path coefficient between eWOM and RI without a mediating variable is 0.209, and a one-unit rise in eWOM will cause an increase of 0.209 in RI. This relationship is a one-way structural relationship. Accordingly, it is possible to say that hypothesis H1 is confirmed, that is, eWOM has a positive and significant effect on RI (H1 accepted). Similarly, this study is in line with

findings that eWOM strengthens RI (Sparks & Browning, 2011; Filieri & McLeay, 2014). For example, tourists contribute positively to the promotion of the destination by sharing information about their tourism experiences in the destination through eWOM. Therefore, it mobilises tourists' desire to visit again (Paisri et al., 2022). Furthermore, in previous studies (Abubakar et al., 2017; Sharipudin et al., 2023; Seow et al., 2024), it is possible to find studies where eWOM is accepted as the main factor influencing RI.

**Table 6.** Direct and Indirect Effect Results

	Outcome Variables				Decision
	Destination Image		Revisit Intention		
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	
eWOM			0.209***	0.056	Supported
R <sup>2</sup>			0.082		
eWOM	0.483***	0.59			Supported
R <sup>2</sup>	0.387				
eWOM			-0.057	0.058	
Destination Image			0.500***	0.089	Supported
R <sup>2</sup>			0.305		
Direct Effect			0.241*** (0.125-0.380)		Mediation

(\*\*\*)  $p < 0.001$

Source: Own Elaboration

After the validation of the simple effect model, the other hypotheses of the study were tested by including the mediating variable DI in the structural model. According to this model, a positive path coefficient was obtained between eWOM and DI ( $\beta=0.483$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) and between DI and RI ( $\beta=0.500$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). The indirect effect between eWOM and RI was 0.241, and the 95% bootstrap confidence interval was 0.125-0.380. Since this interval does not include the value 0, the indirect effect was found to be statistically significant. Within the framework of the results obtained, hypotheses H2, H3, and H4 are accepted. In the literature, it is possible to find studies (Setiawan et al., 2014; Lestari, 2023; Yang et al., 2024) in which eWOM has a significant and direct effect on DI. Among the findings obtained within the scope of this study, it is noteworthy that DI influences the effect of eWOM on RI as a mediating variable. Previous studies (Kim et al., 2012; Carballo et al., 2022; Chi & Pham, 2024) have found that DI is used as a mediating variable by examining its relationship with a number of variables. For example, Chew and Jahari (2014) found that DI mediates the effect of perceived risk on RI. Therefore, the findings of this research are supported by empirical findings that are similar to the literature.

## 5. Discussion

Consistent with former research, this study revealed that eWOM and DI have an important influence on RI (Jalilvand et al., 2012; Rizky et al., 2017; Ruhamak et al., 2021; Soliman, 2021; Hung & Khoa, 2022; Azhar et al., 2022). These findings support previous studies that investigated the impact of eWOM on DI and demonstrated that DI has a mediating role in the connection between eWOM and RI (Andriani et al., 2019; Harahap & Dwita, 2020; Chrismardani & Arief, 2022; Wijaya et al., 2022). There are also studies examining the mediating role of eWOM in the effect of DI on RI (Kanwel et al., 2019; Adam et al., 2022). The study outcome conveys the connection between eWOM, DI, and RI and their impact on cruise tourism, which is a niche area for tourists. These findings indicate that eWOM and DI are critical for the sustainable success of destinations. By effectively managing eWOM and strengthening their image, destinations can increase tourists' RI. This provides valuable insights for destination marketers and tourism policies for specific regions.

Amasra, the main tourist centre of Bartın Province, has considerable potential for the development of cruise tourism. The docking of cruise ships at Amasra Port enables tourists to undertake a brief excursion. The cooperation of local administrations, relevant institutions and tourism stakeholders is important for the evaluation of Amasra in terms of cruise tourism (Karakas & Findik, 2023). Amasra, with its historical structure dating back to B.C., its cultural richness and its natural beauty integrated with the sea, can be positioned as an attractive cruise destination for Russian tourists. More Russian tourists can be attracted to the region through targeted marketing campaigns that highlight Amasra's unique features and appeal to the interests of Russian tourists. In a report prepared by the Western Black Sea Development Agency (2023) on cruise tourism in Amasra, it was noted that both local people and tourists visiting Amasra were satisfied with the activities of Amasra Port and would like to visit Amasra again. However, in order to improve cruise tourism at Amasra Port in the medium/long term, it is important to create new attractions in the region, enrich the tourist experience and adopt an integrated tourism approach. For example, based on tourists' first impressions of Türkiye during their cruise visits, opportunities can be provided to facilitate their access to prominent elements (especially culinary delights). In addition, by closely monitoring the experiences and comments of Russian tourists on online platforms, valuable information can be obtained to strengthen the image of Amasra as a destination and increase the intention to return. Therefore, destination managers in particular should pay more attention to social media and online comments in order to strengthen and develop a positive destination image in tourists' memories (Casaló et al., 2015; Llodra-Riera et al., 2015). In addition, understanding how local people also perceive the tourism environment will provide valuable insights that can be applied in various fields, including research, business and local public institutions for future tourism development and management (Roberts et al., 2022).

## 6. Conclusion

The factors that determine tourists' destination preferences and revisit intentions should be understood, given the rapid growth of cruise tourism. As well as helping to develop marketing and public relations strategies specific to cruise tourism, the results of this research have important indications for the sustainable success of destinations. All of the hypotheses formulated within the scope of the research were accepted. When demographic characteristics are analysed, it is determined that the tourists are predominantly female university graduates and Russian citizens. On the other hand, when the findings obtained regarding the travel behaviour of tourists are examined, it is noteworthy that tourists visit Türkiye for travel and entertainment purposes. It was found that most tourists did not find it difficult to communicate with the locals while travelling. It is notable that positive perceptions of Turkish people and their hospitality are widespread. The country's appeal can be seen to encompass a number of different factors, including historical interest, natural beauty and modern entertainment. Türkiye's cuisine, in particular the dessert baklava, appears to be the aspect of the country that is most strongly associated with it.

Enhanced comprehension of the effects of eWOM and DI on intention to revisit can enable businesses and local public institutions to develop more effective and targeted marketing and public relations campaigns that focus on these factors. In this way, they can not only increase the number of tourists but also build long-term loyalty by strengthening the emotional bond that tourists have with the destination. Furthermore, by identifying the mediating role of DI in the connection between eWOM and RI, destinations can make more strategic efforts to enhance their image. This could encompass a range of initiatives, including the enrichment of cultural experiences, the fostering of interaction with local communities, and the enhancement of physical infrastructure, along with the establishment of a distinctive destination identity.

The results of this research are particularly important for Amasra, which is one of the most well-known destinations for cruise tourists in the Black Sea region of Türkiye. Amasra's natural beauty, historical structure and cultural richness can be promoted to a wider audience through eWOM, strengthening the destination image of the region and increasing tourists' intention to visit again. In this way, Amasra can become an important destination not only for regional cruise tourism but also for international cruise tourism.

The study concludes that eWOM, DI, and RI are critical to the sustainable success of cruise destinations. Strategic marketing, tourism communication, public relations and destination management efforts that

focus on these factors will support both economic gains and long-term destination competitiveness by increasing tourists' revisit intentions.

This study is based on the responses of cruise ship tourists who visited a specific region of Türkiye within a specific time frame. Therefore, more research can be done in different geographical and cultural contexts and compared with the relevant research findings. For example, the study could be extended to include tourists visiting other cruise ports in the Black Sea or adapted to include the views of tourists from different regions, such as ports on the Mediterranean and Aegean coasts of Türkiye. Especially considering that Istanbul is an important representative in the minds of tourists, this finding can be evaluated in other studies. Also, as this research focuses mainly on Russian tourists, future research could investigate the relationship between eWOM and the image of the destination and re-examine the intentions of tourists from different countries. This could provide a broader understanding of how tourists from different cultures perceive destinations and how this influences their revisit intentions. In addition, future research could investigate other potential variables that influence the relationship between eWOM, destination image and revisit intentions. For example, factors influencing revisit intention may include tourists' demographic characteristics, travel motivations and previous experiences with the destination. Future research can provide a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics that influence tourist behaviour and preferences by taking these factors into account.

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## **The Wedding at the Hotel: Venue Choice, Servicescape and Customer Experience as Shared on TripAdvisor**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A wedding is always a special event. The wedding experience, carved under the influence of environmental stimuli – servicescape or wedding-scape – and an antecedent of behavioural outcomes, as shared in online platforms, increasingly influences the decision-making of other couples. Adopting an experiential Marketing perspective of the wedding as a staged experience and framed by the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm, this study aims to investigate venue choice criteria, servicescape/wedding-scape attributes, experience, and behavioural outcomes related to wedding ceremonies performed at the hotel venue as shared in social media. A thematic content analysis was performed on the 173 comments gathered from TripAdvisor. These reviews were shared by the bride and groom and their guests who had their wedding at a five-star Hotel Resort located in the Algarve, south of Portugal. The study reveals positive perceptions of venue conditions, location, staff, and cleanliness, alongside negative evaluations of price and styling, shaping guests' cognitive and affective responses, ultimately fostering memorable wedding experiences and high recommendation intentions at Tivoli Resort.

### **KEYWORDS**

Customer Experience, Wedding-Scape, Wedding Venue, Servicescape, E-Wom.

### **ARTICLE HISTORY**

Received 29 August 2024 Accepted 15 May 2025

## 1. Introduction

A wedding is undoubtedly a special event in someone's life, and it is recognised as a product of solid implication and involvement (Major, McLeay & Waine, 2010). In Western societies, marriages are declining, but weddings abroad are becoming more popular (Ritter, Boger & Draper, 2020; Rydzik, Agapito & Lenton, 2021). Furthermore, wedding tourism arises as a concept related to the flow of tourists who travel away from home to celebrate with the couple (Daniels & Wosicki, 2021) in the scope of family obligations (Obrador, 2012). Wedding destinations are described as popular places to celebrate a marriage outside the home (Etemaddar, Thyne & Insch, 2018).

Once in the geographical area, the venue choice is critical (Chen et al., 2017). A trend to elect luxurious resorts to hold a wedding is noted in the literature (Rydzik et al., 2021). Influenced by context-based factors - atmospherics (Kotler, 1973), physical surroundings (Belk, 1975), physical evidence (Booms & Bitner, 1981) or tangibles (Parasuraman et al., 1988) – consumer experience draws the behavioural outcomes. Built on the intangible nature of service contexts, the *experiencescape* concept in the Marketing and tourism literature, Bertella (2015) coined the term *wedding-scape* to include the dimensions of *servicescape*. Literature reports little research on the topic and mainly focuses on the wedding guests at the bride's expense and the groom's perspectives (Schumann & Amado, 2010; Del Chiapa & Fortezza, 2016).

The search for information to support the choice of a location for a wedding tends to be intense. It is more and more frequent to use online platforms and social media to know the other customers' feedback before deciding (Douglas, 2016). The content sharing in the digital sphere, known as electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), proves to be critical in supporting decision-making, as it is recognised as credible and independent, thus, with the capacity to influence the purchase decision by other customers.

Following an experiential Marketing and *servicescape* approach and guided by the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), this research analyses the information shared by customers of a hotel resort located in the Algarve regarding their wedding experiences on the online platform TripAdvisor. TripAdvisor is an online multiple-year archive that reviews various destinations and organisations, so it is common to use this platform for study purposes (Berezan et al., 2015; Molinillo et al., 2016; Wong & Qi, 2017). In addition, although several empirical studies prove the existence of a relationship between the phenomenon of e-WOM and the consumers' purchase decision (Carusona et al., 2017; Zanibellato et al., 2018), the category of high-involvement products, or products considered once-in-a-lifetime, as holding a wedding, has generally been neglected in the literature (Mowzer, 2016).

To date, wedding tourism remains an under-researched topic (Ritter et al., 2020), especially in the social media context (Boden, 2003). As Etemaddar et al. (2018) recognised, little research has been devoted to wedding parties and guests. Built on these gaps, this study aims to investigate venue choice criteria, *servicescape/wedding-scape* attributes, experience, and behavioural outcomes related to wedding ceremonies performed at the hotel venue as shared in TripAdvisor. In line with Bertella (2015), this study adopts an experiential Marketing perspective of the wedding as a staged experience. As far as authors know, no other study addresses *servicescape/wedding-scape*, customer experience and behavioural outcomes in the context of a wedding ceremony.

In order to make this analysis more comprehensive and to enhance the clarity and relevance of its implications for the management of the product and the venue, on the one hand, the reviews written on TripAdvisor by couples and their wedding guests were analysed. An exploratory qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) with a deductive and inductive approach (Bardin, 1977) was performed. Thematic analysis of categorical content was adopted (Bardin, 1977).

This paper is organised as follows. The next section is dedicated to the literature review, which frames the research herein. In the third section, the methodological approach is introduced. The fourth section presents and discusses the results of the empirical study. The final section presents the main conclusions.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Stimulus-organism-response Paradigm

This study adopts the S-O-R model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) as a comprehensive framework to examine how environmental stimuli influence individuals' internal cognitions and perceptions, ultimately shaping their attitudinal and behavioural responses. Building on its original focus on emotional responses to environments, later developments incorporated cognitive, physiological, and psychological dynamics over time (Bitner, 1992; Jacoby, 2002), extending its applicability in tourism and hospitality contexts (Kim et al., 2020). The model provides a systematic approach for understanding the influence of wedding ceremony and weddingscape on wedding experience while also capturing the role of emotional states and cognitive cues in shaping audience responses (Cheng et al., 2020). Its flexibility offers a robust theoretical foundation for exploring emotional and behavioural outcomes by integrating internal and external stimuli, experiential processes, and attitudinal and behavioural responses (Sultan et al., 2021).

### 2.2 From the Wedding Destination to the Servicescape of the Venue

One of the most critical decisions in hosting a wedding is choosing where it will be held (Bowdin et al., 2006). Starting from the bridal appearance (Broekhuizen & Evans, 2016) to the wedding location and venue, every piece in the performance is aligned towards an imaginary stereotype that can be described as "romantic and paradise-like settings" (Rydzik et al., 2021, p. 3). When the choice of the location for the wedding falls on a venue outside the country of residence of the couple (Schumann & Amado, 2010), tourist flows are at stake (Major et al., 2010; Del Chiappa & Fortezza, 2016) and it impacts on local economy (Schumann & Amado, 2010). In the tourism literature, wedding destinations tend to be perceived as exotic, romantic and unique places (Freeman, 2002) that offer an appreciated opportunity to escape the daily routine while considering family tradition surrounding this event (Schumann & Amado, 2010).

The organization of the wedding involves a diverse set of decisions, and the venue where the banquet will take place is one of the most notable (Chen et al., 2017). Couples increasingly choose venues like luxurious resorts to hold their wedding (Rydzik et al., 2021). Lau and Hui (2010), in their investigation on the choice of venue for the celebration, conclude that availability, installation, the whole logistics of the place - the size of the space, the audio equipment, the bridal room and accommodation and the gastronomy are key elements in choosing a venue for the wedding. Location is another element and includes both the beauty of the place and its convenience in terms of accessibility and parking (Callan & Hoyes, 2000). The price is an element that includes the space rental, food and drinks, equipment and setup, which impacts decision making (Lockyer, 2005). All in one, the venue - or the place where consumption occurs - and related scenography, especially in the services domain due to its intangible nature (Reimer & Kuehn, 2005), are critical since it corresponds to the stage where the experience will be lived (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

The atmosphere of the place, or venue, that is, "the conscious designing of space to create certain effects in buyers" (Kotler, 1973, p. 50), also known as atmospherics (Lau & Hui, 2010), is a crucial element in the choice of a wedding location. The importance of the atmosphere is due to the recognition that the physical environment, its visual impact, the design and the decorative aspects produce effects on consumers as they influence behavioural outcomes (Kotler, 1973; Bitner, 1992; Walls, 2013; Pizam & Tasci, 2019; Bhatt et al., 2020). Atmosphere is formed by environmental conditions (temperature, air quality, noise, music, smell), space/ function (layout, colour, equipment, furniture) and signs, symbols and artefacts (signage, personal artefacts, decoration style). Bitner (1992) uses physical surroundings or atmospherics and proposes a framework with three categories: a) ambient conditions (sensory-based), b) spatial layout and functionality, and c) signs, symbols and artefacts. To Pizam and Tasci (2019), this is related to the cultural component of servicescape. Lau and Hui (2010) studied the impact of the atmosphere on the wedding ceremony and wedding reception. Findings revealed that these contribute to the "elegance and solemnity" (p. 269) and, consequently, to a cheerful consumer's experience.

Following this track, environmental psychology postulates that individuals experience the external environment in a holistic way, so the stimuli present in the surroundings must be managed in an integrated way (e.g., Bitner, 1992), ensuring a design that generates appealing consumption environments (Bhatt et

al., 2020). Fuelled by this argument, the concept of experiencescape is elaborated on the rationale that the influence of external factors (stimuli) affects the individual's engagement in the consumption experience (Mossberg, 2007; Walls, 2013; Pizam & Tasci, 2019; Bhatt et al., 2020). Built on this, other authors add the role of human or social elements (e.g., Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003; Garmaroudi et al., 2021) to the purely physical dimension proposed by Bitner (1992). So, by expanding Bitner's (1992) servicescape framework, many scholars see social stimuli as an important part of the consumption environment (Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003; Garmaroudi et al., 2021). Tombs and McColl-Kennedy (2003) design a new conceptual framework named 'social servicescape', claiming that customers play a key role in others' emotions and feelings.

In fact, in the particular case of hospitality, where guests tend to stay at the property longer, their interaction with the hotel setting, servers and with other guests can shape emotional reactions and behavioural outcomes like satisfaction and loyalty, service quality, WoM and e-WoM intentions, among others (Lockwood & Pyun, 2019). The literature reports relationships between the servicescape and the nature of customer-server interaction and guest-with-other-guests' interactions (e.g. Line et al., 2018; Lockwood & Pyun, 2019; Garmaroudi et al., 2021). Collishaw et al. (2008) identified that customers' perceptions of the commitment of the staff are related to positive affect, which generates satisfaction and attitudinal loyalty.

The rationale is that the management of the servicescape, especially in contexts of experiential consumption, and particularly in hospitality and events, must be managed in order to offer memorable experiences. Kandampully, Bilgihan and Amer (2022) argue that servicescape and experiencescape are interrelated concepts, so they should be managed complementarily to produce customer engagement, satisfaction and positive emotions and behavioural intentions.

In line with the assumption that tourist activities are "theatre-like performances" and tourists are "actors who follow more or less disciplined scripts", to Bertella (2015, p. 398), a wedding celebrated abroad "can be conceptualised as a staged tourism experience". Its scenography is carefully prepared, including choosing the destination and venue for the bride's white wedding gown with its symbology (Broekhuizen & Evans, 2016). The venue, built on the concepts of servicescape (Bitner, 1992) and experiencescape (Mossberg, 2007), has been conceptualised as a "wedding-scape" which includes the physical scene, properly managed by the professionals, where the ceremony takes place (Bertella, 2015). Hoye and Johnson (2016, p. 1) used the term "weddingscapes" as "liminal touristic experiences". The "scenography of the wedding-scape" refers to "the physical scene where the wedding experience, particularly the ceremony, takes place", whose choreography is directed by wedding planners in accordance with the family's cultural references (Bertela, 2015, p. 399).

The relationship between the couple and their guests with the staff, referred to as a social factor, is also a very important aspect of the servicescape to be considered in the wedding-scape. In this regard, the wedding planner plays a crucial role as "service provider, decision-maker, organizer, artistic designer, confidant, mediator and friend" (Daniels & Wosicki, 2021, p. 9). Working on the preparations for holding the wedding, managing timelines, checklists and itineraries, ensuring a perfect articulation between the participants in the event, thus avoiding stressful situations, the wedding planner provides also advice to the artistic part of the ceremony such as on floral décor, lighting. The wedding planner is still more relevant when couples choose a wedding abroad, as a deeper understanding of existing services in place and of the legal requirements necessary for the wedding itself is required (Bertella, 2015, 2017; Khodzhaeva, 2016). Their role in making the wedding event more sustainable is also acknowledged (Deale & Lee, 2024).

Prepared as a scenographic experience in which the script is carefully drawn (Bertella, 2015), the venue and the actors (grooms and their wedding guest, servants and, in the case of the hotel, other hotel guests), are active parts that influence the experience design (Broekhuizen & Evans, 2016; Carter & Duncan, 2017), the way it is lived and then shared on social networks.

### **2.3 The Wedding Ceremony as an Experiential Event**

The classic approaches to consumer behaviour - the microeconomics perspective - see the decision process as purely rational and based on the perception of attributes such as price and utility. Subsequent research in the domain of motivation views the needs that drive the purchase decision as irrational or of limited rationality (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Advances in research in consumer behaviour consider other



essential aspects that also contribute to explaining consumption, such as recreational and leisure activities, sensory pleasures, aesthetic dimensions and emotional responses (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Assuming that consumers are simultaneously rational beings and emotional, the purchase decision, although it may be rational, is driven by emotions (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). In line with this perspective, Experience Marketing assumes that the purchase/consumption decision process and the consumer journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) are imbued with a mix of emotions, pleasure, self-satisfaction and fantasies. Since “Experiential marketing is everywhere” (Schmitt, 1999, p. 53), this approach has been adopted in a great diversity of industries and activity sectors, including in the wedding industry (Bertella, 2015).

While Pine and Gilmore (1998) introduce the concept of Experience Economy in an approach to managing experiences, Schmitt (1999) introduces a broader view of the consumer experience, according to which consumers’ desires and motivations are focused on consuming memorable and engaging experiences. The customer experience should be addressed by adopting a holistic perspective (Schmitt, 1999; Tsaour et al., 2007; Rather, 2020). In accordance, Schmitt (1999) defines the consumption experience as a multidimensional concept and establishes five dimensions, or experiential nodes, to be taken into account when designing a memorable experience: (1) sensory experiences (SENSE), (2) affective experiences (FEEL), (3) cognitive and creative experiences (THINK), (4) physical, behavioural and lifestyle experiences (ACT), and (5) social identity experiences that result from a relationship with one or more reference groups and/ or culture (RELATE). Ideally, companies should be able to provide consumers with sensory, affective, cognitive, physical, and relational experiences (Schmitt, 1999).

According to Schmitt (1999, p. 60), “Experiences are private events that occur in response to some stimulation (e.g., as provided by marketing efforts before and after purchase), and they often result from direct observation and/or participation in events – Whether they are real, dreamlike, or virtual.” In the case of a wedding, the idea of a unique experience (Getz, 1997; 2008) becomes even more noticeable. Boden (2003, p. 18) refers to it as a “once-in-a-lifetime” event and Rydzik et al. (2021, p. 2) as “a milestone event in one’s life”.

Even with recognised cultural roots in different landscapes (Carter & Duncan, 2017) and performing sociocultural rituals (Etemaddar et al., 2018), a wedding is a ceremony between two people to establish the marriage between both parties. It is a moment to “uniting relatives and friends to celebrate the birth of a new family” (Etemaddar et al., 2018, p. 422). Generally, these “supposedly unique and deeply personal events” (Carter & Duncan, 2017, p. 4) presume the presence of guests and the signing of a marriage contract (Lau & Hui, 2010). It is a socially constructed event that has been facing considerable changes over the years, both in legal, sociocultural and consumerism terms (Rydzik et al., 2021), where “weddings function as a globally marketed spectacle” (Broekhuizen & Evans, 2016, p. 335).

From a purely religious ceremony, the wedding day becomes a ritual wrapped by a modern cultural spectacle where the couple and their wedding guest – usually family and special friends with structural ties that are anchored on shared emotional bonds (Bertella, 2015) - seek to live a memorable experience (Boden, 2003; Carter & Duncan, 2017). As recognised by Winch and Webster (2012, p. 51), “with the decline of traditional wedding values, consumer-led culture has rushed to fill this gap to connect the pursuit of wedding perfection with the need to consume”. Couples and their families are engaging in preparing a memorable day that involves both the venue and the bridal appearance (Broekhuizen & Evans, 2016; Carter & Duncan, 2017), and where everything and everyone are managed like in a play (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

## 2.4 Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

Customer satisfaction is “the extent to which a product’s perceived performance matches a buyer’s expectations” (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016, p. 35). However, if cognitive dissonance occurs and guests are unsatisfied with their experiences, dissatisfaction occurs (Wang et al., 2020). Customer satisfaction and loyalty have been extensively explored in the scope of marketing and consumer behaviour literature (Berezina et al., 2016). It is recognised that satisfaction leads to positive attitudes, and dissatisfaction may generate negative ones. Traditionally accessed with quantitative methods, the user-generated content offers accessible data for qualitative research on the topic (Berezan et al., 2015; Berezina et al., 2016). Although in tourism, positive reviews prevail over negative ones, the analysis of spontaneously generated

content allows suppliers to know their customers' expectations and whether they are met (Mirzaalian & Halpenny, 2021). Sparks and Browning (2011) identified that positive information posted on the Internet, jointly with ratings, increases the consumers' willingness to book a hotel room and potentiates high levels of consumers' trust.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (henceforward e-WoM) can be defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39). E-Wom is considered a powerful communication tool, significantly influencing purchase decisions (Carusona et al., 2017; Mirzaalian & Halpenny, 2021) and, at the same time, it is an important database for studying and monitoring consumer behaviour.

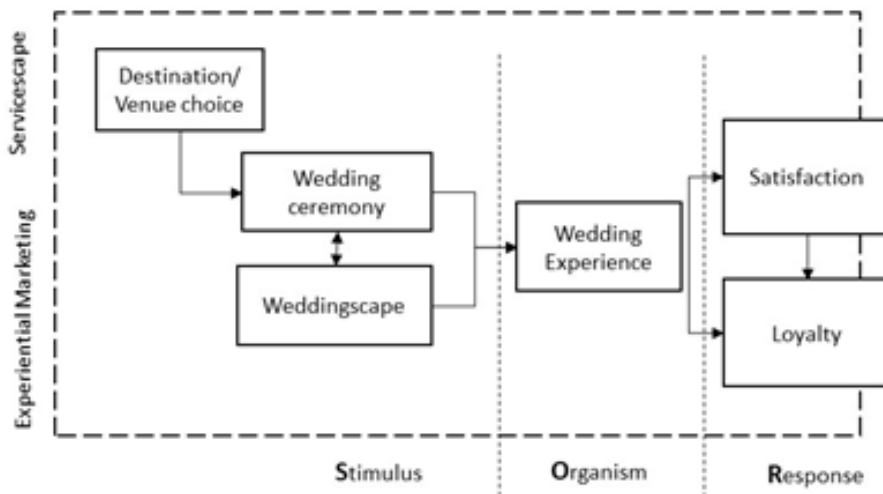
Satisfaction influences loyalty. Loyalty is often measured as the intent to return and willingness to recommend the product or service to others (Bowen & Chen, 2001). It is recognized that the cognitive psychology of consumers plays a central role in behavioural (revisit) and in attitudinal (commitment, recommendation) perceptions and that it commands guests' decisions to share comments about their experiences in social media (Berezina et al., 2016; Zemke et al., 2017). Hotel guests act as informal influencers with an impact on prospective guests' behavioural intentions and decision making (Berezina et al., 2016; Zemke et al., 2017) and on hotel brand reputation (Barreda & Bilgihan, 2013). Literature in marketing and tourism states that reviewers' satisfaction affects their online reviews (Han, 2021) and it impacts consumers' judgements (Hu et al., 2019). Alarcón et al. (2020) identified that the ranking position of a hotel, based on e-Wom reports of its guests, impacts the hotel's capacity to set higher prices. Han (2021) found that the reviewer's expertise can influence reviewers' satisfaction, and it is also affected by contextual factors like travel type (Ahn et al., 2017). The rating given by the customer is a sign of his level of satisfaction with the experience, which is described throughout positive and negative comments. Thus, e-Wom valence reveals customers' satisfaction with the experience (Zanibellato et al., 2018).

Like other customers, in this context, the way the bride and groom seek and choose service providers for this special day has changed. The online platforms allow the couple to see reviews from other customers, containing varied opinions, reports of their own experience and sometimes even photos of the place. The bride and groom do not need to leave their house to choose where to celebrate their wedding, and online reviews are influential sources (Douglas, 2016).

### 3. Methodology

Based on the literature review, Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework that frames the analysis in this exploratory study. Starting from the choice of the destination and the venue in which the wedding ceremony would take place, the scenography and related choreographies are carefully designed and performed. The wedding-scape, described by Bertella (2015, p. 399) "as a space regulated" by the grooms and their families and generally orchestrated by wedding planners, is the stage where the wedding experience occurs. The wedding experience influences the satisfaction achieved by couples and their wedding guests, which, in turn, is reflected in behavioural outcomes, namely loyalty, online reviews (e-Wom), intention to return and/or to recommend. The stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) paradigm (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) provides the theoretical foundation for the wedding ceremony at the hotel venue. From the lens of the S-O-R paradigm, the wedding-scape environmental stimuli generate a response from the organism which, in turn, influences consumers' behavioural outcomes.

**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework for the Wedding Ceremony at the Hotel Venue



Source: Own Elaboration

Based on the literature review, the main categories of analysis and respective subcategories that characterise the choice of the wedding venue, the servicescape/wedding-scape and the wedding experience are identified in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Dimensions of the Venue Choice, Customer Experience, Servicescape and Customer Loyalty

Category	Subcategory	Indicator
<b>Venue choice</b> (Lau & Hui, 2010)	Availability	The period during which the customer intends to have the wedding
	Location	Beauty and convenience of the place   accessibility and parking
	Venue installation/logistics	Size, audio equipment, bridal room and accommodation
	Gastronomy	Menu and quality of food
	Price	Space rental, food & beverage, equipment, and set up
<b>Servicescape/ wedding-scape</b> (Bitner, 1992; Baker, Grewal, & Parasuraman, 1994; Bertella, 2015)	Ambient conditions	Temperature, air quality, noise, music, odour, lighting, etc.
	Spatial layout and functionality	Layout, equipment, furniture, floor covering, wall covering, shop windows, colour, cleanliness, ceilings, changing rooms and corridors
	Signs, symbols and artefacts	Signage, personal artefacts, decoration style, etc.
	Social factors	Other people, including staff and other customers
<b>Wedding experience</b> (Schmitt, 1999)	Sense	Sensory experiences (Vision, Hearing, Taste, Smell and Touch)
	Feel	Affective experiences
	Think	Creative-cognitive experiences
	Act	Physical experiences, behaviours and lifestyles
	Relate	Experiences of social identity that result from the relationship with a group reference or culture
<b>Customer loyalty</b> (Bowen & Chen, 2001)	Intention to return	Willingness of a customer to revisit or repurchase the experience in the future, based on their prior experience, satisfaction, and perceived value
	Intention to recommend	Willingness of a customer to suggest the experience to others based on their own experience

Source: Own Elaboration

### 3.1 Setting

Portugal is an attractive destination to host weddings from abroad, mainly because of the beauty of the landscape and heritage features, the gastronomy, the mild climate, the cultural richness and the quality-price relationship (Khodzhaeva, 2016). Despite the weddings abroad representing a niche for the Portuguese wedding industry (around 4%), it is a niche in exponential growth (Vidal, 2021). The foreign weddings in Portugal increased from 856 in 2014 to 1409 in 2019 - a change of 65.6% (Vidal, 2021). Pereira et al. (2022) conducted a study to analyse how destination weddings have contributed to the growth of event tourism in Portugal. They distributed a survey via email to a sample of couples, based on the 6,401 weddings in 2019 that involved at least one foreign spouse. The authors found that 65% of the forty foreign couples surveyed—more than one-third of whom were from the United Kingdom—had chosen Portugal as their first-choice wedding destination. Economically, weddings abroad show to be an advantageous niche for the industry as couples from abroad spend more money than national couples on the celebration and bring on average 87 guests that stay for a week. It is estimated that the organisation of weddings abroad provided the industry with 70.5 million euros in 2019 (Mendonça, 2020).

If the weight of wedding tourism in Portugal is not high, the same cannot be said for the different parts of the country, especially for the southern region, the Algarve, in which weddings with couples from abroad represented approximately 32% of all celebrated weddings (Vidal, 2021). The Algarve is an important tourist destination in Europe, being recognised as a pleasant place with beautiful beaches and a milder climate, but also for its historical past and culture. Furthermore, compared to other competing destinations, Portugal has high-frequency flights at a lower cost (Khodzhaeva, 2016). Although there is no official data on the number of establishments that offer the wedding venue product in Algarve, searching TripAdvisor for the expression “Algarve Wedding Resorts”, 20 resorts/hotels were found, of which fifteen are 5 stars and four are 4 stars.

Tivoli Carvoeiro hotel is one of the five-star resorts that offers a wide range of venues, with sea views and indoor spaces designed for weddings, private parties, birthdays, cocktail parties, or other social events. When it comes to private events, Tivoli Weddings is a top-rated product at the resort. With over 25 years of experience, the hotel underwent a major refurbishment in 2017, which included reducing the number of rooms from 293 to 248 to create more spacious accommodations with panoramic balconies. The renovation also introduced three restaurants with distinct gastronomic concepts, the establishment of the Tivoli Spa, and the addition of a conference centre featuring seven meeting rooms (Tivoli Carvoeiro Algarve Resort, 2020).

### 3.2 Data and Methods

Positioned within the interpretivist paradigm, according to which the world is an emergent social process created through shared meaning (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), this work is an exploratory study with a qualitative and deductive approach to the data. The researcher assumed the task of interpreting user-generated content in TripAdvisor to identify the most relevant elements in venue choice, servicescape/wedding-scape, customer experience and loyalty outcomes. The data was collected from TripAdvisor, one of the most recognised online review platforms in tourism and hospitality (Mirzaalian & Halpenny, 2021). This platform was used because it is globally known and has more than 859 million reviews shared by travellers worldwide (TripAdvisor, 2020). Consequently, the platform is widely used as a database for academic research (Zanibellato et al., 2018). The analysis of such a platform was considered appropriate given the goal of this investigation, as the Internet was found to be the main means of spreading Portugal as a wedding destination (Peste, 2016). Within the scope of this study, a total of 4496 reviews of the Tivoli Carvoeiro hotel were collected. In order to gather only the comments regarding weddings in the hotel, in Portuguese, the word “casamento” was used as the search word, and in English, the word “wedding”. The data were collected without any time filter, giving 95 comments between 2006 and 2020 in the exact moment before the COVID-19 lockdown. Although the collected data comprises comments posted between 2006 and 2020, they refer to weddings that occurred between 2005 and 2019.

To extract the comments, Scrape Storm software, version 3.5.3, was used. This tool helps compile the data collected from each comment, creating a document with the variables selected for the extraction.

From each comment was retrieved the following information: the reviewer's username, the date when he/she shared the comment (month and year), the date in which he/she stayed in the hotel (month and year), his/her country of origin, his/her number of contributions/comments made on the TripAdvisor – reviewer's status, his/her rating (from 1 to 5) given to the resort, the title of the comment, the comment itself and its link. Each reviewer is identified by the initials of his/her name and by the review year. This type of identification is used throughout the analysis when text extracted from the reviews is presented.

Adopting an approach such as Zanibellato et al. (2018), the NVivo 12 Plus software was used to analyse and encode the data. Some of the 95 collected comments addressed multiple categories listed in Table 1. As a result, these comments were divided into separate, self-contained cases to ensure that each segment of text could be analysed according to the specific issue it addressed. One hundred seventy-three cases were created, corresponding each case to a distinct review. The most frequent words (attributes) described in the comments were identified, and these terms were categorized according to each of the dimensions/elements described in the literature review. The similar or synonyms words identified by the software were added, removed and merged so that it was possible to create cohesive nodes and exclude from the analysis cases that revealed zero or one or two occurrences in the reviews. After that, all comments were read to confirm the encoding assigned by NVivo. Therefore, 27 nodes were identified, each corresponding to an attribute.

Regarding the analysis of review valence, each node was divided into two sub-nodes: a positive and a negative one. The positive sub-node was associated with parts of the comments that refer to positive experiences related to that attribute (for example, to the attribute "pool": "(...) pool areas are simply stunning." (KR, 2016). The same procedure was adopted in the analysis of the negative sub-nodes: "(...) only minor complaint was the pool was freezing, but this is typical in Algarve." (T, 2019). In order to analyse the number of positive and negative comments by the reviewer's country, month and year of his/her stay, and his/her review rating, the "matrix coding" function was used. This functionality allows verifying how many English reviewers had a negative experience with the attribute pool, i.e., how the two variables intersect.

Finally, to determine customer loyalty, comments were identified in which couples and their wedding guests expressed their intention to return and/or recommend the hotel. "Intention to return" and "intention to recommend" nodes are still divided into two sub-nodes corresponding to the comment "yes" or "no".

### 3.3 The Reviewers' Profile

The 95 reviews shared by the couples and their wedding guests correspond to individuals who were accommodated at Tivoli Carvoeiro hotel, and from those indicating the year of staying, mainly, are for the period before the hotel's refurbishment (35,9%) – see Table 2. Most of the customers are from the United Kingdom (69.5%), followed by Irish customers (7.4%). Vidal (2021) has also identified that the UK was the primary origin of couples having their weddings in the Algarve. As expected, more comments were made to events taking place in peak season, i.e., between June and September (43,1%). The majority of the reviews from couples and their wedding guests are new reviewers on TripAdvisor.

**Table 2.** Profile of Couples and their Wedding Guests

Variables	Categories	Reviews of the couple and their wedding guests		
		No.	(%)	
Stay Date	Years	Before Hotel Refurbishment (2005 – 2016)	34	35,9
		During Hotel Refurbishment (2017)	9	9,5
		After Hotel Refurbishment (2018 – 2019)	12	12,6
		Not specified	40	42,1
	Months	Mar-May	10	10,6
		Jun-Aug	29	30,5
		Sep-Nov	16	16,9
		Not specified	40	42,1
Country	United Kingdom	66	69,5	
	Other European Countries	17	18,1	
	Other Continents	2	2,1	
	Not specified	10	10,5	

Source: Adapted from Zanibellato et al. (2018).

## 4. Results

Regarding the venue choice criteria, *rooms* (37 reviews - 38.9%) and *location* (34 reviews - 35.8%) were positively assessed (Table 3). Paradoxically, in the analysis of the reasons for choosing the place, the *rooms* also received negative reviews (12 - 12.6%) with the argument that: *"The rooms are a bit old fashioned"* (A, 2010); *"The hotel rooms were a bit tired, but the hotel is about to get a major refurbishment."* (P, 2016). The *price* is also classified with a negative valence (11 - 11.6%).

Data also shows that the attribute that stands out most positively concerning the servicescape/wedding-scape is the *staff* belonging to the "social factors" (67 reviews - 70.5%). *"This is a traditional Portuguese hotel where the staff are excellent and genuine, which is hard to find"*. (MR, 2013); *"The staff were very friendly and helpful .... always on hand to help and make everything as good as it could possibly be."* (A, 2014). The following positively assessed attributes are *cleanliness* (with 34 positive reviews - 35.8%). Within the servicescape/wedding-scape, the *styling* is the attribute that gets more negative reviews (9 reviews - 9.5%).

The results show that the attributes of customer experience, which are more positively reviewed, propel positive e-Wom: the *landscape* and the *feelings*. The attribute that is mentioned more often in a positive way as the wedding experience by the couples and their wedding guests is the *landscape*, which belongs to the dimension "sense" (59 reviews - 62,1%): *"The views from this hotel are amazing. Nothing comes close to this."* (JP, 2018); *"The views genuinely match the promotional photos of the hotel. Could sit watching the world go by for hours."* (T, 2020). The following attribute positively reviewed is *feelings* that is part of the dimension "feel" (19 reviews - 20%): *"(...) our wedding was so special (...) We really want to thank you all with all of our heart for what you have done for us."* (E, 2018); *"Her attention to detail and willingness to ensure everything was to our preference, did not go unnoticed by ourselves and we are incredibly grateful."* (A, 2015). There is no evidence that there are attributes with a significative negative impact on the wedding experience. The attribute that has the highest number of negative reviews in the dimension "act" is the *pool*, but it has only four negative reviews out of a total of 95, which represents 4.2% of those reviews.

**Table 3.** Attributes of Venue Choice, Wedding Experience and Servicescape/Wedding-Scape and their Valence

Category	Subcategory	Attributes	Reviews No. (N= 95)		
			+	-	
Venue choice	Location	Location	34 (35,8%)	0	
		Accessibility	6 (6,3%)	0	
	Venue installation/logistics	Stay	30 (31,6%)	0	
		Facilities	6 (6,3%)	1 (1,1%)	
		Rooms	37 (38,9%)	12 (12,6%)	
		Food	26 (27,4%)	3 (3,2%)	
	Gastronomy	Drinks	5 (5,3%)	0	
		Price	5 (5,3%)	11 (11,6%)	
	Servicescape/wedding-scape	Ambient conditions	Air	3 (3,2%)	3 (3,2%)
			Weather	3 (3,2%)	0
Noise			2 (2,1%)	2 (2,1%)	
Spatial layout and functionality		Lighting	2 (2,1%)	1 (1,1%)	
		Cleanliness	34 (35,8%)	1 (1,1%)	
		Layout/ Set Up	14 (14,7%)	0	
		Styling	7 (7,4%)	9 (9,5%)	
Social factors		Decoration	2 (2,1%)	1 (1,1%)	
		Staff	67 (70,5%)	5 (5,3%)	
		Landscape	59 (62,1%)	1 (1,1%)	
Wedding experience	Sense	Taste	3 (3,2%)	0	
		Comfort	12 (12,6%)	0	
		Feelings	19 (20%)	1 (1,1%)	
	Think	Memory	3 (3,2%)	0	
		Expectations	4 (4,2%)	1 (1,1%)	
		Pool	17 (17,9%)	4 (4,2%)	
	Act	Walks	9 (9,5%)	0	
		Wedding Planning	10 (10,5%)	0	
	Relate	Service	11 (11,6%)	2 (2,1%)	

Source: Own Elaboration

Although 27% of reviews were made by *New reviewers*, 34% of them were authored by *Senior or Top contributors*. The rating given by customers reveals high levels of satisfaction with the experience since around 93% gave a rate of *Very good* (4 stars – 30,5%) or *Excellent* (5 stars – 62,1%). Table 4 presents these results.

**Table 4.** Reviewers' Status in TripAdvisor and Hotel Rating

<b>Reviewers' status in TripAdvisor</b>	New reviewers (1–2)	26	27,4
	Reviewers (3–5)	8	8,4
	Senior reviewers (6–10)	6	6,3
	Contributors (11–20)	14	14,7
	Senior contributors (21–50)	15	15,8
	Top contributors (> 50)	17	17,9
	Not specified	9	9,5
<b>Rating</b>	Terrible (1 star)	0	0
	Poor (2 stars)	0	0
	Average (3 stars)	7	7,4
	Very good (4 stars)	29	30,5
	Excellent (5 stars)	59	62,1

Source: Own Elaboration

Couples and their wedding guests' intention to return and to recommend the hotel were analysed. From the total of 95 comments, 29.5% of the reviewers (28 reviews) revealed an intention to return to the resort. Regarding the intention to recommend, 20 positive comments represented 21,1% of the total reviews (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Number of Comments regarding the Intentions to Return and to Recommend the Resort Posted by Couples and their Wedding Guests

<b>Category</b>	<b>Reviews no.</b>	
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Intention to return	28 (29,5%)	1 (1,1%)
Intention to recommend	20 (21,1%)	0

Source: Own Elaboration

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Reviews on Venue Choice

Couples getting married at the Tivoli Carvoeiro hotel are mainly from the UK. This result is aligned with the predominant origin of couples choosing to have their wedding in the Algarve (Vidal, 2021). Bertella (2015) has also identified that couples from the UK were the most represented in selecting Tuscany, Italy, to have their wedding abroad.

The most relevant attributes regarding the wedding venue are the *room* and the *location*. These results are not entirely aligned with Lau and Hui (2010), who identified elegance, the size of the space and the accommodation as the most significant elements in choosing the wedding venue. However, the results are in accordance with Boden's (2003), who considers the *location* a critical element in the choice of a wedding venue, jointly with style, scale and ambience of the place. The dimension *location* only received positive reviews, which complies with Callan and Hoyes's (2000) statement on the beauty of the place. Regarding the attribute *room accommodation*, Peste (2016) also identified *accommodation* as one of the top push attributes of Portugal as a wedding destination.

*Price* was one of the attributes that gathered more negative references on TripAdvisor. This result is aligned with the findings of Mendonça (2020) and Pereira et al. (2022) that reported price reduction as the



most relevant aspect to be improved to increase the attractiveness of Portugal as a wedding destination. This is an aspect that deserves attention from the industry by taking into consideration the competitors in this product niche, since *price* is the determining element in the decision-making (Lockyer, 2005; Khodzhaeva, 2016).

## 5.2 Reviews on Servicescape/Wedding-scape

The attributes *staff* and *cleanliness* received a significantly higher number of positive mentions, underscoring the importance of both spatial layout and social factors within the servicescape—consistent with the frameworks proposed by Bitner (1992) and Tombs and McColl-Kennedy (2003). Of the 67 positive reviews related to *staff*, 49 (73%) were from customers from the United Kingdom, emphasizing the significance of this attribute for the hotel's primary market segment. *Cleanliness* was among the attributes that showed the most marked improvement following the hotel's renovation. The number of annual positive comments on cleanliness rose from an average of 1.3 prior to renovation, to 2.0 during the renovation phase, and to 2.5 after completion. These findings indicate that enhancements in these dimensions positively influenced electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) regarding the venue's suitability for wedding ceremonies, as perceived by both the bride and groom and their guests.

While the *styling* attribute received some negative feedback, all such comments were related to the period before the refurbishment, suggesting that the renovation effectively addressed previous concerns. Overall, the findings for the wedding-scape align with the observations of Line et al. (2018), Lockwood and Pyun (2019), and Garmaroudi et al. (2021), who emphasized the role of social interaction with both the physical setting and service personnel in shaping customers' emotional responses.

## 5.3 Reviews on the Wedding Experience

For the couple and their wedding guests, the critical attributes that characterise their wedding experience as shared in TripAdvisor are the landscape, attributes associated with the *Relate* dimension and positive *feelings*. As previously stated by Schmitt (1999), Tsaour et al. (2007) and Rather (2020), the dimension "sense", which includes the *landscape* attribute, can be used to differentiate brands, products or companies, making, in this way, recognizable the brand to the consumers, adding value to it. Furthermore, the *landscape* is related to a romantic idea about the event (Boden, 2003), which is associated with the venue choice for the wedding (Freeman, 2002; Rydzik et al., 2021). The ocean view is the key point of this hotel, being fairly recognised by customers and working staff as a differentiating point of the resort and the customers' experience, thus ensuring a romantic, forever memory. The relevance of *landscape* for the wedding experience is consistent with the findings for Portugal as a wedding destination. Mendonça (2020) and Pereira et al. (2022) identified, for Portugal, that the attractiveness of the *landscape* was the second factor influencing the wedding abroad, only preceded by the factor of *good weather*. The dimension "relate" ranks in the second position concerning positive reviews (21), which means that the venue provided a wedding experience that promoted social identity between participants. These attributes offer positive stimulus to this segment of clients. These results are aligned with the literature (Schmitt, 1999; Tsaour et al., 2007; Rather, 2020). In the dimension "feel", the attribute *feelings* creates a link between positive feelings and the venue brand since customers use words like "special" or "grateful" to express their feelings.

## 5.4 Reviews on Customer Satisfaction and Behavioural Intentions

Following literature on satisfaction and loyalty on user-generated content in social media, our results conclude that positive reviews prevail over negative ones (Mirzaalian & Halpenny, 2021), which is a sign of satisfaction with the experience (Zanibellato et al., 2018; Han, 2021). The positive appreciation of the attributes experienced by the bride and groom and their wedding guests allows us to conclude that they had a memorable experience. Positive reviews are prevailing over negative ones, which shows that the couples and their wedding guests' expectations were met (Mirzaalian & Halpenny, 2021). This finding is of great value since hotel guests act as informal influencers impacting hotel choice and tourists' decision-making (Berezina et al., 2016; Zemke et al., 2017). Online positive reviews accompanied by high ratings improve the confidence of prospective customers that the hotel delivers what is promised, which increases the

likelihood of purchase choice (Sparks & Browning, 2011). Although 27% of reviews were made by *New reviewers*, 34% were authored by *Senior or Top contributors* whose status is set as an expert, which can influence reviewers' satisfaction (Han, 2021). All in all, the rating given by customers reveals high levels of satisfaction with the experience since around 93% gave a rating of Very good (4 stars – 30,5%) or Excellent (5 stars – 62,1%). Satisfaction influences loyalty, and the analysis of the behavioural intentions expressed by the couples and their wedding guests reflects a pleasant global experience.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1 Main Findings

Following an experiential Marketing and servicescape approaches and informed by the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm, this research analyses the user generated content shared by clients of a hotel resort located at the Algarve in the context of a wedding ceremony, namely venue choice criteria, servicescape/wedding-scape attributes, experience and behavioural outcomes related to wedding ceremonies. Among the results of a qualitative thematic analysis on customers' reviews on the online platform TripAdvisor, a few highlights arise. Regarding the Stimuli factors, critical criteria in the appreciation of the wedding venue *room conditions* and venue *location*, attributes ranked with the most positive valence. On the other hand, reviews on *price* accounted for the most negative valence. For couples and their guests, the attributes of servicescape/wedding-scape with more positive valence are *staff* and *cleanliness*. The *styling* is the attribute that gets more negative reviews. Organism in S-O-R results from interactions with stimulus, and it refers to psychological processes (Sultan et al., 2021), like cognitive and affective responses (Pizam & Tasci, 2019). In this regard, findings highlight the role of sense, feeling and related dimensions in the design of memorable experiences in the context of a wedding ceremony. In the scope of attitudinal and behavioural learning (Response in S-O-R paradigm), the experience at Tivoli Resort generated mostly positive reviews, high ratings done by *Senior or Top contributors* and high levels of intentions to recommend, thus a sign of memorable experiences.

### 6.2 Implications for Theory

Since literature reports little research on the topic, this study sheds light on this kind of high-involvement product, classified as once-in-a-lifetime. Following the S-O-R paradigm, authors extend knowledge on venue choice and wedding-scape, wedding experience and attitudinal and behavioural outcomes from the perspective of wedding couples and their guests using content shared in TripAdvisor. Additionally, this work proposes a conceptual framework for *the Wedding Ceremony at the Hotel Venue*, which may lead to more integrated management approaches.

### 6.3 Implications for Management

Departing from the reviews of couples and their wedding guests that had their weddings in a hotel resort in the Algarve, south of Portugal, this study has interesting practical implications that can impact the experiences offered to customers in the hotel industry, namely in the “weddings” segment. The findings show that couples married at the hotel resort and their wedding guests had a memorable experience, in which the attributes valued for the venue choice interconnected positively with the provided servicescape. Positive reviews were quite superior to negative ones. The visibility of the memorable experiences from the wedding abroad reported on online platforms needs to be amplified, something that the industry still needs to explore.

Despite the predominance of positive reviews, some aspects need to be carefully addressed, namely the hotel's *layout* and the charged *price*. The *layout*, an attribute of the servicescape, collected some negative reviews. This implies that resorts/hotels hosting weddings should pay attention to international trends regarding the design and the decorative aspects of such spaces, as they influence behavioural outcomes. *Price* had the highest number of negative reviews. Thus, having in mind that the *price* is re-

garded as critical at the moment of purchase choice, the industry should compare its offer with that of competitors.

## 6.4 Future Research Avenues

Despite this, the exploratory study identifies positive and negative aspects associated with a wedding ceremony at a hotel resort, but it provides only a partial picture of this reality as it relies on only one hosting hotel. For the sake of confirmation/refusal of the current findings, this kind of analysis should be extended to other hosting places in the Algarve. Desirably, the extended analysis should cover other social networks beyond TripAdvisor, which is a limitation of the current work. The innovative character of the topic and the exploratory nature of this work justify, in the future, a quantitative study using a questionnaire survey applied to couples and their wedding guests. This kind of analysis would allow for the identification of patterns in the assessment of the attributes of the hosting places by sociodemographic characteristics of the customers, thus extending the knowledge on wedding tourism.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is financed by National Funds provided by FCT- Foundation for Science and Technology through Research Centre for Tourism, Sustainability and Well-being - CinTurs (UID/04020/2020) and Centre for Advanced Studies in Management and Economics - CEFAGE (UID/04007/2020).

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# The Mediating Role of Social Sustainability in the Relationship between Community Participation and Support for Tourism

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate the perceptions of residents in Mardin, one of Turkey's most significant cultural tourism destinations, regarding community participation, social sustainability, and support for tourism. The study also examines whether social sustainability mediates the relationship between community participation and support for tourism. In this context, data were collected from 617 residents using the convenience sampling method, and 537 of them were analyzed through reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modeling (SEM). The results indicated that community participation negatively affects host-guest conflict and positively influences social acceptance. It was also found that community participation has no significant impact on social tolerance. Similarly, it was revealed that host-guest conflict negatively affects support for tourism, while social acceptance positively affects support for tourism. However, social tolerance was found to have no significant impact on support for tourism. Furthermore, the study revealed that host-guest conflict and social acceptance, as dimensions of social sustainability, mediate the relationship between community participation and support for tourism.

## KEYWORDS

Social Sustainability, Community Participation, Host-Guest Conflict, Social Tolerance, Social Acceptance, Support for Tourism.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 14 July 2024 Accepted 27 February 2025

## 1. Introduction

Three fundamental dimensions underlie sustainable development: social, environmental, and economic sustainability (UNEP & WTO, 2005). Social sustainability has recently begun to attract more attention as a crucial part of sustainable development (Larimian & Sadeghi, 2019). Although this concept is essential, less attention has been given to it in the academic literature than to economic and environmental sustainability (Razia & Ah, 2023).

Many authors have stated that there is no common view on the conceptual definition of social sustainability (Dempsey et al., 2009; Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017; Larimian & Sadeghi, 2019; Cope et al., 2022). This concept is inextricably linked to environmental and economic sustainability. A stable social environment ensures economic and environmental sustainability (Foot & Ross, 2004).

From a tourism perspective, social sustainability includes “equity, equality, employment, accessibility, education and information, health, social infrastructure, social cohesion, community support, good governance, local procurement, preservation and development of cultural heritage, public participation, economic self-sufficiency, ethics, and maintaining tourist satisfaction” (Nugraheni et al., 2019a, p. 270). Many authors have stated that the number of studies on social sustainability in the literature, including tourism, is quite limited (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017; Nugraheni et al., 2019a; Nugraheni et al., 2019b). Indeed, there are a few studies under the title of social sustainability in tourism (Aspinall et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2017; Helgadóttir et al., 2019; McClinchey, 2021).

Cost-benefit analysis within the social exchange theory (SET) and quality-of-life (QoL) analysis can contribute to predicting social sustainability (Aspinall et al., 2011). Likewise, residents' tolerance is seen as one of the critical elements of social carrying capacity (Yusoh et al., 2021). Exceeding the carrying capacity may lead to a decrease in the level of acceptance of tourists by local people to their area (Kılıç & Seçilmiş, 2022). In this context, Zhang et al. (2017) stated that social tolerance and acceptance are essential for social sustainability in destination environments. From this perspective, social sustainability is linked to many concepts, such as social exchange theory (SET), quality of life (QoL), and social carrying capacity (SCC) (Aspinall et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2017; Helgadóttir et al., 2019; Yusoh et al., 2021). In general, the achievement of tourism development in a region depends on how the residents perceive tourism impacts and how they support it (Adongo et al., 2017). In this context, the sustainability, success, and development of tourism require the support of local people (Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004).

One of the essential determinants of social sustainability is community participation (Bafarasat & Oliveira, 2023). Participation in local and community activities is identified as a dimension of social sustainability (Dempsey et al., 2009). From this perspective, people must participate at the local level in procedures and other areas of political activity to create and implement the social sustainability process (McKenzie, 2004). In tourism, community participation (CP) refers to a process whereby the community impacts the direction of tourism development rather than passively utilizing the benefits of tourism. Through community participation, homeowners' needs and interests can be considered, their quality of life can be improved, and economic development can be promoted (Jaafar et al., 2015). A community's value can be enhanced through community participation by improving tourism's positive effects and decreasing its negative impacts (Lee, 2013). Therefore, community participation is a critical element for development of sustainable tourism (Nicholas et al., 2009).

When evaluated from all these perspectives, it can be seen that community participation is vital in social sustainability and social sustainability has a considerable role in support for tourism. In this context, this study aims to determine the residents' perceptions of social sustainability, community participation, and support for tourism. The study also aims to examine whether social sustainability mediates the relationship between community participation and support for tourism.



## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Social Sustainability

Underlying the concept of sustainable development lies the idea of meeting today's needs without jeopardizing the capability of future generations to fulfil their necessities. Sustainable development is founded on three basic dimensions: social, environmental and economic sustainability (UNEP & WTO, 2005). These concepts related to sustainability emphasize long-term human well-being, minimizing resource consumption, maximizing resource use efficiency, and ensuring democracy and equality (Martins et al., 2021).

Compared to other dimensions of sustainable development, social sustainability is the least developed in theory and practice (Bafarasat & Oliveira, 2023). Although social sustainability is an important topic, academic literature has paid more attention to environmental and economic sustainability rather than this dimension (Razia & Ah, 2023). However, this dimension has recently been given more attention as a crucial aspect of sustainable development (Larimian & Sadeghi, 2019). Moreover, many authors have stated that there needs to be a definition or consensus on what social sustainability is (Dempsey et al., 2009; Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017; Larimian & Sadeghi, 2019; Cope et al., 2022).

McKenzie (2004, p. 12) defined social sustainability as "a situation that enhances life in communities, and a process with that is accomplished of achieving that condition". Bafarasat and Oliveira (2023, p. 1) defined social sustainability as "the cultural, political and economic inclusion of various groups and individuals in development". The authors stated that community participation and economic equality are the main determinants of social development. Social sustainability means respect for human rights and equal opportunities for everyone in the community. It requires equitable distribution of benefits, with a focus on poverty reduction. It also refers to issues such as maintaining and strengthening local communities' life support systems, avoiding exploitation, and respecting and recognizing different cultures (UNEP & WTO, 2005).

Social sustainability considers issues such as equity, community participation, quality of life, social justice, good governance and human well-being (Nugraheni et al., 2019a). Social sustainability is considered substantive and procedural. While the substantive dimension generally refers to people's well-being, rights and needs, the procedural dimension relates to achieving these goals, such as democratic governance, democratic decision-making, empowerment and access to information (Helgadóttir et al., 2019). Dempsey et al. (2009) stated that the overarching dimensions underlying the idea of urban social sustainability are social equality and sustainability of society. The social equity aspect focuses on a distributive concept of social justice, while the sustainability of society is concerned with society's health, functioning, and continued viability.

Environmental and economic sustainability are inseparable from social sustainability. Environmental and economic sustainability is supported by a stable social environment (Foot & Ross, 2004). The first aim of social sustainability is to build inclusive and resilient societies where citizens are represented and governments are responsive, generating opportunities for everyone, both today and in the future. The second aim of social sustainability is the duty of societies to provide their basic human requirements and protect natural resources for future generations. From these perspectives, social sustainability ensures everyone has a good quality of life to achieve a sustainable future (Razia & Ah, 2023). The basic social sustainability principles include promoting social relations, ensuring community participation, equality, and education, and ensuring access to health, housing, employment, green spaces, and a safe environment (Martins et al., 2021). Social sustainability refers to the long-term viability of a city as an environment for human interaction, communication, and cultural development (Akcali & Cahantimur, 2022).

McKenzie (2004) states that the basic principles of social sustainability are equality (e.g., the community ensures that all its members receive equal outcomes and opportunities, especially the most vulnerable and the poor people), diversity (e.g., diversity is promoted and encouraged by the community), interconnectedness (e.g., the community ensures structures, systems and procedures that foster connections outside and within the community at the institutional, informal, formal levels), quality of life (e.g., the community is responsible for meeting basic needs and promoting a good quality of life for every citizen),

and democracy and governance (e.g., the community ensures governance structures and democratic processes that are transparent and accountable).

Especially urban social sustainability, many studies on social sustainability have been carried out, and the conceptual dimensions of social sustainability have been revealed (Dempsey et al., 2009; Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017; Larimian & Sadeghi, 2019; Martins et al., 2021; Akcali & Cahantimur, 2022). For example, Dempsey et al. (2009) stated that social sustainability consists of physical and non-physical factors. Eizenberg and Jabareen (2017) revealed that the conceptual framework of social sustainability consists of security, equality, eco-consumption and sustainable urban forms. Larimian and Sadeghi (2019) showed that social sustainability is a multiple dimensions concept that includes six fundamental dimensions: the sense of place, social equity, social interaction, safety/security, neighbourhood satisfaction and community participation. Martins et al. (2021) revealed that sub-dimensions such as environmental awareness, protection of historical heritage, crime prevention, and proximity to green areas contribute to social sustainability. Akcali and Cahantimur (2022) proposed a five-dimensional social sustainability model for urban areas: person (household and demographic characteristics), place (social infrastructure, accessibility, places for daily operations and open spaces), people (social network, social relationships and sense of community), perception (safety, security and sense of place) and process (the future of place and participation).

## 2.2 Social Sustainability in Tourism

From a tourism perspective, social sustainability (SC) can be defined as “a process and state that addresses the interrelationships of individuals, communities, governments and societies and aiming to achieve the aims of sustainable tourism, while also considering the physical boundaries of both the tourism destination and the world as a whole” (Nugraheni et al., 2019b, p. 6). In this context, social sustainability in tourism includes issues such as “equality, employment, equity, health, education and information, social harmony, social infrastructure, community support, good governance, accessibility, local purchasing, economic self-sufficiency, public participation, protection and development of cultural heritage, ethics and tourist satisfaction” (Nugraheni et al., 2019a, p. 270). It also emphasizes achieving a social situation that ensures a high quality of life and justice in the tourism industry (Nugraheni et al., 2019b).

McKenzie (2004) states that the steps for establishing and implementing the process of social sustainability are: a) equality in access to essential services, including education, health, transportation, recreation, and housing, and b) a system of cultural relations that values and protects the positive aspects of disparate cultures and encourages cultural integration. Aspinall et al. (2011) stated that cost-benefit analysis within the social exchange theory (SET) and quality-of-life (QoL) analysis can considerably contribute to predictions regarding social sustainability in general. In addition, the hosts’ tolerance level towards the presence of tourists is considered one of the critical components of social carrying capacity (Yusoh et al., 2021). The decrease in carrying capacity leads to a decrease in local people’s acceptance of tourists in their region (Kılıç & Seçilmiş, 2022). In this context, Zhang et al. (2017) stated that social tolerance and acceptance are essential for social sustainability in destination environments. When evaluated from these perspectives, it can be seen that social sustainability is linked to many concepts, such as social exchange theory (SET), social carrying capacity (SCC) and quality of life (QoL) (Aspinall et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2017; Helgadóttir et al., 2019; Yusoh et al., 2021). Studies carried out based on these concepts provide clues in determining social sustainability (Aspinall et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2017; Helgadóttir et al., 2019).

SET aims to determine how individuals perceive relationships’ relative benefits and costs and their effects on relationship satisfaction (Ward & Berno, 2011). The first and most common approach in social exchange theory is the cost-benefit approach (Stylidis et al., 2014). Positive effects are described as “benefits”, while negative effects are considered “costs” (Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004, p. 297). In terms of the tourism industry, if local people believe that the costs of tourism are greater than the benefits, they will discontinue support for tourism, which could threaten the industry’s future development and success (Sharpley, 2014).

Quality of life (QoL) can be defined in its most basic form as “contentment with one’s experiences in the world and satisfaction with life” (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011, p. 248). Residents’ quality of life can be affected by a community becoming a tourism destination (Gursoy et al., 2002). Tourism activities in a region can affect a community’s quality of life through social, cultural, environmental and economic im-

pacts (Matatolu, 2019). Therefore, quality of life influences local people's attitudes towards future tourism development in their communities (Liang & Hui, 2016).

In some studies on quality of life within the scope of social exchange theory, tourism's negative and positive impacts were separated according to some quality of life areas, and satisfaction in these areas was examined. These studies generally revealed that tourism's positive impacts positively affect relevant aspects of QoL (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Aref, 2011; Kim et al., 2013; Eslami et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2022; Han et al., 2023), while the negative effects of tourism negatively affect relevant aspects of QoL (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Kim et al., 2013; Roberts et al., 2022). Secondly, it has been found that the benefits of tourism increase the QoL (Su et al., 2016; Campon-Cerro et al., 2017; Kolawole et al., 2017; Çalışkan et al., 2022; Mihalic & Kuscer, 2022; Riyanto et al., 2023; Yayla et al., 2023), while its costs decrease the quality of life (Su et al., 2016; Kolawole et al., 2017; Mihalic & Kuscer, 2022).

Nugraheni et al. (2019b) stated that there are few studies on social sustainability in the tourism literature. Indeed, only a limited number of studies have been conducted under the title of social sustainability (Aspinall et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2017; Helgadóttir et al., 2019; McClinchey, 2021). For instance, McClinchey (2021) found that festival experiences, including festival preparation, performance, and venue creation, can contribute to social sustainability.

Zhang et al. (2017) revealed that social sustainability in destination environments consists of three elements: social acceptance (SA), social tolerance (ST) and host-guest conflicts (HGC). In this context, host-guest conflict includes inappropriate behaviour of tourists (e.g., spitting, eating and shouting in forbidden public areas) and conflicts of interest between tourists and hosts due to complaints occurring as the number of tourists rises. Social tolerance represents the owner's feedback on the destination tourism capacity (e.g., their evaluations of social equality, medical facilities and transportation facilities), and social acceptance refers to the extent to which local people accept the guests and tourism development. Within the category of host-guest conflict, the authors found that Hong Kong residents complained that tourists from mainland China engaged in inappropriate behaviour (e.g., eating in prohibited public areas, spitting, and shouting). Similarly, Hong Kong residents complained about goods shortages, price inflation on consumer goods, overcrowding, changes in the appearance of local environments, and increased visits. In terms of social tolerance, it has been found that residents complain about not being able to find free rooms in local hospitals and the high cost of hospitals due to the Hong Kong administration's support of health tourism and the increasing demand of tourists for medical services. All of this has triggered hostile attitudes towards tourists.

Aspinall et al. (2011) evaluated social sustainability regarding perceived quality of life and compared before-and-after scenarios through a hypothetical tourism development project. The authors revealed that the perception of tourism in the community affected residents' perception of overall quality of life, with residents perceiving that their quality of life would be lower after resort development.

Helgadóttir et al. (2019) examined social sustainability based on social exchange theory and quality of life, revealing residents' attitudes in Reykjavík, the capital of Iceland. The authors found that residents prioritize welcoming and helping visitors. However, locals were concerned about overcrowding in certain areas, vehicle traffic, human traffic caused by group tours, increased prices of services and goods, and limited access to services and goods.

As previously mentioned, Zhang et al. (2017) revealed that social sustainability in destination environments has three-dimensional structure: host-guest conflicts, social acceptance, and social tolerance. This structure provides a significant clue in ensuring the social sustainability of the destination within the scope of tourism. Therefore, this study used Zhang et al.'s (2017) three-dimensional structure to measure homeowners' perceptions of social sustainability.

### **2.3 Social Sustainability and Community Participation**

Community participation (CP) encourages people's active participation in the affairs of their local communities to encourage sustainable social development in various communities in the human environment (Ugwu & Aruma, 2019). The social sustainability process considers community participation (Nugraheni et al., 2019a; Nugraheni et al., 2019b). Bafarasat and Oliveira (2023) stated that community participation and economic equality are critical determinants of social sustainability. Dempsey et al. (2009) noted that par-

ticipation in local and community activities had been identified as one of the domains of social capital and a dimension of social sustainability related to social network integration and social cohesion. McKenzie (2004) stated that one of the steps towards creating and implementing the process of social sustainability should be the participation of citizens at the local level, not only in election processes but also in procedures and other fields of political activism. Therefore, local and community organizations are the social structures that best deal with complexities and social issues related to social sustainability and are most likely to contribute to social sustainability (Stevenson, 2021).

Understanding each stakeholder's perspective on tourism development is crucial in creating tourism experiences because stakeholders are involved in tourism development (Kattiyapornpong et al., 2018). Community participation in tourism involves collaboration among community members to achieve common goals, improve their local communities, and pursue individual interests (Jaafar et al., 2015). A community's value can be enhanced through community participation by increasing tourism's positive effects and decreasing negative impacts (Lee, 2013). Therefore, community participation is considered the foundation stone of the development of sustainable tourism (Nicholas et al., 2009).

Much research has been done on community participation within social exchange theory and QoL. Some of these found that community participation positively impacts the perceived benefits (Lee, 2013; Kim et al., 2021; Riyanto et al., 2023), support for tourism (Lee, 2013; Fong & Lo, 2015; Sher et al., 2015; Gannon et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2023), quality of life (Abdillah, 2016), and others found that community participation negatively impacts the perception of conflict (Wang et al., 2021). The following hypotheses are proposed in light of theoretical support from the literature:

**H1:** Community participation negatively affects host-guest conflict.

**H2:** Community participation positively affects social tolerance.

**H3:** Community participation positively affects social acceptance.

## 2.4 Social Sustainability and Support for Tourism

The successful operation, development, and sustainability of tourism require the support of local people, as tourism heavily relies on their goodwill (Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004). A community's active support is a prerequisite for the tourism industry's sustainable development. By assessing the host community's views on tourism, the industry's negative impacts can be minimized, and appropriate policies can be implemented. Residents' attitudes towards tourism also significantly impact development policies (Nunkoo, 2016).

As mentioned before, Aspinall et al. (2011) stated that cost-benefit analysis within the social exchange theory and quality of life analysis can considerably contribute to predictions regarding social sustainability in general. Support for tourism (SFT) has been a variable evaluated in many studies conducted within the scope of social exchange theory. Most of these studies have revealed that perceived benefits positively impact support for tourism (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012; Lee, 2013; Styliadis et al., 2014; Nunkoo & So, 2015; Rua, 2020; Kim et al., 2021), the perceived costs negatively impact support for tourism (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012; Lee, 2013; Rua, 2020; Kim et al., 2021). With regard to QoL, it has been found that quality of life has a positive impact on support for tourism (Woo et al., 2015; Campon-Cerro et al., 2017; Eslami et al., 2019; Yayla et al., 2023; Han et al., 2023). Some studies on quality of life have revealed that as satisfaction in the relevant areas of life increases, support for tourism also increases (Liang & Hui, 2016).

Zhang et al. (2017) identified three dimensions of social sustainability: social tolerance, social acceptance, and host-guest conflict. Many studies have been carried out within the scope of host-guest conflicts, one of the dimensions of social sustainability (Tsaur et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2021; Xiang & Yang, 2022). For example, Tsaur et al. (2018) revealed a negative relationship between tourist-local conflict and support, finding that the greater the tourist-local conflict perceived by residents, the less likely they are to support tourism development. Xiang and Yang (2022) examined host-guest conflicts in a five-dimensional structure (e.g., economic, environmental, social, emotional and cultural conflicts). The authors found that each dimension negatively affected the residents' support for tourism development. Wang et al. (2021) revealed that the perception of conflict negatively impacts the support for tourism.

Tolerance towards tourists plays a considerable role in the sustainability and facilitation of tourist-host interactions, and hosts' tolerance needs to be considered in tourist-host relationships. Tolerance has been defined as "the ability or endurance to endure a situation that one dislikes or even hates" (Qin et al., 2021, p. 116). Under social exchange theory, tolerance is an overarching appraisal consisting of a general attitude toward benefits and costs and a coping or adaptive appraisal that deals with dynamic adjustments and attitude change (Qi et al., 2021). Many authors have stated that highly perceived benefits increase tolerance, and highly perceived costs reduce tolerance (Qi et al., 2016; Qin et al., 2021). Therefore, tolerance is a determinant of support, and high tolerance increases the level of support (Qi et al., 2016). For example, Qi et al. (2021) revealed that residents' tolerance positively impacts support for tourism and that perceived benefits/costs also determine tolerance. Specifically, perceived costs decrease acceptance, while perceived benefits enhance acceptance. Positive interactions between tourists and the host society will increase tourists' positive perceptions about the region and the host society's acceptance of tourists in their region without any problems (Armenski et al., 2011). The following hypotheses are proposed in light of theoretical support from the literature:

**H4:** Host-guest conflict negatively affects support for tourism.

**H5:** Social tolerance positively affects support for tourism.

**H6:** Social acceptance positively affects support for tourism.

## 2.5 The Mediating Role of Social Sustainability

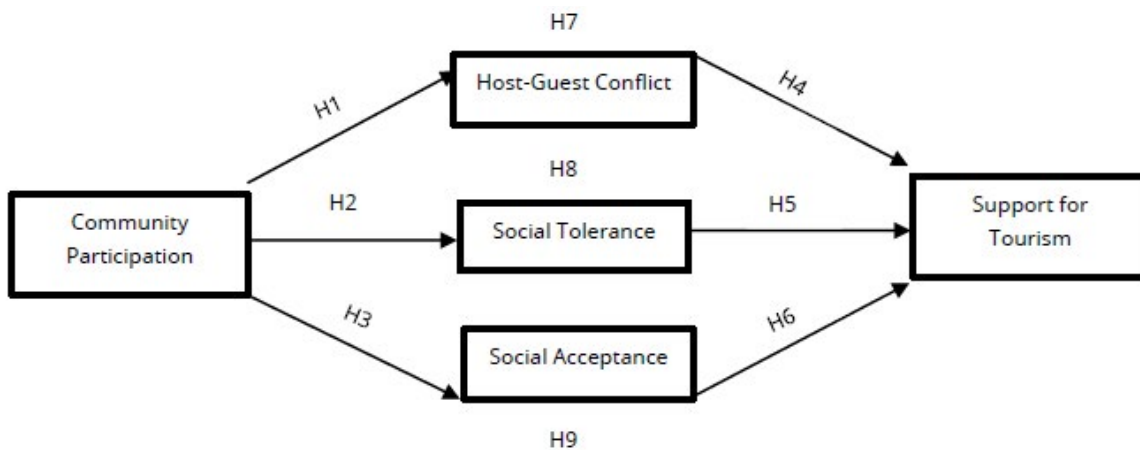
Zhang et al. (2017) identified social tolerance, social acceptance, and host-guest conflict as the three most important dimensions of social sustainability. Qi et al. (2021) found that tolerance partially mediated the effects of perceived benefits on support and wholly mediated the effects of costs on support. Qi et al. (2016) revealed that residents' tolerance towards tourism activities mediated the relationship between support for tourism and perceived costs/benefits. Qin et al. (2021) found that hosts' tolerance plays a moderating role in the relationship between the perceived costs of tourism and the support for tourism. If tolerance increases, the negative effects of costs on support decrease significantly. Likewise, Kılıç and Seçilmiş (2022) found that community participation mediates the relationship between social carrying capacity and support for tourism development. Wang et al. (2021) revealed that the perception of conflict has a mediating effect between community participation and support for tourism. The following hypotheses are proposed in light of theoretical support from the literature:

**H7:** Host-guest conflict mediates the relationship between community participation and support for tourism.

**H8:** Social tolerance mediates the relationship between community participation and support for tourism.

**H9:** Social acceptance mediates the relationship between community participation and support for tourism.

In this context, Figure 1 presents the conceptual model with the hypotheses of this study.

**Figure 1.** Proposed Conceptual Model of the Research

Source: Own Elaboration

### 3. Methodology

This study aims to evaluate the perceptions of local people living in Mardin regarding community participation, social sustainability, and support for tourism. The research also aims to determine the mediation effect of social sustainability on the relationship between community participation and support for tourism.

#### 3.1 Study Area

Mardin, which is in Turkey, was chosen as the study area. Mardin is one of Turkey's most important cultural destinations (Atsız & Kızıllırmak, 2017). Mardin, one of the most important cities of Mesopotamia, contains many important cultural and historical attractions due to its strategic location (Ataman, 2019). Mardin called the cradle of civilizations, is a cosmopolitan city where different ethnic groups live together. The different cultures of these ethnic groups, independent of each other regarding lifestyle and beliefs, have added cultural richness to the city. Hence, Mardin resembles an open-air museum in terms of its archaeological, architectural, historical, visual and ethnographic values. Therefore, it is frequently visited by tourists as a touristic destination (Atsız & Kızıllırmak, 2017). In 2023, Mardin hosted 2.6 million tourists (Ntv.com, 2023). According to 2023 data, the total population of Mardin province is 888,874 (TUIK, n.d.).

**Figure 2.** Study Location

Source: Maphill, n.d.

### 3.2 Sampling and Data Collection

The research was carried out using quantitative research method. Survey data collection technique was used in the research. Permission was obtained from the affiliated university's department of the Board of Ethics on May 2, 2023, and numbered 2023/64418 for the data collection phase of the research. A survey was distributed to 617 people between 15 May 2023 and 1 May 2024 using the convenience sampling method. Popular tourist locations in each district (e.g., shops, restaurants, hotels, and busy streets where locals work) were selected for survey distribution. First, participants in these popular locations were asked if they would like to participate in a survey for a scientific study on sustainability. The questionnaires had been duplicated in advance and were distributed to local residents, who were asked to complete them by marking the required boxes with a pencil. For population sizes over 1,000,000 people with a 5% sampling error, a sample size of 384 is sufficient (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Of the 617 surveys collected, a total of 537 surveys were subjected to data analysis, and 80 were excluded from the analysis because they had missing data.

### 3.3 Measurement

The survey was adapted from previous studies. Experts reviewed the survey to make it better understandable (four field academics and two linguistic experts). The part of the survey on social sustainability was adapted from the study of Zhang et al. (2017), the part on community participation was adapted from the study of Lee (2013), and the part on support was adapted from the study of Nicholas et al. (2009). Evaluations about the survey were measured on a 5-point Likert scale with response statements ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. The survey occurs in four parts in total. The first part includes questions about descriptive and demographic information; the second includes questions about social sustainability; the third includes community participation; and the last includes questions about tourism support.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, structural equation model (SEM) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). All these analyses were carried out using SPSS Statistics 26 and SPSS AMOS 26.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Respondents' Demographics Results

As seen in Table 1, most participants are between the ages of 26-35 (32.4%) and 18-25 (24.8%). In terms of education levels, the majority of the participants have a high school education or above (42.6%, 14.2%, 17.9%, 2.8%, 0.6 %, respectively). The majority of the participants are men (77.3%). Regarding marital status, 55.1% are married, and 44.9% are single. Most participants reside in Artuklu (36.7%) and Midyat (34.5%).

**Table 1.** Respondents' Demographics Information

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18-25	133	24.8
26-35	174	32.4
36-45	111	20.7
46-55	71	13.2
56-65	36	6.7
66 +	12	2.2
Gender		
Woman	122	22.7
Man	415	77.3
Education		
Primary school	46	8.6
Secondary school	72	13.4
High school	229	42.6
Associate degree	76	14.2
Bachelor	96	17.9
Master	15	2.8
PhD	3	0.6
Marital Status		
Married	296	55.1
Single	241	44.9
Residence Area		
Artuklu	197	36.7
Kızıltepe	110	20.5
Midyat	185	34.5
Nusaybin	38	7.1
Others	7	1.3

Source: Own Elaboration

## 4.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

The reliability of the scales was tested before performing confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The scale reliability for HGC was 0.935, for ST was 0.850, for SA was 0.823, for CT was 0.850, and for STD was 0.923. In this regard, the scales are considered reliable, as Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70 indicate good reliability (Eriksson & Lindstrom, 1998; Ursachi et al., 2015).

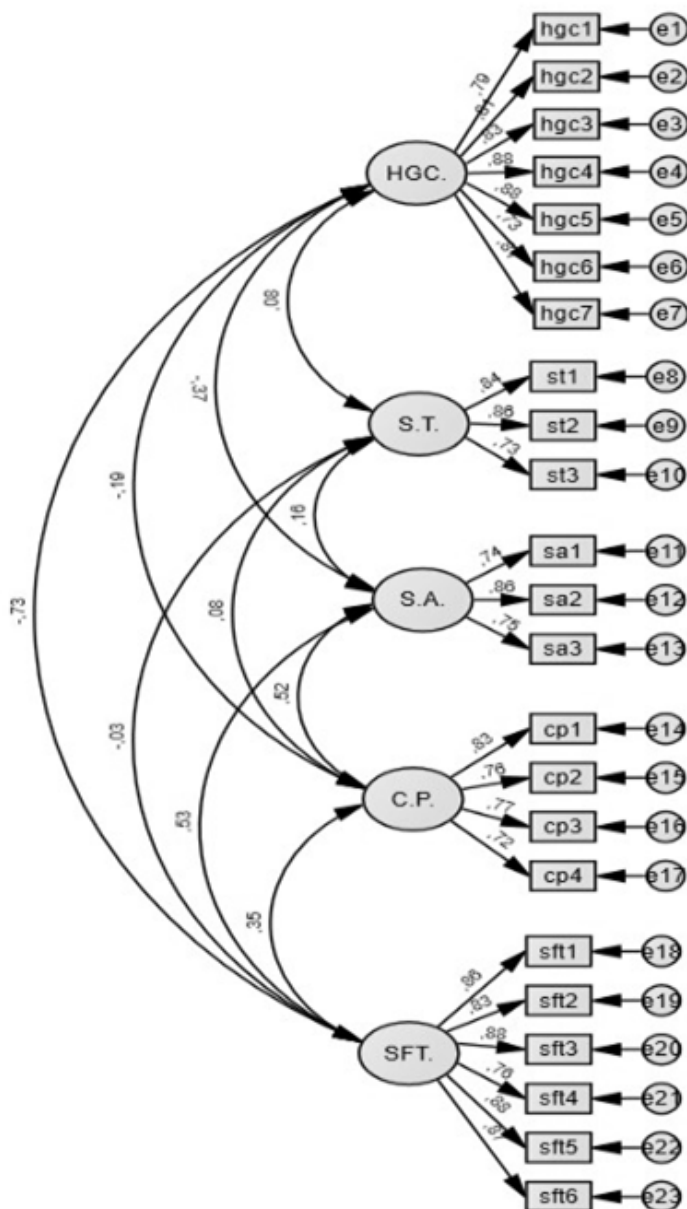
The formal normality tests, such as the K-S (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) and S-W (Shapiro-Wilk) tests, can be used small-to-medium-sized samples (e.g., < 300), but when used for larger samples, they may give imprecise and unreliable results (Kim, 2013). Ghasemi and Zahediasl (2012) stated that the K-S test should not be used to evaluate normal distribution due to its low power. But values of skewness and kurtosis and histograms can be examined without considering z values for sample sizes greater than 300 (Kim, 2013; Mishra et al., 2019). Many authors indicated that -1 and +1 values for both skewness and kurtosis is considered perfect for normal distribution but also -2 nad +2 values is acceptable (Hair et al., 2022; George & Mallery, 2024). It was observed that the data were normally distributed, as values of the kurtosis and skewness fell between -2 and +2 [HGC = (Skewness = 0.501; Kurtosis = -1.005); ST = (Skewness = -0.397;



Kurtosis = -0.966); SA = (Skewness = -0.739; Kurtosis = -0.199); CP = (Skewness = -0.388; Kurtosis = -0.789); SPT = (Skewness = -0.501; Kurtosis = -0.883)]. Additionally, Hatem et al. (2022) indicated if the skewness values is between -0.5 and 0.5, the data is highly symmetrical, if the skewness values is between -0.5 and 1 or 1 and -0.5, the data is moderately skewed and if the kurtosis values is less than zero, the distribution is slightly flat-tailed (platykurtic). For ST and CP, the data are symmetrical and slightly flat-tailed, while for HGC, SFT and SA, the data are moderately skewed and slightly flat-tailed. According to this, data were normal distribution in general.

The measurement model is expected to be tested before the research hypotheses. The structure that envisages testing the research’s structural equation model was tested with first-level CFA. Accordingly, Hair et al. (2014) indicate that the factor loading must be greater than 0.70 for CFA. In this context, it was found that the factor loading of each variable was statistically significant and above the limits accepted in the literature (>0.70). In addition, although there are still debates about which goodness-of-fit values should be given during the analyses, this study follows Kline’s process of reporting  $\chi^2/df$ ,  $p$ -value of  $\chi^2$ , RMSEA, CFI, and SRMR indices (Kline, 2016). The measurement model of research is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Measurement Model Results for the Research



Source: Own Elaboration

Note(s): HGC. = Host-Guest Conflict; ST. = Social Tolerance; SA. = Social Acceptance; CP. = Community Participation; SFT. = Support for Tourism.

Figure 3 shows the structure and results of the confirmatory factor analysis (chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) = 639.209; degrees of freedom (df) = 220;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 2.905$ ; CFI = 0.952; SRMR= 0.0467; RMSEA = 0.060; GFI=0.909). Numerous authors stated that values less than 0.08 are acceptable for RMSEA (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996; MacCallum et al., 1996; Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003; Hooper et al., 2008; Cheng, 2011). For SRMR, values up to 0.10 indicate an acceptable fit (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003; Hooper et al., 2008). For  $\chi^2/sd$ , values up to 5.0 can be accepted (Hooper et al., 2008). Values above 0.90 can be accepted for GFI (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003; Hooper et al., 2008; Cheng, 2011). CFI is considered a good fit when values exceed 0.95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Hooper et al., 2008). In this context, goodness-of-fit values of the CFA model meet acceptable levels. Table 2 displays the measurement model's regression coefficients, significance levels, standard error, and  $t$ -values.

**Table 2.** CFA Results for the Measurement Model

			$\beta^0$	$\beta^1$	S.E.	$t$	$p$
cp1	<---	CP	0.833	1.000			
cp2	<---	CP	0.756	0.875	0.046	21.216	***
cp3	<---	CP	0.770	0.930	0.048	21.937	***
cp4	<---	CP	0.716	0.913	0.046	23.702	***
sft1	<---	SUP	0.858	1.000	0.047	23.437	
sft2	<---	SUP	0.826	1.018	0.051	18.587	***
sft3	<---	SUP	0.883	1.041	0.049	21.243	***
sft4	<---	SUP	0.760	0.877			***
sft5	<---	SUP	0.876	1.041	0.056	19.437	***
sft6	<---	SUP	0.868	1.077	0.046	17.484	***
hgc1	<---	HGC	0.791	1.000			
hgc2	<---	HGC	0.814	0.977	0.070	17.323	***
hgc3	<---	HGC	0.834	1.054	0.067	16.080	***
hgc4	<---	HGC	0.883	1.083			***
hgc5	<---	HGC	0.875	1.102	0.048	18.269	***
hgc6	<---	HGC	0.735	0.943	0.050	18.648	***
hgc7	<---	HGC	0.815	1.037	0.053	17.160	***
st1	<---	ST	0.839	1.000			
st2	<---	ST	0.863	1.082	0.041	24.541	***
st3	<---	ST	0.727	0.802	0.038	27.733	***
sa1	<---	SA	0.738	1.000	0.041	21.410	
sa2	<---	SA	0.855	1.211	0.038	27.301	***
sa3	<---	SA	0.752	1.075	0.040	26.806	***

Source: Own Elaboration

Note(s):  $\beta^0$ = Standardized regression coefficient,  $\beta^1$ = Unstandardized regression coefficient, \*\*\*:  $p < 0.001$

It would be useful to conduct a more detailed analysis to confirm the validity of the measurement model. In this context, the AVE, CR, ASV, and MSV values of the latent variables included in the measurement model must be calculated to ensure convergent and discriminant validity. Table 3 shows the convergent and discriminant validity values of the latent variables.

**Table 3.** Convergent and Discriminant Validity Outcomes of the Scale

	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	S.A.	HGC.	S.T.	C.P.	SFT.
S.A.	0.826	0.614	0.282	0.177	<b>0.783</b>				
HGC.	0.936	0.676	0.529	0.177	-0.367	<b>0.822</b>			
S.T.	0.852	0.659	0.025	0.009	0.157	0.082	<b>0.812</b>		
C.P.	0.853	0.593	0.267	0.108	0.517	-0.195	0.076	<b>0.770</b>	
SFT.	0.938	0.716	0.529	0.233	0.531	-0.727	-0.028	0.349	<b>0.846</b>

Source: Own Elaboration

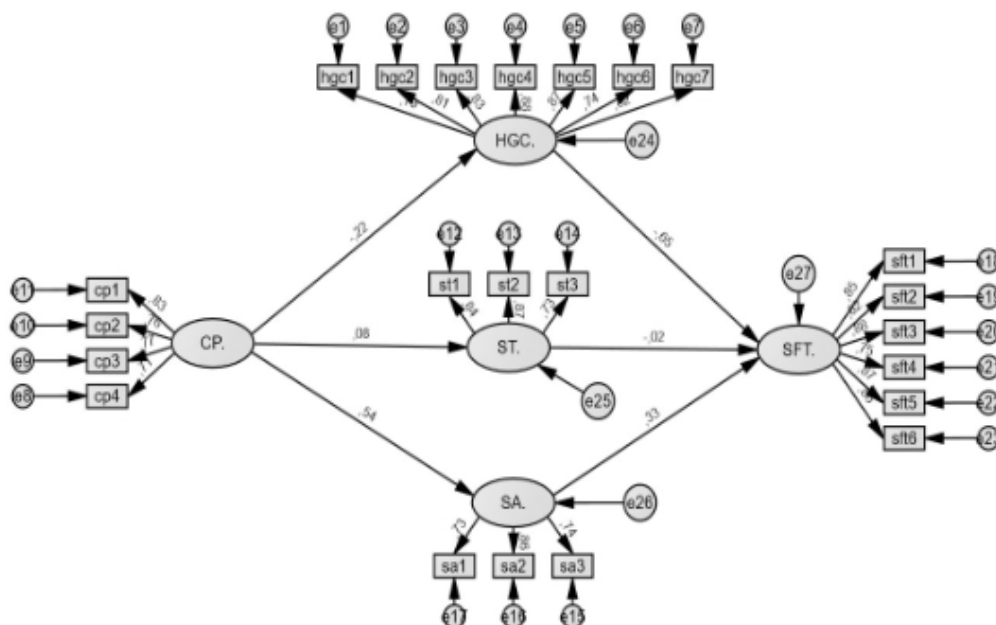
Note(s): C $\alpha$ = Cronbach Alpha; CR= Composite Reliability; AVE= Average Variance Extracted; MSV= Maximum Shared Variance; ASV= Average Shared Variance; Values in bold indicate =  $\sqrt{AVE}$  scores.

For convergent validity, CR values must exceed 0.70, AVE values exceed 0.50, and the CR>AVE condition must be met (Almen et al., 2018). When Table 3 is examined, CR values are above 0.70, AVE values are above 0.50, and the CR>AVE condition being met indicates that convergent validity is achieved. For discriminant validity, AVE values should be greater than ASV and MSV (AVE > ASV; AVE>MSV) and square root values of AVE should be greater than the correlation values between factors (Sürücü & Maslakçı, 2020). When Table 3 is examined, these conditions are achieved for discriminant validity. On the other hand, Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  and CR values being over 0.70 indicate that the reliability of the factors is ensured. The maximum likelihood calculation method was employed for SEM because the data was normally distributed.

### 4.3 Structural Equation Modeling Results

The structure of the structural equation modeling (SEM) is shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4.** SEM Model of the Research



Source: Own Elaboration

It was found that the goodness of fit values of the SEM model were within limits accepted in the literature (chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) = 698.792; degrees of freedom (df) = 224;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 3.120$ ; SRMR= 0.0726; CFI = 0.945; RMSEA = 0.063; GFI=0.900) (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996; MacCallum et al., 1996; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003; Hooper et al., 2008; Cheng, 2011). The regression coefficients, significance levels, standard errors, and  $t$ -values of the model are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Results of SEM

Path			$\beta^0$	$\beta^1$	SE	CR	$p$	R <sup>2</sup>	Hypothesis	Result
HGC	<---	CP	-0.225	-0.254	0.055	-4.631	***	0.050	H1	Supported
ST	<---	CP	0.083	0.091	0.055	1.651	0.099	0.007	H2	Not Supported
SA	<---	CP	0.537	0.520	0.054	9.688	***	0.288	H3	Supported
SFT	<---	HGC	-0.650	-0.597	0.039	-15.343	***		H4	Supported
SFT	<---	ST	-0.023	-0.022	0.032	-0.697	0.486	0.586	H5	Not Supported
SFT	<---	SA	0.334	0.359	0.041	8.837	***		H6	Supported

Source: Own Elaboration

Note(s):  $\beta^0$  = Standardized regression coefficient (\*\*\*) = ( $p < 0.001$ );  $\beta^1$  = Unstandardized regression coefficient

When Table 4 is examined, it was found that community participation had a significant and negative impact on host-guest conflict ( $p < 0.001$ ). In this context, the H1 hypothesis was supported. It was revealed that community participation has no significant impact on social tolerance ( $p = 0.099$ ). In this context, the H2 hypothesis was not supported. Likewise, it was revealed that community participation positively affects social acceptance ( $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, the H3 hypothesis was supported. When the results affecting support were examined, it was concluded that host-guest conflict negatively affects support for tourism ( $p < 0.001$ ). In this context, the H4 hypothesis was supported. Additionally, it was revealed that social tolerance has no significant impact on support for tourism ( $p = 0.486$ ). In this context, the H5 hypothesis was not supported. Lastly, it was found that social acceptance positively affects support for tourism ( $p < 0.001$ ). In this context, the H6 hypothesis was supported.

#### 4.4 Mediation Effect Results

**Table 5.** Goodness Fit of Mediating Model

Path				$\chi^2$	Df	$\chi^2 / df$	CFI	GFI	RMSEA	SRMR	
CP	---->	HGC	---->	SFT	378.643	116	3.264	0.962	0.925	0.065	0.0488
CP	---->	ST	---->	SFT	238.520	62	3.847	0.960	0.937	0.073	0.0546
CP	---->	SA	---->	SFT	297.664	62	4.801	0.949	0.927	0.084	0.0583

Source: Own Elaboration

Table 5 shows the goodness-of-fit values of the mediation model. In this context, the goodness-of-fit values of the mediation model meet acceptable levels. Path analysis was conducted using the bootstrap technique to test whether community participation affects support through the social sustainability factors of host-guest conflict, social acceptance and social tolerance. 5000 resampling options were used in this analysis. In mediation effect analyses performed using the bootstrap method to evaluate the research hypotheses, the 95% confidence interval (CI) values obtained during the analysis should not include the value zero (0) (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Hayes, 2018). According to, the results of the mediation models and effects are shown in Table 6 and Table 7.

**Table 6.** Results of Mediating Models

Path		$\beta^0$	$\beta^1$	SE	CR	$p$
For Mediating by HGC						
HGC	<----- CP	-0.190	-0.215	0.055	-3.931	***
SFT	<----- CP	0.212	0.228	0.039	5.869	***
SFT	<----- HGC	-0.657	-0.687	0.042	15.820	***
For Mediating by ST						
ST	<----- CP	0.078	0.085	0.055	1.550	0.121
SFT	<----- ST	-0.55	-0.54	0.045	-1.211	0.226
SFT	<----- CP	0.347	0.372	0.053	7.074	***
For Mediating by SA						
SA	<----- CP	0.516	0.467	0.050	9.334	***
SFT	<----- SA	0.478	0.567	0.068	8.344	***
SFT	<----- CP	0.102	0.110	0.056	1.960	0.050

Source: Own Elaboration

Note(s):  $\beta^0$ = Standardized regression coefficient,  $\beta^1$ = Unstandardized regression coefficient, \*\*\*:  $p < 0.001$

**Table 7.** Results of Mediation Effects

Path	STE	SDI	SIE	SE	Confidence Interval (CI)		$p$	Hypothesis	Result
					Lower	Upper			
CP ---> HGC ---> SFT	0.343	0.212	0.131	0.034	0.062	0.197	0.001	H7	Supported
CP ---> ST ---> SFT	0.342	0.347	-0.004	0.006	-0.024	0.002	0.193	H8	Not Supported
CP ---> SA ---> SFT	0.349	0.102	0.247	0.050	0.165	0.361	0.000	H9	Supported

Source: Own Elaboration

Note(s): SDI= Standardized Direct Effects; SE.= Standart Errors; S.I.E = Standardized indirect effects; STE=Standardized Total Effects

According to the bootstrap results, it was concluded that host-guest conflict mediates the relationship between community participation and support for tourism ( $\beta=0.131$ ; CI (0.135, 0.286). In this context, the H7 hypothesis was supported. Secondly, it was found that social tolerance does not mediate the relationship between community participation and support for tourism. ( $\beta= -0,004$ ; CI (-0.024, 0.002). In this context, the H8 hypothesis was not supported. Lastly, it revealed that social acceptance mediates the relationship between community participation and support for tourism. ( $\beta=0.247$ ; CI (0.165, 0.361). In this context, the H9 hypothesis was supported.

## 5. Conclusion

This study aims to evaluate the residents' perceptions of community participation, social sustainability, and support for tourism. It also seeks to explore the mediating role of social sustainability in the relationship between community participation and support for tourism.

Firstly, the study examined the impact of community participation on social sustainability and found a significant effect on the other two dimensions (host-guest conflict and social acceptance), excluding social tolerance. A community's value can be enhanced through community participation by increasing tourism's positive effects and decreasing its negative impacts (Lee, 2013). Therefore, it is considered the foundation stone of sustainable tourism development (Nicholas et al., 2009). In previous research on community participation in the literature, no study has been found that observes the impact of community participation on social sustainability. However, community participation has been found to have a

positive impact on perceived benefits (Lee, 2013; Kim et al., 2021; Riyanto et al., 2023), a positive impact on quality of life (Abdillah, 2016), and a negative effect on conflict (Wang et al., 2021).

Secondly, the impact of the dimensions of social sustainability on support for tourism was examined in the study. In this context, it was found that host-guest conflict negatively affects support for tourism. This result was similar to previous studies, which found that support for tourism decreases as conflicts between hosts and visitors increase (Tsaur et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2021; Xiang & Yang, 2022).

The study revealed that social acceptance positively affects support for tourism. It also found that social tolerance does not impact support for tourism. This result contrasts with the findings of Qi et al. (2021), who found that tolerance positively impacts support for tourism. However, Qi et al. (2016) stated that although tolerance has the potential to support tourism, it does not necessarily mean encouraging tourism development. Moreover, in this study, social tolerance was measured using the social tolerance variable developed by Zhang et al. (2017), which primarily reflects hosts' feedback regarding the carrying capacity (such as transportation and medical facilities) at a destination. Specifically, the social tolerance variable in the authors' study represents situations related to carrying capacity. Therefore, this result may arise from the fact that the tourism carrying capacity in Mardin has not been exceeded, and thus, this situation has not yet impacted transportation and medical facility availability.

The study also revealed that host-guest conflict mediates the relationship between community participation and support for tourism. This result is similar to the result of Wang et al. (2021). The authors found that conflict played a mediating role between support and community participation (Wang et al., 2021). The study revealed that social tolerance does not mediate the relationship between community participation and support for tourism. This result is contrasted with previous studies. Previous studies have revealed that tolerance mediates between perceived benefits/costs and support (Qi et al., 2016; Qin et al., 2021). Moreover, the study also found that social acceptance mediates the relationship between community participation and support for tourism.

## 5.1 Theoretical Implication

Although social sustainability is an important concept, it has yet to receive much attention in the academic literature (Razia & Ah, 2023). In tourism literature, there are a few studies, albeit a small number, under the title of social sustainability. In these studies, social sustainability has been examined in terms of social exchange theory and quality of life (Aspinall et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2017; Helgadóttir et al., 2019; McClinchey, 2021). Many authors have stated that community participation is one of the critical determinants of social sustainability (McKenzie, 2004; Dempsey et al., 2009; Nugraheni et al., 2019a; Nugraheni et al., 2019b; Bafarasat & Oliveira, 2023).

In general, studies on community participation were conducted on perceived benefits/costs (Lee, 2013; Kim et al., 2021; Riyanto et al., 2023), support for tourism (Lee, 2013; Fong & Lo, 2015; Sher et al., 2015; Gannon et al., 2020; Wang, 2021; Jiang et al., 2023), quality of life (Abdillah, 2016), and conflict perception (Wang et al., 2021). Therefore, this study contributed to the literature in terms of uncovering the impact of community participation on social sustainability. Previous studies on support for tourism mainly were carried out on social exchange theory (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Stylidis et al., 2014; Nunkoo & So, 2015; Campon-Cerro et al., 2017; Rua, 2020; Kim et al., 2021) and quality of life (Woo et al., 2015; Campon-Cerro et al., 2017; Eslami et al., 2019; Han et al., 2023; Yayla et al., 2023). Therefore, this study found the impact of social sustainability on support for tourism. The study also contributed to uncovering the mediating role of social sustainability in the relationship between community participation and support for tourism.

## 5.2 Managerial Implication

To ensure sustainable development in a tourism destination, local people's opinions about the impacts of tourism need to be considered and their participation in tourism-related decision-making processes is essential. In this context, tourism planners should thoroughly analyse environmental, economic and socio-cultural impacts caused by tourism in the region to enhance the locals' quality of life. Therefore, meetings and workshops should be organized with the participation of all tourism stakeholders. Additionally, it is necessary to develop transportation and infrastructure systems for a livable environment and reduce the factors that will deteriorate the quality of life of residents, such as traffic, noise and pollution.

Tourism planners must make efforts to develop community-based tourism activities in the region. To gain the support of the host society, the society should be informed about the benefits of tourism, and internal marketing techniques can be used in this regard. Additionally, it is necessary to increase communication and cultural exchange between tourists and local people and guests coming to the region should be informed about the culture and values of the region.

### 5.3 Limitations and Future Research

The questions prepared for the research on social sustainability included the questions included in Zhang et al. (2017) confirmatory factor analysis. In addition, question Q18 was removed due to cultural differences. The research focuses only on Mardin province. The research can be investigated in different countries, cities and other tourist destinations with different tourist densities in future research. In addition, due to time and cost savings, it was mostly conducted in the Artuklu and Midyat districts, which are the leading districts of Mardin in cultural tourism. In the research, due to cultural prejudices in the region, female participants were not willing to fill out the survey, so there was a problem in reaching female participants, and mostly male participants participated in the research. Only the attitudes and perceptions of the local people were investigated in the study, and other tourism stakeholders were excluded. Therefore, other stakeholders' views on social sustainability can be considered in future research. Moreover, issues such as host-guest conflict and host tolerance, which are among the most important dimensions of social sustainability, can be investigated in future research. In addition, the research can be examined in the context of different demographic and predictive variables (e.g., age, education, marital status, level of contact with tourists, distance to the tourism center, personal benefit and tourism knowledge, etc.).

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## APPENDIX

### Host-Guest Conflict

1. Tourists bring challenges to local government.
2. Community resources are occupied by tourists.
3. I heard a lot of complaints on tourists.
4. Tourists cause a great number of social problems.
5. Mardin is overcrowded because of tourism.
6. There are conflicts of interest between Mardin residents and tourists.
7. I saw some uncivilized behavior of tourists.

### Social Tolerance

1. Even though there are many tourists, I am satisfied with the medical facilities provided by the government.
2. Even though there are many tourists, I am satisfied with the transportation facilities provided by the government.
3. Tourism in Mardin is developed in a fair and social way.

### Social Acceptance

1. Most tourists can keep public places clean and tidy.
2. Tourists can help Mardin residents understand cultural diversity.
3. I think most tourists are satisfied with traveling in Mardin.

### Community Participation

1. I participate in sustainable tourism-related activities.
2. I support research for the sustainability of community
3. I am involved in the planning and management actions of sustainable tourism in the community.
4. I am involved in the decision-making process for sustainable tourism in the community.

### Support for Tourism

1. I support the development of community-based tourism initiatives.
2. I support the participation of local in tourism planning and development.
3. I support cultural exchange between local residents and tourists.
4. I support cooperation in tourism planning and development.
5. I support the development of regulatory environmental standards to reduce the negative impacts of tourism.
6. I support the promotion of environmental education and conversation.

# **Sustainable Tourism as a Source of Income Diversification for Local Communities Through Mediating Effect of Community Empowerment**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Sustainable tourism is always concerned with fulfilling visitors' and local communities' requirements while keeping current and future generations' interests in mind. Meghalaya, a state of India well known for its natural beauty and rich cultural heritage, offers a wide opportunity for sustainable tourism. This research aimed to develop a framework for establishing the relationship between sustainable tourism and diversifying local communities' income sources in Meghalaya through the mediating effect of community empowerment. The proposed framework was tested and validated using the PLS-SEM approach in Smart PLS 4.0. A sample of 425 local community members was drawn for the research from the famous tourist places in Meghalaya: Shillong, Cherrapunji, Mawlynnong, and Dawki, based on the multistage cluster sampling technique. Primary data was collected using an enumerator survey. Research findings revealed that sustainable tourism activities significantly enhance income diversification beyond traditional earning sources like agriculture and handicrafts. Also, the research further confirmed the mediating role of community empowerment between sustainable tourism and income diversification. This study recommended strategies for sustainable tourism development and attaining long-term economic and social goals by integrating community empowerment with tourism and income generation in local communities. At the end of the study, future research directions were provided for further research.

## **KEYWORDS**

Sustainable Tourism, Community Empowerment, Income Diversification, PLS-SEM.

## **ARTICLE HISTORY**

Received 29 September 2024 Accepted 12 April 2025

## 1. Introduction

Meghalaya is the smallest but one of the most beautiful hill states of north-east India, having astounding landscapes, rich biodiversity, and a quite distinct cultural heritage (Ministry of Tourism, 2021). The state, however, remains economically challenged, with the majority of its population dependent upon traditional agriculture and an underdeveloped local industry (Bordoloi, 2020). Also, the state is dependent on tourism to meet its requirements (Mukherjee, 2019). The state is taking a shift to sustainable tourism in light of SDGs, aware visitors and the local community. Meghalaya offers pristine natural beauty and cultural richness, thus providing a strong base for initiations in sustainable tourism (Mukherjee, 2019).

The concept of sustainable tourism refers to tourism and ancillary activities that reduce the negative impacts on the environment and culture but maximize the economic benefits to host communities (UNWTO, 2015). The challenge remains to see that the increased trend in tourism does not lead towards degradation of the environment or erosion of culture (Nongbri, 2018). The motive to implement sustainable tourism in Meghalaya is not only to conserve them; its utilization in the creation of sustainable livelihood opportunities with active local residence involvement (Pandiya, 2024). The Living Root Bridges of Meghalaya, a UNESCO (2020) World Heritage tentative list site, is a prime example of sustainable tourism that involves local communities. The project, supported by the Meghalaya government and various NGOs, has provided direct and indirect employment to over 1,000 residents. Villages like Nongriat, where the famous double-decker root bridge is located, have seen a 40% increase in household income since the project began. Villages like Mawlynnong, often referred to as the “cleanest village in Asia,” have embraced eco-tourism by developing community-run homestays. These homestays promote local culture and offer tourists a chance to experience the rural lifestyle, while also supporting sustainable income for locals. (Ministry of Tourism, 2021).

Critical reports, such as the “United Nations World Tourism Organization’s Sustainable Development of Tourism in the Indian Himalayan Region,” (UNWTO, 2018) have been drawing attention to why sustainable practices are vital for the preservation of balance in these delicate ecosystems. Other research has also indicated that sustainable tourism, if carried out properly, will play a very important role in the conservation of natural and cultural resources (Cole, 2006).

The sampled areas- Shillong, Cherrapunji, Mawlynnong, and Dawki, in Meghalaya hold immense potential for sustainable tourism in a variety of ways, such as eco-tourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism, and community-based tourism (Mukherjee, 2019). The eco-tourism spots represent issues related to conservation and education, while cultural tourism represents the traditional, unique tribal customs and styles of life. On the other hand, adventure tourism is represented by trekking or caving for those seeking adventure, and community-based tourism allows visitors direct contact with the local community for authentic experiences (Ellis, 2000). Each of these forms of tourism has the potential to diversify income through new revenue sources for members of local communities. Diversification of income is very important in reducing economic vulnerability and improving resilience, especially in agriculture or other seasonal industry-based economies. In addition, according to research conducted by Ashley et al., (2009), tourism has great potential to contribute substantially to poverty alleviation through offering alternative livelihood opportunities. Income diversification, therefore, refers to the expansion of the base of income sources with the view to reducing dependence upon any single economic activity (Ellis, 2000). In this regard, sustainable tourism is one sure avenue to achieve this diversification for the communities in Meghalaya (Bhat & Mishra, 2021). In an area with developed tourism infrastructure and services, locals can engage in numerous other economic activities related to hospitality, guiding, handicrafts, and transportation (Ashley et al., 2000). Such options are likely to afford more stable and higher household incomes, which would eventually lead to a decrease in the level of poverty and hence improved living standards (Goodwin, 2008).

Sustainable tourism, as it applies to Meghalaya, embodies some core aspects of Social Exchange Theory (1976). The theory holds that social relationships are interdependent on the reciprocal exchange of resources between interacting parties. In this respect, tourism offers both economic and non-economic benefits to the locals in exchange for preserving the environment and culture. This mutualism plays a critical role in the success of sustainable tourism in regions like Meghalaya, whose economic growth de-

depends on tourism but whose cultural and ecological integrity they retain (UNWTO, 2015). In this context, sustainable tourism in Meghalaya becomes an important part of understanding the model through which empowered communities can use tourism for diversified and sustainable economic benefits.

Studies by Moscardo (2008) and Bordoloi (2020) conclude the importance of tourism in community development, but detailed empirical data from the state of Meghalaya, which is confronted with a strong biodiversity base and a rich cultural heritage can be considered economically backward, are scant. It represents a prospective research exercise to find out how sustainable tourism mechanisms can empower the locals, generate multiple sources of stable income. Existing literature largely addresses sustainable tourism's environmental and cultural preservation aspects but provides insufficient empirical evidence on its role in community empowerment and income diversification, particularly in rural and economically underdeveloped regions like Meghalaya. This paper attempts to analyze how sustainable tourism contributes towards the sources of diversifying local communities' income in the context of Meghalaya, with special emphasis on how the empowerment of the communities serves as a mediator in this process. It aims to provide empirical evidence for how initiatives for sustainable tourism could improve the resilience of economic development and income diversification.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism seeks to reduce the adverse impacts of tourism while maximizing its benefits, which are normally derived from local economies and communities. According to the UNWTO (2018), it can be defined 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" (p.1). Various research efforts in this area have noted that sustainability-oriented tourism offers several benefits, which relate to conservation, preservation of cultures, and economic development (Sharpley, 2000; Stronza & Gordillo, 2008; Koščak & O'Rourke 2023). Butler (1999) concluded that the successful implementation of sustainable tourism requires the presence of active participation and support from the local communities.

### 2.2 Income Diversification

Income diversification pertains to the process whereby a person or household expands sources of income other than the single primary source of income (Moscardo, 2008). This is particularly important in rural areas, where dependence on agriculture or a single industry can result in communities that are vulnerable to economic shock (Barrett et al., 2001). Sustainable tourism can supply this diversification of income as an immense source, lending alternative employment opportunities and stimulating local economies (Ashley et al., 2000). Mitchell and Ashley (2010); Telfer and Sharpley (2008) indicate that tourism-related activities can improve household incomes and decrease poverty in rural communities. Moreover, sustainable tourism enhances the economic resilience of rural areas, encouraging entrepreneurial ventures and ensuring more stable income streams (Su et al., 2020).

### 2.3 Community Empowerment

Community empowerment is a process whereby individuals and communities exert greater influence and control over their lives and environment by acting on issues they define as important (Zimmerman, 2000). Community empowerment simply means enhancing the capacity of local people so they can take charge and handle tourism development for themselves in regards to tourism development (Scheyvens, 1999). According to Timothy (2007), the empowered communities are likely to support and engage in the application of sustainable tourism practices, leading to better outcomes for residents and visitors. Research shows that community empowerment is positively correlated with social cohesion, participation in decision-making, and improvement of life quality as reported in Boley and McGehee (2014).

## 2.4 Sustainable Tourism and Income Diversification

Various studies have tried to link sustainable tourism with income diversification. For instance, Wang et al. (2019) established that sustainable tourism development was an effective means of improving income diversification by creating other new economic opportunities and reducing what the people conventionally relied on for their livelihoods. On the other hand, Tao and Wall (2009) indicated that sustainable tourism ventures in rural areas can appreciably enhance household incomes and improve the level of economic stability. However, the degree to which sustainable tourism can diversify incomes is channelled by factors such as the degree of community involvement and the available supportive infrastructure (Tosun, 2000). Based on the arguments presented above, the first research hypothesis is proposed as:

**H1.** There is a significant direct positive relationship between sustainable tourism and income diversification.

## 2.5 Sustainable Tourism and Community Empowerment

Community empowerment forms a sine qua non for any sustainable tourism venture to be successful. According to Scheyvens (1999), empowered communities may be better placed to manage tourism resources sustainably for the wide sharing of benefits accruing from tourism. Cole (2006) underscores the requirement for involving local communities in tourism planning and decision-making processes to meet sustainable ends. Moreover, it has been recorded that empowered communities are likely to practice sustainable activities and fight against activities likely to negatively affect their environment or culture (Murphy, 1985; Pretty, 1995; Pandey & Kumar, 2019). Based on the cited reviews, it is hypothesized:

**H2.** There is a significant direct positive relationship between sustainable tourism and community empowerment.

## 2.6 Community Empowerment and Income Diversification

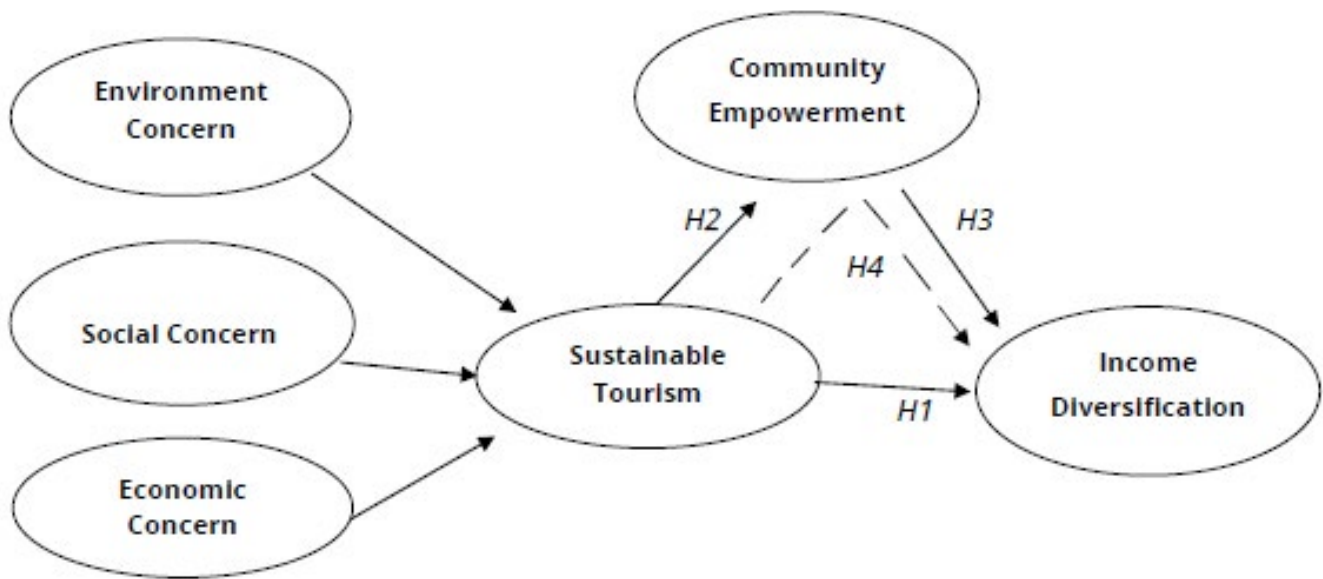
Recent studies have examined the role of community empowerment for income diversification. Lee and Jan (2019) establish that community empowerment significantly enhances the positive effect that sustainable tourism has on income diversification. Besides, empowered communities can seize opportunities availed by tourism better, hence increasing economic benefits (Moscardo, 2008). Empowerment will allow communities to dictate favourable terms with investors, control impacts effectively, and ensure advantage sharing is done equitably (Cole, 2006). Accordingly, Ashley et al. (2001) regarding maximizing the economic benefits of tourism, policies and programs geared towards promoting sustainable tourism have to pay equal attention to empowering local communities. Hence, the following is hypothesized:

**H3.** There is a significant direct positive relationship between community empowerment and income diversification.

## 2.7 Mediating Role of Community Empowerment on Income Diversification

Concerning income generation, sustainable tourism brings in many opportunities, ranging from hospitality/guiding service operations to local crafts and agricultural product sectors (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004). Spenceley (2008) in South Africa reported that sustainable tourism initiatives offer considerable improvements in enhancing the livable incomes of local people through job creation and running businesses from which the accruals derive. Community empowerment, therefore, serves to increase the benefits gained from sustainable tourism. According to Moscardo (2008), empowered communities can maximize their opportunities for income diversification out of tourism more sufficiently. The cited review helps frame the following hypothesis:

**H4.** There is a significant mediating role of community empowerment between sustainable tourism and income diversification.

**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework

Source: Own Elaboration

### 3. Methods and Procedure

#### 3.1 Methods

To attain the goal of the study, an empirical investigation based on descriptive cum diagnostics research design was conducted in Meghalaya, India. A sample of 425 community members was drawn based on a multi-stage cluster sampling technique during February-April, 2024, and was approached in person with the assistance of an enumerator. The sampling technique is justified on the ground that the research focuses on local communities, which may be spread across different geographical areas. Multi-stage cluster sampling allows for efficient data collection from dispersed populations (Malhotra & Dash, 2016). In the first stage, large clusters such as regions or districts can be selected. In the subsequent stages, smaller clusters, such as villages or households, can be chosen, making it practical for reaching diverse areas. Based on the major tourist activities in Meghalaya, the principal clusters of Shillong, Cherrapunji, Mawlynnong, and Dawki were selected at the first stage. From the discovered major clusters, smaller sub-clusters were formed, and the respondents from each sub-cluster were selected at random for primary data collection. All individuals in the sub-cluster were assigned unique identification numbers. A lottery method was used to select participants from the list.

#### 3.2 Instrument Development

The study used an adapted scale where the standard statements were modified in the context of tourism to achieve the objectives of the study. Sustainable tourism was measured using three dimensions of sustainability: environmental concern, economic concern, and social concern (Cárdenas et al., 2015; Mehraj et al., 2015; Basak et al., 2021). Community empowerment was a unidimensional construct and was measured through five observed variables, referring to previous research by Satarat (2010). Five observed variables were used for measuring income diversification, referring to previous studies of Kim Kong et al., 2023; Brel et al., 2023. The observed variables were based on a five-point Likert scale where 1 represented strongly disagree and 5 represented strongly agree. The content validity of the instrument was assessed through expert opinion and a pilot study using a sample of 30 respondents.



### 3.3 Sample Description

425 community members were contacted to get the information. Ten respondents' responses were eliminated during the data cleaning and editing stage, while 415 respondents' responses were deemed suitable for data analysis. 230 (55%) of the 415 responses that were gathered were from women, and 185 (45%) were from men. Sixty-two percent of the respondents had incomes below ₹ 2,00,000 (€ 2257.90). Of those surveyed, 104 (or 25%) fall between ₹ 2,00,000 (€ 2257.90) and ₹ 5,00,000 (€ 5644.75). The remaining 249 respondents had incomes exceeding ₹ 5,00,000 (€ 5644.75). Agriculture accounted for 124% (30%) of respondents' principal source of income. 38% (158) of respondents said they were mostly engaged in tourism-related activities, while 25% (104) of respondents said their main source of income was from handicrafts. 7% (29) of respondents fall in the other category.

### 3.4 Statistical Tools Used

The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique was employed to establish the relationship of sustainable tourism with income diversification with the mediating role of community empowerment. While measuring a sequence of dependent variables, causal models, and equations concurrently, SEM is an appropriate statistical tool for data analysis (Chin, 1998; Cohen et al., 2018; Hair et al., 2019, Prakash et al., 2022). CB-SEM and PLS-SEM are the major two approaches to SEM (Hair et al., 2019). A higher-order PLS-SEM approach using SmartPLS 4 was applied in this research. Due to the lack of arresting distributional assumptions (Hair et al., 2019), PLS-SEM has recently attracted the attention of academics, particularly those working in business research sectors (Sarstedt et al., 2019). There is a shift witnessed in PLS-SEM from lower-order constructs or small and focused models to higher-order constructs and advanced model designs (Ringle et al., 2019; Sharma et al., 2021). Gaining popularity of higher order constructs over lower order is because of numerous applications of higher order in terms of reduced path model relationships that are easier to comprehend, making path models more parsimonious (Edwards, 2001; Johnson et al., 2011; Sarstedt et al., 2019; Yadav et al., 2023). The issue of common method variance (CMV) bias in the survey samples is a major concern that arises when data are acquired from a single source (Podsakoff et al., 2003). A thorough collinearity assessment test was conducted using Smart PLS, a method that is efficient and concise according to Kock (2015). The VIF values of all the constructs were below the predetermined threshold of five (Hair et al. 2017) (Table 5), indicating that common method bias is not a significant concern in this study.

## 4. Analysis and Results

### 4.1 Measurement Model Assessment

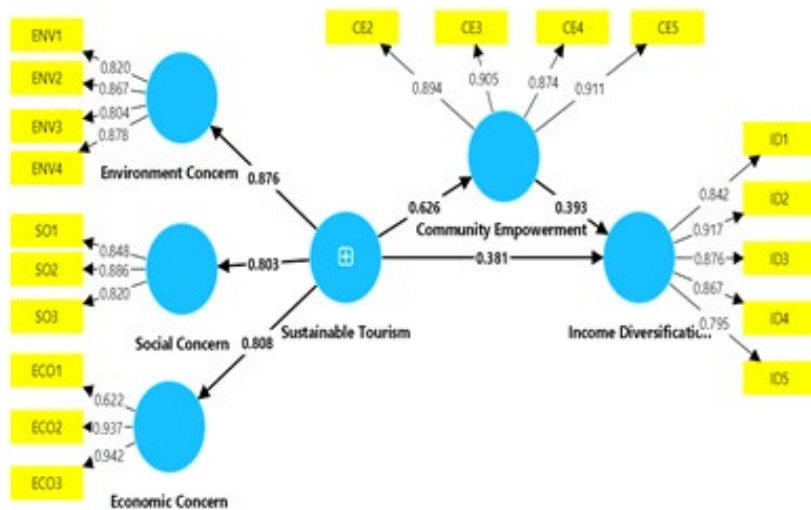
The desired model in the current research was reflective - reflective higher-order model (Figure 2). In the case of higher-order constructs, firstly the reliability and validity of lower-order constructs should be assessed, followed by higher-order constructs (Sarstedt et al., 2019). Reflective lower-order constructs were evaluated on the grounds of indicator loadings, reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity using the PLS algorithm. The recommended threshold value for indicator loading is 0.5 (Hulland, 1999; Truong & McColl, 2011) while some researches indicate that loading over 0.7 is appropriate for indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2021). Indicator CE1 was eliminated from the intended model due to inadequate indicator loading (less than 0.5). The loadings of the other eighteen indicators, except ECO1, as indicated in Table 1, ranged from 0.795 to 0.886 and were deemed suitable. The loading of indicator ECO1 was reported 0.662, between 0.6 and 0.7, still acceptable as the model was found reliable and valid overall.

**Table 1.** Lower Order Constructs and Standardized Indicator Loadings

Construct	Item	Description	Indicator loadings
Environment Concern	ENV1	I am concerned about the environmental impact of tourism in my community.	0.820
	ENV2	I believe that sustainable tourism practices are essential to preserving our local environment.	0.867
	ENV3	I strongly support tourism initiatives aimed at environmental protection.	0.804
	ENV4	Environmental sustainability in our community should be on top in tourism planning.	0.878
Social Concern	SO1	I care about the social impacts of tourism on our community.	0.848
	SO2	Tourism should benefit all members of our community.	0.886
	SO3	I do believe that tourism may also be a development tool for enhancing social cohesion within our community.	0.820
Economic Concern	ECO1	The economic development of our community is a necessity for tourism.	0.622
	ECO2	Sustainable tourism provides a significant economic benefit for the development of our community.	0.937
	ECO3	I am in favor of tourism initiatives that are run about the economic development of our community.	0.942
Community Empowerment	CE1	I feel empowered and capable of engaging in all tourism-related decision-making processes within our community.	Removed
	CE2	Our community is in control of how tourism is developed and managed locally.	0.894
	CE3	I am confident that our community can develop tourism in a sustainable manner.	0.905
	CE4	Community members are actively involved in tourism-related planning and development.	0.874
	CE5	Training and education programs related to tourism are accessible to all community members.	0.911
Income Diversification	ID1	Tourism has created new income for me/my family.	0.842
	ID2	My household's income is now more stable compared to before, because of tourism.	0.917
	ID3	I have diversified my income source with tourism-related jobs or businesses.	0.876
	ID4	Tourism has reduced our dependence on traditional livelihoods.	0.867
	ID5	My economic situation has improved due to the tourism industry.	0.795

Source: Primary Data (PLS-SEM output)

**Figure 2.** Sustainable Tourism and Income Diversification Model



Source: PLS-SEM Output

After evaluating the lower-order measurement model based on indicator loadings, the desired model is further evaluated based on reliability and validity criteria. Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ), Roh\_A, and composite reliability (CR) criteria were used for evaluating the reliability of the constructs. Measures of reliability that are commonly employed include Alpha ( $\alpha$ ), Roh\_A, and Composite reliability (CR), with values better than 0.7 being considered appropriate (Bland & Altman, 1997; Hair et al., 2017). Contrary, Diamantopoulos et al. (2012) argued that Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) and Composite reliability (CR) value greater than 0.95 are considered problematic as they show the redundancy in data. All the lower-order constructs fulfilled the required criteria of reliability (table 2) and proved internal consistency. The convergent validity of the lower-order constructs was evaluated based on Average Variance Extracted (AVE) criteria with a threshold value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019). All the constructs fulfilled the condition of convergent validity, as their value ranges from 0.710 to 0.803 (Table 2), which was above the threshold limit.

**Table 2.** Reliability and Convergent Validity Assessment of Lower Order Constructs

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Roh_A	Composite reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Community Empowerment	0.918	0.919	0.942	0.803
Income Diversification	0.911	0.914	0.934	0.740
Environment Concern	0.864	0.868	0.907	0.710
Social Concern	0.810	0.813	0.888	0.726
Economic Concern	0.793	0.873	0.881	0.718

Source: Primary Data (PLS-SEM output)

The discriminant validity of the constructs was further evaluated based on Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criteria (Table 3) and Fornell-Larcker criteria (Table 4). Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) is a precise measure of discriminant validity with a cut-off limit of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). On the other hand, the Fornell-Larcker Criteria measures the discriminant validity of the constructs based on variance. As per the recommendation of Fornell & Cha (1994), the variance of the latent variable for its indicators should be higher than that of other latent variables. Results of the study confirmed that all the lower-order constructs fulfilled the required HTMT criteria (Table 3) and Fornell-Larcker criteria (Table 4) and proved the discriminant validity of the model.

**Table 3.** Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Criteria for Discriminant Validity of Lower Order Constructs

Constructs	Community Empowerment	Environment Concern	Income Diversification	Social Concern	Economic Concern
Community Empowerment					
Environment Concern	0.551				
Income Diversification	0.689	0.691			
Social Concern	0.544	0.652	0.479		
Economic Concern	0.669	0.630	0.562	0.635	

Source: Primary Data (PLS-SEM output)

**Table 4.** Fornell-Larcker Criteria for Discriminant Validity of Lower Order Constructs

Constructs	Community Empowerment	Environment Concern	Income Diversification	Social Concern	Economic Concern
Community Empowerment	0.896				
Environment Concern	0.493	0.843			
Income Diversification	0.632	0.615	0.860		
Social Concern	0.471	0.546	0.413	0.852	
Economic Concern	0.606	0.541	0.500	0.521	0.847

Source: Primary Data (PLS-SEM Output)

The lower-order constructs i.e. outer model was further tested based on the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) after successful attainment of reliability and validity (Table 5). Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is a measure to assess the lateral-multi-collinearity effect among variables. Hair et al. (2017) recommended that a VIF value less than three or near three is considered excellent, three to five is considered acceptable, and greater than five shows the multi-collinearity issue among latent variables. The results of the study supported that there was no lateral multi-collinearity issue among lower-order latent constructs.

**Table 5.** Collinearity statistics (VIF) of the Outer Model

Indicators	VIF	Indicators	VIF
ENV1	1.915	CE2	2.887
ENV2	2.269	CE3	4.020
ENV3	1.806	CE4	2.627
ENV4	2.414	CE5	4.092
ECO1	1.221	ID1	2.586
ECO2	4.429	ID2	4.144
ECO3	4.310	ID3	3.061
SO1	1.829	ID4	2.793
SO2	2.283	ID5	1.908
SO3	1.807		

Source: Primary Data (PLS-SEM output)

In this research, PLS-SEM was run for higher-order constructs. As shown in figure 3, three lower-order constructs—environmental, social, and economic—were combined to form the higher-order construct of sustainable tourism. To assess the validity and dependability of higher-order constructs, a higher-order construct of the reflexive-reflexive type was created.

For evaluating the quality of the higher-order construct, again PLS algorithm was run, and statistical results found the higher-order measurement model reliability (table 6) with no issues in terms of convergent validity (table 6) and discriminant validity (Tables 7 and 8).

**Table 6.** Reliability and Validity of Higher Order Constructs

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Community Empowerment	0.918	0.919	0.942	0.803
Income Diversification	0.911	0.914	0.934	0.740
Sustainable Tourism	0.776	0.785	0.869	0.689

Source: Primary data (PLS-SEM)

**Table 7.** Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Criteria for Discriminant Validity of Higher Order Constructs

Constructs	Community Empowerment	Income Diversification	Sustainable Tourism
Community Empowerment			
Income Diversification	0.689		
Sustainable Tourism	0.745	0.729	

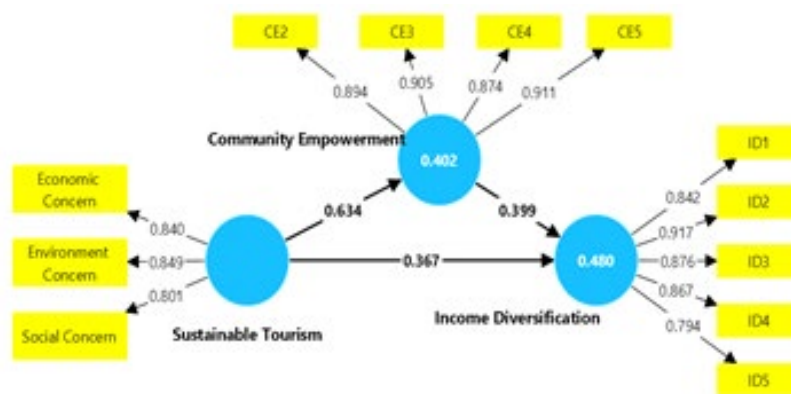
Source: Primary Data

**Table 8.** Fornell-Larcker Criteria for Discriminant Validity of Higher Order Constructs

Constructs	Community Empowerment	Income Diversification	Sustainable Tourism
Community Empowerment	0.896		
Income Diversification	0.632	0.860	
Sustainable Tourism	0.634	0.620	0.830

Source: Primary Data

**Figure 3.** Sustainable Tourism and Income Diversification Model with Higher Order Constructs



Source: PLS-SEM Output

## 5. Structural Model

Both the lower- order and higher-order measurement models were found statistically fit, which further offered an opportunity to test hypothesized relationships among latent variables. For testing hypothesized relationships, a structure model was developed and run for bootstrapping considering a sub-sample of 2000 with a confidence interval of 95%. The structure model was evaluated on the basis of standard criteria of coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), strength of the effect ( $f^2$ ), statistical significance, and relevance of the path coefficients.

The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) is an indicator of measuring the explanatory power of the model. Depending on the  $R^2$  values of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75, respectively, the model is considered weak, moderate, and substantial (Henseler et al., 2009).  $R^2$  for income diversification was found to be 0.480, showing that community empowerment and sustainable tourism explained 48% variance of income diversification and fell in the moderate category.  $R^2$  for community empowerment was 0.402 (moderate) depicting that 40.2% of the variance of community empowerment was explained by sustainable tourism. The value of adjusted  $R^2$  was reported further for income diversification (0.478) and community empowerment (0.4000).

The strength of effect sizes ( $f^2$ ) was reported for income diversification and community empowerment. The value of  $f^2$  used to measure the strength of the model as small (0.02), medium (0.15), and large (0.35) (Henseler et al., 2015). Results of the study showed that sustainable tourism had a large effect on community empowerment ( $f^2 = 0.671$ ;  $p = 0.00$ ) followed by community empowerment on income diversification ( $f^2 = 0.184$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ) and Sustainable tourism on income diversification ( $f^2 = 0.155$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). The model was further evaluated based on model fit indicators. Standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) value of 0.064 was discovered, falling within the acceptable range that Henseler et al. (2016) recommended. The intended model's chi-square statistic was 521.355. Unlike CB-SEM, PLS-SEM does not generate multiple model fit indications (Hair et al., 2019).

After evaluating the model based on  $R^2$  and  $f^2$ , the hypothesised relationship among variables was tested using path coefficients. Results of the study (table 9) further showed that sustainable tourism had a significant direct and positive relationship with income diversification ( $\beta = 0.367$ ;  $t = 7.950$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Thus, hypothesis H1 was supported hereby. The direct relationship between sustainable tourism and community empowerment ( $\beta = 0.634$ ;  $t = 21.233$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) and community empowerment on income diversification ( $\beta = 0.3999$ ;  $t = 8.139$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) were also found significant. As a result, alternate hypotheses H2 and H3 were supported under this research.

The mediating role of community empowerment between sustainable tourism and income diversification was found to be significant ( $\beta = 0.253$ ;  $t = 7.323$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Results provided an opportunity for researchers to support alternate hypothesis H4 hereby. The total effect of sustainable tourism on income diversification ( $\beta = 0.620$ ;  $t = 20.051$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) was found to be significant (table 9). The total effect of sustainable tourism on income diversification was 0.620, out of which 0.367 effect was direct and the remaining 0.253 effect was generated through the mediating effect of community empowerment.

**Table 9.** Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path coefficients	t Statistics	p Values	Remarks
H1	Sustainable Tourism -> Income Diversification	0.367	7.950	0.000	Supported
H2	Sustainable Tourism -> Community Empowerment	0.634	21.233	0.000	Supported
H3	Community Empowerment -> Income Diversification	0.399	8.139	0.000	Supported
H4	Sustainable Tourism -> Community Empowerment -> Income Diversification (Mediating effect)	0.253	7.323	0.000	Supported

**Total effect**

Sustainable Tourism -> Income Diversification (through mediating effect of Community Empowerment)  
( $\beta = 0.620$ ;  $t = 20.051$ ;  $p = 0.000$ )

Note: Community empowerment ( $R^2 = 0.402$ ; Adj.  $R^2 = 0.4000$ ); Income diversification ( $R^2 = 0.478$ ; Adj.  $R^2 = 0.468$ ); Sustainable tourism -> Community empowerment ( $f^2 = 0.671$ ;  $p = 0.00$ ); Community empowerment -> Income diversification ( $f^2 = 0.184$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ); Sustainable tourism -> Income diversification ( $f^2 = 0.155$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ).

## 6. Conclusion

This research study therefore gives key findings towards the insight into what role sustainable tourism may play in income diversification within Meghalaya, through a mediating effect of community empowerment serving as a key component. The results thus show a positive link between sustainable tourism and income diversification to support the findings of Sharpley and Telfer (2015) that sustainable tourism can improve the economic benefits of the local communities. This further underlines the ability of tourism to

reduce dependence on traditional livelihoods and, hence, expand other sources of income among locals.

The research establishes a positive relationship between sustainable tourism and community empowerment and strengthens the earlier reports by Matarrita-Cascante et al. (2010), who believe that the prevalence of local participation and influence over tourism initiatives is important. Community empowerment not only creates engagement but also develops a feeling of ownership and responsibility to maintain sustainable tourism ventures. This aspect makes sustainable tourism projects successful in the long run.

Furthermore, this research attempts to validate the argument that empowered communities are more likely to engage in diversified economic activities, a finding which finds a resonance with other similar works done by Beeton (2006) and Nwosu (2016). It was found during the research that mediation between income diversification and sustainable tourism happens through community empowerment. Only through empowerment can the economic benefits of sustainable tourism then be fully realized for local residents, equipping them with the know-how and the capacity to maximize the potential of tourism economically even as these are placed on a sustainable basis. In this respect, therefore, there seems to be an intrinsic link between sustainable tourism, community empowerment, and economic diversification pointing at empowerment as the key to unlocking wider benefits for local communities.

## 6.1 Implications of the Study

Meghalaya is well known for its natural and untouched beauty. This state has enormous potential for sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism is a way to support economic development while preserving regional culture and environment for long-term benefits. The current study established a positive relationship between sustainable tourism and diversifying income sources via empowering local communities. The results of the study offer significant theoretical, societal, and practical implications for stakeholders. This study diverts academicians' and scholars' focus from investigating the current landscape of sustainable tourism and its prospects. Concerning sustainable tourism and income diversification, this study adds to the body of literature already in existence and provides insightful information.

Based on empirical findings, this study offers practical implications for locals, regulatory authorities and society members. The study's findings align with Social Exchange Theory (SET) by demonstrating that empowering local communities fosters a sense of ownership and enhances their willingness to support sustainable tourism practices. For local communities, the findings highlight the importance of community empowerment as a catalyst for income diversification through sustainable tourism. By participating in tourism-related activities, local communities can enhance their economic resilience, improve their livelihoods, and contribute to attaining sustainable development goals. The study provides valuable insights to regulatory authorities to develop environmentally sound and culturally sensitive policies and frameworks that support sustainable tourism practices with the support of local communities. Sustainable tourism can be seen as a significant income-generating source for the local population and authorities can organize training programs related to sustainable tourism for local communities to empower them. This study highlighted the value of sustainable tourism for the development of local economies. This study appeals to society members and tourists to choose eco-friendly tourism options and learn to respect local cultures. Also, they should contribute to the well-being of host communities through participating in sustainable tourism.

## 6.2 Limitations and Future Research Directions

In the end, there are some limitations to the study too. The current investigation is confined to Meghalaya only, which creates a hurdle to generalize the results of the study in other regions with different socio-cultural backgrounds.

Future research should address these limitations by expanding the scope of the research. Further research can be done across different cultures and regions to increase the generalizability of the results as well as to gain a better understanding of the degree of association between sustainable tourism and income diversification. Future research can be conducted by considering some other mediating and moderating variables like local support, government, and infrastructural support, etc. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable in tracking the long-term effects of sustainable tourism initiatives on community

empowerment and economic outcomes. The role of digital platforms in promoting sustainable tourism and diversifying income sources can be studied in the future.

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# Internal Migrant versus Non-Migrant Female Worker: The Effect of Family Responsibility on Job Performance in Guangzhou, China

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores and compares the impact of family responsibility on job performance among internal migrant and non-migrant female workers. A total of 155 questionnaires were collected from female housekeeping attendants working in hotels in Guangzhou, China. The analysis used partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) and multiple-group analysis. The findings reveal a significant difference in the influence of family responsibility on job performance between the migrant and non-migrant female worker groups. Specifically, the direct effect of family responsibilities on job performance is more pronounced for non-migrant female workers compared to their migrant counterparts. This study underscores the importance of cultivating employees' awareness of family responsibilities. It contributes substantially to theoretical research by extending our understanding of the relationship between family responsibilities and job performance within the job demands-resources model (JD-R).

## KEYWORDS

Migrant Worker, Family Responsibility, Job Demands-Resources Theory, Job Performance, Multiple-Group Analysis.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 29 August 2024 Accepted 17 May 2025

## 1. Introduction

In China's urbanization process, internal migration has filled the labor shortage and contributed to the rapid growth of industry and services. An internal migrant worker is a person who refers to those who migrate within a country, often from rural to urban areas, in search of better economic opportunities. International migrant workers are a different population. In 2023, there were 297.53 million internal migrant workers (hereafter "migrant workers") in China, most of them moving from the middle and western regions of China to the eastern areas. Migrants generally have a low level of education: 52.1% have a junior high school education, 13.8% have a primary school education, 17.5% have a high school education, 15.8% have post-secondary education, and 0.8% have no formal schooling. The average age of migrants is 43, and 81.4% are married. The gender distribution is 62.7% male and 37.3% female, with the proportion of female migrants increasing by 0.7% in 2023 compared to 2022. In 2023, 53.8% of migrants were employed in the service sector, 45.5% in manufacturing, and 0.7% in agriculture. Notably, the employment rate of migrant workers increased compared to 2022, with the accommodation sector seeing a 0.6% rise in employment. Furthermore, the accommodation sector experienced the fastest wage growth, with average wages rising by 4.6% in 2023, outperforming other sectors (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2024). However, the average turnover rate of housekeeping attendants increases (China Hotel Human Resources Survey Report, 2023), and job satisfaction is lower than average, comparable to 27 countries (Andrade et al., 2021). The data indicates that while the average wages of employees in the accommodation sector have increased, issues such as low job satisfaction among housekeeping attendants and rising employee turnover rates persist. These problems could lead to decreased employee job performance and increased labor costs in the accommodation sector. For instance, China's hotel industry's average labor cost increased by 16% in 2023 compared to 2022 (China Hotel Human Resources Survey Report, 2023). This vicious cycle may severely hinder the development of accommodation industry.

The hotel's main objective is to provide clean rooms to customers. The quality of room hygiene is related to guests' health and customer satisfaction and loyalty. The room average revenue accounts for 48% of the total hotel revenue (China Hospitality Association, 2023). Therefore, the role of housekeeping attendants is more critical. According to the China Human Resource Report (2023), female migrant workers account for 84% of housekeeping attendants in the hotel housekeeping department. The housekeeping attendant's job is defined as feminine, dirty, low-skilled, and low-paid work (China Hotel Human Resources Survey Report, 2023). Job performance is critical to the organization's growth, and family plays an essential role in the career development of employees (Siu & Unger, 2020). Family-work conflict impacts job performance (Susanto et al., 2022). Workers with family responsibilities are the ones who are more likely to experience family-work conflict (Medina-Garrido et al., 2021). Due to the different family backgrounds of migrant and non-migrant workers, they may also have different perceptions of jobs and family. The wages of migrant workers are needed to cover the expenses of their rural families and, at the same time, to support their living expenses in the city. Existing research has paid insufficient attention to this group, with some studies suggesting that migrant workers are at greater risk of developing psychological problems than non-migrant workers (Yang et al., 2020; Zainal & Barlas, 2022). The main reasons for the adverse psychological issues of migrant workers include economic pressure, family pressure, working environment, identity, cultural conflict, and occupational stigma (Organista et al., 2019). For example, Hasan (2021) collected 44,365 migrant workers' responses in 17 countries, and 38.99% of migrant workers had mental illnesses such as depression, which were caused by occupational (poor working conditions, poor benefits, abuse), personal (poor coping, poor living conditions, family genetics, other health problems); environmental (limited access to healthcare); and social (occupational stigma) factors (Hasan et al., 2021). Most existing studies have focused on the impact of economic factors and the urbanization process on migrant workers. Nonetheless, there is a paucity of study on the effect of family on migrants' work. Migrants are spatially distant from their families, which differs from non-migrant workers. Therefore, the impact of family responsibilities on job performance should be different for migrant and non-migrant employees. Little attention has been paid to differences in the effects of family responsibilities on job performance across groups. In particular, fewer studies exist on female housekeeping attendants in a specific industry. Therefore, this paper employed the job demand resource model to explore the mechanism of influence

of family responsibilities on employees' job performance and tries to find the differences between migrant workers and non-farm workers through a comparative study of the two groups.

Research results can help companies optimize the allocation of hotel resources, develop a scientific and practical management system, improve housekeeping attendant job performance, reduce labor costs, increase employee satisfaction, and thus reduce staff turnover. Analysing the differences between migrants and non-migrants from the point of view of group differences can help the local government and enterprise management to formulate a corresponding management system, which can better coordinate and safeguard the needs of different groups and promote the harmonious development of enterprises and society.

## 2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

### 2.1 Family Responsibilities of Migrant and Non-Migrant Female Workers

Family responsibility refers to an individual's consideration of the needs and wants of family members when making decisions, as well as their sense of duty and obligation to them. A person's sense of family responsibility is a measure of the extent to which they have the responsibility to take care of their immediate family, such as raising children, elders, caring for a spouse, and the individual's need to consume time, energy, and cost of living expenses. Family responsibilities significantly affect employees' career mobility (Bose & Pal, 2020). China has a strong family culture, and family responsibilities substantially impact employees' career development (Chen, 2019). Middle-aged individuals, particularly women, often bear the bulk of family responsibilities, such as caring for elderly family members, raising children, and handling household chores. It has been proven that women employees usually have more family responsibilities than men (Thriveni Kumari, 2021). Female migrant workers are required to leave their home locations, and as a result, they are unable to fulfil the responsibilities and duties of their family roles. According to the work-family conflict theory, it is believed that work-family conflict arises when an employee's work interferes with family activities. Family-work conflict negatively affects job performance (Warokka & Febrilia, 2014). Theoretically, migrant workers experience more family-work conflicts than non-migrant workers.

Different family-work conflicts can lead to different results. Some studies classify family-work conflict as time, role, and psychological stress conflicts. Time conflict is when job demands take up time that employees should use to perform their family responsibilities, for example, if an employee works eight hours a day (the working hours stipulated by the Chinese labour law), the employee can be with the children as well as take care of the household chores after work, but due to the employee's overtime work, they are unable to be with the children and take care of the household chores, thus leading to a family-work conflict. Role conflict occurs when employees apply their thinking patterns and methods of dealing with problems from their work role model to their family role. That is one of the leading causes of family conflict, and role change also requires specific resources; therefore, when the employees' resources are insufficient, role conflict will be more severe. In addition, psychological stress conflict usually refers to the fact that when an employee experiences a lot of family stress, it can significantly affect job performance in the workplace. It is worth emphasizing that the spatial distance between migrant workers and their families allows them to allocate their time more flexibly. For example, when non-migrant workers finish daily work, they must go home to take care of household chores and spend time with their families. However, migrant workers do not possess such advantages. In other words, migrant workers have more free time than non-migrant workers. As a result, migrant workers can devote more time and energy to their work.

Additionally, non-migrant female workers have greater access to family support due to the proximity of the home to the workplace and the ability of other members of the family to share family responsibilities, such as emotional support (Hasan et al., 2021). In contrast, female migrant workers are separated from their families for long periods, and the lack of emotional communication and support causes them to be more vulnerable and prone to anxiety (Warokka & Febrilia, 2014). Combined with economic pressures, this double burden often leads to more significant work-family conflict for migrant female workers.

## 2.2 The Impact of Family Responsibilities on Job Performance

Existing studies have used work-family conflict theory and role theory to explore the relationship between family responsibilities and job performance. This study used resource conservation theory and job demand-resource theory to explore the relationship between family responsibilities and job performance from a resource and demand perspective. According to resource conservation theory, to acquire and conserve resources, people will mobilize resources in different domains to avoid continuous resource depletion. Employees may mobilize resources in the work domain to help them cope when the family domain is depleting resources. According to Halbesleben et al. (2014), Karatepe et al. (2018), and Xanthopoulou et al. (2009), when family responsibilities deplete resources, employees may adopt self-regulation strategies.

Wu et al. (2018) suggested that family responsibilities may directly or indirectly affect job performance (Wu et al., 2018). Job performance is “the level of productivity of an individual employee, relative to his or her peers, on several job-related behaviors and outcomes” (Arasli et al., 2018). Bao et al. (2022) revealed that job resources are vital in mitigating stress caused by family responsibilities. Supervisory support, flexible working arrangements, and high work autonomy can significantly help employees balance work and family responsibilities and reduce work stress caused by family responsibilities (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Grover et al., 2017). For example, flexible working time arrangements can enable employees with family responsibilities to effectively organize their work and family affairs and reduce the stress caused by time conflicts. There is an interactive relationship between job demands and family responsibilities. High job demands may consume employees’ time and energy to deal with family matters, leading to increased stress from family responsibilities; in turn, increased family responsibilities may cause employees to feel more severe stress and demands at work (Carlson & Frone, 2003; Van Der Heijden et al., 2019). This two-way influence exacerbates the conflict between work and family.

According to the job demands-resources model (person  $\times$  situation approach), this model integrates individual and environmental factors into one model. It divides the path of influence on job performance into two processes: motivational and health impairment processes (Barbier et al., 2013; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Family responsibilities are demands in the family domain that also require the consumption of resources to satisfy them (Waqas et al., 2019; Chen & Fellenz, 2020). Demands in the family domain affect resources and demands in the work domain (Chen & Fellenz, 2020). Some studies suggest that those with substantial family responsibility are most likely to experience family-work conflicts (Premeaux et al., 2007; Karatepe, 2013; Medina-Garrido et al., 2021). In the same work environment, employees with high family responsibilities should have a different impact on job performance than those with low family responsibilities.

Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H1.** There is a significant difference between the effect of family responsibility on job resources in migrant and non-migrant workers.
- H2.** There is a significant difference between the effect of family responsibility on job demands in migrant and non-migrant workers.
- H3.** There is a significant difference between the effect of family responsibility on job performance in migrant and non-migrant workers.

The job demands resources model is a widely recognized theoretical model that explains how job demands and resources interact to influence employee job performance through health impairment and motivational processes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Grover et al., 2017). The JD-R model classifies work-related components as either job resources or job demands. Job resources refer to aspects of work that contribute to the achievement of goals, reduce (or buffer) the demands (and associated costs) of work, or stimulate growth (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). In contrast, job demands refer to aspects of work that consume physical or mental effort or skill. Excessive job demands can deplete employees’ resources, leading to burnout and deteriorating health (Rudolph et al., 2017; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011; Lazazzara et al., 2020). Demerouti (2001) was the first to propose the job demand resource model, which suggests that job demand and burnout are related to exhaustion, while lack of job resources is linked to lower-level work engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001). After more than a decade of development, the job demand resource model has continued to be refined and expanded, and Bakker (2014) identified job crafting as

representing a missing piece in the reverse causal path from burnout and work engagement to future job resources and job demands (Bakker et al., 2014). Bakker (2018) revealed that job crafting and engagement are important for employees to acquire rich job resources. Employees motivated by their jobs are likelier to adopt job-crafting behaviors that promote work engagement (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2019). Li (2023) believed that job complexity indirectly affects work engagement and highlighting the need to consider the individual employee's cognitive appraisal and job characteristics (Li et al., 2023). Concurrently, Bakker (2023) proposed that personal characteristics are stable while the work environment is changing daily, thus proposing a new job demands resources model that encompasses daily job resources, daily job demands, daily work engagement, daily job crafting, daily burnout, and daily self-undermining (Bakker et al., 2023). In addition, Kooij et al. (2017) and Tim et al. (2015) proposed that job crafting has a significant impact on job performance (Tims et al., 2015; Kooij et al., 2017). Some studies revealed that self-undermining has a significant impact on job performance (Bakker & Wang, 2020; Roczniowska & Bakker, 2021). Lee and Eissenstat (2018) explored the JD-R model by gender (Lee & Eissenstat, 2018), various occupational groups (Lesener et al., 2019), and countries. Urien (2017) studied the relationship between resources, demands, and outcomes in the JD-R model in two countries, resulting in significant relationship differences (Urien et al., 2017). This relationship may vary depending on the context.

Differences between migrant and non-migrant workers include differences in status and hukou status between internal migrant workers and local migrant workers in China, such as compulsory schooling for children, and restrictions on processing residence documents. Differences are usually related to ethnicity and culture. Differences in economic status: internal migrant workers come from areas with poorer economic conditions, and their demands for employment salaries and job choices are significantly different from those of non-migrant workers. They typically possess low education and job skills, resulting in disparities in their ability to compete in the labor market. Noteworthy, a big challenge for migrant workers is to leave their hometowns to work and live in unfamiliar urban places. Most housekeeping attendants, who are middle-aged women, may also have to bear the problem of being separated from their children and the stress of their roles due to being unable to provide for their children (Qin et al., 2014; Sambajee & Scholarios, 2023). In this context, due to the low wages and long working hours of migrant workers, their chances of returning to visit their families are greatly restricted, leaving them in a permanent state of lack of emotional support (Qin et al., 2014; Liem et al., 2020). Moreover, migrant workers may face problems adapting to urban life (including air pollution and substandard housing) and various environmental differences between regions (cultural and dialectal differences), which increase the challenge of self-adjustment for migrant workers (Qin et al., 2014; Sambajee & Scholarios, 2023). Due to regional cultural differences and the Chinese immigrant hukou system, there may be differences in how Chinese internal migrants perceive the work environment and how they cope with acculturation challenges.

Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H4.** There is a significant difference between the effect of job resources on work engagement in migrant and non-migrant workers.
- H5.** There is a significant difference between the effect of work engagement on job crafting in migrant and non-migrant workers.
- H6.** There is a significant difference between the effect of job crafting on job performance in migrant and non-migrant workers.
- H7.** There is a significant difference between the effect of job demands on burnout in migrant and non-migrant workers.
- H8.** There is a significant difference between the effect of burnout on self-undermining in migrant and non-migrant workers.
- H9.** There is a significant difference between the effect of self-undermining on job performance in migrant and non-migrant workers.
- H10.** There is a significant difference between the effect of work engagement on job performance in migrant and non-migrant workers.
- H11.** There is a significant difference between the effect of burnout on job performance in migrant and non-migrant workers.



### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Study Area

Establishing the scope of the study in alignment with its objectives, according to the Guangzhou Government Work Report (2023), Guangzhou plans to deepen the integration of culture, commerce, tourism, sports, and services, promoting the establishment of a national demonstration zone for the integrated development of cultural and tourism industries. This initiative aims to create unique tourism products and services by integrating diverse resources, enhancing the city's appeal and competitiveness. Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong Province in southeast China, boasts a history of 2,200 years and has been designated by the State Council of China as an international metropolis and a comprehensive national gateway city. In 2023, Guangzhou welcomed 234 million tourists, a 51.8% year-on-year increase, securing its position as one of China's top 10 most popular destinations (Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China, 2023).

In addition, due to the limited number of housekeeping attendants in each hotel—typically ranging from 5 to 15 attendants in medium-sized hotels and 15 to 25 attendants in large-sized hotels—priority was given to selecting large-sized hotels to ensure the collection of a greater number of questionnaires and meet the minimum required sample size. Firstly, large hotels with a sufficient number of housekeeping attendants were selected. Most large hotels are high-end hotels. Official statistics indicate that Guangzhou has 26 five-star hotels, ranking first among cities in Guangdong Province. Secondly, choosing a hotel management group's chain hotels ensures that the hotel's management system is consistent, which can effectively avoid the disturbing influence on job performance because of the difference in the hotel management system. After investigation, only M Hotel Group can meet the above two conditions.

#### 3.2 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire used in this quantitative study, measured family responsibility (4 items) (Bose & Pal, 2020), job resources (6 items), and job demands (4 items) (Lequeurre et al., 2013; Chen & Wu, 2022), work engagement (7 items) (Schaufeli, 2003), job crafting (9 items) (Bakker et al., 2012; Toyama et al., 2022), burnout (5 items) (Demerouti et al., 2001), self-undermining (3 items) (Bakker & Wang, 2020), and job performance (4 items) (Bakker et al., 2012; Bakker & Demerouti, 2016; Arasli et al., 2018), was adapted from previous studies. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated strongly disagree, and five indicated strongly agree. The questionnaire was administered in Guangzhou, China. Select eight five-star hotels under the M Hotel International Group. In this study, we used purposive sampling to conduct questionnaires in the staff aisle of eight hotels. Considering the relatively large differences in the education levels of housekeeping attendants, this study employed face-to-face completion of the questionnaire to ensure the accuracy and validity of the data. Participants first underwent a pre-screening process based on gender and work department, with only female housekeeping attendants from the housekeeping department being invited to participate in the survey. During the data collection, participants used their cell phones to fill out the online questionnaire by scanning a QR code. This approach allowed them to receive immediate assistance and clarification if they encountered any issues or areas of confusion while completing the questionnaire. A total of 155 questionnaires were returned after we requested the housekeeping attendants to participate in the survey.

#### 3.3 Data Analysis Process

This study estimated the model and performed multigroup analysis (MGA) using the PLS-SEM approach (statistical software 4.0). The ten times rule is a general PLS-SEM sampling rule (Kock & Hadaya, 2018). When targeting any construct in both the outer, a minimum sample size of ten times the maximum number of paths should be used. Therefore, for the two groups this study looks at, sample sizes of 76 non-migrants and 79 migrants are appropriate.

## 4. Results and Findings

This sample included 155 participants (migrant and non-migrant workers) working in the M hotel house-keeping department in Guangzhou, China. In Table 1, A vast majority (64.5%) of the participants of this study worked 8 to 12 hours daily, and 1.9% worked over 12 hours daily. 36.1% of working years in a hotel are below one year, 27.7% between 2 and 3 years; concerning age, 38.1% were 37 to 47 years old, and 30.3% were 26 to 36 years old. In addition, the level of income is 29% below RMB 3500 (USD 1 = RMB 7.2; at the time of this writing), RMB 4501 to RMB 5500 (18%), and RMB 5501 to RMB 6500 (20%).

**Table 1.** Profile of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
18 and below	2	1.3
18-25	18	11.6
26-36	47	30.3
37-47	59	38.1
48-58	27	17.4
59 and above	2	1.3
Type of Employee		
Non-Migrant Worker	76	49
Internal Migrant Worker	79	51
Working Years in Hotels		
1 and below	56	36.1
2-3	43	27.7
4-6	13	8.4
7-9	19	12.3
10-12	13	8.4
Above 12	11	7.1
Working hours daily		
Below 8 hours	52	33.5
8-12 hours	100	64.5
Above 12 hours	3	1.9
Level of income		
RMB 3500 and below (USD 486 and below)	45	29
RMB3501-4500 (USD 487-USD 625)	22	14.2
RMB4501-5500 (USD 626-USD 763)	29	18.7
RMB5501-6500 (USD 764-USD 902)	32	20.6
RMB6501-7500 (USD 903-USD 1041)	13	8.4
RMB7501-8500 (USD 1042-USD 1180)	1	0.6
RMB8501-9500 (USD 1181-USD 1319)	6	3.9
Above RMB 9501 (Above USD 1320)	7	4.5

Note: USD 1.0 = RMB 7.2 (at the time of this writing).

Source: Own Elaboration

## 4.1 Model Assessment using PLS-SEM

### 4.1.1 Assessment of measurement model and invariance measurement across two group

Examining the reflective measurement model’s validity and reliability in relation to the latent variables (LVs) is part of the assessment process. That means assessing the relationship between the LVs and the entities to which they are connected. Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) are crucial coefficients commonly used when assessing internal consistency reliability and convergence validity. The measurement model used in this study included four constructs: family responsibility (FR) toward job resources (JR), family responsibility toward job demands (JD), job resources toward work engagement (WE), job demands toward burnout (BO), work engagement toward job crafting (JC), burnout toward work engagement, burnout toward self-undermining (SU), job crafting towards job performance (JP), self-undermining towards job performance, and family responsibility towards job performance. The loading of each indication on the corresponding LV needs to be computed and compared to a threshold to evaluate a model’s reliability. In general, indication reliability is deemed suitable when the loading is greater than 0.7. Table 2 showed that for the respondents in each group, most of the indicator loadings on the respective LVs were greater than 0.7. Several indicators showed loading values between 0.4 and 0.7, suggesting that, depending on the CR and AVE, they might alternatively be removed. The CR coefficient is also used to evaluate construct reliability; internal consistency must be higher than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2017).

All reflecting LVs in the PLS path model had CR values exceeding 0.7 for each data category, as shown in Table 2. These findings suggest that the measurement model’s dependability was acceptable. The AVE of the reflective LVs must be greater than 0.5 to establish convergent validity, and Table 2 demonstrates that the AVE of constructs was higher than 0.5 for each data set. Convergent validity and discriminant validity assessments enable the researcher to support the validity of results. Furthermore, we found that the CR and AVE were above the threshold, meaning that none of the indicators used in the models with loading ranging from 0.4 to 0.7 needed to be removed (Hair, 2021).

**Table 2.** Assessment Results of the Measurement Model

Construct/Associated Items	Loading		CR		AVE	
	Non Migrant Worker	Migrant Worker	Non Migrant Worker	Migrant Worker	Non Migrant Worker	Migrant Worker
Burn Out (BO)			0.926	0.924	0.767	0.765
BO1: I feel tired as soon as I get up in the morning and see a new working day stretched out in front of me.	0.800	0.900				
BO2: Working with people the whole day is stressful for me.	0.903	0.834				
BO3: I feel as if I'm at my wits' end.	0.907	0.864				
BO4: I have become more callous to people since I started doing this job.	0.883	0.909				
BO5: I have the feeling that my colleagues blame me for some of their problems.	0.881	0.864				
Job Crafting (JC)			0.910	0.921	0.567	0.588
JC1: I try to develop myself professionally.	0.792	0.823				
JC2: I try to learn new things at work.	0.838	0.775				
JC3: I make sure that I use my capacities to the fullest.	0.809	0.825				
JC4: I manage my work so that I try to minimize contact with people whose problems affect me emotionally.	0.665	0.666				
JC5: I organize my work to minimize contact with people whose expectations are unrealistic.	0.696	0.598				
JC6: I ask my supervisor to coach me.	0.818	0.804				
JC7: I ask others for feedback on my job performance.	0.778	0.794				
JC8: When an interesting project comes along, I offer myself proactively as a project co-worker.	0.745	0.785				
JC9: I try to make my work more challenging by examining the underlying relationships between aspects of my job.	0.607	0.801				

Job Demands (JD)			0.850	0.791	0.680	0.615
JD1: My job requires me to invest a lot of physical effort.	0.803	0.808				
JD2: My job requires me to invest a lot of emotion.	0.799	0.739				
JD3: I have too much work to do .	0.835	0.796				
JD4: I have the the problem arising from the task change.	0.861	0.791				
Job Performance (JP)			0.865	0.836	0.713	0.652
JP1: I complete tasks as per the specifications and standards.	0.869	0.808				
JP2: I ensure that materials and tools meet the set criteria and standards.	0.893	0.723				
JP3: I conduct quality inspections before the delivery of goods or services.	0.776	0.819				
JP4: I ensure that products or services meet the expectations of customers.	0.834	0.872				
Job Resources (JR)			0.861	0.894	0.581	0.645
JR1: I get the direct performance feedback from my superior.	0.641	0.676				
JR2: I adequately kept up-to-date about important issues within the hotel.	0.805	0.898				
JR3: I can participate in decisions about what my job does or does not entail.	0.825	0.896				
JR4: I can personally decide how much time I need for a specific activity.	0.795	0.852				
JR5: I think that my company pays good salaries.	0.897	0.873				
JR6: I get on well with my superior.	0.554	0.563				
Family Responsibility (FR)			0.838	0.839	0.700	0.703
PD1: Making provision for day-to-day expenses of my family is entirely my responsibility.	0.839	0.918				
PD2: My work-related movements are restricted because of my childcare commitments.	0.796	0.836				
PD3: Many of my work absences are due to my responsibilities towards elders.	0.587	0.514				
PD4: I feel overburdened with family responsibilities.	0.723	0.646				
Self-undermining (SU)			0.925	0.923	0.656	0.667
SU1: I create confusion when I communicate with others at work.	0.908	0.912				
SU2: I create a backlog in my task.	0.921	0.911				
SU3: I run into a problem at work.	0.654	0.668				
Work Engagement (WE)			0.768	0.827	0.551	0.556
WE1: At my work, I feel bursting with energy.	0.855	0.869				
WE2: When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.	0.671	0.777				
WE3: At my job, I am very resilient, mentally.	0.799	0.833				
WE4: I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose.	0.899	0.827				
WE5: I am proud of the work that I do.	0.870	0.735				
WE6: To me, my job is challenging.	0.697	0.789				
WE7: I feel happy when I am working intensely.	0.851	0.877				

Source: Own Elaboration

The degree of differentiation between each LV and the other constructs in the model is known as discriminant validity. Recently, it has been determined that the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio is a better criterion for establishing discriminant validity than conventional assessment techniques like the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Hair, 2021). Prior research has proposed two distinct thresholds for the HTMT criterion to demonstrate discriminant validity: 0.85 and 0.9. This study evaluates discriminant validity using the 0.9 threshold. As shown in Table 3, all HTMT values are below the critical value of 0.9, indicating that discriminant validity has been established for each group-specific model estimation (Hair, 2021).

**Table 3.** Discriminant Validity (HTMT 0.9 Criterion)

Constructs	Non-Migrant Worker								Migrant worker							
	BO	JC	JD	JP	JR	SU	WE	FR	BO	JC	JD	JP	JR	SU	WE	FR
BO																
JC	0.430								0.285							
JD	0.899	0.511							0.892	0.239						
JP	0.367	0.567	0.271						0.465	0.743	0.396					
JR	0.463	0.572	0.406	0.577					0.572	0.716	0.533	0.796				
SU	0.895	0.359	0.832	0.411	0.488				0.867	0.195	0.870	0.359	0.416			
WE	0.475	0.839	0.500	0.566	0.441	0.288			0.372	0.878	0.337	0.814	0.797	0.369		
FR	0.283	0.201	0.470	0.456	0.351	0.329	0.238		0.247	0.155	0.230	0.168	0.222	0.282	0.167	

Note: BO: Burnout, JC: Job Crafting, JD: Job Demands, JR: Job Resources, FR: Family Responsibility, SU: Self-Undermining, WE: Work Engagement, JP: Job Performance.

Source: Own Elaboration

Measurement invariance and model fit should be confirmed before using MGA to compare path coefficients between non-migrant and migrant worker contexts. The measurement invariance of composites (MICOM) approach for PLS-SEM was proposed by Henseler et al. (2016). The measurement invariance of the current investigation is evaluated using the MICOM technique.

**Table 4.** Results of Invariance Measurement Testing using Permutation

Constructs	Configural invariance (Same algorithms for both groups)	Compositional invariance		Partial Measurement Invariance established	Equal mean value		Equal variance		Full measurement invariance established
		Original correlation	5%		Differences	Confidence Interval (CLs)	Differences	Confidence Interval (CLs)	
BO	Yes	1.000	0.999	Yes	0.100	[-0.266,0.259]	0.038	[-0.384,0.386]	Yes/Yes
JC	Yes	0.999	0.997	Yes	-0.268	[-0.267,0.269]	-0.253	[-0.323,0.330]	No/Yes
JD	Yes	0.999	0.994	Yes	0.187	[-0.266,0.269]	-0.093	[-0.402,0.409]	Yes/Yes
JP	Yes	0.998	0.995	Yes	-0.217	[-0.260,0.268]	-0.235	[-0.462,0.461]	Yes/Yes
JR	Yes	0.997	0.987	Yes	-0.087	[-0.264,0.265]	0.150	[-0.449,0.454]	Yes/Yes
SU	Yes	1.000	0.987	Yes	0.194	[-0.266,0.260]	-0.180	[-0.419,0.425]	Yes/Yes
WE	Yes	0.999	0.997	Yes	-0.376	[-0.271,0.265]	-0.312	[-0.370,0.380]	No/Yes
FR	Yes	0.946	0.587	Yes	-0.086	[-0.261,0.273]	0.250	[-0.475,0.487]	Yes/Yes

Note: BO: Burnout, JC: Job Crafting, JD: Job Demands, JR: Job Resources, FR: Family Responsibility, SU: Self-Undermining, WE: Work Engagement, JP: Job Performance.

Source: Own Elaboration

The MICOM procedure consists of three steps: (1) evaluating configural invariance, (2) establishing compositional invariance assessment, and (3) evaluating equal means and variances. We create partial measurement invariance of the two groups following the MICOM approach (Table 4), which is necessary to compare and evaluate the group-specific differences of PLS-SEM results of the MGA (Henseler et al., 2015).

**4.1.2 Assessment of the structural model and multigroup analysis**

The findings from the structural model evaluation and the MGA results derived from two distinct non-parametric approaches (Klesel et al., 2019) are summarized in Table 5. A multi-method approach and the permutation test represent the most conservative ways to evaluate differences in the route coefficients

between the two groups when applying PLS-SEM. Group-specific bootstrap estimates from each bootstrapping sample are directly compared through Henseler's MGA, which indicates significant differences in specific path coefficients between groups at the 5% level if the p-value of the differences is less than 0.05 or greater than 0.95 (Henseler et al., 2009). Furthermore, the permutation test provides a p-value, with significant differences at the 5% level determined when the p-value is below 0.05.

As shown in Table 5, family responsibility positively and significantly affects job resources within the non-migrant worker group. In contrast, the effect of family responsibility on job resources is significant and negative in the migrant workers group. Family responsibility positively and significantly affects the job demands of non-migrant workers, while it is non-significant in the migrant workers' group. Moreover, the results indicate a positive and significant effect of job resources on work engagement among non-migrant and migrant workers groups and include work engagement towards job crafting, job crafting towards job performance, job demands towards burnout, burnout towards self-undermining, and work engagement towards job performance.

In addition, self-undermining has a negative and significant effect on the job performance of non-migrant workers, while the effect was not supported in the migrant workers group. Burnout has a significant and negative impact on the job performance of the migrant workers group, while the effect was not supported in the non-migrant workers group. Family responsibility significantly and positively impacted the job performance of the non-migrant workers' group, while the effect was not supported in the migrant workers group.

The results of a multi-method MGA, using both Henseler's MGA and the permutation method, Henseler's MGA, and a permutation test with a p-value less than 0.05 demonstrate the significant differences in the data. They revealed significant differences between non-migrant and migrant workers concerning the effect of family responsibility on job performance (H3) and job resources on work engagement (H4). The findings do not support a significant difference between non-migrant and migrant workers groups regarding the effect of family responsibility on job resources (H1), family responsibility on job demands (H2), work engagement on job crafting (H5), job crafting on job performance (H6), job demands on burnout (H7), burnout on self-undermining (H8), self-undermining on job performance (H9), work engagement on job performance (H10), or burnout on job performance (H11). Both approaches similarly confirm the significance or non-significance of the differences in the results, offering a multi-method confirmation of our findings.

**Table 5.** Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationships	Path coefficient		CIs (Bias corrected)		Path coefficient differences	p-value		Supported
		Non-Migrant Worker	Migrant Worker	Non-Migrant Worker	Migrant Worker		Henseler's MGA	Permutation test	
H1	FR->JR	0.285	-0.231	[-0.400,0.562]	[-0.427,0.467]	-0.516	0.163	0.035	No/Yes
H2	FR->JD	0.324	0.164	[-0.152,0.577]	[-0.314,0.383]	-0.16	0.487	0.240	No/No
H3	FR->JP	0.399***	0.047	[0.183,0.629]	[-0.128,0.259]	-0.352	0.036	0.016	Yes/Yes
H4	JR->WE	0.406***	0.715***	[-0.050,0.554]	[0.576,0.792]	0.309	0.004	0.006	Yes/Yes
H5	WE->JC	0.775***	0.824***	[0.661,0.842]	[0.696,0.916]	0.049	0.495	0.269	No/No
H6	JC->JP	0.221	0.203	[-0.209,0.701]	[-0.140,0.485]	-0.018	0.973	0.496	No/No
H7	JD->BO	0.796***	0.764***	[0.662,0.877]	[0.600,0.848]	-0.032	0.681	0.347	No/No
H8	BO->SU	0.764***	0.744***	[0.623,0.848]	[0.590,0.843]	-0.019	0.817	0.412	No/No
H9	SU->JP	-0.251**	0.071	[-0.471,-0.016]	[-0.150,0.363]	0.322	0.064	0.036	No/Yes
H10	WE->JP	0.222	0.493***	[-0.149,0.606]	[0.188,0.824]	0.271	0.280	0.203	No/No
H11	BO->JP	-0.020	-0.253**	[-0.268,0.225]	[-0.519,-0.031]	-0.234	0.187	0.101	No/No

Note: \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; BO: Burnout, JC: Job Crafting, JD: Job Demands, JR: Job Resources, FR: Family Responsibility, PR: Personal Resources, SU: Self-Undermining, WE: Work Engagement.

Source: Own Elaboration

## 5. Discussion

We have compared migrant and non-migrant female housekeeping attendants concerning the effects of family responsibility, job resources, and job demands on work engagement, burnout, job crafting, self-undermining, and job performance. The study results showed that family responsibility has a significant positive direct effect on job performance in the group of non-migrant female housekeeping attendants. In contrast, in the group of migrant female housekeeping attendants, the effect of family responsibility on job performance is not significant (H3). Therefore, we found that family responsibilities have different effects on job performance in different groups of the same gender. This is further supported by the results of the MGA cluster analysis. Previous studies have concluded that family responsibilities affect job performance differently across employees of different genders (male and female) (Baker, 2010). The findings of this study are more finely grained in explaining that the mechanism of the effects of family responsibilities on job performance is also different for the same gender (different groups). We speculate that the non-significant effect of family responsibilities on job performance among migrant female housekeeping attendants may stem from heterogeneity in their perceptions of family responsibilities. Not all attendants view these responsibilities as obligatory in the same context. Some may not fulfill these responsibilities despite having them, while others may believe that fulfilling family responsibilities does not necessarily require working hard. Alternative means of fulfilling these responsibilities and potential intervening variables may warrant further exploration. In contrast, for the non-migrant female housekeeping attendants group, family responsibilities positively impact job performance. This finding contrasts with previous studies, which argued that females bear more family responsibilities than males, leading to more pronounced family-work conflicts and a negative impact on their job performance (Geiger, 2024). The perspective of the wage and income level of room cleaners, most of the cleaners' income is in the middle level or lower than the average wage level of urban laborers. They may be more eager to work to improve their living situation in order to ensure the basic needs of their children or other family members. From the perspective of the living environment, non-migrant workers have been living in developed cities for a long time, and they have a higher demand for quality of life (Zhang et al., 2021), which may also lead to their family responsibilities that will contribute to the improvement of job performance to a certain extent.

Additionally, there was a significant difference in the effect of job resources on work engagement (H4) between migrant and non-migrant groups. Job resources significantly impacted work engagement among migrant female housekeeping attendants compared to non-migrant female housekeeping attendants. These findings underscore the critical role of job resources for migrant female workers. Previous studies have suggested that job resources positively influence engagement (Qin et al., 2014). However, the results of this study provide a more nuanced explanation by highlighting differences across groups. For example, each additional unit of job resources increased work engagement by 0.715 units for migrant workers, whereas for non-migrant workers, the increase was only 0.406. Therefore, in hotel management practices and strategies aimed at enhancing employee performance, greater emphasis should be placed on providing and enriching job resources specifically for the migrant worker group.

In addition, the effect of self-undermining on job performance (H9) also differs in migrant worker and non-migrant worker cohorts. In the non-migrant worker group, this effect was negative. Consistent with previous findings, self-undermining negatively affects job performance (Bakker et al., 2014; Rudolph et al., 2017). However, this effect is non-significant among migrant workers. The wages of housekeeping staff are typically calculated on a piece-rate basis, meaning they are paid per room cleaned according to the hotel's standards. Their income depends on the number of rooms cleaned, and if a room fails to meet the required standards, they are often required to redo the work. Consequently, even when they feel physically exhausted or emotionally fatigued, they continue to work due to a lack of alternatives. Migrant workers are acutely aware that their jobs are vital for maintaining their livelihoods in the city. Losing their jobs would mean losing both their income and their ability to remain in urban areas. This could partially explain the high prevalence of psychological issues among migrant workers.

The non-significant differences between the effect of work engagement on job crafting (H5), job demands on burnout (H7), and burnout on self-undermining (H8) in migrant and non-migrant worker groups are showcased in Table 5. This positive effect is powerful in both groups and is consistent with previous

studies (Barbier et al., 2013; Bakker & Demerouti, 2016; Barello et al., 2021). In addition, the direct impact of family responsibilities on job resources and job demands appears to be insignificant (H1, H2). We suspect that this relationship may be influenced by a mediating variable, such as personal resources. It is possible that abundant personal resources can mitigate the impact of family responsibilities on work (Liu & Cheung, 2015). Future research could further explore how personal resources mediate the relationship between family responsibilities, job resources, and job demands.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1 Theoretical Implications

In this study, we examined the differences in the impact of family responsibilities on job performance between female migrant and non-migrant female housekeeping attendants. Drawing on prior research, it has been suggested that family responsibilities may vary across different genders or groups, potentially leading to differing effects on job performance. Therefore, comparing the influence of family responsibilities on job performance between migrant and non-migrant female housekeeping attendants of the same gender represents a unique theoretical contribution of this study to the literature on work-family conflict. Furthermore, this study emphasizes on the intrinsic mechanisms through which family responsibilities affect job performance. Using the job demands-resources model as a framework, this study explore and attempt to expand the application of this model. By adopting a perspective integrating work and family, it delve deeper into the antecedent factors influencing job performance. This approach enriches the understanding of the job demands resources model and provides new insights into the dynamics of work-family interaction and their implications for enhancing job performance.

### 6.2 Practical Implications

The findings of this study demonstrate that the extent of job resources available to female housekeeping attendants has a significant impact on their work engagement. Additionally, family responsibilities influence job performance, with varying degrees of impact across different groups. Based on these findings, hotel management should emphasize on providing adequate job resources when designing strategies to enhance housekeeping attendant's work engagement. Moreover, incorporating support for employees in fulfilling their family responsibilities into performance improvement initiatives can further strengthen these efforts. Such initiatives foster a sense of belonging within the organization and enhance employees' performance levels. Emotional support from the family can play a pivotal role in reducing employees' psychological health issues, which boosts productivity. By prioritizing the provision of job resources and addressing family responsibilities, hotels can improve operational efficiency and create a supportive work environment. This dual focus enhances economic benefits for the enterprise and contributes to a healthier, more harmonious society.

### 6.3 Limitations

This limited focus can be considered a limitation of the present study, and future investigations should compare migrant worker and non-migrant worker groups and consider a more comprehensive range of community participation activities. Future research can be conducted on the degree of matching between family responsibilities and individual affordability to further the research on the impact of family responsibilities on job performance. In addition, this study only considers four dimensions of family responsibility. Future research may address more dimensions of measuring family responsibility, enriching the job demands resource model. Identifying unrecognized heterogeneity is a crucial issue that may be addressed in future studies. Additional heterogeneity may occur inside each data group, even though we formed two data groups using a priori information to explain the heterogeneity.



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