

Transforming the tourism supply network through digitalisation: The case of Tourism MSMEs in South Africa

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Keywords | Transformative tourism, Digitalisation, Tourism supply network, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises, South Africa

Objectives | Fragmented coordination hinders the effectiveness and efficiency of delivering travel experiences in the tourism supply chain network. Inefficient use of resources within the supply chain causes delays, higher expenses, and a worsened visitor experience. Moreover, a digital skills gap in the digital labour market in South Africa (DCDT, 2020) hinders progress for the Micro Small Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the tourism value chain. The objective of this study is to utilise transformative transdisciplinary approach to evaluate the effect of digitalisation in the tourism supply chain network (TSC) and to co-design and co-produce it from a praxis (Afrocentric) approach in South Africa.

Methodology | Collaborative and participatory research seeks to change practice. A transformative transdisciplinary approach was adopted in KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng Province, in South Africa, among 122 MSMEs, where an embedded experimental research design was adopted to actively engage with the tourism supply chain network to test and apply transformation strategies in real-world scenarios.

Main Results and Contributions | About 40 businesses received professional training focusing on creating social media content and 5 received websites, all were advised on the use of big data, chatGPT, cybersecurity, legal matters, social media platforms using WhatsApp for business and reels, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook.

Limitations | The limited number of tourism MSMEs that were willing to participate in the study affected the representativeness of the findings and research design in general. Transformative transdisciplinary research, considers the inclusion of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary academic research that involves (non-academic) societal actors as process participants. This study focused on real-world problems to proactively support action or intervention through collaborating with researchers, students, and MSMEs through the associations. Another limitation was observed through a response and selection bias; only two associations were selected, 1 in Gauteng with 137

members and 1 in KwaZulu Natal with stakeholders at the national, provincial, and local levels. They were responsible for the invitations of the participants. The participants may provide responses that they believe are socially desirable or that they think associations want to hear, potentially leading to response bias. Hence, this research may not capture the experiences and challenges of those tourism MSMEs that have not embraced digitalisation, potentially leading to selection bias.

Conclusions | Stakeholder engagement, coordination, and participation across the value chain are encouraged for inclusive growth, and sustainability, and to have a competitive advantage. Such collaboration is paramount in the tourism industry because it is one of the commercial sectors that is easily affected by digital disruption.

References

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