

INNOVATION IN HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM EDUCATION AND ITS EFFECTS ON TOUR GUIDES

Abdul Murad Bin Ahmad J.P

Alzette University

Hospitality & Tourism, East West International College, Malaysia

admin@alzette.edu.eu, murad@eastwest.edu.my

ABSTRACT:

The hospitality and tourism industry has taken a large hit over the course of the past year and a half as a result of the global coronavirus pandemic. Now that many areas around the world are starting to reopen for tourism once more, there is a need to determine the different innovations that have occurred in hospitality and tourism education. Still further, there is a need to understand what recent changes in hospitality and tourism education have occurred, including new innovations, as changes in educational practice within the field of hospitality and tourism education impact those who are already operating within the industry. To this end, the purpose of this study is to determine the influence of innovation in hospitality and tourism education over the course of the past two years in order to identify the impact of these educational changes on hospitality and tourism professionals in general and on tour guides in particular. A case study allowed the researcher to utilize survey data as a means of collecting qualitative and quantitative insights from professionals within the tourism industry. The results of this study led to recommendations regarding modifications to current educational programs within this field of study and recommendations for future areas of study.

Keywords:

Hospitality and tourism education, Tourism education, Hospitality education, Innovations, Modern tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The hospitality and tourism industry is one of the more unique industries present within the business environment in that it is a broad industry focused on the delivery of services targeted to recreation and leisure, relying on high levels of customer service as a means of revenue generation (Kamruzzaman, 2020). Tourism and hospitality exist within an ever-changing economic and technological space, with different advancements and innovations, not to mention economic considerations, influencing the different approaches to the delivery of services within the tourism and hospitality industry (Kamruzzaman, 2020). The high level of innovation and advancement within the industry has continued in spite of the global coronavirus pandemic (Baum et al., 2020; Dube et al., 2021). Some of these innovations have occurred as a result of the pandemic, however, others start their implementation at an earlier stage, during hospitality and tourism education (Kim & Jeong, 2018). Due to the rapid change of pace within the industry, there is a targeted need for students to be up-to-date with current developments within the field (Kim & Jeong, 2018). These developments have an impact both on the industry itself and on the professionals already working within the field. In light of these considerations, this study sought to establish the

influence of innovation in tourism and hospitality education on professionals in general, and on tour guides in particular.

The primary aim of this study was to explore the influence of innovation in the tourism and hospitality sector, with a focus on professional tour guides. Educational developments within the tourism and hospitality field result in an influx of individuals who have been trained differently, as compared to those already operating within the industry. This places individuals with multiple skill sets operating within the same field simultaneously. As a result, there is a need to assess the marketability of new skills and innovations taught within hospitality and tourism education, as compared to those already operating within the industry. This includes exploring the influence of new students on experienced professionals, their career outlook, and the perceived significance of the innovations in hospitality and tourism education, as compared to experience attained within the field or knowledge attained as a result of prior hospitality and tourism education experiences. Past studies in this area have explored different innovations within the field of hospitality and tourism education, however, these studies have not addressed the impact of these innovations on existing professionals within the industry, leaving a gap within

the current body of literature, as the majority of new studies in this area of investigation have placed their focus on coronavirus (COVID-19) related considerations (Daniel et al., 2017; Hsu, 2018; Hsu et al., 2017; Mushtaq et al., 2019; Sharma et al., 2021).

1.1 Scope

Innovations within the field of tourism and hospitality education have taken several distinct approaches in recent years, particularly for those whose focus in this educational process is to become a tour guide. Among some of the new innovations that have been introduced in recent years in tour guide education are the integration of digital tour guiding lessons, game-based learning, and the integration of virtual reality learning environments (Chiao et al., 2018). As a result of these, and other, innovations, the tourism and hospitality industry education field has worked to highlight an increased emphasis on its willingness to adapt to changing consumer needs (Chiao et al., 2018). Balula et al. (2019) asserted that the creation of new innovations in digital technology was a primary factor driving innovation in tourism and hospitality education. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the integration of digital technologies in the delivery of education has arguably increased due, in part, to social distancing considerations (Tejedor et al., 2021). The use of digital education innovations has resulted in the integration of enhanced value for consumers, resulted in the ability to improve travel planning, boosted experience sharing and experience enhancement in destination settings, and facilitated improved provision of services (Balula et al., 2019). While this information highlights the ways in which innovations in hospitality and tourism education have worked to improve the hospitality and tourism industry, it does not provide insight into the affect that these changes have had on those working in the industry prior to the integration of these learning approaches. To this end, the scope of the current study is limited to an exploration of the impact of innovation within the hospitality and tourism industry education fields on those operating as tour guides.

2. Brief review of the literature

The hospitality and tourism industry is heavily focused on a process of continuous improvement in practice and in educational efforts (Farrington et al., 2018). This approach to continuous improvement is driven, in large part, by the continued demands of tourists on the hospitality and tourism industry (Farrington et al., 2018). Trends within the industry suggest that the constant need to provide the highest quality customer service possible, the foundation of the industry, combined with the need to continually offer services that allow an organization to outperform its competitors, means that the industry is focused on a

process of rapid improvement through multiple pathways or approaches (Farrington et al., 2018). This process of continual improvement starts with the innovations that occur during the hospitality and tourism education process (Farah et al., 2018; Balula et al., 2019). By working to identify the ways through which it becomes possible for change to occur within the industry, these changes can be implemented at the education level instead, decreasing the amount of on the job training required for new hires, and thereby placing organizations within the industry at that much more of an advantage. Still further, the integrations of innovation within the hospitality and tourism education field work to highlight the changing state of the industry, introducing new workers within the field to the myriad tools available at their disposal (Balula et al., 2019). While this approach is one utilized by many industries, i.e. update the curriculum to decrease training costs, or work with education agencies to update the curricula, focusing on the skills and abilities that are lacking or not fully developed in those fresh out of school, at the same time, innovation is also essential because it is what works to develop the industry as a whole. Zopiatis and Theocharous (2018) noted that innovation within an industry has become one of the benchmarks of organizational success for businesses within that industry in recent years. The researchers noted, however, that it is praxis, "defined as action informed by theory and experiences," which serves as the root of that innovation within the hospitality industry and suggests that without experience, this innovation would not be possible (Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2018, p. 9). Given that experience forms the basis of innovation, and that new students within the hospitality and tourism industry are receiving the benefit of innovation in education within the field, this dichotomy creates a unique relationship which allows for a deeper exploration of the perceived desirability of innovation in hospitality and tourism education versus experience in the hospitality and tourism industry on the part of tour guides.

3. Methodology

In order to obtain the thoughts and perspectives of individuals working in the hospitality and tourism industry as tour guides, it was determined that a qualitative methodology was the most appropriate design for implementation, as the data being collected in the completion of such a study may not be easily quantified (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Following a review of the most common qualitative research designs and taking those designs into consideration within the context of the stated aim of the study, the case study research design was identified as the most appropriate for use within the current study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The research question that the study sought to resolve was: How are innovations

within the education sector of the hospitality and tourism industry impacting or affecting tour guides who have years of experience within the industry but who have not been introduced to these educational innovations?

3.1 Population & Sample

The total population for this study was all individuals working in the hospitality and tourism industry as tour guides. The desired sample population was set at 20 participants in order to achieve saturation (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Sim et al., 2018). Inclusion criteria consisted of being over the age of 18, currently working, or, as a result of COVID-19 lockdowns, having worked as a tour guide within the course of the past 1.5 years. Exclusion criteria included being unable to provide answers to the survey in English, to prevent potential issues with translation, having not worked as a tour guide for 1.6 years or longer, and/or, based on self-reporting, having a condition or taking medication that has cognitive side effects which could otherwise impact the ability of participants to respond to questions accurately.

Participant recruitment consisted of reaching out to different corporations operating within the tourism and hospitality industry for which tour guides worked. Corporations were asked about their willingness to have their employees participate in the study. Those that indicated in the affirmative were asked to send the survey link to their tour guides digitally, allowing for data collection to occur while at the same time ensuring the safety of the participants and the researcher alike, allowing all parties to maintain appropriate social distancing. Surveys are anonymous and results are transmitted directly to the researcher, preventing any potential ethical considerations by decreasing the amount of access to collected data by unauthorized persons.

3.2 Research Limitations

Certain limitations were present in the completion of the current study. The primary limitation was in the digital delivery of surveys to participants through the companies for which they work. This may have led to certain potential participants being unwilling to complete the survey due to the involvement of the company for which they work in the distribution of surveys. Still further, this may have led to answers that were modified in case participants were concerned about their employers viewing the results, leading to a bias in the findings. Future research can be conducted following the conclusion of the pandemic in which a researcher is able to reach out to tour guides directly in order to negate this limitation.

An additional limitation associated with the completion of the current study stems from the fact that the study only focuses on the perspectives of the

tour guides. It does not take into account the perspectives of the employers or the perspectives of those who are interested in going on tours in which tour guides are required in order to determine their desires. The collection of this additional information would allow for a way to refine the desired continuing education courses in order to increase efficacy.

3.3 Data Collection & Analysis

An online survey instrument was used as the primary means of data collection, consisting of a 10 question survey consisting of a mixture of open and closed ended questions intended to allow participants to provide their thoughts and perspectives was distributed. As a part of these 10 questions, demographic data was also included, along with an initial survey page on which the participant was required to provide their digital consent to participate in the survey. If the participant declined, the survey was terminated, working to additionally ensure the ethical considerations for the participants. The questions sought to establish how innovation within the hospitality and tourism education sector had impacted or affected the employability of older professionals, their job prospects, their willingness to enroll in continuing education courses, and their general perspectives regarding specific objectives.

Participants were provided with a two week time frame during which time they were able to submit their responses to the created survey. Those participants who did not meet the inclusion criteria or who met the exclusion criteria were screened out prior to being able to access the survey. Those who did not provide digital consent were screened out of the digital survey. No cap was placed on the number of responses that could be submitted. As survey responses were submitted, the researcher conducted a content analysis of results in batches of 5. Saturation in responses was achieved at 25 responses. Once saturation was achieved, the remaining responses were discarded, digitally erased. Content analysis was used to identify emergent themes within participant responses, allowing for a deeper understanding of participant perspectives.

4. Results

The 25 participants were asked to provide a breakdown of the number of years working as a tour guide. To participate, the respondent had to be an active tour guide working for a company in the hospitality and tourism industry that provided tours. The distribution of the surveys through tour providing companies worked to ensure that all participants were actively listed as tour guides, even if they had not provided a tour over the course of the past year and a half as a result of the pandemic. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of the total years' experience held by each participant.

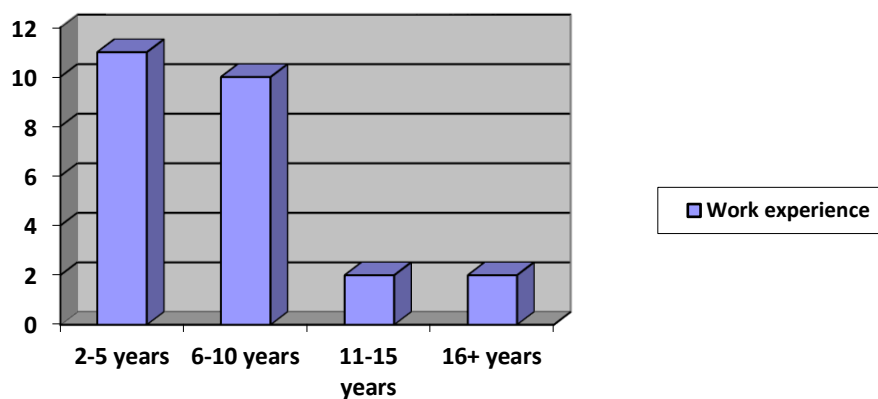


Figure 1: Years Work Experience

The responses showed that the majority of the participants had been working as tour guides for 2-5 years, with the second largest number of participants having worked as a tour guide for 6-10 years. This breakdown of participants suggests that, in light of reports of the innovations in the tourism and hospitality education industry from 2018 and 2019, that slightly less than half of the participants will have

had the option of being exposed to these new innovations in education (Balula et al., 2019; Chiao et al., 2018). Participants were then asked to indicate their familiarity with new innovations within the hospitality and tourism education field and their use of those innovations during their own training. The results are displayed in Figure 2.

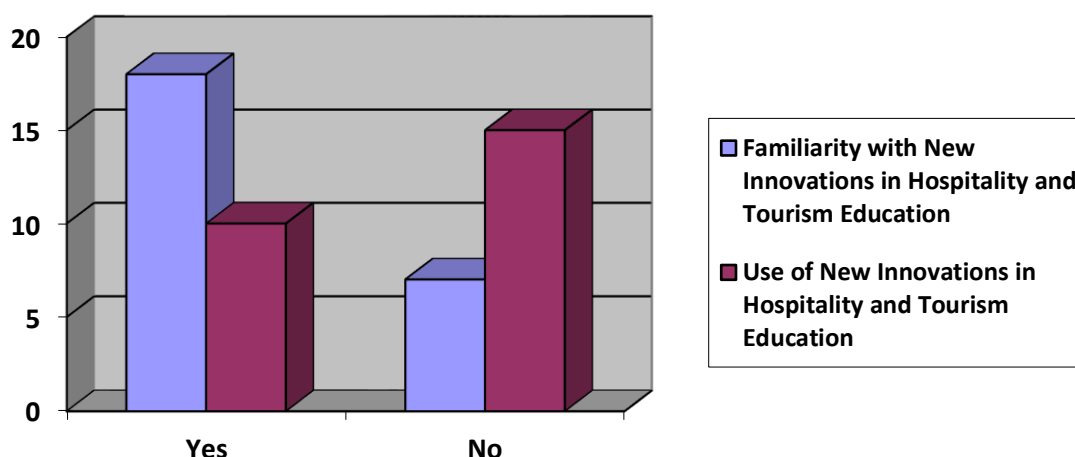


Figure 2: Familiarity and Use of New Innovations in Hospitality and Tourism Education

The responses to this question suggest that the majority of the participants are familiar with the new approaches and innovations being utilized in hospitality and tourism education, however, the majority of participants have not completed courses using these newer technologies. This suggests that the participant group is ideal for the exploration of the subject matter in question, allowing for a deeper understanding of the thoughts and perspectives of participants working within the hospitality and tourism industry as tour guides.

The remaining questions asked of participants were open ended questions, allowing for participants to provide their thoughts and perspectives regarding the impact of these educational changes within the

position of tour guide. While these results are discussed in greater detail in section 4.1, there is a need to provide an overview of these results as well.

Participants were asked, in a two part question, to identify who they thought was better prepared to handle customer demands: recent education graduates or those who had the benefit of experience from years on the job and then to indicate what led them to that perspective. The majority of the participants indicated they felt as though new graduates had the greater degree of preparation to address customer demands, largely because they were more technologically savvy, as compared to those tour guides who had years of experience on the job. When exploring the answers given to the second part of the question, the

justification for their response, the majority of participants indicated that this was because the modern tourist was largely attached to their technological devices and, as a result, the younger graduate would have the higher level of experience with those technologies and be able to respond better to meet the needs of those customers. A secondary subset of those that indicated that new graduates had the upper hand as a result of the technological innovations to which they had been exposed indicated that the newer graduates had a better understanding of the shorter attention span of the modern tourist, resulting in an increased ability to meet the needs of the modern tourist. The focus, in all instances of responses targeted toward the more recent students of the hospitality and tourism education programs then, was not focused on the benefit that those technological innovations afforded in the education of the tour guide, but instead on the knowledge of technological innovations in response to the consumers of the tours themselves.

Participants were next asked to indicate the level of value they attributed to the number of years' experience held as a tour guide in terms of job acquisition and job retention. While some participants indicated that they felt it was better to be up to date on current training practices, the majority of participants indicated that the greater the amount of experience held by the individual, the more beneficial it was as a tour guide in terms of job acquisition or job retention. Several of the older participants indicated that they had an easy time finding new jobs as tour guides when their past employers went out of business due to the number of years' experience they held as a tour guide in spite of their lack of recent education in the hospitality and tourism industry. Others indicated that the greater the experience within the field, the more likely they were to receive a pay boost when starting a new job as a tour guide. In light of these considerations, in spite of the innovations that have occurred within the education field for hospitality and tourism, this industry appears to be one that values experience over more recent education.

The next several questions were focused on the perceived benefit of continuing education by the participants. The majority of the participants indicated that they were in favor of continuing education, and that they were willing to engage in continuing education courses should those courses be offered in such a way that the participants would be able to attend, i.e. provided by their employers or offered on a part time basis so as not to interfere with the completion of their job duties as tour guides. Several participants indicated that, even though they were in favor of continuing education, they would not be able to participate themselves if, by engaging in continuing education courses, they would be required to cut their working hours. This provides a potential area of

improvement or an area of further investigation to determine the best approach to addressing continuing education within the context of the schedules of the tour guides themselves.

4.1 Discussion

The results of the study led the researcher to several insights regarding how innovation in the education sector is affecting experienced professionals within the hospitality and tourism industry. More than half of the respondents admitted that they felt as though recent graduates of hospitality and tourism education programs were better equipped to handle consumer demands. The respondents indicated that the reason for this feeling was that the younger graduates were more tech-savvy. The modern tourist was interested in more than the classic tour experience, seeking out additional opportunities for education, entertainment, and an insightful experience. As a result of these considerations, most participants felt as though they needed to reinvent themselves to fulfill the needs of the consumers.

The second key takeaway from the results was that the level of experience held by the participants was still perceived as a valuable attribute within the industry. In spite of the potential lack of technological knowledge, those professionals that had a greater number of years' experience in the field as a tour guide were able to deliver higher quality experiences for tourists, resulting in interactions that were perceived as more interesting and were perceived as offering a more in-depth potential for interaction on the excursion. The additional variation that the added knowledge held by the more experienced tour guides worked to increase the variability in the tour experience depending on the desires of the tour group itself, as opposed to a more structured or uniform approach adopted by the younger tour guides.

The final takeaway from the results was that those who had not received the benefit of a newer education within the hospitality and tourism industry were willing to enroll in current courses as a means of enhancing their technological adeptness. The belief was that, although they were still able to provide a comprehensive tour experience, the completion of continuing education courses would provide additional benefits in the form of knowledge of new technological advancements and ensure that they were better equipped to provide impeccable service intended to meet the needs of all potential types of modern tourists, increasing their overall effectiveness across a wider demographic range.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of the current study suggest that there is both a desire and a need among established professionals to enhance their training in order to meet

the needs of the modern tourist environment. They also reveal that, in spite of the innovations within the field of hospitality and tourism education, the lack of access to these new innovations has not dampened the effectiveness of tour guides who have been in the industry since before these educational opportunities were offered. Indeed, professionalism and experience are viewed as desirable qualities within a tour guide, and as such, do not translate to difficulties associated with job acquisition or job retention. The only difficulty mentioned by participants was the current COVID-19 pandemic and the appropriate decision to slow and halt tourism, depending on the country in which the individual operated, in order to decrease the spread of the disease.

The research question that the researcher sought to resolve in the completion of the current study was: How are innovations within the education sector of the hospitality and tourism industry impacting or affecting tour guides who have years of experience within the industry but who have not been introduced to these educational innovations? Based on the data collected during the completion of the current study, it can be stated that innovations within the education sector of the hospitality and tourism industry are impacting or affecting tour guides who have years of experience within the industry but who have not been introduced to these educational innovations by decreasing their potential confidence levels when it comes to assisting more modern tourists, defined as those who are focused on the increased use of technology during vacation over disconnecting while on vacation. In spite of this impact, tour guides with years of experience are still viewed as highly desirable commodities, and those who have a large number of years' experience as a tour guide are more likely to be hired quickly and for a higher rate of pay, as compared to those starting out within the industry.

5.1 Recommendations

There are several recommendations to be made based on the aforementioned collected data. First, it is recommended that further studies are conducted to assess the willingness of employers to sponsor and support their employees in their return to school, either full time or part time, or whether employers are willing to provide their own form of continuing education courses as a means of facilitating the acquisition of additional knowledge on the part of the tour guides working for those companies. A further study in which additional data was collected to assess the impact of continuing education on the placement of a tour guide would likewise be beneficial, as this information would provide insight into whether continuing education or training results in increased rates of promotion, increased remuneration, or other similar advantages within the workforce. It is further

recommended that a comparative study, dividing responses based on multiple countries, would allow for the identification of the ways in which different tour companies are responding to the innovations in the education environment and would highlight the variables present from country to country in response to the process of serving as a tour guide.

In addition to the aforementioned recommendations for areas of future study, it is also recommended that, in light of the information presented within this study, that efforts to redesign instructional approaches should be undertaken at current hospitality and tourism educational centers or current hospitality and tourism education programs. Ways in which this recommendation could be accomplished include the integration of a higher number of distance education programs and a larger amount of part time programs, allowing current tour guides to continue working while at the same time focusing on bolstering their current knowledge base. An additional recommendation for implementation is the incentivization of continuing education by corporations operating in the hospitality and tourism industry who provide tour guide services. Tour guides can be incentivized to undertake additional training through the provision of wage subsidies or increased remuneration to those who are willing to attend continuing education courses. Alternatively, the companies can simply incorporate continuing education classes through their own organization, allowing employees to attain additional information while simultaneously benefitting the organization. It is likewise recommended that additional data be collected on the approach to tours by guides from different countries allowing for the creation of a database or online portal that tourists could use to better facilitate their own tourism experience.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researcher would like to acknowledge the contribution of the distribution of the survey to employees by participating organizations. Although their names have been withheld to protect the identities of the participants, their assistance in the completion of the current study as a result of their willingness to internally distribute the survey link to active tour guides was invaluable in the data collection process.

REFERENCES

- Balula, A., Moreira, G., Moreira, A., Kastenholz, E., Eusebio, C., & Breda, Z. (2019). Digital transformation in tourism education. *Tourism in South East Europe*, 5(1), 61-72. <https://doi.org/10.20867/tosee.05-45>
- Baum, T., Thi, N., & Hai, T. (2020). Hospitality, tourism, human rights, and the impact of COVID-19. *International Journal of Contemporary*

- Hospitality Management*, 32(7), 2397-2407.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-03-2020-0242>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). To saturate or not to saturate? Questioning data saturation as a useful concept for thematic analysis and sample-size rationales. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise, and Health*, 13(2), 201-216.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1704846>
- Chiao, H., Chen, Y., & Huang, W. (2018). Examining the usability of an online virtual tour-guiding platform for cultural tourism education. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport, & Tourism Education*, 23(1), 29-38.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2018.05.002>
- Creswell, J., & Creswell, J. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage.
- Daniel, A., Costa, R., Pita, M., & Costa, C. (2017). Tourism education: What about entrepreneurial skills? *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 30(1), 65-72.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2017.01.002>
- Dube, K., Nhamo, G., & Chikodzi, D. (2021). COVID-19 cripples global restaurant and hospitality industry. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 24(11), 1487-1490.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2020.1773416>
- Farrington, T., Antony, J., & O'Gorman, K. (2018). Continuous improvement methodologies and practices in hospitality and tourism. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 30(1), 581-600.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-03-2017-0141>
- Farah, G. A., Ahmad, M., Muqarrab, H., Turi, J. A., & Bashir, S. (2018). Online shopping behavior among university students: Case study of Must University. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 5(4), 228-242.
- Hsu, C. (2018). Tourism education on and beyond the horizon. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 25(1), 181-183.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2017.11.022>
- Hsu, C., Xiao, H., & Chen, N. (2017). Hospitality and tourism education research from 2005 to 2014: "Is the past a prologue to the future?" *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 29(1), 141-160.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-09-2015-0450>
- Kamruzzaman, M. (2020). *Defining the hospitality discipline: A discussion of pedagogical and research implications*. Feiertag Collection (pp. 1-3). <http://hdl.handle.net/10919/97350>
- Kim, H., & Jeong, M. (2018). Research on hospitality and tourism education: Now and future. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 25(1), 119-122.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2017.11.025>
- Mushtaq A., Beddu, S., binti Itam, Z., & Alanimi, F. B. I. (2019). State of the art compendium of macro and micro energies. *Advances in Science and Technology Research Journal*. Volume 13, Issue 1, March 2019, pages 88–109
<https://doi.org/10.12913/22998624/103425>
- Sharma, G., Thomas, A., & Paul, J. (2021). Reviving tourism industry post-COVID-19: A resilience-based framework. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 37(1), 100786.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100786>
- Sim, J., Saunders, B., Waterfield, J., & Kingstone, T. (2018). Can sample size in qualitative research be determined a priori? *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 21(5), 619-634.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2018.1454643>
- Tejedor, S., Cervi, L., Perez-Escoda, A., Tusa, F., & Parola, A. (2021). Higher education response in the time of coronavirus: Perceptions of teachers and students, and open innovation. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 7(1), 43.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/joitmc7010043>
- Zopiatis, A., & Theocharous, A. (2018). PRAXIS: The determining element of innovation behavior in the hospitality industry. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 35(1), 9-16.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2017.12.004>